

Words with Purpose



Titles to inspire understanding and peace

IN RICARDO CHÁVEZ CASTAÑEDA'S *The Book of Denial*, one of the titles on this year's United States Board on Books for Young People's (USBBY) Outstanding International Books list, the narrator's father writes, "I must write this so that others will care...and so that I will continue to care...So long as it seems that words have some purpose."

It is USBBY's view that words do indeed have a purpose, and the 40 titles on this year's list, chosen by a committee with expertise in and passion for children's literature from around the world, affirm that.

The purpose of words can be to delight—like the Argentinean tale of a curious young girl untangling a world of magic and mystery (*Loose Threads*), or the Brazilian classic in which a small child makes up his own words with élan to spare (*Marcelo, Martello, Marshmallow*).

By the Outstanding International Books Committee, with an introduction by committee chair Rachel Roseberry

The purpose of words can be to educate and inform—like a Russian creator’s story of water and its uses (*Water*), or a book recounting the life of Iceland’s Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the world’s first democratically elected female president (*Vigdís*).

The purpose of words can be to share new perspectives (or familiar ones)—like a story of a shared meal with family, neighbors, and friends in a bustling town in southwest China (*Grandma’s Roof Garden*), or a coming-of-age story navigating queer, Asian identity in Vancouver (*Crash Landing*).

Words can also be a call to action—like the story of tween activists in Norway who work to save a forest (*Save Our Forest!*) or *The Book of Denial* itself. It is a horror tale recounting brutality toward children, and it reminds us that the lives of all children across the globe are precious and must be protected.

Following a devastating year of violence against children, our deepest hope is that these outstanding international titles, and the words within them, can inspire bridges of understanding and peace.

The 2025 Outstanding International Books Committee

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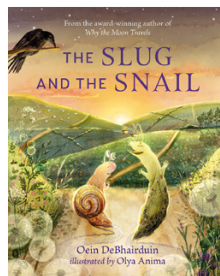


BENET, Nuria Gómez. *Montezuma's Tantrum.* tr. from Spanish by Elisa Amado. illus. by Santiago Solís Montes de Oca. Aldana Libros/Greystone. (Spain/Mexico)
Emperor Montezuma awakens in a cantankerous mood. His advisors eventually cajole him by presenting a frothy cup of hot chocolate. Using a palate of desert hues, punctuated by bright teals and reds, Solís Montes de Oca includes Aztec symbols throughout this Mesoamerican folktale.

CHIRIF, Micaela. *A Sleepless Night.* tr. from Spanish by Jordan Landsman. illus. by Joaquín Camp. Transit. (Argentina)
A hilarious and charming story about the night when the whole planet heard baby Elisa crying “like a flood,” until one of her special people knew exactly



what to do. And just like that, a fart—provocatively described and magically illustrated—saves the night.



DEBHAIRDUIN, Oein. *The Slug and the Snail.* illus. by Olya Anima. Little Island. (Ireland)
Bright colors reflect the lush countryside in this tale rooted in the oral tradition of indigenous Irish Travellers. A slug and a snail confront their different understandings of home in this allegory highlighting the existence of nomadic cultures like the Travellers.



GOMI, Taro. *Taro Gomi's Big Book of Words.* tr. from Japanese by Kaisei-Sha Publishing, Taro Gomi & Naomi Kirsten. illus. by author. Chronicle. (Japan)

In a culturally rich Japanese context, this book explores colors, food, shapes, animals, and places using playful illustrations and text designed for language learning. Nuances of language, such as words and phrases for physical distance and nonverbal communication, are innovatively conveyed through distinctive visual storytelling.

KRISHNASWAMI, Uma. *Look! Look!* illus. by author. Groundwood. (Canada/India)

A young girl in India discovers a hidden well and, with the help of her community, begins to restore it. An acclaimed author and illustrator combine simple text with vibrant Indian-in-

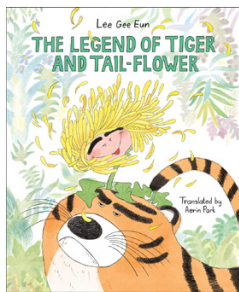


spired folk art to show how a child can counter the effects of climate change.



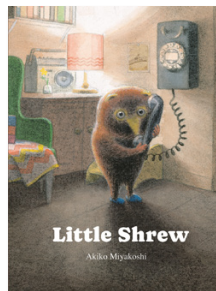
LEBOURG, Claire. *A Day with Mousse.*

tr. from French by Sophie Lewis. illus. by author. Transit. (France)
Mousse lives alone by the sea, content to follow his ordinary yet pleasant routine, until that routine is disrupted by the appearance of Barnacle, an unexpected guest. This charming story of an unlikely friendship is universal in subject, yet creative and unique in approach.



