Skipping Stones

Summer 2026

A Multicultural Literary Magazine

Reviews of the 2026 Multicultural & Nature Award Books

The 2026 Skipping Stones Honor Awards

We are pleased to honor the following 25 outstanding books—in three categories: Multicultural, Nature, *and* Teaching Resources—as our 2026 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

The Echo People, by SD Youngwolf; illustr. Shonto Begay. *Lee & Low.* Picture Book. Ages 3-6.

Have you ever wondered if your words could come back to you? That's exactly what happens in **The Echo People**, a beautiful picture book that follows two cousins, Aiyanna and Little Wolf, as their grandfather takes them on a journey to a special river gorge to meet a mysterious presence known as the Echo People. After preparing a blessing, Grandfather, the village chief, informs Aiyanna and Little Wolf that today they will meet the Echo People, who reside in the river gorge and have much to teach them.

Each child has a very different experience. Impatient Little Wolf shouts out frustrated words, believing he is simply being mocked when they echo back, while gentle Aiyanna speaks with love and tenderness and finds the Echo People warm and kind in return. Together, the cousins learn a gentle but powerful truth: our words, actions, and even thoughts can come back to us.

Rooted in Indigenous storytelling traditions, the book pairs its heartfelt message with Shonto Begay's magnificent, earth-toned illustrations, creating a dreamy and atmospheric setting. It's a quiet, thoughtful story that encourages kindness without ever feeling like a lecture.

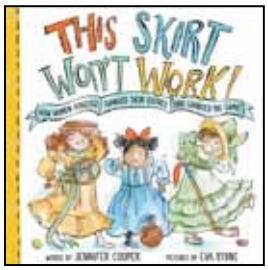
Recommended for young readers ages 3 to 6, this book is perfect for story time, classroom discussions about kindness, or for anyone who loves a tale that lingers after the last page.

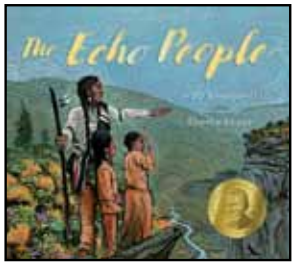
—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern. She will attend O.S.U. this September.

Humphrey the Hopeful Helper, by Marcie Davis; illustr. Ros Webb. Workinglikedogs.com. Ages 3-5.

This short and simple, yet warm picture book tells—in light poems—the story of Humphrey, a yellow puppy who starts out training to be a service dog. Humphrey is happily learning the skills he needs, but has an allergy to pollen and grass. His itchy eyes and runny nose become barriers to his passing the test. But Humprey still finds a happy home with a woman who tells him that they will become a perfect team. With care and love his sneezes ease, and he still gets to use his skills to help her with tasks that are harder for her as she is riding an electric wheelchair. Humphrey is described as a hero who wags his tail.

This story reminded me of another yellow dog, Gilbert, the beloved family member of Melissa and Mark Hortman. Gilbert also flunked his service dog training before he came to live with the Hortmans. Gilbert was shot defending his fam-





ily, and his urn was placed in state alongside the caskets of the human Hortmans at the Minnesota Capitol. Gilbert, probably the first dog to receive the honor, is a hero like Humphrey.

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

Ahhh, Milk!: *The Many Ways Milk Is Made,* by Abbe Starr; illustr. Evelline Andrya. *Gnome Road Publishing.* Ages 4-7.

Did you know milk is made from rice or oats? Today, in any large grocery store in America you can find all kinds of milk. There are colorful illustrations on every page showing how milk is made from cows and other animals. It shows how it is harvested from rice fields and coconut trees. The reader can get an idea of just how much work is involved in the process. All of the illustrations are full-spread in bold, beautiful colors. Pictures alone are not enough for a non-reading child to understand that milk is actually being made from rice or nuts. At the end of the book there is a picture index which emphasizes all of the different places milk comes from. This is a great book for parent and child to read together.

—Paulette Ansari, retired librarian & storyteller, Georgia.

This Skirt Won't Work!: *How Women Athletes Changed Their Clothes and Changed the Game,* by Jennifer Cooper; illustr. Eva Byrne. *Sourcebooks.* Ages 4-8.

As a women's sports enthusiast, I was thrilled by this delightful illustrated book. As I started to read the beginning descriptions of how historically women athletes were restricted by too many clothes, I was wondering if the book would describe that now some women are demanding more bodily coverage. I was delighted to see that issue was described at the end of the book.

