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2020

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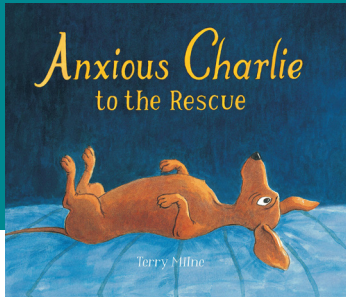
Various Reviewers

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Book Review

Anxious Charlie to the Rescue

Author

Terry Milne

Illustrator

Terry Milne

Reviewer

Erica Sonzogni

Rating

Dependable

Level

Primary

Pages

28

Year

2018

ISBN

9781536209167

Publisher

Candlewick Press

Charlie the Dachshund's life revolves around doing the same rituals to get through the day, needing every task to be perfect, and worrying constantly. He goes to bed thinking that everything turned out okay because of this predictable schedule. One morning, Charlie gets a call that his friend Hans got stuck in a pipe. To help his friend, Charlie must forgo his rituals and focus his efforts on saving Hans. With Charlie and his friends' ingenious thinking, Hans is quickly freed and able to play. That evening, when Charlie reminisces about the day, he realizes that his former routines have not helped him. Instead, Charlie learns that he can handle the unpleasant events that come his way, especially with the help from his friends.

Charlie suffers from anxiety and obsessive-compulsive symptoms. His overthinking is clearly described throughout the story. With limited books that depict characters that suffer with mental disorders, Charlie's story allows young readers a look into these struggles. This focus can build empathy towards friends and family members who suffer from these symptoms. It can also help those with similar tendencies to identify with Charlie as he learns that it does not have to control his life. While the character was relatable, the plot line itself was dull, with a flat conflict and a predictable ending that offers little excitement.



Book Review

Bruce's Big Storm

Author

Ryan T. Higgins

Illustrator

Ryan T. Higgins

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Dependable

Level

Preschool, Primary

Pages

540

Year

2019

ISBN

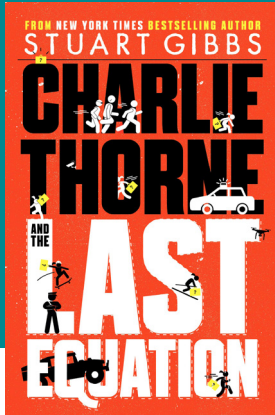
9781368026222

Publisher

Disney-Hyperion

A storm brings all of Bruce's neighbors into his home. When a mouse sees a bunny struggling, he grabs Bruce's favorite umbrella to set out for the rescue. He is unfortunately swept away by the storm, and even Bruce's enormous weight is not enough to prevent them from being tugged up towards a tree. All the animals then form a chain to pull them safely home. But when a tree blows into the roof, they have to snuggle by the fireplace until they can return home. This leaves a very grumpy Bruce to survey the damage, until all of his friends return and repair the roof. They even add an addition to the back of the cabin to make his home the neighborhood gathering place, even though Bruce is not entirely happy with the new arrangement.

Bruce constantly finds himself besieged by circumstances that thrust responsibility on him, but he always rises to the challenge. While it would be reasonable to expect that Bruce would like his neighbors, especially after they help him rebuild, he still finds them a tolerable nuisance. Though Bruce fails to grow, it is clear that his grumpy nature is the basis for humor in the series. It is also clear that Bruce embraces his parental role and does love his neighbors. The bright, humorously colored illustrations provide readers with an opportunity to linger on each page and find things to point out to each other. This book, even with its lack of character growth, is solid entertainment.



Book Review

Charlie Thorne and the Last Equation

Author

Stuart Gibbs

Reviewer

Tessa McMillan

Rating

Excellent

Level

Young Adult

Pages

400

Year

2019

ISBN

9781534424760

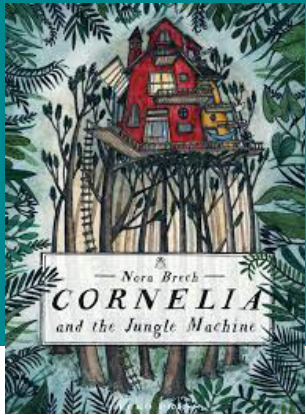
Publisher

Simon and Schuster
Books for Young
Readers

For seventy years, the CIA has been searching for Albert Einstein's final equation: a shortcut for harnessing atomic energy called Pandora. Einstein left a clue to Pandora on his deathbed, but no one has solved it. Now a German terrorist group, the Furies, is on the trail. To get ahead, the CIA wants to bring someone as smart as Einstein into their confidence: twelve-year-old prodigy, Charlie Thorne. When CIA agents Dante Garcia and Milana Moon find her, she resists. But once they explain their predicament, she agrees to help, especially since Dante is her half-brother. Working together they solve Einstein's clue revealing a complex riddle, which leads them to Jerusalem. Finding the Furies are there too, a violent struggle ensues, attracting Israel's own covert agency, the Mossad. Using her amazing intellect, Charlie solves the riddle that leads them to Mount Wilson Observatory in California where they find Pandora, just as the Furies' leader and Mossad agents swarm in. It's up to Charlie save Pandora before anyone else can take the equation from her.

Gibbs' book is a seriously satisfying and entertaining espionage thriller. But there's a deeper side to this spy adventure. Charlie might have Einstein's IQ, but she is far from being wise. She is still a twelve-year-old girl who wants to have fun and be a kid. Being a genius has both blessed and burned her. She takes outrageous risks knowing her brain will automatically calculate all possible solutions. But her aptitude thrust her into a cutthroat world where adults, including her parents, took advantage of her skills. With no trust for authority, Charlie attempts to fly under the radar and use her skills when she wants something. When Charlie is reunited with Dante, he pushes her to fulfill her full potential by helping others. The book is targeted for middle-grade readers, and the moderate violence makes it only appropriate for those ages thirteen and up. Fans of Roland Smith and Ron McGee will enjoy this book.

