The Teachers’ Choices logo that Chris Van Allsburg created (see above) illuminates the idea that good books reach out and tap us on the shoulder to get our attention.

Each year since 1989 the International Reading Association’s Teachers’ Choices project has identified outstanding trade books published for children and adolescents that teachers find to be exceptional in curriculum use. Parents, also, will find books from the Teachers’ Choices list good for reading aloud at home and for background information on questions that arise from tours to a farm, aquarium, or museum and from other shared family events such as television viewing.

The selection is accomplished through a field test in the U.S. of over 300 newly published books submitted by North American trade book publishers. Seven teams, made up of a regional coordinator, field leaders, teacher reviewers, and trainees for the project, try out the books in classrooms and libraries to select those that meet the established criteria. Regional coordinators circulate copies of the books among teachers and librarians who use them with students.

The coordinators record educators’ reactions to each book and tabulate their final ratings. Each book is read by a minimum of six teachers or librarians in each region, although some books have been read by as many as 200 people in a single region.

Ratings from the seven regions are collated to produce the national list. Books are grouped into Primary (K–2, ages 5–8), Intermediate (Grades 3–5, ages 8–11), and Advanced (Grades 6–8, ages 11–14) levels. The bulleted items illustrate selection criteria.

- Books that reflect high literary quality in style, content, structure, beauty of language, and presentation.
- Books that might not be discovered or fully appreciated by children without introduction by a knowledgeable educator or other adult.
- Books that have potential for use across the curriculum. Teachers incorporate such strategies as reading aloud, displays, group projects, and art/music/drama productions. All curriculum areas are covered in the selections.

Regional coordinators for the 1999-2000 field test were Marjorie Arnett, Redlands, California; Anna Heatherly, Little Rock, Arkansas; Diane Nielsen, Lawrence, Kansas; Judy O’Brien, Dowagiic, Michigan; Gwen Taylor, Lewiston, Idaho (trainee: Carole Monlux, Missoula, Montana); Pamela J. Dunston, Clemson, South Carolina (trainee: Margaret A. Deitrich, Clarksville, Tennessee); and Mary Ellen Redden, Batavia, New York (trainee: Andrea Davis, Charlestown, Rhode Island). Carol Lynch-Brown, Tallahassee, Florida, coordinated the project.

Annotations contain bibliographic data, including ISBN (International Standard Book Number), number of pages, and price. If a publisher has both a library and trade edition, the ISBN for the library edition is included. Information about paperback editions is provided when known. The letter F indicates that the paperback edition is not available in 2000 but is forthcoming. Publishers furnished price information as of late spring 2000; prices are subject to change without notice. The letters CU indicate suggestions for Curriculum Use. Regional coordinators and trainees who wrote the annotations are identified by their initials following the review.

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Primary

Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride
Pam Muñoz Ryan. Ill. by Brian Selznick.
Inspired by facts, this picture book is a fictionalized look at an event that took place in the U.S. when Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt slipped away from a White House dinner for a grand adventure in the night sky. In April 1933, the two prominent women flew over Washington, D.C.—still dressed in their evening gowns. This book celebrates the courage and pioneering spirit of two famous friends. Graphite pencil with colored pencil drawings complement the text and evoke the mood of a night flight. CU: The text is an excellent read-aloud for units on courage and on friendship. It gives a historical perspective on gender-based role expectations prior to World War II. MA

Dr. White
Jane Goodall. Ill. by Julie Litty.
What better therapy is there than having a four-legged doctor that makes hospital rounds, comforts the sick, and brings new hope to their families? Dr. White is based on a real dog adopted by a children's hospital in London, England, and credited for many recoveries because of the love and attention he showed patients. Soft pastels capture the warmth and beauty of the story. CU: It's a book to read aloud to all age groups and is especially useful for class discussions on the critically ill and the "healing power of love." MER

The Emperor's Egg
Martin Jenkins. Ill. by Jane Chapman.
The cover illustration of a chick peeking out from between its father's feet invites children into this book about the life cycle of the Emperor penguin. With a focus on the unusual role the father penguin plays—keeping the unhatched egg warm for 2 months and taking immediate care of the newborn—information about these penguins is given with a humorous tone. Acrylic illustrations convey the icy, blue cold of Antarctica in winter. CU: In addition to a study of penguins, this book provides a model for student research reports; its storytelling voice conveys the main aspects of an animal's life cycle, and it includes brief facts about the species. DN

The Hatseller and the Monkeys
Baba Wagué Diakité. Ill. by the author.
On his way to a festival, BaMusa the hatseller naps under a tree and awakens to find monkeys high above wearing his hats. Diakité tells this authentic teaching tale just as he heard it as a child in a small village in Mali, West Africa. Diakité's ceramic tile paintings bring the setting and story to life. The story of a peddler having his wares ransacked by monkeys as he lay sleeping has been told in many cultures. In the United States it is best known through Esphyr Slobodkina's Caps for Sale. CU: This picture book is an exciting addition to the study of folk tales with the author's end note explaining its African origins. Activities could include a comparison chart of The Hatseller and the Monkeys with similar tales, a trail map of the story, and painting in the style of Diakité. MA

Henry and Amy (right-way-round and upside down)
Stephen Michael King. Ill. by the author.
The wonderfully whimsical characters make the reader smile just looking at the cover. Amy, the perfect one, and Henry, the one who does things differently, bump into each other and become friends. They have new adventures while romping, rolling, and “cartwheeling” across the clear, bright, watercolor illustrations. Each child’s unique and special talents help the other. This delightfully refreshing book, first published in Australia, presents the idea that uniqueness and diversity are to be celebrated. CU: Reading it will help children feel good and recognize that friends can be different or opposite, boys and girls can be best friends, and you should take pride in who you are. Great for class discussions and for writing about and drawing friends. MAD


If You Hopped Like a Frog
David M. Schwartz. Ill. by James Warhola.

