

Good Books for Verbally Talented Learners

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This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of books that all children should read. Rather it is a brief list of titles that have motivated and interested children in recent years and further in the past. Among the criteria used to select the books are complex plots, rich language and vocabulary, characters with whom children can identify, and characters who are bright, problem-solving individuals. Some of the books were published many years ago; others are contemporary. Several titles, although limited in availability, are included because they may be found in libraries, used bookstores, and websites specializing in used books such as <http://www.abebooks.com/> Books marked * are limited in availability.

It is almost impossible to categorize books by the age of the reader because of the variability in children's reading skills and interests. Some have indicators of suitability for MS (middle school) or HS (high school) following the annotation.

Rather than attempt to list and describe from the hundreds of more traditional classics, I refer the reader instead to the book *Classics in the Classroom* by Michael Clay Thompson. (See information on the last page.)

Fiction

Picture Books for Young Readers

Bedard, Michael. *Emily* il. by Barbara Cooney (1992). New York: Delacort Press. One spring day, a young girl goes with her mother to visit her reclusive neighbor, the poet, Emily Dickinson. The visit prompts an exchange of gifts between Emily and the child. The language of the book is poetic itself. This story could provide an introduction to the life and writings of Dickinson.

Brett, Jan. *Annie and the Wild Animals*. (1985). Boston: Houghton Mifflin. In this beautiful winter story for young children, Annie makes corn cakes to try to attract a new pet after her cat disappears. A number of wild animals come to visit, including a moose, a bear, and a deer. This book, like others by the same author, has illustrations that tell their own stories on the border of each page.

Brett, Jan. *Trouble with Trolls* (1992). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. On a trip up Mount Baldy, Treva and her dog, Tuffi, encounter a group of persistent trolls in search of a dog. They manage to capture Tuffi several times, but Treva cleverly outwits them. As is characteristic of Jan Brett's books, illustrations tell the main story as well as the secondary tale that takes place in the trolls' underground home.

Browne, Anthony. *Voices in the Park* (1998). New York: DK Publishing. A simple story of a trip to the park – told from the points of view of multiple characters. This is a wonderful resource for illustrating the concept of voice and point of view in writing.

*Chesworth, Michael. *Archibald Frisby* (1994). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Young Archibald is crazy about science! He creates experiments and opportunities for learning from everything he encounters. His well-intentioned mother packs him off to camp, urging him to forget about science and "have fun." Is it possible? Many bright children will see themselves in this humorous story.

Cooney, Barbara. *Miss Rumphius* (1982). New York: Puffin Books. Young Alice chooses to live her life as her grandfather lived his, by traveling the world and then living by the sea. This independent young woman is challenged by her grandfather to do something to make the world more beautiful. The book tells her story in words and pictures.

Deedy, Carmen. *Agatha's Feather Bed* (1991). il. by Laura Seeley. An unusual combination of fact and fiction with a heavy dose of humor in the form of puns. Agatha sells cloth that she has made and she tells stories. In this story, Agatha weaves a tale to explain the origins of common products and many puns ensue. Great curricular tie-in to economic concepts of production, consumption and distribution.

Fox, Mem, *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* (1985). New York: Kane/Miller Book Publishers. Wilfred lives next door to an old people's home, and those who live there are his special friends. When he hears that one of his friends has lost her memory, he asks the others to tell him what a memory is. He then gathers up things that will help her find her memory. This is a sensitive story with charming illustrations.

Grimes, Nikki *Meet Danitra Brown* il. by Floyd Cooper (1984). New York: William Morrow & Co. This Coretta Scott King Honor Book is the story of two devoted friends, Danitra and Zuri. Each two-page spread is a poem that tells something of their lives in rhyme with lively illustrations. The friendship continues in two sequels, *Danitra Brown Leaves Town* and *Danitra Brown, Class Clown*.

Hesse, Karen *Come On, Rain*, (1999) il. by Jon Muth, Scholastic Press. A perfect blend of words and pictures, this book reads like poetry. Hesse uses lyrical verbs and adjectives to describe a hot, summer day and the relief brought by the rain. Similes and metaphors abound and the reader just wants to sing along.

Hoffman, Mary & Caroline Binch, *Amazing Grace* (1991). New York: Dial Books for Young Readers. Grace's imagination leads her to act out many roles. When she wants to play Peter Pan, her classmates tell her that she can't because Grace isn't a boy and Peter Pan isn't black. Her supportive mother and grandmother help her realize that she can achieve her goals. Three additional stories about Grace have been published.

*Martin, Ann il. by Nancy Poydar, *Rachel Parker, Kindergarten Show-off* (1992). New York: Holiday House. Olivia is the only kindergartner in her class who can read and write--until Rachel Elizabeth Parker moves in next door and joins the kindergarten class. Not only can Rachel also read and write, but she has two first names, a baby sister, and a puppet theatre. Can rivals become friends?

