

Presenting USBBY's Outstanding International Books for 2021

A Story About Afiya interior spread courtesy of Lantana.



Another time she passes red roses
and there the clustered bunches
are, imprinted on her frock.

A Story About Afiya by James Berry, illustrated by Anna Cunha

A Global Community of Readers

By Anamaria López Anderson

EVERY YEAR, the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY), the U.S. section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), shares a list of Outstanding International Books (OIB) selected by a dedicated committee of its members. This year we received nearly 500 books published in 2020, of which 41 were chosen for the 2021 OIB list. The titles range from picture books to poetry, nonfiction to novels. They come from as far as Norway and New

Zealand, and as near as our neighbors Mexico and Canada. This year especially, we are so grateful for the work of artists, writers, and book creators, and for the support of publishers from around the world who, in the tradition of IBBY founder Jella Lepman, are committed to bringing international and translated books to children and young adults in the U.S.

The pandemic poses a number of challenges to this work; at the same time, it reminds us that we are part of a worldwide community of readers—including children and their caregivers, teachers, and librarians—living through this experience together, albeit in different ways. Likewise, many of the titles on our list have acquired new resonance during this pandemic year. A Brazilian picture book shows us the view from another window, of a lively favela in Rio; an Argentine one takes us on a memorable trip (even if it's only up and down

on the elevator). This year's list is rich in folklore and fantasy as well: Among those titles, a Canadian novel reimagines the classic portal story through an Indigenous lens, and a British one, grounded in the daily life of a newly blended family, gradually blurs the boundary between books and real life.

Notably, there are also a number of books about migration, which continues in a pandemic, of course. Some of them speak to journeys made by young people in the past, while others address crises and realities for readers of all ages with sensitivity, imagination, and hope. The 2021 OIB list honors all of these titles for meeting their readers where they are, for taking them to places they can only imagine, and for bringing the world closer to home.



Above: *Letters from Bear* by Sarah Ardizzone, illustrated by Marie Caudry

PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 2

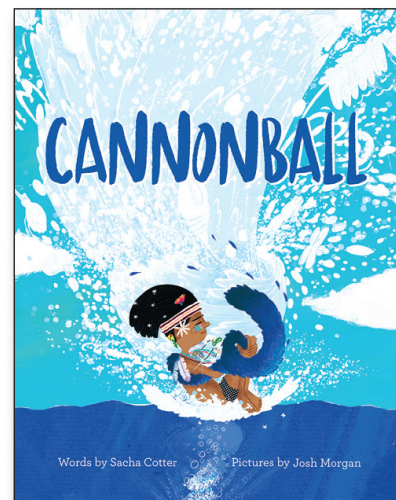
AHMED, Sufiya. *Under the Great Plum Tree.* illus. by Reza Dalvand. Tiny Owl. (UK)
Based on a classic Indian tale from the Panchatantra, this story reflects the universal message of friendship and forgiveness. Readers will be enchanted by an amusing cast of characters. Intricate and colorful illustrations, inspired by Indo-Persian traditions, are sure to dazzle.

ATINUKE. *Catch That Chicken!* illus. Angela Brooksbank. Candlewick. (UK/set in West Africa)

Lami is the fastest, bravest chicken-catcher in her entire West African compound. She loves, loves, loves to catch chickens and does it well until she scrambles, snatches, slips, falls—and sprains her ankle. With Nana's wisdom, Lami's tears turn into clever (and calmer) chicken catching.

BERRY, James. *A Story About Afiya.* illus. by Anna Cunha. Lantana. (UK)

Jamaican poet Berry's joyful celebration of childhood is captured in the awe and wonder of Afiya's white frock. She is amazed how memories from all occasions are imprinted on her dress—pigeons in flight, butterflies, sunflowers, tigers at the zoo, the windswept leaves of October.



COTTER, Sacha. *Cannonball.* illus. by Josh Morgan. Sourcebooks/Jabberwocky. (New Zealand)

A young boy's desire to perform a perfect cannonball generates a plethora of advice that almost drowns out his own voice. Guided by the gentle encouragement of his Nan, he hears his inner voice and makes quite a splash transforming his dream into reality.

DAVID, Gauthier. *Letters from Bear.* tr. from French by Sarah Ardizzone. illus. by Marie Caudry. Eerdmans. (Belgium)

Bird flies south for the winter, leaving Bear to hibernate. Before long, Bear decides to re-



unite with Bird, writing a series of letters documenting the journey. The warm palette and whimsical illustrations celebrate the beauty of nature and the importance of love.

