

## Vermont Middle-Grade Children's Book Award\* Master List 2020-2021

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PUBLISHER</u>	<u>GRADE</u>
Andrews, Ryan	<i>This Was Our Pact</i>	First Second	4 up
Bacon, Lee	<i>The Last Human</i>	Abrams	5 up
Benjamin, Ali	<i>The Next Great Paulie Fink</i>	Little, Brown	5 up
Bunker, Lisa	<i>Zenobia July</i>	Viking	6 up
Craft, Jerry	<i>New Kid</i>	HarperCollins	5 up
Day, Christine	<i>I Can Make This Promise</i>	HarperCollins	5 up
Dee, Barbara	<i>Maybe He Just Likes You</i>	Aladdin	6 up
Donnelly, Jennifer	<i>Stepsister</i>	Scholastic	7 up
Doughty, Caitlin	<i>Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs? Big Questions from Tiny Mortals about Death</i>	Norton	7 up
Gemeinhart, Dan	<i>The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise</i>	Henry Holt	5 up
Gibbs, Stuart	<i>Charlie Thorne and the Last Equation</i>	Simon & Schuster	6 up
Heidicker, Christian McKay	<i>Scary Stories for Young Foxes</i>	Henry Holt	5 up
Horwitz, Sarah Jean	<i>The Dark Lord Clementine</i>	Algonquin	5 up
Kelly, Lynne	<i>Song for a Whale</i>	Yearling	5 up
Kramer, J. Kasper	<i>The Story That Cannot Be Told</i>	Atheneum	6 up
Marciano, Johnny and Emily Chenoweth	<i>Klawde: Evil Alien Warlord Cat</i>	Penguin Workshop	4 up
Mbalia, Kwame	<i>Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky</i>	Disney-Hyperion	6 up
McAnulty, Stacy	<i>The World Ends in April</i>	Random House	5 up
Ogle, Rex	<i>Free Lunch</i>	Norton	7 up
Palacio, R.J.	<i>White Bird</i>	Knopf	5 up
Pancholy, Maulik	<i>The Best at It</i>	Balzer + Bray	5 up
Parry, Rosanne	<i>A Wolf Called Wander</i>	Greenwillow	4 up
Ramée, Lisa Moore	<i>A Good Kind of Trouble</i>	Balzer + Bray	5 up
Ritter, William	<i>The Oddmire: Changeling</i>	Algonquin	4 up
Rodkey, Geoff	<i>We're Not from Here</i>	Crown	5 up
Sloan, Holly Goldberg and Meg Wolitzer	<i>To Night Owl from Dogfish</i>	Dial	4 up
Sumner, Jamie	<i>Roll with It</i>	Atheneum	4 up
Tyson, Neil deGrasse with Gregory Mone	<i>Astrophysics for Young People in a Hurry</i>	Norton	6 up
Venkatraman, Padma	<i>The Bridge Home</i>	Nancy Paulsen	5 up
Warga, Jasmine	<i>Other Words for Home</i>	Balzer + Bray	5 up

**\*Formerly the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award**

## MASTERLIST OF ANNOTATIONS

Andrews, Ryan. *This Was Our Pact*. First Second, 2019. \$14.99. ISBN: 978-1626720534.

Every year, the people of Ben's village send paper lanterns down the river during the Autumn Equinox Festival. And every year Ben and his friends wonder where they go. This year, the boys make a pact to follow the lanterns on their bikes, and to never give up, no matter what. Nevertheless, one by one the friends drop out until only Ben, and that 'weird' kid from school, Nathaniel, are still riding. Soon Ben realizes how much he needs Nathaniel's enthusiasm, positivity, and even friendship. Full of delightful oddities, like a dapper eloquent bear, a tiny witchy woman with huge eyes who makes potions from the sun, massive, map-making crows, and a night swim in a cave full of stars, this is a world of marvelous journeys and escapes.

