Outstanding Books Reviewed in This Issue

The Story Peddler by Lindsay A. Franklin

Where the Fire Falls by Karen Barnett

Mere Science and Christian Faith by Greg Cootsona

Plus: Q & A with Janice Peterson

Also: Selected 2018 Award Books for Children and Teens
A Letter from the Publisher

Dear CLJ Readers:

Autumn greetings!

Please accept my apologies for the hiatus in our publishing schedule. Earlier this year, Nancy Hesch, founder of CLJ and my mentor, decided to finally and fully retire from her work for the journal. We wish her well and pray for many blessings on her continuing service to our Lord in her other work, but she is sorely missed! Between Nancy’s retirement and other changes in personnel, as well as some health issues on my part, the last few months have posed some challenges.

But God is able and He is our provider! Through this time of transition, we are learning to lean more on His leading and provision, and have been gaining insights into how to continue with CLJ’s mission to be a blessing to our readers and our reviewers. Please keep us in your prayers!

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the many fine reviews in this issue, including our annual coverage of selected ALA Award titles. We also have a special treat for you—Q&As with Janice Peterson, wife of beloved pastor and author Eugene Peterson, who shares with us about her first book, Becoming Gertrude.

In Christ,
Angela Walsh
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editor@christianlibraryj.org.
The purpose of the *Christian Library Journal* is to provide reviews from a Christian point of view, of both Christian and secular titles for the Christian reader. Materials reviewed may reflect a broad range of Christian doctrinal positions and do not necessarily reflect the views of *Christian Library Journal*.

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Cover image taken from *The Story Peddler* by Lindsay A. Franklin. Copyright © 2018 by Lindsay A. Franklin. Used by permission of Enclave Publishing.
Review Rating System

*5 Outstanding — a book which impacts someone’s life or thinking
5 Excellent — well written, among the best
4 Very good — definitely worth reading
3 Good — may be a good source for relaxation or to meet needs for information
2 Fair — poor writing or editing; read only if very interested
1 Poor — not much going for this title.

Recommended with caution (may be used with any of the above ratings) – Note reservations within the review.
Not recommended (may be used with any of the above ratings) – Note problems within the review.

Value of the book:

With fiction, the rating includes the quality of plot development/pacing, characterization, sense of time and place, mood, and atmosphere, dialogue, depth of perception, sensitivity of writing, use of humor. Be aware that some books are character driven, so character development is extremely important. Others are plot driven, so character development isn’t as critical; plot is.

With nonfiction, the rating includes quality of the information, accuracy, up to date, stimulates further inquiry, adds to the understanding of the topic, illustrations which are informative and appropriate.

With picture books, first be aware that these are written today for various age groups, so don’t assume little children. The rating includes those above for fiction and nonfiction, and also emphasizes the illustrations.

Commonly used abbreviations in CLJ reviews

LCCN  Library of Congress Cataloging Number
C  Canadian Library Cataloging Number
ISBN  International Standard Book Number

CDR  CD-ROM
DVD  Videodisc
VID  Videocassette
Q & A with Janice Peterson
Author of *Becoming Gertrude*

Janice Peterson is the wife of beloved pastor and author Eugene Peterson and the mother of three. *Becoming Gertrude*, her first book, illustrates the legacy of a life of faith and intentional relationship.

The title of your book is *Becoming Gertrude*. Who is Gertrude and why might we want to become more like her?

When I was growing up, Gertrude and her husband were my family’s backdoor neighbors. They liked us and we liked them. Mother and Gertrude were good friends. I often walked across the yard to Gertrude’s back door to visit with her when I was 13 and knew I would receive a warm welcome. I had questions and knew she would listen. I think each one of us, especially women, need other and wiser women in our lives.

You talk about how Gertrude was readily available, how she always listened attentively, present and caring. Can you give an example of how she engaged with you in friendship and showed you the love of God?

Gertrude knew the family I was growing up in very well. She was a mother as well. In fact, she liked me so much that she taught me to babysit her newborn grandson. She must have really trusted me! Shortly after I spent quite a bit of time learning all a baby’s needs, etc., I started being asked by other mothers to babysit their children. I was only paid 25 cents an hour, but I babysat a lot after that teaching experience and helped pay my first year of college. (Of course it didn’t cost as much as it does now, and it was a state school.)

In your book, you talk about how spiritual friendships show us the love of God and help shape our faith. Can you unpack that for us?

We were not created by our heavenly Father to walk this journey alone. We need the “other” to help us sound out our thoughts and questions; we need to have a community of others to encourage and help us along this journey called life. It helps us so much to express our feelings to a good listener, to have a sounding board for our feelings and questions. Often-times we carry these feelings around for a whole lifetime, not knowing that someone else, a good listener who loves the Lord and cares, can make all the difference in our lives.
Why do you prefer spiritual friendships over the mentor/mentee relationship?

Friendships are back and forth. We are on equal ground. I think of a mentor as a professional person who knows more than we do, a person who has training. Spiritual friendships, to me, are warmer, more “real,” less distanced than a professional mentor.

In your book, you say, “In my richest friendships, I’ve made intentional decisions to love the other person well.” What does that look like?

Being attentive to them—their conversations, their pain, whatever, but especially practicing attentive listening, prayerful listening. Not interrupting while they talk but listening to them as they might struggle to express themselves. After that, you might question something they’ve said to make it clearer both to you and to them.

You say that “relationship in the body of Christ is where we grow best,” and that community is vital for spiritual growth to challenge, sharpen, and restore us. In your experience, how has this played out? Can you provide an example of a relationship that sharpened or restored you?

In my visits with Ray, the pastor/friend I talk about in the book, he encouraged me with questions about me, helping me to become a more reflective person and understand who this Jan Peterson is at her core. He helped me find more self-understanding in my relationships and more confidence inside myself to be able to share my life of faith and love with others.

You say, “Choosing to see friendships as an integral part of my faith brought me into a new way of living.” How so?

It helped me to become able to share myself in a more real and honest way, to be open and able to be expressive of the life of faith God has given me. Doing that has opened me up to be a real friend who has a life of faith to share with others. I grew up as the “baby” of the family, the third child. So I always looked up to my parents, brother, and sister. They always knew so much more than I did. But I grew in self-confidence about who I was in Christ, so that I could share that with my friends and they with me.

You talk about five elements of spiritual friendship—caring, accepting, serving, offering hospitality, and encouraging others. Do you have a particular strength in one of these areas?

I think hospitality is my “natural” characteristic but as I say in the book, I didn’t learn that I was especially hospitable until a friend leaving our home after a couple of days’ visit said it to me. I really like having people in our home and getting to know the ones we didn’t know before. As for the ones we have known for many years, I like our sense of humor and enjoyment of being together again.

You say that an “others-focused life” is God’s desire for us. You refer to it as a “life of not
overlooking the needs around us but of choosing to see and deciding to care.” What advice can you provide for getting better at this?

I believe a life of prayer, spending time in quietness with our Lord, helps us to be mindful of “the other” and even shows us ways we can make a difference in other people’s lives and their needs. Without our relationship with Jesus, I don’t think we do that easily or naturally. We need that relationship in and for Him to keep us on track. Otherwise we are selfish.

You also advise your reader to care for herself. Why is this so important?

If I am strung out, too busy, too distracted, I have no energy left for the “other.” We all need quiet time, downtime. This also applies to me. If I truly want to be a servant of Christ, I must look out for my own personal care. This is not always natural or easy to do. We need to “take our temperatures” daily. It takes some thought, certainly awareness of what each day holds for us. But we also need to allow space and quietness when that unexpected person comes into our lives who is hurting, in need of care, etc.

As it relates to acceptance, you say that “spiritual friendship is simply about choosing to love people right as they are, choosing to invest in them.” Can you give us an example of this?

Gertrude knew she was listening to and talking with a 13-year-old with questions. She didn’t preach to me; she loved me as she listened, laughed with me, and showed a caring heart and life for me to engage with.

You say that you are “still in process.” What do you mean by this?

As I continue in my prayer time and in reading the Bible and good books, I grow in my thinking, in my awareness of God in my life. Hopefully, I am still growing, still learning, still being open to God in my life each day.

You also talk about “leisure time with God.” What is this and why is it important?

This means quiet time, with my focus on God and not what the calendar necessarily dictates. I often have a hard time letting go of those appointments for a time. They tend to dominate my thinking and my prayer life, so I try to pray about them and then set them aside for the time being. I am not always successful in that. I feel this urging in my mind, telling me I need to get on with my day and the tasks at hand. But what I need more is that quiet, leisure space for God. I need to sense His Presence within me so that I can be His person, His child loving and caring for “the other.”

Another element of spiritual friendship is service, which you call caring in action. You say that “you can’t separate caring from service . . . without service, caring is superficial, and without caring, service has no heart.” Can you help unpack this idea for us?
In our listening and caring for the other, we need to be open to God’s voice in what we might actually do to help our friend. If she seems lonely and in need of friendship, I am to come alongside her and be her friend. If she has a problem, I am to listen carefully and think if there is something I can say or do to alleviate her pain. I don’t think what I am saying has to be some huge action; just coming alongside someone in pain or need may be enough. A follow-up telephone call may be all the “action” needed, but letting that other person know you care is such a gift.

How is this done and what does it look like in real life?

I think hospitality has been me having people in our home for dinner. Period. But what might go a step further in hospitality is inviting someone in for dinner with another couple that you feel they might really get along with, have common interests with, etc. In other words, think creatively in our hospitality. Of course, we can’t program everything. God has surprises for us too.

You talk about our unique callings. You say that we have been created with unique gifts and a call to serve right where we are. How do we discern these things? Do you have any practical advice on this?

It has seemed to me over the years that the things we enjoy doing the most are very likely to be the gifts that God has blessed us with.

How do you hope your message will resonate with readers?

My prayer for this little book is that it may engage women—especially younger women—to want to grow deeper in God’s Spirit, to seek the face of God and spend precious time with Him. I pray that it will be an encouragement.

Prayer is the most earthy and practical thing I can think of. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to discern in our beings just what those callings are. Like with my awareness of my hospitality gift, I was just doing what came naturally, what I liked doing. I love people and I love serving them, making them comfortable in our home, doing whatever is at hand to do. No one said to me, “Be hospitable.” It was just a natural (and still is).

You frame out hospitality—when done right—as profound. You say, “We create wholeness in relationship when we welcome others.”
This CLJ issue features reviews of a selection of books that won major awards for books for children and teens in 2018. Some of these awards focus on works that portray a specific type of experience. Others focus on works of literature or illustration that are outstanding or distinguished in a particular genre.

Literary merit aside, some of these books include violence, vulgar language, sexual situations, and potentially offensive (or at least uncomfortable) topics. While only you can judge what is appropriate reading for you or your reader(s), we urge you to consider that these books may be a window into the hurts and needs of our fallen world, and that they could be read prayerfully in a manner that leads to understanding and compassion for those that need the Gospel and the ministry of Christ’s church.

Following are descriptions of the honors and medals won by the books featured in this special section:

The **Pura Belpré Award** “is presented annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth” (ALSC Pura Belpré Award home page, [http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal](http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal)).

The **Caldecott Medal** “was named in honor of nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott. It is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children” (ALSC Caldecott Medal home page, [http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal](http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal)).

The **Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal** “is awarded annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished informational book published in the United States in English during the preceding year. The award is named in honor of Robert F. Sibert, the long-time President of Bound to Stay Bound Books, Inc. of Jacksonville, Illinois. ALSC administers the award” (ALSC Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal home page, [http://](http://)).
www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/sibertmedal).