LEE, Gee Eun. *The Legend of Tiger and Tail-Flower.*

tr. from Korean by Aerin Park. illus. by author. Levine Querido. (South Korea)
Tiger and Tail-Flower are introduced humorously through Lee's comic art, but, by the end, their unexpected bond gives new insight into the meaning of friendship and the cyclical nature of life. This is a quirky and moving folktale for the world today.



MIYAKOSHI, Akiko. *Little Shrew.*

tr. from Japanese by Kaisei-Sha Publishing & Kids Can. illus. by author. Kids Can. (Japan)

The three vignettes in this collection capture the quiet pleasures and simple moments that make up Little Shrew's life. The pencil, charcoal, and acrylic gouache artwork is cozy and comforting, inviting readers to celebrate life's small joys.



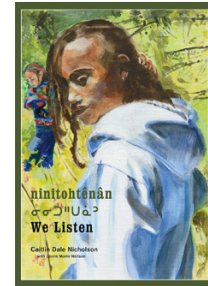
MOHAMMADI, Hadi. *Amu Nowruz and His Violets.*

tr. from Persian by Sara Khalili. illus. by Nooshin Safakhoo. Elsewhere Editions. (Iran)

This elegant folktale tells of the transition from winter to spring. Naneh Sarma reigns over an icy winter, waiting for Amu Nowruz to appear on the eve of spring equinox, only to

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 literature that introduces young people to outstanding authors and illustrators from other countries, helps young people in the United States to see the world from diverse perspectives, promotes literature that is accessible to 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 447 books published in 2024, of which 40 were chosen as OIB. For additional information and access to all OIB lists, visit www.usbby.org. Note: Country names in parentheses indicate where the book was first or simultaneously published. A second country name in parentheses indicates book setting if it differs meaningfully from country of publication.

fall asleep before his colorful arrival heralding Nowruz, or the Persian New Year.



NICHOLSON, Caitlin Dale with Leona Morin-Neilson. *ninitohtênân / We Listen.*

tr. from English to Cree by Leona Morin-Neilson. illus. by Caitlin Dale Nicholson. Groundwood. (Canada)

Written in two representations of Cree and English, this intergenerational story celebrates family and the valued role of grandmothers like Nôhkôm and other "women elders" in Indigenous communities. The illustrations in acrylic are a window into everyday life, including Nôhkôm's knowledge of native plants.

PAWIS-STECKLEY, Mangeshig.

Boozhoo! Hello! tr. from English to Anishinaabemowin by Mary Ann Corbiere. illus. by author. Groundwood. (Canada)

Children are introduced to animals in both Anishinaabe and English across the span of a day. Golden light announces daybreak and continues until an owl welcomes nbaak, the time to



sleep. A familiar story rhythm and illustrations in the Woodland art style will encourage repeated reading.



ROCHA, Ruth. *Marcelo, Martello, Marshmallow.* tr. from Portuguese by Tal Goldfajn. illus. by Ana Matsusaki. Tapioca Stories. (Brazil)

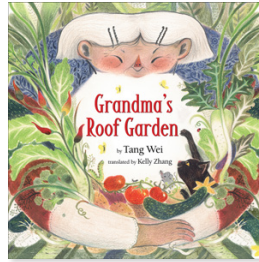
A beloved Brazilian classic is given new life through its pairing with a young illustrator who uses mixed media collages to illustrate Marcelo's inventiveness with language that escalates in surreality and whimsy. Ultimately, even though Marcelo's family don't understand him, they accept him—a universal message.



SANTOS, Victor D.O. *What Makes Us Human.* tr. from Portuguese by Victor D.O. Santos. illus. by Anna Forlati. Eerdmans. (Brazil)

Santos explores language as a cornerstone of human identity, intertwining linguistics with culture and history. This insightful work, published with UNESCO, reveals the profound power of communication and the

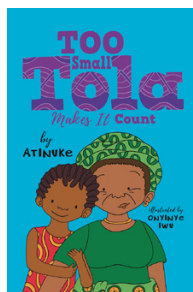
enduring connections that unite us across cultures and time. Gentle illustrations represent a variety of global cultures.



