The latest Outstanding International Books list offers tales that speak to every student

By Carolyn Angus

Talk about an international effort. Some of the world's best children's book artists got together to help Amnesty International celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 60th anniversary in We Are All Born Free, one of the 42 titles recommended by the fourth annual United States Board on Books for Young People's (USBBY) Outstanding International Books committee. This and other titles on our list offer young people the best of children's literature from faraway places—books that introduce them to outstanding authors and illustrators from other countries, help them see the world from other points of view, and provide another perspective or address a topic that may be missing from children's books in the United States.

The number of translated books submitted to our committee was higher than ever before, and the diversity of the more than 400 submissions we received is most obvious in the titles for students in grades K–2, where 7 of the 11 picture books were written and illustrated by authors and illustrators from countries in which English is not the official language. Although English-language books from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom still represent the majority of titles on the 2009 USBBY Outstanding International Books list, this year's selections include volumes from South Korea, India, Japan, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Our committee is pleased to present this year's choices with the hope that these books will be used by young people, and those who work with them, to explore our diverse world. Information about the Outstanding International Books project, including lists of previous USBBY Outstanding International Books, can be found at www.usbby.org.

Members of the 2009 USBBY Outstanding International Books List Committee
Carolyn Angus (chair), George G. Stone Center for Children's Books, Claremont Graduate University, CA; Nancy Hadaway, University of Texas at Arlington; Marilyn Hollinshead, West Tisbury, MA; Helen Kay Kennedy, Kent District Library, MI; Ginny Moore Kruse, Madison, WI; Elizabeth Poe, Morgantown, WV; Karen Scott, Thompson Middle School, Alabaster, AL; Barbara Scotto, Children's Literature New England, Brookline, MA; and Kay Weisman, Vancouver, BC.
Gr 3-5—Young Lizzie’s father is building a pair of wings to fly in the Great Human Bird Competition. The sadness and grief he feels over the death of his wife contribute to his strange behavior. An understanding Lizzie helps her father on his journey of healing, hope, and love.

Gr 3-5—In this oversize book, published to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, each of the 30 articles of the Declaration has been simplified for young readers and illustrated by an internationally renowned artist. Photographs of and brief biographical information about the illustrators are included.

K-Gr 2—Born in Trinidad, Granny Vero loves calypso music, chicken with plantains, and Anansi stories. British Granny Rose appreciates brass band music, steak and kidney pie, and “Jack and the Beanstalk.” When her two grannies care for Alvina while her parents are on holiday, she must find a way for them to enjoy being together.

K-Gr 2—A large cast of characters have mini-adventures throughout the year in this oversize, almost wordless book featuring intricately detailed scenes of various sites all around their town. This is a book to read again and again, following the activities of the characters and noticing changes in the town during the four seasons.

K-Gr 2—While her mother is away having her hair done at a salon, Minji is inspired to give her dog a shampoo, set, and color treatment at home. Parallel illustrations featuring mother and Minji’s dog follow each step in this creative process.

Gr 6-8—Historical fiction at its best, this companion to Crossley-Holland’s award-winning “Arthur” trilogy is Gatty’s story. As chamber servant to Lady Gwyneth, Gatty sets out with the Welsh noblewoman and seven others on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1203. Both the journey and Gatty’s return to Caldicot are filled with extraordinary surprises.

Gr 6-8—After nine-year-old Abela’s Tanzanian mother dies from AIDS, an uncle tricks her into leaving her village. In suburban London, 13-year-old Rosa figures that her single mom’s plan to adopt a child will wreck their close relationship. Strong, believable girls resist adult authority in a master writer’s outstanding novel filled with surprises.

Gr 9 Up—In this perceptive look at the effect of politics and history on ordinary people in Ireland in 1981, Fergus discovers the ancient body of a murdered girl in a peat bog. As troubles mount, he finds it difficult to make his own way in an increasingly complex world.

Gr 6-8—Ted and Kat watch their cousin Salim board the London Eye. When his pod on the giant Ferris wheel makes its way back down, Salim does not get off. The two siblings join forces as they follow clues across London to find their cousin. A fast-paced story that will keep readers guessing.

