

Maine Student Book Award
2017-2018 Reading List ((2016 copyright))
*A joint project of: Maine Library Association, Maine Association of School
Libraries and Maine Literacy Council*

Anderson, John David. ***Ms. Bixby's Last Day***. HarperCollins. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 300 pgs. Good read aloud. Three sixth-grade boys spend a disaster-filled day in the city playing hooky from school in hopes of giving their teacher, hospitalized with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, a special day. Readers get to know Topher, Steve, and Brand and each boy's story as their well-intentioned plans go awry. Hard to put down. ISBN: 978-0-06-233817-4.

Angleberger, Tom and Dellinger, Paul. ***Fuzzy***. Amulet Books. Science fiction. Gr. 4+. 263 pgs. Good read aloud. Imagine your school is studying artificial intelligence and you are assigned to help the new student, Fuzzy, (a robot!) navigate middle school. Seventh grader Maxine mentors Fuzzy but both wind up in trouble with Barbara, the supercomputer vice principal in this thought-provoking and entertaining read. ISBN: 978-1-41972-122-9

Bauer, Joan. ***Soar***. Viking. Sports fiction. Gr. 4+. 296 pgs. Good read aloud. Jeremiah, who had a heart transplant at the age of 10, is determined to bring baseball back to the small Ohio town where he moves. He can't play, but can this unforgettable character convince classmates to revive the local Muskrat team in spite of the recent scandal involving one of the town's young players? ISBN: 978-0-451-47034-8

Bauer, Marion Dane. ***Little Cat's Luck***. Simon & Schuster. Poetic narrative. Gr. 4+. 211 pgs. Good read aloud. Patches leaves home, chasing after a wind-blown autumn leaf, until she is lost. She thinks she finds refuge in what turns out to be the doghouse of a mean and lonely dog, Gus. Readers will delight in this charming story, rich in description and suspense. ISBN: 978-1-48142-488-2.

Ashley, Bryan. ***Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life***. Atheneum. Poetry. Gr. 4+. Unpaged. Good read aloud. Combining paintings and poetry, Bryan brings to life the hopes and dreams of 11 slaves who were listed as part of the property for sale in an 1828 estate's auction. Bryan imagines each person's ancestry, talents, and hopes — in stark contrast to the lives they were forced to lead on someone else's plantation. ISBN: 978-1-48145-690-6.

Budhos, Marina Tamar. ***Watched***. Wendy Lamb Books. Realistic fiction. Gr. 6+. 265 pgs. Nadeem, a teenager in Queens who emigrated from Bangladesh, finds himself in trouble with the police. Should he become an informer/spy in his neighborhood or face criminal charges? Nadeem's decision is fraught with unseen consequences. Who should he trust? What is community? ISBN: 978-0-553-53418-4.

Burg, Ann E. ***Unbound: A Novel in Verse***. Scholastic. Poetic narrative. Gr. 4+. 345 pgs. Good read aloud. Fiesty Grace, a 9-year-old in Virginia, is sent to the Big House from the slave cabins to work in the plantation kitchen. Her questioning attitude angers the Missus who is determined to teach Grace a lesson at an unbearable price. Based on historical research about the Great Dismal Swamp, this is a story of terror and love; inhumanity and resolve. ISBN: 978-0-545-93427-5.

Cecil, Randy. ***Lucy***. Candlewick. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. Unpaged. Good read aloud. The story of three lovable characters: Lucy, a stray dog looking for a home; Eleanor, a young girl with a tender heart and plenty of sausages; and Sam, her father, a store clerk aspiring to be a juggler but paralyzed by stage fright. The story, in four acts, is told in text and beautiful illustrations that demand a careful look. A delightful read/view for all ages. ISBN: 978-0-7636-6808-2.

Connor, Leslie. ***All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook***. HarperCollins. Realistic. Gr. 4+. 381 pgs. Good read aloud. Perry has been allowed to live in a room near his mom's cell at a correctional facility in Nebraska for years. A new district attorney arrives and, angered by this breach of protocol, forces Perry into foster care, and delays his mom's parole application. While Perry lives with the attorney on the "outside," he researches his mom's crime, preparing to plead her case. A story of hope and perseverance. ISBN: 978-0-06-233346-9.

Diaz, Alexandra. ***The Only Road***. Simon & Schuster. Realistic fiction. Gr. 6+. 308 pgs. Cousins Jaime and Angela, age 12 and 15, flee Guatemala when a local gang of murderers try to recruit them. Determined to find Jaime's brother in the United States, the young teens set out on a harrowing, uncharted journey, facing starvation, bandits, and possible arrest. A sometimes horrifying glimpse of what can happen to would-be immigrants trying to leave South America. ISBN: 978-1-48145-750-7.

