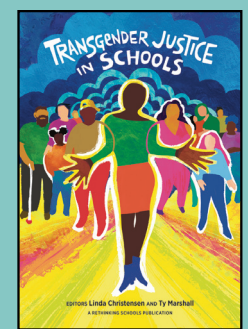
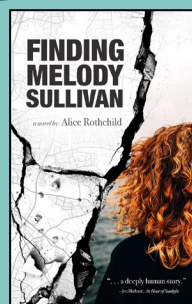
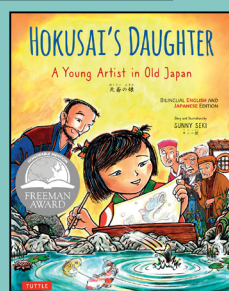
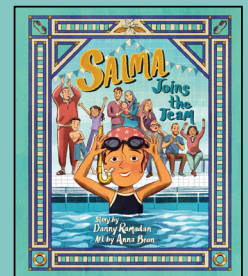
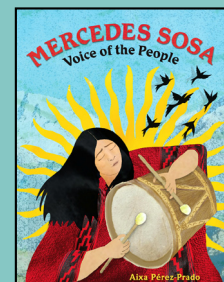
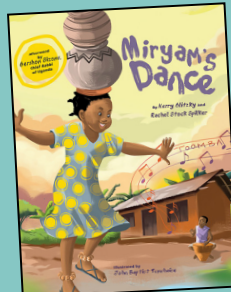
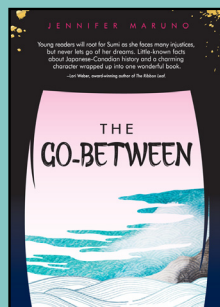
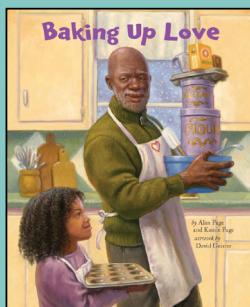
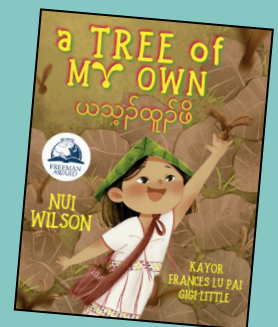
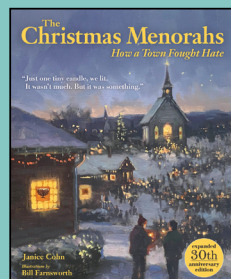
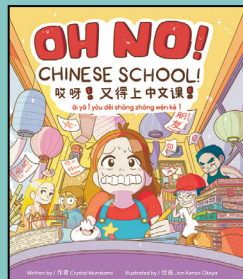
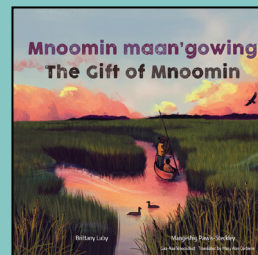
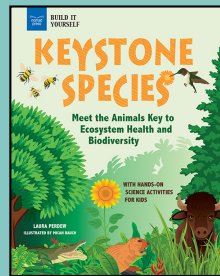
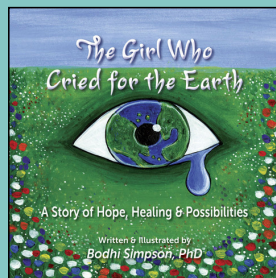
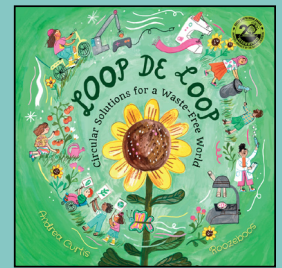
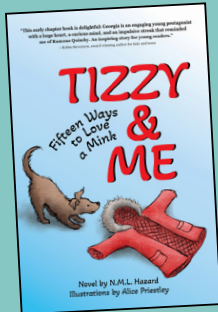


Skipping Stones

Summer 2025

A Multicultural Literary Magazine

Reviews of the 2025 Multicultural & Nature Award Books



The 2025 Skipping Stones Honor Awards



We are pleased to honor the following 25 outstanding books—in three categories: Multicultural, Nature, and Teaching Resources—as our 2025 Award Winners. These picture books, chapter books, novels and nonfiction works promote an understanding of cultures, cultivate cooperation, and/or encourage a deeper awareness of nature, ecology, and diversity. They foster respect for multiple viewpoints and closer relationships within human societies. The honored titles offer various perspectives, help us understand our diverse cultures and their histories, and how we overcome challenging situations.

Hearty congratulations to all the creators of these timely books! —the editors.

Multicultural and International Books

Mnoomin maan'gowing/The Gift of Mnoomin by Brittany Luby; illustr. Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley; trans. Mary Ann Corbiere. *Groundwood Books*. Ages 3–6.

