

# Skipping Stones



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*A Multicultural Literary Magazine*

- Nature Haiku Contest
- 2018 Book Awards
- Celebrate America

**Reviews of the 2018  
Multicultural & Nature Books  
and Teaching Resources**

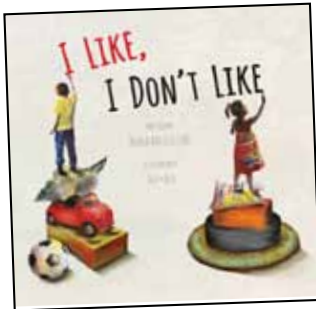
*Art by Victoria Aiko Ferrante, gr. 7, California.*

# The 2018 Skipping Stones Honor Awards



This year we recommend 29 outstanding books and four teaching resources as the winners of our **26th Annual Skipping Stones Awards**. These books 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 many ways to explore and understand families, cultures, places, societies and their histories for readers of all ages—from the very young readers to high school seniors and adults.

## Multicultural & International Books



**I Like, I Don't Like** by Anna Baccelliere, illustr. Ale + Ale. Picture book. *Eerdmans Books for Young Readers*.

**I Like, I Don't Like** helps us see that what we like because it's fun or pretty or tasty can have a very different

meaning for the poor children who have to contribute to their families, working long hours at boring, tedious or dirty jobs. Flowers are wonderful until you have to sell them in traffic. Phones are great for happy little girls chatting, but not so great for the boy who squats on the ground to take them apart for recycling. And who doesn't like rugs? Maybe the Afghan girl doesn't like them because she weaves by hand at a big loom every day, with no time to play. How we see the things we like can change when we realize the larger story, often involving child labor and deep poverty that keeps kids working at unpleasant tasks, just to survive.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.

**A Different Pond** by Bao Phi, illustr. Thi Bui. Picture book. *Capstone Young Readers*.

One Saturday, a Vietnamese refugee father wakes his youngest son before sunrise to accompany him on a fishing trip. He is fishing early, before going to his second job, to ensure that his family has food that day. While fishing, he teaches his son how to build a fire to warm them, and reminisces about fishing at another pond in Vietnam before coming to this country.

This beautifully told and illustrated story focuses on the day to day struggles of a refugee family after their difficult journey to arrive in the United States. The author, the youngest of six children, poetically describes life as he lived it with his family when they



settled in Minnesota after fleeing Vietnam during the war. Illustrator Thi Bui, who is also a member of a Vietnamese refugee family, draws on her experience for her illustrations. The words and pictures together poignantly honor refugee families and their struggles as they work together to survive in a new land.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller and grandmother.

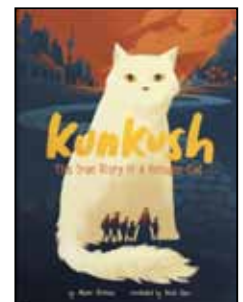
**Kunkush: The True Story of a Refugee Cat** by Mae Ventura, illustr. Beidi Guo. Picture book. *Capstone*.

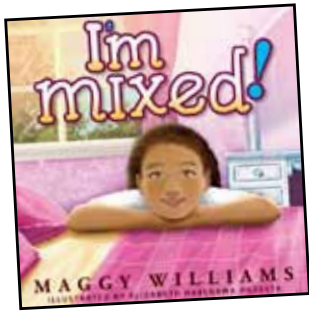
A widowed refugee mother with five children brought their cat named Kunkush along with them in a basket as they escaped Iraq in a small boat headed for Turkey. After that long difficult journey, Kunkush pushed up the lid of his basket and ran off to hunt for food as they landed. Though the family searched for him, they were unable to locate him before they were taken to a refugee camp. Through a series of fortuitous events, Kunkush was taken in and cared for by volunteers. Several kind strangers helped to organize an ultimately successful effort on social media to find Kunkush's family, who had by then moved on to Norway.

The kindness of all those who helped Kunkush and his family testifies to the basic goodness of humanity.

Children will strongly identify and empathize with Kunkush. Through their understanding of his journey to be reunited with his family, they will better comprehend the journey refugees make when fleeing to safety. This heartwarming story is an excellent one to read aloud and discuss.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller and grandmother.





**I'm Mixed!** by Maggy Williams, illustr. Elizabeth Hasegawa Agresta. Picture book. *Loving Healing Press.*

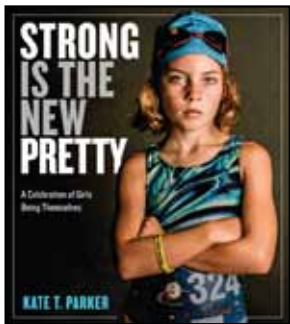
If you have a mother or father who is white, and the other parent is black, who are you? Black or White? Author Maggy Williams felt that people like her—biracial children and adults—should be able to claim both their identities, black and white. They shouldn't have to choose only one! The author wants biracial children to grow up celebrating their Mixed heritage, right from a very young age.

We should love who we are, and be proud of our heritage. That is the central message of this simple but profound book for young children.

Until recently, biracial children of a black mother or father were simply considered black, notwithstanding who the other parent was! The American social history has been less than desirable when it comes to empowering children of multiracial backgrounds. So books like **I'm Mixed!** are especially important. They should be in our schools, libraries, and on our bookshelves. It is likely that the number of multiracial children in the United States will increase many-fold in the next few decades, and the country will no longer remain a White Majority country. We need more resources to help make all of us—multiracials, blacks, whites, Asians, and Natives included—become self-confident and be proud of who we are.

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

**Strong is the New Pretty:** *A Celebration of Girls Being Themselves* by Kate T. Parker. *Workman Publishing.*



Strong Is The New Pretty is an inspiring book full of quotes from girls who have overcome their fears, disabilities, impediments, challenges, failures, and mistakes. No matter our age, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, we all face different obstacles in our daily life. However, the variety in our challenges does not separate us; on the contrary, it unites us.

Strong Is The New Pretty tells the story of girls like

Faith, age 18, whose parents both died of cancer in the same year. Faith was resilient and strong, and worked diligently in school to make her parents proud.

Grace B., age 12, tells us, “Cancer stole part of my leg, but not my joy. I choose happiness, Being happy is my superpower.”

Ella, who is 8 years old, confidently assures us that she is magic. Whitney, who is 10, has an A-plus in her science class.

Caroline R., age 15, says: “I have a smile on my lips, my hands on my hips, and spirit in my heart. Cheerleaders can jump, kick, toss, tumble, fly, catch, stunt, and be fierce—all in a bow.”

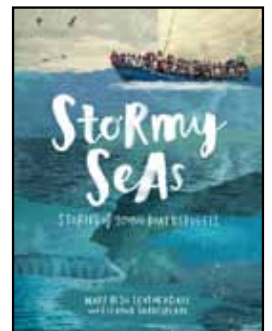
Each of these girls is strong in her own way. Though they all face different challenges, their ability to bounce back with renewed energy and grit is what unifies them as strong girls.

After all, as Grace P. tells us, “Strong is being able to look at a challenge and foresee the magnificent outcomes that it may bring.”

I loved every single quote and picture in this book, and I have no doubt that girls all over the world were as inspired as I was after reading this book. I would recommend it for anyone—girl or boy—who has ever felt discouraged, frightened, or stressed out. This book is an amazing remedy to restore confidence and self-satisfaction.

