

## Manuscript SLJ

### Presenting the 2017 USBBY Outstanding International Books List

“An Invitation to Re-View, Re-Think, Re-Value”

By Holly Johnson

Following over a decade of effort by publishers, authors, librarians, and teachers to offer engaging literature for young people from across the world, the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) continues this endeavor by highlighting impressive international titles that contain literary and artistic value as well as unique cultural perspectives. The 2017 Outstanding International books (OIB) list gathers 41 books that will delight and enlighten readers with a variety of experiences found within narratives and informational texts from or set in countries such as Brazil, Netherlands, India, Norway, Australia, and our neighbor to the north, Canada.

The OIB list this year invites readers to re-view, re-think, and re-value. During a time when many have grappled with intolerance and misunderstandings, these books suggest readers “look again” and recognize that while we are different—culturally or geographically—we are still connected and still hold many common values. These books present unique experiences that resonate with the essence of a common humanity. These narratives also ask readers to “think again” about their communities and those within them. To consider those who are part of the human or animal family in ways that remind us that we strive together in our endeavors. Finally, these works encourage young people to re-evaluate what they may have dismissed because of difference.

These books are filled with the young striving to reach outside their own way of knowing or wrestling with the boundaries of community when circumstances are less than optimal. Other narratives give readers a glimpse inside, where the heart and mind reside, into dreams and perhaps even nightmares. All reach beyond the individual experience in ways that create compassion for and connection to others, to self, and to the wider world. Each beckons with a charm of its own, requesting, prodding, or enticing readers to see, to question, and to value beyond the previously presented so as to become more conscious and conscientious.

As with all OIB lists, reading levels are suggested, but these are only guidelines. Enjoy all these stories as a way of creating possibilities to look more deeply, think more expansively, and care more inclusively. Outstanding international books compel us to reach out, and to begin again.

#### Grades P-2

DEGENNARO, SUE. **The Pros and Cons of Being a Frog.** illus. by the author. Simon & Schuster (Australia)

A keen interest in numbers and a penchant for costuming become the basis for a not only a friendship but bridging and appreciating communication differences between a young girl and boy.

DUBUC, Marianne. **The Animals' Ark.** tr. from French. illus. by author. Kids Can Press.

(Canada)

This playful and humorous variation of Noah's ark finds a joyous group of animals becoming increasingly anxious as they run out of ways to entertain themselves in a crowded space. The sighting of land is certainly welcomed!

HIRST, Daisy. **The Girl with the Parrot on her Head.** illus. by the author. Candlewick Press.  
(England)

After her best friend moves away, Isabel decides it's better to be by herself and develops a system of sorting all the things in her room into boxes. But the system is flawed: there is one box that is full of wolves...

HOHN, Nadia L. **Malaika's Costume.** illus. by Irene Luxbacher. Greenwood Books.  
(Canada/set in the Caribbean)

Inspired by the colors of the Caribbean, this lively picturebook chronicles Malaika's life with her grandmother while her mother is in Canada trying to find work. Without the funds to buy a carnival costume, Malaika and her grandmother use their creativity to create the perfect outfit.

LANTHIER, Jennifer. **Hurry Up, Henry.** illus. by Isabelle Malenfant. Puffin Books/Penguin Books. (Canada)

Always late, Henry stops to look at everything. His grandmother "gives" his hurry-up family an extra hour so they, too, can learn to appreciate that not everyone needs to go through a day at the same pace.

LEROY, Jean. **A Well-Mannered Young Wolf.** tr. from French. illus. by Matthieu Maudet.  
Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. (France)

In this humorous trickster tale, a young, very polite but hungry wolf, encounters savvy prey. The book ends with a delightful ironic twist.

O'LEARY, Sara. **A Family is a Family is a Family.** illus. by Qin Leng. Greenwood Books.  
(Canada)

When students must present something about their families, one girl doesn't want to talk at all. Only after she's heard about the diverse home lives of her twelve classmates does she share. Powerful illustrations and sparse text serve to validate the love she receives from her foster family.

