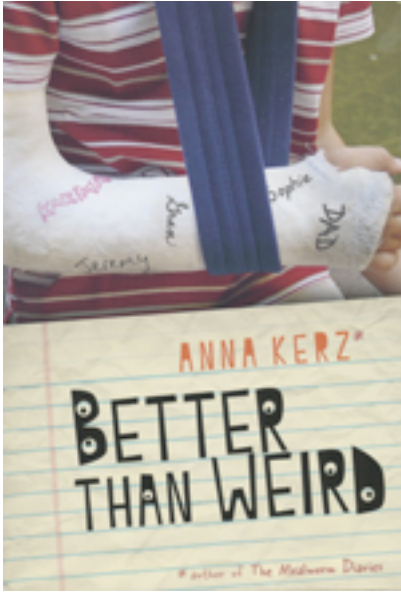


Silver Birch® Fiction Nominees



Better Than Weird

Anna Kerz
Orca Book Publishers

Sometimes reading faces is a lot harder than reading books.

In this stand-alone sequel to *The Mealworm Diaries*, Aaron is anxiously waiting for his father to return for the first time since Aaron's mother's death eight years earlier. Aaron works hard with a counselor at school, but he still has problems getting along with and understanding other kids, and he's worried that his dad will think he's weird. As well as having to confront Tufan, the class bully, Aaron must find ways to cope with the fact that his dad now has a pregnant wife and his beloved Gran needs surgery. In the end, his greatest strength is not his intelligence or his sense of humor, but the openness and warmth of his heart.



Crossing to Freedom

Virginia Frances Schwartz
Scholastic Canada

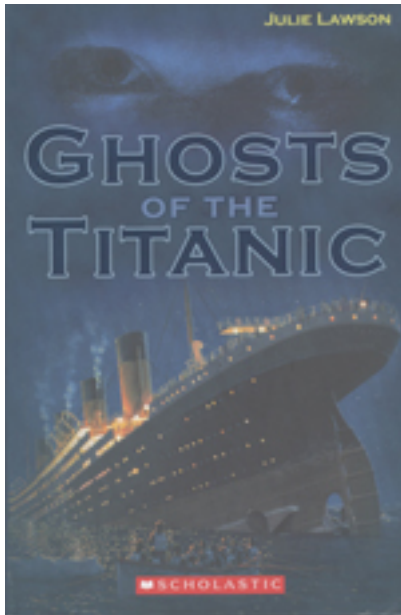
Eleven-year-old Solomon is a fugitive slave on a dangerous journey north to Canada, and to freedom. His young life has seen many losses: his mother was sold in a slave auction when he was a baby; his father escaped from the plantation and hasn't been seen in five years; and now his grandfather, who has been injured during the last leg of their journey to freedom, and is forced to stay behind. Solomon continues with their group leader, but his feelings of loss and isolation haunt him, as he attempts to forge a new home in Canada. It soon becomes apparent that racial prejudices know no borders, and while Solomon works hard and begins to experience some newfound freedoms, he faces discrimination and segregation and lives with the ongoing fear of being caught by slavecatchers and dragged back to the South. With all of these barriers facing him, Solomon must find the strength — the same strength that brought him north, the same strength that gives him hope of finding his father — to persevere and understand the true meaning of freedom.



Ghost Messages

Jacqueline Guest
Coteau Books

Ailish O'Connor supports herself and her father with her fortunetelling skills. Their gypsy caravan travels from one place to another looking for the crowds in which to earn their living. In Ireland in 1865, the place to be is on the west coast, as people gather to launch the largest ship ever built, the Great Eastern. Its mission is to lay the first undersea telegraph cable right across the Atlantic Ocean, to Newfoundland. Ailish's father thinks he has their future secured with a solid-gold horse that has come into his possession, but when the figure is stolen, 13-year-old Ailish pursues the thief and winds up trapped on the Great Eastern as it sails! She pretends to be a cabin boy to avoid the harsh treatment of a stowaway. On the journey, she gets help from another young boy, Davy, who seems to live below decks. She also makes friends with an Irish sailor and tries to track down the hiding place of their precious horse. The crew must battle the seas and the mishaps of their cable-laying mission, some of which appear to be sabotage. Through many adventures, Davy is her constant companion. But why won't he ever come topside? Can Ailish use her wits, her determination and her friendships to survive the trip, let alone save the day? With her trademark storytelling skills, Jacqueline Guest has fashioned a nail-biter of an historical seafaring action adventure.