—Mary Caroline McCoy, homeschooler, 13, Oregon.

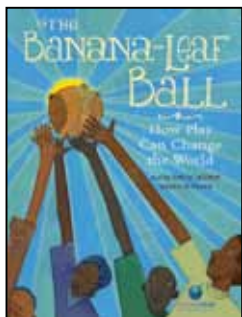
**Stormy Seas:** *Stories of Young Boat Refugees* by Mary Beth Leatherdale and Eleanor Shakespeare. *Annick Press.*



A collection of true tales, **Stormy Seas** begins with a chronology of the major refugee groups that fled their homes by boat from the 17th to 20th Centuries. The book follows five young refugees who flee intolerable conditions at home then find themselves in boats they hope will carry them to safety. People with them are terrified of drowning but more afraid of being sent back. Escape seems their only hope for survival. Crowded rickety boats, hunger, thirst and ripping storms threaten their lives. And when they

arrive in a new land, everything is different—sometimes awful. The hardships that these young refugees face: forced migration, loneliness, etc., are difficult to imagine for most of us. These stories make the harrowing experience come to life, and conclude with hope. Though not all refugees are so lucky, these kids survive, some find success and happiness in their new country.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger, and educator.



**The Banana-Leaf Ball:** *How Play Can Change the World* by Katie Smith Milway and Shane W. Evans. Picture book. *Kids Can Press.*

This is a fascinating book about how playing sports can bring people together. It shows how just playing a team game can end up uniting former enemies.

Kids anywhere will be able to appreciate this story.

The story is set in western Tanzania, near Burundi, where a young boy named Deo is forced to leave his family's hillside farm because of war. He gets separated from his family and is surviving on his own until a kind fisherman finds him and brings him to Lukole, a refugee camp. The supplies at the camp are few, and he misses his family. He also has to avoid a bully named Remy. Deo remembers something his father told him before they were separated, and realizes that he needs to make a banana-leaf ball, because he remembers playing with one when he was still home. Then, one day, he sees a stranger at the refugee camp holding a manufactured soccer ball, and soon he and Remy are on the same team, which changes their relationship.

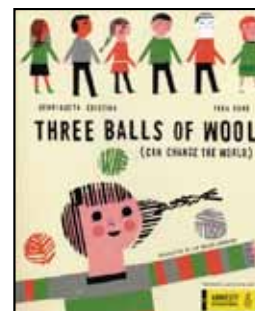
Since I love sports, I thought this was a really interesting story. Even though Deo's life is so different than mine, we both enjoy sports. I thought that Remy had an important role in the story and was a believable character. I learned that kids all over the world love to play sports with each other, and that sports can build cooperation.

I'm glad that I read this because I learned a lot from it. I think this book would be great for kids from ages 7 to 11, although younger kids might need it to be read aloud to them.

—Kevin McCoy, age 10, homeschooler, Oregon

**Three Balls of Wool** (Can Change the World) by Henriqueta Cristina and Yara Kono, trans. Lyn Miller-Lachmann. Picture book.

*Enchanted Lion Books.*



This story is set in Portugal during a difficult period in history. Hoping for a brighter future in a country where their children could go to school, a family goes to another country. Things seem better at first, but conformity is everywhere, even in the color of the clothing everyone wears. The clever mother unravels three sweaters in the allowed colors, orange, green, and grey. She then reknits the yarn with different patterns made from those colors for each of her children.

When other mothers see those sweaters in the town square on Sundays, they too begin to use their creativity to unravel sweaters and reknit them in their own patterns.

This wonderful book demonstrates the strength of the human spirit, even under governmental repression. I recommend it highly.

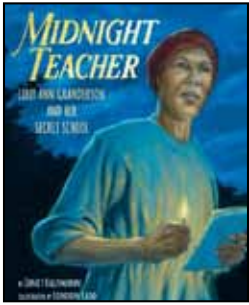
The forward written by Amnesty International Senior Director Cynthia Gabriel Walsh, reminds us that defending and protecting the human rights of all people is a responsibility that belongs to us all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is printed in the back of the book.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller and grandmother.

**Midnight Teacher:** *Lilly Ann Granderson and Her Secret School* by Janet Halfmann, illustr. London Ladd. Picture book. *Lee & Low*

Lilly Ann was born about 1821, a slave in Petersburg, Virginia. When she was four-years-old her master sold her to a family in Kentucky. She was allowed to play with the new master's children. When the adults weren't looking the children played school. They found an old-ragged blue-black speller for Lilly Ann to use and keep. In secret Lilly Ann practiced reading and writing letters in the dirt with a stick, every chance she got. She would read secretly everything she could. In the newspaper she read about people who believed slavery was wrong and that there



were places up north where there was no slavery. Lilly Ann believed that education was the road to freedom.

Lilly Ann realized that if slaves learned to read and write that they could write out their own passes. A written pass could give safe travel across the countryside. She was a young woman by this time and she began teaching children what she knew out in the woods on Sundays.

As word spread, more and more adults began showing up for class. Lilly Ann was forced to stop teaching when her master died and she was sold to a new master in Mississippi. She then met a kind man named Oliver Granderson. Lilly Ann and Oliver had a son together and she decided to begin teaching slaves to read again. “What kind of future will my son have if he can’t read or write?” she thought.

Her school opened at midnight inside of a ragged-abandoned cabin on the back streets of Natchez, Mississippi. The punishment was 39 lashes if caught teaching a slave to read, the same for a slave learning to read. Despite the threat of punishment she kept right on teaching. Her students would share what they learned with others, and some did write their own passes and escape. This went on for seven years until one night they were caught. After weeks of waiting for punishment the authorities told Lilly Ann’s master that there was no law against a slave teaching a slave so there was no punishment. Lilly Ann saw this as the answer to her prayers, reopened her midnight school and started a Sabbath church school as well.

Lilly Ann was still teaching after the Civil War ended in 1864. Now that slavery was ended, she could teach everyone out in the open. There are two-full pages of extra information about Lilly Ann Granderson in the back of this beautifully illustrated picture book.

—Paulette Ansari, educator, and grandmother.

**Travel, Learn and See Your Friends:** *Mandarin Immersion Adventure* by Edna Ma, trans. Eddie Liu, illustr. Irfan Budhiharjo. Picture book. *Dr. Ma Publishing*

Bonds can come from simple origins. Similar interests, shared family values, learning the same language—

it can be easy to connect with other people. The two boys Ethan and Dean in **Travel, Learn, and See Your Friends** meet on the first day of school at a Mandarin immersion school, and they quickly become best friends.

Dean explains that he is learning Mandarin because his family believes he should know his family’s language and culture. But when asked his reason why, Ethan gives the answer his parents have told him time and time again: Learning a language is good for you, like eating healthy food.

But just why is it good you, anyway? Ethan asks his parents this, and we learn a valuable truth that many language learners already know. Anyone can learn a new language, regardless of where they are from, and there are many benefits to doing so. Using another language exercises your brain. A new language offers new perspective, just like new art supplies help an artist create something beautiful. One can make more friends and better understand and experience the world.

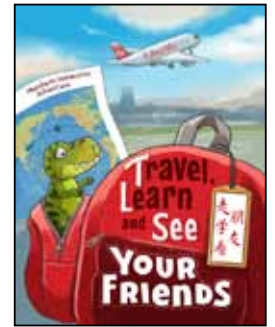
When Dean learns his family will be moving away, he’s very sad. But with some creative thinking, he plans a way for Ethan and him to still see each other. With the title of the book as his plan, he suggests that Ethan travel to China to learn Mandarin, and see his best friend all summer long.