*Contains moderate violence.



Book Review

Cornelia and the Jungle Machine

Author

Nora Brech

Illustrator

Nora Brech

Reviewer

Danielle Dallas

Rating

Excellent

Level

Preschool, Primary

Pages

32

Year

2019

ISBN

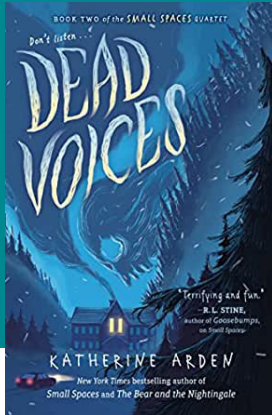
9781776572595

Publisher

Gecko Press

Cornelia did not want to move into a strange new house. Unable to listen to Cornelia's complaining while they unpack, her parents suggest that she go outside. Grudgingly, Cornelia leads her small dog on a walk in the surrounding forest, where she finds a ladder that seems to stretch hundreds of feet into the treetops. Here she meets a boy, Fredrik, who is an inventor of a complex network of treehouses and, most ingenious of all, a jungle machine that transforms the ordinary forest into a larger-than-life jungle playground. Together they have an afternoon of adventures, and Cornelia's new neighborhood no longer looks so bleak.

The value of this book lies in its visual artistry. With barely more than one hundred words translated from Norwegian, succinct text lays a sparse landscape for the Gothic style illustrations to fill and inspire inference and imagination. Detailed spreads capture the reader's attention and encourage fantastical exaggerations. Savvy readers will decipher that the adventures are a daydream, but everyone will be entranced with the oversized treehouses, ladders, slides, and brilliantly plumed giant birds. Interestingly, the title emphasizes an invention that appears only once halfway through the story. This is likely purposefully designed to encourage the reader to think deeply about the objective of the book, which is about finding joy, discovering friendships, and transforming a lonely situation through imagination and inventiveness.



Book Review

Small Spaces #2: Dead Voices

Author

Katherine Arden

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

256

Year

2019

ISBN

9780525515050

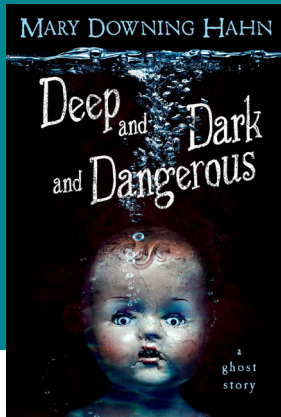
Publisher

G.P. Putnam's Sons

Ollie, Coco, and Brian are still struggling to lead normal lives after their show down with the Smiling Man. On their way to the grand opening of a new ski lodge on Hemlock Mountain, paranormal activity begins to haunt them. Coco has a dream about the Smiling Man, and as they approach the lodge she sees a mysterious skier in a blue jacket in the middle of the road. The collection of taxidermy animals at the lodge keep changing positions, and the hallway on the second floor is very eerie. When the only other guest at the lodge reveals himself to be the Smiling Man, Ollie is manipulated into a trap inside the mirrors. The friends use their intelligence to outwit the Smiling Man and pull Ollie back into the real world, but even as they celebrate their triumph, the Smiling Man hints that the game is not over yet.

The second book in this series delivers thrills and chills for middle grade readers. Arden has a gift for creating creepy challenges for her characters to solve. Hidden in these scares are several positive themes. Ollie is thrown off by the developing relationship between her father and Coco's mother, and the description of her feelings are realistic and relatable for many readers. Ollie and Coco are courageous, and Coco's reliance on her intelligence is a positive message for girls and boys alike. These character traits show readers that problems can be solved, and you don't have to be an athlete to have worth. This story full of ghosts, natural disaster, and courage is highly recommended for children who don't scare easily.

*Contains mild violence.



Book Review

Deep and Dark and Dangerous

Author

May Downing Hahn

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

192

Year

2008

ISBN

9780547076454

Publisher

HMH Books

Ali is invited to babysit her five-year-old cousin, Emma, at the family cabin for the summer. There, Ali hopes to solve a mystery about a girl in a photograph taken at the lake. One day at the beach, Ali and Emma meet a very disagreeable girl named Sissy. Emma is immediately taken with her new friend, but Ali has reservations. As Emma spends time with Sissy, her behavior spins out of control. Ali then discovers that Sissy is the ghost of the girl in the photograph. Sissy's disappearance is linked to a forbidden canoe trip that is connected to the two girls' mothers. Now her ghost wants revenge, and it's up to Ali to ensure that the truth is told so that the participants can face effects of their deception and find peace.

This is a great little paranormal getaway with some worthwhile messages stowed in between the mysteries. In the beginning, Sissy is so unforgivably truculent that it is hard to regret her early demise. Emma's loneliness explains her devotion to her harsh and moody new friend, and the reader feels complete sympathy for Ali's initially harsh attitude. These emotions morph into sympathy and understanding as Ali learns about Sissy's past. The primary theme of the story is learning to accept someone repugnant because they are more than their worst selves. In other words, the theme is that everyone deserves to be treated with respect. This elevates a simple ghost story to something more. There is real dignity in the way that Ali grows and learns to stand strong for what she feels Sissy deserves, and Sissy's constant rude behavior helps Ali's compassion stand out. By the end, these two girls have had a major impact on each other that is beneficial to them and to the adults in charge.

*Contains mild violence.



