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## Great Lakes, Great Books Friendship Stories

Lynette Marten Suckow  
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# Great Lakes, Great Books Friendship Stories

by Lynette Marten Suckow

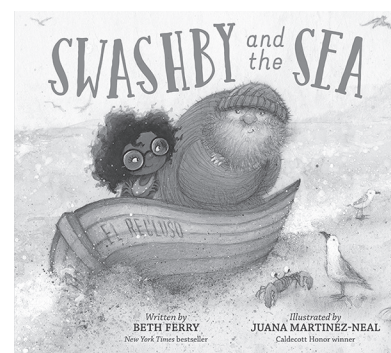


**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

After a year of pandemic isolation, we realize the value of friends more than ever. While some of us may feel that we need to relearn social skills and how to interact with our peers, the pull of human interaction remains strong. Crafted with friendship as the underlying theme, the following stories show protagonists who are unsure of friendship, but crave a sense of belonging that comes with it. Storyline twists, along with amazing illustrations, made each one enjoyable and thought provoking.

This pandemic year was no different than any other, regarding the GLGB committee's dedication to reading hundreds of books. They ultimately selected 40, 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. Great Lakes Great Books is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement projects, promoting student participation in the reading process. After reading the selections below, we invite you to look for a classroom ballot, a student certificate, promotional bookmarks, last year's winning titles, and the opportunity to nominate your favorite new book on MRA's website ([michiganreading.org/awards/great-lakes-great-books/](http://michiganreading.org/awards/great-lakes-great-books/)). We invite you to treat yourself to all the suggestions on the 2021-22 Great Lakes Great Books list, including the ones here.

***Swashby and the Sea*** by Beth Ferry (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020) is a friendship story about Captain Swashby, who planned a peaceful retirement on the beach

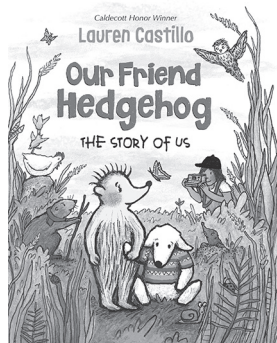


after a lifetime at sea. His plan for peace and quiet was soon interrupted by joyful new neighbors setting up their beach umbrellas next to his deck. He wrote unwelcoming messages in the sand to scare them off, but the ocean waves repeatedly washed away some of the letters, transforming the unkind words into fun phrases. Seeing only the transformed messages, the neighbors were convinced that Swashby was a great neighbor. Little by little, he joined in their activities, but it took an emergency to make Swashby realize how much he valued his new friends. The illustrations by Juana Martinez-Neal have soft, textured backgrounds with distinctive main characters who effortlessly convey emotion. The story's clever word play with messages in the sand could be reshaped into a creative language arts activity.

***Our Friend Hedgehog: The Story of Us*** by Lauren Castillo (Penguin Random House, 2020) is a study in contrast between a solitary existence and the fullness

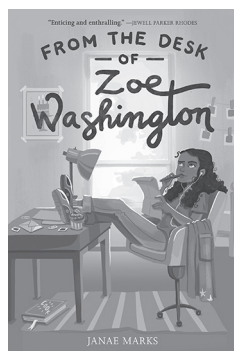
## Must Read Texts

of life with friends. When Hedgehog loses Mutty in a windstorm, he leaves his island to find the treasured stuffed animal. The journey takes him through the underground home of Mole, to the treetop home of Owl, across the river to Beaver's dam, into the meadow with Hen and her chicks, and straight to the house of Annika Mae. Hedgehog follows the trail of clues, finding new friends as he travels to each location. As his small world expands, he realizes how lucky the adventure itself had been. Annika Mae, who found Mutty along the river, returned him to Hedgehog. In return, Hedgehog retrieved her red notebook from Beaver's newly repaired dam. You may have guessed that the notebook got wet, smudging the pages, but the new group of friends went to work creating new pages and a new story for themselves. Young readers will enjoy well-constructed chapters that are visually supported by vivid watercolor illustrations.



### *From the Desk of Zoe*

*Washington* by Janae Marks (Harper Collins, 2020) introduces Zoe on her twelfth birthday, aglow from a wonderful party with friends, as she receives a letter from the Massachusetts State Penitentiary, where her father has been incarcerated her whole life. She's intrigued, and writes back before her mom and stepfather find out. Meanwhile, Zoe has the entire summer ahead of her to patch up a misunderstanding with her best friend, Trevor, and begin an internship at a cupcake bakery in downtown Boston. She chafes when assigned to non-baking tasks, but finally accepts that there's more to a bakery than mixing the batter. Zoe continues to correspond with her biological father with assistance from her grandmother, who allows her address to be used for the letters. When Zoe finds out about a witness that could prove her father's innocence, Trevor

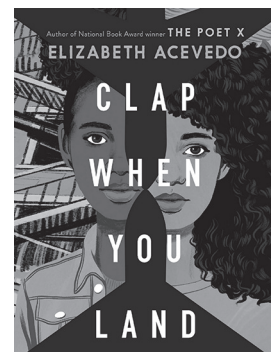


steps up to help her find the elusive person. The author embeds several social issues and the love of baking into this sweet novel, with friendship at the base of it all.

*The Magic Fish* by Trung Le Nguyen (Penguin Random House, 2020) is a color-coded graphic novel that allows readers to seamlessly make transitions from the present to the past and into the imaginative world of fairy tales. Nguyen layers together three separate storylines to show the melding of Vietnamese and American cultures through traditional European fairy tales. To help themselves learn more English, Tien and his mother read centuries-old fairy tales, including complicated and gruesome retellings of "Cinderella" and "The Little Mermaid." The tales are tied to the sea and its miraculous creatures, illustrating the arduous, overseas immigration journey of Tien's mother. Her story parallels that of the little mermaid, who left her home under the sea to live on land without the ability to communicate with humans. Both heroines feel the isolation of a language barrier, while seeking acceptance within a new community. Tien's own longing for love and acceptance has less to do with a language barrier than juggling two cultures on a daily basis and butting up against social norms. He can't find the right vocabulary to tell his parents that he's gay, and fears becoming an outcast if he confides in his friends. Nguyen's compelling story is presented with detailed and expressive graphics, giving this book the double impact of story and art.



*Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo (Harper Collins, 2020) is a mystery that unfolds chapter by chapter, as Camino and Yahaira alternately tell their stories. Camino lives with her aunt in the Dominican Republic, where her father joins them in the summer months. Yahaira



lives in New York City with her mother and her father, who travels for business each summer. Is it a coincidence, or could both of their fathers be the same man? Both worlds collide when Papi is killed in a plane crash on his way to the Dominican Republic, releasing the secrets of his double life. Camino and Yahaira will soon meet and work through new emotions in order to accept one another. As it turns out, their father wasn't the only one keeping secrets. Family structure, economic advantage, sexual identity, and sexual harassment are also factors in this complex page-turner.

## 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 member of the Marquette-Alger Reading Council, and serves on the Michigan Reading Association's Great Lakes Great Books Award committee. She can be reached at [lynette.suckow@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.suckow@gmail.com).