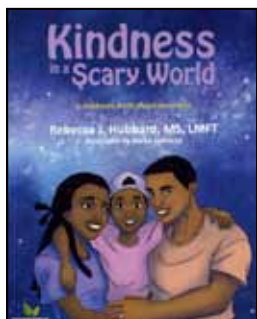
The book is left open ended, just as the parents are working to decide what international school Ethan and Dean will attend over the summer in China. It leaves us wanting more, to know what happens next for these two close friends. We can see the valuable connection people can have, thanks to a common language. Bilingual readers or Chinese language learners will adore this book.

—Elizabeth Ponce-Del Valle, student intern.

**Kindness in a Scary World:** *A children’s book about terrorism* by Rebecca J. Hubbard, illustr. Becca Johnson. Picture book. *Title Town Publishing*

**Kindness in a Scary World** is a book designed to be read by parents to their children. Author Rebecca J. Hubbard suggests in the introduction that parents read the guide for parents, caretakers, and concerned





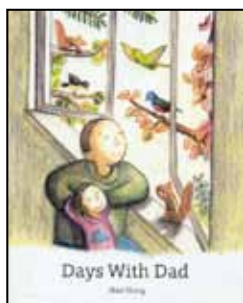
adults in the back of the book before sharing it with their children. The purpose of both the guide and the book itself is to help allay children's fears around terrorist attacks and other scary events they may see on television by focusing on positive ways a child can contribute to society.

The story is told in the first person by a child who overhears his parents' reactions to a terrorist attack they view on television. He joins them and sees the rebroadcast before they are aware of his presence. When they realize he is there, he begins to ask them questions. His parents acknowledge both their son's feelings and their own. They reassure him that they are doing everything they can to keep him and themselves safe, and that nothing that happened is in any way his fault.

Mama suggests they can make things better for people in the world by being kind. She and Papa discuss with the boy the kind things he is already doing for his neighbors. As the story progresses he is encouraged and applauded by his parents, as he discovers other ways to be kind. They help him understand that people belong to one another, and being kind means helping one another. And helping one another feels good, and makes the world makes the world a better place.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher and storyteller.

**Days With Dad** by Nari Hong.  
Picture book. *Enchanted Lion Books.*



When one thinks of spending time with his or her dad, activities like playing catch, building things together, or going out often come to mind. But that's not the norm for everyone. **Days with Dad** shows us a daughter's love and

appreciation for the good times she spends with her father who has a disability.

While he often apologizes to her and laments that he cannot do certain things, she tells her dad the many things they do together are just as valuable and fun. Instead of biking together through the park, the two spend time looking at the flowers there. Where skat-

ing together isn't possible, ice fishing proves to be just as enjoyable. Time at the beach lets them make fantastic sand castles. Hot chocolate indoors on a rainy day is also a cherished memory. She highlights her dad's strengths, like cooking, drawing, and his knowledge of birds. For every thing he feels sorry that he cannot do with her, there is something else she knows he can.

Disabilities are not often talked about in a positive light, like in the pages of this book. Usually, when the topic is discussed, the conversation shifts to that of burden, pity, and apologies. But there is so much more to the story, in addition to the one society tends to paint onto disabled people. With its gentle colors and humble art style, **Days with Dad** shows us this other side of the story with a bright smile.

—Elizabeth Ponce-Del Valle, student intern.

**Freedom for Me: A Chinese Yankee** by Stacie Haas. Ages 8-14.  
*50/50 Press.*



This story of Thomas Beck is based on the real life of a Chinese-born youth named Joseph Pierce, who sailed from China and was adopted by a Connecticut merchant captain of the boat.

In July 1862 he enlisted in the 14th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry when he saw his brother Robert do the same. As he was one of a very few Chinese Americans in the area, he faced name-calling, insults and ridicule by others.

When Thomas befriended a runaway slave, he began to understand what freedom really meant, and he was determined to fight even harder for the Union and the freedom of all slaves. In the battle of Gettysburg he was injured but after recovering from the gun-shot wound to his shoulder, he was promoted to the rank of Corporal for his bravery. However, for him it was simply a privilege to help spread freedom in America—freedom for all of us.

In "Author's Note" section, we read that the real-life Joseph Pierce received an honorable discharge after the war. When the 13th Amendment was adopted in 1865, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1866. He married, had four children, and lived rest of his

life in Meriden, Connecticut. However as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the growing prejudice against the Chinese Americans, he felt threatened, and so he identified his race as “Japanese” in the 1890 census. He died at the age of 73.

A good read that takes us to the Civil War times.

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

**Clutch** by Heather Camlot. Grades 4-8. *Red Deer Press.*

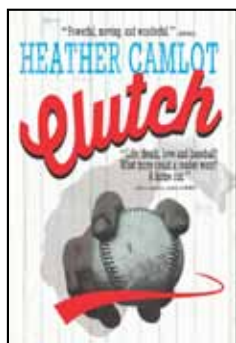
Readers of *Clutch* will be surprised by how relatable the character of Joey Grosser is, no matter how different his life may seem from their own. As a 12-year-old boy living in a poor Jewish neighborhood in post-World War II Montreal, Joey spends most of his time thinking about the same things that occupy the minds of boys today: sports, the girl he likes, and how to earn money. But he has some additional worries and challenges, including the death of his father, the well-being of his mother and younger brother, and the management of his family’s store.

As I read his story, I sympathized with Joey right away because of his sincerity, determination, and optimism. Even when he made mistakes or displayed his flaws, it was obvious that his heart was in the right place. As he prepares for his bar mitzvah and strives to be as good a man as his father was, he navigates difficult situations within his family, with his best friend, and with Shelly, the girl he adores.

Even though this story has plenty of action, suspense, and poignant moments, the author somehow also manages to weave baseball into the narrative, with frequent references to Jackie Robinson recent entrance into major league baseball. Joey and his younger brother are huge fans, and as minorities themselves, they are inspired by Jackie’s example. Each chapter in the book

begins with a quotation about baseball, which gives the whole story a playful feeling, despite the sometimes heavy subject matter.

This was an enjoyable story that was also eye-opening and entertaining. I found the characters to be believable and lovable, the storyline compelling, and the historical per-



spective enlightening—and I’m not even a sports fan!

—Sarah Mendonca McCoy, PhD, educator, musician & mom

**Wordwings**, a novel by Sydelle Pearl. Grades 6 and up. *Guernica Editions.*

One of the most effective ways of teaching young people about historical events is through literature. Whether told in the form of a memoir or from the perspective of an observer, stories about individuals help to depict the reality of a place and time. With regard to the Holocaust, the *Diary of Anne Frank* amazed people all over the world when it was published in 1947 by allowing readers to gain insight into the actual experiences of a young Jewish girl living in hiding during World War II. Many years later, in 2005, *The Book Thief* offered a fictional window into the same time period through an invented cast of characters. And in 2017, *Wordwings* follows in the same tradition by blending fact and fiction in an intriguing way.