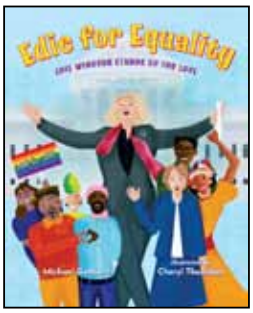
The story begins with Kitty Knox, of the USA, who in the 1890's bicycle-raced in a dress covering everything from neck to ankles, corset, puffy sleeves, and layers of undergarments. She switched to knickerbockers that still covered her body. In the early 1900's, swimming sensation Annette Kellerman of Australia traded a skirted outfit to a sleeker suit. A Canadian hockey team and French tennis player exchanged long skirts for short skirts, while a British soccer team went from skirts to shorts.

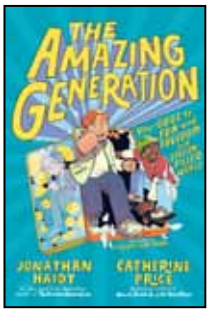
The book ends with a section called, "The Story Continues." In 2021, Norwegian team was fined for wearing shorts instead of regulation bikini bottoms but a few months later the International Handball Federation changed the rules so that women could have the same coverage and protection as the men. In the 2020 Olympics, the German gymnastics team wore full-length leotards instead of shorter leotards. The International Swimming Federation changed the regulations on swimcaps to include ones that are large enough to fit natural Black hairstyles, and companies are now offering *hijabs* for female athletes that are easy to move in and are comfortable.

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

Black Hands: *Builders of Our Nation,* by Carole Boston Weatherford; illustr. R. Gregory Christie. *Crown Books for Young Readers.* Ages 6-9.

A gorgeous picture book depicting African Americans as leaders working, and creating throughout history. These facts are what makes





America the country it is today. This book begins with the African slave trade, then takes us through history to the civil rights struggles of today. African American children who read this book will understand that they are not "less than" any other race. Too often the self-esteem of Black children is destroyed by educators in public/private schools. One book could not possibly show all the contributions African Americans have made to the United States of America. Eighteen different areas are touched on and a few famous names are mentioned. Names like Harriet Tubman, Bill Pickett, Nat Love, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Augusta Savage, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mae Jemison, Katherine Johnson and Shirley Chisholm are talked about briefly in the very back of the book. The colors throughout the book are deep and powerful, black, red, gold, and browns. Each page is a full spread of bold illustrations making it easy for a non-reading child to read the story by the pictures alone. The print is in black or white ink and flows with the illustrations. All ages would enjoy this book. The art work is exquisite and the message profound.

—Paulette Ansari, retired librarian & storyteller, Georgia.

Kai Po Che: *Mini's Perfect Kite,* by Suhasini Gupta; illustr. Devika Oza. *Gnome Road Publishing.* Ages 6-10.

While **Kai Po Che** is filled with information about the annual kite festival in Northern India in the middle of January, it is also a joyful tale of siblings in a family and the local community. (*Kai Po Che!* means "I've cut your kite!" in the Gujarati language, spoken by a majority of people in Gujarat, Western India).

Younger sister Mini is determined to make and fly a kite. Her brother, at first condescending in the way that older brothers can be, teaches her how to fly the kite that she had made herself, and together they join the light hearted, high flying celebration.

Colorful illustrations, cultural tidbits, and scientific information add to the enthusiasm of this warm story. The book shows that a girl can be as good as her brother, and can make and fly her own kite, and still be a kind and compassionate sibling.

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

The First Girl on Stage, by Shruthi Rao; art by Devika Joglekar. *Yali Books/Sambasivan & Parikh.* Ages 6-10.

As a young girl in India, Tunga was taken to an elaborate traditional performance filled with music, dance and colorful costumes. She yearned to learn the dances and music of the stories and participate.

In her community, the performers were all men but Tunga used ingenuity and persistence to learn. Eventually she performed widely and taught other girls and women the intricacies of the dances and stories.

This tale of dissolving boundaries and changing norms is international. It's a powerful, accomplishment and readers everywhere will appreciate bravery, passion and hard work of Tunga and other women.