WEI, Tang. *Grandma's Roof Garden.* tr. from Chinese by Kelly Zhang. illus. by author. Levine Querido. (China)

In this contemporary tale set in southwest China, Grandma's rooftop vegetable garden brings her community together, culminating in a warm meal with family and friends. The lyrical text, inspired by Chinese folk nursery rhymes, and soft illustrations beautifully showcase sustainability, cultural heritage, and intergenerational bonds.

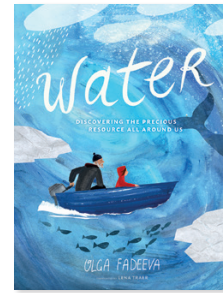
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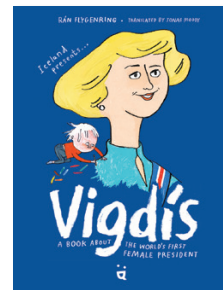
ATINUKE. *Too Small Tola Makes It Count.* illus. by Onyinye Iwu. Candlewick. (United Kingdom/Nigeria)

Tola, a small but mighty girl from Lagos, faces challenges with courage and cleverness in her close-knit neighborhood. Atinuke's lively prose and Iwu's lively illustrations capture the city's vibrant culture, Tola's resilience, the strength of family bonds, and the powerful spirit of community life.

FADEEVA, Olga. *Water: Discovering the Precious Resource All Around Us.* tr. from Russian by Lena Traer. illus. by author. Eerdmans. (Russia)



This vividly-illustrated nonfiction picture book explores water's vital role in sustaining life from cultural, historic, and scientific perspectives. Fadeeva's lush, intricate artwork and engaging text will inspire young readers to reflect on conservation and the value of this precious resource.



FLYGENRING, Rán. *Vigdís: A Book About the World's First Female President.* tr. from Icelandic by Jonas Moody. illus. by author. Helvetiq. (Iceland)

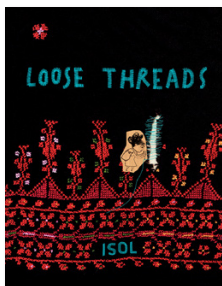
Meet Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Iceland's trailblazing president, in this vibrant, comic-style picture book biography. It traces her inspiring journey from teacher and activist to the world's first democratically-elected female leader, using the framing of a conversational interview throughout to engage young readers.



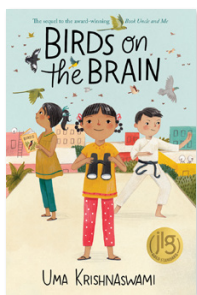
GOUPIL, Mylène. *Taming Papa.* tr. from French by Shelley Tanaka. Groundwood. (Canada)

Melie's father has been released to re-

join her family after a long period as a political prisoner. Except he doesn't really feel like someone Melie knows at all. One day a stray kitten wanders into their lives and helps them begin to rebuild their relationship.

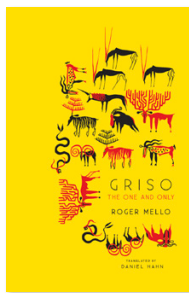


ISOL. Loose Threads. tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by author. Enchanted Lion. (Argentina) One day, Isol was gifted a Palestinian scarf so special that she transformed it into Leilah's world—superimposing hand-drawn figures on images of the scarf to tell a story of curiosity and consequences in a world where tight stitches meet the fog and mystery of the Other Side.



KRISHNASWAMI, Uma. Birds on the Brain. illus. by Julianna Swaney. Groundwood. (Canada/India) Reeni becomes an environmental activist as she works on a campaign to protect city birds in a major city in India. This inspiring middle grade novel captures the complexities of climate change alongside tricky family and friendship dynamics while advocating for local perspectives on global issues.

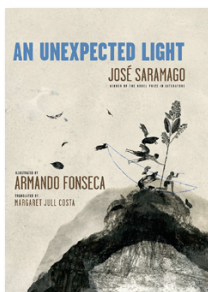
MELLO, Roger. Griso: The One and Only. tr. from Portuguese by Daniel Hahn. illus. by author. Elsewhere. (Brazil) Hans Christian Andersen Award–winner Mello recreates some of the world's most famous art styles as he illustrates Griso's journey to find an



other unicorn. Brilliant colors startle and poetic language enchants readers as Griso circles the globe in his fruitless search.