The Newbery Medal “was named for eighteenth-century British bookseller John Newbery. It is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” (ALSC Newbery Medal home page, http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/).

The Geisel Award “is given annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year” (ALSC (Theodor Seuss) Geisel Award home page, http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/geiselaward).

The Batchelder Award “is given to the most outstanding children’s book originally published in a language other than English in a country other than the United States, and subsequently translated into English for publication in the United States” (ALSC (Mildred L.) Batchelder Award home page, http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward).

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards “are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values. The award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and honors his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood” (ALA The Coretta Scott King Book Awards home page, http://www.ala.org/emiert/cskbookawards).

The Schneider Family Book Awards “honor an author or illustrator for a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences: The book "must portray some aspect of living with a disability, whether the disability is physical, mental, or emotional.” (ALSC Schneider Family Book Award home page, http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/1/apply).
The **YALSA Book Awards** include several awards administered by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). YALSA honors the best teen literature each year with its six literary awards, including the **Alex Awards**, sponsored by the Margaret A. Edwards Trust, which honor adult books with special appeal to teens. (ALSC YALSA Book Awards home page, [http://www.al.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/bookawards](http://www.al.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/bookawards)).

*Valorie Cooper, CLJ Special Features Writer*
Selected Children’s Award Books: Fiction

All Around Us / by Xelena Gonzalez; illustrated by Adriana M. Garcia.

Cinco Puntos Press, 2017  
ISBN 9781941026762  
Grades 2-5  
Rating: 5

Grandpa’s daily chores and routines seem mundane and dreary, yet through them his granddaughter learns about the wonders of nature that encompass everything about them, including her.

When she sees a rainbow arc in the sky, Grandpa explains that the other half of the circle, the part we cannot see, is hidden in the earth. Patting the garden soil where Grandpa planted seeds, he reminds his grandchild that the seeds, though now unseen, will become the visible fruits and vegetables that will feed them. Throughout the day, Grandpa introduces her to many other unseen secrets and she begins to see and to understand her own place in the circle of life.

All Around Us by Xelena Gonzalez is a reflective celebration of life—a warm and tender story of the relationship between a grandfather and his granddaughter and the lessons he teaches her about our connection to the earth and the world around us. The illustrations by Adriana M. Garcia support the theme of circles all around with deep rich earth tones and with bright greens and vibrant yellows that swirl around each page. Intermingling with the text, they enfold the reader into the story to help them feel the warmth of the earth and the love between adult and child.

All Around Us is a 2018 Pura Belpre Illustrator Honor Book, an ALSC Notable Children’s Book, and a 2018 American Indian Youth Literature Award: Picture Book Honor recipient.

Veronica Jorge, CLJ

Award: Belpre (Illustrator) Honor Book

Big Cat, little cat / illustrated and written by Elisha Cooper.

Roaring Brook Press, 2017  
ISBN 9781626723719  
PreK-Grade 1  
Rating: 5

Elisha Cooper wrote and illustrated this delightful picture book for the youngest of readers.

In Big Cat, Little Cat, a white cat lives alone. One day a new little cat shows up to live with him. The first cat shows the little black cat where to eat, drink, and rest. Days go by, and the little cat grows up. They spend years together until one day the older cat leaves. Then a new little cat comes to live with him, and the cycle begins all over again.

Cooper pens a picture book with bold black and white illustrations, with bright yellow accents. He presents a story that shows the role animals play in our lives, as well as the friendship of two cats. Readers will enjoy viewing the simple text and drawings over and over again, and personalizing it with their own experience of family pets. The departure of the older cat is told simply, and off-stage, yet it offers a venue for discussion. Cooper, the author of several picture books, draws on his personal experience with cats to deliver a warm message that the love experienced by pet lovers continues even during loss. The repetition of text and artwork is what makes this book a welcome addition to the library.

Recommended for public and school libraries, and especially pet lovers. It is especially a suitable book to share with families experiencing the loss of a pet. A 2018 Caldecott Honor Book, Big Cat, Little Cat is a
touching story that will be read and enjoyed over and over again by readers, both parents and children alike.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

**Award:** Ralph Caldecott Honor Book

**Crown : An Ode to the Fresh Cut / by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James.**

Bolden, 2017  
ISBN 9781572842243  
K-Grade 3  
Rating: 5

Derrick Barnes presents a picture book tribute to the importance of a new haircut in the life of a teenage African-American youth.

In *Crown*, a young boy goes to the barber shop for a haircut and experiences how self-confidence, swagger, and more comes from a fresh haircut. According to the author, the text is “actually a poem I was inspired to write after seeing an illustration from one of my illustrator buddies (shout out to Dan Tate) of his teen son after a trip to the barber.”

Barnes writes that boys go in as lumps of clay and exit with their new haircuts, which make them look sharper, get better grades, be more attractive to the girls, and so on. A “fresh cut” has the power to make the boys fly! Barnes’ delightful read-aloud celebrates the self-esteem, confidence, and swagger boys experience after their fresh cut. It has the power to change how they see themselves and the world around them. Nationally-recognized illustrator Gordon James used colorful oil on board paintings to convey the joy-filled event of the boys, inviting the reader along for the experience.

Recommended for school and public libraries. *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* was a 2018 Newbery Honor Book, 2018 Caldecott Honor Book, 2018 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book, 2018 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book, 2018 Ezra Jack Keats New Author Award winner, as well as the recipient of starred reviews in a number of journals.

Carol R. Gehringer, worthy2read.wordpress.com

**Awards:** Newbery Honor Book; Randolph Caldecott Honor Book; Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book; Coretta Scott King Honors Illustrator

**A Different Pond / by Bao Phi; illustrated by Thi Bui.**

Capstone, 2017  
ISBN 9781623708030  
K-Grade 2  
Rating: 5

Poet Bao Phi offers his son, while fishing on a small pond in Minneapolis, a story of how he and his father before him fished for food in their homeland of Vietnam. This 2018 Caldecott Honor Book brings together issues of diversity, culture, and immigration without using platitudes. The personal story offers many positive messages about family values that highlight the relationship between father and son and between cultures, old and new.

Illustrator Thi Bui’s art offers a striking exhibit of Phi’s prose through illustrations with depth and a quiet, moving emotion. Using a dominant blue background with insets, Bui presents a powerful picture and experience of an immigrant family making its way in a new home while honoring its bonds to the past. The use of varying blues and then illustrations that offer a close-up view as well as an overall view of a scene enables children to linger in the family relationships so integral to the story. Both author and illustrator provide a closing note after the story.

Leroy Hommerding, CLJ

**Award:** Randolph Caldecott Honor Book
**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**SELECTED 2018 AWARD BOOKS FOR CHILDREN & TEENS**

**King & Kayla and the Case of the Missing Dog Treats** / by Dori Hillestad Butler; Illustrated by Nancy Meyers.

Peachtree Publishers, 2017
ISBN 9781561458776, K-Grade 2 Rating: 4

*King & Kayla and the Case of the Missing Dog Treats* by Dori Hillestad Butler is a short chapter book with illustrations that is ideal for beginning readers, as well as an appealing mystery story for early elementary students.

King is a dog explaining the Case of the Missing Dog Treats from his point of view. He loves the dog treats his friend Kayla is making, but he must share this time. When some go missing the thought is King has taken them. He has not, so he is determined to find out who has taken the treats and clear his name. King wants to prove he is not a bad dog.

Readers will be eager to find out what happens next as the story holds their interest to the end. King is a lovable dog, and readers will feel for him and hope he can solve the case and prove he is a good dog. Problem-solving skills are also presented as the mystery progresses through the book.

Colorful illustrations by Nancy Meyers throughout the book go along perfectly with the story. These are nice visuals adding details to the storyline and depth for the reader.

Did King really gobble up the treats he loves so much instead of sharing? Or does he find who actually took the missing dog treats? Find out all the answers in this adorable mystery perfect for beginning readers.

*Charity R. Bartley Howard, CLJ*

**Award:** Geisel Honor Book

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**La Princesa and the Pea** / by Susan Middleton Elya; illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal.

G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2017
ISBN 9780399251566, PS-Grade 2 Rating: 5

Susan Middleton Elya pens a delightful retelling of the classic fairy tale (The Princess and the Pea). Beautifully illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal, this bilingual picture book won the 2018 Pura Belpré Medal for Illustration.

In *La Princesa and the Pea*, the lonely prince finds the princess he thinks is perfect for him when she visits his castle. His mother, the queen, has a different opinion, as she often does. She has a secret test to see if the girl is indeed a royal princess and worthy of her son—and fit to be queen one day! The queen places a very small pea under 20 mattresses before the princess goes to bed. The prince has his own plan to make sure his future bride passes the test. But does the princess have a good night’s sleep or does she pass the ultimate test?

Author Susan Middleton Elya and illustrator Juana Martinez-Neal team up to present a charming retelling of a classic story with a Latina twist. The vibrant illustrations—done with acrylics, colored pencils, and graphite—mirror Peruvian artwork and are so enchanting that they won the Pura Belpré Medal. The lively artwork is inspired by indigenous Peruvians, and beautifully executed in the facial expressions of the queen, the prince, her cat, and even the print of the mattresses!

The book incorporates Spanish words in its rhymes and rhythm, and includes a glossary for the reader. Not only are the illustrations breathtaking, but the lyrical rhyming couplets in Spanish and English add to the pleasure of reading and re-reading the book over and over again.
Recommended for school and public libraries.

*Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ*

**Award:** Pura Belpré (Illustrator) Award

**Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess / by Shari Green.**

Pajama Press, Inc., 2017  
ISBN 9781772780338  
Grades 4-7  
Rating: 5

Macy admits it: change is not her specialty. Yet soon she’ll have another dad and twin step-sisters, move into a new home, and attend a different school. Why, she complains, can’t things remain the same?

Macy refuses to pack; that way they won’t be able to move. So she thinks. But her mother plans otherwise. Macy has to box her things plus help Iris, the extravagant neighbor next door, to get ready for a move of her own–Iris who insists that she was named after the goddess, not the flower, and who always wears something orange. To top it off, Macy is hearing-impaired and Iris doesn’t know how to sign. Macy stresses over how they will understand each other.

While Macy grumbles and secretly plots to derail the approaching wedding, and Iris prepares herself to transition into an assisted living facility, an unexpected friendship blossoms between them. Communicating via notes, finger writing and Iris’ magic cookies, together they share their love of books, lessons learned, and marvel at the power of words.

Macy starts to consider that maybe change might lead to a wonderful new beginning.

*Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess* is a delightful, humorous, and tender story about a young girl’s challenge to cope with and accept change. Told in first-person verse, Shari Green allows Macy’s voice to come through via her internal dialogue and emotions. Green also uniquely uses bold lettering to indicate when conversations take place in sign language. A Schneider Family Book Award recipient, *Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess* is a great read with inspiring lessons for all ages.

*Veronica Jorge, CLJ*

**Award:** Schneider Family Book Award Ages 9-13

**My Kite Is Stuck! And Other Stories / by . by Salina Yoon. (Duck, Duck, Porcupine, Book 2)**

Bloomsbury Children’s Publishers, 2017  
ISBN 9781619638877  
K-Grade 2  
Rating: 5

Playful and colorful, *My Kite is Stuck and Other Stories* by Salina Yoon is a Duck, Duck Porcupine! picture book starring three friends—a chatty Big Duck, a quietly resourceful Little Duck, and a kind Porcupine. Designed for ages 5-7, this is a charming read for little listeners not yet reading and early readers starting on the reading path. There are three different adventures including “My Kite is Stuck”; the other stories are “A New Friend” and “Best Lemonade Stand.”

