Books have long had the ability to transport us. To spark our imaginations and call us to wonder. But sometimes, a book comes along that grants us the power to reimagine the world and our place within it. In each of the 41 titles on this year’s USBBY’s Outstanding International Books list, the authors and illustrators empower readers to make sense of themselves, make sense of the world at large, and to recognize change is always possible. These titles, selected by a committee passionate about children’s literature, highlight myriad global stories and perspectives. The recommended titles, for readers in preschool through high school, highlight the different ways this empowerment can look.

Sometimes empowerment includes heroes fighting dragons or real people fighting great odds to change the status quo. But in these selections reimaginations is unlimited, with characters big and small and settings far away and near, all showing how agency and power can sow the seeds of change. It can start in minor ways with characters challenging opinions or finally saying no. It can begin with students finding new methods to walk to school. With women blazing trails in male-dominated spaces. With daughters pushing back against generational trauma.

By the Outstanding International Books Committee, with introduction by Committee Chair Sara Kersten-Parrish
In each of these books, readers will be inspired to imagine different possibilities globally, locally, and internally. The delight of reading about characters time traveling, tooth fairies around the world, and even the glories of the moon can cause readers to reimagine a world where joy, curiosity, and wonder take precedence. The books on our list reimagine the world as a more equitable, just, happy, and empowering place. With these stories, children can transform their ideas of what they think is possible.

Preschool–Grade 2

AGUILERA, Claudio. *9 Kilometers*. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by Gabriela Lyon. Eerdmans. (Chile)

This story describes the challenges and joys of a young boy in rural Chile and his monumental undertaking traversing the countryside to receive an education. Sweeping painted illustrations of nature and robust back matter, featuring children from other countries on their journey to school, are highlights.

ÁLVAREZ, David with David Bowles. *Ancient Night*. illus. by David Álvarez. Levine Querido. (Mexico)

Through poetic text and mesmerizing artwork, readers experience a twist on ancient stories about rivalry and the power of repairing damage. Using two characters deeply rooted in Mesoamerica—the Rabbit and Opossum—the creators hauntingly weave together many traditional story elements involving the earth, moon, and sun.


The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asserted universal human rights for children around the world. Here, Dalvand presents these important rights (to education, health, love, and more) simply—at a child’s level—complemented by vibrant illustrations, filled with feeling and global resonance.

FADEEVA, Olga. *Wind: Discovering Air in Motion*. tr. from Russian by Lena Traer. illus. by author. Eerdmans. (Russia)

This nonfiction book explores wind and its influence on humans and the natural world. Fadeeva uses lively, painterly spreads to illustrate scientific concepts with a sense of scope and beauty. Information is clearly presented and robust, put together in consultation with a meteorologist.

FONTENAILLE, Élise. *At the Drop of a Cat*. tr. from French by Karin Snelson & Emilie Robert Wong. illus. by Violeta López. Enchanted Lion. (France)

A six-year-old boy adores hearing his grandfather’s stories of his life as a refugee.

Luis’s unique turns of phrase enchant, inspiring his grandson to emulate him. The lush, multilayered illustrations depict nature as a living part of their relationship, one that can flourish and take root.

GOMBAČ, Žiga X. *Adam and His Tuba*. tr. from Slovenian by Olivia Hellewell. illus. by Maja Kastelic. NorthSouth. (Slovenia/Switzerland)

Adam is a young boy in a family of circus performers—but he doesn’t like visibility, applause, or accolades. Slowly, his family learns to appreciate his unique, less showy talents. Warm sepia colors reflect the deep tones Adam creates while making music with his tuba.


What’s the story behind who collects...
your baby teeth? In Spain, Tooth Mouse Pérez gathers these teeth, whether tossed into the fireplace or under a pillow. Folk art illustrations accompany this tall tale of one culture’s ever-changing rituals associated with this rite of passage.

LEE, Suzy. The Shade Tree. tr. from Korean by Helen Mixter. illus. by author. Greystone. (South Korea)
In this folk tale of ingenuity and generosity, a young man outsmarts a greedy, rich man to provide people in the community with access to the shade of a tree. Lee’s vignette-style illustrations paired with abstract shapes bring this story into the modern era.

MAJALA, Marika. Rosie Runs. tr. from Finnish by Mia Spangenberg. illus. by author. Elsewhere Eds. (Finland)
A racing dog named Rosie is trapped at the track, but one day escapes and bounds toward freedom in this panoramic tale. The colorful illustrations evoke movement as the greyhound takes back her life, makes friends, and revels in the joy of a newfound path.

NARAYANAN, Priya. Friend of Numbers: The Life of Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. illus by Satwik Gade. Eerdmans. (India)
Discover the life of Ramanujan, India’s mathematical genius, in this biography. Narayanan describes his short life and journey from India to extraordinary achievements in STEM at Cambridge University. The vibrant illustrations, featuring mathematical concepts, add to this inspiring story of a lifelong passion for math.

