

Summer Reading 2023
All Together Now
Reading List

All selections and annotations by WPL Librarian Anna L. Nielsen

Picture Books

Britt, Fanny; illus. Isabelle Arsenault; trans. French Susan Ouriou. *Forever Truffle: Three Stories*. Berkeley, CA: House of Anansi Press, Groundwood Books, 2021. Truffle is a rock star! A biker with a black leather jacket! At least, he is going to be. When he grows up. Meanwhile, he is in love with Nina. Loves her! Love love love! But he cannot get his heart to talk. So he asks his father, his friends, his mother. His father says to open his heart but his friend says that's what a doctor did for his grandfather, and his mother doesn't like doctors. He knows he's supposed to let his heart talk, but how? How?! Fortunately, his brother says he can use his mouth to talk. Phew. Lighthearted and fun about real things, balanced with love born of pizza and Nina Simone. And a band named Man-Eating Pants. Rock on! Arsenault's pencil, ink, and collage illustrations are quirky and hilarious, creating the perfect complement to Britt's story of a red-headed boy. A pleasure to read.
Ages: 7+.

Hess, Amy; illus. Philip Stead. *Sometimes It's Nice to Be Alone*. NY: Neal Porter Books, Holiday House, 2023. A girl sits at a table, swinging her feet, drinking her milk and eating her cookie, and quietly thinking how really lovely it is, how really nice, to be alone. There is such contentment in solitude. But you know what? Being with friends is really lovely, too. What if you had friends who were whales, or even giraffes? Or alligators or horses? Dreaming is also lovely. Really lovely. The world is such a marvelous place. Hess's narrative is quiet and sure with just a bit of barely suppressed excitement and Stead's illustrations are soft and gentle with all the touches of the very best dreams.
Ages: 4+.

Kim, Sung Mi; trans. Korean Clare Richards. *Say Hello?* Victoria, Australia: Bear Books Inc., Berbay Publishing, 2022. Black and white ink illustrations with a dash of red for Little Fox and a swath of blue for Mr. Wolf tell the tale of two neighbors who never quite manage to say hello. There are perfectly good reasons, of course: they're both late so they don't have time, is one, but then Little Fox tries and Mr. Wolf gets distracted and so Little Fox fills up the page in red rage, "What? Did he just ignore me? I'm never saying hello again!" And so it goes. Miscommunication, hurt feelings, and before they know it, they're both being rude to each other, and alternating between feeling bad for doing it and feeling bad for having it done to them. Awkward. But what if they try again? What then? That's the ticket.
Ages: 4+.

Salati, Doug. *Hot Dog*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022. This Caldecott Award winner is all about the joys of summer, from hot, steamy streets to the salty, sweet sea. Dog is hot and does not want to stay in the city. His human gets it, and before he knows it, he hears her familiar cry, "Taxi!" And off they go! To the sea! Where a pup can run swift as he pleases and sniff a seal! And sleep on the subway, snuffle-snoring on the way home. Such a perfect summer day – the exuberance of the pencil and gouache with Photoshop illustrations perfectly matches the rhythmic text.
Ages: 4+.

Sworder, Zeno. *My Strange Shrinking Parents*. NY: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2023. Gorgeously rendered, Sworder visualizes the maxim of immigrant parents sacrificing everything for their children in a tale of two parents who literally shrink over time, giving inches of their height, of their lives, for their son. As he grows, they sacrifice more inches and shrink into barely visible versions of themselves. Powerfully profound, and tender with a child's appreciation.
Ages: 8+

Middle Fiction

Forman, Gayle. *Frankie & Bug*. NY: Aladdin, Simon & Schuster, 2021. Sometimes, when a book tackles what seems like a checklist of Things To Discuss – stereotypes, racism, transphobia - to name a few – the book feels like it was written as a Tool for Discussion. Not here. Forman steps out of her Young Adult Lit zone and gifts us Frankie & Bug, two kids trying to have a summer vacation. And to solve the case of the Midnight Marauder. And to figure out how some people can be so nice to some people and so terribly awful to other people. Why isn't life fair? Frankie & Bug are good kids, and good friends. If anyone can figure it out, they can. **Ages: 9+**. For another book including biracial identity and trans identities, please enjoy *The One Who Loves You the Most* (Medina, NY: Levine Querido, 2022).