Book Review

Fat & Bones

Author

Larissa Theule

Illustrator

Adam S. Doyle

Reviewer

Amanda Morgan

Rating

Dependable

Level

Primary, Intermediate,
Young Adult

Pages

103

Year

2014

ISBN

9781467708258

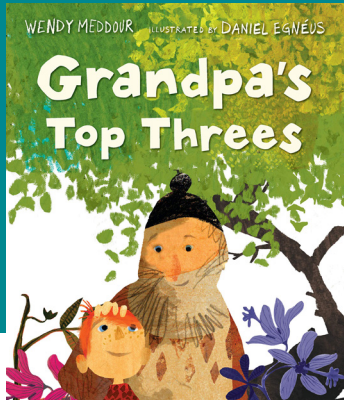
Publisher

Carolrhoda Books

On a not-so-ordinary farm, the farmer Bald has died. His son Bones is now unchecked and free to release his wrath on his arch nemesis, Fat the Fairy. This starts a chain of unusual and often unfortunate events. The farmer's wife cries until there are inches of water on the floor. A little mouse must sail across this new ocean to reach the mouse he loves on the other side. Fat makes a potion for Bones that requires spider blood, and the not-so-adventurous spider Leonard must save the day. From a sneezing dog to a dancing pig, animals and humans wreak havoc upon the farm until the Man in the Moon himself wanders if it could ever be fixed.

Several short, fairy-tale like stories intertwine to make up this unique book. With distinctive characters, descriptive imagery, and exciting suspense, the story is well crafted. However, the content is unusual and often unpleasant. Like the original Grimm tales, these stories do not shy away from strange violent content, such as pigs who live with few to no feet for the sake of pig foot soup. Unlike some fairy tales, these stories have no obvious morals, although digging deeper may reveal some obscure lesson. The writing style is suitable for children as young as eight, however the content will probably be better appreciated by older readers who favor the dark and peculiar.

*Contains moderate violence.



Book Review

Grandpa's Top Threes

Author

Wendy Meddour

Illustrator

Daniel Egneus

Reviewer

Jessica Mellor

.....

Rating

Excellent

Level

Preschool

.....

Pages

36

Year

2019

ISBN

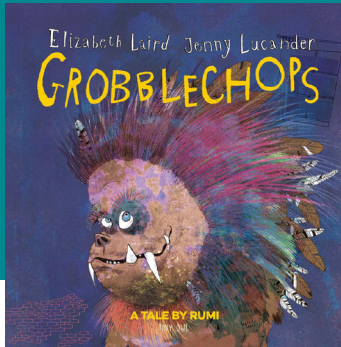
9781536211252

Publisher

Candlewick

Grandpa won't talk to Henry. His mom says to give him time, so he gives him six minutes. To help his grandpa, Henry plays his top threes game. In this game, you list your favorites of something, like sandwiches or jellyfish. Eventually Grandpa starts smiling again, and what used to be lonely becomes a bunch of fun as the pair reconnects with one another.

By playing a simple game, Henry helps his grieving grandfather stay connected to his family. While grief is a sad topic, it is dealt with in a way that respects the sadness without focusing on it. The pictures contain a variety of colors and the font is cute and curly, expressing Henry's gaiety and allowing readers to see the hope and love the book is trying to convey. The ending also conveys these themes when Grandpa finally talks about his wife and what she treasured, including her family.



Book Review

Gobblechops

Author

Elizabeth Laird

Illustrator

Jenny Lucander

Reviewer

Amanda Morgan

Rating

Excellent

Level

Primary

Pages

32

Year

2019

ISBN

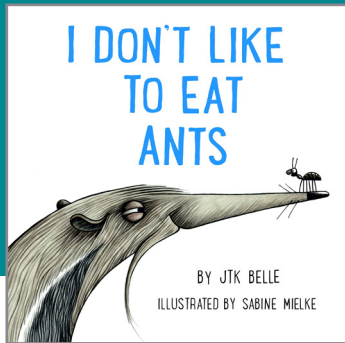
9781910328415

Publisher

Tiny Owl Publishing

Amir does not want to go to bed. He knows that if dad turns the lights off, a monster will appear. Amir's dad isn't worried because he would fight the monster off himself. If the monster also has a dad, though, then they must be doomed. But dad knows Amir's mom would come to the rescue. As this father continues to calm his son's fears, Amir learns that the whole family would vanquish the monsters. Maybe they wouldn't even need vanquishing, and they could all get along. Soon Amir can sleep in peace, knowing there is no need to fear monsters.

This charming story is based on the poem Masnavi, written by the well-known philosopher Rumi. It uses unique mixed-medium illustrations, reminiscent of a child's artwork, that bring the imaginative tale to life. The text is relatively lengthy, but the story is entertaining enough to keep the attention of younger children. This book will help children who are scared of the dark, as it encourages them to believe in the best possible outcome when they are gripped with fear. It also displays the power of families by showing all the ways Amir's family works together to keep each other safe and happy.



Book Review

I Don't Like to Eat Ants

Author

J.T.K. Belle

Illustrator

Sabine Mielke

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

.....

Rating

Excellent

Level

Preschool, Primary

.....

Pages

36

Year

2019

ISBN

9780578499512

Publisher

Picklefish Press

Anteater does not like to eat ants. He says that they tickle his tongue. His friend, however, loves ants and tries to persuade him to stick to the traditional diet. Still not convinced, Anteater persuades his friend to give peanut butter sandwiches a try. When his friend agrees that peanut butter sandwiches are wonderful, the ants themselves find a little relief in the fact the anteaters have found an alternate source of protein.

This is a great little story that humorously demonstrates to readers that it can be good to try new foods. The sing-song rhyming humor carries this message from page to page with illustrations reminiscent of the Spy vs. Spy comics published in MAD magazine in the seventies. The text has a consistent meter and maintains a reasonable word order that does not distract from the story. Overall, this is a great book for picky eaters and those who love a bit of fun with their food.



