Great Reads for Growing Minds

Eric Carle: A Life’s Work Illustrated

9-Year-Old Author
Kristin Maggio
Inspires Kids to Rise Above Their Challenges

TV Executive
Adam Reed
Produces an Award-Winning Picture Book

Lupe Cruz
Encourages Young Readers to Believe in Themselves

Missing in Plain Sight:
Children of Color in Picture Books

Learning about Heroes
on Leadership Day in Charleston

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The artwork of Eric Carle is distinctive and instantly recognizable. Since it was published in 1969, The Very Hungry Caterpillar has been translated into more than 62 languages. Since then, Carle has illustrated more than 70 books, most of which he also wrote, and more than 100 million copies of his books have been sold around the world. Meet the beloved author/illustrator who continues to capture the hearts of children with his magical world of color and words.

Also in this issue, we meet a 9-year-old author who is an inspiration to us all, a television executive who proves that if you can dream it, you can achieve it, and an author who didn’t let life’s hardships stand in her way of success. Our special contributors this month are Jo Ann Kairys, who writes about the lack of diversity in children’s books, and the Team Backpack Journalists, who covered a very special event and met the future leaders of our country.

Tell us what you think of this issue! Email your comments to Cristy@FiveStarPublications.com.
With over 100 million copies of his books sold, including the immensely popular *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, honorary degrees bestowed upon him, and numerous awards for his work, Eric Carle chooses to downplay his own talent and focus on those who have helped him become one of the world’s most-beloved children’s book illustrators. “I feel very grateful for many things—being able to do the artistic work I love and to have had numerous, generous ‘door openers’ in my life—people who have helped me to find my true course in life.”

Born in Syracuse, New York, Carle’s parents moved back to Germany when he was a child. Adjusting to the move was difficult for young Carle. “I started first grade twice—once in the U.S. and once in Germany, both at the tender age of six,” he says. “Two cultures, two languages, two different teaching methods.” His personal experience had a lasting impact on him and his attitude towards childhood. “I am especially interested in a child’s transition from home to school because this can be quite traumatic,” he says. “For me, it was a particularly difficult period in my own life and I hope my books will help to make this transition easier for children.”

Carle had an artistic bent from an early age. “I have always loved to draw and have been making pictures ever since I was a very young child,” he says. His earliest mentor was his father, who used to take Carle on nature walks through the woods as a boy, leading to a lifelong interest in nature. “He’d lift up a rock and
show me the small creatures that lived underneath it,” says Carle. “I think in my books, I honor my father by writing about small living things.”

Others saw potential in Carle as well, including his first grade teacher in Syracuse, who he calls one of the most influential and important people in his life. “Miss Frickey encouraged my creative interests at that early age and impressed upon my parents that they must nurture and encourage my talents as a visual person, which they did,” he says.

**While living in Germany,** Carle studied art and graphic design. He was taken under the wing of an instructor who ignored Nazi restrictions and bans placed on great works of art. “My brave teacher Herr Krauss, at great personal risk, secretly showed me the reproductions of paintings of modern and expressionistic art deemed ‘degenerate’ at that time,” Carle says. “The paintings were unlike anything I had been exposed to before. This experience at first shocked me and I found it unsettling. But in the end, it changed my view of art, though I didn’t know it at the time.” Carle was further shaped by one Professor Schneidler, whom Carle studied under at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart. “He instilled in me the principles of design that remain true for my work today,” Carle says. “Simplify and refine, be logical, and harmonious.”

**As an adult,** Carle moved back to New York where he worked as a graphic designer for The New York Times and served as an art director at an advertising agency. By chance, children’s author Bill Martin, Jr., saw an advertisement featuring a red lobster designed by Carle. Martin was so impressed by the colorful crustacean, he asked Carle to illustrate his latest book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* Carle, who was in his late thirties at the time, sensed the beginning of something epic. “What an inspiring book!” Carle recalls. “I was set on fire! It was possible, after all, to do something special that would show a child the joy to be found in books. This opportunity changed my life.”

**Rather than drawing or painting,** Carle illustrates with collage. While his work is instantly, undeniably recognized as his own, he’s quick to point out that many artists have used the technique before him. “Matisse and Picasso are famous for their collages,” he notes, adding that picture-book artists Leo Lionni and
Ezra Jack Keats also employ the method.

Carle spent much time experimenting before he perfected his signature style. “I first made collage out of painted papers in art school,” he says, adding that in order to get the exact shades and tones he wanted, he created his own colored tissue paper. “Initially, I just added a few brush strokes of paint to the commercially available colored tissue papers,” he explains. “Then I discovered that the commercially available tissue papers faded after some time, so now I use only unpainted tissue paper and acrylic paint in all colors.” Carle’s process has evolved over time. “Over the years, my painted papers have become more detailed, complex, and richer, and some have become works of art in themselves,” he says.

Carle’s classic The Very Hungry Caterpillar, which follows the gastronomic adventures of a somewhat clumsy critter and his metamorphosis into a beautiful butterfly, has been translated into 40 languages and sold millions of copies around the world. “I didn’t realize it right away, but I believe the popularity of the book, which I first published in 1969, was because it is a book about hope,” says Carle. “It says you, too, little caterpillar, can grow and change into a beautiful butterfly, spread your wings, and fly off into the world.”

In 2002, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art opened in Amherst, Massachusetts. Among the features of this attraction are three galleries exhibiting an ever-changing collection of artwork created by picture book artists from around the world. There’s also a hands-on art studio, an auditorium, and of course, a library. It’s become a mecca for families and school field trips with over half a million people having passed through its doors. Carle says he and his wife Barbara were inspired to open such a place after visiting a number of picture-book museums during a trip to Japan. “We decided to create a museum in this country to encourage, especially in children and their families, an appreciation for and an understanding of the art of the picture book,” he says. According to Carle, his wish for those who visit his museum is much like his wish for the audience who reads his books. “I hope my books are entertaining, interesting, and pass along some learning as well.”

Carle’s latest picture book, The Nonsense Show, has received rave reviews and features more of the vibrant, vivacious animals he’s known for. More books by Carle will be released later this year. For more information about Carle and his books, visit www.eric-carle.com.
Winter is coming!
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Don’t forget to share the kindness using #bekind. Be a #Tweeviller
It’s never easy to lose a faithful and beloved pet, but it was especially difficult for eight-year-old Kristin Maggio, whose Australian Shepherd therapy dog, Holly, had been by her side her whole life.

Kristin, who is autistic, was initially unable to express her grief through words. Instead, she communicated through art—drawing and painting her memories of Holly and demonstrating the special bond they shared. Kristin’s parents, Mike and Susan Maggio, gathered Kristin’s renderings of Holly, helped her to add appropriate captions, and turned them into a book and a tribute to a much-loved dog. “That’s what *My Dog Holly* is,” Susan explains. “It’s Kristin’s way of saying goodbye to a friend.”

**Holly was with** the Maggios for five years before Kristin was born. Susan recalls bringing Holly along when she would visit her grandfather in a nursing home. “She brought a lot of joy to my grandfather and all of the residents there,” she says. “At one visit, a resident who had not spoken for the entire three years he had been there lit up and asked if he could give Holly a biscuit. The nurses were shocked. Holly was a great gift to many people.”

Kristin and Holly’s story started the day the Maggios brought their newborn daughter home from the hospital in 2006. “Holly was drawn to her and watched over her,” says Susan. “Wherever Kristin was, Holly was. They were inseparable.” Early on, Susan recognized that something was different about her baby. “She was completely non-verbal. She didn’t even have frontal sounds, like ‘mama.’ There was nothing.” Kristin experienced other delays as well. “Watching Kristin work so hard to do things that are so natural for you and me was an eye-opener on so many levels,” says Susan.

From birth to age four, Kristin was non-verbal. Like many people on the autism spectrum, she’s particularly sensitive to sounds, but she was unable to express that to her parents without words. “One day she did a drawing of all the sounds that hurt her ears and it all made sense,” says Susan. “If Kristin hadn’t made that drawing for us, we wouldn’t have understood what she was experiencing so early on.” From then on, Kristin used her art to say what she couldn’t say with words.

