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# An Assessment of Character with Great Lakes, Great Books

by Lynette Marten Suckow



Let's explore the "assessment" theme in selections from the Great Lakes Great Books Award list for the 2015-16 school year. These five titles feature protagonists who each face the true test of character and demonstrate the determination to tackle challenges as they arise.

The GLGB committee selects 40 books, published within the last two years, to introduce as new literature into K-12 classrooms on an annual basis. Teachers and librarians provide students with books from their grade level lists and allow students to vote on their favorites. GLGB is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement projects, promoting students' active participation in the reading process. You'll find a classroom ballot, promotional bookmarks, and the opportunity to nominate a book for next year at: <http://michiganreading.org/studentinvolvement/great-lakes-great-books>. After you read the books at your grade level, have fun reading them all!

**THREE BEARS IN A BOAT**, by David Soman, is nothing like the story of *The Three Bears*. These three bears, Theo, Dash, and Charlie, are cubs who have broken their mother's blue seashell and promptly set out on a quest to replace it. They meet interesting boaters along the way, and resist tempting side trips in order to stay focused on their mission; but they're unsuccessful in the hunt for the blue seashell. With their moods deflated and large storm clouds moving in, they begin to squabble. Realizing they must work together in the face of danger, they complete their journey and return safely home where Mama Bear waits for an explanation of their absence. The three bears, in a true test of their character, confess to their misbehavior and the reason they left home without permission. If the story isn't heartwarming enough,

the watercolor illustrations are a treat for your eyes. Kindergarten and first grade readers will get a chuckle from the illustration where the bears swim underwater investigating every possible, yet unlikely, place for a seashell.

**FIREBIRD**, by Misty Copeland, is Misty's own story told through her role as mentor to a young ballet dancer. The text is in verse and very short. Readers in grades 2 and 3 will want to focus on the words, as capitalization and punctuation have not been added. However, the message is clear that "the space between you and me" is the gap between a youngster with a dream to dance and a grown-up who has achieved that dream. Misty Copeland bridged the gap by working extra hard to become the best of ballet dancers. She is known for her portrayal of the Firebird in the ballet of the same name, changing expectations of success for dark-skinned ballerinas around the world. The distinctively bold illustrations of Christopher Myers emphasize elongated limbs and positions of ballet dancers in all their beauty.

**HALF A CHANCE**, by Cynthia Lord, is a coming-of-age novel filled with the thoughts, questions and emotional reactions familiar to students in grades 4 and 5. Lucy, the daughter of a famous photographer, loves photography and aspires to be as good as her father. She's been taught to find "the story in the shot" when looking for a good photo. When her father agrees to judge a photo contest, Lucy enters under an assumed name because she wants



**Lynette  
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to be judged on her talent, not her last name. While seeking the perfect photo, Lucy also gets to know her neighbor, Nate, and his grandmother, who is slowly slipping into dementia. The camera reveals what Nate and his family don't want to see, but will it cost Lucy his friendship in order to win the contest?

***THE CROSSOVER***, by Kwame Alexander, was written for middle schoolers and is a story of strong character that was recognized with both a John Newbery Medal and a Coretta Scott King Honor Award in 2015. This is the story of Josh, the twin brother of Jordan, and son of professional parents who have every expectation that their boys will succeed in academics and sports and then enter into college. It doesn't take many words to tell the story because the text is written in verse, limited to a single column down the left side of each page. However, the words used are well-chosen and packed with emotion, conveying the questions and concerns Josh has about life, basketball, and his father's mysterious reluctance to take on a coaching job when it's evident that he loves the game.

In stark contrast to the family expectations and challenges experienced by Josh and Jordan, ***DARIUS & TWIG***, by Walter Dean Myers, features best friends from a Harlem neighborhood

who have managed to pursue and excel in their fields of interest: Darius as a writer and Twig as a runner. Faced with individual challenges that include unsavory and unsupportive family members, bullies at school, and danger on the streets, these teens strive to find a way out of the neighborhood and into college. Instead of letting themselves fall into despair over their lots in life, Darius and Twig encourage each other's progress and keep working toward their individual goals. Myers scores big with this tale of steadfast friendship and determination.

### Author Biography

**Lynette Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library in Marquette, MI, where she teaches people how to find and use digital information. She holds a master's degree in education, is currently a Michigan Reading Association board member, and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member since 2005. For questions, comments, or additional information please contact her at [lynette.suckow@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.suckow@gmail.com).



# KALEIDOSCOPE 2016

The Michigan Reading Association invites a deserving student from your school to become a published author!



Just follow these easy steps:

1. Select **ONE** piece of writing from your building.
2. Fill out the Student Information Sheet.
3. Proofread and edit selection with student author.
4. **Email** the writing and information by the deadline.

## **SPECIFIC GUIDELINES:**

- One entry per school building, any grade K-12.
- The original manuscript may be prose or poetry.
- Students may submit a black line drawing as a scanned photo within the Word document (due to space limitations, drawing may not be published).
- The entry must be in "polished" form (no invented spellings).
- **Manuscript must be emailed as a Microsoft Word document** to [mra@michiganreading.org](mailto:mra@michiganreading.org). Include student name and teacher contact information in the email.
- **WORD LIMIT – Please count accurately.**
  - K - 6<sup>th</sup> grade 250 words
  - 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade 500 words
- **Student Information Sheet MUST be completed and attached** to entry email as a Word document or scanned attachment.