Book Review

I Wanna Be Where You Are

Author

Kristina Forest

Reviewer

Amanda Bishop

Rating

Dependable

Level

Young Adult

Pages

272

Year

2019

ISBN

9781250294883

Publisher

Roaring Book Press

Chloe Pierce, a young black girl, dreams of becoming a famous ballerina. Her protective mother isn't sure about her only child moving to New York, so while her mother is on a cruise, Chloe decides to drive to Washington D.C. and try out for a conservatory run by her favorite dancer. Her ex-friend and neighbor Eli blackmails her into letting him come along so he can visit colleges. Together they venture on a road trip that leads them to unexpected places, physically as well as emotionally, as they discover is the power of forgiveness, never giving up on your dreams, and the meaning of friendship.

This is a touching, fast-paced, fun-filled adventure road trip story with some romance thrown in. There is a lot that happens in the short span of this book and readers will love the journey through the tensions of young love. The story is mostly focused on the two main characters and the much-needed forgiveness that must be realized before they can address their feelings for one another. Overall the story would have benefited from more time developing the other characters, even though their stories were not within the scope of this book. However, this book will attract many readers who are looking for a quick, breezy weekend read.



Book Review

Little Libraries, Big Heroes

Author

Miranda Paul

Illustrator

John Parra

Reviewer

Nicole Clark

Rating

Dependable

Level

Primary

Pages

40

Year

2019

ISBN

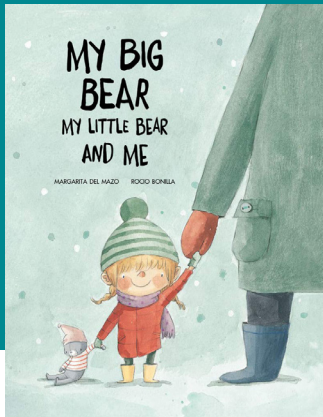
9780358168539

Publisher

Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt

Todd Bal was an ordinary guy who wanted to find a way to honor his mother. She, as a teacher, had helped many kids learn how to read. Todd decided to build thirty miniature libraries and place them in locations between Minnesota and Wisconsin. People were free to take a book and leave a book. These little libraries became gathering places for friends and neighbors to unite with books as common ground. Word spread quickly, and soon, other people wanted to know how to have a Little Free Library in their community. Since their inception, Little Free Libraries have been placed by kids, volunteers, teachers, hikers, and others in places from street corners to refugee camps.

This book is a good addition to the study about community helpers, and the mentions of diverse global locations also lends itself well to a study of geography or history. However, while this book attempts to convey the idea that regular people can be heroes by finding small ways to make a difference, the theme seems somewhat forced. An author's note at the back of the book gives additional information about Little Free Libraries for those interested in learning more. The book states that over 75,000 registered Little Free Libraries are in existence around the world.



Book Review

My Big Bear, My Little Bear, and Me

Author

Margarita del Mazo

Illustrator

Rocio Bonilla

Reviewer

Sarah Rawle

Rating

Excellent

Level

Toddler, Preschool,
Primary

Pages

36

Year

2019

ISBN

9788417123505

Publisher

NubeOcho

Having two bear friends is better than having one, especially when one is big and the other small. A little child out for an adventure through the snow finds it easy to appreciate big bear for keeping her warm, carrying her on their shoulders, and showing her new things. Little bear is really soft, fun to take care of, and really good at making friends. With so many things to love about each, she takes her two bears everywhere.

While the story is a little sparse, the simple words and pictures are direct and easy for a small child to understand. It is unclear who or what big bear is, leaving readers to speculate if it's a dad, big brother, or an actual bear. The ending gives readers a better idea and underscores the purpose of the story, which is to help children to appreciate different things in different people. Small children will appreciate the pictures as they are all from the child's point of view.



Book Review

My First Book of New York

Author

Ingela P. Arrhenius

Illustrator

Ingela P. Arrhenius

Reviewer

Hannah Webb

.....

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Toddler, Preschool,
Primary

.....

Pages

32

Year

2019

ISBN

9781536209907

Publisher

Walker Books

The Big Apple, one of the greatest cities in the world, is home to the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building. But that's only starting to scratch the surface of everything this bustling metropolis has to offer. There are so many things to see in New York. Readers can explore the different boroughs, neighborhoods and iconic locations including Central Park's Belvedere Castle, Alice and Wonderland statue, and Strawberry Fields.

With so much to explore, it is only fitting that the small details in the scenes and illustrations make this book a visual feast. Its oversize format (10"x14") contains all the punchy pictures as it emphasizes the larger-than-life nature of New York. This book takes readers off the beaten path by featuring lesser-known attractions like the oyster bars near Grand Central Station and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. However, it still pays homage to the classic sights like the Brooklyn Bridge and Time Square. This embeds some great learning opportunities into the book while still grounding it with familiar scenes. The cultural diversity of New York is beautifully represented with Harlem Jazz clubs, Mah-jongg players, cannoli, and tributes to the many things that make the city unique. Colorful illustrations and fun details make this book a great conversation starter that introduces readers of all ages to New York City.



Book Review

Navigating Early

Author

Clare Vanderpool

Reviewer

Cynthia Frazier

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate, Young
Adult

Pages

306

Year

2013

ISBN

9780385742092

Publisher

Delacorte Press

Jack's mother dies near the end of world War II. His father, who is in the Navy, must go back to his ship, so Jack is sent far from his home in Kansas to a boarding school in Maine. Grieving, he struggles to fit in until he makes a friend named Early. Early is a little strange. He loves numbers and explains the number Pi as if it was a person. In fact, he plans to find Pi by traveling on the Appalachian trail, so Jack joins him on his quest. As they walk, Early tells stories about Pi, pirates, a great white whale, a 100-year-old woman, a hidden cave and the Great Appalachian Bear. Then, the most amazing things happen as the stories begin to come true. Early finds an unexpected Pi, and Jack comes to understand friendship, himself, and the father he has barely known.