This beautifully illustrated, bilingual picture book begins with the sentence: “A seed is a story you can hold in your hand.” Written in Anishinaabemowin (language of the native people of northwestern Ontario in Canada) and English, it explains the cultural and ecological significance of the “wild rice” harvested by Indigenous people from time immemorial. Through colorful illustrations and descriptive language, it shows the relationship between the rice and the animals around it: the mayfly, the pike, the eagle, the muskrat, the moose, the heron, the duck, the bat, and the people, as they harvest and prepare the rice to save, eat, and sow for future harvests. The book ends: “Each seed we sow is a story for the future. Each seed we sow is a gift for those to come.”

—Nancy Bray, community activist & retired educator, Oregon.

Momma's Going to March by Jennifer Maruno; illustr. Vivian Rosas. *Groundwood Books*. Ages 3–6.

What a timely message for us in the United States! It's so important that we get out in the streets and speak out to resist authoritarianism and fascism.

Momma's Going to March shows several

causes that have inspired diverse people to get out into the streets to have their voices heard. The illustrations highlight equal rights, voting rights, civil rights, integrated schools, Equal Rights Amendment, peace, clean water, climate, environmental justice, and more. The book answers questions like what makes a march, why some people are dressed in white, the use of flags, drums, and banners.

While this book is written and illustrated for younger readers, it will also appeal to anyone who, like myself, has marched for causes that are dear to their hearts.

—Charlotte Behm, ex-board member of Skipping Stones, is an educator and author, Oregon.

Baking Up Love by Alan Page and Kamie Page; art: David Geister. *Page Education Foundation*. Ages 5–9.

Baking Up Love is an outstanding picture book. The illustrations and the words draw the reader in so deeply that you can almost smell the cake baking. When Esther, a young African American girl, enters the front door her face is very expressive. You can see her nose, her face sniffing the air for a sign of baking. There was no smell of baking, and her home was just too quiet. She realizes right away that mom was not home from work and she finds grandpa asleep in his favorite chair. Esther is

worried that she won't have her special cupcakes for the Literacy Feast at her school the next day.

Grandpa tells her that he knows how to bake, and he goes to the recipe box and pulls out the right card. The two of them gather all the ingredients together while they dance and sing to music. Before they pour the batter into the baking molds grandpa says we must add a little love to it. "How do we add love?" Esther asks. Finally, they decide to hug the bowl while hugging each other. All the illustrations are gorgeous and half of them are full-spread—they continue from the far-left edge of the page to the far-right edge of the next page. The colors are deep, rich, and very real. You can feel love in this story.

—Paulette Ansari, our board member, Georgia.

The Home We Make by Maham Khwaja; illustr. Daby Zainab Faidhi. *Lee and Low Books*. Ages 5–10.

This gorgeous large picture book, painted in light and dark pastels, tells a story of a refugee family. In the beginning the parents and their little girl have sad, worried expressions. The little girl tells how they are forced to flee their home when rockets destroy their garden. How each of them could only take a small suitcase. How they walked and walked for many hours until they arrived at the beach where they laid down and slept under the dock with many strangers. In the morning boats came and picked the displaced people up. The boats take them to a large ship, and all the people board.

The boats and the ship were very crowded. The ship takes them to a camp where each family is assigned a small tent. The tent is home for many months through rainy and cold weather. During these months her parents fill out stacks of papers and they wait. Finally, they receive permission to fly to America. They must say good-bye to many friends in the camp.

The contrast between the light and dark colors in this picture book is impressive. The colors are so deep, and their faces are expressive. You can see the

fear and sadness of their long journey. We share the joy, the family experiences when they finally reach their new home. You can also feel their pain when someone throws a brick through their window with a paper tied to it which said, "Go Home!" There were a few problems settling in their new home. But the story ends with the family breaking bread with new friends in their new home. This book brings the plight of tens of millions of refugees to our attention with sensitivity and care.

—Paulette Ansari, retired librarian & storyteller, Georgia.

Miryam's Dance by Kerry Olitzky and Rachel Stock Spilker; illustr. John Baptist Tumuhaise. *Apples & Honey Press*. Ages 5–8.

Set in a small Jewish community in Uganda, the story of **Miryam's Dance** brings a new perspective to ancient traditions. The Abayudaya, the Jews of Uganda, prepare for *Shabbat*—the Sabbath—as Jews all over the world do. Welcoming the Sabbath includes songs in Hebrew and Luganda (their native language) and a shared dinner.

The story tells and illustrates the customs and preparations of the *Shabbat*. Everyone has tasks in the village, including young Miryam. But Miryam hears the joyful sound of a drumbeat that captivates and distracts her, and she dances her way to a group of musicians.

Miryam is welcomed and invited to join the dancers. She does so with pleasure and is delighted to learn that the troupe will be coming to her village that evening.

As the villagers gather together the drummers and dancers parade into the center and begin to dance. Miryam is invited to join but her parents object to this break from tradition. Miryam prevails in the spirit of celebration: there are many ways to welcome the Sabbath. Soon everyone is dancing, finding a new way to celebrate and honoring the wishes of a young girl.

—Judith Volem, retired educator in Oregon who continues to enjoy interacting with children of all ages.

Hokusai's Daughter: *A Young Artist in Old Japan*, by Sunny Seki. *Tuttle Publishing*. Ages 5–14.