McDonald, Megan, *Insects Are My Life* il. by Paul Brett Johnson (1995). New York: Orchard Books. "Amanda Frankenstein was a bug's best friend." Protector of ants, fireflies, and all other flying, crawling insects, Amanda finds little companionship among her classmates who do not share her passion for entomology. She's back in *Reptiles are My Life*.

Muth, J. J. *Zen Shorts* (2005). A Caldecott Honor book, the three connected stories invite readers to consider alternative perspectives on big ideas such as luck, gifts, anger. The thought-provoking stories are told by a panda named Stillwater to each of three children. Sequels, *Zen Ties*, (2008) and *Zen Ghosts* (2010) bring Stillwater and the children together again.

Ringgold, Faith, *Tar Beach* (1991). New York: Crown Pub. Described as a story quilt, this book combines Ringgold's artistic and writing gifts into a magical tale that begins and ends on a rooftop in Harlem. The story incorporates the African-American theme of "flying" into a little girl's dream of life as she wishes it to be, including a good job for her daddy and ice cream for dessert every night.

Rylant, Cynthia, il. by Stephen Gammell *The Relatives Came* (1985). New York: Simon & Schuster. This rollicking story of a family gathering literally sings with joy! Rylant recreates the journey, the reunion, and the goodbyes of generations of people who are willing to sleep head to toe just to be together.

Rylant, Cynthia, il. by Diane Goode *When I Was Young in the Mountains* (1982). New York: Penguin Books. This quiet book tells of childhood with grandparents during simpler times. Each page celebrates the pleasures of country life with loving family.

Scieszka, Jon & Smith, Lane *Math Curse* (1995). New York: Viking. Another brilliant, witty offering from this duo. There is enough math in this book to provide math lessons for a many weeks! Look for the little “math jokes” in the dedications and on the dust jacket. Mrs. Fibonacci, the math teacher, states that almost everything can be thought of as a math problem, and that’s what happens! Whether one is boarding the school bus or handing out birthday cupcakes, the world does, indeed, seem to be made up of perplexing, humorous math predicaments.

Scieszka, Jon & Smith, Lane *Science Verse* (2004). New York: Viking. Proving their versatility once again, these two embed science in parodies of familiar poets and rhymes. What a terrific way to lead kids to the original poems that sparked the verse.

Schotter, Roni, il. by Giselle Potter *The Boy Who Loved Words* (2006). New York: Schwartz & Wade. Selig is a collector of words. His life evolves from this love of language and the story is chockablock (one of Selig’s favorites) with exquisite language. Listeners and readers will find themselves thinking of their own favorites and learning Selig’s lexicon along the way.

Stephoe, John, *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (1987). New York: Scholastic Books. Based on an African folktale, this book tells the story of two beautiful young women, one ill-tempered, the other kind and generous. When the king announces a search for a queen, the two set out on separate journeys to the city. (Caldecott Honor book.)

Woodson, Jacqueline, il. by E. B. Lewis *The Other Side* (2001). New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons. Text and illustrations place the reader back in a period when mothers wore dresses and hats to town and when people were unlikely make friends with those who were different. But children, being children, look beyond the surface and forge friendships with those who are more like them than different.

Chapter Books – Elementary and Middle School

Anderson, Laurie Halse, *Fever 1793* (2000). New York: Simon & Schuster. How does a 14-year-old rise to the challenges of running a business during the plague sweeping the city of Philadelphia? Based on well-documented events, this story weaves a thread of fiction into a historical event.

Balliett, Blue, *Chasing Vermeer* il. by Brett Helquist (2004). New York: Scholastic Press. It’s a mystery! It’s filled with puzzles! It’s populated by intriguing characters. The story is set in Chicago’s Hyde Park and the University of Chicago Laboratory School. A painting has disappeared and two talented 6th graders are drawn into the crime by their connections to the seemingly unrelated people and events. Two sequels have been published: *The Wright 3*, and *The Calder Game*.

Birdsall, Jeanne, *The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy* (2007). New York: Alfred A. Knopf. This National Book award winner and its sequel, *The Penderwicks on Gardam Street*, are reminiscent of books for young readers published decades ago. The sisters, ages 5 through 12, are talented fun-loving children who live relatively normal lives. No special effects, no fantasy or magic, just growing up with a loving father and each other.

*Brooks, Bruce, *Midnight Hour Encores* (1986). New York: Harper Keypoint. Sib is a gifted cellist raised by her father after her mother gave her up when she was a day old. At sixteen, she decides to go west to meet her mother. During the trip, Sib's father helps her understand, primarily through music, who her parents were then and what the times were like. (MS)

Brooks, Bruce, *What Hearts* (1992). New York: HarperTrophy. When we first meet Asa as a bright, happy first grader, he has no idea how many sharp turns his young life will take before we leave him in seventh grade. He copes with an emotionally fragile mother, a difficult stepfather and frequent relocations, all the while maintaining his brilliance, his sensitivity, his curiosity and his insights into others' feelings and lives. Newbery Honor Book.