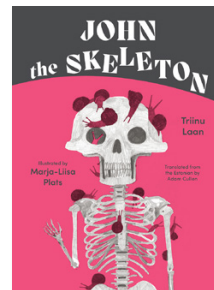


OLIVEIRA, Inês Viegas. The Duel: A Story about Peace. tr. from Portuguese by Rosa Churcher Clarke. illus. by author. Seven Stories/Triangle Square. (Portugal) Two men about to duel stand back-to-back and begin to walk away from each other. Will they turn around and fire or choose peace? This metaphor in picture book form adds saturated color as one man keeps walking and his anger dissolves.

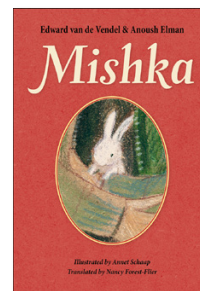


SARAMAGO, José. An Unexpected Light. tr. from Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa. illus. by Armando Fonseca. Seven Stories/Triangle Square. (Portugal) A deceptively simple story of a boy and his uncle journeying to market, excerpted from Saramago's childhood memories. It closes with a star-

ling moment of profundity as the boy stops to appreciate the world around him. Fonseca's ink and watercolor illustrations are equally wondrous.

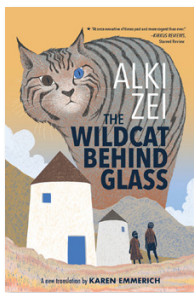


TRIINU, Laan. John the Skeleton. tr. from Estonian by Adam Cullen. illus. by Marja-Liisa Plats. Restless/Yonder. (Estonia) John, a newly-retired classroom skeleton, brings joy to Grams' and Gramps' lives as their beloved companion. Set in rural Estonia, this title celebrates small moments and explores life after death with a surreal flair, using distinctive pencil illustrations in black, white, and bright pink.



VAN DE VENDEL, Edward & Anoush Elman. Mishka. tr. from Dutch by Nancy Forest-Flier. illus. by Annet Schaap. Levine Querido. (Netherlands) Roya and her family, Afghan refugees in the Netherlands, adopt Mishka, a pet rabbit. Soon Mishka becomes the family confidante—learning about their harrowing immigration journey alongside moments of joy. But what happens when Mishka disappears? This title highlights themes of family, home, and belonging amid prejudice.

ZEI, Aiki. The Wildcat Behind Glass. tr. from Greek by Karen Emmerich. Restless/Yonder. (Greece) In this story set in the late 1930s, Me-



lia enjoys a carefree summer on a small island in Greece until the rise of fascism can no longer be ignored. Zei's compulsive chapter book tackles the meaning of freedom and has resonance for the world today.

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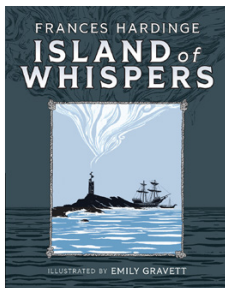
DÅSNES, Nora. *Save Our Forest!* tr. from Norwegian by Lise Lærdal Bryn. illus. by author. Astra/Hippo Park. (Norway)

This graphic novel follows a young teen and her friends as they stand up to fight climate change and successfully save their local bog from being converted into a parking lot. Full-color graphics including beautiful oversized panels are interspersed with illustrated text messages and informational spreads.



ESCOBAR, Melba. *Johnny, the Sea, and Me.* tr. from Spanish by Sara Lissa Paulson. illus. by Elizabeth Builes.

Enchanted Lion. (Colombia) On a vacation with his mother, 10-year-old Pedro runs away and meets grumpy old Johnny, who tells him tales of pirates and, ultimately, gives him courage. This is a moving middle-grade novel concocted with a dose of magical realism, imaginative storytelling, and evocative line drawings.



HARDINGE, Frances. *Island of Whispers.* illus. by Emily Gravett. Amulet/Abrams. (United Kingdom)

A suspenseful gothic ghost story that borrows from the Greek myth of Charon and the River Styx, this is ultimately a heartwarming coming-of-age story depicting grief, family, kindness, and being true to oneself as young Milo unexpectedly takes on the role of the Ferryman.



KURIMOTO, Kengo. *Wildful.* illus. by author. Groundwood. (Canada)

In this nearly wordless graphic novel, Poppy seeks solace in a wild, untamed landscape after witnessing her mother's deep grief following her grandmother's passing. Kurimoto's striking, textured illustrations explore themes of loss, resilience, and nature's transformative, healing power.