Ghosts of the Titanic

Julie Lawson
Scholastic Canada

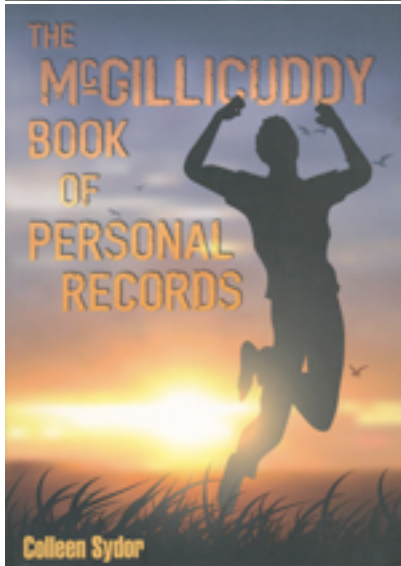
In this story of the un-dead, a young teen, Kevin, travels with his family to what will be their Nova Scotian beach house, recently inherited from a stranger. While exploring the basement, he discovers a hand-carved wooden box, containing pictures of a young woman, a mother perhaps. At night he hears a voice, then sees something, or someone. He wonders if it's the same woman in the picture. Shortly afterwards, he is visited by the woman, yet she is a ghost. Kevin is transported to the wooden deck of an old passenger ship, an ill-fated cruise liner called The Titanic. Now, he needs to make the connection between the voices, the visions, and the house; and why he is on the Titanic. Only then will he rid himself of the hauntings.



The Glory Wind

Valerie Sherrard
Fitzhenry & Whiteside

We fall in love with Gracie just as Luke does, perhaps not because of her curly hair, but because of her joie de vivre and the way she sees things differently. Gracie's mom, Raedine, moves to Junction after her husband is killed in WW2 and sends tongues wagging after taking a job at the Prairie Inn; a possible brothel. Once it is discovered that Raedine had Gracie illegitimately, small town mindedness takes over and any compassion given to newcomers is retracted and replaced with bitterness. Only the tragic consequences of a tornado bring the townsfolk to Raedine's door, many of whom link the tornado with the will of God.. This book beautifully explores the themes of morality, honesty, friendship, loyalty and finally, forgiveness. A memorable gem.



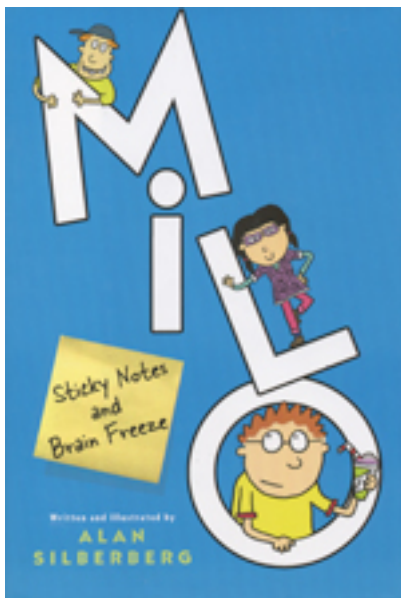
The McGillicuddy Book of Personal Records

Colleen Sydor
Red Deer Press

This is an extraordinary story about a 13-year-old boy named Lee who loves setting personal and odd records. He's obsessed by them in fact - from tracing the annual public marathon with his dog Santiago to bouncing a basketball in the school playground for 12 hours straight with no one around - but he's not interested in going public with them.

Along the way Lee collects famous quotes from all manner of famous people whose lives and words have encouraged him - and provided inspiration during trying times. In addition he sees himself as the director of the definitive movie about his life, focusing on the light and dark moments he experiences as he seeks a raison d'etre for his life.

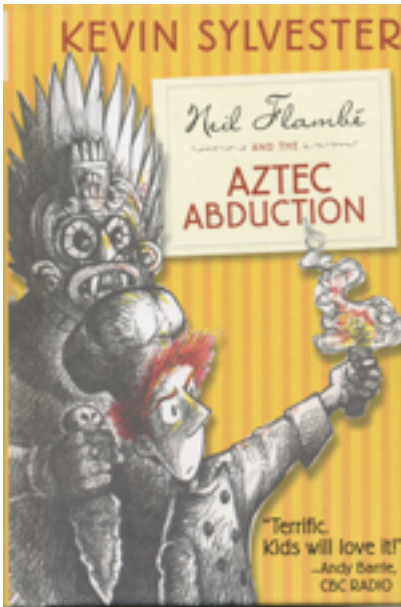
Above all, he seeks to escape being ordinary, and when he's confronted with the greatest challenge of his young life - saving his pesky friend from certain death - his strength of character and purpose demonstrate that he is anything but ordinary.