Working together, problem solving, welcoming others, and a good amount of silliness are all part of these cute stories. The author tells short engaging stories with beautiful visuals spoken through bubble quotes by the characters. The reader will find important educational elements sprinkled throughout as well as some colors and numbers too.

Everything about this book is a value from the literary presentation and colorful, well-done illustrations to the delightful messages and stories of friendship. Early readers might find some words to learn, but there is plenty of repetition to help them catch on to
any bigger words such as “porcupine” and “lemonade.”

*My Kite is Stuck and Other Stories* is a delightful book perfectly designed to read aloud, with lovable characters and fun messages. This would also make a great book for older siblings to read to younger siblings.

*Charity R. Bartley Howard, CLJ*

*Award: Geisel Honor Book*

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**Selected Children’s Award Books: Non-Fiction**

**Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos / by Monica Brown; illustrated by John Parra.**

NorthSouth Books, 2017
ISBN 9780735842694
PS-Grade 2       Rating: 5

*Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* by Monica Brown is a picture book introduction to the renowned Mexican artist and the influences on her life and work.

Growing up in a bright blue house in Coyoacán, Mexico, Frida loves colors, animals, and observing nature with her photographer father. Early in life, her lively imagination and unusual group of pets (including a fawn, parrot, monkeys, turkeys, and an eagle) combine with her enjoyment of painting to help her endure two medical crises.

Author Monica Brown tells Frida’s story with warmth and admiration. Young readers will be surprised to learn about Frida’s animal friends, amused by the description of her mischievousness, and compelled to know more about this gifted 20th century artist. John Parra provides vibrant acrylic scenes in a folk-art style that capture Frida and her beloved “animalitos.” These delightful illustrations take readers on a visual journey through Frida’s challenging life.

A 2018 Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor book and ALA Notable Children’s Book, *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* is an enjoyable and inspirational biographical portrait. A thorough author’s note and photograph provide more details and insight for older readers.

*Nina Ditmar, CLJ*

*Award: Pura Belpre (Illustrator) Award*

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**Grand Canyon / illustrated and written by Jason Chin.**

Roaring Brook Press, 2017
ISBN 9781596439504
Grades 3-5       Rating: 5

Using a narrative of a girl and her father hiking throughout the canyon, going from present day to the past and back again, Jason Chin’s *Grand Canyon* presents information appealing to the imagination of third to fifth graders. The journey enables children to understand how rivers wind through earth, eroding the soil for millions of year, creating what is the Grand Canyon, a cavity 277 miles long, 18 miles wide, and more than a mile deep. The illustrations in this 2018 Caldecott Honor Book add a lot to the narrative by capturing the feel of this high desert landscape and each elevation’s own ecological zone.

The breathtaking walk covers an astonishing variety of plants and animals that have lived within its walls for millennia. In Chin’s illustrations, one grasps many details about geology, geography, and biology.
A double foldout clearly offers testimony that the Grand Canyon is much more than a big hole in the ground.

Along the way, children also gain an appreciation for Southwestern biomes, sedimentary geology, and the discoveries to be made in observing and being close to nature. Chin provides further notes and illustrations covering the canyon’s history, ecology, human settlement, and geology in the closing section of the book.

Leroy Hommerding, CLJ

Awards: Randolph Caldecott Honor Book; Siebert Honor Book

Malala: Activist for Girls’ Education / written by Raphaëlle Frier, illustrated by Aurélia Fronty and translated from French by Julie Cormier.

Charlesbridge Publishing, 2017
ISBN 9781580897853
Grades 3-9 Rating: 5

Malala: Activist for Girls’ Education by Raphaëlle Frier details the true story of Malala Yousafzai, youngest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Growing up in Pakistan, Malala joins her father in speaking out when the Taliban impose restrictions on education for girls. By age 13 she has become a noted activist for children’s rights in her country and in 2012 she survives an apparent assassination attempt by the Taliban. After recovering at a hospital in England, Malala continues to be a voice and advocate for girls all over the world.

This compelling picture book is absorbing and inspirational. Many young readers will likely have heard of Malala without fully realizing the extent of her courage and leadership. Author Raphaëlle Frier narrates the dramatic events of Malala’s childhood in the present tense, conveying the sense that her story is very much ongoing. Extensive end notes include photos, speech excerpts, a timeline, map, and historical information that greatly expand the reading level and audience.

Vivid illustrations by Aurélia Fronty show Malala’s world from a variety of perspectives, including both peaceful times and times of violence.

A Batchelder Award Honor Book, Malala: Activist for Girls’ Education is an eye-opening and thought-provoking biographical picture book. Though violent acts are presented carefully, parents may wish to preview the material before sharing with younger readers.

Nina Ditmar, CLJ

Award: Batchelder Honor Book

Mama Africa! How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope with Her Song / by Kathryn Erskine; illustrated by Charly Palmer.

Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, 2017
ISBN 9780374303013,
Grades 4-8 Rating: 4

Mama Africa! How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope with Her Song by Kathryn Erskine is a picture book introduction to the South African singer who used her voice to fight apartheid.

Growing up near Johannesburg in the 1930s, Miriam loves to sing despite the oppression of harsh restrictions on black people in South Africa. Inspired by the work of Nelson Mandela, she is determined to use her voice to tell the world about the injustice of apartheid. Where this leads her and what she accomplishes are revealed in the story.

This striking book is powerfully written in the present, which creates a tone of tension and suspense.
befitting the subject matter. With generous use of vocabulary from numerous African languages, the book transports young readers to a time and place of great inequality—but also a time of bravery, activism, and hope.

Bold illustrations by Charly Palmer feature broad shapes and dark colors that highlight the dramatic storyline. Brighter colors in the final scenes celebrate freedom and the homecoming of "Mama Africa."

*Mama Africa! How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope With Her Song* is suggested for middle grade readers owing to the sensitive content and difficult vocabulary. In a detailed author’s note, Kathryn Erskine shares reflections and photos from her own childhood years in South Africa. Other materials include a bibliography, suggestions for further reading, and a glossary of 23 foreign words used in the book.

*Nina Ditmar, CLJ
Award: Coretta Scott King/ by John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award*

**Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask about Having a Disability / by Shane Burcaw; photographs by Matt Carr.**
Roaring Brook Press, 2017
ISBN 9781626727717
Grades 1-5 Rating: 5

Shane Burcaw answers questions about living with spinal muscular atrophy in *Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask about Having a Disability.*

The author has a small body and extremely weak muscles due to SMA. He candidly addresses the curiosity of young readers by explaining that he is "just a little different". Photographs by Matt Carr capture Burcaw’s personality and show his many capabilities alongside his physical challenges.

*Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask about Having a Disability* is written with sincerity, humor, and insight. The author’s openness and positive outlook help to educate readers of all ages about living with a disability.

An Author’s Note contains additional reflections of the author and information about his non-profit organization.

*Nina Ditmar, CLJ
Award: Siebert Honor Book*

**Out of wonder: poems celebrating poets / by Kwame Alexander with Chris Colderly and Marjory Wentworth; illustrated by Ekua Holmes.**
Candlewick Press, 2017
ISBN 9780763680947
Grades 3-7 Rating: 5

It has been said imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. In *Out of Wonder*, Kwame Alexander, along with Chris Colderley and Marjory Wentworth, take this concept to heart. With a collection of their own inspiring poems, the authors celebrate 20 of their favorite poets by incorporating some of the poets’ styles, voices, and techniques into their own poetry.

This collection is sectioned into three parts, each beginning with a short introduction on how the following poems celebrate its specific poet. Under each poem’s title, the name of the poet being honored is listed. At the end of the book is a short biography for each poet. It is recommended that one begin with the biographies before reading the poems, as the biographies explain many of the references in the poems about each poet.

It is easy to see why this beautiful collection of po-
ems has won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award for 2018. The mixed media illustrations are a gorgeous collage of color, geometric shapes, and bold and subtle images of nature, people, and places. Each illustration brings visual life to its accompanying poem, reinforcing the lessons, truths, and themes shared within.

Overall, this book is an excellent addition to any child’s library, as well as the classroom. It would make a great springboard for a poetry unit. Students will learn about some of the world’s greatest poets, ranging from Rumi to Robert Frost to Maya Angelou. They will be exposed to a variety of different forms of poetry, such as the guided structure of haiku and the creative liberty of free verse. Along the way, they are sure to be inspired to create their own poems following the methods highlighted in each unit.

Justina McBride, CLJ
Award: Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award

Young Adult Award Books - Fiction

The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora / by Pablo Cartaya.
Penguin, 2017
ISBN 9781101997253
Grades 5-8 Rating: 5

Pablo Cartaya writes a delightful book about a seventh-grade boy, his grandmother, and his Cuban-American family in Miami. Sprinkled with Spanish words, the reader is able to understand the words in the context of the story, and is introduced to the Cuban-American culture.

In The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora, 13-year-old Arturo Zamora loves playing basketball and working as a junior dishwasher in his grandmother’s restaurant. He also wants to win the heart of Carmen, a girl he likes and his mother’s goddaughter. Arturo wants to make his abuela proud, especially when his grandmother gets sick. Her family rallies around her to keep the restaurant running and to fight Wilfrido Pipo, the greedy developer who wants to take over the neighborhood where her restaurant is located. Wilfrido makes a lot of promises to the community but are his designs just empty words? As his abuela gets sicker, Arturo discovers family stories and the poetry of José Marti, Cuban writer. At his abuela’s funeral, the entire community turns out to honor her. Will the Zamora family and their neighbors win the fight against Pipo?

Cartaya writes a touching narrative where characters naturally use Spanish but the reader doesn’t need all the words translated in order to follow the story. Family bonds and community ties are central to this story. In fact, at a protest, one of the signs read: “Community is Family, Family is Community.” Cartaya includes family recipes and an author’s note.

Recommended for school and public libraries, especially fans of Rita Williams-Garcia. The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora was a 2018 Pura Belpre Honor book, and an E. B. White Read-Aloud Middle Reader Award finalist, among other honors.

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ
Award: Belpre (Author) Honor Book

The First Rule of Punk / by Celia C. Pérez.
Puffin Books, 2017
ISBN 9780425290422
Grades 3-6 Rating: 4

Celia Pérez pens a delightful story of friendship,
middle school, and finding your inner worth.

In *The First Rule of Punk*, 12-year-old Malú (María Luisa) moves to Chicago with her mother. On her first day of school at Posada Middle School, she annoys the most popular girl and breaks dress code with her punk rock look. Her Mexican-American mother is disappointed Malú isn’t more of a girly-girl. Malú loves rock music, zines, and Mexican food (without cilantro!). She doesn’t fit the mold of the popular crowd. Some classmates call her a coconut (white on the inside and brown on the outside).

Her dad who lives over a thousand miles away, reminds her of the first rule of punk: *be yourself*. Malú is proud of her Mexican heritage but she also loves punk music. Can she combine the two? Malú gathers a group of students who don’t fit the standard mold, and they start a punk music band for the upcoming fall festival. But will the principal let them perform at the festival?

*The First Rule of Punk* has black-and-white illustrations, and the collage art emphasizes the story’s theme of creating something new. Even the end papers capture the essence of the book’s theme. Like Malú, Pérez is a fan of punk music, dislikes cilantro, and loves writing and making zines inspired by punk. She presents a book that speaks from her heart about Mexican-American and Cuban-American culture, being different from others, and being confident in one’s true self.

