

KEYSTONE TO READING SECONDARY BOOK AWARDS 2020-2021
ANNOTATED MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK LIST

Count Me In by Varsha Bajaj

Karina Chopra would have never imagined becoming friends with the boy next door - after all, they've avoided each other for years and she assumes Chris is just like the boys he hangs out with, who she labels a pack of hyenas. Then Karina's grandfather starts tutoring Chris, and she discovers he's actually a nice, funny kid. But one afternoon something unimaginable happens - the three of them are assaulted by a stranger who targets Indian-American Karina and her grandfather because of how they look. Her grandfather is gravely injured and Karina and Chris vow not to let hate win. When Karina posts a few photos related to the attack on social media, they quickly attract attention, and before long her #CountMeIn post - "What does an American look like? #immigrants #WeBelong #IamAmerican #HateHasNoHomeHere" - goes viral and a diverse population begin to add their own photos. Then, when Papa is finally on the road to recovery, Karina uses her newfound social media reach to help celebrate both his homecoming and a community coming together.
(Realistic Fiction, grades 6-9)

Lion Down by Stuart Gibbs

For once, operations at the enormous zoo/theme park appear to be running smoothly (except for the occasional herring-related mishap in the penguin exhibit) and Teddy Fitzroy is finally able to give detective work a rest. But then a local lion is accused of killing a famous dog - and the dog's owner, an inflammatory radio host, goes on a crusade to have the cat declared a nuisance so it can be hunted. But it looks like the lion might have been framed, and a renegade animal activist wants Teddy and Summer to help prove it. Soon, Teddy finds himself wrapped up in the middle of his most bizarre, hilarious, and dangerous case yet.
(Mystery, grades 6-9)

Locked in Ice: Nansen's Daring Quest for the North Pole by Peter Lourie

An explorer who many adventurers argue ranks alongside polar celebrity Ernest Shackleton, Fridtjof Nansen contributed tremendous amounts of new information to our knowledge about the Polar Arctic. At a time when the North Pole was still undiscovered territory, he attempted the journey in a way that most experts thought was mad: Nansen purposefully locked his ship in ice for two years in order to float northward along the currents. Richly illustrated with historic photographs, this riveting account of Nansen's Arctic expedition celebrates the legacy of an extraordinary adventurer who pushed the boundaries of human exploration to further science into the twentieth century.
(Nonfiction, grades 6-9)

Maybe He Just Likes You by Barbara Dee

For seventh-grader Mila, it starts with some boys giving her an unwanted hug on the school blacktop. A few days later, at recess, one of the boys (and fellow trumpet player) Callum tells Mila it's his birthday, and asks her for a "birthday hug." He's just being friendly, isn't he? And how can she say no? But Callum's hug lasts a few seconds too long, and feels...weird. According to her friend, Zara, Mila is being immature and overreacting. Doesn't she know what flirting looks like? But the boys don't leave Mila alone. On the bus. In the halls. During band practice—the one place Mila could always escape. It doesn't feel like flirting—so what is it? Thanks to a chance meeting, Mila begins to find solace in a new place: karate class. Slowly, with the help of a fellow classmate, Mila learns how to stand her ground and how to respect others—and herself.
(Realistic Fiction, grades 6-9)

Roll with It by Jamie Sumner

Ellie's a girl who tells it like it is. That surprises some people, who see a kid in a wheelchair and think she's going to be all sunshine and cuddles. The thing is, Ellie has big dreams: She might be eating Stouffer's for dinner, but one day she's going to be a professional baker. If she's not writing fan letters to her favorite celebrity chefs, she's practicing recipes on her well-meaning, if overworked, mother. But when Ellie and her mom move so they can help take care of her ailing grandpa, Ellie has to start all over again in a new town at a new school. Except she's not just the new kid—she's the new kid in the wheelchair who lives in the trailer park on the wrong side of town. It all feels like one challenge too many, until Ellie starts to make her first-ever friends. Now she just has to convince her mom that this town might just be the best thing that ever happened to them! (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-9)

Shouting at the Rain by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Delsie loves tracking the weather--lately, though, it seems the squalls are in her own life. She's always lived with her kindhearted Grammy, but now she's looking at their life with new eyes and wishing she could have a "regular family." Delsie observes other changes in the air, too--the most painful being a friend who's outgrown her. Luckily, she has neighbors with strong shoulders to support her, and Ronan, a new friend who is caring and courageous but also troubled by the losses he's endured. As Ronan and Delsie traipse around Cape Cod on their adventures, they both learn what it means to be angry versus sad, broken versus whole, and abandoned versus loved. And that, together, they can weather any storm. (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-9)

