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Lynette Marten Suckow

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# Great Lakes, Great Books

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

In these times of shrinking financial resources and support services, we are forced to take a closer look at the assets we already have in our schools and libraries, our cities, and our state. Among the best things that Michigan has to offer is an abundance of great authors and illustrators. Some are newly published and others are already known nationwide. The following titles, by Michigan authors and illustrators, can be found on the Great Lakes Great Books ballot for the 2017-18 school year. Enjoy reading each one.

The GLGB committee selects 40 books, published within the last two years, to introduce K-12 classrooms to recently published literature on an annual basis. Teachers and librarians provide students with books from their grade level lists and allow them to vote on their favorites. GLGB is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement projects, promoting active participation in the reading process by students. You will find a classroom ballot, promotional bookmarks, and the opportunity to nominate a book for next year at [www.michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org) under the "Student Involvement" tab.

***SQUASH BOOM BEET: AN ALPHABET FOR HEALTHY, ADVENTUROUS EATERS***, by Lisa Maxbauer Price, is a beautifully photographed alphabet book that sets its sights on vegetables, and a few herbs, that can grow in any Michigan garden. The author traveled to farms near Traverse City to photograph some tasty and unusual produce. There is an eye-catching full page spread for the letter "S" featuring a variety of squash, such as

pattypan squash, summer squash, winter squash, and the multi-colored carnival squash. Readers will find that the alphabet letters are used liberally to encompass a variety of delicious and colorful vegetables. The rhyming text and spectacular produce pictures will make this book fun to read aloud, and may supplement a unit on plants, foods, or nutrition.

***DINO-RACING***, by Lisa Wheeler, is the latest in the series of dinosaur sports books. Wheeler once again teams up with illustrator Barry Gott to include auto racing in a long line-up of favorite sports, such as dino-hockey, dino-soccer, dino-football, dino-baseball, dino-wrestling, dino-swimming, dino-basketball, and dino-boarding. The excitement of racing competition is combined with rhyming text and colorful, full-page spreads that capture every detail of the race track. As in the preceding dino-titles, the main focus is on teamwork and competition between dino-friends.

***THE UNCORKER OF OCEAN BOTTLES***, by Michelle Cuevas and illustrator Erin Stead, is a quiet tale about a man who lives on the seashore,

collects bottles from the sea, uncorks them, and delivers the notes within to people who will benefit from the messages. One day a party invitation arrives in a bottle. The uncorker asks around the village for a potential recipient, but the invitation remains unclaimed. He decides to attend the party and apologize to the sender for not delivering the message. Much to his surprise, the whole village shows up with food and party favors. After years of solitary activity, the uncorker finds his heart “filled to the brim,” with affection for his new friends. To match this beautiful sentiment, Stead’s woodblock print illustrations are soft and wistful, mirroring the colors of sand and sea.

***WE ARE GROWING***, by Laurie Keller, gives control of the book to Mo Willem’s Elephant and Piggie, who introduce beginning readers to several blades of grass - personified to interact just like any group of friends. The group notices as each blade has a growth spurt, and transforms into a unique piece of grass with characteristics such as curliest, tallest, crunchiest, silliest, and dandiest. A lawn mower soon mows the tops off the grass making them all the same again. They are disappointed until someone cheers them up by reminding them, “You will grow again!” Elephant and Piggie return at the end of the story to continue the fun, as they decide they are the “READ-I-EST.”

***MEMOIRS OF A PARROT***, by Devin Scillian, begins at Day One when Brock reveals the inner thoughts of a parrot living in Wilbur’s Pet Shop. This opinionated parrot prefers the company of other animals in the shop to the strange people who try to coax words from him every day. By Day Six, he has been sold to Todd, a ukulele playing young man who names him Echo and attempts to teach him to talk. Readers quickly catch on that the parrot already knows how to talk and has an abundance of sarcastic wit. On the positive side, Todd is generous with crackers for his parrot, who promptly drops them into the toaster for a crispy treat. Todd and Echo do not hit it off at first, until a cracker starts to burn in the toaster. Quick action

on the parts of Todd and his beloved pet save the day and ignite the flame of mutual respect. Tim Bowers’ large colorful illustrations add another dimension to the story, especially the distinct facial expressions of animals and humans alike. This is the fourth in the Memoirs series by Scillian and Bowers, which also includes *Memoirs of a Goldfish* (2010), *Memoirs of a Hamster* (2013), and *Memoirs of an Elf* (2014).

***IDEAS ARE ALL AROUND***, by Philip Stead, is a book of story ideas discovered by the author while walking his dog. By narrating information about the people he greets along the way, the events begin to form a story. Stead’s encounters are illustrated on white space with monotype prints and small photographs. The text looks like it was written on an old manual typewriter – the product of a hard day’s work. Young writers will be inspired to create their own stories from everyday experiences around the neighborhood.

***MY NEAR-DEATH ADVENTURES – 99% TRUE***, by Allison DeCamp, introduces Stanley Slater to life in a logging camp near Manistique on the north shore of Lake Michigan. Readers will meet his family and friends and the many ways he gets into trouble without even trying. In the 2016 continuation, ***MY NEAR-DEATH ADVENTURES: I ALMOST DIED, AGAIN***, the adventures continue as Stanley moves back to St. Ignace, on the eastern end of the Upper Peninsula. He is still trying to get rich to save his hardworking mother from having to marry the horrible, but wealthy, Mr. Crutchley. He is still afraid of his very mean grandmother and his cousin Geri. However, Geri has pleurisy and is the inspiration for various “cure-all” concoctions that Stanley hopes will bring her back to health and make him rich in the process. Meanwhile, Stanley is earning money by taking care of seven-year-old Cuddy who never questions the outrageous ideas that escape from Stanley’s mouth. This story is fast-paced and entertaining. DeCamp adds to its visual interest by peppering the text with vintage postcards,

photographs, and ads from newspapers, all from the 1890's.

***THE ART OF HANGING ON AND LETTING GO***, by Kristen Bartley Lenz, is literally about rock climbing technique, but is also a metaphor about hanging on to the routines of childhood and letting go in order to grow into adulthood. In this book, the main character Cara is at the top of her game - a champion rock climber competing in events around the world with her parents, who are also climbers. While competing in Ecuador, her parents and Uncle Max are caught in an avalanche, resulting in Uncle Max's disappearance and assumed death. Cara's parents are grief-stricken and send her to live with her grandparents in the suburbs near Detroit while they find ways to cope with the death of their best friend. Cara does not want to be in Michigan, as she is also grieving, and would rather have the emotional support of her parents. Good fortune brings her to the lunch

table of Kaitlyn and Nick, rather unusual characters who end up being good friends for Cara. Her grandfather signs her up for driving lessons and takes her to the local climbing gym to keep her moving forward with life. There is also a romantic interest named Tom and a series of mysterious notes that keep Cara engaged in the present. As she finds out more about her grandparents, Cara begins to better understand her parents, and gains patience while she sorts out this new chapter of her life.

### **Author Biography**

**Lynette Marten Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library's Reference Desk in Marquette, MI where she provides assistance with library resources and teaches people how to use technology in the transition to digital learning. She holds a master's degree in education, and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member since 2005.  
lynette.suckow@gmail.com