RODARI, Gianni. A Daydreamy Child Takes a Walk. tr. from Italian by Antony Shugaar. illus. by Beatrice Alemagna. Enchanted Lion. (Italy)
Animated by wonder and curiosity, a young boy loses himself, and his limbs, over the course of a single day. This is a playful and surreal showcase for the magic of childhood, with Alemagna’s collaged illustrations providing the perfect showcase for this virtuosic Italian storyteller.

RODRÍGUEZ, Nelson & Leonardo Agustín Montes. Colorful Mondays: A Bookmobile Spreads Hope in Honduras. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by Rosana Faría & Carla Tabora. Eerdmans. (Spain)
Everyone looks forward to Mondays, when the bookmobile turns gray skies to rainbows. Whether through books, music, or puppet shows, the vehicle’s arrival is a hopeful event. The back matter explains how this real-life bookmobile provides opportunities for literacy and art in underserved communities in Honduras.

SCHNEIDER, Noemi. Ludwig and the Rhinoceros: A Philosophical Bedtime Story. tr. from German by Marshall Yarbrough. illus. by Golden Cosmos. NorthSouth. (Switzerland)
Bright illustrations, created using only three printed colors, depict the bedtime philosophical argument between Ludwig and his father about a rhinoceros in the room, seen by the boy but not his father. This fictional exploration introduces readers to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s existential philosophy of believing without seeing.

SHATOKHIN, Oleksandr. Yellow Butterfly: A Story from Ukraine. illus. by author. Red Comet. (Ukraine)
In this wordless tale done in black, white, and the colors of the national flag, a child observes the conflict in Ukraine through the devastation around her. She imagines vibrant yellow butterflies transforming the acts of war as emblematic of the hope for a free Ukraine.

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 (OIB) 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 United States, 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 454 books published in 2023, of which 41 were chosen as OIB. For additional information and access to all OIB lists, visit www.usbbby.org.
Explanations about ebb tides, gravitational pull, and moon phases are supported through soft acrylic illustrations that illuminate the nighttime scenes.

COLFER, Eoin. Three Tasks for a Dragon. illus. by P.J. Lynch. Candlewick. (Ireland) Colfer tells the story of a prince, a girl in distress, and a menacing dragon—in an unexpected way. The hero is more clever than brave, the girl commands wolf-hounds, and, inexplicably, the dragon becomes a friend. Classic illustrations punctuate this modern fairy tale.

DESNITSKAYA, Anna. On the Edge of the World. tr. from Russian by Lena Traer. illus. by author. Eerdmans. (Russia) Desnitskaya skillfully and creatively represents the experience of two children who live in remote parts of the world—Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula and the coast of Chile. The tête-bêche format symbolically represents the distance, and the possibility for connection, between countries and people.

VASCO, Irene. The Young Teacher and the Great Serpent. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by Juan Palomino. Eerdmans. (Spain) Legends, folktales, and traditions are treated as important sources of knowledge in Vasco’s story of a teacher who comes to live with a community in the Amazon. Palomino’s illustrations operate on a cinematic scale, rendering the villagers and their stories in wide, lush panoramas.

YOMOTO, Kazumi. The Bear and the Wildcat. tr. from Japanese by Cathy Hirano. illus. by Komako Sakai. Gecko. (Japan) In this allegorical tale of a friend’s death, Bear carries Bird’s coffin everywhere until encountering music. As Bear recalls joyous times, the intense, shaded charcoal-black-and-white illustrations gradually integrate joyful pink accents. Finally, Bear releases his grief to remember their lovely friendship.

Grade 3–Grade 5

ANISIMOVA, Anna. The Invisible Elephant. tr. from Russian by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp. illus. by Yulia Sidneva. Restless Books/Yonder. (Russia) In this illustrated chapter book, comprising four separate stories, a young girl’s blindness is deftly explored through simple, whimsical drawings and tender writing. Her sensory experiences, familial relationships, city adventures, and budding friendships are all infused with a uniquely magical perspective on the world.

CHANG-HOON, Jung. The Moon Tonight: Our Moon’s Journey Around Earth. tr. from Korean by Paige Morris. illus. by Jang Ho. Blue Dot Kids. (South Korea) Written by an astronomer, this book explores the 29-day lunar cycle through the relationship between a father and daughter viewing the evening sky.

FRANCK, Ed. The Moon Is a Ball: Stories of Panda & Squirrel. tr. from Dutch by David Colmer. illus. by Thé Tjong-Khing. Gecko. (Belgium) Through their many adventures around their bamboo grove, Panda and Squirrel are inseparable and earnest friends. Franck’s sensitive language portrays the friendship as playful and philosophical, while the skillful simplicity of Tjong-Khing’s illustrations captures their expressions and emotions through the ups and downs of every day.