The Japanese artist Hokusai was a famous artist in Japan, whose daughter, Eijo, also loved to paint and carried her art supplies with her everywhere. She would follow her father around to watch him work, and took his suggestions to heart so that she could be a better artist. But because she was a girl, most people thought that she couldn't create art the way a boy could.

When the Boys Day Festival arrived, Eijo had a chance to prove her talent. Her father was busy with a commissioned painting project, and she decided to show what she could do. She painted a huge Koi fish kite that drew the attention of the Shogun, the ruler of Japan at that time. But he couldn't believe a small girl could do that, and was dismissive of her talents. Hokusai took her to the palace anyway and she surprised everyone!

The illustrations are lively and colorful, and Japanese text runs along with the English text; this is an engaging story for young people and a great introduction to Japanese culture. Historical notes added at the end of the story give more information about this famous artist and his daughter, and will inspire young people to appreciate creativity in every person. There is also helpful information about specific artworks included in the story, their history, and importance in Japanese culture.

—Robin Winfree-Andrew, educator and parent, Oregon.

Oh No! Chinese School! *A bilingual Chinese/English picture book*, by Crystal Murakami; illustr. Jon Kenzo Okeya. www.eastwestdiscovery.com. Ages 6–9.

A bilingual book, **Oh No! Chinese School!**, describes Crystal's feelings about spending her Saturdays learning Chinese. The book's vibrant manga-style illustrations pop off the page, showing Crystal's rapidly changing reactions to tough and fun activities. Crystal is a biracial child, neither resembling her mom nor her dad, and she feels that

she is different from others. While her friends get to play, she struggles with being expected to learn her mom's language, even though the Saturdays include a trip to Chinatown with delicious snacks. The book shows how sharing food and language can bridge between cultures, promoting kindness and strengthening friendships. Crystal's Chinese lessons help her befriend a new student. While this bond forms very quickly for someone learning basic words, she is an appealing character with entertaining expressions. I found the book is easy to follow with both the English and Simplified Chinese text.

—Nancy Yen-wen Cheng, an American-born Chinese, teaches architecture at the University of Oregon.

Salma Joins the Team by Danny Ramadan; art by Anna Bron. *Annick Press*. Ages 6–9.

Salma, whose family immigrated from Syria, wishes she could swim like her idol, Yusra Mardini, who qualified for the Olympics on the Refugee Athletics Team, swimming the butterfly. But Salma doesn't know how to swim and no one in her family has ever been to a swimming pool.

Salma's parents are, at first, concerned about her wearing a swimsuit in public because it is considered too revealing in their Islamic culture. But her parents decide to support their daughter, and Salma works hard at learning to swim in preparation for the school team tryouts.

Meanwhile, people at the mosque start giving her a hard time about the swim suit, even though they say nothing about that to her school friend—another Syrian Canadian boy—on the team. The gossip is hurtful, but Salma receives wisdom and support from her parents and grandmother. Salma also switches to a full-body suit which makes her more comfortable.

I appreciate the love of swimming as I have swum laps for 50 years. I wished the author would have explained that many competitive swimmers choose to wear full-body suits to reduce drag, so it's not

such an outlying decision for Salma to use one. These suits have been worn in the Olympics until they were banned in 2010.

What happens when Salma gets in the pool for the swim meet? Is she nervous? Grab the book to find out what happens!

—Charlotte Behm, educator and author, Oregon.

The Go-Between by Jennifer Maruno. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 8-12.

The Go-between is an engaging young adult novel about Sumi, a 12-year-old Japanese Canadian girl, and her challenges in her first job as a live-in helper on an island near Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. While learning to navigate an isolated upper class household, she reminisces about her humble but loving home. She encounters people who are variously kind or brusque, and puzzles over the proper behavior. In facing a new daily routine with a harsh supervisor, what is the right thing to do? When she is asked to act as a Go-between, her thoughts reflect the divided bicultural loyalties of immigrants and their first-generation children.

Based on a true story, the book is filled with compelling characters and natural environments that bring early Pacific Northwest history to life. Both are at times touching and beautiful, and, at other times, severe. Seeing Sumi weather her trials could make the story comforting to those trying to thrive in an unfriendly setting. Because some secondary characters are briefly described, they might come across as one-dimensionally good or evil. To make it more accessible, the book comes with a glossary of Japanese terms and an interview with Jennifer Maruno that explains how the story was imagined from parts of her mother-in-law's experiences of growing up in North America. Overall, **The Go-between** brings to life a rarely told personal history from a youth point-of-view.

—Nancy Yen-wen Cheng, an American-born Chinese, teaches architecture at the University of Oregon.

The Christmas Menorahs: How a Town Fought Hate, by Janice Cohn; illustr. Bill Farnsworth. *Le Chambon Press*. Ages 7 and up.

In some ways the story of **The Christmas Menorahs** seems hard to believe in this internet age, when people tend to be choosy about who “deserves” solidarity and who might “deserve” hate. In this book, when a Jewish family's home is attacked because of visible Jewish holiday symbolism, the people of the town choose to stand with their Jewish neighbors, despite not knowing a whole lot about Judaism. They don't ask first what the Jewish family's politics were. They don't try to parse out whether the family did something to “deserve” the attack. They understand that no one deserves rocks thrown through their window during a holiday celebration.