In addition to following Tunga's story, there is information and photos about the real women who participate in the performances, as well as a glossary of words. The reader can go deeply and learn more about the ancient culture and stories, or simply appreciate a young girl following her dreams.

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

Sign Up For Adventure! by Lavanya Karthik. *Modern Marigold Books/Sambasivan & Parikh*. Ages 6-10.

The focus of **Sign Up For Adventure** is on communication among deaf and hearing people. However, it really encompasses more than sign language. It's about the power of friendship, imagination and communicating with all your senses.

We follow two boys at school, one who is deaf and one who is hearing, as they figure out how to communicate with one another. Adil, who is deaf, shares his skills of close observation and activities he loves, like swimming and running. Neel, the boy who can hear, begins to learn sign language. He shares his love of drawing and they become The Doodling Duo, creating imaginative, visual adventures together.

Originally published in India, the book has drawings of the Indian Sign Language alphabet and the American Sign Language alphabet.

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

Edie For Equality: *Edie Windsor Stands up for Love,* by Michael Genhart; illustr. Cheryl Thuesday. *Lee & Low.* Ages 7-13.

Edie For Equality is the chronicle of one woman's role in the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ rights. Rather than attempting to cover the entire scope of this process, this book hones in on just one event: Edie Windsor's lawsuit to convince the U.S. Supreme Court that she should not have to pay taxes on her inheritance from her late wife, Thea Spyer. After all, assets wives inherit from their husbands were not taxed. **Edie For Equality** demonstrates the struggles Edie faced in her effort for justice, but it takes care to show joy as well, such as Edie's love for dancing and mathematics. This book also emphasizes the importance of Edie's and Thea's community, especially her lawyer Roberta. When Edie finally wins her case, the illustrations make clear that this was a victory for all LGBTQ+ people in the United States. Lastly, while **Edie for Equality** ends mainly with optimism and hope, it does emphasize that there is further work to be done, and gives young readers the tools to speak out as Edie did.

—Serena Abraham is our student intern, New York.

The Amazing Generation, by Jonathan Haidt & Catherine Price. *Rocky Pond Books.* Ages 9-12.

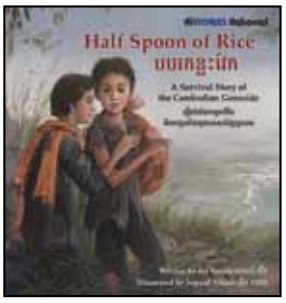
Written by Jonathan Haidt and Catherine Price, **The Amazing Generation**, is a guidebook that speaks directly to nine-to twelve-year-olds, regardless of whether they already have smartphones or social media accounts. It is filled with surprising facts, a graphic novel, interactive challenges, and secrets that tech leaders don't want kids to know. It also includes real-life stories from young adults who regret getting smartphones too early and want to help the next generation make better choices.

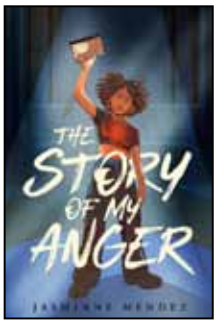
This book begins with an unexpected story for a guide about phones. A group of greedy wizards creates magic stones that promise happiness in the form of friendship, freedom, and fun. Initially, everyone who uses the stones feels wonderful, but over time they begin to lose their sense of genuine happiness and enjoyment. Sound familiar? It's a clever metaphor for smartphones and social media, setting the stage for everything that follows.

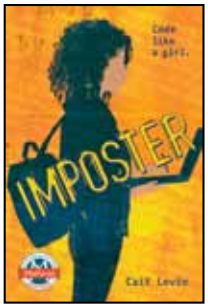
Rather than merely warning readers about screens, this guide offers a bold, optimistic approach to becoming your most authentic, confident, and adventurous self. It encourages young audiences to reconsider the true use of cell phones and social media, a decision that's healthier for all of us.

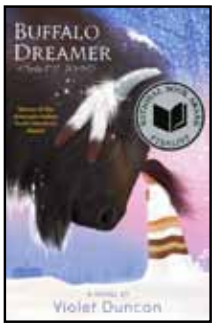
—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern.

Half Spoon of Rice: *A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide,* by Icy Smith; illustr. Sopaul Nhem. *A bilingual book in English and Khmer. East West Discovery Press LLC.* Ages 9-14.