Dinerstein, Eric. ***What Elephants Know: A Novel***. Disney Hyperion. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 273 pgs. Good read aloud. In the jungles of Nepal (where the author has lived), Nandu is abandoned as a toddler and adopted by a one-armed stable manager and a female elephant! He plans to become a mahout (elephant trainer) for the king's stable, until the government threatens to close the facility. At 12, Nandu is determined to save the stable. Details about Nepal's culture and environs add depth to this fascinating read. ISBN: 978-1-48472-854-3.

Dumas, Firoozeh. ***It Ain't So Awful, Falafel***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Historical fiction. Gr. 4+. 378 pgs. It's 1978 and Cindy (originally Zomorod in her native Iran) has just moved to California; then Iranians take American hostages and, instead of blending in, her family becomes the target of racism. This semi-autobiographical story offers historical facts, cultural lessons, and some hilarious moments as readers follow Cindy from sixth to eighth grade. ISBN: 978-0-544-61231-0.

Fantaskey, Beth. ***Isabel Feeney, Star Reporter***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Historical fiction/Mystery. Gr. 4+. 336 pgs. Good read aloud. Isabel Feeney, a 10-year-old newspaper girl in Chicago circa 1920, aspires to be a crime reporter. When one of her customers is accused of murder, Isabel manages to join the investigation while Miss Giddings languishes on Murderess' Row. This Prohibition-era tale of gangsters, bullet-proof cars, and the first women crime reporters, is written in short, action-filled chapters. ISBN: 978-0-544-58249-1.

Fox, Janet S. ***Charmed Children of Rookskill Castle***. Viking. Fantasy/Historical fiction. Gr. 6+. 388 pgs. Kat Bateson and her two siblings are sent to a strange Scottish castle to be "safe" from the London blitz during World War II. But as classmates begin to disappear, the children realize that Lady Eleanor, their unsettling headmistress, is not what she seems. A supernatural mystery with a resourceful heroine battling evil on many fronts. ISBN: 978-0-451-47633-3.

Freedman, Russell. ***We Will Not Be Silent: The White Rose Student Resistance Movement That Defied Adolf Hitler***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Nonfiction. Gr. 6+. 104 pgs. The heart-wrenching, true story of siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl, who courageously led a student resistance movement against Hitler's Nazi Germany. Freedman tells their story with archival photos, from their beginnings as Hitler Youth and gradual disillusionment with the Nazi movement, to their rebellion and eventual execution. A chilling, but inspiring story of resistance to evil. ISBN: 978-0-544-22379-0.

Grimes, Nikki. ***Garvey's Choice***. Highlights. Poetic narrative. Gr. 4+. 108 pgs. Good read aloud. Written in tanka poems, this chronicles an overweight boy's attempts to connect with his sports-loving dad. Garvey initially avoids feelings of inadequacy by binge eating and reading science fiction until a friend convinces him to join the school chorus. Beautifully written, this short novel captures the heartache and eventual self acceptance of a misunderstood youth. ISBN: 978-1-62979-740-3.

Hamilton, Alwyn. ***Rebel of the Sands***. Viking. Fantasy. Gr. 6+. 314 pgs. Mythical beasts and magical djinni, “Nightmares” with teeth, and “Skinwalkers” who can steal bodies, populate this desert story centered around a political rebellion. Amani, a daring 16-year-old sharpshooter, running from a forced marriage, meets Jin, a mysterious foreigner. They team up, sometimes, and face an ever-changing assortment of dangers, human and other. Romance, magic, and never-a-dull-moment action propel this unique adventure. ISBN: 978-0-451-47753-8.

Harrington, Karen. ***Mayday***. Little, Brown and Company. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 344 pgs. Seventh grader Wayne Kovok survives a plane crash but injures his throat, losing his voice. Usually spouting random trivia, he struggles to find new ways to relate to his Grandpa, his often-absent dad, and a girl he likes. Surprisingly, losing his voice enables Wayne to finally communicate with everyone that matters in this complex narrative replete with random facts, and plenty of heart. ISBN: 978-0-316-29801-8.

