It is an honor to present the 2015 Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts from NCTE’s Children’s Literature Assembly. In selecting these books, particular attention is paid to language and how it is used, giving the NCBLA award its distinctive significance. NCBLA books must 1) explicitly deal with language, such as play on words, word origins, or the history of language; 2) demonstrate uniqueness in the use of language or styles; and 3) invite child response or participation.

The idea of “searches” emerged from this year’s list. We often reach out for a good read when on personal searches—searches that might bring peace, answers, voice and direction, a better life, wonder, or the right words. We hope others will begin their own searches here and that these explorations spread to students in grades kindergarten through 8. We also hope these searches will lead down meaningful paths.

In Search of Peace

Voices from the March on Washington
Written by J. Patrick Lewis and George Ella Lyon

Through a series of riveting poems, six fictional characters tell their stories of the historic March on Washington in 1963. Although many students may know about this momentous day solely because of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech, there are many more perspectives that are not often addressed. This book gives readers a feel for the history and emotions of the March that they may not understand from typical history textbooks. The poets’ introduction, a guide to the historical figures found throughout the book, plus additional lists of resources and websites can extend the reading experience. (CD)

Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914
Written and illustrated by John Hendrix

Shooting at the Stars interweaves fact and fiction while presenting a moving account of the historic “Christmas Truce” that spontaneously occurred in 1914. Hendrix based the book on letters from actual English soldiers of the time, who wrote home and shared stories about their Christmas Day Truce with the Germans. He intertwines their unique experiences with striking cinematic illustrations. Despite the fierce fighting, both Allied and German soldiers ceased fighting on Christmas Eve and came together on the battlefield to celebrate the holiday by singing carols, exchanging gifts, and even lighting Christmas trees. Hendrix’s story truly shows the human side of war. The author’s end notes speak to some of the negative ramifications of that day. A bibliography, index, and glossary are included. (CD)
issues of racism and death. His poetry weaves these contemporary topics in an honest manner as he experiments visually and verbally with language. (SPC)

**In Search of Answers**

*Any Questions?*

*Written and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay*


When Marie-Louise Gay visits schools, children often ask her “Where does a story start?” In picturebook format, she attempts to answer this question by showing how writers use their imagination and curiosity to develop a story. Gay models the writing process by actually beginning a story about a shy, young giant. She invites several child characters to help finish the story by creatively using their own words and drawings. At the end, they realize what a meaningful experience it has been and decide to begin another story. Character speech bubbles and fanciful, colorful, childlike illustrations entice young readers to actively respond to this story-within-a-story. At the end of the book, Gay answers other frequently asked questions. (DK)

**The Crossover**

*Written by Kwame Alexander*


The *Crossover*, a brilliant novel-in-verse, tells the story of Josh Bell, also known as “Filthy McNasty,” and his family. Josh has two loving and attentive parents and a twin brother named Jordan (a.k.a. “JB”). The twins are best friends and basketball teammates. However, when JB gets a girlfriend, Josh feels as if he has lost his best friend. Their relationship becomes strained and distant. The *Crossover* is much more than a sports story. It’s a story that acknowledges young people’s nearsightedness about school, basketball, and family. Alexander doesn’t shy away from

**Rain Reign**

*Written by Ann M. Martin*


Written in the voice of a 12-year-old, high-functioning, autistic girl named Rose, this superbly crafted novel is sensitive, emotional, and at times humorous. Rose lives with her alcoholic father and is obsessed with homonyms, rules, and prime numbers. She loves structure and predictability and gets upset when people break rules or disrupt routines. When her dog, Rain, runs away during a hurricane, Rose becomes obsessed with finding her. She has no idea, however, of the truths she will learn about Rain, as well as her own
family, in doing so. Her determination to find Rain becomes her personal journey of moving out of her comfort zone and interacting with people and the world in new and different ways. (DK)