ROCHA, Ruth. **Lines, Squiggles, Letters, Words.** tr. from Portuguese by Lynn Miller-Lochman. illus. by Madalena Matoso. Enchanted Lion Books. (Brazil)

Young Pedro is mystified about the signs and objects in his neighborhood; when he starts school and learns his alphabet, he finds joy in recognizing the squiggles are letters and words! Wonderfully illustrated, readers follow Pedro as he makes his developmental journey.

SANNA, Francesca. **The Journey.** illus. by the author. Flying Eye Books/Nobrow. (UK)

The Journey becomes that of any one of millions of refugee families who are forced to flee into the unknown. The pacing of the text and expressionistic art serve to show the young person's perspective of the intangible, unknowable, unfathomable and terrifying forces at play.

STARK, Ulf. **The Midsummer Tomte and the Little Rabbits.** tr. from Swedish by Susan Beard. illus. by Eva Eriksson. Floris Books (Sweden)

A delightful fairy-tale about a little gnome-tomte that helps rescue all the small animals of the forest, including rabbits, squirrels, mice, and hedgehogs during a summer flood that occurs just before their midsummer festival. The colorful illustrations aptly replicate their wonderful celebration and survival.

VISWANATH, Shobha. **The Blue Jackal.** illus. by Dileep Joshi. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. (India)

This retelling of an ancient Indian tale involves the jackal's rise to king and his comeuppance when he is discovered to be a fraud. White line drawing from the Warli tradition flow across the pages.

### Grades 3-5

ARGUETA, Jorge. **Somos Como Las Nubes/ We Are Like the Clouds.** tr. by Elisa Amado. illus. by Alfonso Ruano. Groundwood Books. (Canada).

A series of bilingual poems capturing the struggles, hopes, and fears of displaced children who migrate along the long journey from Central America to the southern border of the United States. Enhanced by captivating illustrations, the poems highlight multiple perspectives and the variety of individuals along the route.

CORNILLE, Didier. **Who Built That? Bridges: An Introduction to Ten Great Bridges and Their Designers.** tr. from French by Yolanda Stern Broad. illus. by the author. Princeton Architectural Press. (France).

An unusual format and detailed illustrations highlight ten bridges from around the world built from 1779 to 2013. Each section also highlights the engineers and architects responsible for these amazing structures.

FABER, Polly. **Mango & Bambang, the Not-a-Pig.** illus. By Clara Vulliamy. Candlewick Press. (UK)

Lonely but amiable and resourceful, urbanite Mango befriends a tapir who's lost his way in her city. In an "animal-comes-to-the-city" tradition, the interactions within Mango's neighborhood are fraught with misunderstandings and humor as neighbors encounter Tapir's peculiarities. Ultimately, Mango and Bambang's friendship proves delightful.

FENTON, Corinne. **Bob the Railway Dog: The True Story of an Adventurous Dog.** illus. by Andrew McLean. Candlewick Books. (Australia).

A delightful narrative based on actual events is the story of Bob, a stray dog adopted by a railway engineer in 1884. Befriending engineers along the railways, Bob travels from mining towns to farming towns and through Australia's smallest outposts and largest cities tracing the routes and expansion of railroads in the 19th century.

HURST, Elise. **Imagine a City.** illus. by the author. Doubleday. (Canada)

Follow two children as they enter a pen-and-ink literary wonderland where the imagination soars, characters and concepts from across classics in literature allow readers to imagine that the world of books is a place where anything is possible!

KRISHNASWAMI, Uma. **Book Uncle and Me.** illus. by Julianna Swaney. Groundwood Books. (Canada/set in India)

When book-loving Yasmin's favorite free library is threatened with shut down, a book and words from her teacher prompt her to get involved in local politics. An inspiring book that highlights young people's agency and the changes that come from community involvement.

KUHLMANN, Torben. **Armstrong: The Adventurous Journey of a Mouse to the Moon.** tr. from German by David Henry Wilson. illus. by the author. NorthSouth Books. (Germany)

A masterful picturebook chronicling a mouse that--convinced by his research that the moon is not cheese but stone--sets out to prove it by developing and flying his own space ship there in 1955, setting the stage for a later human journey.

