This children’s literature review column showcases the winners of the 2019 NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children.

Since 1989, the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction has annually recognized high-quality, engaging, and artful nonfiction for readers in grades PreK–8. The award pays tribute to the first picturebook for children, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, written by Johann Amos Comenius in 1658. *Orbis Pictus* was also the first nonfiction book for children and the first to capitalize on the potential of words and images to work in concert to convey information. Since the inception of the award, the field of nonfiction for children and young adults has continued to evolve and push boundaries, just like *Orbis Pictus* did over 300 years ago.

The 2019 Orbis Pictus Award recognizes one winner, five honor books, and eight recommended titles. These books demonstrate accuracy and authenticity, as evidenced by the research conducted by authors and illustrators, as well as engaging writing, illustrations, and overall book design. The books hold appeal to a wide range of readers and can play a diverse range of roles across the content areas. At a time when we are looking to increase the informational literacy of elementary and middle school students, these Orbis Pictus-winning titles are important touchstone texts. Generous back matter offers young readers and writers the chance to understand both the academic and the artistic processes that create these versatile teaching tools and works of art.

Winner

*Between the Lines: How Ernie Barnes Went from the Football Field to the Art Gallery*

Written by Sandra Neil Wallace
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

In her author’s note, Sandra Neil Wallace writes that “art has the capacity to change people’s points of view.” Throughout her picturebook biography of 20th century Neo-Mannerism painter and National Football League (NFL) player Ernie Barnes, readers can bear witness to the ways in which art provides Barnes with new perspectives, and the ways in which *Barnes creates* new perspectives for others through his art. Barnes is grounded in art in his childhood, literally learning to paint with mud and sticks before graduating to a sketchbook. Using the Civil Rights Movement as a backdrop, Wallace skillfully reveals the power of desegregation in Barnes’s life, starting when he first gains access to art museums as a college student. Despite the acclaim Barnes receives for his abilities as an...
offensive lineman, including multiple college scholarships and an early career in the NFL, he leaves professional football in order to paint. Demonstrating continued agency, Barnes sustains himself financially by creating a new position as official artist of the NFL.

Illustrator Bryan Collier animates Barnes’s life through intricate layers of watercolor collage that hum with movement and energy. Throughout, Collier artfully plays with the book’s title, Between the Lines, from the preview of the picket fence from Barnes’s childhood that ultimately gets repurposed into the frames for his first art exhibit, to the gridiron within which he plays football, to the infusion of lines throughout his two-page spreads. Extensive back matter includes author and illustrator notes, sources notes, quote citations, and additional resources on Barnes’s art and the museums that house his paintings. Ideal for a general biography genre study, or one focused on artists, athletes, or African American history, this picturebook biography also provides an accessible introduction to the Civil Rights Movement, the Black is Beautiful Movement of the 1970s, considerations of masculinity, and a historical connection to today’s Black Lives Matter Movement. (MAC)

Billions of trees lost, unstoppable blight, and no solution in sight: a perplexing issue with seemingly few possibilities. In this well-sourced book, Sally M. Walker engagingly showcases the fight to save a vital, centuries-long source of food, shelter, and health for many U.S. communities: the American Chestnut tree. Walker’s detailed account of our dependence upon the American Chestnut, as well as scientists’ race against the clock to save it, involves a delicate interweaving of scientific inquiry and ingenuity with historical documentation. Photographs and illustrations help readers bear witness both to the majesty of the tree and to the fight for its survival, while discipline-specific terminology bolsters readers’ scientific understanding and exploration. Strategic narrative pacing and extensive back matter, inclusive of youths’ contributions to the cause, further elucidate the trials, tribulations, and anticipated triumphs of ecological restoration projects such as this one. Like the tree, this book is a champion. (JMG)
Pass Go and Collect $200: The Story of How Monopoly was Invented
Written by Tanya Lee Stone
Illustrated by Steven Salerno

Billions of people in over 100 countries have played Monopoly, yet how many know of its intriguing history? Thanks to Stone’s lively, episodic narrative and Salerno’s computer-enhanced, mixed-media illustrations, readers learn about the economic underpinnings of the game’s creation and evolution. Stone first introduces the reader to Elizabeth (Lizzie) Magie, the original inventor and patent holder who developed and patented what was first called the Landlord’s Game to help educate others about the economic inequities of property management. Stone then conveys societal supply and demand through the players’ sharing and personal customization of the game based on their circumstances and locations. The economics of life and game become clearer during Charles Darrow’s battle with Magie for the game’s patent. Salerno’s larger-than-life illustrations of game pieces, economic symbols, and character sketches further solicit comparisons between the game and its history, both of which are rife with entrepreneurial risk-taking and strategic decision making. An author’s note, source material, trivia, and math problems complete this engaging text. Rich discussions about crowdsourcing and ownership as well as what constitutes “winning,” who “wins,” and why are waiting for those who enjoy thinking critically. Be sure to “Pass Go” and collect this much-needed historical narrative involving an “unsung heroine” in the world of business and entertainment. (JMG)