For more information contact the Michigan Reading Association office, [mra@michiganreading.org](mailto:mra@michiganreading.org) or (616) 647-9310.

## **DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: DECEMBER 18, 2015**

## Student Information Sheet

Complete and attach to entry.

Title of Entry

Student's Name

Grade

Student Address

City

State

Zip Code

School Name

School Address

City

State

Zip Code

( )

School Phone (include area code)

Teacher's Name (please print)

Teacher's email

Principal's Signature

Parent Signature

( )

Parent Phone (include area code)

A submitted entry gives Michigan Reading Association permission to publish manuscript in KALEIDOSCOPE 2016

**DEADLINE: December 18, 2015**



## OFFICIAL BALLOT for the 2015-2016 GREAT LAKES GREAT BOOKS AWARD

Have your class vote for their favorites!

Students should read, or have read to them, as many books from their grade level as possible. To participate in the election, each student votes for his or her favorite book. (Be sure to include the total vote count for each book from your grade level.)

Completed ballots must be received by

**January 27, 2016**, and should be mailed to:

**Lynette Marten Suckow**  
**Great Lakes Great Books**  
**604 Mesnard Street**  
**Marquette, MI 49855**

Or e-mailed to: [greatlakesgreatbooks@gmail.com](mailto:greatlakesgreatbooks@gmail.com)

Or faxed to: (906) 226-1783

Teacher Name:	_____
School Name:	_____
School Address:	_____
City/State/Zip:	_____
E-mail Address:	_____

Votes	Title	Author	Publisher/Copyright
	<b>Grades K - 1st</b>		
	Gaston	Kelly DiPucchio	Atheneum Books, 2014
	The Lion and the Bird	Marianne Dubuc	Enchanted Lion Books, 2014
	The Farmer and the Clown	Maria Frazee	Beach Lane Books, 2014
	One Big Pair of Underwear	Laura Gehl	Beach Lane Books, 2014
	Once Upon an Alphabet	Oliver Jeffers	Philomel Books, 2014
	Maple	Lori Nichols	Nancy Paulsen Books, 2014
	Three Bears in a Boat	David Soman	Dial Books for Young Readers, 2014
	Mama Built a Little Nest	Jennifer Ward	Beach Lane Books, 2014
	<b>Grades 2nd - 3rd</b>		
	My Teacher is a Monster!	Peter Brown	Little, Brown and Company, 2014
	Firebird	Misty Copeland	G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2014
	The Scraps Book	Lois Ehlert	Beach Lane Books, 2014
	My Explosive Diary	Emily Gale	Aladdin, 2014
	The Year of Billy Miller	Kevin Henkes	Greenwillow Books, 2013
	Creature Features	Steve Jenkins	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014
	Fly Away	Patricia MacLachlan	Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2014
	I Love You Just Enough	Robbyn Smith van Frankenhuyzen	Sleeping Bear Press, 2014
	<b>Grades 4th - 5th</b>		
	El Deafo	Cece Bell	Amulet Books, 2014
	The Madman of Piney Woods	Christopher-Paul Curtis	Scholastic Press, 2014
	Space Case	Stuart Gibbs	Simon & Schuster Books, 2014
	The Mark of the Dragonfly	Jaleigh Johnson	Delacorte Press, 2014
	A Snicker of Magic	Natalie Lloyd	Scholastic Press, 2014
	Half a Chance	Cynthia Lord	Scholastic Press, 2014
	Zane and the Hurricane: A Story of Katrina	Rodman Philbrick	Blue Sky Press, 2014
	Winter Bees	Joyce Sidman	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014
	<b>Grades 6th - 8th</b>		
	I Kill the Mockingbird	Paul Acampora	Roaring Book Press, 2014
	The Crossover	Kwame Alexander	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014
	The Night Gardener	Jonathan Auxier	Amulet Books, 2014
	Ali: An American Champion	Barry Denenberg	Simon & Schuster Books, 2014
	Gaijin: American Prisoner of War	Matt Faulkner	Disney - Hyperion Books, 2014
	Absolutely Truly	Heather Vogel Frederick	Simon & Schuster Books, 2014
	Half a World Away	Cynthia Kadohata	Atheneum Books, 2014
	The Forbidden Library	Django Wexler	Kathy Dawson Books, 2014
	<b>Grades 9th - 12th</b>		
	Killer of Enemies	Joseph Bruchac	Tu Books, 2013
	Jumped In	Patrick Flores-Scott	Henry Holt & Company, 2013
	The Half Life of Molly Pierce	Katrina Leno	HarperTeen, 2014
	We Were Liars	E. Lockhart	Delacorte Press, 2013
	Darius & Twig	Walter Dean Myers	Amistad, 2013
	Clariel: The Lost Abhorsen	Garth Nix	HarperCollins, 2014
	Dorothy Must Die	Danielle Paige	Full Fathom Five, 2014
	Schizo	Nic Sheff	Philomel Books, 2014

The Great Lakes Great Books program is brought to you by the Michigan Reading Association.  
 For more information visit: [www.michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org).