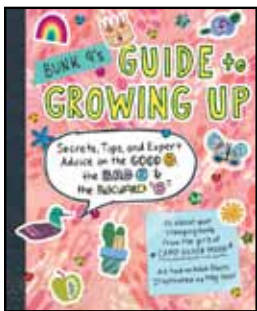
During the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, the city was divided into different sections for Polish people, German people, and Jewish people. As many as 400,000 Jews from many Polish provinces, and even some from outside of Poland, were forced to live in the Warsaw Ghetto, enduring cramped living conditions, extremely strict security, and a wide variety of cruel punishments. Despite this fierce oppression, the Jewish people living in the Ghetto found ways to secretly practice their faith, educate their young, and preserve their culture and history. Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum established the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto to preserve written records that documented the experiences of his people, and his work provided the inspiration for this fictional account of a twelve-year-old girl named Rivke Rosenfeld.

When the main character, Rivke, feels compelled to write down her impressions and experiences of living in the Ghetto, she has no paper or notebooks, so she uses the only material that she can find: a printed collection of fairy tales written by Hans Christian Andersen. She fills the book’s margins with her own

thoughts and observations, and becomes known in her community for being a gifted storyteller. The author weaves the historical figure of Dr. Ringelblum into the story, as he invites Rivke to contribute her writing to his collection. Rivke likes the idea of her words surviving the war and being shared with others in the future.

I think this book has tremendous value for all young people, as it offers an inspiring example of human resilience in the face of tragedy, and illustrates the lasting power of literature to transcend the limits of time and space. Young readers with very imaginative minds and a strong love of words might find the story especially compelling. Although many books have been written about the Holocaust, there will always be a need for new works that remind us about the extremes of human nature and caution us against repeating the mistakes of the past. Sydelle Pearl has come up with a clever way to share Dr. Ringelblum's work with us, and I'm grateful for it!

—Sarah Mendonca McCoy, PhD, educator, musician & mom



**Bunk 9's Guide to Growing Up: Secrets, Tips, and Expert Advice on the Good, the Bad, and the Awkward**, by Adah Nuchi, illustr. Meg Hunt. *Workman Publishing*

**Bunk 9's Guide to Growing Up** is a wonderful book that explains that mysterious thing called puberty in an easily understandable way. It helpfully provides some do's and don'ts for acne treatment, explains the ins and outs of proper deodorant use, and answers questions about everything from hair removal to halitosis.

I liked the way this book stressed the fact that every girl's body is different and changes at its own speed. This is extremely important for every girl to understand, whether she is nine or nineteen! Many, many girls worry about developing slower or faster than their peers, be it physically, emotionally, or socially, so I was glad to see so much diversity in the girls of Bunk 9.

**The Guide to Growing Up** also provides tips and conversation starters for girls with tips for talking to their parents about uncomfortable subjects. These are important tools for girls with a stepmother or step-

father, girls with a single dad, or girls who simply don't feel comfortable talking to their parents.

I would recommend this book for any girl who has ever had any questions about her changing body. Using the fictional girls of **Bunk 9 at Camp Silver Moon, the Guide to Growing Up** covers plenty of otherwise painful subjects that are a critical part of every girl's transition to adulthood.

—Mary McCoy, homeschooler, 13, Oregon.

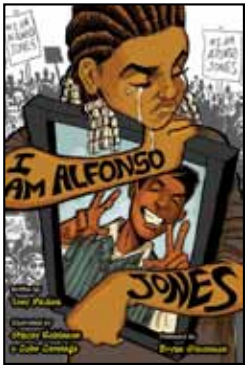
**I Am Alfonso Jones** by Tony Medina, illustr. Stacey Robinson & John Jennings; with a foreword by Bryan Stevenson. Grades 7-12. *Lee & Low Books*.

**I Am Alfonso Jones** is a graphic novel about a Black teenager in New York. He goes to buy his first suit, in anticipation of meeting his wrongly incarcerated father. However, an off-duty NYPD officer shoots him dead, in front of his girlfriend, in the clothing store, mistaking the clothes hanger in Alfonso's hand for a gun. The novel both humanizes Alfonso—who is a high school drama student, auditioning for a part in Hamlet, a bicycle messenger, deeply aware of Black history—and also points out the absurd human tragedy of racism in our society.

**I Am Alfonso Jones** takes place largely in the afterlife on an underground ghost train, where the deceased meet and guide Alfonso on his journey and search for justice. This book is an extended meditation on "The Talk." Not the "Birds and Bees Sex Talk" but the Talk that every conscious parent of color has with their children. The Talk is about the realities and forms of racism, and how to rationally cope with and survive them, how to remain sane against the lies of white supremacy. Black Psychology studies racism, and classifies racism as a form of mental illness, a mentality that reserves a safe place in a society for police to kill unarmed Black people out of fear, yet allow white youth to arm themselves and enact mass shootings.

The graphic novel illustrates issues from Black History and Black people, to the police and the white communities they live in. In flashbacks and vignettes, the book shows us how Alfonso's friends, family, teachers, and community, celebrate his humanity, and mourn his loss. He visits them, an invisible man in death, the imagery echoing Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.





My ten-year-old granddaughter, a voracious reader, read the novel first, deeming it good, but intense. Some might think the subject matter too intense for an elementary school student. As my parents taught me, I would recommend it be read with not only a dictionary, but perhaps a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis “Skip” Gates’ *Africana*, for those unfamiliar with common African American references. Of course a living cultural reference like a community elder would be best.

In my parents’ version of The Talk, I was told about Emmett Till when I was seven, in 1962, after my first racial attack, by a white adult in an amusement park. Back then, Black people stood a 50/50 chance of surviving an encounter with law enforcement. Mamie Till gave Emmett The Talk before he went to Mississippi. A Black boy from Chicago, he could hardly imagine he could be terrorized, tortured, and murdered for putting money in the hand of a white woman, or even allegedly whistling at her. That he could be killed for a lie. I told two of my daughters about Emmett Till at seven. Some might think this is too early, but since research has identified negative racial associations as early as three or four, seven-years-old may be late. We’re a family of activists, descended from a family of activists of color extending back past slavery.

In **I Am Alfonso Jones**, activists are portrayed in a very favorable light, while not demonizing the police, or the media. In a more conventional family, this would be fair for young adults. In today’s world, given that police have killed unarmed ten-year-old boys, and pregnant women who have called the police and get shot in front of their children, without the police suffering any legal penalties, this book is a dose of reality therapy for our times. Alfonso may not find justice, but the intent of the novel is to inspire a more humane society. I would recommend this book for parents, activists, and allies, especially children who must embody and practice our traditional excellence, and deepen our humanity, while also being targeted. The underlying message: keep moving, even in the afterlife.

—Mark Harris, *African American, educator, Oregon.*

**Ahgottahandleonit**, a novel by Donovan Mixon. Grades 9-12. *Cinco Puntos Press.*

**Ahgottahandleonit** by Donavon Mixon tells the story of Tim, a teenager growing up in Trenton, and it follows him over the course of an eventful summer vacation. The book opens at the end of the school year, when Tim gets jumped in the park and beat up by some other kids he knows. He tries to run away but his escape is foiled when he fails to read a road sign warning about hot asphalt—because of his dyslexia—and his shoe gets stuck.

This scene frames the rest of the story that follows: Tim is poor, black and doesn’t have a lot of options. As the summer goes on, Tim is faced with an increasingly daunting series of dilemmas and obstacles, and his life quickly spins out of control.