Half Spoon of Rice by Icy Smith is a well-crafted picture book that sensitively introduces young readers to one of history's darkest chapters. The fictional story follows nine-year-old Nat, who is separated from his family in 1975 and forced into labor camps under Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime. Smith uses simple, accessible language to convey the harsh realities of this period to young audiences.

The illustrations by Sopaul Nhem are beautifully muted and rich in tone, effectively reflecting Nat's perspective as he leaves his home and everything familiar behind. Each spread features historically accurate depictions based on survivor testimonies, providing readers with a comprehensive view of the historical realities.

The book serves as a wonderful introduction to the Cambodian genocide for young readers, teaching lessons of resilience and empathy through Nat's experience. Suitable for ages 9 and up, **Half Spoon of Rice** is a moving story that is ideal for young readers interested in history and culture.

—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern.

All that Chandni Knows, *a novel in verse,* by Khushboo Patel. *G.P. Putnam's Sons BFYR*. Ages 10-16.

Khushboo Patel's **All That Chandni Knows** is a vibrant and touching story of a young girl in India navigating several secrets at the turn of the millennium. The writing uses free verse poetry to accurately convey Chandni's emotions, effectively manipulating sentence structure and form. Chandni's many relationships—with her parents, her aunt, her older brother Suraj, her crush, Rohan, and her best friend, Ramya, each play a role in the narrative, creating a varied community that uplifts the novel. Her relationships with Suraj and Ramya, in particular, are affected by the secrets she keeps (one of which forms the central conflict of the novel) and display a struggle many young people face: the challenge between growing up and maintaining past relationships. Her brother is anxious to distance himself from his supposedly too-girlish sister in an effort to display his maturity. Meanwhile Ramya, who will move to Bombay at the end of the year, is anxious about their upcoming separation. Both Suraj and Ramya are deeply close to Chandni's heart, but it is the constant of her relationship with her mother that truly makes the book sing.

—Serena Abraham is our student intern, New York.

Buffalo Dreamer, *a novel*, by Violet Duncan. *Nancy Paulsen Books*. Ages 10-18.

Summer and her family travel from Arizona to Alberta, Canada, to the Cree Reservation where Summer's maternal family lives. Before she gets there, Summer starts to have vivid dreams about a girl who walks alone through the snow hoping to get home. Summer continues to have the dreams while in Canada. The girl in the dreams is named Buffalo Dreamer but she was forced to change her name to Mary when she was sent to a residential boarding school.

As usual, Summer enjoys her days in Northern Alberta, but this year, she becomes part of an effort to acknowledge and call attention to the plight of children at the residential schools, who were forced to give up their culture and identity. Summer is fascinated by the stories of the schools, and as she continues to have the dreams, she worries if Buffalo Dreamer survives the journey home. The

community holds a march and a ceremony to call attention to the cemetery that holds children that didn't come out alive.

As more elders speak up about their experiences at the schools, Summer is able to find the answers about what happened to Buffalo Dreamer. The connection between her dreams to the real-life woman is a highlight of the book.

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

The Story of My Anger, *a novel in verse,* by Jasminne Mendez. *Dial Books.* Ages 12-17.

Yuli is frustrated at how she and other minority students are treated at school in her small town in Texas. This young adult novel-in-verse is a timely and telling depiction of "anti-woke" pushback, racism, and book bans that are happening in today's schools and classrooms.

Yuli is a Dominican Afro-Latina girl who watches her drama teacher refuse to cast her in a leading role while all the good parts go to whites. The school board threatens the job of her favorite teacher for assigning diverse "controversial" literature. Yuli believes that BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and other minority students deserve to have schools that support them.

Yuli finds she can no longer be the silent, good girl, and she follows in the footsteps of her brother's activism and her mother's past revolutionary spirit. She and her school friends form a guerrilla theatre club which forces some conversations.

I liked how the racism, homophobia, and other bigotry was called out in this book. Yuli is fighting for herself but she is also fighting for equality, justice, and the voices of others. It's good to see a strong and hopeful character whose story is real in today's political and social landscape.

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

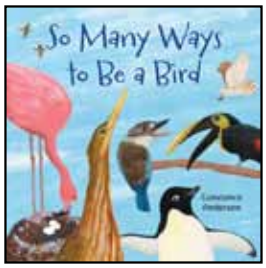
Imposter, *a novel,* by Cait Levin. *Charlesbridge Teen.* Ages 13-18.