Canfield, Dorothy, *Understood Betsy* (1916). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Betsy is a gifted 8-year old, but she is so coddled by her overprotective aunts that she had no chance to show it until she goes to live with other relatives on their farm. She blossoms as she finds that she can do many things and solve problems now that she has a chance to trust her knowledge and intuition. Her school experiences will warm the heart of every gifted child!

Curtis, Christopher Paul, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* (1995). New York: Bantam Doubleday. Humor, family bonds, and a dark moment in the country's history come together in this award-winning novel. Kenny, age 10, and his "juvenile delinquent" 13-year-old brother and their little sister head south with their parents to visit their grandmother. Events in Birmingham change their lives.

Curtis, Christopher Paul, *Bud, Not Buddy*, (1999). New York: Delcorte Press. It's 1936, and 10-year-old Bud sets out to find his father, whom he has never met. Following clues left by his mother, Bud seeks the musician who may be his dad. There is laugh-out-loud humor in the story, and genuine warmth among those he encounters along his quest.

Cushman, Karen, *Catherine, Called Birdy* (1994). New York: HarperTrophy. The adventures of a 14-year-old girl who lives in the Middle Ages are told through her diary. Catherine is a spirited young woman whose independent character and sensitive nature often put her at odds with her father whose goal is to marry her off quickly. Her "diary" entries present a detailed view of daily life during medieval times. There is much humor among the historical facts. (MS)

Dahl, Roald, *Matilda* (1988). New York: Puffin Books. Here is another gifted character to whom other bright children can relate. Matilda is a genius who survives parents too stupid to be believed and a school principal who mercilessly terrorizes children. Matilda speaks the thoughts that many gifted children may suppress when confronted with ignorance and malice.

Enright, Elizabeth, *The Saturdays* (1941). New York: Dell Publishing. In this classic, a family of four bright, creative children devise a plan for allowing each member the freedom to explore her or his dream through the Independent Saturday Afternoon Adventure Club. There are three sequels about this family, the Melendys, and all have recently been reprinted and remain popular.

Estes, Eleanor, *The Hundred Dresses* il. by Louis Slobodkin (1944). New York: Voyager Books. A timeless classic tells the story of children's insensitivity to one who is different because she is poor and comes from an immigrant family. One of the characters recognizes the unfairness of the taunting, and comes to regret stand by silently.

Fenner, Carol, *Yolanda's Genius* (1995). New York: Simon & Schuster. Yolanda struggles to adapt to life in the calm of small-town Michigan after the excitement of Chicago. In addition to the challenge of making new friends, Yolanda has to watch out for her little brother, Andrew, whose gift is describing the world through his harmonica. Yolanda knows he's a genius, but how can she protect him from those who don't understand his talent.

Fleishman, Paul, *Seedfolks* (1997). New York: HarperCollins. The setting is an urban neighborhood, and each chapter represents a different character in this diverse population. Strangers become acquaintances, even friends, and barriers break down as they learn about each other through their community garden.

Gaiman, N., *The Graveyard Book* (2008). New York: HarperCollins. It takes a graveyard to raise a child! After the brutal murders of his family, a toddler wanders into a graveyard where he is “adopted” and watched over by all who reside there. This Newbery Award book is a good match for gifted readers who love the horror genre. Historical information and challenging vocabulary are woven together to delight and engage the reader. I was hesitant to pick up the book after hearing about the opening chapter, but I was quickly won over.

Hesse, Karen, *Out of the Dust* (1997). New York: Scholastic Press. This powerful book, recipient of the Newbery Award for 1997, is a series of free verse poems that comprise the journal of a 14-year-old girl who lives in the Oklahoma dust bowl during the Depression. Billie Jo endures hardship and profound tragedy, but her words teach us about resiliency and strength.

Jarrell, Randall, il. by Maurice Sendak *The Bat-Poet* (1963). New York: Macmillan. This short book would be a perfect read-aloud companion to a poetry study. A small bat, so sensitive to the world around him, decides to be a poet and to share his poetry with the living things that share his world, some of which are quite the literary critics!. Embedded in the story are examples and elements of poetry. The language is rigorous and delightful.

Konigsburg, E. L., *Father's Arcane Daughter* (1976). New York: Dell Publishing. An especially intriguing book by an author with great appeal for gifted readers. This mystery revolves around Winston, his sister Heidi, and their half-sister, Caroline, who returns after a long absence. (Now reprinted under the title *My Father's Daughter*.)

Konigsburg, E. L., (*George*) (1970). New York: Atheneum. This book is somewhat hard to find, but it is worth the search for its portrayal of an extremely precocious sixth grader, Ben, and “the funniest little man in the whole world,” George, who lives inside Ben. Many of Konigsburg's books are peopled with gifted characters, and she writes of them insightfully.

