OLA Best Bets 2003

Picture Books


It starts innocently enough. Stanley the dog climbs onto the couch while his “people” are out for the evening. Before long he is breaking into the fridge and has learned to turn on the stereo. Then, one night, he invites all the neighbourhood dogs over for a party, and his “people” come home early. This funny story is brought to life with Bill Slavin’s illustrations.


Jessica gives her grandfather some good advice when he tries to befriend a stray cat. In this delightful and charming story, the partnership of the two grows stronger as the goal of gaining the confidence of the cat becomes a reality. The strong detailed illustrations cleverly keep the reader wondering if that cat will ever reveal herself completely.


If God is to be thanked for Grandpa’s wonderful bagels, what is the best way to do that? Benny thinks that giving God some of those bagels would be perfect. And so it is– for a surprising and wonderful reason.


Move over Stella, it’s Sam’s turn to shine. Sam with the occasional help of his wiser older sister, Stella struggles to navigate the intricacies of getting dressed. Here is another wonderful star in Marie-Louise’s constellation.

Gonsalves, Rob. Illustrator. *Imagine A Night* Atheneum

Author Sarah Thomson’s spare poetic words are brought to life with beautiful evocative art which is the highlight of the book. Reminiscent of Van Allsburg, these painting will bring you back for repeated viewings.

Little, Jean. *Pippin the Christmas Pig* North Winds Press

On a blustery Christmas evening, all of the animals in the barn boast about the important roles their ancestors played at the nativity. Except for Pippin, for his relatives were not there. Poor Pippin feels left out, until he is able to show the other animals the true meaning of Christmas.

Morck, Irene. *Old Bird*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside

When Papa bought the old horse, Bird, he thought that she was not good enough to help on the farm. Instead, her job was to take the boys to and from school every day. Old Bird, however, had other ideas. In this beautifully illustrated story, the quiet determination of Old Bird who wants to prove that she is a good farm horse, causes much
frustration within the family. The crisp dialogue adds to the mounting tension as readers reach the surprising conclusion to this endearing story.

Reid, Barbara, *The Subway Mouse.* North Winds Press (Scholastic)
Nib is a mouse living in a subway station who has grown up listening to stories of a mythical land known as Tunnel’s End. He sets out to find this dangerous but beautiful place. Barbara Reid’s lively illustrations incorporating plasticine and found objects complement the text perfectly.

Trottier, Maxine, *The Paint Box,* Fitzhenry & Whiteside
A richly illustrated picture book that tells the story of Marietta, daughter of the Renaissance painter Tintoretto, who dresses like a boy so she can work with her father. Marietta helps an enslaved boy gain his freedom. Warm colours convey the Venetian setting of the book.

Autumn drifts on, and still his people have not been able to find the buffalo, which they need to survive. Young Sky Running has a vision which reveals where the buffalo are - the badlands- enemy territory. The tribe must decide if the promise of the buffalo is worth risking the journey.

Fiction:

Attema, Martha, *Hero.* Orca
It is World War II and a young Jewish boy, Izaak, is sent into hiding to a farm in the north of Holland. Izaak, now called Jan, saves a beautiful black stallion named Hero from being taken by the Nazis. A gripping tale based on a true story.

Bell, William. *Alma* Doubleday Canada
Alma’s only friends live within the pages of her books. Reading is her one solace, until she takes a job for a new woman in town, the secretive Miss Lily. Alma reveals herself as a writer, as she uncovers the mysteries of her elusive, favourite author and her new friend.

Matthew disappears on his first day of school in a new town. Winnifred (Freddie), a classmate, leads her Rebel Rescue Squad to solving the mystery of Matthew’s disappearance and the significance of his pink scarf. This is an amazing debut novel, both funny and touching.

Ellis, Sarah, *The Several Lives of Orphan Jack.* Groundwood
As young dreamer, Jack, wanders the world to find his place in it, he becomes, among other things, a Ledger boy, a bird of passage, a wandering boy, a patch minder and a fellow of fortune in this poetic paean to the love of words and ideas.
**Ghent, Natale.  *No Small Thing*. HarperCollins.**  
Struggling to deal with his father’s abandonment and his feelings for the pretty, rich girl in his class, twelve-year-old Nat’s life isn’t always easy. An ad in the paper for a free pony changes life.

**Horvath, Polly  *The Canning Season* Groundwood Books**  
Rachel Clark doesn’t fit into her mother’s plans and so is sent to live with two pleasantly demented aunts in the bear infested wilderness of Maine.

**Huser, Glen.  *Stitches*. Groundwood Books**  
Travis knows that he is different from the other boys in his class. Burning inside him is an artist who has embraced the art of puppetry. This has become his one true passion in life. Despite ridicule and abuse from some people at his school, Travis remains confident in his own ability. He discovers that he has good friends, an encouraging family, and caring teachers who recognize and celebrate his talent. Readers will be cheering Travis on as he realizes his dream.

