It is with great pleasure that the NCTE Children’s Literature Assembly presents the 2013 Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts. While all the books adhere to agreed upon features of quality children’s literature, it is the careful attention to language that makes the NCBLA award list unique, with each book evaluated carefully according to the following criteria:

• Explicitly deals with language, such as play on words, word origins, or the history of language
• Demonstrates uniqueness in the use of language or styles
• Invites child response or participation

This year we organized the list around the theme of “Stories,” because we believe when the books we share and create with children center on the value of the stories themselves, their potential for creating new, reimagined worlds, seeing the familiar differently, and expanding children’s life spaces from “what is” to “what might be” is limitless (Short, 2012, p. 12).

We invite readers to join us in sharing these stories that connected us to the past, created community with others, explained the natural world, engaged our imaginations, and expanded our notions of what it means to be human.

Reference

Stories That Connect Us to the Past
His Name Was Raoul Wallenberg: Courage, Rescue, and Mystery during World War II
Written by Louise W. Borden

Louise Borden encourages readers to become storytellers and share the life story of Sweden’s Raoul Wallenberg who offered hope to Jews in Hungary during WWII. Described as a man “... with energy and intelligence ...” (p. 51), Wallenberg was responsible for saving thousands of lives. This free verse biography is beautifully written. Photographs of key people, places, events, and documents support the telling of Wallenberg’s compelling story. Wallenberg once said, “I’d never be able to go back to Stockholm without knowing inside myself I’d done all a man could do to save as many Jews as possible” (p. 110). (JS)

I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery
Written by Cynthia Grady
Illustrated by Michele Wood

Reading Grady’s soul-stirring poems that commemorate the strong women who, with deliberate attention to stitches and pieces of cloth—old sheets, worn out flannel shirts, or
raggedy blankets—created quilts to pass along from one generation to the next. Grady’s collection celebrating African American culture and history is written in unrhymed verse. In addition to the quilts of poetry, Wood’s masterful artwork synthesizes the heartbreaking and hopeful underpinnings of each poem. A list of additional readings is provided. (SPC)

**The Lions of Little Rock**  
*Written by Kristin Levine*  

Many residents of Little Rock, Arkansas, refused to accept the Supreme Court-ordered desegregation of its public schools in 1957, forcing the closure of several high schools. Twelve-year-old Marlee unexpectedly finds friendship with Liz, an outspoken new girl attending her middle school. But when Liz leaves school amid rumors she was passing for white, Marlee continues their friendship despite potential danger. While shedding light on a little-known part of history, this book describes the coming of age of a quiet but determined girl and her divided community. This personal perspective on civil rights is filled with powerful language and characters who, like Marley, are struggling to find the words, deeds, and time to take action. (BW)

**No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux, Harlem Bookseller**  
*Written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson*  
Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie  

Lewis Michaux spent most of his adult life putting books by African Americans into the hands of African Americans. After several failed ventures, Lewis started his own bookstore with five books, peddling his wares on Harlem’s city streets. Certain that knowledge is power, this “born salesman with a passion for books” (p. 57) provided access to that knowledge and power through his Harlem bookstore. Blending elements of fact and fiction, the book uses multiple voices and a writing style akin to a documentary film to describe the life, times, and acquaintances of the man known as the Professor whose store became a rallying point for black pride and heritage and inspired others to dream. (BW)

**Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad**  
*Written and illustrated by Henry Cole*  

The story opens with a young farm girl walking home to complete her farm chores. She notices a group of Confederate soldiers marching. While attending to the chickens, she feels a presence. Scared, she runs home. An eye of someone who hides among the stalks is seen. During the family dinner, the farm girl wonders about this stranger, sneaking food out to the shed. Slave bounty hunters visit and notify her family that an escaped slave may be in the area. . . . Is it the figure whose eye is the only thing that she, and the readers, see? *Unspoken* is a quiet book; yet it shouts volumes, calling for readers to inhale each illustration and acknowledge the bravery of the characters. (SPC)

**Stories That Create Community with Others**  
**Each Kindness**  
*Written by Jacqueline Woodson*  
Illustrated by E. B. Lewis  

When Maya is transferred to Chloe’s school, she works hard to make friends. Sadly, her new schoolmates don’t accept her because of what she eats and wears. Chloe feels conflicted. She feels it’s okay not to be friends with Maya because
of everybody else’s indifference, yet knows she should be nice to Maya—someday—very soon. But Chloe learns a hard lesson when Maya moves away. Each Kindness shows us the consequence of bullying and the importance of kindness. (YKS)