If you love Studio Ghibli movies like *Spirited Away* and *My Friend Totoro*, you'll also love this fantastical and beautiful graphic novel of friendship and adventure. The color palette, mostly dreamy blues, soft yellows and moody grays gives the book a magical, textured feel, like a real late-night adventure in dim lighting.

Bacon, Lee. *The Last Human*. Amulet, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1419736919.

In this sci-fi fantasy, robots have eliminated humans, condemned for their violent and destructive tendencies, and in their place are now efficiently caring for the Earth. Every robot has an assigned purpose - of which they are reminded daily by talks from PRES1DENT, supplemented with video reminders of how awful humans were. Robot XR\_935 has spent twelve years faithfully installing solar panels when he encounters Emma, a 12-year-old human, raised in a hidden bunker and now seeking help for her dying parents. In company with fellow robots SkD\_988 - who communicates solely in emoticons - and the hefty Ceeron\_902, XR sets off to help her, even though PRES1DENT and cohorts are determined to hunt them down. The book includes technological, dystopian, and environmental themes - but ultimately it's a story about what it really means to be human.

Benjamin, Ali. *The Next Great Paulie Fink*. Little, Brown, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0316380881.

When Caitlyn moves from New York to a rural town in Vermont, she's one of only ten students in her tiny new 7th grade - and all she seems to hear about from her classmates is the story of the amazing (and now mysteriously disappeared) class clown/klutz/troublemaker Paulie Fink. Caitlyn is put in charge of a reality-style-show competition to find the next great Paulie Fink - and as the shenanigans ensue, what Caitlyn learns about her eccentric classmates and Paulie himself leads her to question what it means to be a legend.

Bunker, Lisa. *Zenobia July*. Viking, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0451479402.

Zenobia July is not just starting at a new school, she's starting a new life. Zenobia grew up in Arizona, raised by her conservative dad. After her father's death, Zenobia moves to Maine to live with her hippie lesbian aunts - which allows Zenobia to start life over, this time as her true gender, a girl. As she learns to navigate new friendships, new adults in her life, and a whole new persona, hateful memes begin to show up on the school's website. The one thing Zenobia has full confidence in is her computer hacking skills, and she's determined to find out who the perpetrator is and to stop the discriminatory memes. But in doing so, she risks exposing her past to her new friends. This is a story about families, friendships, and being true to oneself.

Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. HarperCollins, 2019. \$21.99. ISBN: 978-0062691200.

Jordan really wants to go to art school - but instead his parents send him to an academically acclaimed and predominately white school where the students make him feel awful. He struggles with simultaneously fitting in at home with friends in his Washington Heights neighborhood and with the students at River Academy - while also remaining true to himself. A great graphic novel for discussion about class, race, being yourself, building bridges, and calling out insensitive and hypocritical behavior.

Day, Christine. *I Can Make This Promise*. HarperCollins, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0062871992.

If you enjoy stories with family secrets, lying parents, mean friends, mysteries, and unexpected endings, then this may be the book for you. Edie knows that her Native American mother was adopted by a white couple, but her mother never talks about her childhood. Then one day, she and her friends discover a box hidden in the attic filled with letters signed "Love, Edith," and photos of a woman who looks just like Edie - and Edie realizes that her parents have been lying to her for her entire life. As the mystery of Edie's name and family is solved, we experience Edie's first glimpses of her Native family.

*I Can Make This Promise* is based on Christine Day's family history, the U.S. government's role in separating Native children from their families, and the way Native Americans have been portrayed in movies and other media sources. This is an important book about one Native girl's journey to learn about both her people and herself.

Dee, Barbara. *Maybe He Just Likes You*. Aladdin, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1534432376.

It starts with a too-long birthday hug from one of the popular basketball boys, then becomes comments, smirks, and more unwanted touching. Seventh-grader Mila's friends tell her she's overreacting, her mom is too stressed at work lately to listen, and her guidance counselor is out on maternity leave. With no one to turn to, Mila experiences humiliation, confusion, and self-doubt. When Mila is finally pushed too far, she realizes she can't battle this on her own—and finds help in some unexpected places.

