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Great Lakes Great Books: Continuing to Learn

Lynette Marten Suckow

Peter White Public Library, lynette.suckow@gmail.com

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Great Lakes, Great Books: Continuing to Learn

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette
Marten Suckow**

Students are back in school, learning skills to make them successful in academics and in life. The following titles from the 2022-23 Great Lakes Great Books list include school experiences and life lessons, all of which highlight the value of learning. Through the pages of these books, readers will experience the geography of forests, rivers, and high desert, along with the cultures of rural, suburban, and city life. The customs and traditions of many characters add to a reader's experiences. Join these protagonists in their daily routines, through victories and failures, and share a glimpse of their worlds.

The GLGB committee takes on the task of reading as many children's and teen books as possible, in order to select forty titles, 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 just one way that The Michigan Reading Association promotes student participation in the reading process. Look for a classroom ballot, printable poster, 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," then the "Awards" tab, and finally the "Great Lakes Great Books" button.

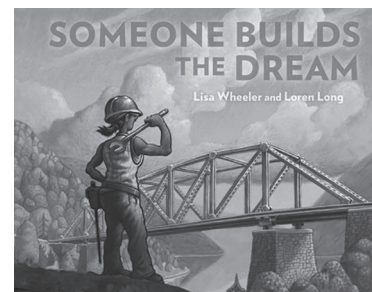
Mel Fell by Corey R. Tabor follows Mel, a brave little bird who feels ready to fly, on her very first flight. From her nest at the top of a tall, tall tree, she dives

straight down, past a family of owls, a group of squirrels, a beehive, a spider web, and a ladybug, into the water below. Part of the reading adventure is the visual element

of Mel falling through page after page, until she hits the water, successfully snags a fish and, as readers turn the book, she flies back up the tree to the nest. The creative illustrations move in one direction for Mel's flight down to the water and then needs to be turned 180 degrees for the return trip where all the critters cheer her on in reverse sequence. The Author's Note is a short paragraph about kingfishers (like Mel) who live near the water's edge and dive for fish. It's no wonder that this book won a 2022 Caldecott Honor Award for eye-catching and innovative illustrations.



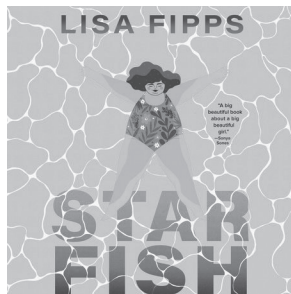
Someone Builds the Dream by Lisa Wheeler is a book-in-rhyme with short sentences and repeating phrases that also introduces vocabulary from the building



Must Read Texts

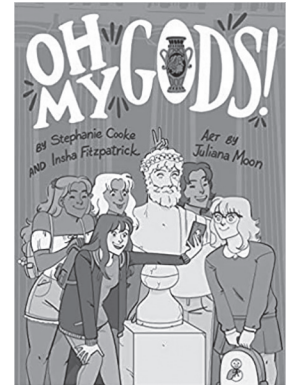
trades. More complex concepts about building infrastructure are illustrated by Loren Long, fashioned after the 1930's era Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals that fill each page from edge to edge. Readers are introduced to the steps needed for revitalizing a community through the design and construction of a house, followed by a bridge to reach the house, a fountain for the park nearby the house, and clean energy to bring electricity to the house. Each project builds on the previous one, and the past and future are tied together in this multi-layered story of planning ahead and learning new skills, all in an effort to accomplish our goals.

Starfish by Lisa Fipps dives into several relevant topics which include friendship, bullying, body image, and pre-teen relationships with parents. Ellie is finishing up a summer of swimming in her pool, where she floats weightlessly, stretched out in the shape of a starfish. Her best friend is moving away, leaving her in a contemplative mood, until the new girl from next door asks Ellie to get together to organize their school supplies before the first day of school. Constantly teased for being overweight, middle school could mean a fresh start for Ellie. To her dismay, the bullies from grade school have followed her to sixth grade. Ellie's well-intentioned mother employs calorie counting, a therapist, and refrigerator reminders to help Ellie lose weight, only to offend her in the process and make her feel less valued as a person. The therapist becomes an ally, joined by Ellie's steadfast father, and a new friend from next door, Catalina. Even the family dog, Gigi, has a "starring" role in Ellie's story of resilience, as she learns to accept herself and others. This book-in-verse is packed with precise vocabulary that thoughtfully conveys Ellie's emotions.

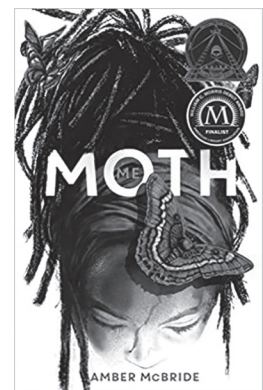


Oh My Gods! by Stephanie Cooke and Insha Fitzpatrick acquaints readers with Karen, a typical middle schooler from New Jersey who likes to play video games with friends. When her mom gets a

new job that requires her to be out of town for some months, Karen is shipped off to live with her father on Mt. Olympus in Greece. As she gets to know her dad and enrolls in school there, Karen finally catches on that she's in the company of mythological gods and goddesses. Her father reveals that she is also a demigoddess and that her powers will emerge eventually (but doesn't elaborate on what they might be). Meanwhile, Karen and her new friends investigate the mystery of a classmate who was turned to stone. They find more stone bodies in the barn belonging to Medusa and her sisters, all homeschooled, and try to find a way to neutralize Medusa's gaze. As things normalize around Mt. Olympus, readers are visually guided down dark corridors in the school's lower level to a large locked door—and the next adventure in the series. As readers might suspect, *Oh My Gods! II: The Forgotten Maze* leads Karen and her friends into a giant labyrinth controlled by an online troll called M1N0T4UR. Karen's handwritten notes at the back of the book will help readers keep track of the Greek gods and their powers. In addition to the clever writing, credit is due to Juliana Moon for illustrating these colorful graphic novels with characters who are easy to identify, and story panels that enhance the humorous text.



Me, Moth by Amber McBride immerses readers in well-paced verse that uses metaphors and similes so effectively that the phrases create visual images as they are read. Moth is a loner of sorts, living with her aunt and keeping to herself as she grieves her family members who were all killed in a car crash. Everything changes when she meets Sani on the bus ride home from school. Sani has Navajo heritage and a spirituality that attracts Moth



from the start. He adheres to a schedule of prescription pills that give him focus and grounds him in reality. When Sani decides to drive across the country to visit his father in New Mexico, Moth takes the opportunity to travel with him. On the Navajo reservation, Sani and Moth share their visions and try to figure out why they feel they have met before. Readers will do a double take when Sani's father provides the answers about their destinies that they seek. It is easy to see why this mystic book was a finalist for the 2021 National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

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>.



Marcus Black is a 5th grade student in Mt. Pleasant Public Schools.