KUHN, Camilla. **Samira and the Skeletons.** tr. from Norwegian by Don Bartlett. illus. by author. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. (Norway)

A humorous story, wonderfully delivered through text and image. Samira is shaken when she learns at school that everyone has a skeleton inside them. She begins to see everyone as walking bones and even asks her mom to help her escape her own skeleton.

LAGERCRANTZ, Rose. **Life According to Dani.** tr. from Swedish by Julia Marshall. illus. by Eva Eriksson. Gecko Press. (Sweden)

Dani's carefree island vacation with her best friend is interrupted by the arrival of her father and his new girlfriend who Dani fears will replace her in his affections.

MARTINS, Isabel Minhós. **Don't Cross the Line.** tr. from Portuguese by Daniel Hahn. illus. by Bernardo P. Carvalho. Gecko Books. (Portugal).

A humorous, metafictional picturebook about totalitarianism, the freedom of movement, and peaceful revolution. A guard attempts to keep the right hand page of the book free for a general, but an increasingly large crowd gets restive. And then a ball breaks through the barrier/gutter, followed by two children! What could happen next?

MULLER, Gerda. **A Year in Our New Garden.** tr. from German. illus. by the author. Floris Books. (Germany)

A new family moves into a house that has a neglected garden. With the help of a boy next door they transform it into a small paradise in the middle of the city. Children learn a lot about gardening and the wonders of nature.

PARVELA, Timo. **Bicycling to the Moon.** tr. from Finnish by Ruth Urbom. illus. by Virpi Talvitie. Gecko Press (Finland)

The friendship of Barker and Purdy is humorously tested as this daredevil cat and cautious dog share their adventures in twenty interconnected stories.

PINFOLD, Levi. **Greenling**. illus. by the author. Templar Books/Candlewick Press. (Australia)  
A faintly sinister but equally inspiring ecological fable about a baby the Barleycorns discover and nurture in their home in the Australian outback, and who, in turn, nourishes them for the entire growing season – but then what? Illustrations in the palette of the Outback create a visual wonder for any audience.

ROSSELL, Judith. **Withering-by-Sea**. illus. by the author. Atheneum/Simon and Schuster.  
(Australia)

In spite of the efforts of her three awful aunts, 11-year-old orphan Stella Montgomery finds high adventure in a Victorian sanitarium, in which she acquires a mysterious, maybe magic-filled bottle, witnesses a murder, and then getting kidnapped, trapped, and rescued. Making friends, and beginning to wonder about her true identity are also aspects of Stella's new environment.

SANABRIA, José. **As Time Went By**. tr. from German by NorthSouth Books. illus. by the author. NorthSouth Books. (Switzerland)

Told through the eyes of a once great luxury liner, this luminous narrative illustrates fragility and fluidity of social class, assumed or assigned, with immediacy and succinctness, to depict the ongoing perpetual cycle of human migration.

## Grades 6-8

BOGART, Jo Ellen. **The White Cat and the Monk: A Retelling of the Poem "Pangur Bán"**. illus. by Sydney Smith. Greenwood Books. (Canada)

A charming version of an ancient, simple poem in which a ninth century Irish monk compares his life of quiet search for knowledge to that of his cat who pursues its prey, illustrated in a way that recalls medieval manuscripts.

DAVIES, Linda. **Longbow Girl**. Chicken House/Scholastic. (UK)

Mystery, adventure, time travel, historical fiction, legend, a classic villain and a strong, female hero, class differences, athletics, all set against the backdrop of Wales, may seem like too many devices to include in one book, but Davies weaves these tropes together with captivating success.

HARDSTAFF, Jane. **The Executioner's Daughter**. Carolrhoda Books. (UK)

Twelve-year-old Moss has lived all her life in the Tower of London with her father, who serves as the executioner for King Henry VIII. She detests this life and runs away, meeting a new friend and the fearful Riverwitch that roams the River Thames.

LEA, Synne. **Night Guard**. tr. from Norwegian by John Irons. illus. by Stian Hole. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. (Norway)

A wondrous and beautiful volume of expressionistic poems are paired with surreal illustrations creates a series of meditations on family relationships that explore isolation, fear, uncertainty and friendship.