This is a #MeToo movement story for the middle-grade audience - a novel about experiencing harassment and unwanted attention from classmates. Middle schoolers will relate to the discomfort over clothing and changing bodies, and short chapters keep the action moving briskly.

Donnelly, Jennifer. *Stepsister*. Scholastic, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1338268461.

This is an innovative take on the story of Cinderella, set in a French village in the 18th century. After Ella departs with the prince for the palace, her stepsisters - mathematically inclined Octavia and brave and bold Isabelle - are left behind. Isabelle is unwittingly caught up in a battle between Chance and Fate - can she or can she not change her life story? She receives some help from the Fairy Queen, and ultimately learns that there's more to beauty than meets the eye - but there's a lot of adventure along the way. A wonderful and thought-provoking read.

Doughty, Caitlin. *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs? Big Questions from Tiny Mortals about Death*. Norton, 2019. \$25.95. ISBN: 978-0393652703.

Can you keep a loved one's skull after they die? Would it make a great last prank to swallow a bag of popcorn kernels on your deathbed before being cremated? And what would happen to your body if you died in space? Learn about death through these questions and more...plus find out if your pets truly would eat your eyeballs.

In this informational and highly entertaining book, mortician Caitlin Doughty answers questions from children. The answers are written in an engaging and factual way, which lifts the stigma and fear from asking about death.

Geminhart, Dan. *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*. Henry Holt, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1250196705.

Since the tragic deaths of Coyote's mother and sisters in a car crash five years ago, she and her dad, Rodeo, have been on the road in an old school bus named Yager - avoiding at all costs their old hometown in Washington State. But when Coyote receives news from her grandmother that the park back home is about to be destroyed, Coyote realizes she needs to get there before the bulldozers can do their job - because

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buried in that park is a precious memory box which contains objects left by her mother and sisters. Determined Coyote comes up with a plan to trick Rodeo into heading west - and along the way, they collect a cast of diverse characters who are on their own remarkable journeys looking for closure or new beginnings. A story of grief, fellowship, and healing.

Gibbs, Stuart. *Charlie Thorne and the Last Equation*. Simon & Schuster, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1534424760.

The CIA has just tapped Charlie Thorne to save the world...but what Charlie really wants is to be old enough to drive! At the age of 12, the extraordinarily clever, smart, and adventurous Charlie is a thief (though she doesn't think so) and a first-rate mathematician, on the level of Einstein, no less. So when the US government needs someone to crack the clues and find the location of Einstein's last equation, one that could save or destroy the world, they have no choice but to recruit Charlie. Slow to trust anyone's agenda but her own, Charlie leads the CIA and the enemy Furies on adventure after adventure in a race to solve Einstein's riddles.

Heidicker, Christian McKay. *Scary Stories for Young Foxes*. Henry Holt, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1250181428. What do foxes fear? Seven fox kits sneak out at night to the cave of the old storyteller, an elderly fox who tells them a tale scary enough to put white in their tails. The story - or rather series of interconnected stories - describes the experiences of Mia, who discovers that her beloved teacher, Miss Vix, has gone rabid, and Uly, abused by his den mates because he was born with a crippled leg.

Without mothers, the kits journey through the woods, finding each other along the way. But nature is cruel and so are humans. And not all foxes make it to the end of the story. Can Mia and Uly survive the terrors that they find in the dark parts of the forest?

Horwitz, Sara Jean. *The Dark Lord Clementine*. Algonquin, 2019. \$17.95. ISBN: 978-1616208943.