The Jewish family—particularly the child whose window was smashed—is portrayed convincingly in their fear and ambivalence, and commitment to their Jewish practice. That saves this book from being a feel-good story for Christians about Christians doing good deeds at Christmas, a trope that it skirts at times. But the book shows honestly how important identity is, and how difficult it can be to proudly show who we are when who we are is under attack, even as it also shows how much it helps when we feel solidarity from friends and strangers.

In this book, vast numbers of non-Jewish people in a small town choose to turn their own homes into visibly “Jewish” homes, risking their own safety, and drawing that risk away from their Jewish neighbors. Even though so much of our discourse has become toxic and polarized, these kinds of acts of solidarity between neighbor and neighbor still exist. I know this personally from my own experience as a rabbi in Eugene, Oregon. Hundreds of non-Jews showed up in solidarity at our services—for weeks—after the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018. After the shooting in Poway, California in 2019,

members of the local mosque came to one of our services and set up tea, cookies, and kind words. When an antisemitic group was flyering for a “day of hate,” in April 2023, local Lutheran pastors arranged for their congregants to stand vigil with love signs outside the synagogue on that day. And the Jewish community has also shown that solidarity—after the mosque shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, by holding interfaith vigil at our local mosque. These acts do make a difference, and in times of fear and shock, remind us all—victim and ally—that we are so much stronger than those who try to spread hate.

This expanded 30th anniversary edition of the original **The Christmas Menorahs** (published in 1995) is a needed reminder that we don’t fight hate by posting on the internet, or by canceling people who disagree with us, or talking about how awful an act of hate is. We fight hate by choosing to take risks that can be uncomfortable, potentially putting the safety of homes and our bodies on the line, to show that we will stand with those who are targeted because of their identity—for whatever reason. And most of all, we fight hate, by responding to each other with curiosity and spreading connection and a vision of love.

—Rabbi Ruhi Sophia Motzkin Rubenstein, Temple Beth Israel—Center for Jewish Life, Eugene, Oregon.

Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People by Aixa Pérez-Prado. *Children’s Book Press/Lee & Low*. Ages 7-10. (Review of the Spanish edition follows this review.)

Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People is an outstanding picture book tells the story of Mercedes Sosa, the Argentine voice of the *Nuevo Cancionero* movement and her fierce resistance during the Dirty War of the Argentine dictatorship of the 1970s.

Mercedes grew up in a humble working class family in northern Argentina. At a young age she discovered her love for singing. Her talent and her passion led her into a long and successful career as a professional singer. Both during and after

her marriage, she performed all over Argentina and later around the world. The *Nuevo Cancionero* movement, inspired by Argentine and other South American folklore, became a popular vehicle for progressive political movements in South America. The book colorfully illustrates her story, both its high points and also her personal and political struggles. During the military dictatorship she was arrested onstage and forced into exile. Eventually she made her return, acting as a powerful symbol of democratic rebirth. Personally, she suffered often from depression and anxiety, some of it brought on by divorce and lack of income. Her personal strength and the support of the Argentine people really shine throughout the pages of the book.

While she did not write her own songs, her selection and interpretation of songs was exquisite. My personal favorites are those of Violeta Parra, the founder of the Chilean New Song Movement. The book could have been, of course, even more moving with recordings of some of these songs. They range from very heartfelt and existential laments such as “*Rin del Angelito*” to the more well-known and upbeat “*Gracias a la Vida*.” Other favorites sung by Mercedes include powerful political songs such as “*They Dance Alone/Cueca Sola*” by Sting and Victor Heredia’s “*Todavía Cantamos*.” We see that arts and artists play a powerful role in popular protests against authoritarian/dictatorial regimes.

Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People is available in both English and Spanish editions, each with an informative *Afterword* for inquisitive readers. Author Pérez-Prado has skillfully illustrated this biography.

—Herb Everett, retired printer and designer, Oregon.

Mercedes Sosa: La voz del pueblo, escrito e ilustrado por Aixa Pérez-Prado. *Lee & Low*.

Empezando por la portada evocadora de mujer, ritmo, sol y cielo; todo esto representando el amor de Mercedes por la música y su patria, Argentina. Esta es la historia que nos cuenta Aixa Pérez-Prado en este lindo libro. Con solo hojearlo vemos como

muchas de las ilustraciones fluyen como música, en este caso la música y las canciones de Mercedes Sosa, y al mismo tiempo su vida. Una vida que no fue fácil, sin embargo, Aixa desde la primera página nos cautiva y atrae con la imagen de Mercedes y el cóndor. Mi mente inmediatamente me dictó “gracias a la vida...” Mercedes luchó valientemente contra la opresión y la pobreza del pueblo argentino y su lucha fue reconocida e imitada por todo el mundo. Revivió música del pueblo dándole así orgullo y dignidad y dejando una huella indeleble en nuestros corazones. Espero que este libro lleve a los jóvenes que lo lean a re-descubrir a esta cantora, y que ellos también se sientan movidos a actuar. Su música se encuentra fácilmente en los nuevos medios.

