

# Great Reading Choices for K - 3 or 4 (or so)

2017 Fall RAN Workshop  
November 3, 2017  
Sally Snyder, Nebraska Library Commission



## ~~~ Beginning Readers ~~~

Garton, Sam ***OTTER: Let's Go Swimming!***

32p. HarperCollins 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-06-236664-1; \$3.99 (pbk) ISBN 978-0-06-236663-4

Otter Keeper encourages Otter to get into the water at the beach, but Otter has excuses: his stuffed animals are either afraid of fish or do not like to get wet. Then Otter exclaims he is afraid of the sea! Otter Keeper has a good idea and soon Otter is trying the water. Kids will relate to being afraid to try something and the calm approach Otter Keeper uses will be encouraging to youngsters. Usually has one sentence per page. **Activity:** Ask your listeners to write a ten-page story about someone with a problem, like Otter had. Can they write one sentence per page to tell their story? (and illustrate it)

Gutman, Dan ***MY WEIRD SCHOOL: Class Pet Mess!***

Illus. by Jim Paillot 32p. HarperCollins 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-06-236747-1; \$3.99 (pbk) ISBN 978-0-06-236746-4

One of several newer titles in beginning reader format featuring Mr. Cooper's class from the well-known early chapter book series.

Alexia hopes the new class pet will be something cool, not a bunny. The class vote results in a snake – an eastern hognose. The children take turns bringing their own pets to school and Andrea's poodle barks right by the tank Bob the snake is in, and he rolls over and dies! The children panic but... Bob is not dead, he is playing dead. Whew! **Activity:** Learn a little more about animals that play dead, OR research the eastern hognose snake to learn more about its behavior and life cycle.

Haas, Jessie ***BRAMBLE AND MAGGIE, SNOW DAY*** (Bramble & Maggie #4)

52p. Candlewick Press 2016 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-7636-7364-2

A major winter storm is on the way so Maggie and Bramble, the family and neighbors all prepare: water in the bathtub for Bramble, extra food from the grocery store, covering the hay pile and shutting Bramble in her shed – but the door won't quite latch. The next morning Bramble is free from her shed but Maggie and her family are trapped by snow in the house. A handful of cereal starts Bramble digging for it and clearing the steps. Now to takes some shovels and help their neighbors get out of their homes. **Activity:** Create a list of things people in your community are likely to do when a winter storm in on the way. How is your list different from the book? How does your community prepare for other storms?

Hale, Bruce ***CLARK THE SHARK AND THE BIG BOOK REPORT***

Illus. by Guy Francis 32p. HarperCollins 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-06-227913-2; \$3.99 (pbk) ISBN 978-0-06-227912-5

Clark is ready, tomorrow everyone will give their book reports. Some other students are nervous so their teacher says, "be bold, be smart, and speak from the heart." Clark is not nervous at all, until he stands in front of the class the next day. His mind goes blank, the students encourage him, but then his teacher repeats her advice, and his words come back to him.

Good encouragement for those nervous about speaking in front of others. Clark's bravado beforehand is typical of students the age of the expected readers. **Activity:** Discuss what a book report should include, in case readers/listeners do not know. Then work together to create a book report on this book, or another favorite of the group.

Virján, Emma J. **WHAT THIS STORY NEEDS IS A VROOM AND A ZOOM**

Unp. HarperCollins 2017 \$9.99 ISBN 978-0-06-241530-1

5<sup>th</sup> and final title in the series: The Pig in a Wig wakes up just in time to rush to her race car for the beginning of the cross-country race. A spin and a thud land her by the side of the road with a flat tire. Her crew is right there to help. Rhyming text, as expected, tells the story. **Activity:** rhyming, of course ☺ or race driving & safety...

### ~~~ Early Chapter Books ~~~

Birney, Betty G. **HUMPHREY'S TREASURE HUNT TROUBLE**

Illus. by Priscilla Burris 82p. G. P. Putnam's Sons 2017 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-399-17231-1

(Humphrey's Tiny Tales series, #6) Garth hides a small treasure chest under Humphrey's bedding, it is the prize for the upcoming treasure hunt for his class – being held in his backyard. But when it comes time for the prize, it is not there! The riddle clues will grab the readers – and who took the prize will also baffle them. Plenty of illustrations with some all text pages thrown in between them. **Activity:** Work together to create riddle clues similar to the ones Garth wrote in the book. Is it easy, or hard to do?