Recommended for school and public libraries. *The First Rule of Punk* is a 2018 Pura Belpre Author Honor Book and the 2018 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award Winner.

**Award:** Pura Belpre (Author) Honor Book

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**Lucky Broken Girl / by Ruth Behar.**

Puffin Books, 2017  
ISBN 9780399546457  
Grades 4-7  
Rating: *5

A car injury binds 10-year-old Ruthie in a body cast and confines her to bed. Anger against those who caused the accident sits in heart like a stone, and having to depend upon her mother for EVERYTHING, because she cannot move, frustrates her and her mother. Fear becomes a new companion when Ruthie’s prolonged immobility indicates that she may never walk again.

Based on her own real-life experience as a child, Ruth Behar’s *Lucky Broken Girl* portrays a young girl’s struggle with a physical injury, assimilation in a new country, mastering a foreign language, and opening her heart to forgiveness and friendship.

The many months in bed make Ruthie complacent, and a new fear takes hold of her that is more paralyzing than the injury itself: the thought of getting out of bed, learning how to walk again, and participating in this new world in which she now lives. She is helped by a host of characters that pass through her room, each one giving her a gift through which she learns life lessons.

Her home school teacher introduces her to the world of books and reading that free her mind. An artist neighbor helps her find joy in painting through which Ruthie learns about perspective and its power to change how one sees the world. A nurse encourages her to stop entertaining fear in order to prevent it from settling inside her like an unwelcome guest. And from a school friend, she learns that little dreams are easy to lose, so she must dream big.

*Lucky Broken Girl* is a warm and delightful book providing insight and inspiration into the world of tragedy, loneliness, newness, and fear. But Ruthie learns to put away her anger against the driver who
broke her and discovers how lucky she really is. Forgiveness becomes her first step toward healing, from the inside out.

Veronica Jorge, CLJ

**Award:** Pura Belpre (Author) Award

**You’re Welcome, Universe** / written and illustrated by Whitney Gardner.

Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2017
ISBN 9780399551413,
Grades 9 and up Rating: 5

Whitney Gardner paints an eye-opening picture of the deaf community in *You’re Welcome, Universe*. This coming-of-age story about Julia, a deaf high school artist, brings to light the difficulties of making new friends, embracing your uniqueness, and following your dreams.

When her only friend snitches on her for spray painting over vandalism on school property, Julia gets kicked out of her deaf school and is forced to go to a “hearie” school. Even with the warm welcome from her new interpreter and a kind-hearted classmate, Julia is determined to push everyone away and focus on her art. Julia feels guilty for disobeying orders from her two moms to give up street art, but that won’t stop her from pursuing her dream.

Being known for her art becomes her obsession—her sole identity. She begins sneaking off at night to graffiti public property. But, each time she returns to one of her pieces, another artist has tagged his or her own art style to them. Sparking a graffiti war, Julia is furiously focused on creating a piece so perfect that nothing can be added. Can Julia keep fighting, even when the cops get involved? And could the culprit of the vandalism be the art teacher who’s vying for her street art to be preserved? Or the attractive coworker that she has crushed on for years? Or someone she would never expect?

Winner of the Schneider Family Book Award, dedicated to books that embody artistic expression of the disability experience, *You’re Welcome, Universe* uses art, texts, high school slang, and the perspective of a deaf woman to tell this unique “be careful what you wish for” story that will give teens a raw perspective on being deaf. *You’re Welcome, Universe* may not be appropriate for readers offended by provocative language, law-breaking, and revenge, and the fact that the protagonist professes that her “only god” is her favorite artist. Nonetheless, this book creates a broad range of emotions relevant to high school students, and may be recommended to young artists and those struggling to find their place in the world.

Rebecca Schriner, CLJ

**Award:** Schneider Family Book Award Ages 14-18

**Young Adult Award Books - Nonfiction**

**The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives** / by Dashka Slater.

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2017
ISBN 9780374303235
Grades 9-12 Rating: 5

*The 57 Bus* is a moving story about two teenage boys from different parts of town with different beliefs. Sasha loves to read, makes up his own language, wears skirts, and refers to himself using the pronouns “they” and “them. Sasha has classified himself as agender. Richard has had some trouble in the past, but he is eager to help others. He likes to cut up and make people laugh, but also works hard to get
good grades in school. Their brief encounter happens on one of the public buses when they’re heading home from school. Richard’s friends think it would be funny if Richard lit the sleeping Sasha’s skirt on fire. Richard, thinking it would be a harmless prank, doesn’t see the harm because he never thought Sasha would become engulfed in flames. Richard thought the little flame would just die out.

Dashka Slater has touched on some very sensitive and controversial subjects in this book: racism and confusion with gender identity. Sasha has struggled to fit in and realize who “they” are. Richard has had to make up for the bad decisions in his past and now he’s facing prison time for an act that he didn’t think through. Due to his actions, he could also potentially be charged for a hate crime. The boys’ families demonstrate struggles, strength, and forgiveness, as Richard’s prank doesn’t just affect Richard and Sasha—it also affects both of their families. This story affirms that people should have the right to be themselves, even if it’s confusing to others, and that nobody should ever be harmed for how they dress or because they are different.

There is some strong language; recommended for public and high school libraries.

Trina Chase, CLJ
Award: YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Honor Book

#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women / edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale.
Annick Press, 2017
ISBN 9781554519583,
Grades 9 and up Rating: 5

#NotYourPrincess is a compilation of poetry, art, and quotes from Native American girls and women. By telling their stories, dealing with past hurts, and expressing their hopes for changes in the future, they aim to break the stereotype of everyone’s ideas of Pocahontas and Tiger Lily. These women have either experienced the pain of discrimination or heard stories of such from their ancestors. They can’t help but feel division among the races because of history, and that by not letting go of the past, some would continue to bring this racism to the present and future.

Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale have created a touching collection from over 50 Native American women artists that helps readers see what these women must deal with. One poem, The Things We Taught Our Daughters, will open readers’ eyes to the cycle of abuse and discrimination that just keeps getting passed down from one female to another. Hopefully, this book will make everyone aware of the problems and result in a sense of open-mindedness to stop the racism and embrace these beautiful women.

Recommended for public and school libraries.

Trina Chase, CLJ
Award: YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Honor Book

Sea Otter Heroes: The Predators That Saved an Ecosystem / by Patricia Newman.
Millbrook Press, 2017
ISBN 9781512426311
Grades 4-9 Rating: 4

Thoughtfully organized with enticing photos of fluffy-faced otters, Sea Otter Heroes presents an interesting story of the relationship between sea grasses and sea otters in a California bay inlet. Utilizing the work of marine biologist Brent Hughes, students come to
understand the role of sea otters in maintaining ecosystems. Studying the nutrient-polluted estuary fed by fertilizers and pesticides used in nearby farming, Hughes discovered that sea otters, the top predators in the food chain, help keep the sea grass algae-free through their feeding habits, which allows the fish population to grow and expand and, in the long term, preserves a natural barrier to storms.

Source notes, glossary, bibliography, suggested resources, and index add to the quality of this title. Sidebars called “Otterisms” both demonstrate and brighten the text. Clear, full-color photographs and illustrations offering scientific diagrams make it easy to see how Hughes’ theory was confirmed. The layout, done much like a picture book, may deter older readers. But since the story is presented as a mystery, clues unfold as the researcher discovers them. Why are the sea grasses in Elkhorn Slough flourishing when the waterway is one of the most polluted waterways in the country? This will help keep readers stay engaged. The final chapter on conservation includes relevant experiments and ways in which young people can help the environment on a daily basis.

Leroy Hommerding, CLJ
Award: Sibert Honor Book

Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers / by Deborah Heiligman.
Godwin Books, 2017
ISBN 9780805093391
Grades 9-12 Rating: 4

Vincent and Theo focuses on the family life of one of the world’s most famous artists: Vincent Van Gogh. In her research, author Deborah Heiligman noticed that very few works focused on the extremely important relationship Vincent had with his brother Theo, who supported him his entire life. The book starts with this relationship and the promise they make to each other as young men to support each other. Beautifully constructed like a piece of art itself, the book uses colorful descriptions and artistic terminology to invite the reader into Vincent’s world. This creative approach encourages the reader to view Vincent’s works—those which are shown in the book, as well as others available online. In addition to this, Heiligman infuses the book with a theme that all readers can relate to—the complications of family life. Vincent and Theo’s relationship is tumultuous, but steadfast, and the bond is inspiring.

The book also deals with some other difficult topics—namely, Vincent’s struggle with mental illness (most likely bipolar disorder) which leads to his being institutionalized. Because the family is a central focus of this piece, the reader is able to observe the tension this causes in his family, who cannot understand him and must support him financially. His illness also leads him to self-harm, both the cutting off of his ear and his suicide. The author suggests that these might not have been self-inflicted though there are other instances in the book where he does attempt to hurt himself while he is institutionalized. In addition, both Theo and Vincent, though children of a pastor, turn away from their faith. They also engage in immoral behavior as it is mentioned that they both frequented prostitutes. In fact, Vincent lives with a former prostitute for an extended amount of time. Despite this, the book is not overly descriptive in these sections, and the reader does see that there are negative consequences to this lifestyle, particularly in how it affects their health.

Tatyana Claytor, CLJ
Award: YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults
**The Whydah: A Pirate Ship Feared, Wrecked & Found** / by Martin W. Sandler.

Candlewick Press, 2017  
ISBN 9780763680336  
Grades 5-6  
Rating: 5

Written for a young adult reader, this true story of the captaincy, wreck, and discovery of the only pirate ship ever found, *The Whydah*, makes for an enticing story. A 2018 YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults finalist, this title is by Martin W. Sandler, a prolific author of books for adults and children, who weaves history and archaeology to offer insights on pirate captain Black Sam Bellamy, his flagship Whyday, and the culture of early 18th-century piracy. Adding to this story, Sandler includes the recovery of the wreck and interpretation of the artifacts.

The factual information presented highlights the golden age of piracy, from the 1650s to the 1730s, when pirates ruled the waves. The Whydah sank in 1717 but was not found until 1984 by marine archaeologists with the artifacts being priceless, both in their value and in the picture they offer of life in this much-mythologized pirate era. The narrative includes detailed maps and period illustrations that enable youth to be involved in the search for the only shipwreck authenticated to be an actual ship used by pirates.

Closing pages offer details about coin artifacts and what they teach us. Five pages of source notes and a bibliography give testimony to the careful research and scholarship achieved. An index is also included. The care with which this story is conveyed makes it easy to understand why *The Whydah* was chosen as A Junior Library Guild Selection.

*Leroy Hommerding, CLJ*

**Award:** YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Honor Book
PRIMARY FICTION

Good Night Tales: A Family Treasury of Read-Aloud Stories / by C.S. Fritz.
NavPress, 2017
ISBN 9781631465567
Grades 2-3 Rating: 4

This book collects children’s stories written and illustrated by C.S. Fritz, each story inspired by Scripture passages or Bible stories. Some chapters adapt Bible stories (such as Noah’s ark or the Good Samaritan) into stories involving talking animals and fairytale creatures, while others take biblical ideas (such as a lesson Jesus said in one of his parables) and create a story that illustrates that principle. Some stories are told entirely through pictures, while others use words with accompanying illustrations. Each chapter starts with a Scripture reference to the passage or story that inspired it, and there are discussion prompts at the back of the book for families who want to discuss these stories with their children.