Susan says she grew concerned by Kristin’s behavior immediately after Holly’s death. “Kristin wasn’t talking about Holly and she wasn’t talking at all, about anything,” she explained. Eventually, Kristin did a painting of her pet, which later became the cover for *My Dog Holly*. That one painting was followed by drawing after drawing after drawing. “She was actually tossing them over her shoulder as she completed each one,” says Susan. “There was a pile of papers on the floor.”
When I gathered them together, I saw that the drawings depicted scenes from Kristin’s life with Holly. It was like looking through a photo album.” Amazingly, after finishing her drawings, Kristin spoke. “She said, ‘I wish everyone had a Holly like me,’” Susan recalls.

According to Susan, parents of non-verbal children need to learn how to listen differently. “I think there’s a misconception that some non-verbal children don’t comprehend things simply because they can’t verbally express themselves,” she says. “But without any spoken words at all, the drawings she did of Holly showed tremendous comprehension of loss and spoke volumes. Even when she had no words, she was still communicating, in a very different way.”

My Dog Holly has become more than a loving memorial to a pet. It’s also a triumph of one young girl’s struggle to rise above the challenges she faces every day. “I had no idea that the little girl who worked so hard because of so many delays would one day be getting letters from other children and families with autism sharing how inspired they are by her,” says Susan.

Now nine years old, Kristin has illustrated a second book, The Glitter Wand and a Frog Named Aady Lou, and there are more books to come, including a series called Antics with Autumn and a Dog Named Duke, which features Kristin’s adventures with the two dogs she has now. But Holly will always have a special place in her heart. “I loved playing dress up with Holly and reading to her,” Kristin says. “Watching movies on our sleeping bag was so much fun. I loved my Holly.” Besides creating books, Kristin loves to draw and play outside. “I like reading books to my dogs and watching black and white movies,” she says. “I love going places like the science museum, botanical gardens, and Disney World. I also love Star Wars and anything Disney.”

Half of the proceeds from the sale of Kristin’s books will go to Autism Services, an organization known for its work with the autistic population and also for its signature arts program. In March, Autism Services will be hosting a solo art exhibit of Kristin’s work. Susan says she especially appreciates the way Autism Services celebrates the individual. “It allows children and adults with autism to be themselves and express their unique strengths,” she says. “Because of all the help and support they give to families like ours, it’s an honor to be able to support them in any way we can.”

The Maggio family has one clear mission. “We want to show the world that people with autism are more than a diagnosis,” says Susan. She also says people often rush to label people who don’t fit the standard mold. “I think it’s easy to hear that someone has autism, or any difference or challenge, and not look beyond that,” she says. “When people do this, they completely miss seeing the individual, the person. Kristin is a very happy, sweet, and creative little girl who happens to live with autism on a daily basis. Life has given people with autism a different journey than you and me. It would be nice if people could look past the diagnosis and not completely miss the person.”

Kristin’s books are available at Amazon.com or on her website at www.kristinsartavenue.com.
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TV Executive Adam Reed Produces an Award-Winning Picture Book

by Melissa Fales
Adam Reed had absolutely no intention of becoming a children’s author. As the executive vice president of Thinkfactory Media in Los Angeles, Reed produced shows such as Married by Mom and Dad, Preachers’ Daughters, R&B Divas, Gene Simmons Family Jewels, and Dead of Winter: the Donner Party. The youngest television producer named to The Hollywood Reporter’s “Reality Power List,” Reed, 39, admits that writing a children’s book was the furthest thing from his mind until the inspiration for his award-winning book Bee in the Sea came to him in a dream. “I realize how crazy it sounds,” says Reed. “I have no idea how it happened but I’m glad that it did. I call it divine intervention.”

Growing up in Bakersfield, California, Reed spent more time writing poetry than watching TV. His father, an aspiring writer, and his mother, who worked in marketing, were supportive in every way possible. “I had two parents who believed in me,” Reed says. “They supported me emotionally and encouraged me to follow my dreams.”

An avid roller skater, Reed spent much of his teen years on eight wheels and was at one time, the second-best in the country. At 18 he ditched the roller skates for roller blades. His fancy footwork on the blades earned him a spot in a Mountain Dew commercial.

The experience piqued Reed’s interest in show business. “It was so much fun to be in front of the camera,” he says. For a time, Reed worked as an on-camera CBS affiliate reporter. “I wanted to be a news anchor,” he says. When the company promised him a job if he earned a journalism degree from UCLA, Reed enrolled. “During my first journalism class, I was told I had to be objective,” he says. “I was told that I couldn’t be partisan or apologetic.” It was a wake-up call for Reed. “I realized I was way too opinionated to be an objective reporter,” he says. He later pursued acting, but realized that it didn’t offer him enough control. “I found out that the people behind the scenes were the ones pulling the strings,” he says. That’s when he began studying film and television.

After graduating from UCLA, Reed set about doing any production jobs he could get, even if it meant not getting paid. “My goal was to immerse myself into the world of production,” he says. Instead of spending thousands of dollars for graduate school, Reed decided to get as much real-world production experience as possible instead. “I saw it as a trade-off,” he explains. “It all sounds glamorous and glossy now, but at age 23, I was $100,000 in credit card debt.”
Reed compiled a reel of sample commercials he created to show prospective clients what he could do. "I didn’t get signed," he says. "I still have all of those rejection letters. I keep them to motivate me." Undaunted, Reed learned that the Partnership for a Drug-Free America was looking for someone to direct their next campaign. He wrote a heartfelt letter, weaving in his experiences about a family member who’d been in and out of jail due to his struggle with drugs. "I admitted I’d never directed a real commercial before," says Reed. "I told them my personal story and said I’d love a chance." He sent the letter along with a copy of the sample commercials he’d created. Reed was chosen for the job. "They really, really took a chance on me," he says.

That chance paid off. Reed’s commercial highlighted the dangers of the drug, Ecstasy, hooking the audience with testimonials from a coroner and grieving parents of a girl who died after taking it. The campaign established Reed’s place in the industry and is still considered one of the most successful campaigns in the history of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

At age 28, Reed co-created the A&E hit Gene Simmons Family Jewels which ran for 186 episodes. "My current business partner had known Gene for 20 years but Gene likes to claim that I had no clue who he was when I first met him since I grew up in a very small town," Reed admits, and he saw that as a benefit. "I actually did know who he was, but I wasn’t infatuated with him as many others were so I had absolutely no bias either way. I wasn’t afraid of him like everyone else.” Reed says working with Simmons was a major learning experience for him. "He’s a branding and marketing genius," Reed says. "Being around him was like attending the Gene Simmons Business School.”

Since then, Reed has been involved in every genre of television. “You name it,” he says. “We’ve done scripted, unscripted, documentaries, live shows, talk shows, game shows … everything.” He acknowledges the stark contrast between his day job as a producer and his career as an author. “With TV, there’s always a network that wants things a certain way,” he says. “I love the networks I work with, but it’s always a collaboration between their vision and your vision. With my books, I’m 100 percent in control. I’m limited only by what my mind can come up with. I like that kind of creative freedom.”

Even for someone like Reed, who is used to the twists and turns of television plots, the story behind Bee in the Sea is unusual. "It’s so odd," he says. “It was about six months before my wife, Jennifer, got pregnant with our daughter, Peyton. I had a dream and I can still hear the voice from the dream that said ‘Write children’s books!’” The voice even suggested the title Bee in the Sea. The next morning, Reed went about his daily routine, including a trip to the gym. While on the treadmill, he felt compelled to start writing the book. “I wrote about 90 percent of the book on my phone on the treadmill that morning,” he says. “It was totally stream of consciousness. I have absolutely no idea where it came from.”

Reed spent the next few months editing the book and searching for a suitable illustrator. Since then, he has completed his second book, Star in the Car, which is about being afraid of the dark and is due out this year. A third book is in the works, too.