It’s an Orange Aardvark!
Written and illustrated by Michael Hall

Five carpenter ants live in a tree stump. One ant is curious and drills peepholes in the stump, and he sees the brightly colored possibilities of the outside world. Another ant, though, is sure these new shapes and colors represent great peril. In fact, with each new hole drilled and new color seen, the fearful ant creates ever more frightening tales of a hilariously hazardous world, one in which he imagines blue-pajama-wearing orange aardvarks who want to eat them up. The story becomes increasingly silly with each new peephole. Through die-cut holes in the pages, readers can see what the ants see and can guess what lurks (or not) outside their tree-stump home. (PJ)

The Categorical Universe of Candice Phee
Written by Barry Jonsberg

Twelve-year-old Candice Phee sees the world from her own unique point of view. Because she has carefully classified and compartmentalized every detail of her world, she is often misunderstood at school and home. Mostly, Candice wants to save her fragile family—one that has been battered by broken relationships, her mother’s depression, and the loss of a baby sister. Her story unfolds through a school assignment: an autobiographical essay in which each paragraph must begin with a key word from A to Z. As serious as her family’s problems are, Candice’s earnest, exacting, and candidly honest approaches for solutions often result in unintentionally laugh-out-loud scenarios as she works to help her family, teachers, friends, and even her pets become categorically happy once again. (PJ)

What Flowers Remember
Written by Shannon Wiersbitzky

Told from the perspective of 12-year-old Delia, this tenderly voiced story recounts a journey of loss and loving gestures. Delia befriends Old Red Clancy whose garden overflows with colorful heirloom flowers, and she asks him to teach her how to care for the flowers and collect their seeds—seeds that hold “the memory of the flowers before them” (p. 11). As Old Red, suffering from Alzheimer’s, begins to forget the details of his life, Delia creates a journal to capture his fleeting memories. Collecting photographs and anecdotes highlighting laughter and love from Old Red’s childhood, youth, and adulthood, Delia presents him with a gift of his stories, keeping Old Red’s memories alive long after he could remember them for himself. (PJ)

The Scraps Book:
Notes from a Colorful Life
Written and illustrated by Lois Ehlert

Using her favored method of collage to create this unique scrapbook, Ehlert offers a glimpse into her personal writing and artistic life. Fans will delight in seeing her lists of ideas and early sketches, the tools and techniques she employs, as well as examples of how her stories change and evolve as she works: “Back and forth, I work on the pictures and words, until together they tell the story.” She explains how personal experiences influence her books and that ideas come from the natural world. “Mother nature gives me free art supplies!” This celebration of art and writing invites readers to explore their environment for inspiration and to create their own artistic works. (HS)
In Search of Voice and Direction

Rhyme Schemer
Written by K. A. Holt

Kevin James is the school bully. Holt’s novel, told in the stream of consciousness of a middle school boy’s thoughts, reminds us that bullies may not always be what they seem. The tables turn when Kevin’s brother throws Kevin’s secret poetry notebook through a car window and Robin, a boy Kevin has bullied, finds it and uses it to blackmail his former tormentor. To gain back some of his lost power, Kevin posts a series of found poems around the school that drive the teachers and principal crazy—and turn him into somewhat of a legend. Readers will enjoy this powerful novel in verse that highlights one boy’s transition from bully to victim. (CD)

The Pilot and the Little Prince:
The Life of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Written and illustrated by Peter Sís

Sís has created another beautiful picturebook biography with his signature illustrations and multilayers of text and art. French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote the beloved classic The Little Prince, first published in 1943. Saint-Exupéry had a passion for flight; he became an airmail pilot and also served as a pilot during World War II. When Germany invaded France, Saint-Exupéry moved to the United States where he wrote The Little Prince. Returning to France, Saint-Exupéry served the Allied cause, but disappeared flying from Corsica to southern France in 1944. Sís recounts the primary story line about Saint-Exupéry’s life with traditional text on the lower half of each page. Detailed illustrations with captions and facts presented in varied colors and fonts convey additional information and historical context. (EBF)

Brown Girl Dreaming
Written by Jacqueline Woodson

In this beautifully written memoir in verse, readers become immersed in the childhood of an African American girl growing up during the civil rights movement. Woodson shares her journey of becoming a writer through autobiographical poems using clear, expressive language. She spent her childhood traveling back and forth between her grandparent’s home in South Carolina and an apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Never feeling completely comfortable in either place, writing became a way for Woodson to understand the two worlds in which she grew up. “Write down what I think/I know. The knowing will come./Just keep listening” (p. 310). An author’s note and family photographs are included. (DK)

Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker
Written by Patricia Hruby Powell
Illustrated by Christian Robinson

Growing up in St. Louis, Josephine Baker (born Josephine “Tumpy” Jones) was a dancer, singer, performer, trailblazer, and pioneer. This icon inhaled music and dance like air; she exhaled on stage. While segregation and racism plagued the United States in the early twentieth century, Baker moved to France and was celebrated and loved. Finally, after many years and financial troubles, Baker came back to the United States to tremendous cheers. Before she died, Baker returned to Paris. Powell’s beautiful poetry...
chronicles the life of this artistic heroine. The illustrations by Robinson uplift the many textures of Baker’s life. (SPC)

**The Noisy Paint Box: The Colors and Sounds of Kandinsky’s Abstract Art**  
*Written by Barb Rosenstock  
Illustrated by Mary Grandpré  

In this biography, Rosenstock introduces readers to Vasya Kandinsky who is known for his abstract paintings with colorful geometric shapes and bold strokes. Kandinsky also believed his art produced sound. While he worked, he heard “bubbling green, clanging orange, and tinkling violet.” Kandinsky attempted to paint in a formal and realistic way, but he could not ignore the sounds of the colors. “The swirling colors trilled like an orchestra tuning up for a magical symphony.” The expressive and colorful acrylic and collage illustrations by Grandpré bring this biography to life. After reading this celebration of creativity and the importance of self-expression, readers will be eager to create their own musical works of art. (HS)

**Ava and Pip**  
*Written by Carol Weston  

Ava’s family loves words and playing with palindromes, homonyms, metaphors, and spelling patterns. Each chapter in this novel is a journal entry in which Ava writes about her fifth-grade experiences, private thoughts, and feelings. She often feels overlooked at home and is sometimes jealous of Pip, her shy older sister, but she is also protective. Ava’s loyalty causes trouble when she writes an unkind story starring the new girl in school who had inadvertently hurt Pip’s feelings. While Ava endeavors to make amends, she learns important lessons and helps Pip build self-confidence. Readers will relate to Ava’s plight and applaud her successes. Weston’s book is filled with intelligent wordplay and literary references. (HS)

**In Search of a Better Life**  
*Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal*  
*Written by Margarita Engle  

Engle tells the story of the building of the Panama Canal and the human and environmental costs of this feat. In poetic prose, Engle follows three characters recruited to work on the project as well as a young native herb girl, all of whom are witness to the harsh, dangerous, and discriminatory situations related to skin color and ethnicity. Readers also hear the voices of the trees and howler monkeys who suffer devastating losses to their species and habitats. The different characters and cultures are strikingly etched in this story infused with history and beauty. (CD)

**Construction**  
*Written by Sally Sutton  
Illustrated by Brian Lovelock  

Young readers will be captivated by the sights and sounds of the construction of a new building in this picturebook, and the multi-perspective illustrations complement the rhythmical text written in a large font size. Multiethnic workers of both genders assemble the construction materials as readers guess what the new building might be. The author uses alliteration and onomatopoeia to enhance the poetic structure of the story: “Fill the holes. Fill the holes. Let the concrete drop. Spread it fast before it sets. Sloosh! SLOSH! SLOP!” In the end, readers learn the new building is a library. A picture glossary provides additional information about the machinery and construction workers’ gear. (DK)
**Migrant**  
Written by José Manuel Mateo  
Illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro  

Presented in codex style, a continuous illustration in accordion folds, this beautiful bilingual Spanish/English picturebook relates the story of a Mexican family and their separate border crossings into the United States. *Migrant* tells of a father having to go north for work. Although he sent money after he left, it soon stopped, and with no way to earn a living, the mother decided to follow her husband, hiding with her children on a train going north. Readers can study the detailed illustrations of farmlands and new geographies that complement the child’s voice in the story as he describes the very real dangers and uncertainties inherent in migrant journeys. (PJ)