**Endangered**  
*Written by Eliot Schrefer*  

Fourteen-year-old Sophie spends every summer in the Congo with her mother, a bonobo researcher and activist. One day Sophie buys a sickly, mistreated baby bonobo with whom she has an inseparable bond. However, this is not a typical animal rescue story. Episodic encounters with men in military uniforms develop into the arrival of war at the sanctuary. The powerful descriptions of the baby bonobo’s physical and emotional vulnerability expose, symbolically, the fragile instability of the Congo. The European and Indigenous Congo languages reflect the historically situated colonialism and consequences of global and regional politics within oppressive regimes. (YKS)

**I Have the Right to Be a Child**  
*Written by Alain Serres (Translated by Helen Mixter)  
Illustrated by Aurelia Fronty*  

What does it mean to be a child? What are the rights of a child? Around the world, children are often the most physically and emotionally vulnerable citizens. This book raises awareness of children’s rights and advocates for children to be protected from unjust contexts and violations of basic rights. Voices in the texts are dynamically poetic and child-friendly. The meaning of children’s rights is examined through a range of similar and opposite concepts like “respected” and “ignored.” Emphasis on timely issues reminds the reader that “we need our rights to be respected now—today because it is right now—today—that we are children.” (YKS)

**Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky: Poetry and Prose by Lakota Youth at Red Cloud Indian School**  
*Written by Timothy P. McLaughlin  
Illustrated by S. D. Nelson*  

Timothy McLaughlin began his teaching career as a volunteer at the Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Dedicated to creating a classroom environment based on trust and inclusion, McLaughlin built a writing community with his 5th-8th-grade students that led to the creation of this poetry and prose collection. Walking on Earth and Touching the Sky offers a rare glimpse into the lives of modern day Native American teenagers, merging both cultural perspectives and adolescent voices, standing as both a cultural document and a literary work. (DM)

**Wonder**  
*Written by R. J. Palacio*  

Born with severe facial abnormalities, August (Auggie) Pullman was homeschooled until now, his fifth-grade year. Auggie has a supportive family and a great dog to help him through the rough spots of this challenging transition. When Auggie wears his old Halloween costume to school instead of the new costume his friends are expecting, he hears comments he can’t shake out of his mind. What if people are pretending to be his friend and going to school was...
Moonbird: A Year on the Wind with the Great Survivor B95
Written by Phillip M. Hoose

A tiny 20-year-old rufa red knot known as B95 (because of his bird-band number) has traveled a distance equivalent to a trip to the moon and halfway back. First banded in 1995, this amazing bird migrates from Tierra del Fuego near the bottom of the Earth north to Southampton Island to mate, breed, and eat before heading south once again. Scientists counting red knots look for Moonbird each year. This unexpectedly inspiring survival tale of the Moonbird’s extraordinary feat—eluding predators, enduring long and tiring fights, and surviving human threats to feeding grounds—reminds readers of the interconnection between species through one incredible winged wonder. (BW)

Stories That Explain the Natural World

A Leaf Can Be . . .
Written by Laura Purdie Salas
Illustrated by Violeta Dabija

This informational book celebrates nature, specifically, leaves. Salas describes the chameleon-like abilities of leaves: “A leaf can be a . . ./ Soft cradle/ Water ladle . . ./ Rain stopper . . ./ Shade spiller.” Leaves protect; they heal; they warm; they nourish. Leaves mark the passage of the seasons. The illustrations delicately uplift depictions of the leaves through muted greens, oranges, yellows, reds, and browns. The language, both visual and written, will delight readers. Salas includes a glossary to remind readers that this is indeed a nonfiction text that can be used to inspire young scientists, nature explorers, and backyard game players. (SPC)

And Then It’s Spring
Written by Julie Fogliano
Illustrated by Erin Stead

“First you have brown, all around you have brown.” With this, the reader enters into the world of a young boy and his animal friends who eagerly prepare for and await the arrival of spring. They plant seeds, wish for rain, worry, and carefully check for the tiniest hint of green. Nothing seems to be growing. Are the birds hindering their progress? Could it be the bears and “all that stomping?” Children of all ages will understand the boy’s desire to exchange the dull, leafless brown scenery of winter for the sparkly green newness of spring. (PB)

