



Building Connections

By Bindy Fleischman

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBYP), the national section of the 75 member country International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), launched its annual Outstanding International Books list to celebrate and elevate the most exemplary international titles that U.S. publishers and distributors bring in from the rest of the world each year. The 39 titles on the 2019 OIB list represent literature from every continent, with voices and artwork from Chile, Haiti, New Zealand, the Philippines, Syria, Zimbabwe, and over a dozen more countries around the world.

Image from *Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings*, text by Francie Latour and illus ©2018 by Ken Daley. Reproduced with permission from Greenwood Books.

The work of each author and illustrator in this collection shows tremendous respect for young readers, encouraging them to look inside themselves to survive in this uncertain world, and to connect with other people across lands and seas to find a way forward together. In effect, they have blurred the lines, erased the borders, and turned *they* into *we*. *International* now refers less to other people and places and more to the universality of the human condition.

Within these picture books, chapter books, graphic novels, wordless books, and novels in verse, young protagonists survive hatefulness, destruction, and displacement with creative expression through visual art and music. They shatter the barriers of loneliness, anxiety, or depression by recognizing and opening up to others suffering the same. They rely on intergenerational relationships to take lessons from the past and glimpse into the future, as they often take on the agency that their adults have lost. They use the materials and expanse of nature, a healthy dose of fantasy, and their own determination and fortitude to become resourceful problem-solvers, bridge builders, and torchbearers.

As IBBY founder Jella Lepman expressed, “If one is to believe in peaceful coexistence, the first messengers of that peace will be in children’s books.” The selections on the 2019 Outstanding International Books list not only give young readers that affirming message but also the means to achieve their goals.

PreK–2

BUITRAGO, Jairo. *On the Other Side of the Garden.* tr. from Spanish by Elisa Amado. illus. by Rafael Yockteng. Groundwood. (Chile/Colombia)

After being dropped off at her grandmother’s country house, a young and uncertain Isabel explores her unfamiliar surroundings with a trio of talking animals during the night. The printlike, digital illustrations are primarily rendered in an enchanting deep blue, highlighted by pops of color.

CHABBERT, Ingrid. *A Drop of the Sea.* tr. from French. illus. by Guridi. Kids Can. (France) Ali goes on a journey from the desert to the sea—and back—to make his beloved great-grandmother’s final dream come true in a timeless tale of kindness, courage, and love.

Evocative language and illustrations convey both the emotional and physical experience of Ali’s journey.

CLARKE, Maxine Beneba. *The Patchwork Bike.* illus. by Van Thanh Rudd. Candlewick. (Australia)

Rambunctious creative children fight boredom by building a bicycle from scrap material. Cruising the neighborhood on their bicycle quickly generates laughter and raucous behavior. This rollicking story also includes a spot for mindful eyes and a scolding word or two from the adults.

CROWTHER, Kitty. *Stories of the Night.* tr. by Julia Marshall. illus. by the author. Gecko. (Sweden)

A young bear requests three bedtime stories and Mother Bear obliges with tales set in a

magical land of miniature people and talking animals, all seeking rest. Gently told and vividly illustrated in Crowther’s characteristic style, the three stories calm and invite sleep.

de ARIAS, Patricia. *Marwan’s Journey.* tr. from Spanish. illus. by Laura Borràs. Minedition. (Chile)

Marwan travels across a desert with many refugees from his village. He finds refuge through the stories and memories of family. Revealing watercolor illustrations capture the desperate situation in the eyes of the travelers and their resilient belief in a better future.

DUBUC, Marianne. *Up the Mountain Path.* tr. from French by Veronique Kirchhoff. illus. by the author. Princeton Architectural Pr. (Canada)

Mrs. Badger shares the secrets of the mountain with little cat Lulu, who carries on her legacy of thoughtfulness and care for others and the natural world. Gentle text goes hand-in-hand with soft pencil, colored pencil, and watercolor, illustrating discoveries both intimate and grand.