Konigsburg, E. L., *Outcasts of 19 Schuyler Place* (2004). New York: Atheneum Books. This author, who “gets” gifted kids, has done it again. This book links the cruelty of 12-year-old girls at camp with young Margaret's fight back home to save a piece of art that is threatened with destruction by powerful members of the community who seem to place their own interests ahead of those of the public.

Konigsburg, E. L., *The View from Saturday* (1996). Atheneum. Four gifted 6th graders and their teacher are the heart of this story of an academic competition team who find each other. Konigsburg again portrays gifted children with sensitivity and luminescence. Bright children will recognize their thoughts, their humor, and their frustrations in these young people. Winner of the 1997 Newbery Award.

Korman, Gordon, *Schooled*. (2007). New York: Hyperion. A “stranger in a strange land” book set in middle school. Cap, who has been homeschooled on a commune, is suddenly thrust into a typical (C Average) middle school. Tradition dictates that he – a newcomer and perceived “nerd” - will assume the presidency of the 8th grade, a responsibility that he does not take lightly. Chapter voices interchange among narrators, so we learn about Cap through his own words as well as the perspectives of others.

L'Engle, Madeleine, *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. A brilliantly written classic filled with intelligent and sensitive children and adults, and other less easily described characters. *Wrinkle* is a complex combination of science fiction and fantasy with a fair amount of humor, mystery and philosophy. There are three additional books about this family.

Lowry, Lois, *Anastasia Krupnik* (1979). Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Anastasia is typical bright 10-year-old in this first of a series of Anastasia books. She encounters frustrations ranging from a teacher who insists that poems must rhyme to the inconvenience of having a baby brother.

Lowry, Lois, *The Giver* (1993), New York: Bantam, Doubleday Dell Publishing. Winner of the 1994 Newbery Award, this book offers challenges and opportunities for the insightful reader. Jonas, a precocious 12-year-old living in a “perfect” society, is chosen to be the recipient of his society’s memories of pain and pleasure. The book offers dilemmas, choices and questions about the future and efforts to manipulate it. Subsequent books, *Gathering Blue* and *The Messenger*, comprise the trilogy.

Lowry, Lois, *The Willoughbys* (2008), Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Clever parody is Lowry’s latest genre. She creates this deceptively simple story with both direct and subtle references to classic children’s literature such as *Mary Poppins*, *The Secret Garden* and *James and the Giant Peach*. The vocabulary is rich (lugubrious, nefarious, odious) and a humorous glossary defines the challenging words.

Lovelace, Maude Hart. *Heaven to Betsy, Betsy In Spite of Herself, Betsy Was A Junior, Betsy and Joe, Betsy and the Great World, Betsy’s Wedding* 1945-1955, New York: HarperTrophy. Betsy and her friends enter high school in the year 1906 in Deep Valley, Minnesota and they remain friends throughout their adolescence. The characters read classics, study Latin, while experiencing some of the same extra-curricular and social adventures as high school students do in contemporary times. Betsy continues to set goals and high standards for herself from world travel to a career in writing. These books are intelligently written, not “dumbed down.” All of these have just been reprinted in new editions, two titles per volume.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *As Easy as Falling off the Face of the Earth* (2010), New York: Greenwillow Books. She had me at *vitrify* p.15! (Or maybe *abraded* or *phalanx*.) Perkins’ story of increasingly improbable events is rich with vocabulary, humor, and human caring. The twisty plot recounts the misadventures of a 15-year-old boy, his grandfather, two dogs, and a kind stranger, as they try to reunite with loved ones. Delightful illustrations by the author add to the story.

Raskin, Ellen *The Westing Game* (1978), New York: E. P. Dutton. The story centers on the distribution of clever clues among 16 characters, all of whom live in the same apartment building in Wisconsin. Whoever solves the mystery will inherit the estate of wealthy Samuel Westing. The most fun is piecing together the clues, following the characters, some of whom are not who they seem to be. Newbery Award.

Scieszka, Jon (ed.). *Guys Write for Guys Read* (2005), New York: Viking. With the purpose of engaging boys in reading, Scieszka presents a collection of writings by more than 90 male authors and illustrators with particular appeal to boys. Short pieces include memoir, funny stories, illustrations, advice, reflections on school, and even a copy of one future writer’s report card! Short bios and bibliographies accompany each piece. Great for motivation and modeling, as well as inviting young people to read.

Stead, Rebecca *When You Reach Me* (2009), New York: Wendy Lamb Books. Set in Manhattan in the 1970s, this book is a bit of mystery, a bit of fantasy, and a lot of coming of age. Miranda experiences the challenges of friendship, becomes fascinated with time travel through the classic book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and, in her spare time, helps her mother prepare to be a contestant on *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. Newbery Award.