C.S. Fritz did an excellent job writing and illustrating this book. Each story contains moments of humor, poetic language or images, and biblical ideas explained in profound ways. Like The Chronicles of Narnia, these stories excel at communicating biblical truths in entertaining ways that will help readers understand them better. The lavish illustrations, which have both silly elements (such as animals wearing glasses) and dramatic ones (such as carefully placed shadows or wafts of smoke), amplify the text’s qualities and make the stories even more powerful. Overall, this book will definitely delight young readers and continue to entertain them even when they become adults.

G. Connor Salter, CLJ

INTERMEDIATE FICTION

Imagine...the Great Flood / (Imagine series; 1)
Barbour, 2017
ISBN 9781683221296
Grades 3-6 Rating: 4

Imagine...the Ten Plagues / (Imagine series; 2)
Barbour, 2018
ISBN 9781683223801
Grades 3-6 Rating: 4

Matt Koceich creates a new adventure series for readers that will capture their imagination as they experience the biblical events in these books.

In The Great Flood, Corey Max’s family is planning a move across the country, but 10-year-old Corey is not looking forward to it. While chasing his dog into the woods, Corey falls. Suddenly, life as he knows it—disappears. When he awakes, Corey is back in ancient Mesopotamia, just before the flood takes place. Corey experiences the story of Noah’s ark firsthand, including opposition to Noah’s venture.

In The Ten Plagues, 11-year-old Kai Wells faces a school bully. When the confrontation turns into a fight that knocks her out, everything changes. Kai wakes up in a field in ancient Egypt where the Israelites are enslaved. Moses goes to Pharaoh to ask for their freedom, and Kai experiences the story of the ten plagues that God sends to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

Koceich creates a world where a significant event is experienced through the eyes of an 8- to 12-year-old. Like the I Survived series by Lauren Tarshish, this biblical historical fiction series allows the reader to experience history through the eyes

Recommended for school and public libraries, especially fans of the *I Survived* series by Lauren Tarshish. Hopefully these are the first of many books in this series for young readers.

*Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ*
YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Story Peddler / by Lindsay A. Franklin. (The Weaver Trilogy; 1)
Enclave, 2018
ISBN 9781683701361
Grade 9 and up Rating: 5

Lindsay Franklin debuts a new young adult fantasy series where storytelling is a gift, one that a wicked king wants to control.

In The Story Peddler, an orphaned peasant girl Tanwen tells stories and weaves crystalized sculptures that she sells to her audience under the tutelage of a cruel mentor. Her dream is to become a Royal Storyteller someday. Tanwen travels around the countryside, selling “crowned” stories (official versions of the stories the way the king wants them told). One day she is telling a story and feels compelled to speak different words, words that tell the truth, but not the “crowned” version. That brings her to the attention of the king, and not in a good way. As the king’s guardsmen hunt her down, she is “rescued” by a band of rebels—story weavers with various gifts who teach her more about her gift. Tanwen discovers secrets about her gift and her family. On the run, will Tanwen find her destiny? Franklin does an excellent job of creating a world where spoken words have magic as they take on new meaning.

The cover shows colorful threads that the storyteller weaves together in telling the story. Her word pictures capture the imagination of the reader and the action builds with each turning page. Tanwen, Brac, Mor, and the other weavers are engaging characters. The dialogue is witty, the plot has several twists and turns, and the faith element is light but still inspirational (Creator vs. goddesses). This is a good vs. evil battle fantasy that will be enjoyed for its colorful imagery, rebels, traitors, unlikely heroes, a princess, a king, and more.


Carol R. Gehringer, worthy2read.wordpress.com

Refugee / by Alan Gratz
Scholastic Press, 2017
ISBN 9780545880831
Grades 7-10 Rating: 5

Three continents. Three different time periods. Three children fleeing their countries.

Alan Gratz joins the past and the present to weave a gripping tale of the harrowing experiences of three children forced from their homes due to war and political unrest.

Josef yearns to celebrate his upcoming bar mitzvah and finally become a man. He just never expected it to be on a ship bound for Cuba, which he and his family board to escape out of Nazi Germany. When the ship is forced to return to Europe, and perhaps certain death, Josef finds himself thrust into adulthood and must make a decision that will determine the survival of his family.

Fast forward to 1994 when Cuba is teeming with food shortages and riots. Teenage Isabel finds herself on a questionable homemade raft. Together with her family and the neighbors next door, they depart for the United States. They just need the raft to hold up, avoid the Coast Guard, pray the sharks don’t get them, and hope that her mother, heavy with child, can survive the journey.

On the other side of the world, in 2015, war tears Syria apart forcing Mahmoud’s father to seek a safe haven for his family. Amidst gunfire, danger, and the ever-present threat of death, they travel...
Refugee is a fast-paced, heart rending story of the strength and courage of children and their valiant efforts, despite all obstacles, to forge a life filled with meaning and purpose. 

Veronica Jorge, CLJ

The Thing with Feathers / by McCall Hoyle.

Blink, 2017
ISBN 9780310758518
Grades 9-12 Rating: 4

The only impression Emilie Day had of high school came from movies. And as a teenager with epilepsy, she never imagined she could do something as normal as attend school.

After her father dies, she gets the chance she never wanted. Her therapist, convinced that socializing would lift her spirits, advises Emilie’s mother to send her daughter to high school. Emilie is mortified by the idea of having seizures and blackouts in public, and she begs her mother not to make her go. They settle with a compromise: a three-month trial.

Mom’s biggest condition? Emilie has to tell all of her teachers and classmates about her epilepsy.

Vowing to make her “prison” sentence as short as possible, Emilie’s determined to keep her condition a secret and not to get attached... until the basketball star looks her way. But would even sweet Chatham York look down upon her for having epilepsy?

The Thing with Feathers challenges teen fiction readers to be authentic. While Emilie is both a humorous and thoughtful character, she creates most of the conflict within herself by trying to be someone else. The story opens the eyes of readers to see that people living with physical afflictions desire the same things as those without—acceptance.

Emilie faces depression and crippling fear because of her epilepsy, which feels realistic, but all of the other characters also have someone close to them who deals with a similar condition or other issue (mental illness, physical abuse, etc.). Despite Emilie’s hiding her ailment, no one judges her or has a negative reaction to hearing about her condition. Because of the other characters’ situations, Emilie is accepted by everyone and gets more friends—which feels unrealistic.

Overall, The Thing with Feathers gives a sassy first-person perspective of what it feels like to seek acceptance in spite of a physical struggle, like epilepsy. Readers of A Walk to Remember and The Fault in Our Stars who are looking for a story of hope and saccharine teen romance will love award-winning author McCall Hoyle’s heartwarming story.

Rebecca Schriner, CLJ

When We Collided / by Emery Lord.

Bloomsbury, 2016
ISBN 9781619638457
Grades 9-12 Rating: 4

When We Collided centers around two 16-year-old teenagers who connect in a memorable way in the small coastal California town of Verona Cove over one summer. Vivian “Vivi” Alexander is into art and quirky fashion, has boundless energy, and makes spontaneous decisions. Jonah Daniels is serious, rarely smiles, and passionate about cooking. When the teenagers meet at a local pottery
shop, they are immediately attracted to one another and become romantically involved. However, their relationship is profoundly affected by the tough issues both are facing in their lives. Vivi is dealing with mental illness and secretly tossing one of her prescription drugs into the ocean every day. Jonah is struggling to cope with the unforeseen death of his father, his mother’s debilitating depression, and parental and household responsibilities.

The story is told from the perspective of both Vivi and Jonah using alternating chapters in first person. This gives readers a realistic view of what the teenagers are thinking and feeling, and the effects emotional distress has not only on their relationship but also on friends and family members. The teenagers help each other cope with their individual challenges by offering support in a number of ways. For instance, although Jonah feels weighed down by responsibility, Vivi persuades him to relax and have fun, allowing Jonah to discover he enjoys acting carefree, even if only for a short time. On the occasions Vivi exhibits outlandish behavior, Jonah is the one who encourages her to rein in her actions. At the same time, the teenagers’ different personalities sometimes lead to conflicts, and an unplanned accident has a life-changing impact on both of them.

Emery Lord has written a compelling novel about what it means to live with mental illness and bereavement. The story includes profanity, discussions involving reincarnation, sexual innuendo and sexual intimacy, under-age drinking, and skinny dipping. In the author’s note, Lord encourages readers, who relate to what Vivi and Jonah are going through, to ask for help and provides resources that offer expertise in mental health issues.

Dianne Woodman, CLJ

Reclaiming Shilo Snow / by Mary Weber.

Thomas Nelson, 2018
ISBN 9780718080945
Grades 9-12 Rating: 4

Mary Weber continues the pulse-pounding story begun in The Evaporation of Sofi Snow, incorporating futuristic fantasy, political intrigue, and aliens. In Reclaiming Shilo Snow, 17-year-old Sofi Snow and her 19-year-old friend Miguel (Earth’s youngest ambassador to Delon) are trying to rescue her brother Shilo. She is convinced he is being held captive on Delon. Sofi and Miguel discover Earth is in danger from allies who are actually enemies and uncover secret dealings that involve the highest officials, maybe even Sofi’s mother, Inola! Meanwhile, Sofi and Shilo experience flashbacks that help reveal secrets from their past—they both survived an abduction and experimentation by the Delonese. Can Sofi, Shilo, and Miguel escape from Delon in time to save the Earth and the other children now held as captives?

Filled with tense suspense and drama, Reclaiming Shilo Snow draws the reader into a believable future world where details of one’s life are documented and available to those in authority. Told in alternating first-person points of view (Sofi, Miguel, and Inola), Reclaiming Shilo Snow picks up where The Evaporation of Sofi Snow ended but with a darker tone as Weber continues the themes of alien invasions, interplanetary politics, and human trafficking in this sequel.

Weber’s central point is “the minute I elevate my life above another’s – the moment I choose mine as more valuable for the survival of humanity – is the moment I begin to give away my humanity. And that is the moment we all begin to lose.” When we value ourselves more than others, we close our eyes to injustice around us. The main story lines are wrapped up in this final book – there’s sacri-
YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

Building Faith Block By Block: An Unofficial Minecraft Guide 60 A to Z (Kids Only) Survival Secrets
Harvest House Publishers, 2017
ISBN 9780736970853
Grades 4-9       Rating: 4

Building Faith Block by Block: Unofficial Minecraft Guide 60 A-to-Z (Kids Only) Survival Secrets by Michael Ross and Christopher Ross provides wonderful detail and interest to the reader. The book is a perfect combination of Minecraft elements and spiritual inspiration, and would be a useful tool for devotions whether at home with the kids or at church camp as a teacher or counselor.

Minecraft is a virtual game world and in Building Faith Block by Block readers enter the Minecraft world of Dragee90, a gamer who shares devotions. Even if the reader does not play Minecraft, the approach in this well-written book is very interesting, making it worth reading to see spiritual messages in another way and helping the reader relate to youth, many of whom are Minecraft fans. Each chapter presents two elements to help relate the game to life. First is “Gameplay”, including tips for Minecraft beginners and intermediate players on how to survive in this virtual world. Then follows “Real Life”, where readers learn about a daily struggle, with Bible verses to help.

When building in Minecraft, gamers have the option of starting over if things are not going as they wish. But, in reality decisions have real consequences. That’s why we have the Bible to help us make wise decisions and build a strong life’s foundation. Win the game of life with the Bible and enjoy the Minecraft world with a gamer’s guide that also provides devotional ideas.