GOMI, Taro. *I Really Want to See You, Grandma.* tr. from Japanese. illus. by the author. Chronicle. (Japan)

A series of mishaps and missed connections prevent Yumi and her grandmother from visiting with one another until their joint determination eventually brings them together in spectacular fashion. A genuine sense of suspense is developed through skillful pacing and meaningful book design.

GRANT, Shauntay. *Africville.* illus. by Eva Campbell. Groundwood. (Canada)

A contemporary child imagines what life was like in Africville, a 150- year-old self-sustaining Black community in Halifax,





Nova Scotia, that was demolished by city officials in the 1960s.

KAADAN, Nadine. *Tomorrow*. tr. from Arabic. illus. by the author. Lantana. (Syria)

Mother no longer paints, and Yazan isn't allowed to play outside anymore. Missing friends and bike-riding, he ventures out anyway. What he finds is unrecognizable and disorienting. Surrounded by destruction, the family's only way forward may be through making their own creations.

LATOUR, Francie. *Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings*. illus. by Ken Daley. Groundwood. (Canada/set in Haiti)

A young girl explores her identity when taking a trip to visit her famous aunt, a painter who records the sights, sounds and smells of her beloved Haiti. With lyrical language and eye-popping illustrations, readers are immersed in the Haitian landscape, culture, and history.

NILSSON, Ulf. *A Case for Buffy*. tr. by Julia Marshall. illus. by Gitte Spee. Gecko. (Sweden)

In this fourth "Detective Gordon" book, the youngest woodland creatures help Detective Buffy (mouse) and Chief Gordon (toad) investigate the mysterious disappearance of Buffy's mother and siblings. Elegant, witty, skillfully-crafted writing and softly textured watercolor and pencil illustrations lend to high accessibility for young readers.

SANNA, Francesca. *Me and My Fear*. illus. by the author. Flying Eye. (UK)

Written and illustrated as a main character, "Fear" protects and insulates, then inhibits and suffocates the girl she's accompanied to a new country. Readers familiar with Sanna's *The Journey* discover the next leg, navigating and mastering emotional hurdles of life in a new place.

SOUNDAR, Chitra. *Farmer Falgu Goes to the Market*. illus. by Kanika Nair. Karadi Tales. (India)

The journey to market presents challenges for Falgu, but with each cracked egg and crushed vegetable, Falgu perseveres to find a delicious way to salvage the situation. Jaunty, humorous language distinguishes this cumulative tale.

Grades 3–5

BLEXBOLEX. *Vacation*. illus. by author. Enchanted Lion. (France)

A young girl's summer vacation at her grandfather's country home is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of a young elephant. Narratively and visually complex, this wordless story is enhanced by lush, tactile bookmaking that features pleasingly toothy paper and a cloth spine.

DUPRAT, Guillaume. *Eye Spy: Wild Ways Animals See the World*. tr. from French by Patrick Skipworth. illus. by the author. What on Earth Bks. (France)

Through vibrant illustrations, large trim size and clean design, readers try on the vision of multiple species from each class of animal, comparing depth, width, brightness, hue and clarity of the same scene. Back matter includes a glossary, author's note, and multiple sources.

EDWARDS, Nicola. *What a Wonderful Word*. illus. by Luisa Uribe. Kane Miller. (UK)

A collection of "untranslatable words" from around the world is presented. Each word is explained and accompanied by related facts about the language and culture from which it originates.

GIFFORD, Clive. *The Colors of History: How Colors Shaped the World*. illus. by Marc-

Etienne Peintre. Quarto. (UK)

Arranged by color families, this vibrant book speaks to and illustrates the origin, nomenclature, value, symbolism and historical significance of gamboge, cochineal, archil, woad, and more throughout human history across the world.

GREEN, Shari. *Missing Mike*. Pajama Pr. (Canada)

Readers see flames, feel heat, smell smoke, hear destruction, and taste ash in this timely novel in verse, conveying the urgency of a family escaping a wildfire, their desperation and disorientation, and the need to cling tightly to whatever they can in order to survive.