Through alternating viewpoints, the author creates an intimate portrait of Tim, his friends, his family, his fears. Tim is not exactly a hero but even as his behavior becomes more erratic, the people close to him stick by him, and he remains sympathetic to the reader as well. We want him to succeed, even as he does the opposite. The resulting story is anything but a caricature, and the author strives to give context to Tim’s actions, to humanize him. The events in the story happen because the characters feel like they have no other choice — they lash out with a volatile mixture of hope and fear and pride and shame. We wish Tim would make better choices, but at the same time wonder if we could have done anything differently.

The phrase “ahgottahandleonit,” appears in the book several times, uttered by characters who clearly do not have a handle on anything. The saying becomes a sort of reverse prophecy, and the people who say it seem to foretell their own downfall. There is something tragic about the phrase, and the story overall, as characters hurt themselves even as they try to set themselves free.

On one level, this is a very specific story, at times reading almost like a cautionary tale to young black men growing up in urban America. The author himself,



after all, grew up in very similar circumstances to Tim. But at the same time, it is a universal story, asking all of us to slow down, to listen, and to forgive.

—Daemion Lee, educator and associate editor.

**My Real Name is Hanna** by Tara Lynn Masih.

Grades 4–12. Mandel Vilar Press

During the Holocaust (1939–1944), people hoping to save lives gave many Jewish people Christian names and identities with baptismal certificates. In other situations, they changed their names in order to fit in better in their new countries to start a new life. Such is the case of this novel's heroine, Hanna Slivka.

The author, Lynn Masih, dedicates her novel to the Ukrainian Jews who did not survive the Holocaust, and to those who did. She uses real life experiences of Esther Sterner, Zhanna Ashanskaya, and Wilhelmina Dichter to supply her narrative with the realities of the Holocaust. Masih's details help to make Hanna's experience very real for the reader.

The story begins with Hanna's family: Mama, Papa, Leeba (sister) and Symon (brother) living peacefully in their Ukrainian village of Kwasova. Ukraine means borderland. It is flat with no natural defenses. Ukraine was Polish in September of 1939 when Hitler invades, and then Russia a week after Rosh Hashanah. The family moves to a cabin in the forest until word comes that the Germans are combing the forest. Now they move to an underground cave. Hanna asks this question after moving into the cave:

“What is expanding outside of our underground caves? What ripples, or torrents, are being set off by the German army and their evil leader that will expand ever outward and forward, from our lives and into others' in the future?” (P. 146).



The stories told by the people sharing the cave with Hanna's family help to keep them alive, and these stories help readers to understand the scope of the evil perpetrated upon a group of people by a whole country.

—Peggy Mendonca, educator & grandmother, Texas.

**Evangelina Takes Flight** by Diana J. Noble. Grades 5–8. Arte Público Press/Piñata Books



Evangelina de León is content to stay on her ranch in northern Mexico forever, feeding chickens, rolling out tortillas, and preparing for her sister's *quinceañera*. But one morning as she collects eggs from the henhouse, Evangelina overhears a whispered conversation between her father and brother that will permanently change her life.

“We're landowners, *m'ijo*. If they do come here, they'll show us no mercy.”

Evangelina learns of the revolution—soldiers, General Pancho Villa, battles breaking out, troops burning houses, and worse. Even with a fierce revolution coming their way, Evangelina's family is determined to celebrate the *quinceañera*, though.

The *fiesta* is perfect. Evangelina's sister looks beautiful, the music is wonderful, and a handsome boy asks permission to court her! But soon, Evangelina's family realizes they have to leave. So they board a train to Seneca, Texas, to stay with Tía, their aunt.

Evangelina is both excited and nervous to suddenly be in the United States! But her family's eagerness to assimilate is met with cruel words, insulting signs, and many hateful people. When Evangelina starts school, she faces many challenges no child should have to face, including children who spit on her, an outhouse that she's forbidden from using, and a teacher who is eager to whip children for even speaking Spanish.

But there are others who are kind. When her pregnant Tía goes into labor, the only person willing to help a Mexican girl turns out to be a white doctor who recognizes Evangelina's potential and invites her to work with him. With his help, she learns a bit of English, and begins to speak to the Lebanese boy at school who has taken an interest in her.

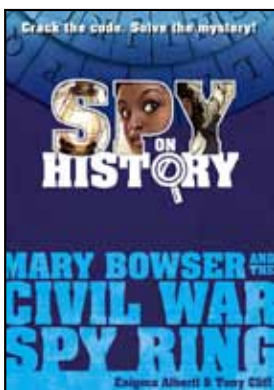
Even when Evangelina is forced to sit through lessons on basic hygiene and how to dress properly, she is still determined to learn as much as she can. Even when one girl constantly and relentlessly taunts the

“filthy Mexican children,” she stays strong. So, when an opportunity comes for Evangelina to spread her wings and take flight, she is ready.

—Mary McCoy, *Homeschooler, 13, Oregon.*

**Spy on History:** *Mary Bowser and the Civil War Spy Ring* by Enigma Alberti and Tony Cliff. Grades 4-7. Workman Publishing

Mary was born a slave. When she was a little girl the Van Lews (a Quaker family) set her and her entire family free. Bet Van Lew saw something special in Mary and sent her to Philadelphia to get an education. As a young adult Mary taught black people how to read in Liberia. Many of them had been former slaves. Mary returned to Richmond Virginia to marry Wilson Bowser. The Civil War was just beginning when they married. Richmond was declared the capital of the Confederacy and Jefferson Davis’s home was the Confederate White House.

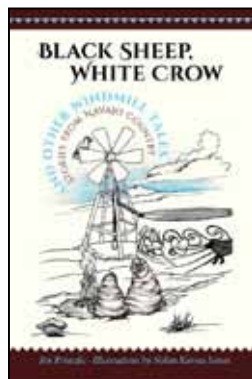


Bet Van Lew was one of a few people who knew Mary possessed a photographic memory. She approached her shortly after her marriage asking her to be a spy in Jefferson Davis’ house. Both women knew she could be killed if discovered. Mary had prayed for a chance to do something to end slavery. Here was her chance to change the entire course of the war. It was more difficult than she ever thought it would be, but she played the part of a half-witted maid to Mrs. Jefferson. By the time she was discovered Mary had gotten out enough information to the Union armies for others to break the code of the Confederacy.

This is a wonderful biography of an unknown hero but it reads like an exciting spy thriller. There are hints throughout the story for readers to break the code also. This short story has many pencil drawings of the Confederate White House and gardens. There are drawings of other scenes in the story. A short biography that makes a major impact.

—Paulette Ansari, *Skipping Stones Board President.*

**Black Sheep, White Crow and Other Windmill**



**Tales:** *Stories from Navajo Country* by Jim Kristofic, illustr. Nolan Karras James. Grades 5-8. University of New Mexico Press.

This book consists of eight stories, two written and told for each season of the year. The tales are from the Navajo country. Each story is rich in cultural perspectives and traditions. The stories teach important lessons about how to live and each can stand alone. Yet they are woven together in such a way as to make a powerful impact on young Kameron’s mind. Kameron, a city kid with his own cell phone, must spend the remainder of the summer and attend the Rez school while living with his grandmother (Rez is short for Reservation) away from all that he knows and understands. While herding the sheep that first afternoon he meets an old Navajo farmer and the stories begin. There are small pencil drawings to enhance each story.