Gr 6-8—Bod, granted the Freedom of the Graveyard as a toddler, has grown up amongst the graveyard residents who maintain quirky characteristics from the time periods of their

www.slj.com
lives. After an exciting adventure in which Bod foils an evil conspiracy, he is released to fully experience life outside the Graveyard.


Gr 6-8—Disguised as a boy named Eon, 16-year-old Eona becomes one of 12 dragoneys, apprentices to the energy dragons of good fortune who serve a mythical Asian kingdom. As she battles with forces attempting to overthrow the emperor and her disguise is revealed, Eona finally bonds with her dragon in this unforgettable page-turner.


KGr 2—Glowing illustrations tell this tender story of an urban family’s finding of an injured bird, and how they nurse it back to health and release it. Very few words are employed to express young Will’s love for a small creature and his understanding of the healing process.


Gr 3-5—When England declares war on Germany, Jack, who immigrated to Australia in search of adventure, enlists and takes part in the invasion of Turkey’s Gallipoli Peninsula. In the 24 days before he’s killed, Jack carries more than 300 wounded men off the battlefield on a donkey. Poignant gouache illustrations highlight this story of heroism.


KGr 2—After Scrubbing Brush is banished to the bin by Dad, action figure Traction Man, assisted by an annoying, battery-powered robotic Turbodog, bravely ventures out to rescue his trusty sidekick. This glorious adventure bursts forth from comic book-style mixed-media illustrations and is filled with tongue-in-cheek humor.


KGr 2—Garmann worries about starting school. He queries elderly aunts, Daddy, and Mama about their worries. He discovers that being scared isn’t a good or a bad thing. It’s simply a fact that everyone fears something. Hole’s award-winning exploration of childhood emotion is expressed visually in edgy mixed-media collages.


Gr 9 Up—Class and gender inequalities of 17th-century England and the state of medicine at the time are explored through the real and gripping story of Anne Green, an innocent young woman who was hanged and presumed dead, but awakens on the dissection table. Alternate chapters are narrated by Anne and Robert, an Oxford medical student.


Gr 9 Up—Music is Ben’s love and also his hope for a better life. During one Depression-era summer, a new and extraordinary cottage on Ontario’s Lake Muskoka unexpectedly opens the doors for his dream to become real.


Gr 6-8—While attending an international folk festival in the small country of Be善onia in 1939, 12-year-old Tally and classmates from her progressive British boarding school help Crown Prince Karl escape the Nazis after his father, King Johannes, is assassinated.


Gr 9 Up—Much admired 18-year-old Claire is hit by a car, causing irreversible brain damage and death. Narrated by her younger sister, Natalie, this is an engaging, if sober, look at how one random incident changes lives forever.


KGr 2—Ellen and her friend Ollie love to play in the big apple tree in her yard, but a winter storm blows it down. In the spring, the tree is replaced with a sapling that bears one delicious apple in the fall. Intricate watercolor-and-ink illustrations depict Ellen’s hardworking, loving family throughout the seasons.


Gr 3-5—Laird retells nine traditional folktales that are much loved by children of Iraq. The collection includes a tale about a lazy man, Ahmed; a trickster tale about a wise hare, Firuz; and other stories about magic, animals, and wise and foolish people. Sources of the tales are acknowledged.


Gr 3-5—Eleven-year-old Mackenzie tries to track down his dog, Cash, who was trapped by kids planning to sell her for illegal pit bull fights. Distinctive child, teen, and adult characters intersect in a suspenseful, fast-moving novel crafted by a Canadian writer and based upon an actual incident.


Gr 6-8—This clever retelling of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Wild Swans” pits Alexandra, the only daughter of the king, against his new and evil wife Zella. It is a story of romance, revenge, love, and transformation that is woven together as a powerful and magical fantasy.


Gr 6-8—This fifth and final volume of the Casson family saga, narrated by youngest sibling Rose, brings hilarious and satisfying closure as Rose discovers a secret that reunites her delightful, messy, fiercely loving family.


Gr 9 Up—As Safia, a young bride, awaits her death at the hands of her cruel husband, she
tells Lalit, a house servant, a tale about Farhad, a young thief, and his white tiger, Nitish, and their quest to rescue a princess. This story within a story, set in India, is engaging and powerful.