Hatke, Ben. ***Mighty Jack***. First Second. Graphic Novel. Gr. 4+. 203 pgs. A garden of plants that bite grows in Jack’s back yard when he and his autistic sister, Maddy, trade their mom’s car for a packet of seeds at a flea market. This remake of “Jack and the Beanstalk” ends in a cliff-hanger, with a sequel anticipated. Hatke’s imaginative, threatening plants (and dragon!) keep Jack, Maddy, and a neighbor, Lilly, vigilant. ISBN: 978-1-62672-265-1.

Hennessey, M.G. ***The Other Boy***. HarperCollins. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 234 pgs. Shane Woods was born a girl but knows he is really a boy. At 12 he wants to begin hormone therapy; his mom is supportive, but his dad opposes it. When someone at school finds an old picture of Shane dressed as a girl, his new identity and his position as pitcher on the school’s baseball team are in jeopardy. Shane’s narration is realistic; his fear when rumors start, palpable. A moving story that ends hopefully. ISBN: 978-0-06-242766-3.

Howard, Eva. ***League of Archers***. Aladdin. Adventure/Survival. Gr. 4+. 280 pgs. Elinor Dray, a 12-year-old novice nun, idolizes Robin Hood and is herself a crack shot with a bow. When Robin is killed by a poisonous arrow, Ellie is accused of murdering her hero. As she tries to clear her name with the help of her friends, she begins to wonder if killing is ever justified. Mob violence and cruelty threaten her in this exciting tale about tough choices. ISBN: 978-1-48146-037-8.

Huey, Lois Miner. ***Forgotten Bones: Uncovering a Slave Cemetery***. Millbrook Press. Nonfiction. Gr. 4+. 56 pgs. Two stories in one: an account of the archaeological excavation of a slave cemetery in New York and a description of the probable daily lives of the eighteenth-century African American slaves whose bodies were found there. Methods of digging and analyzing finds are explained, accompanied by photos and drawings. A fascinating look at how much artifacts can reveal. ISBN: 978-1-46773-393-9.

Jenkins, Steve. ***Animals By the Numbers: A Book of Infographics***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Nonfiction. Gr. 4+. 48 pgs. Everything you want to know about animals — their speed, life span, defenses, and all sorts of interesting trivia — fill this appealing volume. Imaginative bar graphs, pie charts, timelines, histograms, and other charts, as well as Jenkins’ collage animal art, make this a feast for the eye and the mind. ISBN: 978-0-544-63092-5.

King, Wesley. ***OCDaniel***. Simon & Schuster. Realistic. Gr. 6+. 292 pgs. Daniel suffers from obsessive compulsive disorder, repeating rituals he hopes no one else notices, while trying to navigate eighth grade. Enter Sara, a selectively mute classmate who needs his help solving a mystery. Humor, anxiety, and hope combine in Daniel’s compelling narrative. ISBN: 978-1-48145-531-2.

Korman, Gordon. ***Slacker***. Scholastic. Humorous. Gr. 4+. 230 pgs. Good read aloud. Cameron is a die-hard video gamer until his parents insist he find a new interest. He pretends on line to start the Positive Action Group, a service club, to appease them; but, in spite of his efforts, a group actually begins to meet at school and becomes wildly popular! The wacky story of this reluctant leader, told by multiple narrators, is full of laughs and plot twists. ISBN: 978-0-545-82315-9.

Lawrence, Iain. ***The Skeleton Tree***. Delacorte Press. Adventure/Survival. Gr. 6+. 278 pgs. Chris, 12, and Frank, 15, are instant enemies. Chris' uncle dies during a storm at sea, leaving the recently-introduced boys shipwrecked and stranded on the Alaskan coast. Their strained relationship makes survival difficult, as do other challenges: injuries, a rampaging bear, a wild raven, hunger, and more. A suspenseful, fast-paced story about two complicated characters. ISBN: 978-0-385-90395-0.

Leonard, M.G. ***Beetle Boy***. Chicken House/Scholastic. Science fiction. Gr. 4+. 270 pgs. Good read aloud. When Darkus Cuttle's father disappears from a locked room the boy is determined to find him. He observes two very odd neighbors with a serious beetle infestation at their house while an intelligent rhinoceros beetle befriends him. Meanwhile a conniving geneticist, intent on world domination, shows up. This debut novel, first in a series of three, features entertaining characters in a most unusual story. ISBN: 978-0-545-85346-0.

MacHale, D.J. ***Curse of the Boggin*** (hardcover) ***Surrender the Key*** (paperback). Random House. Fantasy. Gr. 4+. 242 pgs. Marcus is being threatened by a shape-changing ghoul who wants him to "surrender the key" or his family/friends will die. This is the first in a planned series about the Library, a place that exists in another dimension, full of stories of disrupted souls. Marcus' battles with the Boggin lead him into some very scary situations. What is real? What is imaginary? ISBN: 978-1-10193-253-7.