FRANKEL, Yael. *The Elevator*. tr. from Spanish by Kit Maude. illus. by author. Tapioca Stories. (Argentina)

Heading out to walk her dog, a girl crowds into an elevator with her neighbors—a woman scared of dogs, an older man, a mother of young twins. When they are stuck between floors for over 40 minutes, imaginative storytelling distracts them from their predicament.

HRAB, Naseem. *Weekend Dad*. illus. by Frank Viva. Groundwood. (Canada)

A boy's parents separate, and he is trying to adapt to this new opaque reality. Here, the underrepresented topic of parental separation is handled with sensitivity and grace—sophisticated illustrations and simple, poignant text make for an insightful read.

JÚNIOR, Otávio. *From My Window*. tr. from Portuguese by Beatriz C. Dias. illus. by Vanina Starkoff. Barefoot. (Brazil)

Drawing from his own childhood, Júnior celebrates the life of the Brazilian favela, without dismissing its complexities. Joyful, vibrant illustrations and an optimistic narrative counteract stereotypes, provoke discussion, and immerse readers in a unique place.

MACLEAR, Kyo. *Story Boat*. illus. by Rashin Kheiriyeh. Tundra. (Canada).

As a family flees through strange terrain and inhospitable seas, two children use familiar objects, such as a cup and blanket, to spin their reality into a hopeful future. This creative story provides readers with a glimpse of the inner life of two young refugees.

STINSON, Kathy. *The Lady with the Books: A Story Inspired by the Remarkable Work of Jella Lepman*.

illus. by Marie Lafrance. Kids Can. (Canada) Anneliese and Pete, brother and sister in war-ravaged Munich, are out searching for food when they happen upon Jella Lepman's 1946 international children's book exhibit. Lepman's groundbreaking collection, including perennial touchstones of children's literature, gives them the imaginative and intellectual impetus to rebuild.

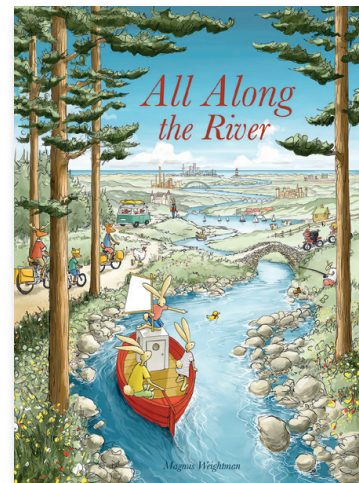
VAN DE VENDEL, Edward. *Little Fox*. tr. from Dutch by David Colmer. illus. by Marije Tolman.



Levine Querido/Em Querido. (Netherlands) An adventurous little fox takes a fall, drifting into a familiar dream. Will he awaken? Colorful mixed-media illustrations of forest animals superimposed on risograph-printed photos of Dutch dunes and woods lend this gently suspenseful book whimsy, as well as a very real sense of place.

WEIGHTMAN, Magnus. *All Along the River*. tr. from Dutch by author. illus. by author. Clavis. (Belgium)

Bunny's toy duck has fallen into the river! As Bunny and her brothers navigate their way downstream, they see mountains, waterfalls, forests, ports, and fields of tulips. Weightman's vivid and expansive illustrations beg readers to find Little Duck before she floats away.



WERNICKE, MARÍA. *Some Days*. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by author. Amazon Crossing. (Argentina)



Story Boat by Kyo Maclear, illustrated by Rashin Kheiriyeh



Through the use of white space, limited colors, and sparse text, this emotional story expresses the emptiness a mother and daughter feel after a painful loss. The spacious design allows readers to ponder, breathe, and understand. The picture book closes with a poignant source of hope.

show up. Eventually, Mercy finds her voice and stands up for herself.

LAM, Thao. *The Paper Boat: A Refugee Story.* illus. by author. Owlkids. (Canada/Vietnam)

Lam draws parallel stories in this wordless book. A Vietnamese family follows a colony of ants through tall grass, past terrifying soldiers, to their rescue boat. The ants, too, survive their perilous paper boat journey. The shades of white, black, and gray, along with themes in several repeated colors, depict a journey of courage and survival.