**In Search of Wonder**

**Winter Bees & Other Poems of the Cold**  
Written by Joyce Sidman  
Illustrated by Rick Allen  

A red fox jumping in the snow greets readers on the cover of this exquisite book that combines poetry, art, and information about winter. Twelve poems about the tundra swan, big brown moose, winter bees, and others are each illustrated on a double-page spread that includes facts about the poem’s topic. A glossary defines specialized vocabulary such as *brumate*, *pantoum*, and *subnivean*. The illustrations, hand-colored linoleum blocks, were “digitally scanned, composed, and layered” (p. 4). The resulting pictures are realistic portrayals of winter scenes, enticing readers to observe and savor every detail. A wordless double-page spread elegantly begins and concludes the book. (EBF)

**A Snicker of Magic**  
Written by Natalie Lloyd  

There used to be magic in Midnight Gulch, and Felicity Juniper Pickle is determined to bring it back. Felicity sees words ripple, swirl, or drip around her. “Some words have thin wings when I see them. Others hum; they make an electric sound, like they’d light up if I plugged them in” (p. 69). She collects her favorites, but fear keeps her from sharing them. Will the snicker of magic in this town, filled with eccentric characters and memory-inducing ice cream, be able to help her share her gift and finally capture the word “home”? Lloyd’s splendiferous wordplay begs to be savored in this celebration of family, destiny, and the histories of a community. (HS)

**A Library Book for Bear**  
Written by Bonny Becker  
Illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton  

Bear feels confident that he owns enough books—seven of them. Although he is reluctant, Bear has promised his friend Mouse to accompany him to the library, a place Bear has never visited. When Bear sees how large the library looks, he hesitates, but Mouse insists. Once inside, Bear continues to complain while Mouse brings Bear books, sure that he can find Bear the “perfect” book. When Bear hears the librarian reading about a “Very Brave Bear,” his interest is piqued and he joins the story time. Success is achieved as Bear enjoys the story and checks out a library book. Denton’s illustrations rendered in watercolor, ink, and gouache convey the various expressions of Mouse and Bear. (EBF)
Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems
Selected by Paul B. Janeczko
Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Divided by the seasons, these poems work in concert with the intricate paintings and collages of Caldecott-winning illustrator Melissa Sweet. Poets in the collection range from canonical poets including William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson, Carl Sandburg, and Langston Hughes to more contemporary poets such as X. J. Kennedy, Joyce Sidman, and Robert Wallace. The short poems illuminate the intensity of precise language and purposeful imagery. Sweet’s illustrations beautifully magnify these characteristics. Readers will become immersed in this lovely, aesthetic experience. (SPC)

Tap Tap Boom Boom
Written by Elizabeth Bluemle
Illustrated by G. Brian Karas

A rainstorm brews in New York City. Raindrops begin to fall. Cars splash through puddles. In a city where people are always in a hurry, the rainstorm creates a beautiful moment. Down on the subway platform, people from all walks of life and ethnicities seek shelter. The communal experience of escaping the rain brings people together and new friendships are made. Bluemle’s rhythmic story in verse and melodic language pleases the ear. Karas’s illustrations delightfully complement the text. (SPC)

Weeds Find a Way
Written by Cindy Jenson-Elliott
Illustrated by Carolyn Fisher

In this celebration of the tenacity and diversity of these pervasive plants, readers will learn the ways weeds reproduce, live in improbable and harsh environments, and bring beauty to unexpected places. “Weeds send their seeds/into the world in wondrous ways:/fluffing up like feathers/and floating away on the wind;/swirled into prickly burrs/that stick to socks and fur,/poking into pants and paws/like tiny needles” Jenson-Elliott’s poetic, factual text weaves among Fisher’s stunning collage illustrations to create a powerful ode to these underappreciated plants. With a peek under the dust jacket, readers find a delightful example of how beautiful and varied the foliage and flowers of weeds can be. (HS)

In Search of the Right Words
The Great Big Green
Written by Peggy Gifford
Illustrated by Lisa Desimini