Some Places More Than Others by Renée Watson

All Amara wants for her birthday is to visit her father's family in New York City--Harlem, to be exact. She can't wait to finally meet her Grandpa Earl and cousins in person, and to stay in the brownstone where her father grew up. Maybe this will help her understand her family--and herself--in new way. But New York City is not exactly what Amara thought it would be. It's crowded, with confusing subways, suffocating sidewalks, and her father is too busy with work to spend time with her and too angry to spend time with Grandpa Earl. As she explores, asks questions, and learns more and more about Harlem and about her father and his family history, she realizes how, in some ways more than others, she connects with him, her home, and her family. (Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

Song for a Whale by Lynne Kelly

From fixing the class computer to repairing old radios, twelve-year-old Iris is a tech genius. But she's the only deaf person in her school, so people often treat her like she's not very smart. If you've ever felt like no one was listening to you, then you know how hard that can be. When she learns about Blue 55, a real whale who is unable to speak to other whales, Iris understands how he must feel. Then she has an idea: she should invent a way to "sing" to him! But he's three thousand miles away. How will she play her song for him. (Realistic Fiction, grades 3-8)

Straw into Gold: Fairytales Re-spun by Hilary McKay

Imagine Hansel and Gretel's story from their teacher's point of view, when Gretel submits her report of, "What I Did in the Holidays, and Why Hansel's Jacket Is So Tight." Learn the story of how Rumpelstiltskin was used by a greedy girl who wanted to marry a prince in "Straw into Gold." Find out what was really underneath all those mattresses the unlucky princess had to sleep on—and who the prince was really in love with—in "The Prince and the Problem." (Fantasy, grades 4-8)

The Bridge Home by Padma Venkatraman

Life is harsh in Chennai's teeming streets, so when runaway sisters Viji and Rukku arrive, their prospects look grim. Very quickly, eleven-year-old Viji discovers how vulnerable they are in this uncaring, dangerous world. Fortunately, the girls find shelter--and friendship--on an abandoned bridge. With two homeless boys, Muthi and Arul, the group forms a family of sorts. And while making a living scavenging the city's

trash heaps is the pits, the kids find plenty to laugh about and take pride in too. After all, they are now the bosses of themselves and no longer dependent on untrustworthy adults. But when illness strikes, Viji must decide whether to risk seeking help from strangers or to keep holding on to their fragile, hard-fought freedom.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 4-8)

The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise by Dan Gemeinhart

Five years.

That's how long Coyote and her dad, Rodeo, have lived on the road in an old school bus, criss-crossing the nation. It's also how long ago Coyote lost her mom and two sisters in a car crash. Coyote hasn't been home in all that time, but when she learns that the park in her old neighborhood is being demolished—the very same park where she, her mom, and her sisters buried a treasured memory box—she devises an elaborate plan to get her dad to drive 3,600 miles back to Washington state in four days...without him realizing it. Along the way, they'll pick up a strange crew of misfit travelers. Lester has a lady love to meet. Salvador and his mom are looking to start over. Val needs a safe place to be herself. And then there's Gladys... Over the course of thousands of miles, Coyote will learn that going home can sometimes be the hardest journey of all...but that with friends by her side, she just might be able to turn her “once upon a time” into a “happily ever after.”

This title has common core connections.

(Realistic Fiction, grades 3-8)

Torpedoed: The True Story of World War II Sinking of the “Children’s Ship”

by Deborah Heiligman

Amid the constant rain of German bombs and the escalating violence of World War II, British parents by the thousands chose to send their children out of the country: the wealthy, independently; the poor, through a government relocation program called CORB. In September 1940, passenger liner SS *City of Benares* set sail for Canada with one hundred children on board. When the war ships escorting the *Benares* departed, a German submarine torpedoed what became known as the Children's Ship. Out of tragedy, ordinary people became heroes. This is their story.

(Non-fiction, grades 3-8)

The Keystone to Reading Secondary Book Awards lists are created to give students a voice in the selection of the children's choice book awards presented each year at the annual KSLA Conference. The information presented in these annotations represents the thoughts and opinions of the reviewers and does not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the Keystone State Literacy Association.