Markell, Denis. ***Click Here to Start: A Novel***. Delacorte Press. Mystery. Gr. 4+. 310 pgs. Good read aloud. Ted, an ace at escape-the-room computer games, is willed the contents of his uncle's apartment, which turns out to be a real-life game with treasure in the offing. Can Ted, his best buddy Caleb, and new-in-town Isabel unravel the mystery before a dangerous stranger steals the fortune involved? World War II buffs will enjoy this debut novel about looted Nazi treasure and the Monuments Men. ISBN: 978-1-10193-187-5.

Marsh, Katherine. ***The Door By the Staircase***. Disney Hyperion. Fantasy. Gr. 4+. 273 pgs. Good read aloud. Fans of Russian folklore's Baba Yaga will enjoy this tale about Mary, an orphan adopted by Madame Z and her cat. Mary appreciates her new mother and the delicious meals she cooks, until she realizes that Madame Z might be the Russian legend, who lives in a house with chicken feet and eats children! Can Mary escape? A complicated, satisfying story with a brave heroine. ISBN: 978-1-42313-499-2.

McGee, Ron. ***Ryan Quinn and the Rebel's Escape***. HarperCollins. Adventure/Survival. Gr. 4+. 362 pgs. Good read aloud. Eighth grader Ryan Quinn, a world traveler, is happy when his family moves to New York City to a normal, settled life. But his father vanishes and his mother is abducted. Ryan realizes it is up to him to rescue his parents who have been members of the Emergency Rescue Committee, a group dedicated to saving rebels around the world. A fast-moving debut novel, the first in a planned trilogy. ISBN: 978-0-06-242164-7.

Nesbet, Anne. ***Cloud and Wallfish***. Candlewick. Historical fiction. Gr. 4+. 395 pgs. Noah travels behind the Iron Curtain into East Berlin with his parents who give him a new name and identity and warn him not to talk about serious things because "they" might be listening. He meets Claudia whose parents reportedly died in a car accident. The two lonely children become fast friends and in this touching story of friendship and espionage. Sidebars tell readers about East Germany, the wall, and the Cold War. ISBN: 978-0-7636-8803-5.

Peck, Richard. ***The Best Man***. Dial Books. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 232 pgs. Two weddings frame this story and Archer is in both. He spends time with his role models — his architect grandpa, his car-customizing dad, and his Uncle Paul. Enter Mr. McLeod, a new and well-liked student teacher who responds to antigay bullying at school by announcing he himself is gay. When he eventually wins the heart of Archer's Uncle Paul, Archer takes the revelation in stride. A matter-of-fact treatment of same-sex marriage. ISBN: 978-0-8037-3839-3.

Philbrick, W. Rodman. ***The Big Dark***. Scholastic. Science fiction/Survival. Gr. 4+. 178 pgs. Good read aloud. A solar flare causes all power, everywhere (!) to fail. Charlie's mom has Type 2 diabetes and is running out of medicine, so he decides to ski 50 miles to the nearest New Hampshire hospital to resupply her. Meanwhile desperate survivalists are hoarding food and resorting to violence. Can Charlie survive the dangerous trip? Can decent people reclaim his town? ISBN: 978-0-545-78975-2.

Plourde, Lynn. ***Maxi's Secrets: (Or What You Can Learn from a Dog)***. Nancy Paulsen Books. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 262 pgs. Good read aloud. Timminy is very short bully bait, and not happy about moving to Maine to start middle school. His parents agree to get Maxi, a Great Pyrenees puppy, for him as a consolation prize. Between his blind neighbor, Abby, and Maxi, who the family finds out is deaf, Timminy realizes he could rethink his negative attitude. ISBN:978-0-399-54567-2.

Ponti, James. ***Framed! A T.O.A.S.T. Mystery***. Aladdin. Mystery. Gr. 4+. 292 pgs. Twelve-year-old Florian Bates uses a novel technique called the "Theory of all Small Things" to notice minute details about people and settings. After he and his neighbor, Margaret, help recover three paintings stolen from the National Gallery of Art using his clever theory, they are recruited to find a missing Monet. The two friends face their assignment with bravery and brains. First of a projected series. ISBN: 978-1-48143-630-4.