The Secret Kingdom: Nek Chand, a Changing India, and a Hidden World of Art
Written by Barb Rosenstock
Illustrated by Claire A. Nivola

This brilliantly simple and colorful picturebook sheds light on a crucial moment in 20th century history: the 1947 Partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, resulting in an enormous exodus of Hindu and Muslim people on both sides. This is a story of bloodshed, displacement, and refugees told through the peaceful lens of art. Nek Chand’s experiences as a simple villager and the stories that shaped his
world, imagination, and life are highlighted here. Chand’s protected, settled life is turned upside down as the region separates. His migration to Indian Punjab takes away everything he loves and cherishes. To combat this trauma, he turns to art and creates a secret hideaway in his new home, using all he remembers of the stories of his forefathers to turn thirteen acres of land into a colorful wonderland that pays tribute to his past. The artwork in the book is reminiscent of stylized Indian folk and Hindu art. Multiple well-researched resources are provided as back matter, proving the authenticity of content in this book. (SA)

**Thirty Minutes Over Oregon: A Japanese Pilot’s World War II Story**

Written by Marc Tyler Nobleman  
Illustrated by Melissa Iwai  

Not once but twice in the fall of 1942, Japanese pilot Nobuo Fujita set off from the deck of a submarine in the Pacific toward the woods north of Brookings, Oregon. On each occasion, Fujita was piloting a small plane carrying 168-pound bombs under its wings. The strikes were in retaliation for a raid conducted over Tokyo earlier that year—and an attempt to prove that the continental United States could be attacked. Unknown to Fujita and those in Japan, both runs were unsuccessful; when the devices did explode, the fires they set soon fizzled out. Years later, local leaders in Oregon tracked down the Japanese pilot who led the failed missions, and, in a gesture of reconciliation, invited Fujita to Brookings to attend the town’s annual Memorial Day celebration. Thus began a twenty-five-year-long relationship between their community and “the only person who had bombed the United States mainland from a plane.” This is a stirring tale of forgiveness and cross-cultural friendship illustrated with distinguished watercolor and mixed-media artwork. (DG)

**We are Grateful: Otsaliheliga**

Written by Traci Sorell  
Illustrated by Frané Lessac  

Some of the basic beliefs of Cherokee people and culture are highlighted in this colorfully illustrated picturebook, powerfully bringing to the fore the transition of the Cherokee from past to present, both visually and verbally. The sacred and basic concepts of being thankful, peaceful, and patient are highlighted here. Extending from elaborate celebrations to common moments of life, “otsaliheliga,” an expression of gratitude, is part of Cherokee daily life. The seasons are
emphasized, beginning with the fall, a time for basket-making and recalling those who suffered on the Trail of Tears. The author’s deeply personal take is a necessary one that gives voice to a culture and language that has been marginalized by mainstream America for too long. Cherokee words and terms are sprinkled throughout the pages along with the syllabary and its phonetic pronunciation. Lessac’s bright illustrations, including hand-lettering, are done in gouache on Arches paper. The written and visual text has been hailed for its authentic values, and the back matter contains pertinent explanations that offer context for the work. (SA)

Recommended Books

**Boots on the Ground: America’s War in Vietnam**  
Written by Elizabeth Partridge  

**Facing Frederick: The Life of Frederick Douglass, a Monumental American Man**  
Written by Tonya Bolden  

**Boots on the Ground** captures the pain and complexity of this most turbulent era of U.S. history. An established historian for young readers, Partridge skillfully begins the book with a personal anecdote that will hook readers immediately, and then leads them through the experiences of eight very different individuals whose lives were changed forever by the Vietnam War. Policy, ego, patriotism, necessity, and serendipity are all at play in people’s lives then as they are now. Partridge unites the perspectives of presidents, soldiers, civilians, men, and women in this thoroughly researched account replete with quotes, memories, and primary sources, all of which add depth and nuance to our knowledge of history. Elegant prose, a diverse range of voices, and powerful photographs will keep readers engrossed from start to finish. (AC)