Edited by J. Patrick Lewis

Whether they are big, small, feathered, furry, or scaly, all animals are welcome in this stunning book of poetry edited by J. Patrick Lewis. Divided into seven sections, the book includes a variety of poetic forms—limericks, shape poems, and haiku among others—written by classic and contemporary poets. Children of all ages can expect to find rich language and mesmerizing photography on every page. For example, in Visitor, Kristine O’Connell George helps readers experience the “Bright flits, brisk zips,/ a green-gray blur,/ wings, zings, and whir” (p. 76) of a hummingbird. Tips for writing poems, a
bibliography of poetry books, and several indices conclude this volume. (PB)

**Snakes**
Written and photographed by Nic Bishop
Nic Bishop’s book, *Snakes*, presents readers with extraordinary close-up photos of different snakes and concisely descriptive prose guaranteed to enhance any reader’s snake experiences. The brilliant snake images look scary, fearful, greedy, gruesome, and yet, in a way, beautiful. The high quality of each snake photo, along with varying font colors and sizes, makes this an irresistible informational text. Endnotes include how Bishop put together photos for this book and personal stories about his encounters with snakes. (YKS)

**Unbelievable Stories That Shape Experience and Thought**

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43 Old Cemetery Road: The Phantom of the Post Office
Written by Kate Klise
Illustrated by M. Sarah Klise

Olive Spence, a ghost, Ignatius P. Grumply, a children’s author, and Seymour Hope, their 11-year-old son, live happily in the Spence Mansion at 43 Old Cemetery Road. Together, they write and publish a children’s book, mailing it to fans—three chapters at a time. But the local post office soon will be closing. According to Sal U. Tayshuns, the postmaster general, letters will be replaced by the VEXT-mail veil, a new “video-enhanced text messaging system” you wear over your head. Written through a series of letters, newspaper articles, memos, and VEXT-mail transcripts, Kate and Sarah Klise incorporate clever, laugh-out-loud wordplay in this fourth book
about Ghastly, Illinois, “America’s Favorite Ghost Town” (Endpaper). (PB)

**Chopsticks**
Written by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
Illustrated by Scott Magoon

A “sequel” in a place-setting series, Chopsticks is a tale of best friends, a pair of chopsticks who are “practically attached at the hip.” The buddies enjoy having fun together until an accident occurs, causing one of the chopsticks to be “whisked away” by a whisk, repaired by a bottle of glue, and put away to recuperate. Scared to be alone, the other chopstick resists going into the world. Rosenthal’s play on words and Magoon’s expressive illustrations will have readers laughing out loud. Chopsticks has an enduring quality, both in language and lessons learned, which will linger with readers. (SPC)

**Hades: Lord of the Dead**
Written and illustrated by George O’Connor

The fourth installment in the Olympians graphic novel series features Hades, the Greek God of the Underworld. Readers will delight in Hades’s manipulative efforts to convince Persephone to become his queen—tapping into the young goddess’s desire to escape her controlling mother, Demeter, and tricking Persephone into eating that famous pomegranate. O’Connor updates the classic Greek myth with modern-age superhero comic illustrations and snappy dialogue, but the storyline remains faithful to the original. Extensive notes in the back explain the literary allusions and terms scattered throughout the text and illustrations. (DM)

**Cat Tale**
Written and illustrated by Michael Hall

Author-illustrator Michael Hall has readers tripping along with feline friends as they set off on an afternoon outing with books and kitty chews. Playful encounters for the three on their excursion highlight homophones and homonyms. “They board a train./ They train a duck/ to duck a shoe./ They shoo a truly naughty gnu.” The bold geometric illustrations contribute to the story’s raucous tone, offering opportunities for laugh-out-loud language play. (JS)

**The Obstinate Pen**
Written and illustrated by Frank W. Dormer

After chasing his interested nephew Horace away, Uncle Flood begins writing with his new pen,
"This is my true story." But the pen, readers quickly discover, has its own agenda, and writes instead, "You have a BIG nose." In a fit, Uncle Flood torpedoes the pen out the window. After continued encounters resulting in insults of different characters, the pen finally ends up in the hands of nephew Horace, who draws . . . and the pen lets him. Dormer cleverly weaves the written text into the color-filled pen-and-ink illustrations, humorously showing how mighty the pen can indeed be. (JS)