HO, Van & Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch. *Too Young to Escape: A Vietnamese Girls Waits to be Re-united with Her Family*. Pajama Pr. (Canada/set in Vietnam and Canada)

Left behind with her grandmother after her parents and siblings flee Vietnam, the author struggled to understand and adapt to conditions in Ho Chi Minh City and, four years later, to a new life with her family in Canada in this compelling true story.

KACER, Kathy. *The Sound of Freedom*. Annick. (Canada)

Anna lives with her grandmother and musician father in Krakow in the 1930s. As conditions for Jews worsen, the family escapes to Palestine with other European musicians to form the Palestine Symphony Orchestra.

KINEW, Wab. *Go Show the World: a Celebration of Indigenous Heroes*. illus. by Joe Morse. Tundra. (Canada)

The rap song lyrics and vibrant illustrations profile a wide range of historical and contemporary indigenous people who believed in themselves and went on to serve their com-

munities. Profiles include John Herrington's work on the International Space Station and Beatrice Mosionier's work in child welfare.

LEWIS, Gill. *A Story Like the Wind*. illus. by Jo Weaver. Eerdmans. (UK)

A 14-year-old's violin music and story sustain dinghy passengers in the middle of the sea "bound together, floating across time and space to the promise of a safe harbor in a different world." Charcoal illustrations lend an ethereal quality to their plight of uncertainty.

PARR, Maria. *Astrid the Unstoppable*. tr. from Norwegian by Guy Puzey. illus. by Katie Harnett. Candlewick. (Norway)

Astrid, the "little thunderbolt of Glimmerdal," serves as an unstoppable force for good in her secluded Norwegian glen. A large cast of quirky and substantive secondary characters consort with the young heroine as she navigates a lovingly depicted setting of snow, spruce, and mountains.

WALTERS, Eric. *From the Heart of Africa: A Book of Wisdom*. illus. by multiple artists. Tundra. (Canada)

Fifteen familiar African proverbs or aphorisms (pithy observations) are traced back to their roots and beautifully depicted through multiple artists from across Africa. The historical connections serve as a wonderful tribute to contributions of wisdom from the continent.

WIDMARK, Martin. *The House of Lost and Found*. tr. from Swedish by Polly Lawson. illus. by Emilia Dziubak. Floris Bks. (Sweden)

Shadowy spaces and bright ones, lost souls and a vivacious child, vibrant memories of youth and gloominess that has saturated old Niles' life, dying plants and the roots' prom-



ise of regeneration—these dichotomies underpin this allegory of how to keep alive light in the darkness.

WILCOX, Merrie-Ellen. *After Life: Ways We Think About Death*. Orca. (Canada)

Wilcox examines many questions about death and the afterlife, responding to these questions from diverse cultural perspectives. Fact is separated from fiction, while maintaining the integrity of each culture's core beliefs regarding death and spirituality.

WINTER, Ali. *Peace and Me*. illus. by Mickaël El Fathi. Lantana. (UK)

One page biographical sketches of 12 Nobel Peace Prize winners from around the world highlight aspects of their work. The textured paper collages with colors, prints and textures symbolically represent the recipient.

Grades 6–8

BAILEY, Linda. *Mary Who Wrote Frankenstein*. illus. by Júlia Sardà. Tundra. (Canada)

How does a story begin? Bailey's biographical account of Mary Shelley's young life traces the experiences and daydreams that would come together, like Frankenstein's

monster, to form her literary creation, while Sardà's stunning illustrations, rendered digitally and in watercolor, set a dark and distinctive mood.

ELLIS, Sarah. *Dodger Boy*. Groundwood. (Canada)

Set in 1970 Vancouver, 13-year-old Charlotte and her best friend Dawn are determined to remain "unteen" by resisting typical teenage concerns; however, the two friends' relationship becomes fundamentally challenged after Charlotte's Quaker family takes in a charismatic draft dodger from Texas.