The story follows Cam, a high school sophomore passionate about building things. After finally getting a spot in the computer science class she has always wanted, she faces challenges from some boys in the classroom who make it clear they don't think she belongs. Instead of giving up, Cam and her sharp-witted best friend, Viv, fight their way onto the school's robotics team and ultimately compete in a national competition.

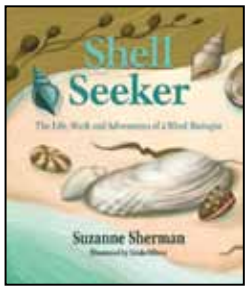
Imposter offers a raw, honest portrayal of the struggle to persevere amid doubt from others. It doesn't shy away from the difficult emotions involved in maintaining self-belief. The friendship between Cam and Viv feels genuine, the robotics scenes are exhilarating, and Cam's journey from self-doubt to confidence is portrayed as a hard-earned achievement rather than a magical transformation. Cam continuously challenges the idea that girls don't belong in robotics, leaving a lasting and beautiful impression on young women to keep fighting for their dreams, despite others' opinions.

The novel contains strong language, including swearing, so it is recommended for readers 13 and older, rather than for younger audiences. If you've ever felt out of place despite your hard work, **Imposter** by Ms. Levin is the perfect novel for you.

—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern.



Nature and Ecology Books



All That Glitters Is Not GOLD, by Emily Brubaker. *Amazon/KDP.* Picture Book. Ages 4-8.

When Willow's glittery art project washes into a nearby creek, her sparkly creation turns into a hard lesson about pollution. Set in Palmer, Alaska, the story uses glitter as a simple, relatable entry point for teaching kids about the harm of long-lasting microplastics. After a violent rainstorm washes the glitter from her birdhouse into the nearby creek, Willow learns that plastic glitter leaves lasting effects on the animals that rely on the nearby environment.

Determined to fix her mistake, Willow comes up with a solution, with help from her parents, to find a natural replacement for glitter. She searches far and wide for leaves, branches, and other biodegradable materials to decorate her birdhouse, a better option for the safety and health of the local wildlife.

What makes this book especially compelling is its origin: author Emily Rose Brubaker is a teenage Girl Scout from Troop 436 who helped lead a real campaign that convinced the Anchorage School Board to back a ban on plastic glitter in classrooms, pairing her advocacy with a story that brings the science home for young readers.

Brubaker ties a child's love of sparkle to real-world consequences with simple, rhythmic language well-suited to reading aloud, and Willow's curiosity models exactly the kind of accountability we want kids to embrace when it comes to preserving Earth. The book includes an abundance of conversation starters and resources for students, teachers, and parents who are interested in pursuing plastic-glitter-free futures.

All That Glitters Is Not Gold is a hopeful, age-appropriate book that introduces young children to environmentalism, ideal for youth ready to make small choices with big impacts.

—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern.

There Doesn't Have to be a Reason, by M C Kasper. *Flare Kids/Catalyst Press.* Ages 4-9.

This is a beautifully illustrated picture book with a powerful message: You don't need a reason to love yourself. It is amazing just how many children and adults there are that need to understand and except this simple fact.

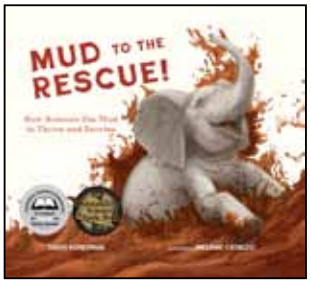
The illustrations begin with a healthy looking bear examining his tail. One by one his neighbors, ask him questions concerning his tail. The beaver asks, can it help you swim? The rattlesnake wants to know does it scare animals away? The bird wants to know, can it help you fly? The bear tries but his tail doesn't do any of those things. So what good is it they all want to know? Why does it have to do anything the bear wants to know. I just like it because it's mine. It does not have to be useful. So simple yet so powerful that a very young child can understand this.

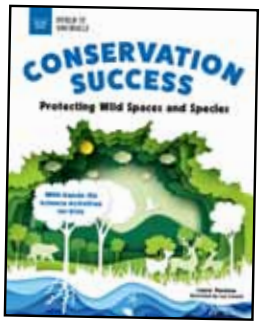
The color illustrations re all pastels, mostly grays, greens, and browns. The drawings are large and full-spread from the left side of the book to the right side. This technique always makes the picture seem bigger.