For Reed, becoming an author is a remarkable adventure he never sought out, but nonetheless embraces. "It’s weird the way life works," he says. "It’s been a wild ride.” Reed says he most treasures the unexpected pleasure of snuggling up with Peyton at bedtime every night and reading to her from a book that he wrote. "That’s all the reward I need.” For more information about Adam Reed, visit www.adamreed.com.
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As the fifth of 11 children born to impoverished, migrant worker parents, Lupe Cruz’s childhood was far from idyllic. Put to work in the fields at the tender age of five, Cruz missed school for months at a time because her family needed the income from the work of her small hands. Her marked lack of education plagued her well into adulthood, to the point where, even as a grown woman, Cruz struggled to read and write in both her native Spanish and in English.

Later in life, inspired to record her story, Cruz taught herself how to write and released a children’s book titled, *Tillie’s Magical Christmas Ride*.

A most unlikely author, Cruz has two more books in the *Tillie* series on the way, and continues to work on her autobiography. “Yes, I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished, but I’m not surprised by it,” says Cruz. “I’ve always been a hard worker and I’ve always believed that where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

Cruz was born in Texas, but her family traveled from state to state to find work. During the early 1950s, Cruz’s parents went wherever fruits and vegetables needed to be picked, bringing their children to labor alongside them. “We worked in the fields from sun up to sun down,” Cruz recalled. “We had very little time for play.” The family would return to Texas in the winter and Cruz and her siblings would attend school for a few months. “I knew my ABCs and
how to count,” Cruz says. “That was about it. I just wasn’t in school often enough to learn much more.”

Cruz’s education wasn’t the only thing that suffered from her harsh upbringing. She lost hearing in her left ear due to lack of medical care. She wanted for simple things, such as milk. “I didn’t have a childhood,” Cruz says. “We never knew our birthdays. Holidays came and went. We were just so poor.” With no money for luxuries such as toys, Cruz and her siblings made their own playthings. She recalls being six years old, living in a barn in Ohio, and making dolls out of ears of corn. “They had silky, beautiful hair,” she says. “I had seen real dolls at the 5 and 10 but we couldn’t afford them.”

When Cruz was seven, her family celebrated Christmas for the first and only time. She recalls watching her mother and grandmother draping tinsel on an orange tree near the tiny Texas home they were living in that winter. “My grandmother said Santa Claus was coming to our house that night,” Cruz says. “I don’t think I’d ever been more excited in my life.”

The pending visit was so exciting, Cruz had trouble sleeping in her makeshift bed on the floor. “My siblings and I all slept on the floor,” she explains. “There was one real bed but that was for our parents.” Cruz tried desperately to fall asleep, remembering her grandmother’s warning that Santa wouldn’t come until she did. “I tossed and turned,” she says.

Eventually Cruz fell asleep, and had the dream she retells in Tillie’s Magical Christmas Ride. “I was under the kitchen table,” she says. “I saw the door open and a man walked in wearing shiny black boots. I knew it was Santa because my father didn’t wear boots like that.” However, when Santa realized that she was still awake, he left in a hurry. “I woke up from my dream crying,” says Cruz. “I don’t know how I ever fell back asleep after that, but I did.”

The next morning, Cruz woke to find Santa had brought her a doll. “You can’t imagine how it felt to finally have a real doll, to have my very own toy,” she says. The memory of that Christmas, and those happy moments in such stark contrast to other times, stayed with Cruz as she grew up.

At age 28, embarrassed that she couldn’t read a children’s book to her young son, Cruz began teaching herself how to read. As her children went through school, Cruz learned their subjects along with them. Today she’s a successful realtor. “My message to everyone is that you can do anything if you’re willing to work hard,” she says.

When Cruz learned that a friend was writing an autobiography, she felt inspired to put her own story down on paper. “People had always told me I should write a book about my childhood, but it never seemed possible,” says Cruz. “Besides, who would want to read about that?” Cruz was determined not to let the fact that she didn’t know how to write stop her. Instead, she studied books at home to see how it was done, and taught herself to write, page by page.

For Cruz, the experience of writing her memoirs was cathartic. “I did a lot of crying,” she says. When she got to the part about that one Christmas she experienced as a child and that memorable dream, Cruz realized it would make a good children’s book. She halted work on her memoir and began writing Tillie’s Magical Christmas Ride. “Then I realized I needed a sequel, and another book, too,” she says. “Now I can’t stop writing. It’s my passion. I’ll eventually get back to my story. Right now I’m having fun writing for kids.”

Perhaps because of her own early hardships, Cruz holds a special place in her heart for children. With her children grown, happy, and successful, Cruz has taken in foster kids and operates a daycare. She lives in San Diego, but made the six-hour drive to Phoenix during the holidays to support a charity called Chicanos Por La Causa, which gives meals and Christmas toys to needy children. Cruz donated copies of Tillie’s Magical Christmas Ride to help brighten the holidays for those young people. “I can’t think of anything more important than encouraging children to believe in themselves.”

For more information about Cruz, visit www.lupealmaguercruz.com.
Maybe you’ve seen some of the statistics about the diversity gap in children’s picture books. They caught my attention in 2013 while illustrating a new book featuring biracial children. I am a white author/illustrator, and because the children in the book are part of my nuclear family, I didn’t give much thought to their racial identity. I focused instead on creating a fun story with my son (their dad) that could be enjoyed by all children and families. As an illustrator, I also wanted to depict real children just being themselves. But I couldn’t ignore the emerging data. And I began to see it everywhere—from small book blogs to mainstream media.

What I discovered is that the lack of diversity in children’s books is a huge problem that hasn’t changed for over 25 years, even as the U.S. population grows increasingly more multicultural. The U.S. Census projects that by 2019, minorities younger than 18 are expected to exceed the number of white children (Bloomberg News). I find this striking, given that kids of color are hugely underrepresented in books available for children. Where are children of color in picture books?

Almost 90 percent of children’s books published in the U.S. feature white children, according to the Children’s Cooperative Book Center (CCBC), which has gathered data about diversity in kid lit since 1985. Although America’s racial and ethnic minorities now make up about half of the under-five age group, less than 10 percent of children’s books reflect the changing realities of America’s increasingly multicultural and racial population.

Adding together human and nonhuman characters, children of color make up just 7.8 percent of the total number of picture book protagonists. Take the 2014 CCBC data as an example. Of the 3,600 children’s books published in the U.S., only 180 were about African Americans, 66 had Latino characters, 38 included Native Americans, and 112 featured characters of Asian or Pacific Island descent.

These statistics generated a burst of media attention in early 2014, including the New York Times article, “Where Are the People of Color in Children’s Books?” by noted children’s book author Walter Dean Myers:
“Books transmit values. They explore our common humanity. What is the message when some children are not represented in those books?”

As I continued work on my book, the lack of diversity phenomenon became a personal wake-up call. But I didn’t make a serious connection between the data and my book publishing worldview until I had to select a BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) “subject descriptor” category. Juvenile Fiction was easy. But there is no category for Multicultural.

So I dove deeper into the growing number of organizations, blogs, and efforts dedicated to raising awareness about the diversity gap. The collective passion about this issue seems to cluster around the core set of ideas, insights, and facts below. These represent my own understanding of the issues and are not in any way intended to prioritize one issue over another. For me, they are equally relevant and enlightening:

There is no single definition of the term “multicultural literature” as it applies to books for children and young adults. The CCBC uses the term to mean books by and about people of color.

“Diversity” in library collections and programs refers to cultural diversity. Culture includes shared characteristics that define how a person lives, thinks, and creates meaning. These characteristics include customs, traditions, rituals, food, dress, and language. Typically people from the same cultural group share similar characteristics.

How we describe diversity is important—but controversial. For example, is there a difference between “casual” versus “intentional” diversity? Elizabeth Bird writes in the School Library Journal, “Casual diversity can be seen in books where diversity is integrated into the storyline without a hitch. Put another way, these are books where the point of the story isn’t diversity, but just a natural outgrowth of it.”

