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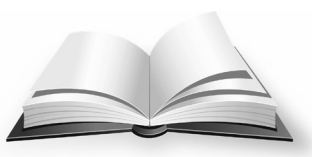
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Great Lakes, Great Books: A New Season

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette
Marten Suckow**

As winter gives way to spring, nature produces new leaves on trees and new shoots from flower beds. Spring also introduces Michigan readers to a new season of Great Lakes Great Books. The GLGB Award committee met in late January to create a new list of book recommendations for the 2022-2023 school year. Check out some of the highlights that sprouted from that diverse list, and then read them all!

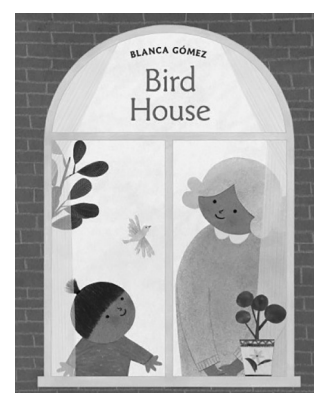
The GLGB committee takes on the task of reading as many children's and teen books as possible, published within the last two years, to narrow down the list and select forty of them. We introduce these to K-12 classrooms as some of the best books available on the market. Teachers and librarians are encouraged to provide students with books from their grade-level

lists and allow them to vote on their favorites. Great Lakes Great Books is just one way that the Michigan Reading Association promotes student participation in the reading process. Look for a classroom ballot, promotional bookmarks, last year's winning titles, and the opportunity to nominate your favorite new book at www.michiganreading.org under the three lines indicating more options, the Awards tab, and the Great Lakes Great Books button (Image 1).



Image 1: Screenshot of the MRA website with navigation to the Great Lakes Great Books page with lists of previous winners, teacher resources, and the ballot for next year's nominees.

Bird House by Blanca Gomez (Abrams, 2021) spotlights the recent trend of talented new authors who illustrate their own writing. Gomez uses solid geometric shapes and patterned backgrounds to enhance the sparse, but thoughtful, text about a young girl and her Abuela.



A wintry walk in the park leads the pair to an injured bird, which they take home to care for. The young girl, who adores her grandmother anyway, immerses herself in the process of restoring the bird to good health. When the bird is healed, they set it free, and their life returns to normal. Months later, the bird makes a surprise return to Abuela's balcony. The girl asks to keep it,

but her grandmother wisely says, “No darling, the bird doesn’t belong to us.” Readers will experience a tug on their heartstrings and a reminder that wildlife is meant to live in the wild.

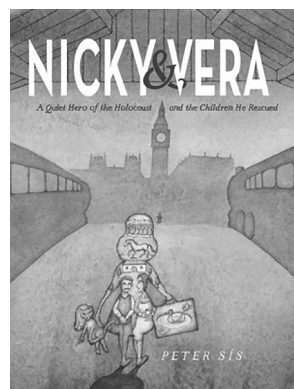
Dear Treefrog by Joyce Sidman (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

Written in two voices, Sidman tells the story of the common gray treefrog in biological and scientific terms, while using poetry to describe a young girl who makes the treefrog her focus as she moves into a new house. Before the first word is written, the illustrator, Diana Sudyka, uses gouache watercolor to portray the apprehension of our protagonist as the moving van is unloaded into her new home. The poems follow her first year of exploring the outdoors nearby, from the first moment she spots the treefrog, camouflaged against a leaf, to finding a friend who shares the joy of nature’s quiet wonders. The parallel stories cover one full year in the lives of a typical treefrog and a child starting over in a new place. Short, easily readable poems allow readers to identify with a shy youngster who slowly adjusts to her natural surroundings.



Nicky & Vera: A Quiet Hero of the Holocaust and the Children He Rescued by Peter Sis (W. W. Norton, 2021) holds its own next to his other Caldecott Honor books, *Starry Messenger: Galileo Galilei* (Macmillan, 2000) and *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Macmillan, 2007), also

featuring storylines of governmental persecution, accompanied by artwork that inspires a second look. Sis reveals his amazing storytelling skills by tackling the topic of the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, while keeping the reader’s interest with complex

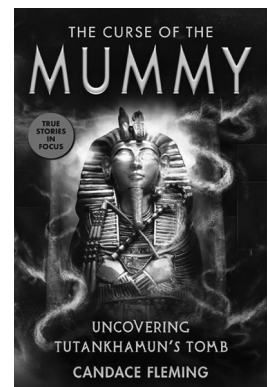


imagery of pattern, intricate detail, and muted colors. It is the dual story of Nicky, a Jewish German living in England, and Vera, one of 669 children rescued from Czechoslovakia and taken to England by a series of trains. These “kindertransports” were organized by Nicholas “Nicky” Winton, a London banker who financed the transport of Czech children to England in 1939, as the German army advanced to take over Eastern Europe. With sparse text blended into full-page illustrations, Sis rolls out history in an honest fashion. Historical notes are included at the back of the book. Readers will want to read it a second time to notice extra information discreetly incorporated into the illustrations.

The Curse of the Mummy: Uncovering Tutankhamun’s Tomb by Candace Fleming (Scholastic, 2021) guides

readers through expansive background information about royal burials in Egypt’s Valley of the Kings before narrowing her focus to the sensational tale of King Tutankhamun’s Tomb.

This early twentieth century archaeological dig has been researched and retold over the last hundred years. The curse that surrounded Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter, who headed up excavation of the tomb, has been used to fuel horror stories about mummies coming back to life and to spark investigations into the supernatural. Fleming’s retelling is factual, and includes more than 75 historical photos, as well as an extensive bibliography, source notes, and index. Despite its nonfiction status, the book reads like a novel, with a number of personalities that clash, the effects of government politics, the challenges of the Egyptian climate, and the dangerous work of tomb excavation all blending together into a gripping narrative form.



Hurricane Summer by Asha Bromfield (Macmillan, 2021) opens with Tilla traveling to Jamaica, her father’s homeland, for the first time in ten years. She is making the visit with her younger sister, Mia.

Must Read Texts



During that decade, however, she has continually longed for her father's approval and finds herself going down all the wrong paths to find it. Upon arrival in Kingston, Jamaica's capital city, Tilla and Mia's father greets them and leaves them in the care of his extended family, who live in the countryside. Nine-year-old

Mia has no problem connecting with the family, but Tilla is the object of jealousy by her cousin Diana, who resents her Canadian, middle-class upbringing, and then tells lies about—and plays dangerous tricks on—her. Driven to find friendship with some of her male cousins and friends, she makes many of the typical teenager's kinds of bad choices while rumors of promiscuity begin to circulate. As Tilla unwittingly finds out the truth behind her father's behavior—as well as Diana, and her Aunt Herma and Aunt Adele—she puts the pieces together, considering the culture and poverty of her Jamaican family. At the same time, a

hurricane hits the island and causes destruction everywhere. Tilla feels that she's also experienced a personal hurricane, destroying the beliefs she grew up with, and prompting her to cut off the toxic relationships she endured over the summer. The physical and emotional events of the summer will allow Tilla to build a new resilience within herself. In addition to the compelling storyline, this book begins with a Patois Word Bank to help American readers connect with the dialect used by native Jamaican speakers, making it accessible for many readers.

Author Biography

Lynette Marten Suckow is a Reference Librarian at Peter White Public Library 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 from Northern Michigan University and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member for the past twelve years. She can be reached at <lynette.suckow@gmail.com>.