LIM, Rebecca & Kate Gordon. *The Mailbox Tree.* Walker. (Australia)

This is the story of two very different girls growing up on the island of Tasmania and impacted by climate

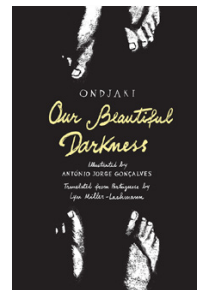


change. Shifting between two time periods, one in the present and one 70 years from now, the book shows how actions today can impact the future.



MARUNO, Jennifer. *The Go-Between.*

Red Deer. (Canada) In Canada in 1927, a 12-year-old Japanese Canadian girl navigates her new life as a housemaid for the summer, ultimately supporting striking dock workers. She faces racism and inequality with bravery and finds the courage to pursue her dream of becoming a journalist.



ONDJAKI. *Our Beautiful Darkness.* tr. from Portuguese by Lyn Miller-Lachmann. illus. by António Jorge Gonçalves. Unruly/Enchanted Lion. (Brazil/Angola)

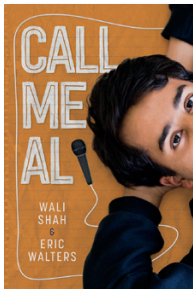
Ondjaki's title foreshadows an Angolan Civil War blackout. Suddenly thrust into darkness, a young couple dares to reveal their secret dreams and steal a kiss—until the boy's vigilant grandmother interrupts with her

candle. The teens' self-discoveries are intensified by stunning white-on-black illustrations.



RUNDBERG, Johan. *The Queen of Thieves: The Moonwind Mysteries.* tr. from Swedish by A. A. Prime. Amazon. (Sweden)

In the second installment of a series set in 1880s Stockholm, 12-year-old Mika discovers a crime ring involving children from her orphanage. She disguises her identity and, with split loyalties, begins investigating. Readers will appreciate the thrilling mystery and Mika's spunky, clever character.



SHAH, Wali & Eric Walters. *Call Me Ali.* Orca. (Canada)

Ali is from a Pakistani immigrant family and struggles to navigate his Muslim identity and love of poetry with expectations from friends, family, and school. Then he experiences a racist assault and must decide how to live in its aftermath. Who will he choose to be?

STRIDSBERG, Sara. *We Go to the Park.* tr. from Swedish by B. J. Woodstein. illus. by Beatrice Alemagna. Unruly/Enchanted Lion. (Sweden)

Stridsberg uses poetic and lyrical text to capture the essence of childhood—playing and wandering in



the park—while Alemagna's earthy and rich artwork creates an otherworldly atmosphere. Together, they convey a sense of liberation, endless possibility, and the timelessness of imagination.

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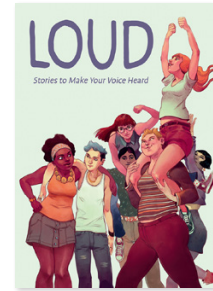


BUTLER, George. *Ukraine: Remember Also Me: Testimonies from the War.*

illus. by author. Candlewick Studio. (United Kingdom/Ukraine) An evocative and powerful collection of testimonials and profiles of 24 Ukrainians who experienced war and devastation. With poignant pen, ink, and watercolor drawings, award-winning reporter-artist Butler captures ordinary people—volunteers, fighters, students, parents—in underground shelters, hospitals, and bombed-out streets, and lets them speak.

CERCIGNANO, Anna, Elenora Antonioni, Maurizia Rubino, Francesca Torre & others. *Loud: Stories to Make Your Voice Heard.* tr. from Italian by Anna Barton. illus. by authors. Dark Horse. (Italy)

A powerful collection of short comics by Italian female illustrators portrays different types of gender-based violence and shows readers, particularly teenage girls, that they are not alone. Multiple art styles are showcased as the creators



work under the motto of “women’s desire to tell our own stories.”



CHÁVEZ CASTAÑEDA, Ricardo. *The Book of Denial.* tr. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel. illus. by Alejandro Magallanes. Unruly/Enchanted Lion. (Mexico)

A boy is haunted by his father’s brutal manuscript about violence against children, based on real events. To fight the pain, he rewrites the text, adding the word “not” to erase the horrors. Powerful black-and-white artwork heightens this poignant exploration of history, violence, innocence, and hope.



LI, Charmaine Anne. *Crash Landing.* Annick. (Canada)

Jay has to decide just how much her new friend Ash will impact the choices she makes, where she’s going, and who she will become within the boundaries of a strict Chinese-Canadian family. Explorations of queer identity alongside skate culture shape this realistic coming-of-age novel. ■