Blabey, Aaron **THE BAD GUYS** (Book 1)

158p. Scholastic Press 2016 \$16.00 (PLB) ISBN 978-0606400398; \$5.99 (pbk) 978-0-545-91240-2

Hilarious! Mr. Wolf (as in Big Bad) enlists Mr. Snake (The Chicken Swallower), Mr. Piranha (The Butt Biter) and Mr. Shark (Jaws) to join his new Good Guys Club, he thinks they all need to change their image. The others are reluctant. First some practice – rescue a kitty stuck in a tree. (oh, the many teeth the kitty sees looking up at him.) Next, rescue 200 dogs from the pound. Should go like clockwork, err, not so much. Told in graphic novel style, a couple of fart jokes, the cartoon-style artwork really makes the story. **Activity:** Name another “bad” animal that Mr. Wolf could invite to join the Good Guys Club. What are the new animal's “bad” and “good” traits?

Blabey, Aaron **THE BAD GUYS IN MISSION UNPLUCKABLE** (Book 2)

139p. Scholastic Press 2017 \$5.99 (pbk) 978-0-545-91241-9

After the TV News reported their rescue of the dogs at the pound as frightening and terrifying for the dogs, Mr. Wolf is determined they be hailed as heroes for their next rescue: 10,000 chickens held in cages at Sunnyside Chicken Farm, a place “impossible to break into.” So they are joined by Legs, a tarantula. Mr. Shark is terrified of Legs. What can go wrong? **Activity:** Name a new mission the Good Guys could undertake next. What other animals need their help, and how would the mission go?

Cronin, Doreen **DARK SHADOWS: Yes, Another Misadventure** (The Chicken Squad, Bk 4)

Illus. by Stephen Gilpin 115p. Simon & Schuster 2017 \$12.99 ISBN 978-1-4814-5049-2

The chicks (Sugar, Dirt, Poppy and Sweetie) are mystery-solvers. Now, along with their mother and the former rescue dog J.J. Tully, they are going to a family reunion. There are chicks and chickens

everywhere on the farm so Sugar goes back to the car for a respite, and some jellybeans. Something large and shady takes Sugar's jellybeans – this dark shadowy thug must be caught! **Activity:** The names of the 85 chicks the Chicken Squad meets on the farm all start with the letter "B." Choose another letter and write down at least ten names that start with it.

DiCamillo, Kate ***EUGENIA LINCOLN AND THE UNEXPECTED PACKAGE***

Illus. by Chris Van Dusen 96p. Candlewick Press 2017 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-7636-7881-4

(Tales from Deckawoo Drive, #4) The tough, no-nonsense Eugenia Lincoln receives a package containing an ... accordion! Why? Who sent it? She calls the company to return it but they say she must keep it and will send it back to her if she tries to return it. Coincidentally, a man stops by the house and one of his many skills is to teach people to play the accordion. Baby Lincoln, her sister, suggests she learn a song. Eugenia is completely out of her normal mindset – and finally she gives it a try. (everyone needs some fun now and then.) **Activity:** Talk about musical instruments and which ones the students like to hear, play, or learn to play.

Kelly, Jacqueline ***SKUNKED!*** (Calpurnia Tate Girl Vet series, Bk 1)

Illus. by Jennifer L. Meyer 106p. Henry Holt & Co. 2016 \$15.99 ISBN 978-1-62779-868-6

First title in a new series aimed at younger readers than the original title, *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*. Fortunately they will follow this story fine without having read the original, a Newbery Honor Book of 2010.

Calpurnia (12) discovers her younger brother (11) has brought home a baby skunk for a pet, since it was abandoned. Complications grow when Travis discovers a runt skunk in the same nest and rescues it too. It is only a matter of time before they are discovered by their mom. **Activity:** Calpurnia's interest in animals has resulted in her desire to become a veterinarian. What other job(s) could Calpurnia undertake? Ask the listeners if they currently have any interests that could guide them to a career.

Kelly, Jacqueline ***COUNTING SHEEP*** (Calpurnia Tate Girl Vet series, Bk 2)

Illus. by Jennifer L. Meyer 104p. Henry Holt & Co. 2017 \$15.99 ISBN 978-1-62779-870-9

Calpurnia hopes to help a butterfly with a damaged wing. Also, her mother's prize sheep is expecting and while Calpurnia knows she can help, she cannot let her mother know that she reads the books in the veterinarian's office, it is not ladylike. When Snow White has trouble, the vet is not available and it is up to Calpurnia to save the sheep and the lamb. Each title contains science and animal information in a nonintrusive way. **Activity:** Science is included in several stories on this list. Ask the listeners what kind(s) of science they like – space, animals, experiments, etc.

LaReau, Kara ***THE INFAMOUS RATSOS***

Illus. by Matt Myers 58p. Candlewick Press 2016 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-7636-7636-0

Louie and Ralphie Ratso try to be as tough as their father. Their mother has passed away and when he leaves for the day their father tells them they need to be tough! But whenever they try to be tough – at school or at their apartment building – they accidentally end up being helpful. Thinking that “being nice and helpful is for softies” and being tough is bullying or tricking others they are surprised that their father is proud of them and wants to be more like they are. Humorous and thoughtful. **Activity:** Think of a task or behavior that might at first be considered bullying, then find a way to turn it into helping, like the author does in the book.