Raczka, Bob. ***Wet Cement: A Mix of Concrete Poems***. Roaring Brook Press. Poetry. Gr. 4+. 43 pgs. Twenty-one cleverly arranged poems give readers a new look at ordinary things. Raczka says he "created pictures with words." He titles each poem using one word with a special visual arrangement. Powerful ideas are shared succinctly with style in this must read/see! ISBN: 978-1-62672-236-1.

Reynolds, Jason. ***Ghost***. Atheneum. Sports fiction. Gr. 4+. 181 pgs. Good read aloud. "Ghost" is a seventh grader whose father tried to shoot him and his mother 3 years ago. He is recruited as a sprinter for one of the city's youth track teams. Ghost is combative and doesn't always make the best decisions; but, at the same time, he is candid, humorous, and a character worth rooting for. This is the first in a 4-book series; each to focus on a different team member. ISBN: 978-1-48145-015-7.

Rhodes, Jewell Parker. ***Towers Falling***. Little, Brown and Company. Historical fiction. Gr. 4+. 228 pgs. Good read aloud. Deja, a fifth grader living in a homeless shelter, attends a new school in Brooklyn. When her class begins a unit about September 11, her father seems unnecessarily upset. Two students in her class — a Muslim girl, Sabeen, and Ben, a boy whose father served in Iraq, befriend her and the trio decides to further investigate how the terrorist attacks affected Americans. ISBN: 978-0-316-26222-4.

Sales, Leila. ***Once Was A Time***. Chronicle Books. Science fiction. Gr. 4+. 324 pgs. While Lottie's physicist father is researching time travel in London in 1940, the Nazis threaten his daughter, Lottie, and her best friend, Kitty, to coerce him into sharing his information. Instead Lottie jumps through a time-travel portal and finds herself in Wisconsin in 2013. She adjusts to life in the modern world but is determined to find Kitty. A unique story about a loyal and very British heroine. ISBN: 978-1-45214-009-4.

Sweet, Melissa. ***Some Writer!: The Story of E.B. White***. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Biography. Gr. 4+. 161 pgs. This beautifully crafted book brings E.B. White to life with handwritten letters, family photographs, maps, and collages featuring watercolor illustrations. The storyline follows White from his birth through summers in Maine, and from writing for "The New Yorker" to becoming a famous author. Quotes from E.B. himself at various ages pepper the narrative. A wonderful look at this shy, brilliant writer's life. ISBN: 978-0-544-31959-2.

Thomson, Sarah L. ***The Eureka Key (Secrets of the Seven)***. Bloomsbury. Adventure/Survival. Gr. 4+. 227 pgs. Good read aloud. Middle schoolers Sam and Martina win a contest awarding them what they think will be a summer vacation traveling America. Instead they find themselves embroiled in a life-and-death struggle in Death Valley to find one of seven keys supposedly hidden by the Founding Fathers. Full of facts and puzzles centering around Benjamin Franklin, this is the first in a planned series. ISBN: 978-1-61963-731-3.

Walliams, David. ***Demon Dentist***. HarperCollins. Humorous. Gr. 4+. 429 pgs. Good read aloud. From the United Kingdom's best-selling children's author comes this horror/comedy about the very wicked Miss Root, a new dentist in town. Alfie, 12, has a mouth full of rotten teeth and quickly becomes one of her victims. Can Alfie and his friend, Gabz, overturn this extremely nasty dentist's evil schemes? ISBN: 978-0-06-241704-6.

Weeks, Sarah. ***Save Me A Seat***. Scholastic. Realistic fiction. Gr. 4+. 216 pgs. Good read aloud. Two outsiders — Joe, with an auditory processing disorder, and Ravi, a new student from India — find common ground during one week in fifth grade at Albert Einstein Elementary. Each boy takes turns, in alternating short chapters, describing run-ins with bully, Dillon, and life in the resource room. A poignant, at times amusing, look at cafeteria/classroom conflicts. ISBN: 978-0-545-84660-8.

Wolk, Lauren. ***Wolf Hollow: A Novel***. Penguin Random House. Historical fiction. Gr. 6+. 291 pgs. Betty, a particularly cruel bully, comes to live with her grandparents in a small Pennsylvania town and begins to terrorize Annabelle and her little brothers. Adults are clueless as Betty, a deceptively sweet-looking child, turns the town against Toby, a World War I veteran, who wanders the region lost in his own world. Annabelle tries her best to protect him. This story of innocence lost is narrated by Annabelle as she looks back on a terribly dark period in her community's past. Memorable characters in a shocking story in this Newbery Honor book. ISBN: 978-1-10199-482-5.