This is a heartwarming tale about the friendship of two very different boys who are each grieving in their own way. Vanderpool builds interesting characters and well-written parallel narratives that the reader will latch onto, taking them to the unpredictable conclusion. Her vivid descriptions of places and people create mind pictures. Early's character and his determined belief that Pi isn't dead are especially intriguing. Appropriate for middle school readers, this is a good book for families to read aloud and discuss together.



Book Review

One of a Kind

Author

Chris Gorman

Illustrator

Chris Gorman

Reviewer

Amanda Morgan

Rating

Excellent

Level

Primary

Pages

28

Year

2018

ISBN

9781524740627

Publisher

Nancy Paulsen Books

This kid is different. He dresses differently, acts differently, and hears the world differently. His uniqueness helps him make his own music and march to his own beat. Sometimes marching to his own beat can be lonely, but fortunately, he's not the only different kid out there. He finds friends who engage with the world uniquely and march to their own beats. Together, they harmonize to create amazing music.

This book is as unique as its main character. The illustrations are created from photographs filtered to a grainy black and white with the text highlighted in bright pink and yellow. The minimal text states things about the boy that are different, such as how he expresses himself, but never explains how exactly they are different. The illustrations give the reader this insight by depicting the boy in punk style outfits with a short, messy mohawk. This unique picture book can inspire children to be confident in who they are, even if they feel different.



Book Review

Parker Bell and the Science of Friendship

Author

Cynthia Platt

Illustrator

Rea Zhai

Reviewer

Sarah Rawle

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Primary

Pages

152

Year

2019

ISBN

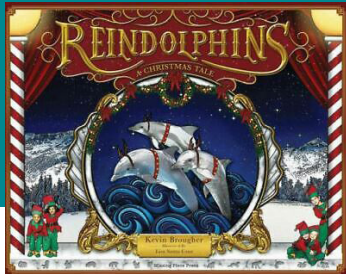
9781328973474

Publisher

Clarion Books

Parker Bell absolutely loves science, and she is thrilled when she finds out that the school is holding a science triathlon. But when her best friend Cassie invites Theo to be on their team, Parker thinks Theo might completely ruin their chances of winning. Theo had been Parker's science partner in second grade, where, in an experiment, they could never get anything to sink or float. Not only is Parker's chance of ever becoming like her idols, Jane Goodall and Mae Jemison, slipping away, but she's not too thrilled about the idea of sharing Cassie with Theo. But if she uses all her powers of scientific inquiry, Parker may find that Theo is not so bad after all.

Displayed right from the front cover, the themes showing that you can't judge someone without knowing them and that sometimes you have to share friends address common concerns for young readers. Additionally, Parker has always felt pretty different than her gym teacher mom (who didn't always understand why Parker had to take things apart), yet Parker thought her mom was amazing. This plot point addresses the idea that it is okay to accept people that are different from you. This fun storybook could definitely be read to convey these especially relatable messages to young kids.



Book Review

Reindolphins

Author

Kevin Brougher

Illustrator

Lisa Santa Cruz

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

.....

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Preschool, Primary

.....

Pages

44

Year

2016

ISBN

9780997795905

Publisher

Missing Piece Prss, LLC

With all of the reindeer sick, Santa may have to cancel Christmas because he can't pull the sleigh by himself. Then a quick-thinking elf suggests finding another animal to substitute for the ailing deer. They hold tryouts, but problems with each animal eliminate them from the running. The smart little elf pulls Santa out to the ocean and suggests dolphins, who are only too happy to help because they can "splash away, splash away, splash away all!"

This surprisingly wonderful story told in captivating humorous rhyme. The superlative illustrations are in rich, vibrant colors rendered in deep red and blue. This is in keeping with the Christmas theme and is reminiscent of vintage illustrations from the 40s and 50s. The attempts to replace the deer with alternate animals keep a humorous tone running through the story, making this a highly recommended addition to other Christmas traditions.



Book Review

Sticks



Author

Diane Alber

Illustrator

Diane Alber

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Preschool, Primary

Pages

32

Year

2019

ISBN

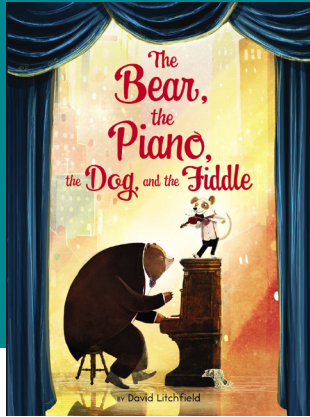
9781732934610

Publisher

Dian Alber Art LLC

A popsicle stick is distressed when her purpose in life melts away. A nearby twig is all sympathy and introduces the sad little stick to a few of her friends. Pencil has found purpose that “lead” to success, and brush is swept up in her art. None of this impresses the despairing little stick, who believes she will always just be “an icky, sticky stick.” Then her destiny is at last revealed when a bird swoops in and lifts her into a tree, making her the last piece of a popsicle bird house.

The story is told in rhyme with bright, cheerful illustrations. The primary colors in the artwork help keep the message simple and direct while adding to the positive theme. The way the other pieces of wood try to build up the stick makes for a positive message about helping friends and trying new things when life suddenly changes. The twig also never gives up, which exemplifies persistence in a positive way. Full of positive, optimistic messages, this fun little book would be especially appropriate for readers who have experienced a recent challenge.