—*Esther Celis is a board member of Skipping Stones.*

Grandma, Don't Forget How Much I Love You by Linda A. Gerdner and Jacqueline A. Witter; illustr. Amy Bunnell Jones. *Pizzicato Press*. Ages 7-10.

Grandma, Don't Forget How Much I Love You is a picture book with a distinct purpose: to share the experiences of Alzheimer's and related diseases with young children. Taking place in a vivid and lush setting in Jamaica, we spend one Sunday with Amancia, her mother, and her grandmother, walking to and from church and having a special dinner. We learn about the disease, but most importantly, we learn how the family communicates and responds to the challenges and changes in the Grandma's condition.

The authors have extensive professional and personal experience with Alzheimer's. Through the characters we hear subtle advice about communicating with children, explaining what may come next, and how they can participate in caring for a loved one. Amancia's mother speaks to her honestly, and Amancia responds with thoughtful suggestions. This strong family will prevail and Grandma will be well cared for.

—*Judith Volem, retired educator in Oregon who continues to enjoy interacting with children of all ages.*

A Tree of My Own by Nui Wilson; illustr. Kayor, et. al. *Qilin Press*. Ages 7-12.

It is a challenging task to write a book for children that tells of real-life hardship and relocation. The author and illustrator of *A Tree of My Own* do a beautiful job by letting Posada, a vivacious young girl, share her family's story. Set in Burma (Myanmar), Posada's ethnic Karen family had to leave their village in the mountains to escape the ongoing violence of a repressive military dictatorship.

Through Posada's narration we have an intimate description of her family's life and customs. We follow their travels, first to a refugee camp in Thailand and then to settle permanently in Portland, Oregon.

Though the family experienced the trauma and dislocation of refugees, they carried with them the spirit of their home in the mountains. For Posada this was the memory of the “strong, beautiful and useful” tree which had been chosen by her father when she was born. Her tree was a companion that she shared dreams and thoughts with. It was a source of creativity for Posada and of practical use for her father, who gathered leaves and branches for the construction and repair of their home.

When the family finally settled in Oregon, Posada joyously discovered a Douglas fir tree that would be her own. The tradition continued further: at the birth of her niece, Posada found a “strong, beautiful and useful” tree for her, and a hope that one day they could return to Burma and visit Posada's tree.

A Tree of My Own was written and illustrated by people who know the Karen community well. This book is highly recommended for the clear, authentic telling of a difficult story of history, tradition and hope from the perspective of a beloved child. It's hard not to love Posada! Additional notes about the history and aspects of Karen history are helpfully included at the end.

—*Judith Volem, retired educator, Oregon.*

Finding Melody Sullivan, a novel by Alice Rothchild. *Cune Press*. Ages 16 – adult.

Alice Rothchild is not daunted by taking on difficult subjects. Her novel **Finding Melody Sullivan** explores several complex and highly charged issues with a deft and compassionate touch. Rothchild's detailed character description of sixteen-year-old Melody Sullivan gives the reader an intimate sense of Melody's many challenges.

We quickly learn that Melody's mother has died of cancer. Her off-hand, rather biting sarcasm, and her inner thoughts are filled with expletives, likely not unusual for many teens facing difficult obstacles. Initially, the only things that appear to give Melody solace are her journaling and poetry writing, her mother's silver and emerald bracelet which she never removes and her best friend Yasmin. There is also a budding mutual crush with Aaron who Melody has known since childhood.

That red-headed Melody is Jewish from her mother's side and a professed atheist, and Yasmin is Palestinian-American and Muslim, and Aaron devoutly Jewish and considering becoming a rabbi, sets up a plot that takes an intense and powerful political direction. Melody's father, Phillip, from whom she feels isolated and estranged, is a professor and archaeologist at the college in their Vermont town. He insists on taking Melody with him to a professional archeological conference in Jerusalem. At the same time, Yasmin will spend the summer visiting her large extended Palestinian family in Hebron.

With too many lonely hours to explore Jerusalem on her own and a first and disturbing experience with drugs and an aggressive sexual situation, Melody becomes increasingly needful of the comfort of her beloved best friend Yasmin. She takes the impulsive risk to find her way to Hebron. At Yasmin's request, her Uncle Mahmoud finds Melody and brings her safely to Hebron in his taxi. The novel is most alive in this section as Mahmoud

gives Melody a history lesson from the Palestinian perspective and she sees for herself the harsh, seemingly unlivable conditions imposed by the Israeli military and the Settlers.

Yet, arrival in Hebron with Yasmin's extended family shows Melody the warmest welcome and people bound by love and life-giving traditions of hospitality, family, food, dancing, music and kindness. All the while, Melody has texted Aaron with images of what she recorded. He does not want to believe what she is showing and telling him about the situation Israel has imposed on the Palestinian people. Aaron has a different, more Zionist and religious perspective and Rothchild handles this with compassion and grace. Ultimately, Melody and her father find a fragile peace, a peace that both she and Yasmin and reluctantly Aaron hope for. It is not only Melody who is a poet, throughout the novel there are breathtaking passages describing the ancient feel of Jerusalem and the hills and orchards and olive groves of Palestine.

Finding Melody Sullivan is an eye-opening, heart opening novel that strives to hold different perspectives and that ultimately reminds us of the immense difficulties of and longing for creating a lasting peace.