Clementine Morcerous is 12 years old and the Dark Lord Elithor's sole heir...and that means she must master the art of dastardly deeds! But when her father is cursed by a clever rival known as the Whittle Witch, Clementine must step into the Dark Lord role sooner than she had expected. She soon discovers, however, that she's not so sure she wants to be a Dark Lord after all. With the help of more than a little magic and some newly found friends- including a chicken who's also a spell book, a sheep who's really a boy, a boy who wants to be a knight, and a sword-chucking Lady in the Lake-Clementine endeavors to cure her father and carve her own destiny. Oh, and there's a unicorn...and a unicorn hunter!

Kelly, Lynne. *Song for a Whale*. Yearling, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1524770235.

Iris is deaf, loves to repair radios, and knows a little something about being lonely. So when she learns about Blue-55, a whale who can't communicate with other whales, she sets out to help. After all, everyone, human or whale, deserves to know that they're not alone. With the help of a creative group of friends and a grandmother who knows a thing or two about following your heart, Iris has the opportunity to create and share a whale song for Blue that will let the whale know someone is out there who cares...but will she ever get the chance to share it?

Kramer, J. Kasper. *The Story That Cannot Be Told*. Atheneum, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1534430686.

Can a story be dangerous? Ileana, growing up in Bucharest, is a storyteller and a fairy tale collector. She is clever like her namesake in the story - but she has learned that words can get you in trouble, and in Communist Romania, everyone listens carefully to every word you say. After making a near-fatal mistake, Ileana, for her own safety, is sent away to live in a remote village with her grandparents, where life is very different from that she has been accustomed to in the city. Her grandparents are farmers with no electricity or plumbing; and the people of the village are confused by the way Ileana dresses and acts. What connects

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Ileana to the village is the importance of storytelling. She begins to see that the people of her grandparents' world are not so different after all - while at the same time government officers begin to close in. Historical fiction paired with altered fairy tales.

Marciano, Johnny & Emily Chenoweth. *Klawde: Evil Alien Warlord Cat*. Penguin Workshop, 2019. \$14.99. ISBN: 978-1524787202.

On the planet Lyttyrboks, Klawde, evil alien warlord cat, had clawed his way to the top and ruled his subjects with an iron paw. When his political rivals oust him from power, however, in hopes of getting rid of him forever, they exile him to a planet in a galaxy far, far away, a planet considered primitive and said to be inhabited by cat-eating ogres. The planet's name is...Earth.

Klawde arrives on Earth in Oregon during the rainy season and is faced with the awful choices of either getting wet or seeking shelter among the ogres. He ventures to the nearest house and requests entry, and there meets Raj. Raj's family has recently moved to Oregon, and he's friendless, lonely, and homesick. Unsuspecting, he sees the yowling cat on his doorstep as a potential friend and housepet.

And so the story begins. Will Klawde settle in as a common housecat or does he have diabolical plans for the future?

Mbalia, Kwame. *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*. Disney-Hyperion, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1368039932.

Tristan is miserable after losing his first boxing match, which disappointed his father, and - far worse - failing to save the life of his best friend, Eddie, in a bus accident. He takes Eddie's journal with him to his grandparents' farm in Alabama where he's being sent to spend the summer - and the action begins when a sticky doll-like creature called Gum Baby shows up to steal it. Chasing after Gum Baby and the journal, Tristan punches a hole in his grandmother's Bottle Tree and at the same time unknowingly punches a hole in the sky of Midpass, a world of burning seas, bone ships, monsters, and gods. In Midpass, Tristan joins forces with African-American icons John Henry and Brer Rabbit to help the inhabitants break free of the terrible creatures who are after them - and to try to convince tricky Anansi the Weaver to repair Tristan's hole in the sky.

McAnulty, Stacy. *The World Ends in April*. Random House, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1524767617.

Elle's Grandpa Joe is a survivalist who for years has been preparing Elle and her younger brothers to respond to pending catastrophe with bug-out drills and stockpiles of equipment and food. When Elle discovers a professor on the internet warning that a life-threatening asteroid is shortly to strike the Earth, she's determined to spread the word and help her classmates prepare for TEOTWAWKI (The End of the World As We Know It).