Stewart, Trenton Lee, *The Mysterious Benedict Society* (2007), New York: Little, Brown. One can tell that this book was written for young people because of the price, but how nice to see it appear in a newspaper recommendation of “great summer reading titles” with no indication that it’s a “kids’ book.” It’s about giftedness, embodied in various forms by four children (and a few adults). There are tests to take, puzzles and mysteries to solve, villains to outsmart and collaborations to establish. Gifted individuals will see themselves and others in the characters and will certainly appreciate the celebration of intelligence and creativity. Thank goodness there are two sequels!

Tolan, Stephanie, *Listen!* (2006). New York: HarperCollins. Tolan, writes of issues that resonate with gifted young people. This story tells of one summer in which Charley, a 12-year-old, deals with the emotional pain of losing her mother and the physical pain of her own recovery from an accident. A wild dog appears to offer a focus to Charley's life as she tries to tame the animal and understand the direction her life has taken.

Tolan, Stephanie, *Surviving the Applewhites* (2002). New York: HarperCollins. The household in this Newbery Honor book might be described as a Melendy family for this century (see Enright's *The Saturdays*). They are smart, diversely talented, and hilarious as they open their home to Jake, who has been expelled from various schools and now joins this homeschooling group. Anyone who loves theatre will delight in the account of a very local production of "The Sound of Music." Here's a hot tip: There will be a sequel in 2012!

Tolan, Stephanie, *Welcome to the Ark* (1996). New York: Morrow. Not only are the main characters prodigiously gifted, but the story focuses on issues that resonate with gifted individuals: heightened sensitivities, feelings of alienation, and fears about the future. In the very near future, in a world of increasing violence, four young people come together in a residential treatment facility. Their meeting has the potential to change the world. A sequel, *Flight of the Raven*, has been published. (MS)

Zusak, Markus, *The Book Thief* (2006). Random House/Knopf. This book is gaining the attention of talented adolescents and their teachers. The story complements other holocaust books such as *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. Liesel is another young person caught in the tragedies of WW II as she loses her younger brother and becomes a foster child to a German family. Moral issues shape the larger story, while day-to-day events add emotional depth. Most unusual is the narrator of the story – Death. (Note: strong language MS)

Fiction – Secondary (Although most older readers are selecting their own literature; these are often overlooked and too good to miss!)

Gibbons, Kaye, *Ellen Foster* (1987). New York: Vintage Books. Ellen is one of the most resilient and bright characters in contemporary literature, an 11-year-old whose family has disintegrated, leaving her to bounce among relatives and compassionate others. Ellen knows what she is looking for, and she goes about getting it.

Gloss, Molly, *The Jump-Off Creek* (1989). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. Although this is a fictional work, the author credits journals and diaries of women who settled the west. This is the story of Lydia Sanderson, a pioneer who moves alone to homestead in Oregon in the 1890s. The book offers a riveting account of daily life, physical and emotional hardship, loneliness, friendship by interspersing diary entries with narrative.

Lightman, Alan, *Einstein's Dreams* (1993). New York: Pantheon Books. What if time moved backward? What if time progressed more slowly at higher altitudes? What if time exists only in the present; there is no past to remember, no future to anticipate? These are only three of the dreams of a young patent clerk named Albert Einstein. This novel is provocative in its varied conceptions of time, and it is beautifully written. This combination should appeal to many bright young people who enjoy conjecturing about the world they know.

Biography and Autobiography

Angelou, Maya, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). New York: Random House This poet, teacher, actress, lecturer writes of her childhood and the people and events that shaped her early years. This eloquent work captures what it was to grow up in the rural south in the 1930s. Early influences on Maya Angelou, including her grandmother; her teacher, Mrs. Flowers; her Sunday School, and members of the community, both Black and white, are vividly portrayed. (MS & HS – Note: mature content)

Burleigh, Robert, il. by Leonard Jenkins *Langston's Train Ride* (2004). New York: Orchard Books. Those familiar with the story of how Langston Hughes came to write his famous poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" will appreciate this illustrated narrative that explicates Hughes' inspiration to create this work. (Picture Book)

Carson, Ben M.D., *Gifted Hands* (1990). New York: Harper Paperbacks. This inspirational, insightful book traces a life which begins in inner-city Detroit and culminates in a brilliant career as a neurosurgeon. Ben Carson is a gifted young man whose mother, a single parent with a third grade education, instills in him the values of achievement and perseverance, along with a deep spiritual foundation. As Dr. Carson recounts his life story, the reader sees vividly many of the textbook characteristics of giftedness. There are touches of the miraculous throughout the book as Ben and his family overcome potential obstacles. (MS)

Cleary, Beverly, *A Girl from Yamhill* (1988). New York: Dell Publishing. A favorite author for several generations, Beverly Cleary writes in great detail about growing up. Readers familiar with her books and her characters will enjoy finding the antecedents of a number of fictional events. Readers will discover with delight that in at least one of the photographs included in the book, Beverly Cleary looks remarkably like her most popular character, Ramona. In *My Own Two Feet*, published in 1995 by William Morrow, Cleary's story continues with the years from college through the publication of her first book.