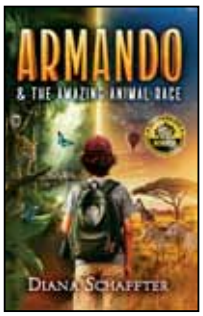
—Paulette Ansari, retired librarian & storyteller, Georgia.

So Many Ways to be a Bird, by Constance Anderson. *Star Bright Books.* Ages 4-9.

From a tiny hummingbird that fits in a tablespoon







to a 9-foot-tall Ostridge, **So Many Ways to be a Bird** is a fascinating book that shows us the amazing diversity of bird species around the world. All birds may have feathers, wings, and beaks, but it's the variation and contrasts in color, shape, size, and behavior that are so well portrayed in this book.

Adaptation underlies the extraordinary differences in the over 11,000 species of birds in the world. One of the examples of this adaptation is in their nesting habits. To quote the author: "A bird's nest can be a cup or cavity, tunnel, burrow, or mound. Mud-dabbed, grass-woven, or silk-sewn, lichen-encrusted, saliva- or gossamer-bound." To show the dissimilarity, the nests of a tailorbird, a Red-winged Blackbird, an Osprey, a Grebe, and a swallow are illustrated.

Some other examples include migrating habits, differences in flying, beaks for different types of diet, and feet that can paddle, climb, walk, or grasp.

This beautifully illustrated educational book combines engaging writing and insightful information to entice young readers to discover the diverse, fascinating world of birds. Not all birds are alike; some fly, some can't. Some can fly, walk, and even swim in deep waters without a problem. Some of them migrate long distances. The book surely will guide readers of all ages in their quest to understand the many unique characteristics of many birds, how they have adapted to, and will continue to adapt to the changing environment and climate. A two-page spread includes interesting bird adaptation information.

Constance Anderson is the author as well as the illustrator and her drawings of the birds show scientific precision and accuracy. This is a unique way to approach the study of birds and will be interesting for all ages. It affirms that there are so many ways to be a bird. The book can be a lifelong reference, a wonderful guide for all ages.

—Paul Dix, birder and photographer, Judith Volem, educator, and Arun Toké, editor, all in Oregon.

Mud to the Rescue!: *How Animals Use Mud to Thrive and Survive,* by Tanya Konerman; illustr. Melanie Cataldo. *Web of Life.* Ages 5-10.

Mud might seem like something to avoid, but **Mud to the Rescue!** by Tanya Konerman makes a strong case that it's actually very essential to survival for many animals around the world.

The book travels across different habitats and climates, introducing elephants, alligators, beavers, birds, and even a duck-billed platypus, each relying on mud in a unique way. Elephants use it to protect their skin from the sun. A turtle buries itself in mud to hibernate through winter beneath the ice. The helmeted hornbill, a bird most readers probably haven't heard of, mixes mud with other materials to build a nest that keeps predators out.

Konerman's writing has a lyrical quality, with alliteration and rhythm that make the facts easy to follow without feeling dry or textbook-like. Melanie Cataldo's illustrations are detailed and realistic, placing each animal clearly in its environment, which helps ground the information visually.

The book also includes short fact boxes with additional details, such as how many eggs an alligator can lay in a clutch or how much of the day a pig spends in mud. These add depth without overwhelming the main text.

While the book is aimed at younger readers, it holds up well for older kids interested in animals

or nature, since the information is genuinely well-researched. It's a solid pick for anyone curious about the less obvious ways animals adapt to their surroundings.

—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern this summer.

Shell Seeker*: The Life, Work and Adventures of a Blind Biologist,* by Suzanne Sherman; illustr. Linda Olliver. *NSTA Kids.* Ages 5-10.

Illustrated beautifully in a painterly style, **Shell Seeker** is a well-told story of passion and curiosity. It seeks to build empathy by showing us that, no matter the adversity, we all have interests we love and will fight to pursue. It tells us that nothing is impossible, and as long as we have the intellect and curiosity, we can fulfill our passions successfully.

The book follows Geerat from his childhood in the Netherlands, where he collected shells, through his experiences at a blind school and a public school in the United States, ultimately leading to his academic career. Throughout the many stages of change he faced, Vermeji showed great transformation by turning one of his weaknesses into an unimaginable strength.