LaReau, Kara ***THE INFAMOUS RATOS ARE NOT AFRAID***

Illus. by Matt Myers 86p. Candlewick Press 2017 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-7636-7637-7

Louie and Ralphie Ratso enjoyed the carnival and decided have their friends join them to clean up a vacant lot to create a carnival for everyone. The lot is next door to the spooky house, though, and Louie doesn't want to go to close to it. Younger brother Ralphie is having his own issue, somehow picking up her pen and giving it back to Stinky Stanko has made everyone think he likes her. Plenty to worry about and deal with, but they can do it! **Activity:** Talk about misunderstanding, how an action or comment can be misjudged and thought to mean something it doesn't.

Medina, Juana ***JUANA & LUCAS***

89p. Candlewick Press 2016 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-7636-7208-9

**Winner of the 2017 Pura Belpré Author Award**

Juana loves her dog, Lucas, her friend, Juli, and living in Bogotá, Columbia. She does not like learning English, math gives her enough trouble. Then Abue (her grandfather) tells her the best reason to learn English: when she does he will take her and their family to Spaceland in Florida where she can meet Astroman! Juana discovers that learning another language, while hard at first, results in being able to talk to many people, and she plans to learn many more languages. **Activity:** Do any of the listeners know another language(s)? What one(s) would they like to learn?

Nilsson, Ulf ***A CASE IN ANY CASE***

Illus. by Gitte Spee 105p. Gecko Press 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-1-77657-108-6

(Detective Gordon, Bk 3 & final) Retirement was great at first, lots of rest and fishing, but now Detective Gordon is bored so he stops by outside the police station in the middle of the night, just to see if everything is all right. Buffy is doing fine, but she is a bit uncertain about her detecting abilities, and something big is waking her up at night with its "scrabbling at the windowpane." But now two kindergarten children are missing (they have run away) and it will take all of Buffy and Gordon's skills to solve the puzzle of where they went. **Activity:** Create another mystery the Buffy and Gordon would need to solve. How would they succeed?

Vande Velde, Vivian ***SQUIRREL IN THE HOUSE***

Illus. by Steve Björkman 72p. Holiday House 2016 \$15.95 ISBN 978-0-8234-3633-0; \$6.99 (pbk)  
ISBN 978-0-8234-3877-8

Sequel to *8 Class Pets + 1 Squirrel ÷ 1 Dog = Chaos* but not necessary to have read the first title. The squirrel, Twitch, enjoys "educating" the dog, Cuddles, but with snow blowing into his usually comfortable home in the tree, he decides to use the squirrel entrance (the chimney) and visit the warm house. While Twitch believes his welcome is heartfelt and polite, he does not realize he is not welcome at all. Chaos ensues, and after Twitch leaves he finds the younger boy walking away in the snow without any of the usual body covering for outside. He enlists Cuddles help to get the people to follow them to the boy, and kids will love Cuddles trick to get outside. All ends well.

The type is a little more dense than most early chapter books, but the numerous illustrations and only 72 pages will draw in readers. Only one 2-page spread is without even a tiny illustration.