—Merna Ann Hecht, teaching artist and social justice educator, Washington.

Nature and Ecology Books

Loop de Loop: *Circular Solutions for a Waste-Free World*, by Andrea Curtis; illustr. Roozeboos. Groundwood Books. Ages 4-8.

The only square thing about **Loop de Loop** is the page size. Everything else is round, like the Earth itself. The wonderful drawings by Roozeboos take us round and round, exploring what it will take to live in harmony with our planet.

The circles in life are everywhere, from the rising sun to ripples in a puddle. The cycles of birth and death, from generation to generation, are eternal. The more we can see them and appreciate how we can live more circular lives, the better.

In modern times we have often been taught to think that history is linear, that we just move forward to the next fad or product, discarding the old and used stuff along the way. This way of thinking has led to overuse of our planet's resources, has created enormous pollution problems and alienated us from each other.

After cheering us up and opening us to circular thinking, **Loop de Loop** proposes many ways we can live healthier and more rounded lives. Creating a circular, more sharing and caring economy is possible, but will require the active participation of many, many people. Organic and local food production systems; renewable energy driven transportation systems featuring shared bikes, cars and scooters; reuse, recycling and repair are all part of a circular social system.

I wish that every child could read this book and have a chance to discuss it and practice the ideas it puts forth. The refreshing message of circular systems stands in great contrast to the constant multimedia barrage of advertisements promoting hyper-consumption and environmental destruction that we are subjected to every day.

—Herb Everett, retired printer and designer, Oregon.

Gifts from the Garbage Truck: *A True Story about the Things We (Don't) Throw Away*, by Andrew Larsen; illustr. Oriol Vidal. Sourcebooks Kids. Ages 4-8.

I always enjoy books about interesting people! This one tells the story of Nelson Molina, who grew up in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York City, and learned from an early age to “reduce, reuse, and recycle” from his mother. The family didn't have much money, and Nelson learned to value discarded items and how to fix them to use them again (for example: using a bottle cap to replace a missing wheel on a toy truck, then giving it to his brother).

In clear and interesting words, we are shown specific examples of items that are rescued and re-homed. Then when Nelson grew up, he became a New York City Sanitation Worker, loved driving around his own familiar neighborhood, and finding garbage that could actually be used and enjoyed again. He even started a “museum” of useful items that had been found in his dumpster truck.

Have you ever visited your local garbage “dump”? It can be an educational experience to see what kinds of things get thrown away. Could you be like Nelson and find hidden treasures? Or perhaps what you are discarding could be repaired and re-gifted and have another life? The story of **Gifts From the Garbage Truck** can inspire us to be more curious and creative, and less wasteful.

—Robin Winfree-Andrew, educator and parent, Oregon.

A Sky That Sings by Anita Sanchez & George Steele; illustr. Emily Mendoza. Lee and Low Books. Ages 5-10.

This is a picture book that captivates the senses. Mia, a young girl who is blind, awakens us to the extraordinary sounds, smells, and feelings of an ordinary walk in the park. Mia can identify birds by their songs, and shares this knowledge with her Tia (aunt) as they walk through a forest, over a hill, and to the edge of a pond.

Mia knows where she is. Tapping with her white cane, she can tell if the ground is soft and muddy. Smelling the air, she knows the lawn has just been mowed. She can hear the “whisper of wings” as a

heron flies away. She is a poet at heart. Mia's imagination is awakened when she hears the red-tailed hawk.

We see the birds in the playful illustrations and learn more about them in the short summaries at the end of the book. It's a true delight to go for a walk with this cheerful, aware, and confident child. And, it would be just as enjoyable to go for a walk to "listen to the sky," after reading this book with a child.

—Judith Volem, retired educator in Oregon who continues to enjoy interacting with children of all ages.

At Home with the Prairie Dog: *The Story of a Keystone Species*, by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent; photos: William Muñoz. *Web of Life Children's Books*. Ages 5–9.

I fell in love with prairie dogs years ago on a trip to Montana when I saw them running around in a field. **At Home with the Prairie Dog** wonderfully describes and illustrates these creatures, and also educates readers. Prairie Dogs are an important part of the ecosystem that maintains many plants and animals. They are called Keystone Species because so many other living beings (150 species in this case) depend on these prairie dogs to survive.

Prairie dogs live in underground burrows that are typically 16 to 33 feet long and are 7 to 10 feet below the surface. These burrows have multiple entrances/exits and several rooms for different purposes. Small animals live alongside of prairie dogs and others live in abandoned burrows. Prairie dogs keep grass around their homes short, with some areas of no grass. Bison nibble and take dust baths in the bare areas. The book offers many examples with photographs of other animals that depend on prairie dogs.

Some species of prairie dogs are not protected and human intentionally kill them, I was sad to note. The book states that 90% of their population has been eliminated since the 1860s. Many organizations are working to preserve grasslands and the

prairie dogs that help maintain them.

—Charlotte Behm, ex-board member of *Skipping Stones*, is an educator and author, Oregon.

Hawk Mother Returns: *A Story of Interspecies Adoption*, by Kara Hagedorn and Marlo Garnsworthy. *Web of Life Children's Books*. Ages 5–9.

