The Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction Committee recognizes high-quality nonfiction published during the previous calendar year. The award, created by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1989, was named after the 1657 publication of what is believed to be the first nonfiction book written especially for children, *Orbis Pictus* by Johannes Amos Comenius.

The seven members appointed to the Orbis Pictus Award Committee apply stringent criteria as they carefully read and review nonfiction books for children in grades K–8. Each book is evaluated for accuracy of information, organization of content, appealing design and layout, and engaging writing style. In addition, committee members consider each book’s ability to interest readers as well as its potential to enrich content area curriculum. Approximately 400 nonfiction titles were received in consideration for the award this past year and discussed via email and during the NCTE Annual Convention in November 2015. Award recipients were announced at the Books for Children Luncheon during the NCTE Convention amid great anticipation and excitement.

The committee selected one winner, five honor books, and eight recommended titles. The 2016 recipients cover a range of topics and themes that include sports, catastrophic events, historical figures, phenomena of nature, infamous individuals, and the artistic process. The 2016 list also addresses a range of reading abilities and will be of interest to both younger and older readers. Teachers searching for high-quality nonfiction that will motivate students to read for information and pleasure will appreciate these compelling and engaging Orbis Pictus Award-winning books. (CG)

On August 29, 2005, at 6:10 a.m., Hurricane Katrina crashed ashore and obliterated the small fishing town of Buras, Louisiana. The hurricane continued along the coastline to Mississippi where

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**Children’s Literature Reviews**

**2016 Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children**

**Cyndi Giorgis, Mary Ann Cappiello, Jeanne Gilliam Fain, Marie LeJeune, Ruth McKoy Lowery, Marianne Richardson, and Scott Riley**

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**2016 Orbis Pictus Award Winner**

*Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans*

Written and illustrated by Don Brown


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*Language Arts*, Volume 94, Number 2, November 2016

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“Skeletons riding bicycles . . . skeletons wearing fancy hats . . . skeletons dancing and strumming on guitars. We call these festive bony figures calaveras” (p. 2). José Guadalupe Posada, called Lupe, was the creator of the calaveras or skull that is associated with el Día de Muertos or Day of the Dead. Lupe’s story unfolds as he demonstrates serious aptitude and appreciation for art. He learns about printmaking in Don Trinidad Pedroza’s print shop. Lupe uses his printing skills, including engraving and artwork, to critique the local politicians in a small newspaper, el Jicote, “The Bumblebee.” He eventually opens his own print shop in León, but a flood destroys the entire city, including his shop. Don Lupe uses his art skills in many print shops prior to opening a new shop in Zocaló. He works with Antonio Vegas and begins to illustrate his tales. As the two celebrate el Día de Muertos, Don Lupe becomes an expert as an illustrator of short humorous poems and publishes them alongside other contributors.

Tonatiuh invites readers to learn about José Guadalupe Posada (Don Lupe) and to explore the history of calaveras or funny bones. The story is informative, well researched, and accessible to

Honor Books

Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras
Written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh

231 people died, and then traveled to Alabama where it destroyed homes. The power of the storm then descended on the city of New Orleans. Over 80 percent of the residents had evacuated, but many people stayed because they were afraid to leave, they were stubborn, or they lacked money and/or transportation. When the levees breached, a million gallons of water a minute flooded the streets and neighborhoods, stranding thousands in their homes or in the Superdome. For days, emergency workers and volunteers attempted to rescue people from rooftops or from the surging water. Other storm survivors broke into the convention center even though it contained no food, water, or beds. Looting ran rampant, and hospitals struggled to keep patients alive. Even though the Louisiana governor made repeated pleas for assistance, aid was slow and inadequate for the thousands of people affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Through a compelling graphic format, Don Brown recounts the horrific and catastrophic effects of Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the local and federal governments to provide assistance to the people in and around New Orleans. “The city has declared the football stadium ‘the shelter of last resort.’ But Mayor Nagin has failed to fully stock it with enough generator fuel, food, and bedding” (p. 33). Gritty watercolor illustrations in muted tones depict the despair, the chaos, and the devastation, while speech bubbles offer personal glimpses of those affected by the hurricane. Brown concludes this gripping account of Hurricane Katrina by stating that by 2012, only 80 percent of New Orleans’s residents had returned, and the city continues to rebuild communities hardest hit, such as the Lower Ninth Ward. Source notes and a bibliography conclude this powerful Orbis Pictus Award winner.
Snow is everywhere the night Anna first attends the ballet, and as the scenes of Sleeping Beauty surround her, she is awakened to the beauty of the dance and her own dream to become a ballerina. Too young to enter ballet school, Anna dances at home, swaying, stretching, dipping, and spinning through daily chores, the rhythm of the dance a part of all she does. “Shirt, shirt, laundry. Shirt, shirt, laundry.” Despite her small size, her thin legs, and her frail figure, Anna’s grace and natural talent propel her to stardom. She is no longer tiny Anna, but instead “a bird in flight, a whim of wind and water. Quiet feathers in a big loud world. Anna is the swan.”