Cooper, Floyd, *Coming Home* (1994). New York: Philomel Books. Langston Hughes, African-American poet, was always a dreamer. As a young man, he turned his dreams into writing and created memorable and beloved poems. This story focuses on his early life with his grandmother, a gifted storyteller.

Delany, S. & Delany E. *Having Our Say* (1993). New York: Kodansha International. Sadie and Bessie Delany were 103 and 101 years old when their book was published. This story of their lives allows the reader to see events of most of the 20th century through the eyes of these African-American women. Born in the south, they eventually became professional women in New York. (MS, HS)

Dillard, Annie, *An American Childhood* (1987). New York: Harper & Row. Annie Dillard's memories go back to age five when she was a child in Pittsburgh and continue through her mid-teen years. Her vivid descriptions of childhood, school, her family and friends, and her increasing fascination with nature and literature, capture the humor, pathos, insights and intelligence of a brilliant young woman. (HS)

Feynman, Richard P., *"Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!"* (1985). New York: Bantam Books. Feynman, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics, weaves the story of his life by recounting events from his childhood, his years at Princeton, Los Alamos, and other locations around the globe. The book is laugh-out-loud funny, instructive in science, education and human nature, and remarkably insightful about creativity and intellect. Feynman was a brilliant storyteller with the ability to translate complex scientific material into the language of the general reader. Best, however, are his recollections of his own thinking and problem solving processes. (S)

Freedman, Russell, *Eleanor Roosevelt, A Life of Discovery* (1993). New York: Scholastic, Inc. This Newbery Honor book recounts the life of a gifted woman, a dedicated teacher, a social activist, a first lady – all in the person of Eleanor Roosevelt. Born into a life of privilege, Eleanor, nonetheless, suffered personal pain as a child and as an adult. Her awareness of social ills and injustice increased as she worked alongside her husband during his terms as governor and president. Following his death, she continued her active involvement in civil rights, nuclear disarmament, and worked with the United Nations to ensure human rights for peoples throughout the world. (E, MS)

*Krull, Kathleen, *Lives of the Writers*, il. by Kathryn Hewitt (1994). San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company. Subtitled, *Comedies, Tragedies (and What the Neighbors Thought)*, this book briefly presents the lives of 20 writers of note. Among them are Frances Hodgson Burnett, William Shakespeare, Emily

Dickenson, Zora Neale Hurston, the Brontë Sisters, Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Langston Hughes. Since a number of high ability students enjoy and appreciate literature and writing, this book may prove instructive and inspirational to them. (Will be back in print in September 2011.)

L'Engle, Madeleine, *Circle of Quiet, The Summer of the Great-grandmother, Two-Part Invention*. Various publication dates, Harper & Row and Farrar, Straus & Giroux. This beloved author of children's books (*A Wrinkle in Time, A Swiftly Tilting Planet, The Wind in the Door*) writes of her life, recalling her childhood precocity, her beginnings as a writer, and her most fulfilling roles as a wife and mother. She poignantly tells of her struggles as a gifted youngster in an insensitive school, and of her negative physical self-image, formed in childhood, that persists even after personal and professional success. (HS)

*Nolan, Christopher, *Under the Eye of the Clock: The Life Story of Christopher Nolan* (1987). New York: St. Martin's Press. If Richard Feynman offers a look inside the mind of a gifted scientist, Christy Nolan renders a view of a gifted writer. This Irish youth creates his own life story in the third person as Joseph Meehan. The struggles of both author and character are centered in the fact that both were born spastic. Unable to communicate orally, Joseph finds a powerfully rich language to write of his struggles to live a life like others. His family is remarkable in their support of him as he fights to attend school, to be with friends, and to create, through his writing, a picture of his own brilliance and gift for language. (HS)

Ryan, Pam Muñoz Ryan, il. by Brian Selznick *When Marian Sang* (2002). New York: Scholastic Press. Marian Anderson was a talented singer from her earliest years. Her story, interspersed with the songs of her childhood, takes her from childhood to the historic moment when she was denied permission to perform at Constitution Hall in Washington, DC. The resolution of this impasse has inspired generations. (Picture Book)

Sís, Peter, *Starry Messenger* (1996). New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. On the surface, a biography of Galileo Galilei, this richly illustrated book is much more. It is a testimony to the scientist who revealed the wonders of the heavens. When his discoveries threatened the Church, he was imprisoned, only to be pardoned 350 years later. The story is enhanced by beautifully rendered drawings and additional text.