Ogle, Rex. *Free Lunch*. Norton, 2019. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1324003601.

Rex Ogle's memoir of middle school is a story of growing up in poverty and trying to survive in a social environment where he feels the constant pressure of food insecurity and lack of stable housing. He spends a lot of time caring for his younger brother, trying to protect him from the violence in their broken, desperate family. Rex watches his parents bicker and abuse each other and him due to the unending stress of poverty. A constant point is his shame when - every day - he has to tell the lunch counter cashiers that he's on the Free Lunch program.

Ogle explains that he wrote his memoir because he doesn't remember seeing books like this when he was growing up, and he didn't know that other people were dealing with the same problems. Winner of the 2020 YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award.

Palacio, R.J. *White Bird*. Knopf, 2019. \$24.99. ISBN: 978-0525645535.

In *White Bird* we are reintroduced to Julian, Auggie's bully in R.J. Palacio's classic, *Wonder*. As Julian realizes that his bullying was hurtful and begins to feel remorse for his actions, he shares his thoughts with his grandmere, Sara, and she in turn tells him the story of her youth. Sara, who is Jewish, grew up in France during the Nazi occupation in World War II, when Jews were persecuted, and many were arrested and sent to their deaths in concentration camps.

Sara was lucky. With the help of Julien, a boy crippled by polio whom Sara and her friends had often taunted and shunned at school, Sara is hidden throughout the war in his family's barn. As Julien and his parents daily risk their lives to keep Sara safe, Sara comes to realize what she and Julien have in common: both have been persecuted not for anything they've done, but for what they are. A tragic, but also uplifting and hopeful, story that serves as a tribute to human courage and decency.

Pancholy, Maulik. *The Best at It*. Balzer + Bray, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0062866417.

The summer before Rahul Kapoor's seventh grade year is filled with anxiety. Rahul imagines another year of being bullied by some classmates and ignored by others. His grandfather advises him to find something he is good at and become "the best at it" - which becomes Rahul's primary goal. He then begins a rocky journey of self-exploration with a number of false starts - among them trying out for the school's football team. As a non-athlete, it doesn't go well. In fact, it's a painful endeavor that ultimately leads to an ambulance ride to the emergency room.

With the support of his family and friends, however, Rahul continues to examine his strengths and weaknesses. Middle school is a time when many students go through a period of self-exploration, and this story follows the process with heart and humor. It will be very relatable to young readers.

Parry, Rosanne. *A Wolf Called Wander*. Greenwillow, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0062895936.

Swift grew up in a close-knit wolf pack, in which he and his siblings were nurtured and taught valuable survival skills by the elder wolves. The lessons proved to be vital. When a rival wolf pack attacked, Swift's family members were either killed or forced to flee for their lives. Swift found himself alone and homeless - and so begins his journey.

Initially he searched for other survivors from his family; later he sought a new territory. Alone and grieving, Swift traveled through mountains, prairies, and deserts, contending with rivers, men with rifles, a cougar, and a forest fire. It's a gripping and moving story, sympathetically told from the wolf's point of view. Read this incredible tale of survival and find out why Swift renames himself...Wander.

Ramée, Lisa Moore. *A Good Kind of Trouble*. Balzer + Bray, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0062836687.

Shayla likes to follow the rules - trouble makes her palms itch - but in junior high all the rules are different. She's uncertain about her relationship with her best friends and curious about her passionately activist older sister's involvement in Black Lives Matter. When Shayla decides to wear a black armband to school in solidarity and protest, everyone takes sides - and Shayla decides that some rules are worth breaking.

Ritter, William. *The Oddmire: Changeling*. Algonquin, 2019. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-1616208394.