Snyder’s picturebook biography of the life and dance career of Anna Pavlova is tenderly told and exquisitely crafted, each line evoking the grace of the ballet and Pavlova’s lifelong love affair with dancing. Morstad’s gouache, ink, graphite, and crayon illustrations offer a quietly lush glimpse into Anna’s life in 19th-century Russia and her delicate, yet powerful dancing persona. Endpages feature a detailed author’s note and offer further explanations into Pavlova’s early life, her nonconforming physique for a dancer of the time, and her belief that “ballet was for everyone.” Readers will be captivated by the beauty of this book and the woman who brought the swan to life, inspiring rich and poor alike with her talent and passion for dance. (ML)
The story of Pedro Martínez, a living baseball star, is poetically presented in this heartwarming tale by Matt Tavares. Growing up in the Dominican Republic, Pedro idolized his older brother, Ramón, whom he considered the greatest pitcher. Pedro wished he could play baseball like Ramón and dreamed of one day playing in the major leagues. After Ramón was offered a contract to play for the Dodgers, he bought Pedro his first real baseball glove. Ramón encouraged Pedro to practice really hard and to learn English so he would be able to communicate when he too joined the major leagues. Pedro did practice hard and was selected to join the professional leagues. Concerned about his small stature, the Dodgers selected Pedro for their minor-league team in Montana. Learning English paid off as he soon was able to do post-game interviews without an interpreter.

Pedro’s dream of playing with his brother came true when he and Ramón were teammates for the Dodgers. Although disappointed after he was traded to the Montreal Expos, Pedro worked hard to disprove his doubts and soon became the highest-paid player and fastest pitcher in baseball, with a “97-mile-per-hour fastball, a curveball that makes hitters’ knees buckle. . . .” Today, Pedro and Ramón have made life easier for their family and are celebrated in the Dominican Republic. Tavares’s exquisite illustrations augment this poignant story of Pedro’s life. An author’s note, a detailed bibliography, and Pedro’s baseball statistics conclude this amazing story of triumph. (RML)

Mesmerized: How Ben Franklin Solved a Mystery That Baffled All of France
Written by Mara Rockliff
Illustrated by Iacopo Bruno

When you hear about a new drug coming to market after a clinical trial, Ben Franklin’s visage probably does not come to mind. Certainly, Franklin is known for his many inventions, such as bifocal glasses, the odometer, and the lightning rod. But interestingly enough, we also have him to thank for the “blind” test process still used in medicine today. This legacy is just one of the many historical tidbits offered in Mesmerized.

Franklin, while in France to persuade the French to support the American Revolution, witnesses the arrival of Dr. Franz Mesmer, who has blazed a path across Europe curing people with a magical “force” invisible to the eye. The French people are in awe. French doctors are enraged. The king, Louis XVI, is puzzled. Franklin is soon tasked with solving the mystery: is Mesmer’s invisible force real? Here, Rockliff immerses readers in the scientific process, taking us through the stages of Franklin’s inquiry. Bruno’s pencil illustrations, digitally colored, establish the synergy at work in the investigation, offering varying visual perspectives, punctuated movement of plot and process, and a mix of font sizes and styles. Text boxes contextualize Franklin’s actions within the scientific process. Franklin not only proved that Mesmer’s invisible force did not exist, he also introduced the concept of the placebo effect. The book concludes by connecting the discoveries of the past with the scientific work of the present, inviting young scientists to join in the conversation. Extensive back matter offers further exploration. (MAC)
Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America
Written by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Today’s headlines warn of pandemics, vilifying both known and possible carriers of disease and forcing them into quarantine. The same headlines might have been those of 1906 when typhoid fever frightened the world with its spread and severity. Susan Campbell Bartoletti follows Mary Mallon (Typhoid Mary) through painful isolation and persecution created by her supposed identity as a carrier of typhoid. Dr. George A. Soper, a sanitary engineer with the United States Army Sanitary Corps, and Dr. Josephine Baker, an inspector for the New York City Health Department, were relentless in their dogged pursuit and accusations. As Mary moved from home to home and institution to institution, she unwittingly spread the typhoid germ through her work as a domestic and a cook. Soper and Baker repeatedly brought Mary to court and forced her into quarantine. One can argue that Mary’s civil rights were infringed upon with little regard for her well-being in an attempt to protect those she came in contact with from contracting the deadly fever. She spent her life attempting to disprove her accusers, and they were equally intent upon proving her responsible for spreading the dreaded disease. “One day she was a hard-working and well-respected cook; the next day she was not” (p.154). Bartoletti’s nonfiction gem would be an asset in the science classroom where students are studying disease. It would find an equally appropriate place in the social studies class examining human rights. (MR)