YOSHITAKE, Shinsuke. *There Must Be More Than That!* illus. by author. Chronicle. (Japan)

After her brother tells her the future is doomed, a little girl's grandmother encourages her to imagine something different. Refreshingly non-linear text is paired with a range of page layouts that lead readers expertly through an exploration of possible futures and alternative options.

MCKAY, Hilary. *The Time of Green Magic.* S. & S./McElderry. (UK)

An awkwardly blended family lives with magic that only the children notice. When a mysterious beast threatens them, the siblings pull together for safety. In this luminous novel, the highly acclaimed McKay celebrates the power of reading, as well as burgeoning family love.

GRADES 3-5

ALMOND, David. *War Is Over.* illus. by David Litchfield. Candlewick. (UK)

Eliciting deep and important questions about war and humanity, this slim WWI novel tenderly depicts a young boy surrounded by bullies and sages. Blurring the line between dreams and reality, Almond's lyrical anti-war message is beautifully supported by evocative images of fear and hope.

MCLACHLAN, Jenny. *The Land of Roar.* illus. by Ben Mantle. HarperCollins. (UK)

Twins Arthur and Rose shared many adventures in their imaginary Land of Roar. Now, Rose wants nothing to do with her twin or Roar. When their grandfather is kidnapped, they must return to save him, and a torn-apart land. Can they mend it together?

FERRADA, María José. *Mexique: A Refugee Story from the Spanish Civil War.* tr. from Spanish by Elisa Amado. illus. by Ana Penyas. Eerdmans. (Mexico)

This poetic picture book introduces readers to the Children of Morelia who escaped the Spanish Civil War. The muted palette echoes the fear, loss, and sacrifice these families and children experienced. A moving and informative afterword is included.

MIAN, Zanib. *Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet.* illus. by Nasaya Mafaridik. Putnam. (UK)

Omar feels miserable. He's starting a new school, a big mean bully threatens he'll be kicked out of the country because he's Muslim, and his neighbor is suspicious of the whole family. Lively text and spirited art reveal an imaginative kid whose family and friends alleviate his worries.

JÄRVINEN, Aino. *1,001 Creatures.* tr. from Finnish by Emily Jeremiah. illus. by Laura Merz. Restless. (Finland)

This abstract black-and-white bestiary pairs inky, multimedia illustrations of animals with poems punctuated by provocative questions, stressing interspecies cooperation. The spreads play with scale while sharing intriguing information about life cycles, habitat, diets, and behaviors.

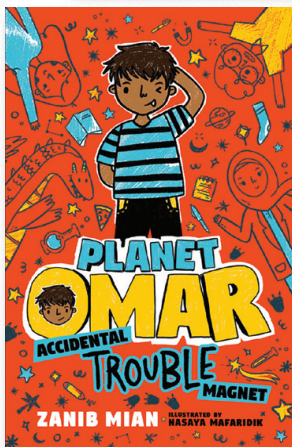
NILSSON, Ulf. *All the Dear Little Animals.* tr. from Swedish by Julia Marshall. illus. by Eva Eriksson. Gecko. (Sweden)

A dead bumblebee transforms one boring summer day into an entrepreneurial adventure as three young children create a funeral business for animals in their community. Witty first-person narration, rhyming poetry, and warm illustrations accentuate this child-centered, compassionate exploration of death (and thus life).

KRONE, Bridget. *Small Mercies.* illus. by Karen Vermeulen. Catalyst. (South Africa)

Mercy's life is falling apart. Her eccentric aunts are in financial ruin, and a conniving developer is eyeing their home. Then she is framed for a theft and worries that social services will

ROMANYSHYN, Romana & Andriy Lesiv. *Sound: Shhh...Bang...POP...BOOM!* tr. from Ukrainian by Vitaly Chernetsky. illus. by authors.



Chronicle/Handprint. (Ukraine)
 Have you ever wondered about sound? This outstanding nonfiction book provides fascinating facts about sounds, sound frequencies, people of sound, and instruments. It draws readers' attention to hearing, deafness, and silence. The oversize format includes dynamic neon-color illustrations with bold graphics and engaging text features.

ROSKIFTE, Kristin. *Everybody Counts: A Counting Story from 0 to 7.5 Billion.* tr. from Norwegian by Siân Mackie. illus. by author. Wide Eyed Editions. (Norway)
 Each page of this intriguing counting book compels readers to carefully study the colorful illustrations to find characters identified within the text. With some characters depicted multiple times throughout, the abstract concept of numbers is grounded in reality. Additional secrets in the back invite repeated readings.

