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## Great Lakes Great Books: Encourage the Joy of Reading

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# Great Lakes, Great Books: Encourage the Joy of Reading

by Lynette Marten Suckow



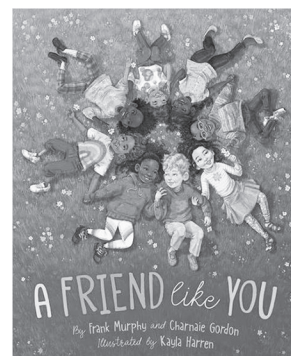
**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

There are few things better than a good book, in my opinion. Yet, what are the elements that work together to make a good book? Well, the words themselves, of course, build a story with dynamic vocabulary and phrasing. From there, I look for an artistic page layout that is sometimes accompanied by illustrations, depending on the target audience of the book, though big kids and even adults like photos and graphics, too! Here are some reading recommendations that adhere to those guidelines for a “good book.” Not only do the following stories from the Great Lakes Great Books list hold a reader’s attention; the illustrations are meaningful and memorable. The visual enhancement of topics about friendship, animal migration, racial injustice, and social activism add to comprehension of the written text. And, even though *What About Will?* (2021) is not accompanied by graphics, the cover art will leave an impression that reflects the story’s impact. Take some time to treat yourself to all the great books on the list.

The GLGB committee takes on the task of reading as many teen and children’s books as possible in order to select forty titles published within the last two years. The goal is 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 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](http://www.michiganreading.org) under the Awards tab.

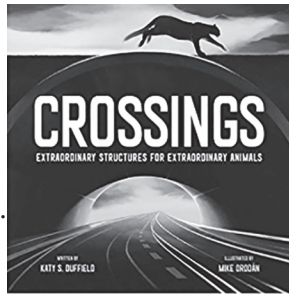
***A Friend Like You*** (Sleeping Bear Press, 2021) by Frank Murphy and Charnaie Gordon highlights the very best advice about how to make friends and features Kayla Harren’s beautifully illustrated chapter-by-chapter hints on friendship. The authors ask readers to be open-minded, kind, accepting of others, thoughtful, and good listeners. “Be a Forgiving Friend” has few words, but it shows two friends playing with a toy that gets broken. This could have resulted in a shouting match of accusations, but it ends instead with a joint effort to mend the broken toy. Friendship is a universal topic that parents and teachers will want to read about with their children and students. Adults may want to read this gem, too, as a refresher course on the importance of friends.



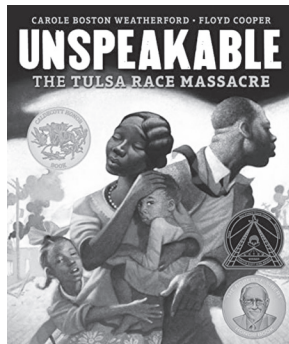
***Crossings: Extraordinary Structures for Extraordinary Animals*** (Beach Lane Books, 2020) by Katy S. Duffield is a celebration for wildlife conservationists around the world. In spite of human

## Must Read Texts

development into wilderness areas, engineers have found ways to connect animal habitats above, below, across, and through manmade structures that cut into migratory routes. The author features overpasses for Canadian elk and Australian red crabs, underpasses for African elephants and Florida panthers, and rope bridges for Costa Rican monkeys. The realistic illustrations by Mike Orodan show animals from around the world migrating through their habitats without encountering the deadly traffic of roads and highways. Details of these twelve diverse crossing sites can be found in small print near each of the featured animals, with more in the back of the book. As the title states, it's an extraordinary book that can serve as a jumping-off point for classroom discussion on animal habitats and the environmental consequences of modern transportation systems.

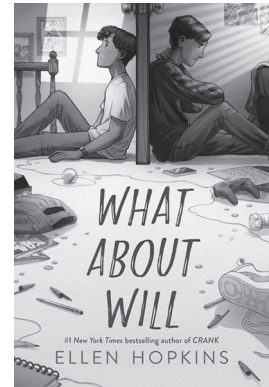


***Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*** (Carolrhoda Books, 2021) by Carole Boston Weatherford is a remarkable tale that begins with “once upon a time,” even though it is a true story buried in time. Illustrator Floyd Cooper adds award-winning, full-page oil paintings to tell the story of Greenwood, located at the edge of Tulsa, Oklahoma and divided by train tracks into a white section and a Black district. The Black community had a thriving economy from long-term oil investments and was nicknamed the “Negro Wall Street of America,” providing good jobs for families and good education for their children. A single incident between a Black teen bumping into a white elevator operator brought both communities to blows on May 31, 1921. Enraged white citizens raided and burned black businesses and homes, killing hundreds of Black citizens, as they rioted through the streets. The National Guard arrived the following day and moved 8,000 homeless residents into camps until they could rebuild



or move on. This incident was swept under the rug for 75 years before it was investigated and made known to the American public. Most readers recently learned of the Tulsa Race Massacre, as the number of publications on the subject swelled to commemorate its 100th anniversary in 1921. The author's note and illustrator's note provide further historical insight into this American tragedy.

***What About Will?*** (G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2021) by Ellen Hopkins is a fast-moving book-in-verse about 12-year-old Trace, who loves baseball, does his best in school and tries to maintain a positive attitude about his broken family. His dad buries himself in his work. His mom got a divorce and left the whole family in order to pursue a singing career. His seventeen-year-old brother, Will, had a football injury that he hasn't recovered from, physically or emotionally. In the midst of family neglect, Trace still loves baseball and makes friends with the new girl on the team, who also has an older brother not living up to his potential. When Will overdoses on pain killers, the family has a wake-up call and regroup. As the characters accept responsibility for their dysfunction, Trace begins to feel hopeful that he can reconcile with the past and construct an alternate future that includes new additions to his list of family and friends. Trace's positive attitude is inspiring.



***The Girl from the Sea*** (Graphix, 2021), a graphic novel written and illustrated by Molly Knox Ostertag, focuses on Morgan, a typical teen from a small town or, in this case, an island. Morgan wants to finish high school and leave the island behind, along with the ever-present sadness of her newly separated family. Why





is she so desperate to put space between herself and her loved ones? Because she doesn't want her family or friends to find out that she is gay. Then she meets a special girl who also has a secret. She's a *selkie*—a mythological creature that is both seal and human—and Morgan's kiss allows her to leave the sea in human form. As Morgan helps Keltie navigate dry land and learn human ways, there are some comedic moments. The girls devise a plan to re-route an excursion boat away from its usual course near a seal rookery where Keltie lived previously. An act of heroism sends Keltie back to the sea for seven years, but the girls both know that destiny will reunite them. The graphic interpretation of this story is laid out well and appeals to a wide range of 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>.