“True casual diversity can only exist in a perfect world,” counters Marion Snow Campbell. “Ideally, people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds would value and appreciate each other, and everyone would recognize that differences are normal. But discrimination, inequality, and intolerance based on ethnicity and culture still exist.”

Creators of color are still heavily underrepresented in children’s books. Lee & Low Books, the largest multicultural children’s book publisher in the U.S. points out that, “In every category except Latino, more books are being published about characters from a particular culture by someone who is not from that culture than by someone who is. This disparity is most dramatic when it comes to books with African/African American content, of which only 39 percent are by African Americans.”

Positive representations of diversity in children’s books facilitate acceptance of cultures different from one’s own and fosters global connections. More and more studies show the powerful benefits of diverse books where characters of different backgrounds are presented naturally, authentically, and in a manner that affirms their cultural identities. Diverse books serve as a window to a multicultural world and show that despite differences, all people share common feelings and aspirations. The Association for Library Service to Children has a wonderful white paper on the “Importance of Diversity in Library Programs and Material Collections for Children” highlighting the importance of diverse books for young readers.

Fortunately, an enormous push to close the diversity gap has emerged over the past few years. Leading the way are organizations such as Lee & Low Books and grassroots initiatives like We Need Diverse Books and Multicultural Children’s Book Day. Through their efforts, diversity appears to be increasing. In 2014, the number of books by/about people of color jumped to 14 percent (up from 10 percent in 2013). Though not as high as it could be, the improvement is encouraging for everyone who loves children’s picture books.

Jo Ann Kairys is an award-winning author/illustrator who writes with her son Daniel. Their first book, Sunbelievable, earned seven national book awards, including Mom’s Choice Gold. I Want Cake! was released in November 2015 and has received stellar reviews. In addition to her Haitian American grandchildren, Jo Ann Kairys and her husband also have three adopted children from both Native American and Russian American backgrounds, two grandchildren from Native American and African American backgrounds, and one grandchild born in Russia.
There is a lot happening in Charleston, South Carolina when it comes to people helping each other. For example, each year, The Citadel, which is The Military College of South Carolina, holds what they call Leadership Day. Everyone in the college’s Corps of Cadets spends the day learning about how to be a leader by serving others, and by studying how to make ethical decisions.

Team Backpack Journalists got to follow cadets around and participate in the painting of the new Charleston Strong mural. We call these outings, “Cover the assignment.” This was our first field trip to The Citadel campus.

We were able to choose what we would cover. We decided to go with cadets who were visiting classrooms to lead writing projects with our classmates about heroes.

We especially wanted to be a part of the dedication of a community mural The Citadel was creating to honor nine people who were killed last June at a church in our city. There was a lot of briefing going on. We learned that the military uses the term “briefing” instead of the word “explaining.”

**We had lots to accomplish.** First, we were met by Lt. Col. Randall Adcock who was in charge of Run for a Reason, one of dozens of Leadership Day events. The cadets in the marathon raised money for local agencies that help people. Dorian, one of our Team Backpack Journalists, wanted to run with them, but was cautioned. “Have you been preparing for this? After all, it is a marathon,” said LTC Adcock. We all had to say no, we were not prepared to run 25 miles. Then we asked him about his definition of a hero.

“It’s someone who goes out of their way to help another, who makes a personal sacrifice, and for sure, it’s someone who has served in our nation’s military, keeping our country free,” he said.

Next, after hundreds of cadets learned firsthand about ethics and discovered that “ethical” means honorable, we were able to sit down with Capt. Joe Schweitzer. Capt. Schweitzer used to be a Marine pilot. He told cadets about how he once made a serious mistake by not telling the truth, an unethical decision. He showed us pictures of a plane he had crashed and told us the hard lesson he learned. He said he hoped that we would always have someone in our lives to help us make the right decision when facing a tough one.

Next, we watched groups of cadets called “companies” board
dozens of school buses to go volunteer at different places. While waiting, the 1,200 cadets were standing perfectly still with their arms and hands by their sides and their eyes looking straight ahead. We were told that this was called “standing at attention.” We were in awe of the campus and wanted to stay longer, but it was time to cover the biggest event.

We walked through the park next to the college to a really long grey wall. This was where the cadets were kicking off the new Charleston Strong mural. There were a lot of people there and Citadel cadets were standing by to help everyone use stencils to paint hundreds of doves on the wall.

In the middle of the wall were the words “Charleston Strong” along with a painted palmetto tree with nine painted doves flying away from it. The palmetto tree is our state tree. We stood by quietly as nine cadets holding white doves lifted them into the air to help them fly away, and then Charleston’s Mayor, Joe Riley, and some other officials spoke to the crowd about the importance of the wall.

The image of the tree with the nine doves was designed by Gil Shuler after nine people in one of our city’s oldest churches were shot and killed last summer. He let The Citadel use his symbol on the wall. That’s what the wall was for, to remember those nine people and to provide hope because Charleston is strong. Mrs. Myra Thomson, who was killed at the church, earned two degrees at The Citadel Graduate College, so they were doing this for her, too.

Our mentor for our team arranged for us to interview Gil Shuler. “After the tragedy, all I could see in my mind were the doves flying upwards to the heavens, and then I added in the palmetto tree, as our entire state was so hurt. I gave my art, this image, to our community so that it would become a symbol of hope for all, as we heal. The nine doves are for the lives lost,” said Mr. Shuler. He said he would visit our classroom soon.

We met Mayor Riley, and all of us got to shake his hand. We decided we may never wash our hands again. Our local newspaper took our photo with the Mayor, and then posted it on its website. Then we lined up to paint our doves on the wall, paying respects for the ones lost. But, our day wasn’t over.

We went to school, Simmons-Pinckney Middle School, where cadets were teaching seventh graders about heroes. They challenged each student to write about their real-life hero. The cadets moved around the room, giving each one of our classmates attention.

When the Citadel Leadership Day ended, we all agreed that we were the lucky kids. We had asked a total of 14 cadets about their heroes. They spoke about teachers, doctors, military service members, and police officers. Some talked about their mothers and fathers. They all agreed a hero is someone who helps others without expecting any reward. Best of all? We met so many cadets, who are the future leaders of our country. We hope to return soon.

About A Backpack Journalist

At A Backpack Journalist, we refer to the successful journey through self-expression as the “finding of one’s voice.” We believe the process of self-expression is crucial to developing confidence. We also believe that once found, this voice forms the necessary foundation for a resilient life. Our journalists, ages 10-17, attend events as a group, taking notes and eventually comparing their observances on notecards. With the assistance of a mentor, the group assembles and edits the notecards until a report takes shape. Learn more about A Backpack Journalist at www.abackpackjournalist.com.
Freedom Fight

by: Noah Young, grade K
(Noah was inspired to write this poem after his family rescued a dog)

When they were born,
they were the unwanted,
sensitive ones.

They had wanted to stay home,
but it was too late.

They had realized that their new
world was actually quite old.
It was horrible.

But, they learned to be strong.
Now, they are safe and will always
be wanted.

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Hey Kids, listen up! Studies show that the average kid in the United States spends more than seven hours a day in front of a screen or on the phone. So what? Not a big deal, you say.

Wrong!

Turn off the television. Put down the Xbox controller. Step away from that PlayStation. Shut down the DS. Get up off of the sofa. It’s time to stand up and get your body moving!

Your body needs physical exercise. Why? The scientific results are in. Young people need at least 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity every day. Just one hour of moving your muscles can keep your body and mind healthy. One hour per day? That’s all? That doesn’t sound like too much to ask. You love to run and jump and dance and move your body. Don’t you?

Unfortunately, the answer for many kids may be NO. Experts at the World Health Organization say that as many as 80 percent of all young people may not be getting enough exercise. The study looked at kids ages 6 to 17 around the world.

The situation might be even worse right here in the United States. First Lady Michelle Obama says that we may be looking at “the most sedentary generation of children in the history of our country.” To make a difference, she travels around the country to promote a program called “Let’s Move!” Families need to learn how to get more active. So do schools and communities.