Tinn and Cole look like identical twins - but one of them, due to Kull, a bumbling goblin, is really a changeling. But which? Now that they're nearly thirteen, a message and a map arrive from Kull, telling them that if the changeling does not return to the goblin horde, both he, the horde, and magic itself will die. So off both boys go on a dangerous adventure into the Wild Wood and across the Oddmire swamp. There they meet a strange shape-shifting girl named Fable and contend with a fearsome monster before, at last, discovering who they really are. The first of a series.

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Rodkey, Geoff. *We're Not from Here*. Crown, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1524773045.

Earth is now uninhabitable, and Mars doesn't readily support human life – so the remainder of the human race, en masse, heads out to Planet Choom, world of the Zhuri, who look like giant mosquitoes, the marshmallow-like Ororo, the Krik (green werewolves), and the Nug (giant worms). By the time the human ships arrive at their destination, however, after twenty years in bio-suspension, the government of Choom has changed hands and no longer wants to accept human refugees. Young Lan Mifune and family are picked as a test case, tasked with proving - in the face of anti-human government propaganda - that humans can assimilate with other races and live in peace.

Sloan, Holly Goldberg & Meg Wolitzer. *To Night Owl from Dogfish*. Dial, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-0525553236.

Bett Devlin and Avery Bloom don't have a lot in common. Bett lives in California, loves the water, animals, and taking chances. Avery lives in New York, is a bookworm, has many anxieties and fears, and loves schedules. What they do have in common is their dads. Both are being raised by single fathers - who fall in love with each other and decide to send their daughters to the same summer camp so that the girls can become best friends. Things don't go according to plan. Bett and Avery do become friends, but their fathers break up - and the girls go from plotting to keep their dads apart to finding ways of bringing them back together.

Sumner, Jamie. *Roll with It*. Simon & Schuster, 2019. \$17.99. ISBN: 978-1534442559.

Ellie was born with cerebral palsy and lives life in a wheelchair - with limited mobility but unlimited dreams. Ellie is both optimistic and ambitious (she plans to become a famous baker/chef), but at the same time painfully aware of life's hardships. When she and her mother move to a trailer park in Oklahoma to help support her aging grandparents, Ellie - with new friends tell-it-like-it-is Coralee, who wants to be a singer, and geeky Bert learns that a family of choice can make up for some of the absences that she's felt in the past. A rare book about disability that is warm but not treacly sweet.

Tyson, Neil deGrasse with Gregory Mone. *Astrophysics for Young People in a Hurry*. Norton, 2019. \$11.95. ISBN: 978-1324003281.

"In the beginning, nearly fourteen billion years ago, the entire universe was smaller than the period that ends this sentence." So begins – literally with a bang – Neil deGrasse Tyson's fascinating and reader-friendly overview of cosmology for curious kids, packed with color photos, fact boxes, and wonderful information. Find out what's the most popular element in the universe and why portly Santa Claus should vacation in Ecuador, and learn about dark matter, dark energy, wormholes, blue galaxies, and the astronomer Tycho Brahe, famed for describing a supernova – who had a pet elk and a brass nose.

Venkatraman, Padma. *The Bridge Home*. Nancy Paulsen, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-1524738112.

Homeless on the streets of India because they needed to escape violence at home, Viji and Rukku discover that the family you choose can be kinder and more loyal than the family into which you were born. After befriending two equally desperate brothers, they scour the trash pits and streets to find food and money. Their situation is dire, but their love for each other gives them grit and hope...and maybe the chance to survive.

Warga, Jasmine. *Other Words for Home*. Balzer + Bray, 2019. \$16.99. ISBN: 978-0062747808.

This novel in verse is the story of twelve-year-old Jude, who has moved to America from war-torn Syria with her pregnant mother, leaving her father and older brother behind. Now living with an uncle's family in Cincinnati, Jude must not only cope with worries about her father and brother but come to terms with a new language and culture - and deal with anti-Muslim prejudice. And who says a Muslim girl can't act in the school play?

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2019-2020**

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Jessica Mattera

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