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## Great Lakes, Great Books Diverse Texts

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# Great Lakes, Great Books

## Diverse Texts

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

Book publishers are offering a bounty of stories written by diverse authors about unique topics. Luckily, the trend for books written by Black, Indigenous and People of Color began several years ago, and the Great Lakes Great Books committee was able to include a number of them on the 2020 list. The GLGB committee has been reading all year long to learn more about the variety of ethnicities and regional customs represented by those outside the circle of our immediate family and friends. Take some time to see why people are so passionate about cultural issues and how those issues affect their daily lives. After reading the selections below, we encourage MRJ readers to prepare for the 2021 GLGB list, which is usually released with the Michigan Reading Association conference in March.

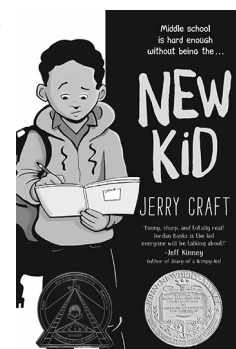
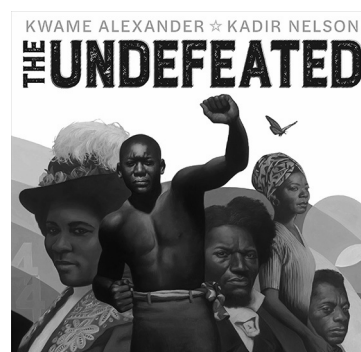
Each year, the GLGB committee selects 40 books, published within the last two years, to introduce K-12 classrooms to some of the best books available on the market. Teachers and librarians are encouraged to provide students with books from their grade-level lists and allow them to vote on their favorites. GLGB is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement projects, promoting active participation in the reading process by students. We encourage readers to look for a classroom ballot and promotional bookmarks, along with the opportunity to nominate your favorite new book on the MRA website, under the "Awards" tab.

Readers of *The Undeclared* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) will be hard-pressed to find text that is more meaningful than the poetic lines of Kwame Alexander,

as he recounts years of Black history in a few well-chosen words. He highlights the accomplishments of notable Black people and reveals the cruelty experienced by many others born with shades of brown skin.

The afterword and index of historical figures and events supplement Alexander's powerful words with the facts behind them. Kadir Nelson's brilliant oil illustrations depict unforgettable images that move the reader and complement the text. Three separate full-page spreads highlight racial injustice with a single, repeated sentence, "This is for the unspeakable." Don't let the idea that this is simply a "picture book" dissuade you. This award-winning team of storyteller and artist have created an emotional literary journey that will resonate with all readers, especially our students of color who will see themselves represented in the stories here.

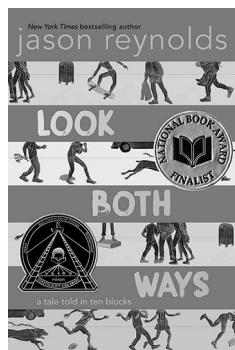
*New Kid* by Jerry Craft (Quill Tree Books) takes a look at the middle school experience in



graphic novel form. As if middle school isn't intimidating enough, Jordan Banks is attending one outside of his neighborhood, where students of color are few and far between. All Jordan really wants is to attend art school, but his parents insist that sending him to the more prestigious Riverdale Academy, which will prepare him for the future. Jordan navigates the classrooms and hallways of Riverdale with only a few mishaps along the way. When he forgets his journal in the cafeteria after being involved in an altercation, one of the teachers reads Jordan's journal and finds out how he feels about her racism; for instance, he writes about how she always calls him "Deandre" instead of his own name. Despite everything, Jordan is able to end the year on a positive note. As an extra bonus for readers who like to play with words, the title of each chapter is a twist on titles from notable literary works. For instance, Jordan's discovery of why the pesky Alex always wears a puppet on her hand is called "The Socky Horror Picture Show." If you enjoy *New Kid*, follow up with Craft's companion book, *Class Act* (Quill Tree Books), to learn more about Jordan's friend, Drew.

***Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks***

by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books), is a collection of ten short stories about urban middle schoolers who all have unique families and lives. Their lives center around school, where they try to avoid conflicts with other students, excel at classes they find interesting, and make deals with teachers in order to get through the school day. For instance, Cynthia of Southview Avenue has been given the last five minutes of math class to tell jokes that she makes up with her grandfather. Simeon and Kenzi, friends who live on Chestnut Street, have a secret handshake that lasts several minutes and a friendship that will go on forever. Trista, Francy, Bit, and John John, also known as the Low Cuts, have a reputation for taking unclaimed change from neighborhood establishments and buying inexpensive candy that can be repackaged and sold for a higher price; readers will be surprised to find out what



they're doing with their profits. And, as the phrase that lends itself to the title of the book, Fatima of Portal Avenue keeps a checklist of activities and observations of her journey to and from school each day, which has developed into the ability to "look both ways." The author has a catalog of other outstanding books for teens, including *When I Was the Greatest* (Atheneum), *The Boy in the Black Suit* (Atheneum), and *Long Way Down* (Atheneum).

***Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me*** by Mariko Tamaki (First Second Books) gives readers a glimpse into the teenage life of Frederica, a.k.a. Freddy. She shares her daily routine with best friend, Doodle, while lamenting her tumultuous relationship with Laura Dean. Laura Dean is the coolest, most sought after girl



in school, but she's not a faithful friend or partner. As Freddy goes through the highs and lows in her relationship with Laura, Doodle is always there to pick up the pieces. What kind of a best friend will Freddy turn out to be when Doodle has a life-changing problem to deal with? The concepts of fidelity and compassion will apply to all readers, and Tamaki emphasizes how the trajectory of our existence depends on the personal choices we make. The story's graphic styling by Rosemary Valero-O'Connell adds visual cues and elements of emotion to the story, which is told almost entirely in speech bubbles.

***Patron Saints of Nothing***

by Randy Ribay (Kokila) introduces readers to Jay Reguero, a Filipino-American high school senior from Michigan, who is ready to graduate, attend college, and begin his adult life. That's the plan—until he gets news of his cousin Jun's death back in the Philippines. The two cousins were close childhood friends and continued that friendship through letters. Jun wrote faithfully, but Jay answered less and



## Must Read Texts

less often, a fact that makes him feel guilty about his cousin's death. Jay tries, in vain, to extract information about Jun from his Filipino father, who keeps quiet out of respect for Jun's father and to protect the family's honor. In turn, Jay refuses to believe that Jun was involved in using and selling drugs, leading to his execution by the government (under President Duterte's aggressive efforts to wipe out the drug trade in the Philippines). Somehow, Jay convinces his parents to let him spend spring break in Manila to visit his extended family, although he secretly wants to uncover the cause of Jun's death. Remembering little of the country from his childhood visits, he re-connects with family while he investigates the truth of his cousin's untimely death. Readers will feel the tension between Jay's allegiances to very different countries, separated by ideology and geography.

## Author Biography

**Lynette Marten Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library in Marquette, MI where she provides reference assistance with library resources and digital technology. She holds a master's degree in education from Northern Michigan University, is a Marquette-Alger Reading Council member, and a committee member for the Great Lakes Great Books Award. She can be reached at [lynette.suckow@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.suckow@gmail.com).