Johnson, Varian. *The Parker Inheritance*. NY: Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic Inc., 2018. Part *The Westing Game*, part serious and straightforward look at racism and oppression and segregation and how the past affects the future, part kid adventure, part family drama, part, part, part. Johnson fits it all in. Candice finds a letter and it relates to her grandmother. So she and her friend Brandon start to research, and find more than they ever wanted to know and also not enough, about themselves, their family, their city, the world they live in. It's a full book, and worth every minute it takes to read. **Ages: 8+**.

Medina, Meg. *Merci Suarez Changes Gears*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2018. Newbery Award winner. First in trilogy; get them all. The author is the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature 2023-2024. Everything is changing, and Merci is definitely not as rich as all the other kids, but she loves her family something fierce, and she is going to get this growing up thing absolutely perfect. Because why not? Of course she can. **Ages: 8+**.

Moriarty, Jaclyn. *The Astonishing Chronicles of Oscar from Elsewhere*. NY: Levine Querido, 2022. Fourth in series, fine as a stand-alone. A human boy drops in on a world of elves and is expected to be king and save them all. Okay, he thinks. That doesn't sound too hard. Just keep traveling and be nice to people. Listen to what they're asking, not just what they say. Listen to what scares them, not just the stuff about which they bluster and shout. And just be a decent bloke. That's all, really. Just be a decent person. One of the best books for this age group in years. **Ages: 8+**.

Pennypacker, Sara; illus. Jon Klassen. *Pax*. NY: Balzer & Bray, Harper Collins Publishers, 2016. Cape Cod author and National Book Award finalist. Peter's mom dies, so he rescues a wild fox for a pet. His father goes to war, so then he must move to his grandparents, and thus give away his pet fox. This doesn't work for Peter. So even though he gave away, left, abandoned, really, his fox back home over two hundred miles away, that's where he goes. Home. To find his fox. By himself. Because a boy has to do what a boy has to do. And so his quest begins – a dangerous quest with death and destruction and war and grief, but also a quest of a boy for an animal, a boy for healing, a boy for love, in the wilds natural and of our very own making. **Ages: 8+**.

Shusterman, Neal and Eric Elfman. *I Am the Walrus. The N.O.A.H Files, Book One*. NY: Little Brown and Company, 2023. Noah is a normal kid. Right? Right. Except, how come when he falls from trees he manifests into a bounceable thing? And how come he flaps like a mating bird when he likes a girl? And what is it with his ability to morph into a giant pile of talking, thinking blubber to keep said girl warm when they get locked in a freezer? And what about the other kids? And the crazy, violent guys after him? What is he? Is he a kid at all? A human, even? So many questions. So many, many questions. Fortunately, Noah has friends. And his sister isn't half bad, either. The first in a series that is destined to be fun. **Ages: 9+**.

Older Fiction

Brooks, Nick. *Promise Boys*. NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2023. The Urban Promise Prep School vows “to turn boys into men.” The Urban Promise Prep School is a horror pile of corruption and destruction. For profit. For profit of the lying few, who don’t care how many boys they promised get destroyed along the way. No. The scapegoats say no. Game on. **Ages: 13+.**

Cottingham, Kayla. *This Delicious Death*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Fire, 2023. “It’s a girl eat girl world.” In this case, literally. Also, ew. It’s another dystopian world, this one with a percentage of the population only able to survive by eating human flesh. It bears repeating: ew. The eaters are a hunted minority group, though, so Valeria, Jasmine, Celeste, and Zooey should be fine. They just want to spend the summer listening to music and going to parties and doing the summer “hang loose” kind of thing, anyway. But Valerie, um, eats someone. A boy, actually. Whoops. **Ages: 13+.**

Dimaline, Cherie. *Funeral Songs for Dying Girls*. NY: Rundra Books, Penguin Random House. Dimaline is one of the best writers of Young Adult literature (check out her dystopia *The Marrow Thieves*) and her latest is no exception. It’s summer, and Winifred spends her time wandering the cemetery, mostly because her father works in the crematorium there but actually mostly because her mother is buried there. So there’s that. But then a real ghost shows up amidst all the talk of the place being haunted, and the ghost is of a girl named Phil, and Winifred starts to wonder on her wanders about love. And how to be in love. And how on earth (or elsewhere?) to manage loving a ghost. **Ages: 13+.**