**Activity:** Consider how the Twitch might react to a cat or another animal in the house, instead of a dog. What opinions and advice might the squirrel have for them?

~~~ Chapter Books ~~~

Allen, Crystal ***THE WALL OF FAME GAME*** (The Magnificent Mya Tibbs series, Bk 2)  
261p. Balzer + Bray (HarperCollins) 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-06-234236-2

Mya (9) is in 4th grade, and not planning to compete in the Wall of FAME game. However, her not-friend Naomi continues to bully and challenges Mya to a bet as to which of them will win the game. Her best friend Connie Tate helps Mya get back on track and realize that the Wall of FAME is special, not something people bet on but something on which to try one's best, for the sense of accomplishment. The F.A.M.E. stands for: "For All My Efforts" and it has been a fourth grade tradition for years.

**Activity:** Have the students think of some questions that could be asked in their own school's Wall of FAME game.

Arnold, Elana K. ***A BOY CALLED BAT*** First title in a new series)  
Illus. by Charles Santoso 192p. Walden Pond Press 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-06-244582-7

Bixby Alexander Tam (nicknamed Bat) is in 3rd grade and is on the autism spectrum. His mom is a vet and one day she brings home a very young baby skunk who needs special care before it can go to a wildlife rehab group. Bat feels a connection with the skunk, and is determined to prove to his mother that he can and will care for it, and that it could be their perfect pet. Bat has a need for order and structure and his school helps him with recognizing people's feelings, etc. Hoping to keep the skunk until it is time to release him, Bat writes to a famous skunk authority...and receives a reply!

**Activity:** Compare the time, place, and care given to the baby skunk in this title, and in the Calpurnia Tate book mentioned above, *Skunked!*

English, Karen ***TROUBLE NEXT DOOR***  
Illus. by Laura Freeman 139p. Clarion Books 2016 \$14.99 ISBN 978-0-544-28306-0

Fourth book in "The Carver Chronicles" series, they can be read separately. In this title Calvin discovers his elderly neighbors are moving. He will miss playing with their grandchildren when they visit, but worse is that the school bully, Harper, is moving in! Calvin comes up with a quick plan for avoiding being seen by Harper, until his dad invites Harper to join them at the movies. Over time Calvin realizes that Harper is struggling in dealing with many things. He is in foster care and is hoping his mom can come and get him soon. To quote Calvin, re: Harper, p. 106, "sometimes you just don't know what a person is all about, at all." There is quite a bit packed into this small novel.

**Activity:** Calvin is into science and has a project for the science fair. Science experiments! Or a discussion of them.

Johnson, Terry Lynn ***SLED DOG SCHOOL***  
193p. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2017 \$16.99 ISBN 978-0-544-87331-5

Matt (11) in danger of flunking math, must do an extra credit project to bring up his grade. He decides to offer lessons in running sled dogs, since it is one of his favorite things to do. He doesn't remember learning, his family has always run sled dogs, so he is overenthusiastic with his only student's first lesson. Fortunately, Tubbs comes back for the next lesson. Two students become friends, can Matt find the needed third student?

**Activity:** Matt made a few mistakes, discuss or have students plan the steps they would use to help a rookie sled dog driver get started. OR look at the expense and profit sheets students used in the book. What are the positives and negatives of each approach?

MacLachlan, Patricia ***JUST DANCE***  
116p. Simon & Schuster 2017 \$15.99 ISBN 978-1-481472524

Sylvie Bloom is in the 4th grade. Her mom was an opera singer until she met the man who would be Sylvie's father in a Wyoming café. It is an idyllic life, mom sings to the cows, the pigs, and the chickens – love is obvious. But when her mom hears from her former singing partner, Sylvie worries that her mom will want to leave to be famous again. A story of love, being content, and embracing life as it is. The back of the Advanced Reader's Copy (ARC) states the book is set in Nebraska, but the only state mentioned when I read it was Wyoming. I'll have to look for a final copy of the book to see what it says on the back. **Activity:** Try some dancing with the readers/listeners, anything from organized square dancing to everyone-dance-as-you-wish to country music, opera, or whatever you have.

Pennypacker, Sara **WAYLON! ONE AWESOME THING**

Illus. by Marla Frazee 198p. Disney-Hyperion 2016 \$15.99 ISBN 978-1-4847-0152-2; \$5.99 (pbk) ISBN 978-1-4847-7821-0

Waylon (9) is a friend of Clementine, from the several books about her. Here, he is puzzled by the changes in fourth grade. On the playground one boy, Arlo, is forming the boys into two teams. Waylon has friends in each group and does not see the need for this division. His sister (14) has gone Goth and is unpredictable, and the new kid is back – scary Baxter Boylen. Waylon loves science and has a notebook he fills with ideas of things to invent or discover. As Waylon works through his issues he begins to see there are other ways for people to get together. A learning year for Waylon and for readers.

Game of OAT (One Awesome Thing) he plays with his sister...

**Activity:** Like Waylon's notebook of science ideas, have students in groups or individually write a list of things they would like to see be invented. Discuss some of the ideas and whether it is likely to happen.

Renner, Benjamin **THE BIG BAD FOX**

187p. First Second 2017 \$15.99 (pbk) ISBN 978-1-62672-331-3

Full-color graphic novel (watercolors)

Try as he might, the fox is not scary and cannot catch a chicken (he gets beat up). The wolf gives him the idea to steal some eggs, hatch them, and then eat the chickens after they grow a bit (the wolf will take his share for the idea). But the chicks imprint on him and are very cute. When the fox finally tells them he is a fox, they think that means they are foxes too. Clever and funny... and touching.

**Activity:** What role could the fox fulfill for the barnyard, now that he and the chicks are living there?

Vernon, Ursula **GIANT TROUBLE** (Hamster Princess, Bk 4)

213p. Dial Books (Penguin) 2017 \$12.99 ISBN 978-0-399-18652-3

Another adapted fairy tale as the author has been doing with this series. The one is a play on Jack and the Beanstalk, with magic beans, a goose, Strings: a hamster-harp (called a harpster), and a giant. Harriet is happy to rescue them all, if she can manage it, with some help from her best friend Wilbur. Humorous and clever with a couple unexpected turns, and fractions show up occasionally. (p.182) as Harriet is fond of them. **Activity:** Strings calls herself a harpster, a play on "hamster-harp." Come up with some other unusual combinations and create words for them.



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