—Paulette Ansari, *storyteller and educator.*

“The author explains his background as non-Native author who spent his childhood growing up on the Navajo Nation. He also explains that he has developed his own stories. His connection and familiarity with growing up on the Navajo reservation have offered him the understanding of life on the reservation, Navajo humor and social family experiences. He weaves descriptive Navajo language throughout his stories which offers a respect for Navajo culture. This is a good book for the reader who is not familiar with Navajo culture, to feel a sense of the humor, life ways and how nature and creatures play a part in storytelling.”

—Marcy Middleton, *Navajo/Diné.*

**#NotYourPrincess:** *Voices of Native American Women*, edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale. Grades 7-12. Annick Press

This amazing anthology is dedicated to “every indigenous woman who has ever been called ‘Pocohontas’”—it is a collection of art, compositions, poetry, photographs, and quotes from over 50 contemporary North American Indigenous artists, mostly in Canada and some in the United States. While most

## Nature and Ecology Books



women featured are established artists and professionals, students and athletes are also included, giving this collection a broad perspective.

The opening piece by Leanne Simpson says, “I am always trying to escape—from dangerous situations, from racist stereotypes, from environ-

mental destruction in my territory, and from the assault on my freedom as an individual and as a part of the Nishnaabeg nation...I hold this beautiful, rich indigenous decolonial space inside and around me. I am escaping into indigenous freedom.”

In her foreword, Lisa Charleyboy quotes words of author Wilma Mankiller, a leader of the Cherokee Nation, reminding us that “despite everything that has happened to us, we have never given up and will never give up.” And Isabella Fillspipe echoes a similar thought in her contribution, *Dear Past Self*, writing, “...you are allowed to cry, you are allowed to scream, but you are not allowed to give up.”

The book is organized into four sections titled, “the ties that bind us”, “it could have been me”, “i am not your princess”, and “pathfinders.” Finally, a four-page section offers short biographies of the contributors, which helps us understand the diversity of first-hand experiences that contribute to the wealth of wisdom shared in these hundred-plus pages.

Highly recommended for a better understanding of contemporary Native American life and issues.

—Arun N. Toké, editor.



**Agua, Agüita/Water, Little Water** by/por Jorge Tetl Argueta, illustr. Felipe Ugalde Alcántara. Bilingual Picture book. *Arte Público Press/Piñata Books*.

**Agua, Agüita/Water, Little Water** is a multilingual nature book by an award-winning Salvadoran poet and children’s author.

The words describe how little drops of water rise from deep down, underground, and how they reach the sky, where they form clouds, only to come back down to the earth as rain. Each spread has short, poetic text both in Spanish and English, appropriate for beginning readers, and very colorful full-page illustrations to keep them engaged. Here is a sample page in Spanish and English:

“Soy de todos los colores y no tengo color.  
Soy de todos los sabores y no tengo sabor.  
Soy de todas las formas y no tengo forma.  
Soy Agua, soy Agüita.”

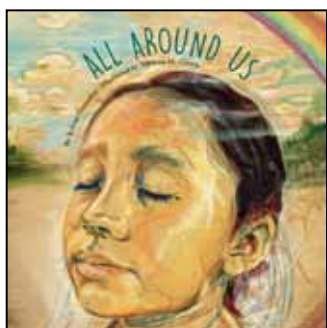
“I am all colors and I have no color.  
I am all flavors and I have no flavor.  
I am all shapes and I am shapeless.  
I am water, I am little Water.”

The last spread of the book is in Nahuatl, the native language of the author, from rural El Salvador. He spent most of his life there before moving to California. The illustrator grew up and studied arts in Mexico City.

—Arun N. Toké, editor, has traveled extensively in Mexico and Central America.

**All Around Us** by Xelena González, illustr. Adriana M. Garcia. Picture book. *Cinco Puntos Press*.

Colorful and beautifully illustrated, **All Around Us** is a girl’s story of spending time with a grandfather she loves, and how he helps her see the beauty of circles in our lives, circles like the sun and moon and rainbows, and the circles of color we discover when we look into the eyes of people we love. She learns of the circles of time too, that bring births and deaths in a family, while the circle of the year shapes soil, vegetables, trees and the seeds of new life in a garden.



The book is a project created by longtime friends Xelena Gonzalez, a journalist, dancer and librarian, and Adriana Garcia who is an award-winning artist and scene designer. Both were both working in Guangzhou, China. But

their shared roots in Texas took them back to being girls in a warmly inclusive neighborhood and the relatives there. Today, they meet often to enjoy tacos and dream of creative possibilities.

**All Around Us** is their first book, a quiet tale of a quiet man with big, working hands who shares with his granddaughter his deep experience of the endless circles that make up the natural and human world we see, and the world we do not see until someone points it out to us.

—Barbara Shaw, grandmother, blogger and educator.

**The Elephant Keeper: Caring for Orphaned Elephants in Zambia**, by Margriet Ruurs, illustr. Pedro Covo. Grades 3-7. Kids Can Press.

Aaron, a teenager when his father passed away, was allowed to take his father's place working at the Lodge. Shortly after reporting for work one morning Aaron heard a loud splashing sound. He ran around the back of the lodge to the swimming pool. A baby elephant was wildly kicking and flailing in the pool. Living in a small Zambian village Aaron had learned to fear and dislike elephants. He could see that the baby elephant would drown without help. He could not get out of the pool alone.

After waking the gardener Aaron flung open the shed doors looking for anything that would help him. He grabbed a rope, hose, and a rake. With help from other staff members and encouragement from the Lodge guests, Aaron jumped into the pool and was finally able to get the rope around the elephant's neck, pulling him out of the pool. The manager of the Lodge phoned the Lilayi Elephant Nursery which was



located near the Lodge.

This is a true story about a baby elephant's life being saved and how Aaron's life was changed forever in the process. Every page is covered in colorful water colors. The text includes four pages of photographed elephants. There is

extra factual information about elephants on these pages. Located in the back there is a one-page glossary and an entire page explaining how you can adopt an elephant or any other endangered species. Your donations help pay for milk, vitamins, medicine, etc. This is an outstanding story well told.

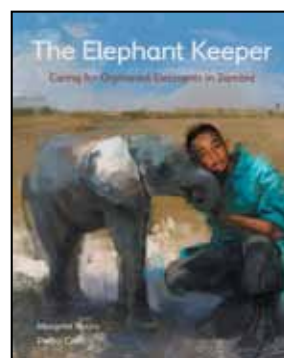
—Paulette Ansari, African American storyteller & educator.

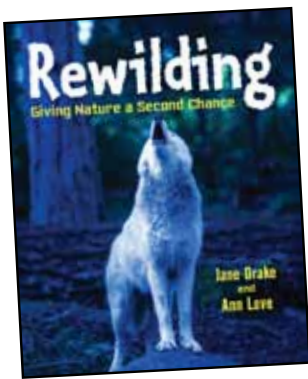
**What a Waste! Where Does Garbage Go?** by Claire Eamer, illustr. Bambi Edlund. Grades 4-9. Annick Press.

The latest generation of humans is maturing in a world unlike anything mankind has seen before. Advancements in technology and agriculture specifically have improved living conditions for some but also made it possible for others to be thrust downwards socioeconomically. Whatever the case, Claire Eamer points out one of the side effects of civilization that has slid to the back burner and could have serious repercussions if left unchecked. In a well researched book tailored for those who are inheriting this world, Eamer addresses the global garbage epidemic that has escalated in recent years.