HARGRAVE, Kiran Millwood. *The Island at the End of Everything*. Knopf. (UK/set in the Philippines)

In the early 1900s Philippines, the government wrenches apart families touched by leprosy, sending healthy children to an orphanage across the sea. With an old boat and brave friends, young Amihan finds her way back to her terminally ill mother and her home.

NIELSEN, Susin. *No Fixed Address*. Penguin Random House/Wendy Lamb Bks. (Canada) Middle schooler Felix, living in a van with his mother after being evicted from their apartment, struggles to keep up appearances. This tale of friendship is told with compassion and humor about families that slip through the cracks.

ORR, Wendy. *The Swallow's Dance*. Pajama Pr. (Canada)

Ancient myths and legends punctuate this imagined Bronze Age Santorini, where a young woman must battle for survival after an earthquake destroys everything she knows. Her journey from pampered upper-





class child to an independent, strong woman is poignant, compelling, and believably developed. Includes free-verse passages.

SMITH, Heather. *Ebb & Flow*. Kids Can. (Canada)

Jett's preteen life has been filled with good and bad events. Spending the summer with grandmother's unconditional love gives him time to reflect and problem solve his reentry back home after a heartbreaking decision that hurt his best friend Alf, an autistic adult.

TREGONNING, Mel. *Small Things*. illus. by the author. Pajama Pr. (Australia)

Anxiety is portrayed as small monsters gradually overwhelming and eating away at people,

making them feel different and thus isolating them from friends, family and interests. The wordless graphic picture book format communicates the universality of worry and the antidotal power of sharing stories.

Voices from the Second World War: Stories of War as Told to Children of Today. First News/Walker Books Ltd. Candlewick. (UK)

Young reporters from a children's newspaper record their interviews of evacuees, resistance fighters, pilots, and sailors as well as survivors of prisoner-of-war camps, the Hiroshima bombing, and others whose lives were impacted by war. Compelling memoirs illustrated with archival photographs give a unique picture of the war.

WILLIAMSON, Victoria. *The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle*. Floris Bks. (Scotland)

The lives of Scottish-born Caylin, newly immigrated Reema, and a wild mother fox run parallel in their impairments, intertwined in their survival, and liberated in their redefining of identity and reviving of agency. Tension, humor, and heart combine for a thoroughly engaging read.

Grades 9–12

BARTER, Catherine. *Troublemakers*. Carolrhoda Lab. (UK)

Raised by her protective half-brother and his more liberal boyfriend, would-be activist Alena is caught in the middle of tensions both personal and political when their East London neighborhood is targeted by a supermarket bomber, and finds herself making some trouble of her own.

MILLS, Jean. *Skating Over Thin Ice*. Red Deer. (Canada)

Painfully shy piano prodigy Imogene St. Pierre meets suspended hockey superstar Nathan McCormick during their final year in a private high school. The gifted students team up for a school project that joins the world of classical music and powerful skating.

NTSHINGILA, Futhi. *We Kiss Them with Rain*. Catalyst. (South Africa)

A harrowing, non-linear narrative weaves together the lives of several generations of women struggling to survive in a South Africa ravaged by AIDS, apartheid, and sexual abuse. Ntshingila imbues the women with strong will, resolute voices, and pragmatic hope for a better future.

The 2019 Outstanding International Book Committee: Bindy Fleischman (Chair), Newton, MA; Anamaría Anderson, Arlington, VA; Susan Corapi, Lake Zurich, IL; Evelyn B Freeman (Asst. Chair), Worthington, OH; Patrick Gall, Evanston, IL; Doris Gebel, Melfa, VA; Janelle Matthis, Denton, TX; Amy McClure, Delaware, OH; Barbara Scotto, Brookline, MA; Stan Steiner, Jackson, WY.

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, 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 United States 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 upwards of 420 books published in 2018, of which 39 were chosen for the 2019 OIB list. For additional information and to access all OIB lists, visit www.usbby.org.