*Turner, Robyn Montana, *Faith Ringgold* (1993). Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Part of the series *Portraits of Women Artists for Children*. This is a biography of the artist who was born in Harlem and became a successful painter at a time when it was difficult for women, much less African-Americans, to gain recognition as artists. Faith has produced vibrant paintings, soft sculptures and story quilts. One of her best known works is the children's book *Tar Beach*. Also in the series are biographies of Rosa Bonheur, Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keeffe. This series contains many reproductions of the artists' works.

Welty, Eudora, *One Writer's Beginnings* (1983). New York: Warner Books. This autobiographical book captures the early life of an outstanding American writer. Welty recalls for her readers the early sights and sounds that remained with her to become the heart of her writing. (S)

Poetry Resources

*Attenborough, Liz (ed.), *Poetry by Heart* (2001). Somerset, UK: The Chicken House. The poems in this book, also available from Scholastic Inc., are selected because they are worth memorizing. Some are short, some are long. Themes include Uplifting and Brave, Love and Friendship, Peace and Quiet, and Fur and Feathers. Different illustrators creates the visual thread that ties the poems together.

Fleischman, Paul, *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* (1988). New York: HarperCollins. This series of insect poems was written to be read aloud by two individuals or groups. Each poem is a different insect – some are humorous, others angry, sad, or contemplative. Excellent for choral reading. Newbery Award.

Hale, Gloria (ed.), *An Illustrated Treasury of Read-Aloud Poems for Young People* (2003). New York: Black Dog and Leventhal, Inc. Selections range from classic (Longfellow, Yeats) to contemporary (Angelou, Silverstein) and offer thematically organized poems chosen to introduce children to poetry and engage them in the joy of hearing and reading poems.

*Heard, Georgia, *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort*, il. by 18 noted picture book artists (2002). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. After September 11, many people sought comfort in words and images. This book is comprised of by authors such as Maya Angelou, Wendell Berry, Emily Dickinson, Eloise Greenfield and others, Each poem is accompanied by an illustration by a noted picture book artist, among them William Steig, Peter Sís, and Chris Raschka.

Kennedy, X. J. & Kennedy, D. M., *Knock at a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry*. (1999). Boston: Little, Brown and Company. This volume is organized around the ideas of what poetry can do (e.g., poetry can make you smile, help you understand people). Illustrative poems by well-known and not-so-well known poets are included.

*Koch, Kenneth & Farrell Kate (ed.), *Talking to the Sun* (1985). New York: Henry Holt and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Art and language blend to present themes such as nature, cities, love, as well as different forms of poetry including haiku, sonnets, rhyming and those that do not. The poetry and the art that accompanies it are selected from diverse times and cultures. There are occasional brief notes defining vocabulary or explaining the circumstances of a poem's creation.

Nelson, Marilyn *Carver, A Life in Poems* (2001). New York: Scholastic. Scientist and artist, George Washington Carver led a distinguished life, which is told with the simple elegance that characterized the man himself. In a series of poems, the author creates memorable images of events in Carver's life. Photographs of Carver, his family, his schools and possessions illustrate the Newbery Honor Book.

Paschen, Elise & Mosby, Presson Rebekah, *Poetry Speaks* Narrated by Charles Osgood (2001). Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks. This is a treasure because it contains not only poems by 42 well-known poets, among them Walt Whitman, Gwendolyn Brooks, Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and Robert Frost, but the book comes with 3 CDs of the poets reciting their own works. Imagine hearing Langston Hughes describe how he came to write "A Negro Speaks of Rivers!"

Paschen, Elise, *Poetry Speaks to Children*. (2005). Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks. Poems for younger listeners and readers by classic and contemporary poets – 95 poems by 73 poets, from Emily Dickinson and Lewis Carroll to Billy Collins and Gwendolyn Brooks. This book comes with a CD containing 52 of the poems, many read by the poets themselves.

Poetry for Young People various editors and illustrators. New York: Sterling. Individual books feature classic poets whose works are selected for young readers. Titles include Shakespeare, Whitman, Lear, Hughes, Dickinson, Poe, Kipling, Frost, Sandburg, and others. The poems are richly illustrated, and each volume includes biographical information about the featured poet.

*Tucker, Shelly, *Writing Poetry* (1992). Glenview, IL: Goodyear Books. This tidy little book is organized around poetic elements: metaphors, similes, imagery, rhyme, to name several. The author makes use of numerous examples of children's poetry to illustrate each of the elements, as well as suggestions for getting started. A user-friendly glossary is included.

Updike, John, *A Child's Calendar* il. by Trina Schart Hyman (1999). New York: Holiday House. A poem for every month of the year with illustrations so welcoming that you want to jump right into them. This collaboration between the noted author and award-winning illustrator was a Caldecott Honor Book.

Non-Fiction with Literature and Curricular Ties

Eisley, Loren, *Immense Journey* (1957). New York: Random House. The beauty of this work is its place in literature as well as science. Eisley conveys the wonder of science as he poses questions such as, How did man get his brain? How did flowers come to be? This book, written more than 40 years ago, is worth reading or rereading to reflect on what we have learned in the years since its publication.