UTKIN, Alexander. *Gamayun Tales I.* tr. from Russian by Lada Morozova. illus. by author. Nobrow. (UK/Russia)
 Adventure and intrigue come to life in this visually arresting anthology of modernized Russian folklore in graphic narrative format. With the witty, human-faced bird Gamayun as narrator, these three interrelated stories of greed, deceit, courage, love, and wisdom evoke delightful, immersive storytime sensibilities.

YABOUZA, Adrienne. *The Magic Doll: A Children's Book Inspired by African Art.* tr. from French by Paul Kelly. illus. by Élodie Nouhen. Prestel. (France/set in Central African Republic)
 In this engaging story of family, fertility, and faith, young Adjoa shares how "Dolly," an Akua'ba statuette of fertility and protection used in Ashanti communities, continues to help her family grow. Not-to-miss back matter offers cultural insights and authorial connections to the Akua'ba doll.

GRADES 6-8

AUNG THIN, Michelle. *Crossing the Farak River.* Annick. (Australia/set in Myanmar)
 Through Hasina's eyes, readers learn about the Rohingya humanitarian crisis. When soldiers attack, she escapes into the forest with her younger brother and cousin. They return to a devastated village, absent parents, and limited resources. This fast-paced novel includes an author's note, time line, and glossary.

BILLET, Julia. *Catherine's War.* tr. from French by Ivanka Hahnenberger. illus. by Claire Fauvel. HarperCollins/HarperAlley. (France)
 This graphic novel, based on the author's mother's story, depicts her hidden childhood in WWII France. Subtle shifts in palette as Catherine moves from place to place are punctuated by red-and-black darkroom scenes, contrasting beautifully with the black-and-white photos Catherine makes to document her journey.

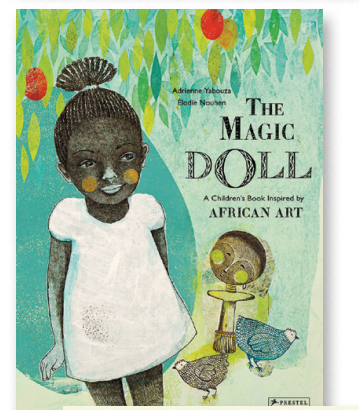
FAGAN, Cary. *Maurice and His Dictionary: A True Story.* illus. by Enzo Lord Mariano. Owlkids. (Canada)
 As Maurice and his family flee Nazi Germany, he finds hope in a dictionary he acquires as a refugee. This engaging graphic narrative, based on Fagan's own family history, invites discussions of universal themes such as courage and resilience.

KADARUSMAN, Michelle. *Music for Tigers.* Pajama. (Canada/set in Australia)
 Louisa is a musician, not a biologist like her nature-obsessed family. Weeks at Uncle Ruff's remote Tasmanian camp change everything. Colin, a boy who has autism spectrum disorder, and an elusive Tasmanian tiger awaken Louisa to history and conservation, and rekindle her love of music.

PÊGO, Ana & Isabel Minhós Martins. *Plasticus Maritimus: An Invasive Species.* tr. from Portuguese by Jane Springer. illus. by Bernardo P. Carvalho. Greystone. (Portugal)
 What is *Plasticus maritimus*? How invasive is plastic to our oceans? Marine biologist Pêgo presents a well-researched book about the existing problem that plastics create for oceans. A sturdy field guide format provides accessible text, diagrams, photographs, colored pencil illustrations, social action tips, and resources.

ROBERTSON, David A. *The Barren Grounds.* illus. by Natasha Donovan. Penguin Random Canada. (Canada)
 In a reimagination of the classic portal fantasy, Robertson (himself an award-winning #OwnVoices writer) weaves Indigenous Cree culture and language with exciting adventure and sensitive portrayals of two Indigenous children in the Canadian foster care system.

VAN DEN ENDE, Peter. *The Wanderer.* illus. by author. Levine Querido/Em Querido. (Netherlands)
 Intricately detailed grayscale illustrations chron-



The 2021 Outstanding International Books Committee

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- Wendy Steadman Stephens,
Huntsville, AL

icle the worldwide voyage of a paper boat on a journey of whimsy and discovery. Van den Ende's breathtaking debut wordlessly floats from more realistic depictions of flora and fauna into a fantastical world, upending usual tropes of oceanic exploration.