LEWIS, Amanda West. **The Pact**. Red Deer Press. (Canada/set in Germany)  
Peter Gruber and his friends join the Hitler Youth Movement as children in 1939. What starts as an adventurous extracurricular activity turns into a nightmare as the boys endure training, relocations, and destruction of their home city of Hamburg.

LUURTSEMA, Nat. **Goldfish**. Feiwel and Friends/Macmillan. (UK)  
After failing swim trials for an Olympic training program, Louise Brown finds too much time on her hands and turns to coaching a trio of popular boys to water-based fame. Delightfully humorous, the protagonist's sense of the world is refreshing and honest.

STEVENSON, Robin. **Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community**. Orca. (Canada)  
Concise but astonishingly thorough summary of key events, change-makers and evolution of the PRIDE movement and those whose lives it enriches throughout North America and around the world. The richly colored photographs flank the text in a brilliant design reflective of a PRIDE parade itself.

SVINGEN, Arne. **The Ballad of a Broken Nose**. tr. from Norwegian by Kari Dickinson.  
Margaret K. McElderry Books/Simon & Schuster. (Norway)  
A stirring narrative of young Bart, who copes with his dysfunctional single parent along with his public housing environment by singing arias in secret, taking boxing lessons in public, and opening himself up to friendship in unexpected places.

## Grades 9-12

ACIOLI, Socorro. **The Head of the Saint**. tr. from Portuguese by Daniel Hahn. Delacorte Press.  
(Brazil)  
Faith and magic intertwine in this story of Samuel living in the concrete head of a saint, answering the prayers of the villagers, trying to fulfill his mother's last wishes and also discover who is singing to him.

DOWNHAM, Jenny. **Unbecoming**. David Fickling Books/Scholastic (UK)  
Three generations of women – estrange grandmother, freshly divorced mother, and a daughter who tries to find who she is and whom she loves. Katie and her special needs brother got involved into taking care of their grandmother, an elderly woman with the Alzheimer disease.

HARDINGE, Frances. **The Lie Tree**. Amulet Books/Abrams (UK)  
Modest and well-mannered Faith Sunderly is burning with questions and curiosity. After her father's death which was no accident, she discovers a tree that bears fruit only when she whispers a lie to it. The fruit, in turn, delivers a hidden truth.

WILLIAMSON, Lisa. **The Art of Being Normal**. Margaret Ferguson Books/Farrar Straus Giroux. (UK)  
An engrossing narrative about two fourteen-year-olds living on the outskirts of London form a special friendship as one is bullied and the other intervenes. They find they are both grappling with gender identity and the meaning of being "normal".

WOLTZ, Anna. **A Hundred Hours of Night**. tr. from Dutch by Laura Watkinson. Arthur A. Levine/Scholastic. (Netherlands)

As Hurricane Sandy descends on New York City, 15-year-old Dutch runaway Emilia finds shelter and comfort with others facing similar personal dilemmas.

WRIGHT, David & BOUCHARD, Lu. **Away Running**. Orca. (Canada/set in France).

Inspired by a tragic event in Paris and the authors' experiences, this is a captivating story about Freeman, a black football player from San Antonio, and Matt, a white quarterback from Montreal, who find themselves playing American football in a predominantly Muslim immigrant suburb that is rife with ethnic tensions and police brutality.

WUNG-SUNG, Jesper. **The Last Execution**. tr. from Danish by Lindy Falk van Rooyen. A Caitlyn Dlouhy Book/Atheneum. (Denmark)

A gripping tale based on the last execution in Denmark, the events leading up to a 15-year-old boy's execution are seen from multiple and complex perspectives. Emotionally stirring and thought-provoking, this narrative is both timely and historic.

**The 2017 Outstanding International Book Committee:** Holly Johnson (Chair) Cincinnati, OH; Olga Bukhina, New York; Debra Gold, Beechwood, OH; Petros Panaou, Athens, GA; Carol Sibley, Dilworth, MN; Martha Walke, So. Strafford, VT; Kathy Isaacs, Pasadena, MD; Mary Beth Dunhouse, Boston, MA; Bindy Fleischman, Newton, MA.