Even when institutions (like the school for the blind that he attended) attempted to limit his interests and regarded him merely as someone to be protected, he remained interested. Eventually, Yale recognized his remarkable potential, which he fully embraced wholeheartedly. Interwoven with facts about biology, this book serves as a testament to what we can achieve when we nurture curiosity and maintain confidence in ourselves.

Shell Seeker is a wonderfully written and well-illustrated picture book for all children. It offers a reminder that all obstacles can be overcome, and may even be a unique boon in the right circumstances. All that is required is curiosity and the will to pursue it.

—Jason Lin, will be a senior in 2026-27, New Jersey.

The Ocean's Heart: *The Tiny Creatures Essential to Life,* by Jilanne Hoffmann; illustr. Khoa Le. *Millbrook Press/Lerner Publishing Group.* Ages 6-10.

The Ocean's Heart takes readers into one of the least visible but most important events on the planet: the nightly migration of zooplankton from the deep ocean to the surface and back again.

Author Jilanne Hoffmann focuses on these tiny, microscopic creatures that live thousands of feet below the surface, in a region known as the twilight zone. Each night, they travel upward through dangerous, predator-filled waters to feed on phytoplankton near the surface, then retreat to the depths before daylight exposes them. It's described as the largest animal migration on Earth, and it happens every single day.

The writing has a lyrical quality, built around short, poetic lines rather than dense paragraphs, which keeps the science approachable without oversimplifying it. Hoffmann connects this migration to broader ideas, showing how zooplankton and other sea creatures support the entire ocean food web and even help regulate Earth's climate by storing carbon. Khoa Le's illustrations capture the strange, glowing quality of deep water, giving shape to creatures most readers will never have seen or even heard of.

What stands out most is how the book treats a genuinely complex ecological process (vertical migration, nutrient cycling, food webs) with transparency rather than talking down to its audience. It rewards readers willing to slow down and take in both the science and the imagery of the world beneath our own.

This is a strong pick for anyone curious about marine biology or looking for nonfiction that treats its subject with real depth. I especially appreciate how this title works for everyone, regardless of one's own knowledge set.

—Megan Blattler, a recent high school graduate, is our student intern this summer.

Armando and the Amazing Animal Race, by Diana Schaffter. *Sea Otter Press.* Ages 8-14.

This is a wondrous and informative novel that presents like a first-hand account of a young boy approaching adolescence with sadness and doubt but learning that the world is so much more than he imagined. The many locations, facts, organizations, and some actual world events had me scrambling to take notes. I immediately knew that a lot of research was performed by the author as a number of locations and events cited were ones that I have visited and experienced. This very research can easily draw out the teen reader into a real world that makes social media and smart phones seen mundane.

The narrative of familial loss, alienation, and aloneness of the young man leads to a hesitant escape yielding to a tireless energy for adventure via a cross-generational friendship with his grandmother, and later on in the story with his father. The end result is a sense of great accomplishment, a sense of self-identity, understanding and family reconnection.

As an older adult I became captivated by the story and have purchased several copies to share with friends and libraries. It will be a stepping stone for a reader from being a small dependent child to a doubting teen to someone who is confident and eager to experience everything that the natural world has to offer. This newly acquired independence and confidence will serve the reader well in meeting the challenges to come.

—Steve Thoemmes, world traveler, Oregon.

Conservation Success*: Protecting Wild Spaces and Species,* by Laura Perdew; illustr. Lex Cornell. *Nomad Press.* Ages 9-12.

Conservation Success: *Protecting Wild Spaces and Species* is a wonderful introduction to pragmatic environmentalism. Coming at a time when it is easy to feel hopeless in the face of the extinction crisis, this book provides a digestible guide to the principles of environmentalism and, more importantly, how to put those ideas into action.

Each chapter of **Conservation Success** gives an overview of a common conservation tactic, such as species rewilding in the chapter 'Ready for Rewilding', as well as several examples of its past success. Along with that, each chapter contains an example of how the youth have aided the environmentalist effort: from fifth-grader Linh, who published a book to fundraise for conservation, to 7-year-old Cash, who organized a community water cleanup project. The chapter concludes with two simple projects for children to do to both learn about and aid conservation, allowing anyone to help protect our planet.