Is a “couch potato generation” growing out of control?

Poor eating habits add to the problem. Unhealthy fast food, sugary drinks, and salty snacks seem to be everywhere. Studies show that kids tend to eat lots more junk food when they sit around in front of a screen.

Combine these poor eating habits with less and less physical activity and you get a recipe for real trouble. The end result may be an entire generation of out of shape, unhealthy couch potatoes. Most experts say that obesity is an epidemic in America. Poor eating habits might be connected to a huge rise in cases of type 2 diabetes and other disorders among kids and adults.
Can anything be done to reverse this dangerous trend?

Professor Charles Corbin is one of the world’s leading experts on fitness and exercise for young people. He is the author of more than 90 books, including *Fitness for Life: Elementary School*.

“Kids need to move their bodies,” says Corbin. “Getting fit is a product of the process of physical activity and exercise.” The problem, Corbin says, is that when most kids think of fitness, they think of exercise. You know, push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, jumping rope, lifting weights, and running laps. Who wants to do that?

Of course, there are lots of fun ways to be active. You can play sports like soccer or volleyball. How about running, swimming, hiking, playing tag or kick the can, or climbing trees? Being active also includes normal everyday things like riding your bike, climbing stairs, or even walking home from school.

“We all like to do things we find fun,” Corbin says. The same is true for physical activity and exercise. The more we like something, the more likely we are to do it over and over again. He says that a physically active child is much more likely to be active as an adult.

**Corbin is all about** the guidelines promoted by Michelle Obama’s program. Those guidelines call for 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity each day for children and teens. An entire hour! Are you kidding me? That sounds like a lot. Not really. It can be much easier than you think to get your body moving. For example:

- Make a new house rule: no sitting during television commercials.
- Limit TV or video game time. Keep the TV out of bedrooms.
- Walk around the block after a meal.
- Walk around when using the phone.

The science is solid. Studies show that even a moderate level of physical activity can lead to better health. A more active lifestyle can help reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart
disease, and cancer. It can also help a person to maintain a healthy weight.

So Kids, what are you waiting for? Put down that remote, get off that sofa, and start moving your body, today!

**Numbers tell a scary story**

» One in three American kids and teens is overweight. That is triple the rate seen in studies conducted in 1963.

» Approximately 17 percent (or 12.5 million) of all American kids and teens (ages 2-19) are considered obese.

» Since 1980, obesity among kids and teens in the United States has almost tripled.

» Childhood obesity is now the #1 health concern among parents in the United States. It tops drug abuse and smoking.

Source: American Heart Association

» One in eight preschoolers in the United States is obese.

» Children who are obese are five times as likely to be overweight or obese as adults.

Source: Centers for Disease Control; Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, Obesity

**Author notes:**

Professor Charles Corbin says that if kids are to be successful in meeting the guidelines for more physical activity, variety and enjoyment are critical. The Physical Activity Pyramid, as shown on page 25, provides a good model for helping kids of all ages select from a variety of activities. Like adults, Corbin adds, kids do not all like the same activities. So trying a wide variety of activities increases the chances that they will find activities they enjoy. Enjoyment has been shown to be one of the most important factors in exercise adherence. It should be about having fun.

MEET HARMONY AND HER DAD...

The Soul of Harmony is a music driven, action adventure that follows the near capture of young Harmony Walker and her famous dad, blues and jazz musician John “Eazy” Walker. Seduced by promises of fame and fortune, she enters into a pact with a mysterious woman accepting possession of a Magical Mouthpiece, promising to return it in one year.

“A new thrilling and gripping children’s series with the emotional fervor of Harmony, a precious child whose only desire is to assit her family out of the clutches of poverty. Her journey to help out takes her family and best friend Juan Carlos down a mysterious path they never could have imagined!”

- Daniele Wilkinson Steiner, author, The Great Adventures of Nina Puppalina and Lizzy Lou

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It’s Fun to Learn with Lonnie the Loon!

In Lonnie the Loon Learns to Fly, Lonnie wants to change shapes like the clouds, blow like the wind, and flow like the river. He learns lessons about all three as he flies with his mom.

In Lonnie the Loon Finds His Home, Lonnie looks for the perfect home as he explores his lake. His mom helps him understand which home is the best one for him.

In Lonnie the Loon Learns to Call, Lonnie wants to learn how to make loon sounds like his dad. A free QR Code Reader App lets the reader “hear” the calls as Lonnie learns them!

Titles appropriate for children ages 2 to 6
Available on Amazon.com and Booklocker.com
Author Barbara Renner is available for pre-k and elementary school visits.
www.rennerwrites.com

The Perfect Bedtime Story...

A helpful aid for children who experience nightmares and encounter difficulty falling asleep again. The short fable tells a story about a rabbit who awakens from a nightmare and is unable to go back to sleep. Through the sage advice of the dream guardian, the rabbit discovers a remedy for his sleepless state.

“A children’s picture book with an important lesson for a good night’s sleep. Highly recommended!”
– Midwest Book Reviews

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I See the Sun series
by Satya House
Explore the world! Life in different countries told from a child’s point of view. I See the Sun books is an award-winning series of bilingual picture books, each focused on one country and one day in the life of one child with a story told from the child’s perspective. Every book introduces the culture, family life, and language of one particular country in a way that is sensitive to each culture. Includes age-appropriate (5+) country facts and a glossary for extended learning. Books include I See the Sun in: Nepal, Afghanistan, Russia, China, Mexico, and Myanmar (Burma). www.satyahouse.com

Shower in the Rain
by Brooke Williams
Rain rain, go away! What’s a kid to do inside all day when it rains? Forget about staying cooped up, Kaelyn wants to play outside in the rain! While mom is usually up for fun, today, she resists … after all, she hasn’t even showered yet! When Kaelyn persists, mom gives in to her daughter’s pleas and simply showers IN the rain! This whimsical tale showcases a mom going back in time to being a kid at heart while the little girl does what little girls do best with puddles.

The Tiniest Tumbleweed
by Kathy Peach
Everyone feels small or inadequate at some point in their lives. The Tiniest Tumbleweed is a story written to help children learn more about what they can do to become their best selves, despite whatever may be making them feel small or limited. The characters are two Sonoran Desert neighbors, a tiny tumbleweed and a baby house sparrow, who are both small for their age. Guided by the loving encouragement of their parents, they learn to work within their own physical limitations to grow to be the best they can be, rather than measure themselves against others.

Side-Yard Superhero: Life Lessons from an Unlikely Teacher
by Rick D. Niece, Ph.D.
Although life’s journey took him far from his childhood home, Rick D. Niece, Ph.D., never forgot the lessons he learned and the people he met as a young man growing up in picturesque DeGraff, Ohio, especially Bernie Jones. Confined to a wheelchair with severe cerebral palsy, Bernie became Rick’s friend, inspiration, and superhero, opening a world of compassion, trust and adventure for them both. Forty years later, Rick returned to Ohio to visit the never-to-be-forgotten Bernie Jones of a childhood long past and a promise finally kept.
**Winter Reading Guide**

**When Grandma’s False Teeth Fly**
by Mary Lee

*When Grandma’s False Teeth Fly* is a light-hearted, fun story to be used by teachers, librarians, and parents to bring up bullying in a conversation with children in a casual way, which may lead to a serious discussion in a safe atmosphere. *When Grandma’s False Teeth Fly* won the Silver Medal Award from the Military Writers Society of America and the Finalist Book Award from Reader’s Favorite. Visit [www.maryleebooks.com](http://www.maryleebooks.com) or [www.marylee.tateauthor.com](http://www.marylee.tateauthor.com) for more information and to purchase this book and other books by author Mary Lee.