Milo: Sticky Notes and Brain Freeze

Alan Silberberg
Simon & Schuster Canada

MILO is the funny and poignant story, told through text and cartoons, of a 13-year-old boy's struggle to come to terms with the loss that hit the reset button on his life. Loveable geek Milo Cruikshank finds reasons for frustration at every turn, like people who carve Halloween pumpkins way too soon (the pumpkins just rot and get lopsided) or the fact that the girl of his dreams, Summer, barely acknowledges his existence while next-door neighbor Hilary won't leave him alone. The truth is – ever since Milo's mother died nothing has gone right. Now, instead of the kitchen being full of music, his whole house has been filled with Fog. Nothing's the same. Not his Dad. Not his sister. And definitely not him. In love with the girl he sneezed on the first day of school and best pals with Marshall, the "One Eyed Jack" of friends, Milo copes with being the new kid (again) as he struggles to survive a school year that is filled with reminders of what his life "used to be."

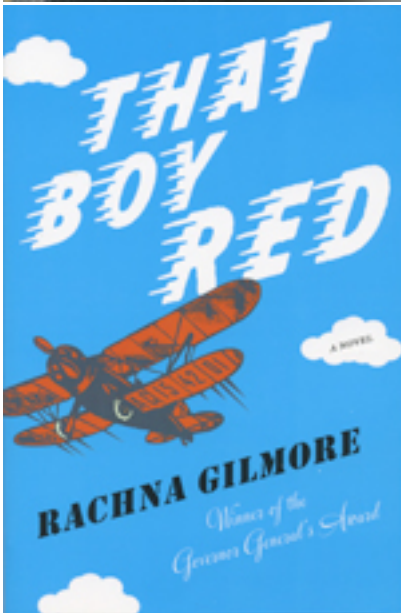


Neil Flambe and the Aztec Abduction

Kevin Sylvester
Simon and Schuster Canada

Neil Flambe is back! In the adventurous second book of the series Neil heads off to Mexico City to find himself being blackmailed to lose in the final of the two week long Azteca Cocina chef competition. Neil wants to show off his cooking prowess and it is definitely not in his nature to lose. To make matters worse, he also needs the money to pay off the loan for his restaurant renovations.

Neil has to solve the mystery of finding his beloved Isabella before the final competition. Isabella's captors send him locks of her hair as proof that they have kidnapped her but Neil is able to use these locks as clues to her whereabouts. He must find her in time or risk Isabella's life and his reputation as the world's best chef.

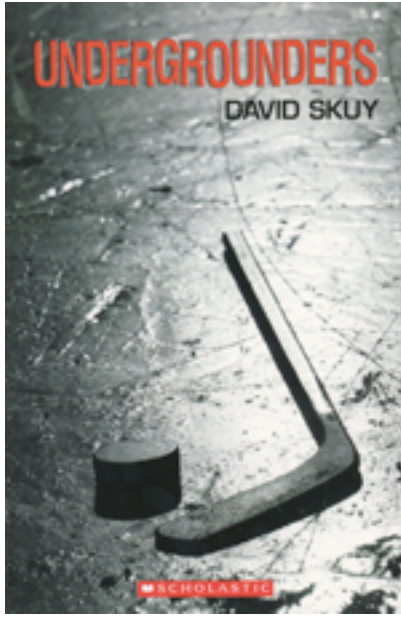


That Boy Red

Rachna Gilmore
Harper Trophy Canada/Harper Collins Publishers

It's the Depression, but Red's family is managing better than most on their Prince Edward Island farm. Hard working and resourceful, they have enough to eat and to help others, even if at times they are mocked by their neighbours for putting education ahead of farm work. Eleven-year-old Red has plenty of chores around the farm, and the days can be long, but he still gets the odd break to go swimming or fishing, provided his homework is done. Red's older sister, Ellen, teaches at the local school, and if Red doesn't shine, she will not only punish him, but also make sure their parents hear about it.

But then Red's father's hand is seriously injured and the family's situation looks dire. Red steps up to the challenge, finishing the tobacco boxes that his father makes and helping shovel out a train stuck in the snow. Stubborn and even pigheaded, Red does make mistakes along the way (such as pretending to be dead so that his younger sister will stop following him), but his heart is always in the right place.



Undergrounders

David Skuy
Scholastic Canada

The most important thing was to eat. I hadn't had a thing since yesterday before the game. Funny how important it had been, and now I couldn't care less — I had way bigger problems than playing hockey with a bunch of idiots. I needed to hawk some money real bad. Ever since his mom died, Jonathon has been on his own, living on the streets. The Underground gives him a place to sleep, but it's not like having a real home or being a regular kid. That seems like an impossible dream . . .