Book Review

The Bear, the Piano, the Dog, and the Fiddle

Author

David Litchfield

Illustrator

David Litchfield

Reviewer

Jazmin Gomez

Rating

Excellent

Level

Preschool, Primary

Pages

40

Year

2019

ISBN

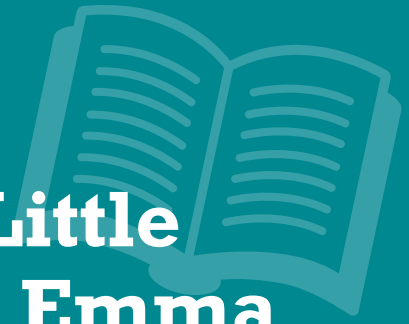
9781328595898

Publisher

Clarion Books

Hector enjoys playing his fiddle on the streets of New Orleans with his canine friend, Hugo, by his side. When he becomes disheartened, he puts his fiddle away for good. Hector distracts himself with other hobbies and has no idea that Hugo has been spending months learning to play the fiddle. Hector hears him one night and sees how much Hugo loves playing. News of the fiddle-playing dog spreads, and he is soon recruited by the famous piano-playing bear. As Hugo is leaving to tour with the band, Hector's jealousy leads him to say hurtful things. When the band returns to New Orleans, a remorseful Hector attends the performance. Hugo helps fulfill Hector's dream by giving him a chance to perform in the great concert hall, and Hector realizes that their friendship can endure through the good and the bad.

Fans of David Litchfield will enjoy this sequel to *The Bear and the Piano*. The rich and colorful illustrations are accompanied by a story that teaches several thought-provoking lessons. From Hector, readers learn that there are physical factors that often accompany feelings and that jealousy can cause damage. He is also an example of how we should continue pursuing the things we enjoy. Hugo teaches the importance of hard work, perseverance, accepting opportunities that we are presented with, and the healing power of forgiveness. Bear models how we can embrace our talents while still supporting and encouraging the talents of others. Overall, the story shows that true friendship can overcome obstacles and last a lifetime.



Book Review

The Biggest Little Farm: Saving Emma the Pig



Author

John Chester

Illustrator

Jennifer L. Meyer

Reviewer

Phyllis Rosen

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Toddler, Preschool

Pages

36

Year

2019

ISBN

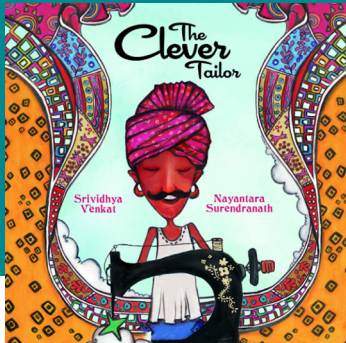
9781250187796

Publisher

Feiwei & Friends

Emma is the new pig at Apricot Lane Farms. She arrives skinny and sick, but she is expecting babies. The farmer tries to get her healthy before they arrive, but unfortunately, the 17 babies are born sooner than they hoped. When Emma develops a fever and cannot care for the babies, the farmer takes them into the house. Meanwhile, Emma's fever has gone but she still won't eat. Realizing that Emma misses her babies, the farmer reunites them to many grunts and snorts of delight. Gradually, Emma begins eating, eventually growing to be a whopping 700 pounds.

This story pulls at the heartstrings. Readers will feel empathy for the piglets and will want the farmer to find a solution as he tries various options to help Emma. They will feel hopeful and triumphant as his efforts succeed. Throughout the story, readers will learn about kindness and finding solutions to problems, realizing that there is hope if one keeps working towards an answer. The illustrations are beautiful. They have a softened quality about them that feels cozy and loving. They help tell the story in the absence of detailed descriptions of events spelled out by the author. At the end of the book is a short synopsis of how the author came to be a farmer, his journey to make Apricot Lane Farms a success, and a picture of Emma.



Book Review

The Clever Tailor

Author

Srividhya Venkat

Illustrator

Nayantara Surendranath

Reviewer

Nicole Clark

.....

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Preschool, Primary

.....

Pages

40

Year

2019

ISBN

9788193388907

Publisher

Karadi Tales Company

Saafa Ram is an Indian tailor whose gift for sewing is matched only by his ability to see the potential in even the most well-loved fabric items. After wearing out a saafa given to him as a present, he turns the turban into a odhni, a head scarf, for his wife. When the odhni wears out, he skillfully transforms it into a shirt for his son. The shirt then becomes a doll and then a decorative rose. When the rose wears out, he turns it into something memorable that will never again wear out.

Readers who enjoy books like Joseph Had a Little Overcoat will love Venkat's fresh twist on the classic "use-it-up" folktale. Venkat skillfully incorporates well-placed words that are likely unfamiliar to western audiences, thus adding realism to the story while a glossary allows readers to learn their definitions. Vibrant jewel-toned, pastel and colored pencil illustrations literally swirl through the pages of the book, supporting readers' understanding of the unfamiliar words while also propelling the storyline. This is an excellent multicultural book with a message of upcycling and creativity that will inspire young readers to think twice before throwing something away.



Author

David Almond

Reviewer

Taylor Bitton

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

218

Year

2018

ISBN

9781536207859

Publisher

Candlewick Press

Book Review

The Color of the Sun

Davie steps out of his house one morning, expecting the day to pass like any other. But when the town discovers the body of local boy Jimmy Killen, everything gets turned upside down. The Killen family has fought with the Craig family for as long as anyone can remember, so naturally everybody suspects Zorro Craig to be the murderer. Davie spends the day wandering the town and hills hoping to find Zorro. While doing so he encounters several townspeople and learns important lessons from each of them. At the end of the day, Davie ponders the changes he has undergone and realizes he is not the same person who set out that morning.

The Color of the Sun is a charming read that highlights the good in the world and the magic of the everyday. None of the people Davie encounters are particularly extraordinary, but each teaches him something important that affects his view of life. Written in thoughtful prose, the experiences Davie undergoes are two-dimensional and encourage introspection. Davie's ethereal daydreams are also multifaceted, showing his childlike nature while exhibiting the themes of the book. These themes include growth, change, and acceptance. This is a highly recommended read for those looking to learn simple and profound lessons about the world around them.