Recommended Books
Courage & Defiance: Stories of Spies, Saboteurs, and Survivors in World War II Denmark
Written by Deborah Hopkinson
Scholastic, 2015, 339 pp., ISBN 978-0-545-59220-8

Today’s headlines warn of pandemics, vilifying both known and possible carriers of disease and forcing them into quarantine. The same headlines might have been those of 1906 when typhoid fever frightened the world with its spread and severity. Susan Campbell Bartoletti follows Mary Mallon (Typhoid Mary) through painful isolation and persecution created by her supposed identity as a carrier of typhoid. Dr. George A. Soper, a sanitary engineer with the United States Army Sanitary Corps, and Dr. Josephine Baker, an inspector for the New York City Health Department, were relentless in their dogged pursuit and accusations. As Mary moved from home to home and institution to institution, she unwittingly spread the typhoid germ through her work as a domestic and a cook. Soper and Baker repeatedly brought Mary to court and forced her into quarantine. One can argue that Mary’s civil rights were infringed upon with little regard for her well-being in an attempt to protect those she came in contact with from contracting the deadly fever. She spent her life attempting to disprove her accusers, and they were equally intent upon proving her responsible for spreading the dreaded disease. “One day she was a hard-working and well-respected cook; the next day she was not” (p.154). Bartoletti’s nonfiction gem would be an asset in the science classroom where students are studying disease. It would find an equally appropriate place in the social studies class examining human rights. (MR)

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In a world beset by international disharmony and war, could one person, or even small groups of individuals, make a difference with regard to peace and freedom? The lives portrayed in Deborah Hopkinson’s narrative would indicate there is power to alter the course of history through resistance. Hopkinson skillfully outlines acts of bravery, espionage, and sabotage, both small and amateurish or large, coordinated, and dangerous. Strong voices of memoir, extensive back matter, and archival photographs tell the story of the Danes who defied the Nazi regime and saved the lives of over 7,000 Jews living in Denmark in World War II. The clear portrayal of the desire to do something coupled with intrigue and the power of youth and bravery in the face of great danger will capture middle grade readers, making it an outstanding addition to any study of World War II. (MR)

Game Changer: John McLendon and the Secret Game
Written by John Coy
Illustrated by Randy DuBurke

On a Sunday morning in 1944, members of the Duke University Medical School basketball team drove from their Durham campus to meet their opponents from the North Carolina College of Negroes. Inside the gymnasium, the secret game was about to begin—one that was illegal because of segregation laws. It soon became apparent that the Duke players were no match for Coach McLendon’s fast-break style that emphasized players attacking the basket. Before the afternoon was over, the players gained respect for each other on and off the court. McLendon continued to change the game of basketball through his pioneering coaching ability and his belief that we should all be playing together. An author’s note, timeline, and selected bibliography conclude this engaging story about a game-changing afternoon in college basketball history. DuBurke’s striking watercolor illustrations display the players’ initial resistance and their eventual camaraderie, both on and off the court. (CG)

The House That Jane Built: A Story about Jane Addams
Written by Tanya Lee Stone
Illustrated by Kathryn Brown

Jane Addams is regarded as the first social worker and activist in the United States. In The House That Jane Built, Tanya Lee Stone pays homage to this iconic woman. As a young girl, Addams realized that many did not live the privileged life she enjoyed. She vowed to make a difference and did so after visiting Tonybee Hall, the first settlement house in London where the wealthy and poor lived together. Addams returned to Chicago and...
Who would have guessed that Daniel Ellsberg, a nerdy Defense Department analyst in 1964, would be deemed “the most dangerous man in America”? Steve Sheinkin’s nonfiction blockbuster re traces Ellsberg’s steps from backroom policy maker to frontline whistleblower. A self-proclaimed cold warrior, Ellsberg supported action to curb the spread of Communism in Vietnam. Troop escalations, misleading policies, and a firsthand account of the atrocities in Vietnam weakened his resolve. A trusted insider, Ellsberg gained access to a top-secret report known as the Pentagon Papers, detailing America’s involvement in and public deception about the war. Mounting lies and an inevitable military stalemate compelled Ellsberg to leak the report’s content, unleashing a political firestorm. Sheinkin accompanies Ellsberg’s story with myriad voices—from Vietnamese villagers to political powerhouses—reminding readers that history is best understood from multiple perspectives. This engaging, accessible book concludes with an epilogue that connects Ellsberg to present-day whistleblower Edward Snowden. (SR)

*Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*
Written by Steve Sheinkin

opened Hull House, where she lived and welcomed immigrants and others who sought a better life. Affluent friends assisted her mission by creating schools, playgrounds, public baths, galleries, and other needed services. Brown’s beautiful watercolors illuminate Addams’s life and work. Stone’s story honors a woman who created the “social” in social justice. Additional author’s note and sources provide extended resources for learning more about this extraordinary matriarch. (RML)

*My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle’s Journey to Alvin Ailey*
Written by Lesa Cline-Ransome
Illustrated by James E. Ransome

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At the age of 13, Robert Battle began his ballet training late in life. Eventually, he not only danced professionally, but become director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. In the book’s foreword, Battle writes of dance as “the process of visualizing and exploring one’s place in the world.” In the pages that follow, readers watch as Battle finds his place, gaining the courage to sing in his church choir, enduring the challenge of leg braces, and overcoming the brutality of bullies through the self-possession that the martial arts provide. Born to a mother who could not take care of him, he flourishes thanks to the unconditional love of his extended family. This love is mirrored in the brilliant yellow that is ever-constant in Ransome’s pastel illustrations, themselves an homage to Degas’s 19th-century paintings in a 20th-century context. This picturebook biography is a portrait of persistence that presents dance as an act of liberation. (MAC)

Raindrops Roll
Written and photographed by April Pulley Sayre
Beach Lane, 2015, unpaged, ISBN 978-1-4814-2064-8

Vivid photographs, spare poetic text, and the remarkable science of the water cycle masterfully mix in this picturebook examination of—and ode to—raindrops. As a storm rolls in, nature prepares for the rain that will “plop,” “patter,” and “spill” across the lush photographic illustrations. Rain washes over pumpkins, fills gently cupped leaves, and muddies the forest floor. Raindrops linger long after the storm’s end, making patterns and magnifying reflections, serving to “highlight what is real” in the natural world. Rhyming wordplay and clever alliteration and personification provide rich depth to this sparsely worded yet scientifically accurate portrayal of the beauty and importance of rain. The book’s expository end notes, entitled “A Splash of Science,” feature fascinating scientific facts and explanations that expand upon the rhyming details sprinkled throughout the text, as well as recommendations for further reading online and in print about the awe-inspiring world of water science. (ML)

Trombone Shorty
Written by Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

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“Where y’ at?” Troy Andrews says hello from New Orleans as he kicks off this autobiography about his life as a trombone player. Troy’s story begins in Tremé, New Orleans, where Mardi Gras parades, brass bands, and “musical gumbo” are integral aspects of everyone’s lives. Troy and his friends experience learning to play instruments through their own homemade devices. When Troy discovers a broken trombone, an instrument twice the size of the young boy, he acquires the nickname “Trombone Shorty.” Troy now uses his musical talents in the band Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue. Andrews’s detailed author’s notes provide additional information about his musical journey in and outside of New Orleans. Bryan Collier uses vivid watercolor and collage, brilliant with balloons, to create a transporting vision of music and its captivating power in New Orleans and the world. (JGF)

W Is for Webster: Noah Webster and His American Dictionary
Written by Tracey Fern
Illustrated by Boris Kulikov

Noah Webster, the man behind America’s standard dictionary, was an odd fellow. As a child, he was an obsessive learner, which compelled him to recite Latin to cows and analyze almanacs under apple trees. Outgrowing his one-room schoolhouse, Webster continued his studies at Yale University and became a teacher. Inadequate British textbooks frustrated him and convinced him that America should develop its own national language. The success of his groundbreaking “blue-backed speller,” complete with simple spellings and patriotic examples, confirmed that he was just the man to create this language. However, Webster was not without his critics. His know-it-all demeanor and outlandish dictionary idea exasperated those around him. Nonetheless, Webster remained steadfast in his relentless research until his tome was complete—20 years later. Tracey Fern’s realistic portrayal of Webster’s appealing, yet appalling character will intrigue readers, while Boris Kulikov’s blend of concrete and abstract illustrations evoke the time period and enhance Webster’s eccentricity. (SR)