Eamer first presents the idea that garbage has a long history, but has never been as big a problem as it is today. Next, Eamer delves into waste today and its many ways, shapes, and forms. All the while, examples are provided to show how attempts are being made to address a certain aspect of eliminating waste. Additionally, bits of garbage trivia and anecdotes make for an enjoyable read.

Clearly, Eamer has done a fine job of researching a problem as well as researching solutions and combining her research with original thoughts and commentary that can appeal to anyone. And while many of us adopt the "out of sight, out of mind" approach, I hope that this book will serve as food for further thought about





solutions to the garbage problem. I would recommend this book primarily for children in middle school, but anyone of anybody age could find a lesson to take away from it.

—Owen McCoy, 15, homeschooler, loves playing chess, Oregon.

**Rewilding:** *Giving Nature a*

*Second Chance*, by Jane Drake and Ann Love. Grades 5–9. Annick Press.

Rewilding is bringing plant & animal life back to areas where they once thrived. The idea is to restore habitats to their natural state, easing the damage done by humans to the planet. In the last 200 years, many unique reptiles, birds, and mammals have disappeared from Australia, the U.S. and other countries. The cause is people. People bring in pets and other animals not native to the area. These new species spread rapidly across the country, taking over native plants & animals. Think of all the natural habitats lost and damaged when people came and plowed up the land for farming. Faced with both damaged lands and wildlife extinction, rewilding is taking place in many countries all over the world.

Pollinators play a crucial role in the life of plants that people and animals need if we are to survive. Things are being done now to bring back the bees and the monarch butterflies. In many parts of the country these insects have all but disappeared.

Keeping large carnivores such as grizzlies in their natural habitats and safe from human beings is a constant challenge. In Banff National Park, Canada there is a four lane highway that runs the entire width of the park. Fencing was installed, this keeps many of the animals off of the highway. The crossovers do the best job of keeping animals safe. These crossovers consist of six bridges and 38 tunnels under the highway. The animal crossovers are designed to look as natural as possible. They are covered with soil, wild grasses, and other plants natural to the area.

This book opens our eyes to a very serious problem and at the same time gives us a new appreciation for all life. It also encourages all readers to get

involved in preserving life. Every page is covered with bright colors. The layout is very attractive and the print is large. Photography includes pictures of plant life, animal life, and cities where rewilding is flourishing. There is a two-page glossary, a one-page index and a page dedicated to sources where more information can be found in the rear of the book.

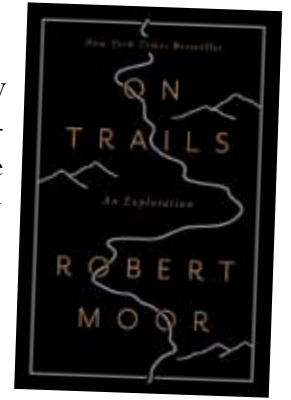
—Paulette Ansari, African American, storyteller, & educator.

**On Trails:** *An Exploration* by Robert Moor. For ages 16 and up. Simon & Schuster

You may think of hiking as an unremarkable pastime, as ordinary as mud. But in the hands of Robert Moor, it becomes a grand adventure. His book is both a personal memoir and a shared celebration of the solitary pleasures of hiking, inspired by a five-month trek across the 2100 mile-long Appalachian Trail that runs from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. Along the way, the author wondered about how trails come to be, why they change shape, and how they influence our ways of thinking.

Zhuangzi, the ancient Chinese sage, provides the first answer: “The path is made in the walking of it.” That circularity is reflected in the hiking trails described by Moor, as well as the myriad pathways and networks that crisscross our planet. Yesterday’s paths, though familiar, may yield new discoveries and insights in the future. The author’s wanderings take him on journeys around the world, prompting a constant stream of commentary and meditation on our desires, our wanderlust, our curiosity, and our oneness as human seekers after truth.

We discover that trails are a proof of our free spirit but also of our need to conform. They resolve the multitude of life options into a single path, confirmed by repeated use. In the author’s life, the trail takes on a religious hue, conferring both purpose and direction. “It was my only real source of navigation. So I clung to it, like Theseus tracing Ariadne’s unspooling ball of twine.” Trails leave their mark on the body; they demand self-discipline and humility in return for gifts of serenity and equilibrium.



Moor's book is a treat for information omnivores. He draws elaborate analogies to ancient paths, insect trails, and migration paths of quadrupeds. He explores the evolution of human societies through language and folklore, and reflects on the pathways of New World colonists. Lastly, he whisks us on a tour of the longest trail in the world (from Maine to Morocco), while alluding to the spread of massive modern networks that connect us around the globe.

Moor puts a new spin on an ancient pastime. According to him, path making is the key to the human journey, whether geographical or spiritual. His journeys become ours because of his ability to write about them vividly and in colorful prose. If you enjoy the thrill of discovery and a freewheeling intellectual adventure through landscapes of mind and spirit, you won't be able to put this book down. At the very least, your vocabulary and imagination will get an instant makeover.

—Prof. Stephen Mendonca, educator, Texas

## Teaching Resources

**Rethinking Bilingual Education: Welcoming Home Languages in Our Classrooms** by Elizabeth Barbian, Grace Cornell Gonzales, and Pilar Mejía. All educators. *Rethinking Schools*.

The first chapter of **Rethinking Bilingual Education** opens with a passionate essay titled “Colonizing Wild Tongues” by Camila Arze Torres Goitia. This essay frames the rest of the anthology. Goitia writes about a time when she was young and a teacher forbid her from speaking Spanish. “She said: ‘NO. We say hello,’” Goitia recalls. “And just like that, a border was drawn across my mind.” Goitia is a high school teacher now, with her own students to teach. She concludes, “it is up to me to resist...the tradition of silencing wild, inappropriate, and primitive tongues.”

In her brief essay, Goitia offers no solutions about how to celebrate instead of silence other languages besides English. That's what the rest of the book is about. Many of the educators included in the anthology are old enough to remember a time when bilingualism was frowned upon, when English-only policies

encouraged and enforced. It gives this collection of essays a sense of urgency. We can do better, they are saying.

Many of the essays focus on Spanish speakers' experiences—the most common language in the U.S. besides English—but quite a few other languages are represented as well, from Tamil to Mi'kmaq, a Native American language spoken in Eastern Canada. I appreciated that this anthology included an essay about Deaf students; the author of this particular essay focused, interestingly, on teaching her Deaf students in ASL about the experience of Native Americans.

The first chapter, *Language Stories*, is filled with personal essay writing, with a variety of authors exploring a cross section experiences and feelings associated with multilingualism. The rest of the chapters—although still personal—are also more logistical. If we want to do better, then what exactly can we do? The writers cover topics from home visits, to disabilities, to standardized testing. As would be fitting in this book, quite a few chapters are devoted to various aspects of dual language learning. These writers are all educators, so the essays are filled with insights gleaned from years of teaching. But the focus isn't just on telling the reader what to do. Most essays feature dialogue and creative-nonfiction-style scene building as these teacher-authors try to bring their lessons to life on the page.