Gr 3-5—Kojo uses a few coins of his mother’s loan from their village to buy a hen. As he sells eggs, he buys more hens, and his business prospers. Based on the life of Kwabena Darko of Sinapi Aba (Mustard Seed) Trust in Ghana, this colorful, lively book introduces young readers to microfinance.


K-Gr 2—After a mother places an order for a birthday cake for her son, a large crew of very small people and their yellow construction vehicles go to work to produce a glorious birthday cake for her son, a large crew of very small people and their yellow construction vehicles go to work to produce a glorious birthday cake for her son, a large crew of very small people and their yellow construction vehicles go to work to produce a glorious birthday cake for her son, a large crew of very small people and their yellow construction vehicles go to work to produce a glorious birthday cake for her son, a large crew of very small people and their yellow construction vehicles go to work to produce a glorious birthday cake for her son.


Gr 9 Up—Todd is the only boy in a community of men who can hear what others are thinking and must constantly live with the noise and intrusion of others. Along with his dog and a girl he finds in the marshes, Todd flees his home. An intense look at adolescence, free will, and information overload.


Gr 6-8—Eleven-year-old Sam keeps a journal of lists, stories, pictures, questions, and facts while he is dying of leukemia. Members of Sam’s family and his friend Felix each express different ideas about illness, death, and memorial services. Compelling characters experience credible emotions in a book celebrating life while confronting its end.


Gr 6-8—When Man’s world is destroyed by a great wave, he finds himself completely alone. Then Daphne, the only survivor of a ship wrecked in the same catastrophe, appears. From entirely different worlds, these two must work together to rebuild their lives, grappling with questions of religion, identity, responsibility, and culture.


K-Gr 2—in this jaunty tale by "India’s Dr. Seuss," the lifting words and dramatic pictures almost dance on the page, making this story of a little elephant, separated from his mother and taken in by buffaloes, perfect for reading aloud. Young readers will cheer when the elephant decides in the end to remain with his friends.


Gr 9 Up—in this ingenious recounting of the Arthurian legend, Myrdlin functions like a medieval press agent, spinning tales to create the myth behind the man seen as the hope for uniting Britain’s warring tribes. Young Gwyna, who plays important roles in creating this heroic legend, eventually becomes a bard herself.


Gr 3-5—Zany Ottoline Brown, a certified mistress of disguise, and Mr. Monroe, a hairy Norwegian bog creature, investigate the mystery of missing lapdogs and the string of burglaries baffling the police of Big City. Intricately detailed black-and-white illustrations, with touches of red, playfully augment the story.


K-Gr 2—Examining only one part of the intruder that has disturbed their sleep, each animal concludes it to be a super big version of itself, only to learn it’s an elephant. All is well as they share their hammock with elephant—until elephant wakes up! A surprise ending and bold illustrations on a black background enhance this clever version of an old tale.


Gr 3-5—Photographs, drawings, and short chronological entries gently tell the true story of Gervelie’s life as a refugee from turmoil in the Republic of Congo and the Ivory Coast. Presently a young teen in England, Gervelie expresses her hopes for the future—especially that she and her father will remain safe.


Gr 9 Up—in this powerful story of the Armenian genocide, Kevork witnesses the brutal suffering of his people as he travels, disguised as an Arab, through Turkey and Syria in search of his love, Marta. Upon their reunion, Kevork learns that Marta has escaped from a forced Turkish marriage and borne a child.


Gr 3-5—Storyteller Taylor describes river, jungle, and villages as he travels along the Amazon and shares tales of tricksters, myth, and magic he hears along the way. Dramatic woodcuts add strength to this collection of Brazilian stories.


Gr 6-8—Balsa, a young woman with great martial arts abilities, guards Prince Chaogum, who must carry the water spirit’s egg, which will save the kingdom from drought, until it hatches. As they are chased by egg-hungry creatures and the king’s star reader warriors, Chaogum becomes a caring person and Balsa confronts her own destiny.


Gr 6-8—Both serious and humorous, the saga of imaginative, good-natured sixth-grader Rex Norton-Norton (aka Rex Zero) continues as the boy confronts a new set of mysteries: a vindictive substitute teacher; a missing address book that leads to a beautiful woman with a black eye; and Mr. Norton-Norton’s secretive behavior.

Carolyn Angus is director of the George G. Stone Center for Children’s Books at Claremont Graduate University in California.