FRIEDLAND, Aaron & Ndileka Mandela. The Walking School Bus. illus. by Andrew Jackson Obol. Greystone. (South Africa/Canada) Inspired by real children from Uganda, South Africa, and India, Friedland, Mandela, and Obol tell the story of how Shaka and Nandi cleverly find a safe way to walk to school—an ode to children’s ingenuity and resourcefulness depicted through colorful digital water-color artwork.
HILLSTRÖM, Ylva. The Art and Life of Hilma af Klint. tr. from Swedish by B.J. Epstein. illus. by Karin Eklund. Thames & Hudson. (Sweden)

When Hilma af Klint’s maps of the spirit world were rediscovered 100 years after her death, she was recognized as the inventor of “abstraction.” This picture book features 15 reproductions of her works and an interpretive chart of the symbols and colors in her art.

KASHIWABA, Sachiko. The House of the Lost on the Cape. tr. from Japanese by Avery Fischer Udagawa. illus. by Yukiko Saito. Restless/Yonder. (Japan)

Three generations of women create a family after a devastating earthquake, forging friendships and honoring tradition in this novel complemented with delicate illustrations. Young Hiyori, mute from past tragedies, eventually finds her voice and saves her new home with the help of traditional Japanese spirits.

MARCINKIEVICIUS, Marius. The Pebble: An Allegory of the Holocaust. tr. from Lithuanian by Jura Avižienis. illus. by Inga Dagile. Thames & Hudson. (Lithuania)

In this moving blend of allegory and narrative, Ethan must be strong as his community resists the attacks of big black birds and the disappearance of neighbors, friends, and family. A sensitive introduction to the Holocaust and Jewish traditions for remembering those who have passed.

NGUYỄN, Trang & Jeet ZDŨNG. Saving H’non: Chang and the Elephant. tr. from Vietnamese by authors. illus. by Jeet Zdung. Dial. (Vietnam)

Chang, a spunky young conservationist, guides readers through an elephant rescue and rehabilitation in Vietnam. Nguyen and Zdung use a unique blend of comic book–style illustration, narrative nonfiction, and informational text to tell an important story of connection between humans, animals, and nature.

PROKHASKO, Taras & Marjana Prokhasko. Who Will Make the Snow? tr. from Ukrainian by Boris Drazyk & Jennifer Croft. illus. by Marjana Prokhasko. Elsewhere Eds. (Ukraine)

This story follows two curious mole pups and their adventures with whimsy, originality, and wit. Rich sensory details (quince jam, a blue knit cap) will delight readers, while the textured illustrations conjure a gentle, natural world filled with everyday magic, community, and family.

VASCO, Irene. Letters in Charcoal. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by Juan Palomino. Lantana. (Colombia)

Hardly anyone in the pueblo of Palenque can read. Yet one young girl is determined to make sense of the alphabet around her. With a shop owner’s help, she learns to read, letter by letter, and soon shares this ability with others in her community.

ZARIF, Marya. Dounia and the Magic Seeds. tr. from French by Yvette Ghione. illus. by author. Owlkids. (Syria/Canada)

Dounia is a vibrant young girl growing up in Syria, but war has come to Aleppo, and she must flee with her grandparents. Her only sources of hope are her magical baraka seeds. Zarif uses magical realism to illustrate Dounia’s courageous journey to a new home.

ZO-O. Corner. tr. from Korean by Ellen Jang. illus. by author. Owlkids. (South Korea)

Readers watch as a crow’s creative step-by-step embellishments elevate a simple dwelling into a cozy sanctuary for himself and others. Zo-O employs minimal words and softly hued illustrations as well as a new and innovative use of the gutter space to grow the story.

Grade 6–Grade 8

BUSHBY, Aisha. A Pocketful of Stars. Carolrhoda. (Kuwait/United Kingdom)

Safiya’s world crumbles when her mother falls into a coma. She yearns to save her. Using time jumps to skip between the present and the past in Kuwait, Bushby tells an emotional journey of self-discovery, revealing the unshakable bond between a mother and daughter.

JOHN-KEHEWIN, Wanda. Hopeless in Hope. HighWater Pr. (Cree/Canada)

Within the confines of her foster home, hopeless teenager Eva discovers her voice by reading her mother’s diary. This refuge is a window into her Cree history and a compass to navigate the complex family trauma of the country’s residential schools.
MORRIS, Sufyan and Omar. The Cricket War. Kids Can. (Vietnam/Canada)

Feeling displaced and heartbroken due to the loss of her mother in a Japanese earthquake that created cracks in time, Sora tries to find closure by investigating those liminal spaces. Blending magical realism with Japanese myth, this novel explores feelings of grief, displacement, and belonging.

SULLIVAN, Deirdre. Savage Her Reply. Little Island. (Ireland)

Aife is the wronged wife of a king and a villain in the story of the Children of Lir. Here, Sullivan gives her a voice—one of vengeance, regret, and flawed humanity—and retells an Irish legend with power and meaning for the world today.

WEIN, Elizabeth. Stateless. Tundra. (UK/Canada)

With the stated goal of “Promoting Peace through Sport,” a dozen teenage pilots compete in the fictional 1937 Olympics of the Air. Representing nations destined to engage in the looming World War, they race for their nations’ glory as well as their lives and their identities.