What is great? What is big? What is green? In this interactive picturebook mystery, the reader becomes involved in discovering the answer to these questions. The simple language contains words written in various font sizes as they move across the page in straight lines and curves. Numerous hyphenated descriptions keep interest high as each page reveals more clues. From “ocean-floor greens” to dangerous “tornado-sky greens,” Gifford’s lyrical phrasing accompanied by Desimini’s mixed media collages lead to a surprising ending. Young children will delight in having this book read aloud again and again. It would make a wonderful mentor text to encourage all children to use words in new and more descriptive ways in their own writing. (DK)

Take Away the A
Written by Michaël Escoffier
Illustrated by Kris Di Giacomo

Take Away the A is a delightfully imaginative approach to the traditional alphabet book. Within our language there are words that can change and become a different word with the subtraction of a single letter. For example, the beast is best if you take away the A, or the chair has hair when one takes
away the C. Young readers will laugh at the pictures and enjoy puzzling over the words that appear when a letter from the alphabet is taken away. They will laugh at the detailed, quirky, yet sophisticated illustrations that help illuminate the words. Readers young and old are encouraged to take a look beyond the pages and to create even more crazy word pairs that change by simply removing one letter. (CD)

Help! We Need a Title!
Written and illustrated by Hervé Tullet

How would you feel if you selected a book, opened it, and found it wasn’t finished? In this postmodern picturebook, readers experience just such a dilemma. The book’s characters, still at the sketchy stage, speak directly to the readers and suggest they return another time. However, feeling the pressure of a reader staring at them, they try—unsuccessfully—to write the story themselves. When they invite the author to take the lead, the banter between the characters, the author, and the reader continues. Now the author asks the reader not to choose this book, at least until he can come up with a title. The mixed-media, child-like illustrations add to the sense of disorganization and confusion the characters are experiencing. Readers get the rare opportunity to see a book-in-the-making and the writing process in action. (PJ)

On the Wing
Written by David Elliott
Illustrated by Becca Stadtlander

Elliott’s collection of poems about birds will inspire readers to go outside and bird watch as it ignites a desire to know more about our feathered friends. Beautifully blending factual information into poems enables readers to experience an expository text in a new way. The illustrations by Stadtlander, which were done in gouache, edify the print text by bringing to life the magic and mystery of various types of birds. Subjects include the cardinal, the bowerbird, the Caribbean flamingo, and the Australian pelican. On the Wing opens a space for aesthetic expression and response. (SPC)

The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus
Written by Jen Bryant
Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Words, words, words—from endpaper to endpaper, the power of words is celebrated in text and illustration in this biography of Peter Mark Roget. Born in 1779 in Switzerland, Roget began his own book when he was eight years old. Creating a list of Latin words with their English translations, he added new lists on various topics. Even after he became a doctor, Roget continued to generate and keep his lists, and Thesaurus was published in 1852. Today we value this volume so we “can still find the right word.” Sweet’s watercolor, collage, and mixed-media illustrations enhance the text with word lists and images from “old botanicals, vintage papers, book covers, type drawers.” A timeline, reference list, and author’s and illustrator’s notes are included. (EBF)
Teacher Inquiry in Literacy Workshops
Forging Relationships through Reggio-Inspired Practice
Judith T. Lysaker, editor
Foreword by Louise Boyd Cadwell
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The challenges and rewards of early childhood education come alive in this collection of narratives by a community of nascent teacher-researchers who share their investigations of enacting literacy workshops in Reggio-inspired classrooms. Teacher educator Judith T. Lysaker and her classroom teacher colleagues observed and documented their students’ talk, actions, ideas, and play in order to develop insights into young children’s literacy learning, improve their own instruction, and move voices of children to the center of the curriculum.

In classrooms infused with the child-centered approach practiced by the educators of Reggio Emilia, Italy, these teachers sought to make connections between the curricular construct of reading and writing workshops and their Reggio-inspired beliefs. Their narratives highlight issues of content, especially new understandings they developed about the importance of relationships, as well as issues of process, the ways in which they developed their ideas through the practice of teacher research. Each narrative chapter is followed by a “Research Conversation” that illustrates the ways in which teacher research becomes personally relevant classroom practice that connects teachers to children and children to their own growing knowledge.

As these teachers pursue their individual research questions, they model the rich potential of teacher research: teacher empowerment, student empowerment, and supportive instruction that sees and encourages the possibilities in every child.

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