**A to Z Character Education for the Classroom**
by Sherry Hoffman, B.S., M.Ed.

A valuable resource for parents and educators! *A to Z Character Education for the Classroom* is an award-winning activity book that teaches key social skills through fun activities and poetry while developing positive character traits. Written by Sherry Hoffman, K-12 reading specialist and author of other classroom stories, this book can be used to encourage readers to be the best version of themselves. 2014 Mom’s Choice Award: Gold, 2014 Eric Hoffer Book Awards: Honorable Mention, 2014 Story Monster Approved (Grades 4 - 6), 2014 Purple Dragonfly Awards: Honorable Mention, Second Place. [www.SherryLHoffman.com](http://www.SherryLHoffman.com)

**Swiss Cheese Adventures**
by Darleen Wohlfeil

Summer is finally here and Jackson can hardly wait for the excitement to begin. Grandma always told him, “You never know where and you never know when adventure will strike.” Jackson knew the only limitation to life’s adventures was a lack of imagination. Grandma would always say, “Enjoy your childhood, for many cares of the day lay ahead, and like hungry insects, they eat their way through your imagination leaving it like Swiss cheese. Sometimes he would watch her making lunch and she would hold up a piece of Swiss cheese and look across at him through one of its holes and mournfully say, “Another adventure lost.” Jackson was ready... let the adventure begin!

**The Growing Sweater**
by Jason J. Marchi

Granny Quigley has knitted a very unique sweater. To her surprise, every time she washes and dries the purple sweater with the white lace collar, it grows one size larger! What can she possibly do with a sweater that keeps growing? Will it ever stop growing? Ashley and Morgan, Granny’s granddaughters, take charge of the situation in an attempt to solve Granny’s dilemma. As the sweater grows unexpectedly for each new owner, the three travel the countryside looking for a home for such an unusual article of clothing. Available at discount from [www.fahrenheitbooks.com](http://www.fahrenheitbooks.com).
Winter Reading Guide

The Legend of Hobbomock: The Sleeping Giant
by Jason J. Marchi

In this dramatic story of a young Quinnipiac brave named Blackbird, award-winning author Jason Marchi and painter Jesse Bonelli teamed up to capture the history of a time before our own. Through young Blackbird’s eyes we learn the Quinnipiac tribal legend of how the Sleeping Giant landform in Hamden, Connecticut came to look like a giant man sleeping on his back. Winner of a CT Press Club Award. A 2015 REVERE Awards finalist highly recommended for schools and libraries. Available at discount direct from the publisher at www.fahrenheitbooks.com or call 203.453.5700.

Just Because
by Chiquita Camille Payne, illustrated by Jerry Craft

Just Because is a short picture book written in poetic form by Chiquita Camille Payne, illustrated by award-winning illustrator, Jerry Craft and published by Mama’s Boyz, Inc. Just Because tells the story of a young mother who takes her inquisitive son on a poetic journey of the importance of family, traditions and how families get together for special occasions for no reason at all and that the greatest love is family ... just because! First-place winner, 2015 Purple Dragonfly Book Awards.

The Azurite Encounter
by Jane Frances Ruby

Desiree and Wes journey with their high school geology class into the Grand Canyon to learn firsthand all the geeky stuff their teacher taught in class. By the time they reach the bowels of the canyon, they are met with unseasonably warm rains and record snowmelt. The canyon floods and Desiree gets cut off from her class. She faces several unforeseen forces of nature including a hidden civilization that has been thriving in the canyon for centuries. The Azurite Encounter is a tale of guts, wits, and resourcefulness that only high school seniors could conjure up when in a pinch.

Pup: A Series of Short Tails “The Cape”
by Dee Ardelean

A toy pup ... a fluffy dog ... and one cape ... anything can happen! Follow the adventures of Pup, Mr. Fluffy, and Lucy, as one magical t-shirt changes everything! A series of short tails and tales for ages 3-7. Get your copy today at Amazon or deeardelean.com.
Saving Jake
by Ophelia Julien
Philip Corts has a unique ability that best friend Jake Holdridge won’t let him ignore, but it is
an ability that Philip both fears and shuns. After an absence of nearly three years, a desperate
Jake comes back to renew their friendship and with a request that triggers every one of Philip’s
hidden nightmares. Would he use that ability once more to help Jake? The request is life-and-
death and Philip must decide: watch Jake die, or try to save him in a way that risks both their

Lonnie the Loon Flies South for the Winter
by Barbara Renner, illustrated by Davina Kinney
While flying south for the winter, Lonnie the Loon encounters strong winds that blow him off
course. Instead of landing on coastal waters, he ends up on a lake in the middle of the desert.
Lonnie becomes friends with a quail, who teaches him about desert critters. Using a free QR
Code Reader App, the reader will be able to listen to the call of the Gambel’s Quail, the song
of a Cactus Wren, the howl of a coyote, and the rattle of a rattlesnake, as well as the wail of a
Common Loon. This is the fourth in a series of children’s picture books about Lonnie the Loon.

The Shark in the Park
by Mark Watson, illustrated by Pablo Michau
The air is misty, bright, and cool the morning Michael walks to school. At the boundary of the
park he waits, nervously he hesitates. The day warms up, the sun shines down and Mike walks
on, into town. Gnarly branches, crook and tight, curl around the ghostly light. Suddenly he
freezes, weak at the knees, what is that swimming beneath the trees?

Three Clever Coyote Pups
by Sharon I. Ritt
Three curious coyote brothers on an adventure in Arizona must be quick and clever thinkers
when encountering a rattlesnake blocking their path. The native creatures and the alluring
foothills setting in Three Clever Coyote Pups are presented vividly with rich illustrations, but the
fact that the story is printed in English and Spanish in the same book makes it unique. Sharon
I. Ritt’s second picture book entertains as it educates, using vibrant language to frame the story
that includes just enough peril to generate excitement, allowing children see the benefits of
staying calm in the face of danger.

Click on the book cover to purchase any of the above titles.
To advertise your book in our Reading Guide, contact Cristy Bertini at Cristy@FiveStarPublications.com for rate information.
Tina Takes the Stage

Rosemary Evans is pleased to announce that Tina, the Tooth Fairy, a musical based on two of her Royal Dragonfly Award-winning children’s books, is in rehearsal now in Salt Lake City. Rosemary’s books, Teeny Tiny Tina the Teeny Tiny Tooth Fairy, and Teeny Tiny Tina and her Teeny Tiny Pet weave together delightful tales with loveable characters that children want to read again and again. Her stories impart gentle lessons to prepare children for some of the challenges they may face while growing up.

From the rave reviews of the books, it seems quite natural that sooner or later Teeny Tiny Tina would take the leap to the stage. Producer, lyricist, and writer Linda Hasting Metcalf describes the play as “an enchanting staged musical preview for the entire family.

The musical will be performed twice by professional and amateur actors onstage at the Marriott Center for Dance at the University of Utah on February 13, 2016. Tickets are available at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/2227364. To order the books, visit www.tinatoothfairy.com or Amazon.com.

Prepare to Launch!

Join the lovable Josh, who uses his brilliant imagination—and his mother’s laundry basket—to take off for the stars and sail on the high seas!

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Valentine’s Day Worksheets

Valentine’s Day Word Search

Take a look at the Valentine’s Day words listed at the bottom of the page and then find and circle each of them in the block of letters below. They can be forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonal.

R D X U Z X C M M N Z V W N W
F D E S X O V F B T E F D V H
N Y O R E W C K T K O G A E Q
F D Q L N H N W Y N Z T H F P
L N G D U I F T Y Y E X U J Y
P A D G P S S I K N L M O A E
D C S K C C E J R N M A A M N
U O J X H D S Y D P H D H F I
H M W U H T O B I K X J A H T
Z M R Z I A R R H E A R T H N
L T F E R O V C T Q C Y I P E
J T E E W S L N Q F U M D D L
I J D J Z B O G U V G F I O A
Y A O J A B V L B Z O P Z Z V
M F D F I C E C U P I D X X A

Candy  Pink
Cupid  Red
Heart  Roses
Hug  Sweet
Kiss  Valentine
Love

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**The Secret Drawer**

by Nancy Gee  
Reviewer: Jill DeMarte

_The Secret Drawer_ was written by Nancy Gee after a real flying squirrel found its way into her bedroom and into her sock drawer. The adventure began when her cat, Odis, refused to budge from the front of the dresser for two long days. I found the illustrations and the rhyming to be particularly fun and attention holding. I wasn’t certain at first where the story was going, but by the end it all came together. For the younger aged children, I would probably give them the back story behind this to get their imaginations flowing. The characters Al and Sal were a lot of fun to follow and so was Maddie.