Stories That Illuminate What It Means to Be Human

Sadie and Ratz
Written by Sonya Hartnett
Illustrated by Anne James

Hannah loves her hands, naming them Sadie and Ratz, and she enjoys a rich imaginary life playing with them. Unfortunately, Hannah’s little brother, Baby Boy, ruins her fun when he invades her privacy and gets the attention of her parents. Whenever Baby Boy angers Hannah, Sadie and Ratz “wake up”—leaping to her defense, which only gets Hannah in trouble. Humorous, sophisticated word choices reveal Hannah’s rich imagination, inviting personal connections and discussion. (DM)

Z Is for Moose
Written by Kelly Bingham
Illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky

Standing in the wings, Apple, Ball, Cat, and the rest of the actors wait to present the alphabet. With Zebra directing the show, what could go wrong? Plenty, if one member of the cast is an anxious moose! After waiting patiently for his turn, Moose is aghast when he hears that M stands for Mouse. A rampage ensues as Moose stomps through the next letters and comically defaces others with his red crayon. This clever twist on a traditional format unfolds letter by letter, with each framed cartoon-style illustration depicting one scene of the show. Label-like text and speech bubbles partner with the illustrations to delight young readers. (PB)

Forgive Me, I Meant to Do It: False Apology Poems
Written by Gail Carson Levine
Illustrated by Matthew Cordell

"This is my true story." But the pen, readers quickly discover, has its own agenda, and writes instead, "You have a BIG nose." In a fit, Uncle Flood torpedoes the pen out the window. After continued encounters resulting in insults of different characters, the pen finally ends up in the hands of nephew Horace, who draws . . . and the pen lets him. Dormer cleverly weaves the written text into the color-filled pen-and-ink illustrations, humorously showing how mighty the pen can indeed be. (JS)
From Red Riding Hood to her editor, Levine’s poetry collection, centered on false apologies, puts a new slant on familiar folklore and the notion of apologizing. Featuring William Carlos Williams’s original poem “This Is Just to Say,” Levine offers suggestions for writing false apology poems, including a “Do Not Attempt” warning. Matthew Cordell adds to the humor with his pen-and-ink drawings. This book is delightful, fiendish, and appealing to readers of all ages. (JS)

**House Held Up by Trees**  
*Written by Ted Kooser  
Illustrated by Jon Klassen*  

A perfect blending of muted illustrations and lyrical poetic verse, *House Held Up by Trees* is about a house that belonged to a small family and the yard that was meticulously cared for by the father. Time passes, and the children grow up and move away. The father moves to the city with hopes of visiting his children. The old, abandoned house becomes overcome by vandals and weariness. Kooser’s narrative shows that the “winds pushed . . ., but the young trees kept it from falling apart.” Nature embraces the old house and raises it toward the sky where it remains today. (SPC)

**See You at Harry’s**  
*Written by Jo Knowles*  

Twelve-year-old Fern feels overlooked in her family. Her older sister, Sara, is taking a gap year before college. Her brother, Holden, thinks no one knows about his homosexuality. Fern’s little brother, Charlie, grabs most of the attention and tests Fern’s patience. Fern’s father comes up with embarrassing plans to increase business at the restaurant, and Fern’s mother meditates. Fern’s friend, Ran, encourages her that “All will be well,” but when a horrible accident rips her family apart, Fern doesn’t believe anything will be well again. *See You at Harry’s* is an emotionally draining, but ultimately uplifting story of one family struggling to heal after tragedy. (DM)

**The One and Only Ivan**  
*Written by Katherine Applegate  
Illustrated by Patricia Castelao*  

Ivan the gorilla, star attraction at the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, spends his days in a glass domain. Ivan seems content, but when the mall owner brings in a baby elephant, Ruby, to increase attendance, Ivan hatches a plan to save her. Deprived of his natural role as a silverback, a mighty protector, Ivan feels powerless, but finds an opportunity for redemption. Based on a true story, *The One and Only Ivan* encourages readers of all ages to consider animal rights and humanity’s role in caring for wild creatures. Like the best animal characters, Ivan teaches us how to be better people. (DM)

2013 Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts Committee Members: Tracy Smiles (TS), Chair, Western Oregon University, Monmouth; Patricia Bandré (PB), Salina Public Schools, Salina, KS; Shanetia Clark (SC), Salisbury University, MD; Donalyn Miller (DM), Northwest ISD, Ft. Worth, TX; Jean Schroeder (JS), Tucson ISD, AZ; Yoo Kyung Sung (YKS), University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; Barbara Ward (BW), Washington State University, Pullman.

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