It is easy to look at problems as immense as pollution and extinction and think that they are unsolvable by any of us. Perhaps, when approached alone and altogether as one project, they are. This book offers an alternative way of seeing things, and shows the small ways even children can act, as well as the large ways conservation has succeeded, such as saving a species or preserving a habitat. It is all of these acts together that will save our planet. It only takes people who care.

Conservation Success is a hopeful yet pragmatic book that arrives at a time that needs both hope and pragmatism. The book provides an easy introduction to conservation and how anyone can help, not just adults or scientists.

—Jason Lin will graduate in 2027, New Jersey.

Our Awards issue, Vol. 38, no. 2 *(available September 1, 2026)* will feature the 2026 Youth Honor Awards and 2026 Asian Celebration Haiku Contest. You may order a print copy of the issue for $10 *(includes postage for U.S. addresses).*

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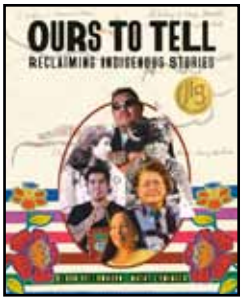


Down Syndrome Out Loud: *20+ True Stories of Disability and Determination,* by Melissa Hart; illustr. María Perera. *Sourcebooks.* Ages 8-14.

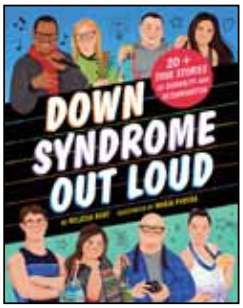
Down Syndrome Out Loud tells the true stories of people with Down Syndrome, their challenges and their victories. The people celebrated in this book are from across the U.S., and around the world. Readers will meet a clothes designer, author, triathlete, gymnast, rapper, artist, and more. The people profiled also share stories of hardship: many have experienced health issues associated with Down Syndrome, including heart defects, feeding difficulties, speech delays and difficulty with motor skills. Many also share stories of bullying from peers and adults. But with the help of their families and other supportive adults in their lives, they were able to overcome setbacks and reach their dreams.

Some of the people in the book were on TV, like John Tucker, who starred on the reality show Born This Way and launched a music video, or Alex Bourne, who starred in the documentary Handsome along with his brother. Other people achieved notable "firsts" for people with Down Syndrome, including the first athlete to be sponsored by Adidas (Chris Nikic), the first designer to have clothes at London's fashion week (Isabella Springmuhl Tejada), first person to present an Oscar award (Zack Gottsagen). And some of the people profiled are simply regular people who found their dream jobs, like teacher Michael Holton, or photographer Geoffery Miko.

In addition to the profiles, the book also includes an "Events and Groups" section, including a chapter on the Special Olympics, the National Down Syndrome Society, and a brief history of the disability movement in the USA.

Overall this book is an excellent resource for children who want to know more about disabilities, advocacy, and people working hard to achieve their dreams.

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



Ours To Tell: *Reclaiming Indigenous Stories,* by Eldon Yellowhorn & Kathy Lowinger. *Annick Press.* Ages 12+.

Ours To Tell: *Reclaim Indigenous Stories* tells various stories of indigenous people, through clear and engaging text accompanied by vivid color photographs, illustrations, and historical photos. The book is organized by the medium or means by which those stories were told.

The book begins with stories of people who used or invented writing systems to document the stories of their people, including Sequoyah who invented a writing system for the Cherokee language. Then we learn about people who reported indigenous stories, including an early indigenous journalist (Elias Boudinot) and anthropologist (Ella Cara Deloria). Part three turns to artists, including writers, musicians and poets, like Pauline Johnson, a 19th century Canadian poet and performer, and comic book artist Jay Odjick. Part four details indigenous people who witnessed historical moments, like Shanadithit who documented the cultural practices of her people in what is now Newfoundland through drawings and diagrams, and Ada Blackjack who wrote on typewriter about the doomed expedition to Wrangel Island in the early 20th century. Finally, we learn about people who make things that tell stories, like designer Agness Yellow Bear who makes ribbon skirts and bead artist Elias Jade Not Afraid.

Ours To Tell includes many fascinating stories of indigenous people. The book succeeds at sharing about indigenous leaders and their stories, while at the same time critically examining how stories are told. And it does this all while remaining accessible for younger readers.

—Daemion Lee is a special education teacher, returned Peace Corps volunteer, and ex-editor of Skipping Stones.