**Rumplepimple**

by Suzanne DeWitt Hall  
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

_Rumplepimple_ is a comical inside view of a clever minded pet. Living with his two moms and his cat sister named Chicken, Rumplepimple often finds himself in unintended mischief. Feeling misunderstood, he lets us in on one of his most recent mishaps. All with kind intention, he bounds from the car and quickly finds his way into the supermarket, where he is able to right the wrongs he approaches. It’s a delightful romp into the personal perspective of a dog’s life. Illustrations by Keven Scott Gierman accent the imaginative story well, bringing each detail to life.

**The Trotters of Tweeville series**

by Shirin Zarqa-Lederman  
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Shirin Zarqa-Lederman is a board-certified professional counselor. Her 17-year counseling career has focused solely on children and adolescents and their families and she has created a children’s book series that demonstrates character development through real-life situations. The soft rhyming text lays easy upon the mind as the reader follows, and hopefully applies the content to their own situations. Each book teaches the importance of making kind and helpful choices. _Zavis DaMavis_ shows us that actions outweigh words, and if they flow from the heart, the words aren’t always necessary. _Harraf Namrattle_ encourages us to make the extra effort to think before we speak, and be kind to others whose preferences may be different from ours. _Joujou McVue_ presents us with a great lesson in time management. Sometimes, it’s good to slow down and experience the most out of every situation!
**Ride to the Stars**
by Suzanne Gene Courtney
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

*Ride to the Stars* is a tender children's story about life, loss, and love. So often when we are faced with such events, we are at a loss for what to say. Overwhelmed with the details, we desperately attempt to soothe the wounded with meaningfully overused sayings, leaving the heart void of our intentions. Especially the heart of a child, who has not yet grasped such idioms and phrases. I personally found myself faced with this very thing. Heartbroken as one may be, little minds warped with grief want an explanation. They too desperately need to find peace and understanding to right the upheaval in their lives. Suzanne Gene Courtney has drawn from her own experience, and lovingly brings those overwhelming losses of life into bite size, digestible portions. Grief often halts our step and stunts our growth as we turn inward to our losses. Courtney offers a gentle hand forward in bringing a new learning experience. Her story takes place in Hawaii, and we are introduced to Honu, a green sea turtle. We are also provided with a glossary of Hawaiian terms and observe different customs and lifestyles. Nothing can replace what is lost, but growing and expanding can lessen the pain. Thank you Suzanne Gene Courtney!

**Adventures of the Sea Kids series**
by Lee Ann Mancini
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Authors and illustrators are truly a team. One breathes forth thought, converting it to living impression, where the other captures it and layers visual substance until it takes form, returning it to dazzle the eye and dance in the imagination. Lee Ann Mancini, creator of the *Adventures of the Sea Kids series*, and illustrator Dan Sharp come to us highly awarded for their joint talent and ability to be just such a team. *Fast Freddy* and *What a Bragger* jump off the shelf and endear you before a single word is read. They are adorably bright in color and design, lending harmony to each encouraging word. *Fast Freddy* opens a panoply of emotions and choices children are faced with every day. Excitement, insecurity, rejection and not fitting in, bullying, competition, all confront them continually. Mancini offers the reader an opportunity to act rather than react, allowing a moment to rethink a quick judgment, and maybe find something great they might have missed. *What a Bragger* teaches us to take the time to look beyond annoying behavior in those around us. Sometimes those behaviors are meant to hide the real feelings they are experiencing. We learn with Cory and Melissa that dealing honestly with those close to us and taking the time to understand the “real” problem can change everything. Mancini subtly points out in both stories that the adults around us may have just the help we need in figuring out our trying situations. *Adventures of the Sea Kids* provides a delightful and encouraging series for our children as they grow and learn how to fit in.

**I Wonder, I Wonder, What’s On This Side of My Super Adventurous Purple Train Ride**
by Valerie Christopher
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

The colorful pages will delight young readers as they share Corey's excitement as he prepares for a new family adventure to begin. From city to country landscapes and back again, the big purple train gives much to take in. Oh, the fun we have when the walls of our lives seem to extend and let new adventures in!
Monster Reviews

**Max and Bear**
by Pam Saxelby
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Pam Saxelby, an expert in childhood education, uses her wit and 25 years of classroom experience to bring us relatable blogs and heartfelt stories for the up-and-coming young reader. First impressions are always important, and we only get one chance at it in each situation. It’s best to imprint the mind while it is open and pliant to fill the recesses of our youth with hope and kindness that will prevail in those special moments. Such stories as *Max and Bear* fortifies the old truth: good things come to those who wait. Everyone has a place, a gift to lend to their environment. When we, like Bear, learn to let our gift make way for us, all are blessed in the experience. Illustrations by Stephen Adams adds a soft flow throughout the story.

**Saving Annie’s Mountain**
by The Children of Wild Dance Farm
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Although *Saving Annie’s Mountain* is a work of fiction, it is based on real events. The four children of this story take us through time and history. Many things, and great lives have brought us to the day in which we live. Sacrifices, injustices, battles fought, won and lost, all brought us to the life we now live, and often take for granted. These four students, Lillie Gill-Newton, Maryam Keeley, Nicholas Mokhiber, and Samantha Stewart, while learning about energy production and mountaintop removal, decided to get more involved in the issues they were studying by writing this book. It is filled with educational information, and relates its effects on humanity. I personally enjoyed the benefits they experienced from Annie’s insight and personal remembrance of the events 90 years prior. Our elderly have seen and experienced amazing changes in life that we only brush lightly as history. They have a wealth of information we can glean, and even learn from, if we take the time to talk and share a moment with them. They came away from their visit with Annie with a greater understanding of life in the coal country that no classroom can provide. This is a remarkable story of fortitude and resilience written by children, for children.

**Timmy Teacup Transforms**
by Barbara Daniels
Reviewer: Jill DeMarte

A fun tongue twister right out of the gate. It made me smile trying to say it out loud! I would have my students repeat this title over and over just to get them excited for the story. I really enjoyed the message in this book about self-esteem, wanting to be something “different” and then getting the chance and learning more about what is wished for isn’t always necessarily better than what or who you already are. I especially love the “Appreciation” message and being careful what you wish for as I think this topic is a great way to get kids writing. I love the delicacy of the teacup being the main character and that it was a boy teacup experiencing life as a mug. I would definitely read this to my class at all ages K-4 because I think it would really go a long way in this day and age.
Dream on Amber
by Emma Shevah
Reviewed by Olivia Amiri, age 8

Dream on Amber is the kind of book that draws you in and you CAN’T stop reading. Amber wants to find out who her father is but instead she goes on this journey and discovers who she is. Amber finds her strong inner self and learns many skills she has. Amber has made up an imaginary dream dad, who guides her through her fears and problems. This story is told with lots of humor. Amber speaks with an authentic voice that both kids and adults can relate to. Dream on Amber is a heartwarming book that anyone in need of a strong story will flip for!

Olivia Amiri Solves the Mystery of the Dangerous Sandwich at Sunshine Academy
by Jeff Nathan
Reviewed by Olivia Amiri, age 8

I really loved Olivia Amiri Solves the Mystery of the Dangerous Sandwich at Sunshine Academy, and not because my name is in the story! The story is engaging and makes you think. As the reader, you become the investigator/detective. I really like this mystery because the main girl, Olivia, starts to learn by doing. She develops skills of solving mystery cases. The actual detective, Sherlock Poems, thinks he is solving them and that he’s a really good detective, but it’s actually Olivia who is doing all the work for him even though he takes the credit. There’s a lot of humor in this. The story stimulates the reader’s mind by giving clues and various options of what could have happened to the lost item. It’s really cool and helps kids use their imagination looking at all the options of what could have happened to the lost item and then, finally reading the actual solution. I also love the Hidden Picture Puzzle. This activity is a fun way to help kids strengthen their ability of being observant and to really focus. I highly recommend this book to ALL KIDS!