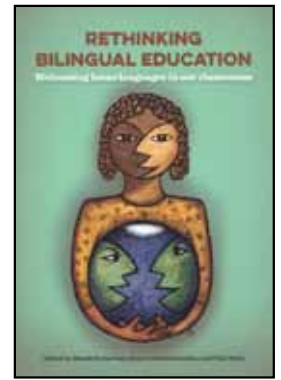
To rethink home languages' role in the classroom is an important task, and one that many teachers are eager to do. **Rethinking Bilingual Education** is an excellent place to begin that work.

—Daemion Lee, Associate Editor & educator.

**Teaching Hard History: American Slavery** by Kate Shuster, Bethany Jay, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly. For middle and high school educators. *Teaching Tolerance*.

Contrary to what many of us think, history is not just the past; James Baldwin reminds us that history is also the present. We carry our history with us.

Slavery was a centerpiece of American history. It wasn't just an event in our nation's history. In the preamble to the constitution, there was no mention of racial justice or equality; instead the founding fathers





included protections for slavery and slave trade.

The institution of slavery has influenced the social, political and economic institutions for most of our history as a nation. Slavery's long reach continues in the form of persistent and wide socioeconomic

and legal disparities that blacks face today. To understand the roots of the social issues in this context, we must fully understand its history and impact.

Unfortunately, our schools often fail to teach the hard history of African enslavement and its truth. High school seniors struggle on even the most basic questions about slavery. For example, in a 2017 Teaching Tolerance/SPLC survey, only 8% of the seniors could correctly identify slavery as the central cause for the Civil War. And 68% didn't know that it took a constitutional amendment to formally end slavery.

Teachers want to teach about slavery but available textbooks are inadequate, and they find it uncomfortable teaching about this topic. State standards are also inadequate. The authors tell us that slavery is often taught without a context—slavery is shown as an exclusively southern institution. It needs to be connected to the ideology that sustained and protected it: white supremacy.

This teaching resource has many specific suggestions to help teachers who are teaching about slavery. The authors have developed a framework for teaching about slavery. The recommendations include:

1. Improving instruction and integrating it into U.S. history.
2. Using original historical documents.
3. Making the textbooks better, and
4. Strengthening the curriculum.

**Teaching Hard History** also spells out ten key concepts that students need to understand, and a list of 21 objectives that can be used by teachers to structure their lessons on slavery. Under each objective, teachers are given pointers under two sections: "What else should my students know?" and "How can I teach this?"

The authors recommend extensive online resources, much of it on the Teaching Tolerance website.

Researched and produced by a well-qualified team of educators, and published by Teaching Tolerance (a project of Southern Poverty Law Center), this is an excellent teaching resource. We recommend it earnestly for all teachers of U.S. History and Social Studies.

—Arun N. Toké, editor.

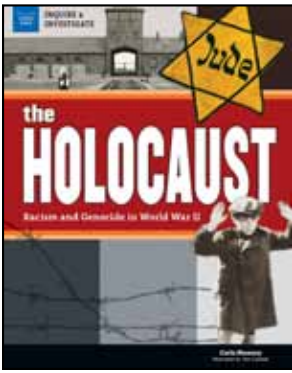
**The Holocaust: Racism and Genocide in World War II** by Carla Mooney, illustr. Tom Casteel. Middle grades. Nomad Press.

Have you thought about what makes people commit good or evil deeds? A study of history presents us with many, many examples of both good and evil behavior. One really shocking example of inhumanity occurred in Germany during the 1940s. At that time, the Nazi party carried out a shocking plan to systematically wipe out the Jewish population. The memory of that horrible experiment haunts the minds of civilized peoples in every corner of the globe because it is a lesson about the consequences of hatred and "discrimination."

To get a perspective on this crime against humanity, you should read Carla Mooney's recent book, **Holocaust: Racism and Genocide in World War II**. This book reads like a multi-faceted report intended for young readers aged 12 and above. It presents a record of facts about the persecution and mass murder of European Jews, in the context of long-standing anti-Semitism that had isolated and humiliated Jewish families to the point of sheer undeserved cruelty. Children were separated from parents, spouses from each other, while their Nazi captors found ways to torture and deprive them of basic human rights. Six million Jews were exterminated in gas ovens, and an additional five million were also targeted for being either mentally disabled, gypsies, or criminals or otherwise undesirable.

This book clearly defines the meanings of "holocaust," "genocide," "anti-Semitism," and offers unbiased explanations about the historical factors leading up to World War II, the rise of Adolf Hitler, and the "Final Solution" aimed at preserving the purity of the German people. The author challenges the young reader to investigate and inquire, and to discover what





it felt like to be wrenched from family and home only to be condemned to a cruel death. In other words, we are invited to look at the facts and consider reasons and causes for what occurred. This is an opportunity to apply critical thinking in an effort to understand history and to never repeat its mistakes.

Young readers will find a wealth of information in this book. There are summaries and sidebars, photographs and QR codes that connect you directly with websites. Each chapter contains learning aids, review questions, and points for further reflection. There are even project suggestions sprinkled throughout, such as the letter-writing simulation in the voices of youth from various countries in the 1930s.

Anyone who reads this book will be filled with great sympathy as well as a deep spirit of compassion and hope for a better future. It opens a window into a dark past, and invites us to honor those who perished as well as to make sure we never stand idly by when evil doers try to have their way.

—Prof. Stephen Mendonca, educator, Texas.

**Reading, Writing, and Rising Up:** *Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*, 2nd ed. by Linda Christensen. For all educators. *Rethinking Schools*.

Linda Christensen isn't sharing any secrets about teaching. She doesn't have a special technique to make the job any easier. In fact, in the opening chapter of the new edition of **Reading, Writing and Rising Up**, she shares a recent anecdote about how she started off on the wrong foot with her high school English class.

It is both humbling and inspiring to read how Christensen, an educator with thirty years of experience and author of several books on teaching, found herself "embarrassed" by her students and "their skimpy work." They wouldn't stop texting in class. They didn't do their homework. Christensen recalls wishing that no one would see her and her co-teacher "totally at the mercy of these 16- and 17-year-olds." It is a dreaded predicament—class out of control, inattentive, learning nothing—made only worse by the modern addition

of cell phones and the endless parade of distractions they bring.

Christensen's path forward—and the overall theme of her book—is to make writing and literature personal. It's not a secret, but a guiding principle. She explains how she and her co-teacher used Sherman Alexie's screenplay

Smoke Signals to start conversations about alcoholism and parent-child relationships. The class moved on to write "forgiveness poems," a turning point for them. "Students cried together as they shared their poetry, written to absent fathers, to dead grandparents, to themselves," Christensen recalls. "The following Monday, they returned to class and wanted to share more." That's when she knew she had them.

Teaching about social justice is the phrase in the title, but the starting point for these lessons begin with putting students and their lives at the center of the curriculum. It's what helped her and her co-teacher engage these constantly texting students, and show them that reading and writing are skills that matter in a deeply personal way. Christensen approaches the task of writing for herself no differently, and the chapters of **Reading, Writing and Rising Up** are sprinkled with personal anecdotes about teaching, as well as some of her own poetry.

The second edition is an update of the first edition, originally published in 2000. Some of the classic chapters, like "Unlearning the Myths that Bind Us" and "Standard English: Whose Standard?" have been revised, and some new chapters included. For example, Christensen's lesson about evaluating cartoons in order to understand biases has been updated to include analysis of the 2012 Pixar movie *Brave*. An update for this book, rather than a rewrite, is fitting because its lessons are classic and more urgent than ever.

—Daemion Lee, associate editor & educator.