One of the most amazing aspects of this book is that It is not only a great book to help with family devotions, but it was also written by a family. Michael Ross is an award-winning writer and Christopher is his teenage son. Their wife and mother, Tiffany Ross, helped with biblical accuracy.

Building Faith Block by Block is easy to read as well as understand, making it a perfect book that the reader can turn to for both gaming tips and use during devotional time.

Charity R. Bartley Howard, CLJ
ADULT FICTION

The Road to Paradise / by Karen Barnett. (A Vintage National Parks novel; 1)
Waterbrook, 2017
ISBN 9780735289543
Adult Rating: 5

Where the Fire Falls / by Karen Barnett. (A Vintage National Parks novel; 2)
Waterbrook, 2018
ISBN 9780735289567
Adult Rating: 5

Margie Lane, senator’s daughter, wants nothing more than to shirk the bustle and expectations of high society to live a Walden-esque life in The Road to Paradise. Her opportunity to do so has come in the form of a job at Mount Rainier National Park, much to the dismay of Chief Ranger Ford Brayden, who has been put in charge of her duties there. The two share a love of the mountain, but forces are at play that could strip the wilderness of its wild wonders—and Margie is saddled with the responsibility to save Mt. Rainier. She’s not sure if she can, but she is willing to die trying.

Olivia Rutherford does everything she can to distance herself from her father’s history in Where the Fire Falls. A talented artist, Olivia accepts the guidance of her art dealer on everything from how to dress and wear her hair to friend choices to accepting an assignment—in Yosemite. Due to its connections with her father and his past, the last place Olivia wants to go is Yosemite. And due to her appearance as a flapper and the wealthy socialites accompanying her, Clark Johnson, handsome park guide and former pastor, does not want to lead the trio through the park. Olivia and Clark will only have a chance at life and love if they learn that not all is as it seems.

Karen Barnett’s writing offers readers an escape to the great outdoors just prior to the Great Depression. The setting of both books is vital to the story line—in both books the characters need to overcome a fear of some kind related to the park or wilderness. The descriptions aid in creating a book vacation to the great outdoors, but do not slow the pacing of the plot. Also, the characters’ sensibilities are shaped by the time in which the books are set. Filled with romance and adventure and a bit of mystery, the plots of both books move quickly. While both books are enjoyable reads, they both deal with some weightier matters through which the characters must work. Both books offer readers a chance to walk with the characters as they overcome fear, learn to accept and rely on Jesus, and learn to accept grace.

“Dis-grace is a human term, Clark. God invented grace. No one can take it from you.” (Where the Fire Falls, p. 333)

Kristina Wolcott, CLJ

Justice Delayed / by Patricia Bradley. (A Memphis Cold Case Novel; 1)
Revell, 2017
ISBN 9780800727086
Adult Rating: 5

Justice Buried / by Patricia Bradley. (A Memphis Cold Case Novel; 2)
Revell, 2017
ISBN 9780800727123
Adult Rating: 5

In Justice Delayed, investigative journalist, Andi Hollister, obtains new information regarding the murder of her sister 18 years earlier. Andi’s friend is to be executed in three days when he receives a letter telling him he hadn’t committed the murder. Unfortunately, by the time Andi and Will, a cold-case detective, visit Jimmy in prison, the letter has
been stolen. Andi’s life is on the line while she seeks justice for her sister and tries to ascertain Jimmy’s guilt or innocence.

Kelsey Allen hopes to start a security consulting agency in Justice Buried. In the meantime, she consults for another company and her jobs include hacking computer and building security systems, as well as scaling walls and breaking into buildings without getting caught. When she is hired to work undercover at the Pink Palace Museum to investigate some missing items as well as check their security, she has no idea the current case will be so closely linked to a cold case that personally affects her. She also has no idea that accepting the position will bring her into regular contact with Brad Hollister—the boy she once had a crush on who crushed her feelings in return in high school. Now a cold case investigator, he is indispensable to closing the case and to keeping Kelsey alive.

Patricia Bradley’s Memphis Cold Case novels are a suspense lover’s delight! The plot takes off from the beginning and rockets to the end. While puzzling through information, the characters also have to puzzle through some of the intricacies of developing relationships. Though plot-driven, the strong female protagonists grow as they overcome personal hurdles. Plentiful dialogue moves the story along and unfolds the character’s personalities. As the characters take on their challenges, fall in love, solve crimes, and encounter deadly situations, they realize their need for God’s help in their journey.

Kristina Wolcott, CLJ

Crisis Shot / by Janice Cantore. (Line of Duty; 1)

Tyndale, 2017
ISBN 9781496423702
Adult Rating: 4

Tess O’Rourke followed in her father’s footsteps by joining the Long Beach Police Department, and she has high hopes of furthering her already distinguished career by becoming the chief of police. However, before she can realize this dream, she fatally shoots an unarmed teenager in defense of her fellow officer. The grand jury decides against pressing charges, but the damage has been done. Tess receives so much bad press that she realizes she has no choice but to leave the only home she’s ever known and take the lone job offer she has—police chief of Rogue Hollow, Oregon.

Tess struggles to find her place in this small, tight-knit town, but before long tragedy strikes: someone has been murdered and another is missing. Tess must draw on her vast experience to navigate the investigation that follows and uncover the dark secrets lurking in Rogue Hollow.

In Crisis Shot, Janice Cantore successfully weaves a plot rich in momentum and suspense. Though the murder and missing person investigation compose the majority of the book, she maintains a sense of urgency. She also succeeds in maintaining the suspense throughout by giving the reader clues along the way, but not such large clues that the resolution becomes obvious.

Cantore also succeeds in conveying an authenticity throughout her plot, something often missing from novels featuring police or detectives. As a retired police officer, her background is certainly advantageous in this regard, and she takes full advantage of it by including procedures and facts that ring with authenticity and in no way bore the reader. The resulting combination of momentum, suspense, and authenticity lends itself to an enter-
taining, interesting novel well worth a weekend read.

Rachel Pfeiffer, CLJ

Freedom’s Ring: A Novel / by Heidi Chiavaroli.

Tyndale House Publishers, 2017
ISBN 9781496423122
Adult Rating: 5

A ring declaring “victory belongs to the strong” helps two women enduring emotional trauma in Freedom’s Ring.

Anaya “Annie” David was a runner in the Boston Marathon the year it was bombed. Her rescuer places a ring in her hands and promises to find her. Two years later, Annie still has the ring but no information about the man who helped her. Nightmares plague her and guilt over injuries sustained by her niece at the bombing drives Annie away from her sister and her family. Reestablishing and forging relationships will require strength beyond what Annie can give.

Just prior to the Revolutionary War, Liberty Caldwell finds herself in Boston with the undesirable job of housekeeper for a British captain and lieutenant while she waits for news of her only living relative, her brother James. After the captain attacks her, Liberty steals some money from the captain and a ring from the lieutenant and runs away. The road she has to travel will require much strength, more than she alone can give.

Heidi Chiavaroli’s writing flows between past and present without any hitches. The dual plots force the characters to change, offering them a chance to either grow and overcome or wallow in defeat. Brief, intense scenes—the bombing and the rape—are not gratuitous. The point of both is to show how the characters choose to handle what has been done to them. The tension resulting from romance drama, a family mystery, and drama resulting from family relationship issues pushes the story along quickly. The dialogue is well-written, also keeping the story moving and spotlighting the characters’ personalities.

The theme of strength coming from the Lord weaves its way into Liberty’s and Annie’s lives. “I needed something more real. Something bigger than myself. Something—someone—stronger than me.” (p. 331) “I wasn’t strong. I was weak. The anchor, the horn...God was strong.” (p. 332)

Kristina Wolcott, CLJ

Death at Thorburn Hall / by Julianna Deering. (A Drew Farthering Mystery Series; 6)

Bethany House, 2017
ISBN 9780764218293
Adult Rating: 5

Death at Thorburn Hall is the sixth in this delightful mystery series. Drew Farthering is hoping for a relaxing time at the 1935 British Open in Scotland. But death continues to follow him; this time his host, Lord Rainsby, has a suspicious riding accident. What causes Drew’s apprehensions is that Rainsby had confided in Drew regarding his concerns towards his business partner—suspicions that he is embezzling funds.

As the story ensues, it seems that everyone Drew investigates has motive for killing his host. But he continues to slog through the clues with his lovely wife Madeline and best friend, Nick. Madeline is an excellent foil to Drew, very intelligent and intuitive. Nick and Carrie are a couple as well, although not married, but Nick is afraid the mystery and all that it encompasses may scare Carrie away. A little romance surrounds both couples and readers will find that a lovely addition to the story. The Fartherings have a sweet relationship
with each other and with the Lord, but the reader will not feel beaten over the head with Christianity.

Many compare Deering’s Farthinger mysteries to Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers.

Ceil Carey, CLJ

**Earlier Series Titles Reviewed by CLJ:** *Rules of Murder* (Jan/Feb/Mar/Apr 2015); *Death by the Book* (Jan/Feb/Mar/Apr 2015); *Murder at the Mikado* (Jan/Feb/Mar/Apr 2015); *Murder on the Moor* (Oct/Nov/Dec 2017).

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**The Newcomer / by Suzanne Woods Fisher.** *(Amish Beginnings; 2)*

Revell, 2017  
ISBN 9780800727499  
Adult Rating: 4

**The Return / by Suzanne Woods Fisher.** *(Amish Beginnings; 3)*

Revell, 2017  
ISBN 9780800727505  
Adult Rating: 4

Anna and Bairn’s story continues in *The Newcomer*. Having just arrived in the New World, Bairn finally reunites with the family who thought him dead. However, the years of living apart from his Amish family and faith are not so easily erased, and Bairn finds himself restless and unsure of where he belongs. When he is offered a position as first mate, he jumps at the chance.

Anna cannot believe he would leave her or his family so soon after finding them, and she begins to fear that the pull of the world and the sea will always keep him from her. Will Bairn find his way back to Anna and to his Amish roots? If so, will she still be waiting for him as she promised?

In *The Return*, Betsy Zook and Tessa Bauer find themselves infatuated with the same man, handsome Hans; however, it is clear that Hans’ affections lie with Betsy. When Betsy is captured by Natives and taken far from all she knows and loves, will her faith and the faith of a young Native man be enough to sustain her through her loss and heartache? Meanwhile, Tessa finally gains Hans’ attention, but will she ever win his heart?

In books two and three of Suzanne Woods Fisher’s “Amish Beginnings” series, old characters are revisited and new ones introduced, bringing the satisfaction of resolution and continued interest for fans of the first book. Fisher does an excellent job maintaining characterization throughout this series, while authentically merging fiction with history to weave a story of hope without shying away from the harsh realities of an untamed land. Romance, adventure, and suspense keep the pages turning, while the inner struggles and growth of the main characters will challenge and evoke a range of emotions.

Themes of forgiveness, coming home, letting go, and holding on are woven throughout the trials and lessons these characters endure along their personal journeys of life, love, and faith. Anna, Betsy, and Tessa are three women with unique personalities and experiences, but each possesses the same steadfast spirit necessary to survive the pioneer life. With its charm, flawed characters, and enduring faith, this series will be a favorite among fans of Amish and historical fiction.

Justina McBride, CLJ

**Earlier Series Title Reviewed by CLJ:** *Anna’s Crossing* (Oct/Nov/Dec 2016)
The Promise of Breeze Hill / by Pam Hillman. (A Natchez Trace Novel)

Tyndale, 2017
ISBN 9781496415929
Adult Rating: 5

With her brother murdered, her widowed sister-in-law pregnant, her father badly burned, and her home half-destroyed, Isabella Bartholomew longs for her pre-tragedy life. The once-prominent Breeze Hill now stands near-ruin, and young Isabella believes restoring her father’s estate is the only thing that will bring some normalcy back into the Bartholomew household.