**Hutchins, Hazel.  *T.J. And the Haunted House*. Orca**  
This first chapter book hits all of the right notes for its young reader. T.J. has to contend with his new cats, a possibly haunted house, a father who wants him to take over the family business and classmates who want to use his home for Halloween. It would all be a bit much if T.J. wasn’t a funny kid who can handle what life brings him.

**Matas, Carol.  *Rosie in New York City: Gotcha!* Key Porter Books**  
Rosie Lepidus’ main concern is winning the neighbourhood game of hide and seek, until her mother falls ill, and Rosie finds herself sweating it out in a garment factory. With her family depending on her income, Rosie endures the factory and works to make a difference by joining the strike and fighting for the workers’ rights.

Sorrow is a part of Stevie’s life. He is small and ignored by his peers, except for Goody Pryne, a large and volatile girl in his class, who befriends him. Together they make a sad team on the verge of a breakdown, and yet these two pained characters manage to heal each other.
Fiction Series:

**Jean Little.  *Dear Canada: Brothers Far From Home* Scholastic Canada**  
Eliza Bates chronicles life in a minister's family, coping with her snooty older sister, and the anguish of having two older brothers away fighting as war losses mount in her community.

**Trembath, Don.  *The Big Show: The Black Belt Series. Orca***  
The friendship of three boys, Charlie, Sidney, and Jeffrey continues to grow in this next instalment of Don Trembath’s entertaining series. With an up-coming karate tournament approaching, each boy must face something about himself that he would rather not think about. Are they ready for the challenge? Readers will enjoy this funny, fast-paced and exciting journey as the boys get ready for the competition and discover something unexpected about themselves.

Non Fiction:

**Debon, Nicolas. *Four Pictures by Emily Carr* Groundwood Books**  
Emily Carr was one of the great Canadian artists of her generation, and here her story is told in a unique and stunning way. Debon has created four comic strips which reveal the beauty of Emily Carr and her work, highlight her eccentric nature, and her determination to express herself.

This is a great introduction to the fascinating world of advertising. Topics covered include the tricks and techniques advertisers use, advertising in disguise, and consumer power. Who knew critical thinking could be so much fun?

**Hancock, Pat. *Haunted Canada* Scholastic Canada**  
A collection of short ghost stories from across Canada, which Hancock claims are all true, true in that she believes that some “ordinary, sane, truthful people have seen, felt and even smelled some very strange things.” This is a spine-tingling approach to Canadian history.

**MacLeod, Elizabeth. *Albert Einstein: A Life of Genius.* Kids Can Press**  
Another in the “Snapshot” Series, this biography of Albert Einstein is a fascinating study of a man whom many had initially dismissed as a failure. Combining photos, letters, and scientific documents with comic book style asides, MacLeod introduces the reader to Einstein, a “late bloomer” who became the most famous scientist of his time. Einstein is revealed as a humorous, generous, and brilliant man who never lost his child-like wonder of the world.
Part of the Kids Can Press Wildlife Series, *Otters* is an appealing, informative, and well-paced book with a pleasing layout. Eye-catching blocks of information called “Otter Facts” are found on most pages. Finally, the strong vibrant illustrations by Nancy Gray Ogle are magnetic in their ability to hold the reader’s attention. Good read for young naturalists.

Amy Pinchuk. *The Best Bike Book*  Maple Tree Press
This book covers the history as well as the science of bicycles. There are plenty of great illustrations and a good deal of information on bicycle maintenance repair and safe handling.

Shapiro, Stephen and Tina Forrester *Ultra Hush Hush: Espionage and Special Missions*  Annick
This book covers the less famous but equally vital covert operations of World War II such as spies and double agents, code breaking and special combat units. It includes Canadian content.

Swanson, Diane. *Tunnels!* (True Stories form the Edge)  Annick Press.
Enter the deep dark world of tunnels. Explore King Tut’s tomb with Howard Carter. Discover how commandos rescued 71 hostages from the Japanese Embassy in Lima, Peru. You may have such a good time, that you’ll be reluctant to come back to the surface!

Wilson, John, *Dancing Elephants and Floating Continents: the Story of Canada Beneath Your Feet*.  Key Porter
Lots of diagrams, maps, hands-on experiments and illustrations plus interesting clear text provide a fascinating look at geological history and what’s underneath Canada. Great reading for adults too!

Non Fiction Series:

The Binkerton kids are at it again, and this time, they’re off on a wild adventure to Ancient China. Can they get through the travel guide and learn enough about the Ancient Chinese before they get caught and executed as barbarian spies?

Friedman, Debra, *Picture This (Kids Can Do It series)*, Kids Can Press
Full of great crafty ways to enhance your photographs as well as basic information about how to use a camera effectively. An attractive addition to this series.

Schwartz, Renee, *Funky Junk (Kids Can Do It series)*, Kids Can Press
Clear instructions on how to safely make all kinds of weird and wonderful things using odds and ends found in a hardware store. Great crafts for ages 8 years and up.
It is well known that the best way to learn a new skill is to do it. This lively and imaginative art book has enough information and projects to keep children learning and creating for weeks. From sketching to painting to mixed media and sculpture, there is a wide variety of levels and abilities needed.