

July 2020

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### Recommended Citation

Suckow, Lynette Marten (2020) "Get Graphic with Great Lakes Great Books," *Michigan Reading Journal*. Vol. 49 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol49/iss1/14>

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# Get Graphic with Great Lakes Great Books

by Lynette Marten Suckow



Get graphic with the Great Lakes Great Books (GLGB) Award list for the 2016 -17 school year. These five titles feature graphics and images to tell the stories. Innovative illustrations and graphics have expanded the ways to tell, write, and draw a story.

The GLGB committee selects 40 books, published within the last two years, to introduce new literature into K-12 classrooms on an annual basis. Teachers and librarians make the books available for reading and provide students with the opportunity to vote on their favorites. GLGB is one of Michigan Reading Association's "Student Involvement" projects promoting active participation in the reading process. 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).

**FLASHLIGHT**, by Lizi Boyd, is a wordless book that can lead to long conversations about the plant and animal life found in your local park or at the edge of a nearby wood. Children in grades K and 1 can relate to the young explorer in this book who uses the beam of his flashlight to spot bats, mice, skunks, an owl, a beaver, a porcupine, a fox, and some fish before tripping over a stone and sending his light flying. As he approaches the light to recover it, some of the animals hiding in the black and white background turn the tables and put him in the spotlight. The light leads him back to his outdoor tent where he settles in for the night. Boyd uses simple grey outlines on a black background to mimic chalkboard drawings, highlighted by color in the white flashlight beam. Readers will have fun identifying all twenty animals that



seem to move around the pages in the darkness.

## **ENORMOUS SMALLNESS: A Story of E.E. Cummings**, by Matthew Burgess, is a

picture book biography of a most unusual poet who wrote his thoughts on paper without the constraints of capital letters or punctuation. He used his words sparingly, but formatted the poems with artistic whimsy, making them so much fun to read. Burgess and the illustrator, Kris Di Giacomo, use textured layers and muted tones of color, along with strategic placement of words in the illustrations, to present the childhood, education, and early adulthood of Edward Estlin Cummings. His love of nature and playfulness with language are evident in the five original poems that are embedded in the text. This, along with the large illustrations, make it all the better to read aloud to an audience of second and third graders.

**SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN ROBOTS**, by Louise Simonson and Jimena Sanchez, is part of the "Far Out Fairy Tales" series of graphic novels based on traditional fairy tales which have, over time, been adapted into movies and retold through various authors and illustrators. However, making "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" into a graphic novel and replacing the dwarves with robots who mine jewels on a distant planet is a first! The alliance between Snow White and her protectors is similar to the original story, as is the rivalry between Snow White and the queen,



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who wants to eliminate anyone who is qualified to take over her powerful position. The most significant difference between the old and new fairy tale is that Snow White's primary asset of beauty has been replaced by her intelligence and bravery. She knows electronics and how to navigate through outer space. Many modern readers (especially girls) will identify with this strong character who relies on brain power in this futuristic adventure!

**THE MARVELS**, by Brian Selznick, is mixed media for middle schoolers. The first 400 pages of this very thick book chronicles the genealogy of the Marvel family in pictures. It's a fantastical story of two brothers at sea who become shipwrecked in 1776. The survivor makes his way to London and takes up life in the theater; backstage where the rope rigging and backdrops are as familiar as the surroundings of a sailing ship. Fast forward to 1990 with a new character, Joseph Jervis, and a switch to telling the story with text. Joseph lives at boarding school, but decides to visit London, where his elusive uncle, Albert Nightingale, lives in a museum of sorts. Uncle Albert is a man of few words and fails to explain why a room in his house is left unused and unchanged. After much effort, Joseph unlocks the mystery of the room and his family history. Flipping through the pages of this book will feel almost like watching a movie, as Selznick zooms in and out of scenes with detailed pencil illustrations. Selznick is famous for his ability to create two separate stories, find the common thread and weave it into a complete, but complex, story, and this book is no exception. To read this story once is not enough. **THE MARVELS** is a masterpiece of storytelling. Since the story is loosely based on an actual house in London, readers will find an afterword and a dramatic black and white photograph of the mysterious unchanging room.

**BONE GAP**, by Laura Ruby, begins as realistic fiction with the very human story of 14-year-old Finn, who daydreams about better days to come and defends himself from bullies, but sees people

in a different way. He notices their shape and movement more than their faces, but in the small community of Bone Gap, he knows who everyone is. His older brother Sean is big and strong and does everything right. He also takes care of Finn. It is the two of them against the world. Their lives change overnight when the most beautiful woman in the world is found in their barn. Her name is Rosza, she is a great cook, and she makes the brothers happy. As quickly as she came, she leaves - taken by a man that Finn cannot describe, even though he saw Rosza get into the man's car and disappear down the road. There are several mysteries taking place at the same time, eventually unraveled through the separate narratives of Finn and Rosza. The story slowly transforms into surreal fantasy, paralleling the Greek myth of Demeter and her daughter, Persephone, who was kidnapped by Hades and taken to the Underworld, just like Rosza was kidnapped and disappeared from view. Finn is fearless in his quest to find Rosza and becomes the hero of the story. There are several allusions to the myth, such as the superhuman strength and persona of the kidnapper. References to the pomegranate seeds that Persephone ate, resulting in six months above the ground and six months below, are found in Rosza's cookie recipe that features an especially delicious pomegranate filling, and her inner need to stay connected to her grandmother in Poland, while, at the same time, wanting to start a new life in the U.S. with Finn and Sean. This is a story about perspective, inner beauty versus physical beauty, and the value of accepting each individual who views the world from a slightly different viewpoint.

## Author Biography

**Lynette Marten Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library Reference Desk in Marquette, MI where she teaches people how to make the transition from print to digital literacy. She holds a master's degree in education, and has been a Great Lakes, Great Books Award committee member for the past eleven years.  
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