McCullough, Joy. *Enter the Body*. NY: Dutton Books, Penguin Random House, 2023. McCullough here plays a genius exercise: she gives voice to the silenced women of Shakespeare. Juliet, Ophelia, and Cordelia – what would they say if the great bard let them live? What would they think of *Romeo & Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*? They realize that “their own experiences are of no consequence to a man they’ve trusted,” but they also learn to clasp hands and dance. Go back and read the original plays, too, for comparison. Absolute pleasure. **Ages: 13+.**

Steffan Ros, Manon. *The Blue Book of Nebo*. Dallas, TX: Deep Vellum Publishing, 2021. Translated by the author from her native Welsh, this story is a post-apocalyptic tale about what it means to hope – to survive – and what safety means when the world starts to come back but you’ve been doing pretty well on your own. With family, family and friends you can trust, without outside influences or motivations. Mother and son, son and mother. Different generations, different ideas for the future, same love. They’ll make it through. **Ages: 13+.**

Graphics

Estrela, Joana; trans. Portuguese Lyn-Miller Lachmann. *Pardalita*. NY : Levine Querido, 2023. Raquel is sixteen years old, and while she’s not exactly misbehaving she’s not exactly behaving either. She’s got questions. The language she uses to ask them – shout them – isn’t always exactly appropriate. So, of course, suspension from school is a bit inevitable. Besides, it’s her parents who are divorced and she’s the one who has to deal with it, so it’s their fault. Right? Maybe. Probably not. So Estrela works on a play, tries some art, and falls into a kind of love. She’s got questions about love stuff, too. A mix of poetry and illustrations, this is an examination of what life means and how to grow up, replete with mistakes, for the older teen. **Ages: 16+.**

Harvey, Laura; Sarah Leaney & Danny Noble. *Class: A Graphic Guide*. Berkeley, CA: Icon Books Ltd., 2022. What do we talk about when we talk about class? What is this thing called money and privilege – and lack thereof of both – anyway? Money, power, social equality, labels, social equality power, money. This is an excellent introduction, complete with pictures. **Ages: 13+.**

Jansz, Litza and Stuart Hood. *Introducing Fascism: A Graphic Guide*. Berkeley, CA: Icon Books, Ltd., 2013. We hear and read words thrown about so much, it seems. It's good to know what words mean, yes? Yes. Icon Books defines terms, walks us through global examples past and present, and the spread of neo-fascism. It's good to know what words mean. **Ages: 13+.**

Jun, Nie. *My Beijing: Four Stories of Everyday Wonder*. Minneapolis, MN: Graphic Universe, 2016. Yu'er lives with her Grandpa in a small neighborhood in Beijing, China. In this collection of stories, Jun keeps the pace personal, sharing the everyday life of a girl who loves her Grandpa, and a Grandpa who loves his granddaughter, and both of whom have marvelous imaginations and love to dream. Is Yu'er learning to swim, or fly, or is she just bouncing on her Grandpa's belly as he naps? Who can really say? Nothing explosive happens, nothing overtly dramatic – or does it? - or even overtly real; rather, they spend time together, in their lovely little neighborhood. **Ages: 7+**

Smith, Brian "Smitty" and Chris Giarrusso. *Officer Clawsome: Lobster Cop*. NY: Harper Alley, HarperCollins Pub., 2023. It's a marine filled world, with kelp and clams and lobsters and seals and seaweed and kelp cakes and sharks and eels and super crabby crabs, and so many animals and vegetables, oh my! Lobster is a good guy with his best friend Stariana the Starfish, and together they are going to keep Caper Cove safe! As long as they can keep the criminals under wraps and the crabs in good moods. Whatever happens, they have each other! **Ages: 7+.**

Wallman, Sam. *Our Members be Unlimited: A Comic about Workers and Their Unions*. Minneapolis, MN: Scribe Publications, 2022. All together now, let's talk about valuing each other equitably. Let's talk about labor conditions, and how and why we do – and really, really don't – treat each well. An excellent primer on 21st century labor conditions. **Ages: 13+.**