Short on funds, Isabella takes a gamble to purchase indentured servant papers for Irishman Connor O’Shea, a carpenter seeking American passage for his brothers, hoping that the harvest will fund his service—that is, if no more misfortune befalls her family.

Connor, scorned by his former mistress, tries to keep focused on his work instead of the enchanting Isabella—though his struggle may be a lost cause. Ruffians, bandits, kidnappers, and courters keep bringing chaos to the Bartholomew family and bringing Connor and Isabella closer together. The misfortune of Breeze Hill begins to appear like a strategic attack. As disaster strikes, can Isabella protect the estate? And will Connor be able to keep her safe?

Because of the close third-person narration that alternates between Isabella’s and Connor’s perspectives, readers get to see their thoughts as they encounter thrilling feats and slowly fall in love. As scenes alternate, however, these main characters always seem to know what the other is thinking—often repeating information and merging these distinct voices.

This novel would fit well into any library’s Christian romance collection. Readers of Karen Witemeyer, Michelle Griep, and Regina Jennings will swoon over the romance in The Promise of Breeze Hill and be sucked into this can’t-put-down story.

Rebecca Schriner, CLJ

Egypt’s Sister: A Novel of Cleopatra / by Angela Hunt. (The Silent Years)

Bethany House, 2017
ISBN 9780764219320
Adult (YA) Rating: 4

As the daughter of the royal tutor, Chava is as close as a sister to the Princess Urbi of Egypt. A word from HaShem makes Chava believe that she and Urbi will be friends for a lifetime, even after Urbi unexpectedly ascends the throne as Queen Cleopatra. In order to fulfill Hashem’s words Chava rejects her own desires for a loving marriage, certain that she will be the Queen’s handmaiden soon enough. But a gift from Cleopatra forces Chava to choose either her friendship or her God. Tossed aside, forgotten, and eventually sold by the Queen, Chava is forced to leave her home and enter Rome on the bottom rung of society. She will have to keep her eyes on HaShem if she ever hopes to rise again.

In Egypt’s Sister, author Angela Hunt depicts women in ancient Egypt as having a great deal of freedom. This helps to make Chava more relatable to
young girls and women just starting their life, and the story presents valuable life lessons. Chava will take readers on a journey of growth, both spiritually and as a person. Young women will relate to Chava’s struggle to remain pure in a world with skewed morals and to chase after God’s will for their life.

Tatiana Bickler, CLJ

**Conspiracy of Silence / by Ronie Kendig.**

Bethany House, 2016
ISBN 9780764217654
Adult Rating: 5

Tzivia Khalon, an archaeologist, seeks to redeem her professional reputation following a disaster that happened three years earlier. She thinks her most current discovery will do just that in *Conspiracy of Silence*. Little does she know the threat found within the biblical era discovery. A special ops soldier, Cole “Tox” Russell, presumed dead by all who love him, returns when his country needs him to neutralize the assassin of the former vice president. As Tox assembles his team, forces are at work to access and proliferate a toxin that could kill those with whom it comes into contact. Haven “Kasey” Cortes, FBI deception detector, once had a schoolgirl crush on Cole, and now holds his freedom in her hands. Tox and his team must find not only the assassin responsible for so much death, but also those bent on spreading a plague.

Ronie Kendig’s suspenseful plot moves quickly. In addition to locating and taking down the assassin, the team of characters must find the source of the plague as well as its remedy before it spreads throughout the world. This mission takes them from the United States to Saudi Arabia, to India then Jerusalem, and finally to Syria and beyond. Each piece of the puzzle seems to add a new layer of history or mystery to their search. In addition to the high stakes plot, the characters face some life-changing realizations—if they can see them. Cole fears hurting those he loves more than anything and must overcome that fear if he is to have any meaningful relationships with them. Tzivias’s lack of faith blinds her to possibilities that could solve a devastating outbreak of a plague. Kasey feels dwarfed by the shadow of her sister which sometimes blinds her to feelings others have for her. As they seek answers and justice, they also seek redemption—some professional, some relational, and some spiritual. And whether they see it or not, Kendig shows that God is there—offering redemption and rescue all along the way.

Kristina Wolcott, CLJ

**The Saturday Night Supper Club / Carla Laureano. (A Supper Club Novel; 1)**

Tyndale House Publishers, 2018
ISBN 9781496420244
Adult Rating: 4

Award-winning author Carla Laureano pens a new contemporary romance series set in a supper club in Denver.

In *The Saturday Night Supper Club*, Rachel Bishop, part owner of a fine dining restaurant and James Beard Award-winning chef, finds herself the victim of an social media campaign when writer Alex Kanin’s article goes viral. It damages Rachel’s reputation, and she is pushed out of her restaurant business by her partners.

Alex realizes the article’s unintended effect on Rachel and tries to apologize by hosting a supper club in his home and inviting influential people. As they work together on this unique dinner party, they discover their feelings for one another are growing—and Rachel discovers her dreams might be different than she thought.

Laureano creates a tasty story with realistic char-
acters, a plausible storyline, a clean but delectable romance, and a sprinkling of faith tossed in. Alex’s backstory is a delightful addition to the storyline. The book has a dash of spice in the chemistry between Alex and Rachel, with rom-com moments and mouth-watering cooking descriptions. The culinary terminology is enjoyable, not overwhelming. One almost expects to see recipes in the back. All in all, The Saturday Night Supper Club is a delicious read for adults.

Recommended for public libraries and fans of Laureano’s earlier books. Watch for the next addition to this series: Brunch at Bittersweet Café (Spring 2019).

Carol R. Gehringer, worthy2read.wordpress.com

The Golden Vial / by Thomas Locke. (Legends of the Realm; 3)
Revell, 2018
ISBN 9780800723873
Adult (YA) Rating: 4

Award-winning author Thomas Locke continues his fantasy series for adults featuring elves, wizards, magic, and an orphan with special abilities.

In The Golden Vial, Hyam suffers from a strange wasting illness. Lady Shona leads her band of loyal followers to Hyam’s hometown to find answers, even if it means they must build new alliances and face deadly enemies.

Meanwhile, an orphaned servant girl named Dally, who lives in Hyam’s hometown, has kept her unique abilities a secret. But she may be the key to winning the final battle against an ancient evil threatening them. Will Dally step forward and embrace her role, and at what cost?

Locke builds a credible world (the Realm), a world in which no one is an innocent bystander in the eternal fight between good and evil. People can choose to ignore the evil around them and hope it goes away, or choose to fight it, using all their resources in trying to push back the darkness. Like most epic fantasies, this book includes sorcerers, elves, unusual creatures, dragons, and magic. Some would argue a Christian book shouldn’t have these elements, but they are essential to the overall plot. The Golden Vial is more engaging than the previous two books, Emissary and Merchant of Alyss. Surprisingly, Hyam plays a very minor role in this book after playing a major role in the earlier books. Readers are encouraged to read the other two books first to better understand the Realm and its story.

Recommended for adult collections in public libraries, and for fans of epic fantasy books by Patrick Carr and Jill Williamson.

Carol R. Gehringer, worthy2read.wordpress.com

Earlier Series Titles Reviewed by CLJ: Emissary (Nov/Dec 2015); Merchant of Alyss (Jan/Feb/Mar 2018).

Fault Lines / by Thomas Locke.
Revell, 2017
ISBN 9780800724375
Adult Rating: 4

Charlie Hazard’s meeting with the captivating and mysterious Dr. Gabriella McLaren is not by chance. Gabriella and her colleagues have opened an entirely new field into the human mind and its abilities, but to complete the study they need Charlie’s help. A rumored syndicate of the world’s rich and influential have learned of the new study and want it for themselves and they’ve hired Reese Clawson to do just that. Reese will use everything at her disposal to gain their knowledge or keep it from advancing any further. Charlie will have to rely on his military training to stay ahead of Reese Clawson to protect Gabriella, her team,
ADULTS’ BOOKS

and their study.

Thomas Locke doesn’t waste a moment grabbing the reader within the first paragraphs of chapter one. Locke can fashion a smoldering adventure packed with the right combination of action and mystery. Pulling the reader deeper, causing them to root for Charlie while simultaneously creating unsettling possibilities with an antagonist that seems to be prepared for Charlie’s every move, Thomas Locke forces the reader to turn the pages until the end.

*Fault Lines* is the prequel to Locke’s earlier two Fault Line novels, *Trial Run* and *Flash Point.*

*Cicely Ben, CLJ*

**With Love, Wherever You Are / by Dandi Daley Mackall.**

Tyndale House Publishers, 2017
ISBN 9781496421210
Adult Rating: 5

Helen Eberhart has her future all planned out: finish nurse’s training and get a job in the city and see the world. Love and war were not a part of that plan. Intern doctor Frank Daley has no desire for a career in the military; however, when Pearl Harbor is attacked, Frank has little choice but to sign up for deferment rather than risk being drafted and unable to finish his residency. Surely this war will be over before he graduates.

As the war drags on, Helen and Frank find themselves enlisted in the military, awaiting shipment overseas. While waiting on transfer orders, their paths cross at Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan and love quickly grows, leading to a swift marriage before they are both sent to different parts of Europe.

Amid the grim brutality of war and separation, Helen and Frank rely on their letters to sustain them through the hardships and heartaches they each endure. Will their young love prove strong enough to survive the fiery destruction of war or will it burn to ashes before it ever has a chance to deepen?

Dandi Daley Mackall’s *With Love, Wherever You Are* is an inspiring World War II romance novel based on the true love story of the author’s own parents. Her personal insight gleaned through her parents’ letters and stories lends a poignant authenticity and heart to this novel that sets it uniquely apart from others of its genre. That this story has a factual basis also adds to the suspense of the plot as readers cannot wait to find out how Frank and Helen’s story will end.

The narrative is told from the alternating perspectives of Helen and Frank. Their letters, dispersed throughout, bridge the gap between their separate experiences and show how their relationship grows. The primary theme is that true love is strong enough to survive the test of time and distance. This novel is more than a romance novel; it is a story of heroism and sacrifice that honors the men and women who gave their lives in service to their country.

*Justina McBride, CLJ*

**Leveraging Lincoln: A Civil War Novel / by Stephenia H. McGee. (The Liberator; 1)**

Vine Press, 2017
ISBN 9780997866018
Adult Rating: 5

**Losing Lincoln / by Stephenia H. McGee. (The Liberator; 2)**

Vine Press, 2017
ISBN 9780997866025
Adult Rating: 5

**Labeling Lincoln / by Stephenia H. McGee.**
Caught in the middle of the Civil War, Annabelle Ross runs a hospital from her Southern plantation, sending partially recovered soldiers back to war and burying the rest. In Leveraging Lincoln, Annabelle is looking for any excuse to avoid marrying her step-uncle, a scheme that would allow her grandfather to claim her land. When a soldier passes her an urgent note for the Confederate army, she tries to fulfill his dying wish by delivering the message. She is apprehended as a spy until Matthew, a wounded soldier, helps her escape. Could his brother, a prisoner of war, have been her childhood betrothed and the only one who could help save her land? Or is Matthew planning to use the note to kidnap the Union president?