In this engagingly written and finely detailed portrait of the most photographed man of the 19th century, Bolden goes beyond traditional accounts...
of Douglass’s early life and his escape from enslavement to document his accomplishments as an orator, abolitionist, publisher, women’s rights activist, statesman, and independent thinker. She recounts the patronizing treatment he endured from some Northern abolitionists (until severing his relationship with them), his occasional failures (often financial), his life abroad, and his incapacitating bouts with depression. Complementing the text are numerous informative quotes by Douglass’s contemporaries, color reproductions of period paintings, and black-and-white archival photos, broadsheets, engravings, and advertisements, all delivered on sepia pages and framed in decorative orange scrollwork. A timeline and extensive source notes round out this well-researched, moving biography. (DG)

Game Changers: The Story of Venus and Serena Williams
Written by Lesa Cline-Ransome
Illustrated by James E. Ransome

Lesa Cline-Ransome shares the stories of determination, focus, and vision that propelled Venus and Serena Williams from the rough streets of Compton to Centre Court at Wimbledon. The vivid images from their challenging journey to the pinnacle of the elite tennis world as African American women are not easily forgotten. The sisters duck nearby gunshots that interrupt practice. Their father pays busloads of kids to hurl the worst insults possible at the sisters as they practice in preparation for what they may face at tournaments. The girls hit so hard the rubber bands in their hair break and scatter beads across the court. Poignant quotes, cited in the back matter, infuse the sisters’ voices throughout the text. James Ransome’s cut-paper collage illustrations beautifully convey this compelling and inspiring story of two women who changed the face of tennis. (JW)

Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor: The Woman Who Loved Reptiles
Written by Patricia Valdez
Illustrated by Felicita Sala

Revered as the Dragon Doctor, Joan Procter was an internationally renowned herpetologist and first female curator of the London Zoo Reptile House. This biography commemorates Procter’s contributions to science and zoological practices and her extraordinary rapport with reptiles, including Komodo dragons. Picturebook illustrator Felicita Sala’s use of white space to frame many of the images in the biography is suggestive of Procter’s focused attention to the individualized
Nothing Stopped Sophie: The Story of Unshakable Mathematician Sophie Germain
Written by Cheryl Bardoe
Illustrated by Barbara McClintock

Sophie Germain believed she could find the poetry in mathematics when no one else thought a woman could be capable of such a thing. As a girl, she understood math concepts that adults could not and would stay up nights to study—much to the chagrin of her parents, though they eventually relented. While the French Revolution raged around her, Sophie studied in the library and covertly attended a university class by posing as a man and mailing in her assignments. Nothing Stopped Sophie is a story of persistence and talent that will delight readers of all ages. It lays bare the sexist norms that kept women back and celebrates pioneers like Sophie who persisted. (AC)

Otis and Will Discover the Deep: The Record-Setting Dive of the Bathysphere
Written by Barb Rosenstock
Illustrated by Katherine Roy

A genuine adventure story for readers of all ages, this impressively sized picturebook chronicles the partnership of engineering student Otis Barton and scientist Will Beebe. Both wanted to be the first explorers to find out what the ocean deep looked like. So, in 1930 Otis and Will “wriggled like seals” into a 5,000-pound submersible diving tank that resembled a giant metal tea ball. Cramped together in the Bathysphere, they dove “down, down” until they were 800 feet below the ocean’s surface. As suggested by the author’s note, these explorers’ bravery and ingenuity “made
When you study roadkill, you study genetics, a cure for cancer, dinner, the history of wolves, art, and animal conservation. Who knew? Heather Montgomery shares her personal, scientific, and passionate inquiry into the complex world of roadkill. With friendly and effective footnotes that invite readers inside her head, Montgomery shows us the inner workings of inquiry. Kevin O’Malley’s simple black-and-white drawings help readers visualize roadkill details new and familiar alike. In addition to the carefully cited sources in an extensive annotated bibliography, the back matter shares practical advice for how to embark on your own inquiry into roadkill. You will need this advice. Montgomery counts on the fact that once you read this book, there’s no going back. Not recommended for the squeamish,Something Rottenwill forever change the way you look at what you see smushed on the side of the road. (JW)

Young people today, and possibly many of their parents and teachers, may never have heard of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, let alone heard her voice on historic television footage from the 1970s and 1980s. Author Chris Barton foregrounds Jordan’s voice at the start of this picturebook biography, inviting readers to consider it as both sonance and advocacy. As an African American
Call for Award Committee Applications

NCTE is seeking new members for the following award committees:

Charlotte Huck Outstanding Fiction for Children
http://bit.ly/HuckCommittee

Orbis Pictus Outstanding Nonfiction for Children

Excellence in Poetry for Children
http://bit.ly/PoetryCommittee

For more information about the awards and the application forms, please follow the links listed. To be considered for membership on an award committee, submit the application form, current vitae or résumé, and one example of a book annotation, book review, or evaluative comments about a recent book. The example should be written by the applicant.

Application Deadline: December 1