In this colorfully illustrated book, we meet Sunshine—a red-tailed hawk—who lives in an aviary. Sunshine has not been able to fly because she was shot many years ago by a hunter. Each spring, Sunshine builds a nest and lays two infertile eggs (which do not hatch). Sunshine's caretaker feels sad because a human took away her freedom to fly, to find a mate, and raise her own young chicks. But her caretaker has seen her motherly instincts.

So when the caretaker receives a call asking if she thinks Sunshine would adopt two hawk eggs that were available because someone had cut down a tree that contained their nest, she welcomes that opportunity.

Sunshine becomes a fabulous mother and raises the two chicks until they can leave her nest. It's thrilling to know that even though these birds belong to a different, competing species of hawks, they and their offsprings come back to be with Sunshine as the years go by.

Photographs of Sunshine and her chicks are beautiful and the story is well-written. The book includes information about hawks and a glossary of terms.

—Charlotte Behm, author, educator, ex-board member.

Tizzy and Me: *Fifteen Ways to Love a Mink*, by N.M.L. Hazard; illustr. Alice Priestley. *Red Deer Press*. Ages 7–9.

Tizzy is Georgia's best dog friend, and Winona is Georgia's best human friend. On a cold day in Toronto area of Canada, after Georgia tells Winona that the fur on Winona's new coat is the result of killing an animal, Winona stops talking to Georgia because she doesn't want to believe her. This inter-

action sets Georgia on a journey to find out more, and through the help of her two moms, she learns about the terrible conditions of animals in fur farms.

After Georgia and Winona reconcile, they set about to make a positive difference in the lives of animals. With the help of their school teacher, they forms a children's club in Toronto, Canada for that purpose. Through their Animal Kindness Club projects and conversations, the reader learns about what everyday people can do to improve the lives of animals.

This novel is well-written with delightful illustrations. The writing is upbeat and hopeful even though the subject can be difficult. It's an inspiring story for young readers.

—Charlotte Behm, author, educator, ex-board member.

The Girl Who Cried for the Earth: A Story of Hope, Healing & Possibilities, by Bodhi Simpson. 2nd Tier Publishing. Ages 11 and up.

The Girl Who Cried for the Earth shares the journey of a girl who is feeling alienated and lost. While this book is unconventional in the sense that it's not meant for very young readers and it's rather long for a picture book—with its 51 pages, it contains numerous thoughtful ideas and suggestions to open mind and heart of its readers. And we believe it is directed toward all ages, especially teenagers.

The author's prescription to open our hearts to the awareness that "there is both darkness and there is also light" is laudable. Receiving guidance from powerful dream animals like an owl, a white buffalo, and an eagle, the girl begins to feel her mind opening, and she senses the interconnectedness of everything. Some of the guiding principles that the author shares are universal truths like seeing beauty and the sacred in our lives, developing a feeling of love and compassion, feeling a connection with all living things, opening up our heart to forgiveness, and learning to appreciate the many gifts we receive everyday in our lives, etc. Guided by these

visions and messages, she recognizes and accepts her fears and at the same time, she feels hope and positive energy pervade her innerself.

The accompanying 24 paintings, also by the author, are charming and colorful. As the author states, the process of writing, visualization and painting were helpful in her own process and are likely effective in her practice as an art therapist, visionary artist, and teacher.

Many teens feel overwhelmed by the complex ecological and social problems that have taken a firm hold in our current global, economic, and political systems. We feel that this book could be used by a therapist working with young people (in their teenage years) who feel powerless, overwhelmed, and are experiencing depression realizing that our planet is in trouble. Author's suggested steps to understanding and changing the girl's perspective can be adapted by the counselors in diverse situations. The book could be read as part of a discussion group, or with a parent or a teacher for guidance.

The activity at the end of the book, "Inner Peaceful Place Visualization and Creative Practice," is an example of using active imagination which, also seems like a useful tool for a therapist. Along with "Additional Thoughts" page, the book shares two-and-a-half pages of "Words of Wisdom."

*Reviewed by Judith Volem, retired educator, Oregon and
Arun Narayan Toké, executive editor*

Keystone Species: Meet the Animals Key to Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity, by Laura Perdew; illustr. Micah Rauch. Nomad Press. Ages 9-13.

In 1966, Robert Paine, an American scientist in Washington state, published a paper describing a simple experiment in which he removed starfish from one tidepool. The results were surprising: within 18 months species diversity in the tidepool without starfish had plummeted. Only mussels remained. It turned out that starfish play a key role in maintaining diversity within a tidepool because

without starfish preying on the mussels, the mussels take over.

In light of this finding, Paine called starfish a “keystone” species, in reference to the top-most stone that forms the apex of an arch. The book **Keystone Species: Meet the Animals Key to Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity** breaks down Paine’s concept of keystone species in a way that is easy for kids to understand. After an introductory chapter, the book details the lives of various keystone species and role they play in ecosystems, including sharks, beavers, bees, and foxes. Readers learn about the crucial roles these animals have, and also what happens when they are not present.