Book Review

The Girl Who Wouldn't Brush Her Hair

Author

Kate Bernheimer

Illustrator

Jake Parker

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Dependable

Level

Preschool, Primary

Pages

40

Year

2013

ISBN

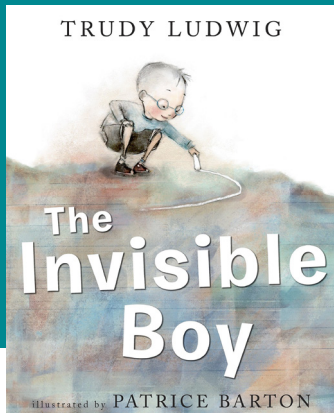
9780375868788

Publisher

Schwartz & Wade

A young girl washes her hair but refuses to brush it, because that's just how she is. A mouse sets up a roost in her tangles and she enjoys his company. Then there are two mice, then three, then one hundred. Living with so many mice is getting complex, but she makes it work. When teacher finally tells her she has broken the rule of one companion at nap time and must leave her beloved doll at home, our heroine is inspired. Kindly evicting the furry inhabitants, she finally washes her hair again. This time she brushes it out, because that's just how she is.

Parker offers a book filled with beautiful illustrations with rich warm colors, making for a merry flip from page to page. The story is entertaining, but there is a lack of learning on the heroine's part that would make this a better tale. She likes her mice; she just likes her doll more. So while the mice do have to move out, the reason that she decides to brush her hair is a little ambiguous. It might have been more useful if she had discovered that hair brushing is good grooming and careful hygiene contributes to good health. This book is quite fun, but the theme lacks some depth.



Book Review

The Invisible Boy

Author

Trudy Ludwig

Illustrator

Patrice Barton

Reviewer

Erica Sonzogni

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Primary

Pages

32

Year

2013

ISBN

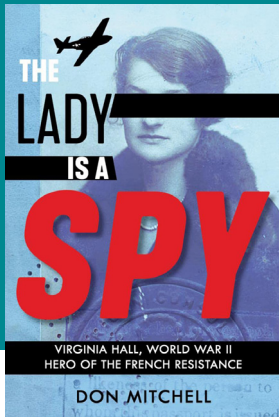
9781582464503

Publisher

Alfred A. Knopf

Brian, an elementary school boy, feels invisible in his classroom. The teacher spends a lot of time with the children who are having difficulties or who misbehave, which leaves Brian alone. Even the other children in the class ignore Brian until one day, a new student comes into the class. Justin eats authentic Korean food and the other students laugh at him. Brian quietly writes Justin a note to tell him that he finds his food delicious. Justin appreciates this act of kindness and the two become fast friends, and Brian does not feel invisible any longer.

Many books do not discuss how kind, well-behaved children can feel invisible, but *The Invisible Boy* does a fabulous job at portraying this feeling through words and illustrations. The illustrations depict Brian in black and white at the beginning of the story, when he is feeling the most invisible. After his act of kindness, the illustrator progressively adds a little bit of color until the end, when Brian is as colorful as the rest of the book. This story also has a strong message about how being kind to others changes the person doing the act of kindness. This message shows that if you are feeling hurt or sad, spreading good can help others as well as yourself.



Book Review

The Lady is a Spy

Author

Don Mitchell

Reviewer

Phyllis Rosen

Rating

Dependable

Level

Young Adult

Pages

262

Year

2019

ISBN

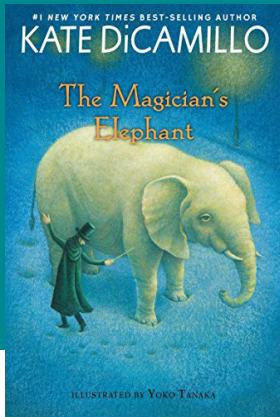
9780545936125

Publisher

Scholastic Focus

Virginia Hall was an American who contributed to the French resistance effort during WWII. In her younger years, Virginia was forced to amputate one leg after a hunting accident. This did not slow her down, although it did put an end to her hopes for a diplomatic career. Virginia traveled and studied in Europe and found herself in France when war broke out. She joined a French ambulance unit and later became a spy, first for the British, later for the United States. Virginia's efforts to rescue and smuggle to safety many Allied soldiers included tasks such as mapping drop zones, establishing safe houses, and training resistance battalions, all while reporting the enemy's movements to those in Great Britain and the US. Although the Gestapo hunted her relentlessly, she managed to elude them and survive the war. After the war she was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the only civilian woman to receive this honor.

Virginia's story has the tone of a documentary and reads like a textbook. The missions she performed are presented chronologically, followed by a 25-page documentation section. The author has included pictures from Virginia's life and from the war zones where she served. As a result, the information is factual but lacks insight into her emotions. Readers looking for a personal narrative of the war may be disappointed. This is not the story of the fear she felt facing dangers, nor the thrill she felt after successful missions. Rather, it is a detailed look at each assignment she was given and the steps she took to accomplish those assignments.



Book Review

The Magician's Elephant

Author

Kate DiCamillo

Illustrator

Yoko Tanaka

Reviewer

Cynthia Frazier

Rating

Excellent

Level

Primary, Intermediate,
Young Adult

Pages

208

Year

2009

ISBN

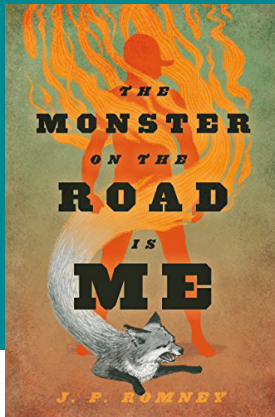
9780763644109

Publisher

Candlewick Press

Peter Augustus Duchene is a ten-year-old orphan, taken in by an old soldier who served with his father. When a fortune teller comes to town, Peter uses his guardian's food money to ask her a question that has long haunted him. She assures him that despite what he has been told, his baby sister is alive. To find her he must follow the elephant, but finding an elephant in the small town of Baltese seems impossible. However, during a magician's performance at the Opera House, an elephant crashes through the ceiling, injuring a patron of the arts. For this, the magician and the elephant are thrown into prison. The stories of Peter, the elephant, his sister, the magician, the crippled Madam LaVaughn, a nun, the police chief and his wife, a stonecutter, and a beggar with his blind dog all intertwine in a curious tale that shows how even impossible things can sometimes be true.