In Losing Lincoln, Matthew and Annabelle have escaped Booth’s president-kidnapping conspiracy and are searching for George, Matthew’s brother. Their prayers are answered when a flood allows George to escape his prison camp. Despite Matthew’s affection toward Annabelle, he leaves her to fall for his brother. Matthew follows one of the conspirators back to their crazed leader, O’Malley, in hopes of stopping the kidnapping. Will Matthew and Annabelle’s attempts to protect Lincoln be enough to save him?

Labeling Lincoln exposes the aftermath of the assassination of Lincoln. Annabelle, Matthew, and George are detained—despite trying to help the police. Believing he has no choice, Matthew signs allegiance papers to help the Union army track Booth and free his brother and love. After being kidnapped by a vicious O’Malley, Matthew’s chances of returning to Annabelle appear slim.

While the first two books focus on the plot with subtle moral lessons, the third book is more preachy. Ideas such as the evils of alcohol, lying, and hate turning into drunkenness, deceit, and demon possession pervade this final chapter. The answer to overcoming all these problems is love and God. Regardless of the overdone conclusion, this is a wonderful series.

Every detail of The Liberator trilogy proves author Stephenia McGee’s dedication to research. Her writing is clear and compelling, leaving the perfect amount of suspense to keep readers flipping pages. She chooses to focus on loveable, fictional characters to tell Lincoln’s story. Adult readers of historical fiction and romance will fall in love with this twist on Lincoln’s assassination.

Rebecca Schriner, CLJ

How Sweet the Sound / by Amy K. Sorrells.

A storm is brewing over Bay Spring, Alabama and 13-year-old Anniston Harlan finds her family and herself at the very center. She thought she had already survived the worst storm of her life when Hurricane Frederic touched down, destroying a large portion of her family’s pecan orchard a few months ago. Nothing, however, could have prepared her for the tragedy that was soon to strike, changing her life forever. How will she find her way through the darkness and hidden secrets surrounding her family?

Comfort Harlan, Anniston’s aunt, seems to have everything a woman living a life of privilege could want—the looks of a pageant beauty queen and the love of her childhood sweetheart. However, she has always lacked one thing: her mother’s love and approval. Just after the announcement of her upcoming marriage, a violent act steals Comfort’s
very will to live, tearing down the protective walls her mind constructed long ago to hide memories too dark to face.

The Harlan family may be at the top of the social ladder, the leading pillars in their southern town, but the glitter of wealth and prestige can only conceal the darkness so long.

Amy K. Sorrells’ novel How Sweet the Sound is not for the faint of heart, addressing incest, rape, and suicide. It is a journey through a dark valley that brings with it a range of emotions from rage to forgiveness, defeat to hope, and sorrow to joy. The story is told through Anniston’s and Comfort’s alternating perspectives. Anniston’s character and point of view help balance the darkness of this tale with her young perspective on life and big heart that reaches to the outcasts and hurting. Comfort’s thoughts and inward battle provide a heartrending glimpse into the life of one who’s innocence has been lost in the most atrocious ways. The reaction of the town to her tragedy mirrors a reality that all too often places the blame and shame on the victim. Overall, as its name rightly attests, this story is truly a picture of amazing grace and its work of sweet healing, redemption, and restoration.

Justina McBride, CLJ

Troubled Water / by Susan May Warren. (Montana Rescue; 4)

Revell, 2018
ISBN 9780800727468
Adult Rating: 4

Bestselling author Susan May Warren presents another installment in her Montana Rescue series, a contemporary romance series with elements of suspense, adventure, and happily-ever-after endings—but only after major challenges are resolved.

In Troubled Waters, Ian Shaw and Sierra Rose have fought their attraction to one another. Their journey to a happy ending has been disrupted by misunderstandings, secrets, and singular focus on (some would say obsession with) a niece’s disappearance. As long as Ian’s niece Esme is missing, that is his primary focus, causing him to have no room for anyone else in his life. When Sierra solves the mystery of Esme’s disappearance but promises Esme to keep it a secret from Ian, it causes difficulties in their being together.

Sierra uses Ian’s yacht for a PEAK Rescue fund-raising excursion for his friends. Things go amiss, causing the yacht to capsize in the Caribbean, and all its passengers to be scattered. Ian and Sierra are washed up on an empty shore. Will they find their way back home, and to rebuilding a relationship with one another?

Susan May Warren returns with another adrenalin-packed adventure/contemporary romance. Characters from earlier books return and their stories continue. Warren includes a faith element that is present but not preachy, romance that is evident but clean, flawed characters the reader will relate to, and thrilling adventure that will keep the reader on the edge of their seat.

Recommended for public libraries and church libraries. The next book in the series, Storm Front, was released in May 2018 (and will be reviewed in the next issue of CLJ).

Carol R. Gehringer, CLJ

ADULT NONFICTION

Mere Science and Christian Faith / by Greg Cootsona.
IVP Books, 2018
ISBN 9780830838141
Adult Rating: 5

Greg Cootsona, writer and researcher with a Ph.D. from Theological Union, draws from his experience in ministry with young adults (emerging adults to use Cootsona’s terminology and referring to 18-30 year olds) and his theological expertise, to explore how faith and science are not in a wrestling match where one will be the victor. *Mere Science and Christian Faith* is written conversationally rather than didactically, and provides a field guide that identifies challenges and creative ways faith can integrate and collaborate with science, whether in concern for environment, an understanding of human sexuality, or the ubiquitous presence of smart media which changes how we relate to each other and the community. Quotes from young adults that relate to chapter themes are sprinkled throughout the narrative. Current scientists like Katherine Hayhoe and Elaine Ecklund are cited, as well as writers on the philosophy of science like Ian Barbour, and theologians like Arthur Peacocke.

Cootsona notes that emerging adults are leaving the church in record numbers or that increasing numbers identify as “spiritual but not religious.” He is concerned that the church too often creates a suspicion of mainstream science, and that when the church does talk about science, it often focuses on conflict instead of embracing that God as first cause works through secondary, intermediate, and natural causes. He sees it as a natural given for mainstream scientists to hold onto Christian faith.

Both the narrative and footnotes point readers to further resources in print and online.

Leroy Hommerding, CLJ

Barbour Books, 2018
ISBN 9781683225638
Adult Rating: 4

In this work, Donna K. Maltese provides a compilation of excerpts from four Christian writers: John Wesley, E. M. Bounds, Andrew Murray, and S. D. Gordon. Through the words of these men, this collection of writings expounds on the topic of prayer using a “Who”, “What”, “When”, “Where”, “Why”, and “How” framework. Each author has a few contributing pieces within each section and subsection, providing a range of insight and varying perspectives on each topic. Many of the excerpts also include a Scripture passage to which the writer was referring, providing direct biblical connections alongside the interpretations or implications drawn out by the writer.

Though this combination of authors and pieces of their larger works does provide the reader with distinct perspectives and a broad understanding of the topic of prayer, the nature of the compilation makes for a disjointed reading experience. With excerpts ranging from a few words to a few pages in length, the subsections or topics within each section often change rather abruptly. Nevertheless, for those interested in growing in their understanding of and engagement in prayer, Maltese’s compilation provides excellent and diverse insight into the multifaceted practice of prayer in a neatly organized fashion.

Elisabeth A. Orr, CLJ
#NotYourPrincess: Voices of Native American Women 22  
The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives 21  
All Around Us 12  
Amish Beginnings; 2-3 33  
Barnes, Derrick D 13  
Barnett, Karen 31  
Behar, Ruth 20  
Big Cat, little cat 12  
Bradley, Patricia 31  
Brown, Monica 16  
Building Faith Block By Block: An Unofficial Minecraft Guide 60 A to Z (Kids Only) Survival Secrets 30  
Burcaw, Shane 18  
Butler, Dori Hillestad; illustrated by Meyers, Nancy 14  
Cantore, Janice 32  
Cartaya, Pablo 19  
Charleyboy, Lisa, editor. 22  
Chiavaroli, Heidi 33  
Chin, Jason 16  
Conspiracy of Silence 36  
Cooper, Elisha 12  
Cootsona, Greg 41  
Crisis Shot 32  
Crow: An Ode to the Fresh Cut 13  
Death at Thorburn Hall 33  
Deering, Julianna 33  
A Different Pond 13  
Drew Farthinger Mystery Series; 6 34  
Egypt’s Sister: A Novel of Cleopatra 35  
Elya, Susan Middleton 14  
The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora 19  
Erskine, Kathryn 17  
Fault Lines 37  
The First Rule of Punk 19  
Fisher, Suzanne Woods 34  
Franklin, Lindsay A. 27  
Freedom's Ring: A Novel 33  
Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos 16  
Frier, Raphaële; illustrated by Aurélia Fronty 17  
Fritz, C. S. 25  
Garcia, Adriana M. 12  
Gardner, Whitney 21  
The Golden Vial 37  
González, Xelena 12  
Good Night Tales: A Family Treasury of Read-Aloud Stories 25  
Grand Canyon 16  
Gratz, Alan 27  
Green, Shari 15  
Heiligman, Deborah 23  
Hillman, Pam 35  
How Sweet the Sound 39  
How to Live a Life of Prayer: Classic Christian Writers on the Divine Privilege of Prayer 41  
Hoyle, McCall 28  
Hunt, Angela 35  
Imagine series; 1-2 25  
Imagine...the Great Flood 25  
Imagine...the Ten Plagues 25  
Justice Buried 31  
Justice Delayed 31  
Kendig, Ronie 36  
King & Kayla and the Case of the Missing Dog Treats 14  
James, Gordon C. 13  
Koechich, Matt 25  
Kwame Alexander 18  
La Princesa and the Pea 14  
Labeling Lincoln 38  
Laureano, Carla 36  
Leatherdale, Mary Beth, editor 22  
Legends of the Realm; 3 37  
Leveraging Lincoln: A Civil War Novel 38  
The Liberator; 1-3 38  
Line of Duty; 1 32  
Locke, Thomas 37  
Locke, Thomas 37  
Lord, Emery 28  
Losing Lincoln 38  
Lucky Broken Girl 20  
Mackall, Dandi Daley 38  
Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess 15  
Malala: Activist for Girls’ Education 17  
Mama Africa! How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope with Her Song 17  
Martinez-Neal, Juana 14  
McGee, Stephenia 38  
A Memphis Cold Case Novel; 1-2 31  
Mere Science and Christian Faith 41  
Montana Rescue; 4 40  
My Kite Is Stuck! And Other Stories 15  
A Natchez Trace Novel 35  
The Newcomer 34  
Newman, Patricia 22  
Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask about Having a Disability 18  
Out of wonder: poems celebrating poets 18  
Palmer, Charly 17  
Parra, John 16  
Perez, Celia 19  
Phi, Bao 13  
The Promise of Breeze Hill 35  
Reclaiming Shilo Snow 29  
Refugee 27  
The Return 34  
The Road to Paradise 31  
Ross, Michael; Ross, Christopher 30  
Sandler, Martin W 24  
The Saturday Night Supper Club 36  
Sea Otter Heroes: The Predators That Saved an Ecosystem 22  
The Silent Years 35  
Slater, Dashka 21  
Sorrells, Amy K. 39  
The Story Peddler 27  
A Supper Club Novel; 1 36  
The Thing with Feathers 28  
Troubled Water 40  
Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers 23  
A Vintage National Parks novel; 1-2 31  
Warren, Susan May 40  
The Weaver Trilogy; 1 27  
Weber, Mary 29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wesley, John</td>
<td>When We Collided</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where the Fire Falls</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Whydah: A Pirate Ship Feared, Wrecked &amp; Found</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon, Salina</td>
<td>With Love, Wherever You Are</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You're Welcome, Universe</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>