The ABC’s of Titles for Tiny Tales
by Mary Lee
Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

The ABC’s of Titles for Tiny Tales by award-winning author Mary Lee is an alphabetical collection of writing prompts to ignite and excite a child’s imagination in creative writing. How many times might one pick up a pen with the desire to be creative, and quickly fall to mindless doodling due to a lack of spontaneous inspiration? Children can find class assignments the same way at times. Mary Lee has stimulated that desire by tapping inspiration with a prompt, giving the child the freedom of creativity to take it from there. She also provides a visual prompt with great illustrations for each page to bring an even fuller experience for our young writers. I took up my pen and opened to the first prompt. I wrote whatever came to mind. Images flowed freely and words hurried after them, and a story appeared in no time. I found it quite enjoyable. I think this handy book will be a great addition to any family bookshelf, perfect for those rainy days or quiet times when little minds yearn to grow.
Valentine Conversation Heart Cookies

Wish someone a happy Valentine’s Day with these yummy sugar cookies inspired by the classic conversation hearts. Personalize the cookies with students’ names for fun classroom party treats.

Ingredients

- 2/3 cup butter, softened
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 (16-ounce) can vanilla frosting
- Food coloring

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Line two cookie sheets with Reynolds® Parchment Paper.

2. Beat butter in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium to high speed for 30 seconds. Add sugar, baking powder, and salt. Beat until combined, scraping the sides of the bowl occasionally. Beat in the egg, milk, and vanilla until combined. Beat in as much of the flour as you can with the mixer. Using a wooden spoon, stir in any remaining flour. Divide dough in half. If necessary, cover and chill dough about 30 minutes or until easy to handle.

3. Roll half the dough at a time between two sheets of parchment paper to 1/8- to 1/4-inch thickness. Using a 2 1/2-inch heart-shaped cookie cutter, cut out cookie shapes, re-rolling dough as needed until all the dough is cut out. Place shapes 1 inch apart on prepared cookie sheets.

4. Bake 6 to 8 minutes or until edges are firm and bottoms are very light brown. Transfer the parchment paper with baked cookies to wire racks and let cool. Once cooled, slide the parchment paper onto a work surface.

Tint frosting as desired with food coloring. Frost cookies with one color and use another color to pipe a message over the frosted cookies.

Recipe by: Reynolds® Kitchens
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When the cruel Thunder Giant Gorgo embarks on a quest to extract the all powerful Horned Crown from the mystic recesses of the Hateful Gate, it falls to a poor farm boy named Jack and a ragtag group of teenagers known as the Giant Killers to stop him.

For Jack and the Giant Killers, stopping Gorgo and his army of Thunder will mean an adventure that none of them has ever imagined. They will face obstacles along the way, daring escapes, thrilling rescues, and incredible discoveries… but the biggest feat of all might be learning to work together as a team.

Available in print and digital formats
Amazon.com, Barnesandnoble.com and Fastpencil.com/marketplace
**Not A Nugget**
by Stephanie Dreyer

Food or friend? Through fun animal facts and charming illustrations, *Not A Nugget* shows children a different way to view animals and their food. With a special foreword by Gene Baur, founder of Farm Sanctuary, this book is an educational resource for parents and teachers to introduce children to plant-based living.

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**Fabulous Me, Piper Lee And The Peanut Butter Itch (Smarties)**
by Tolya L. Thompson

Guided by her inner voice, MeMe, Piper Lee struggles to resist the temptation of eating peanut butter even though she knows she is allergic to peanuts. The itch to taste, and the total body itch that follows, provide an unforgettable lesson on food allergies. Join Piper Lee on her adventures of illnesses seen in the emergency room and discover how to stay healthy, fabulous, and ER free.

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**Asthma Is Not Stopping Me Featuring Fabulous Me, Piper Lee (Smarties)**
by Tolya L. Thompson

You can snowboard, run, dance, swim, and yes, get straight A’s in school! Join Piper on her triumphant tale of conquering asthma. Her message is never let asthma or anything else stop you from living a fabulous life!

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**Snooze**
by Brandi Russell

A magical sheep has just flown in from The Sleepy Sheep Farm. His mission is to transform naptime into a fun adventure. How? Snooze visits children during naptime. Children who are sleeping soundly when Snooze flies by will awaken to a trail of Snooze Clues leading them to a surprise. Get ready to hear your child squeal with delight when you say, “Snooze is on his way... it’s time to hit the hay!”
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Explorations of Commander Josh, Book Two: In Tahiti
by Donna LeBlanc
Commander Josh is back! And this time, he’s sailing on the high seas. Using his colorful imagination, ideas from his favorite travel shows (and a little help from his mom’s laundry basket), Josh makes his way across the South Pacific to the tropical land of Tahiti!

5 Owls, A Howl, And A Huh?
by ZUZA
What happens when Winzlow finds himself in the forest talking to a group of quirky owls? He gets caught up in a memorable conversation that leads to a silly ending! 5 Owls, A Howl, And A Huh? teaches children how to use “Who?, What?, Where?, When?, Why?, How?, and Huh?” to analyze the world around them by asking questions. You’ll find all this and more in the third installment of ZUZA’s line of children’s books detailing the world of WinzlowNation.

Cowboy Tad the Triangle Man
by Sherry Galloway Willis
He always kept his head under cover, hoping his friends wouldn’t discover that he was different than all the rest, though he looked the same with his hat and vest. Saddle up as author Sherry Galloway Willis takes us on an adventure with Cowboy Tad the Triangle Man. Even though he’s different, he shows courage in overcoming his fears and finding the importance of true friendship. Will Cowboy Tad realize that overcoming his fears brings more rewards than he could have ever imagined?
¡Bienvenidos! Welcome to Juicy Jack’s Spanish Corner!

¡Bienvenidos! Juicy Jack wants to know how you are today. He asks you using the phrase below.

¿Cómo estás hoy?

Use the phrase below and fill in the mood using a word from the box below to tell Juicy Jack how you are today.

Estoy (activity) ¿Y tú?

Pronunciation tip: The Spanish word “y” is pronounced like the English letter “e.” “Tú” is pronounced like the number “2.” ¿Y tú? = And you?

Grammar tip: If you are female and the emotion word ends in the letter “o,” change it to the letter “a.”

Practice with Juicy Jack:

Use this short conversation as a guide to practice with your friends:

Jack: Hola amigo. ¿Cómo estás hoy?
You: Hola Jack, estoy ______. ¿Y tú?
You: Adiós Jack.

Emociones – Emotions (moods)

1. feliz – happy
2. contento – content
3. bien – well
4. así así – OK
5. triste – sad
6. enojado – angry
7. tranquilo – calm
8. orgulloso – proud
9. mal – not well
10. enfermo – sick
11. cansado – tired
12. de mal humor – in a bad mood
13. de buen humor – in a good mood
14. aburrido – bored
15. asustado – frightened
16. emocionado – excited

Buenos días = good morning
Adiós = goodbye
Amigo = friend

Leigh Carrasco is an educator and author of the wildly popular Juicy Jack Adventures series about a spunky guinea pig who travels to Peru with his human.

www.juicyjackadventures.com
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THE SECRET’S OUT!
The Secret Drawer now distributed throughout France with other countries coming up!

The SECRET DRAWER, based on a true story, was written by Nancy Gee after a real flying squirrel found its way into her bedroom and into her sock drawer. The adventure began when her cat, Odis, refused to budge from the front of the dresser for two long days. Readers of all ages will find this story fascinating and informative. They’ll also learn that kindness to animals is returned by them in many unexpected ways.

The SECRET DRAWER has won the coveted Gold Award from Mom’s Choice Awards®


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A gem of a book for all ages!
Kim Belmonte, Primary Teacher

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