DiCamillo's lovely book is best for reading aloud. Tanaka's illustrations complement the prose and set the mood for the story. His full-page, black and white paintings create the atmosphere of an old-fashioned city somewhere in the past with carriages, gas lights and fireplaces. The story mentions dreams often, and Tanaka's dream-like illustrations help create this ambience. The author uses these pictures to fill the imagination with details not mentioned in words. This book, aimed at elementary school readers, is well written and heartwarming. Though predictable, the ending is all that a fairytale ending is supposed to be, with everyone ending up happily ever after.



Book Review

The Monster on the Road is Me

Author

J. P. Romney

Reviewer

Amanda Morgan

Rating

Dependable

Level

Young Adult

Pages

325

Year

2016

ISBN

9780374316549

Publisher

Farrar Straus Giroux
Book for Young Readers

Koda Okita has never done anything special, unless you count having to wear a helmet due to narcolepsy. At his secret crush Aiko's funeral, Koda has a narcoleptic episode that brings a dream of Aiko's last moments alive. As the days go on, more tragic deaths follow and Koda has more dreams, with crows stalking the victims in each. As Koda investigates why crows and their dark energy are becoming more common in his Japanese village, he is lead on adventure involving ancient legends. Soon it is up to Koda to face the mountain demon, as he has to choose whether or not to take the path of the dark tengu road.

Romney brings both ancient and modern Japanese culture to life in this thrilling tale. Based on the mystical legends of Japanese folklore, this book's characters are mysterious and events unusual. The book itself is well written, with distinct characters and creative descriptions. At times the storyline can be a bit confusing and the dialogue a bit dry; nonetheless, the author's writing inspires a sense of exhilaration throughout. Readers will also learn much about Japanese culture, and may even pick up some Japanese words or simple phrases.

*Contains mild language, moderate violence, mild sexual content, and mild substance abuse.



Book Review

Carmen Sandiego: the Sticky Rice Caper

Author

Based on the Netflix original series by May Chan

Reviewer

Erica Sonzogni

Rating

Excellent

Level

Primary

Pages

144

Year

2019

ISBN

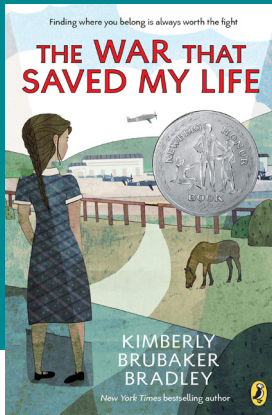
9781328495785

Publisher

Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt

Carmen Sandiego travels to Jakarta, Indonesia to stop the Villains' International League of Evil (VILE) from releasing a biochemical weapon onto the country's rice paddies. If VILE succeeds, they will destroy the entire country's main crop and force the citizens to buy VILE's products. But with the help of her team and some camouflaged weapons, Carmen is sure to defeat the VILE operatives and save Jakarta from a horrible fate.

This graphic novel is based on the popular Netflix series. The novel and the show include a variety of diverse heroes and villains, showcasing males and females of many ethnicities and body types who use their own knowledge and skills to complete tasks. In addition to Carmen, there are many strong female characters who play significant roles in solving the case. As Carmen travels from country to country, the story shares tidbits of important information for that area. For example, it explains that Jakarta is known as The Big Durian, which is named after their native fruit, similar to New York City being called The Big Apple. While the storyline is excellent, the illustrations only use one color tone, making them dull. However, young readers will enjoy the novel as they learn about other cultures, and they will be inspired by the strong characters that defeat evil.



Book Review

The War That Saved My Life

Author

Kimberly Brubaker
Bradley

Reviewer

Cynthia Frazier

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate, Young
Adult

Pages

316

Year

2015

ISBN

9781101637807

Publisher

Dial Books for Young
Readers Penguin Group

Ada has never left the one-room apartment she shares with her mother and brother Jamie. Mam is ashamed of Ada because she is a cripple and treats her like a slave. Ada's only joy is caring for her younger brother and looking out the window at the street below when Mam is away. When the news comes that children are being evacuated to the country to avoid German bombs, it's their chance to escape. Ada and Jamie board a train to Kent without their mother's knowledge. Assigned to the home of Susan Smith, an unhappy single woman who didn't want to have them, a new life begins for the trio. Ada learns to read, ride, and care for a pony, but one thing she can't do is start trusting and caring for Susan. She knows that the clean clothes, good food, and kindness would go away if Mam takes them back to London, so for Ada, hope is more dangerous than war.

Written through the eyes, experiences and emotions of Ada, a ten-year-old girl whose clubfoot had never been treated, we see a character who has never known kindness or maternal love. This well-written story, set in a time of great upheaval and danger, will charm book lovers for depicting how the indomitable human spirit can triumph over evil and adversity. Bradley masterfully weaves in historical details in a way that will intrigue and interest younger readers. Older readers will appreciate the many "wars" that Ada has to fight in her young life, including poverty, abuse, disability, hunger, and the chance of being hurt again. Bradley's main character, Ada, immediately draws the sympathetic reader into the story, and the rest of the reading experience is rewarding and unforgettable.

*Contains moderate violence.