

# Books You and Your Students Need To 'Check Out'!

BY CHRISTINE A. DRAPER  
AND PAMELA C. JEWETT

For the past four years, both Pam and I have sat on the Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts (NCBLA) Book Award Committee. Every year the seven member national committee selects 30 award winning titles in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry for children in grades K-8. To receive this award, books must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- explicitly dealing with language, such as play on words, word origins, or the history of language;
- demonstrating uniqueness in the use of language or styles;
- inviting child response or participation;
- having an appealing format;
- being of enduring quality;
- meeting generally accepted criteria of quality for the genre in which they are written.

This column includes several award winning titles from the 2016 NCBLA list that you may want to add to your reading list. Listed below are a few of our favorites:

## For Younger Readers:

Escoffier, M. (2015). *Where's the baboon?* (K. Di Giacomo, Illus.). New York, NY: Enchanted Lion Books, unpagged.

Is it a book? Is it a game? Is it a detective story? Readers of Escoffier's picture book will celebrate in the hide-and-seek word play of this story. The fun begins when the reader joins a classroom filled with animal students. Each page presents a question, and the illustrations give clues for words embedded inside other words. For example, in the first full-page spread, an ostrich at the teacher's desk asks, "Who brought the APpIE. The highlighted letters come to life in the next page where an APE continues the inquiry by asking, "Who is hiding behind the CAStle? Perfect for young readers who love riddles, surprises, hijinks and word-play, *Where's the Baboon*, brings together images and text to create imaginative new meanings. This book immerses readers in the sheer liveliness and vitality of our language where words are playthings that abound with possibilities! Ages 5-8

Hanson, F. (2015). *The wonder*. Somerville, MA: Templar Books, unpagged.

This stunning picture book tells the story of a boy whose head is filled with wonder. He wonders where birds fly and who makes clouds. He wonders

about playgrounds and how stars shine. However, as he makes his way to school, his wonderings go unacknowledged by annoyed adults in his life - that is until he goes to his art class where he finds a blank piece of paper and is told, "Just use your imagination." And he does. Given the freedom to soar - and inspired by the experiences of his day - pages of creative fantasies follow with brightly plumed birds, whimsical worlds, complex flying machines, imaginative circuses, and invented observatories. At the end of the book, we see an older version of the boy at a museum standing by his sculpture titled "The Wonder," one that spirals up and up through the museum's ceiling and into the night sky. Ages 6-10

Grimes, N. (2015). *Poems in the attic*. (E. Zunon, Illus.). New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, unpagged.

Motivated by her life as a child of a military family, Nikki Grimes tells a story of a young girl visiting her grandmother who discovers poems hidden away in the attic that her mother had written when she was a child. The poems narrate the varied places her mother called home from Alaska to Germany, Japan to Colorado, and Texas to Portugal as her family moved from posting to posting. When she reads the poems the young girl gains insight into strong family ties that characterized her mother's childhood. In response, the little girl creates her own book of poetry which she presents to her mother. To continue her story, as she prepares to leave her grandmother's home, she returns not only her mother's poetry to the attic, but her own for someone else to find another day. Her mother's poems, written in Tanka and her responses in free verse weave a tale of commemoration and the significance of home, wherever it may be. Ages 6-10

## For Older Readers:

Matson, S. (2015). *A year in the life of a complete and total genius*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 268 pp.

Arthur (Artie) Bean, imaginative genius, writer extraordinaire and seventh grader at Terry Fox Junior High School, plans to be a world-famous, very rich author. He also intends to win this year's city-wide Junior Author's Short Story Contest. Artie's story unfolds through a series of letters, emails, journal entries, notes to and from teachers and parents, doodles and drawings. His imaginative and brutally honest commentaries about fellow students, teachers and school events, however, land him in serious

trouble with just about everyone - his English teacher, school newspaper advisor, drama coach, classmates, arch-enemy, substitute teacher and Kennedy Laurel, who he aches to call his girlfriend. Through his writing, we not only learn about his dreams of fame but also of the family loss he is learning to handle one day at a time. Artie's story ends with the stars in alignment and with a short note and year-end report card from his English teacher, who we learn will be his home room teacher again in 8th grade. Ages 9-12

Nelson, M. (2015). *My Seneca village*. South Hampton, NH: Namelos. 87 pp.

This slender volume of poetry, which draws upon historical records and remarkable literary imagination, brings to life Seneca Village. This was a multi-ethnic, multi-racial 19th century village and was Manhattan's first community of African American property owners. Through a series of poems highlighting the voices of the people who lived there, Marilyn Nelson paints a

collection of portrayals that together illuminate life in Seneca Village from 1825-1857. Each person, inspired by Nelson's research into census records, describes moments in time, and we meet people like Epiphany Davis, an unerring conjurer who charges 15 cents to tell the future and Diana Harding who plants a sapling to mark her freedom. We meet others such as Levin Smith who presides over the African Relief Society and Andrew Williams, a bootblack who listens carefully when his rich customers exchange financial tips. This book also tells of endings, and one of the last poems describes how work crews came to build Central Park in 1857 and through the power of eminent domain, they completely erased the prosperous community of Seneca Village. Ages 9-12

If you would like to view the entire list of award winners for 2016, please visit the Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts webpage on the Children's Literature Assembly website at <http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/notables.html>

## GEORGIA JOURNAL OF READING CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

As editors of the *Georgia Journal of Reading*, a refereed journal of the Georgia Reading Association, we invite those interested in improving reading and language arts instruction at all levels to submit manuscripts for publication in future issues. *The Georgia Journal of Reading* is published twice yearly in Spring and Fall.

We request articles that are grounded in current theory and research, book reviews, or creative teaching strategies that address all levels from elementary to college. Three types of manuscripts are currently being solicited.

### Full-length Articles

These articles should deal with research, current issues, and recent trends in reading or literacy programs. Appropriate topics for the Journal include project descriptions, research or theoretical reports that address pedagogical implications or issues in reading education at the local, state or national level. Preference is given to articles focusing on topics that impact Georgia's students.

### Articles for the Exchange Column

Articles for this column should describe creative teaching ideas and strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. These articles are shorter than full-length and may or may not require references.

### Book and Resource Reviews

Reviews should describe and critique children's books, professional books, or reading resources that are appropriate for use by teachers and reading professionals. Complete bibliographic information, the

address of the publisher, and the cost of the resource should be included.

### Manuscript Guidelines

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, and the format should conform to the guidelines presented in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Ed.). Manuscripts should not exceed twenty double-spaced typed pages. The author's name, full address, telephone number, email address, and school/affiliation, and a brief statement on professional experience should be submitted on a separate cover page. The author's name or any reference that would enable a reviewer to know who the author is should not appear on the manuscript. Manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review until this information is provided. All manuscripts will undergo a blind review by at least two members of the editorial board. Decisions will be made within 8-12 weeks of publication of the journal for which the submission was made. Only electronic submissions will be accepted.

Please submit all manuscripts to the co-editors:

**Lina B. Soares and Christine A. Draper**  
[grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:grasubmission@georgiasouthern.edu)

**Lina B. Soares, Co-Editor**  
*Georgia Journal of Reading,*  
*Georgia Southern University*

**Christine A. Draper, Co-Editor**  
*Georgia Journal of Reading,*  
*Georgia Southern University*