WATANABE, Issa. *Migrants*. illus. by author. Gecko. (Mexico)

Magnificent illustrations with black backgrounds and vibrant colors effectively tell this wordless tale about migration. Each animal character wears or carries everything they possess. They are frightened and exhausted yet willing to share what they have. The weight of their experience and message is powerful.

GRADES 9-12

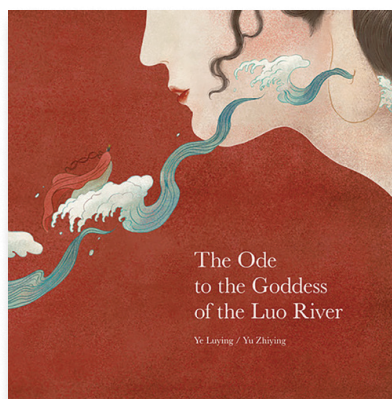
BHATHENA, Tanaz. *Hunted by the Sky*. Farrar. (Canada)

A prophecy of uprising underpins palace intrigue, political machinations, and shifting alliances in a vibrant world marked by Middle Eastern and East Asian touchstones. As Gul grapples with her power, magic and fantasy cloak everything, and escalating action catapults the tale to a thrilling close.

CUTHEW, Lucy. *Blood Moon*. Candlewick/Walker. (UK)

When news of Frankie's first sexual experience goes viral, the aftermath is widespread

Each year USBBY, the United States section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), appoints a committee to select its Outstanding International Books list (OIB), which celebrates children's literature that U.S. publishers and distributors have brought in from around the world. The list highlights exceptional international children's literature that introduces young people to outstanding authors and illustrators from other countries, helps children and young people in the U.S. to see the world from diverse perspectives, promotes literature that is accessible to children and young people in the U.S., addresses topics that may be missing from U.S. children's and young adult literature, and encourages titles that exhibit distinct cultural flavor. The committee received 500 books published in 2020, of which 41 were chosen as OIB. For additional information and access to all OIB lists, visit www.usbby.org.



and destructive. Reputations are destroyed, friendships crumble, and shame reigns. This relatable, timely, and poignant novel in verse will resonate with young women.

HARDINGE, Frances. *Deeplight*. Abrams/Amulet. (UK)

When Hark finds a dangerous artifact on an undersea dive, those around him attempt to manipulate him in order to gain its power for themselves. In lush prose and rich psychological realism, Hardinge investigates the definition of friendship without letting up on the action.

KAITO. *Blue Flag. Vol. 1*. tr. from Japanese by Adrienne Beck. illus. by author. VIZ Media. (Japan)

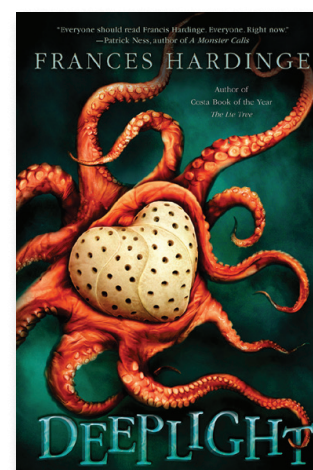
When unassuming high school student Tai-chi, his childhood friend (and star athlete) Toma, and lovelorn Futaba Kuze end up in the same homeroom, relationship drama ensues. This groundbreaking manga features evolving friendships and unexpected romances; distinctive cartooning balances the tension with light-hearted moments.

THAKUR, Sophia. *Somebody Give This Heart a Pen*. Candlewick/Walker. (UK)

In this debut poetry collection, an acclaimed performance poet offers an intimate, honest, heartfelt journey of identity. Divided into four parts (Grow, Wait, Break, and Grow Again), the poems are at times gut-wrenching and raw, and other times a tender celebration of the heart.

ZHIYING, Yu. *The Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River*. tr. from Chinese by author. illus. by Ye Luying. miniedition. (China)

This lush, contemporary adaptation of Cao Zhi's renowned poem "The Goddess of the Luo River" is a tale of forbidden love. Traditional and modern Chinese artistic styles and multipage gatefolds unveil a world of fantasy replete with Chinese mythological gods, goddesses, and creatures. ■



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