Freedman, Russell, *Children of the Wild West* (1983). New York: Houghton Mifflin. So many bright readers want more than the textbooks provide, and this book delivers lively accounts of what it was like for families heading west in the 1840s. Period photographs show what the westward movement was like for children from different backgrounds, including white and Native American. The book focuses on kids' interests – wagon trains, schools, and games, subtly building knowledge of this period.

Freedman, Russell, *Immigrant Kids* (1980). New York: Penguin Books. Freedman's ability to see the world through the eyes of children is evident in this book. Photographs help the reader experience Ellis Island, life on the Lower East Side of New York, at school, at play, and in the workplace, where children in their teens worked in factories and enterprising younger ones earned money in the streets.

Freedman, Russell, *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* (1994). New York: Scholastic. Traveling throughout the country in the early 1900s with his camera, Lewis Hine documented the lives of working children. He found children as young as 4 years old, who worked long hours in unhealthy, often dangerous conditions in factories, on farms, in mines. His photos provided powerful support to the efforts of those demanding child labor laws. Freedman tells his story.

Murphy, Jim, *An American Plague* (2003). New York: Houghton Mifflin. This carefully researched account of the 1793 Yellow Fever Plague that devastated Philadelphia offers rich detail about the illness itself, its effect on the citizens, and the interplay between the medical and the political communities. Illustrated with original documents and photographs, this book is a companion to *Fever*, a fictional account of this period in our nation's history.

*Murphy, Jim, *Blizzard!* (2000). New York: Scholastic. For those who love stories of natural disaster, this book will fulfill their desire for vicarious adventure. Murphy traces the approach of the east coast blizzard of 1888 from its beginning to the peak of power, interspersing the experiences of individuals as they face this horrific storm. Period photographs and drawings support the narrative.

Prose, Francine, *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife* (2009). New York: Harper. For those who have been enthralled by Anne Frank's life and her diary, here is a book that examines the story and its effects almost 60 years after the events and the diary's publication. Author Prose celebrates Anne as a talented writer while supplementing the original with current knowledge and analysis.

Roueché, Berton, *Medical Detectives* (1982). New York: Washington Square Press. Fans of television dramas *House, M.D.* or *CSI* will find similar pleasure in this fascinating look at medical problem solving. Whether pursuing clues to illness among premature babies in hospital isolation, or investigating eleven men who turned blue after eating at the same place, these stories of medical sleuthing hold the reader in suspense, revealing bits of information that allow readers the pleasure of inquiry and speculation.

Schlissel, Lillian, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982). New York: Schocken Books. The journals of women making the torturous trip west lend new perspectives to the country and those who settled it. Details of daily life and milestone events blend together to create a picture of those who traveled the Overland Trail to settle the west. Women, often as young as fifteen and sixteen, left home with their husbands facing childbirth, widowhood, illness and hardship as they crossed the Plains.

Stanley, Jerry, *Children of the Dust Bowl* (1993). New York: Crown Books. The book presents a realistic account of life in a farm-labor camp during the depression. It is a well researched and documented with

photographs of the period and stories told by the teacher and pupils from the school. A good companion to the fiction title, *Out of the Dust*.

Woolf, Virginia *A Room of One's Own*, (1929). New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, Inc. This classic essay develops the thesis that distinguished female writers will emerge when women have two requisite resources: income that ensures financial independence and rooms of their own. The ideas she puts forth, the comparisons she draws between the lives of women and men which influence the products of their intellects, are worthy of consideration by all students of literature-female and male.

Contemporary Authors You Won't Want to Miss~ These writers understand and challenge talented readers

Young Readers

- Jan Brett
- Eve Bunting
- Nikki Grimes
- Kevin Henkes
- Jim Murphy
- Jon Muth
- Cynthia Rylant
- Jacqueline Woodson

Intermediate/Middle School

- Bruce Brooks
- Christopher Paul Curtis
- Karen Cushman
- Russell Freedman
- Karen Hesse
- E. L. Konigsburg
- Lois Lowry
- Madeleine L'Engle
- Katherine Paterson
- Stephanie Tolan
- Trenton Lee Stewart

Also look at:

- Newbery Award Winners/ Honor Books
- Reading lists from librarians
- Classics (read the originals, not the adaptations)
- Reading lists from colleges and universities
- Book sections from newspapers – *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* both make recommendations

For the Teacher: Classics in the Classroom Michael Clay Thompson, 1995, Unionville, New York: Royal Fireworks Press. This “slim volume” is the author’s love letter to literature. Mike Thompson writes convincingly of the need for a curriculum that brings exceptional ideas and words into the experience of all students. An experienced classroom teacher, he also suggests ways in which we can accomplish this.

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