The book’s pages are colorful, with lots of photos, illustrations, and comics to reinforce the ideas in the text. QR codes link to videos that provide further information. Each chapter includes a variety of suggested activities for kids to try out. Overall, this book is a fun and easily accessible introduction to ecosystems and the idea of a keystone species.

—Daemion Lee, special ed. teacher & our ex-editor, Oregon.

Zoe and the Seed Garden by Lorna McMaster; illustr. by the author. *Heartfelt Seed Stories*. Grades 3-8.

At the beginning of this young adult novel, Zoe arrives at her auntie’s farm. It was not unusual for her to arrive with a case of the blues. As the story progresses, her auntie uses the power, knowledge, and science of plants and gardening to cheer up Zoe and give her more purpose. Zoe starts a plant journal, and as she adds details to drawings, learns about bees and many plants and their seeds.

When Zoe gets upset thinking that our planet is dying, her auntie tells her that when she spends time in her garden, she hears a different story. Auntie says, “I hear Mother Nature, who is a force much greater than us. She won’t let the Earth die.” Zoe learns how a garden gives her the opportunity to make a positive difference to the health of Earth. Zoe learns about annuals, perennials, and biennial plants. She writes in her journal about pollinators

and variations. Zoe meets Colleen, a new classmate, and their friendship grows from visiting auntie’s farm together.

I have spent hundreds of hours every year, for decades, in my garden. Even so, I learned new information about plants and seeds from reading this book. I enjoyed the story, illustrations, and the light, hopeful conversations. I agree with the Auntie that gardening is a powerful practice that can grow a calming, positive outlook in us as we spend time in harmony (and close proximity) with nature.

—Charlotte Behm, author, educator, and ex-board member of Skipping Stones, Oregon.

Our Awards issue, Vol. 37, no. 2 (available September 1, 2025) will feature the 2025 Youth Honor Awards, the Annual Book Awards, 2025 Asian Celebration Haiku Contest, and the Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest for fifth graders. You may order a copy of the issue for \$9 (includes postage for U.S. addresses).

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Teaching Resources

Teaching Palestine: *Lessons, Stories, Voices*. Editors: Bill Bigelow, Jesse Hagopian, Suzanna Kassouf, Adam Sanchez, and Samia Shoman. *Rethinking Schools*. Middle and high school grades.

Teaching Palestine: *Lessons, Stories, Voices*, is a compilation of resources for teaching middle and high school about Palestine, including examinations of history, voices of those who live there, and essays by educators. Essays and poems combine with color photos and illustrations to provide a rich introduction to Palestine's history and present.

The editors acknowledge the controversy around the Palestine conflict in the US, at the center of arguments over race, education and social justice. "Let's acknowledge at the outset that this endeavor is fraught," they write, pointing out how criticisms of Zionism may draw accusations of antisemitism. And they address some of the biggest controversies in the beginning: anti-racist teaching and the backlash or terms like apartheid and settler colonialism. Chapters range from the history of Palestine-Israel, to "Challenging Zionism and Antisemitism to Solidarity with Palestine."

I think the best texts included in this volume are those that challenge assumptions; complicate simple narratives; and encourage students to draw their own conclusions. In one essay, an educator writes of having students participate in a mock social mixer where students pretend to be important figures in Palestine's history; in another essay the author writes about activities to help students separate fact from perspective from narrative from one's personal truth. As the editors note in the introduction, it is not a teacher's job to impose conclusions, but encourage activities like critical reading, simulation, and problem-posing to help students search for conceptual patterns and discover on their own.

—Daemion Lee, special education teacher & ex-editor.

Transgender Justice in Schools, editors: Linda Christensen & Ty Marshall. *Rethinking Schools*.

Transgender Justice in Schools compiles writings from transgender students and transgender educators, detailing both the challenges they have faced and the way forward for transgender issues in education. In the introduction, the editors call out the efforts by lawmakers in many areas of the U.S. to exclude queer people from school curriculum, from libraries, and from bathrooms. "We produced this book as an act of defiance," they write.

Transgender justice in education is a challenging issue. Editor Ty Marshall writes in the chapter "Becoming Unapologetically Trans" about how he had to live a "double life" after transitioning, and the conservative school district made him sign what amounted to a gag order regarding his transition, gender identity and sexual orientation. He felt like a "robo-teacher" trying to do all the right things without acknowledging the unspoken. It ultimately was the students who advocated for a student group SAGA (Sexuality and Gender Alliance). "We had gone from being tolerated to demanding acceptance," Marshall writes.

First-person accounts like these are what makes *Transgender Justice in Schools* especially powerful, setting a tone of honesty and hope, and also reinforcing how our paths towards self-acceptance and self-advocacy all look different. Chapter 1: "It's a matter of Life and Death" lays out the stakes, detailing "the fear, danger and loneliness that trans people experience in schools." The chapter "Teaching Trans Curriculum" shares ideas for teaching units and strategies. "Trans Students Speak Out" includes essays by trans students. And "Fighting for the Right to Teach," shares educators' own stories.

Overall this is a powerful and timely book with many resources for teachers, students and parents alike.

—Daemion Lee, special education teacher & ex-editor.

The **2026 Book Awards** program will be announced in October. Please check our website in early Oct.