A delightful look at what humans could do if they had the abilities of several different animals (e.g., if your metabolism was like a shrew’s, you could devour 700 hamburgers in a day). The engaging illustrations and thought-provoking math comparisons will entice the most reluctant reader and mathematician. This book is sure to help teachers in the U.S. meet the challenge of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics to develop children’s math skills. CU: On seeing the entertaining ratios and proportions in the book, children are eager to investigate related math questions. The end notes provide sufficient information to help students and teachers create and solve such questions. GT


No Dragons for Tea: Fire Safety for Kids (and Dragons)
Jean Pendziwol. Ill. by Martine Gourbault.

What a great way to learn about fire safety! This Canadian book makes a serious topic appealing to young children. A girl invites a dragon home to tea. When the dragon starts to sneeze, he accidentally sets the house on fire. The girl wisely drags him outside while the mother goes next door to call the fire department. The firefighters put out the blaze and praise the young girl for following safety rules. CU: Appropriate for teaching about fire safety in a way that is not scary for young children, the book also contains the Dragon’s Fire Safety Rhyme that is fun to learn. An excellent fire safety checklist for adults and children is included. AH


The Pumpkin Book
Gail Gibbons. Ill. by the author.

This simple text is illustrated with brilliant watercolors. The growth cycle of the pumpkin is followed from beginning to end. The special role pumpkins played in the first U.S. Thanksgiving is covered. Directions are provided for planting and caring for pumpkins, drying their seeds, and carving faces on them. Pumpkin varieties, facts, and lore are included. CU: Useful resource for science and social studies curriculum extensions about plants, Halloween, and other special holiday celebrations. CM


Wake Up, World! A Day in the Life of Children Around the World
Beatrice Hollyer. Ill. with photographs.

Children around the world follow a similar routine every day: They wake up, go to school, play, and do chores. Yet, there are many differences in where they sleep, what they eat, how they play, and what they dream. Readers are invited to share a day with eight children from eight different countries and to learn how their lives differ in large and small ways. This book is published in association with Oxfam, and all royalties go to Oxfam. CU: Teachers can help students research geographic differences that account for some of the variations in the children’s lives and land in the United States of the mid-1800s. Ma digs up a red flower from her mother’s garden and puts it in the wagon. As the family journeys westward forging rivers and crossing barren prairies, Ma and the children tend to Red Flower. Once they find a place to settle in California, Red Flower is immediately planted to start the garden at their new home. The soft-hued illustrations reflect these earlier times in history. CU: This picture book can be read aloud to introduce a social studies unit on the U.S. westward movement. Students could also discuss what Red Flower represents in the story. CL-B

then construct charts or Venn diagrams to illustrate similarities and differences in, for example, food, clothes, homes, or pets. PJD


Intermediate

Animal Acrostics
David Hummon. Ill. by Michael S. Maydak.

A collection of acrostic poems describes the characteristics of a variety of animals. These word-play poems are grouped according to animal habitats, and vibrant illustrations make the animals come alive. Facts are provided about each animal. Directions are included for writing acrostics along with a wonderful word list. CU: There are many implications for curriculum use in the study of habitats, animals, poetry writing, and vocabulary building. CM


Animal Defenses
Etta Kaner. Ill. by Pat Stephens.

Eight methods animals commonly use to protect themselves from harm are interestingly and colorfully presented in this book. Each defense method is briefly explained and followed with examples of large and small animals that effectively use it. Pages are well balanced with text and colorful illustrations. A helpful table of contents and index are provided. CU: Using a list of the defense methods, students can add animals that use each one but were not included in the book. Students can generate a list of nonviolent defense strategies that people can use, then choose one they would use and explain why they feel that strategy would be appropriate for them. PJD


The Birchbark House
Louise Erdrich. Ill. by the author.

Set in the U.S. on an island in Lake Superior in 1847, this novel depicts the events in the life of a 7-year-old Ojibwa girl, Omakayas, nicknamed Little Frog. The delightful story of this energetic child quickly engages the reader with both humorous and tragic events. CU: Partially based on author Louise Erdrich’s own family history, the novel could be a springboard for investigating family histories. The information shared about traditional Ojibwa life makes this book appropriate for studies about the Ojibwa people. The glossary will help readers better understand the pronunciation and meaning of selected Ojibwa terms. GT


A Child’s Book of Art: Discover Great Paintings
Lucy Mickelthwait. Ill. with photographs.

The author’s consistent format is a model for students in the study of paintings and the artists who created them. The text of each two-page spread begins with the title and brief background of the painting on the adjacent page. The reader is invited to “investigate” the painting by posing questions about its form, subject, and style. Close-up features from the painting are reproduced beside each question for closer scrutiny. The painting page supports the “investigator” with three minisections of text that call attention to details in the painting; the medium used; and information about the artist’s life, interests, and choices. CU: This book gives teachers a framework for studying works of art and aspects of art form and style, and it provides connections between the artists’ lives, subjects, times, and particular creations. DN


A Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt
C. Coco DeYoung.

Embraced by a loving family in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, USA, 11-year-old Margo Bandini has little understanding of loss and fear until the effects of the Great Depression touch the homes of those living along her street. Faced with the possibility of losing her home, Margo boldly writes a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt asking for help. The book is based on the author’s actual family story. CU: In social studies this book could cre-
ate interest in and help students connect to the emotional aspects of the period. Students can predict what they would do in similar situations and even write imaginary letters to famous people for help. PJD

The Memory Coat
Elvira Woodruff. Ill. by Michael Dooling.
This book was inspired by the author’s visit to Ellis Island where she discovered an exhibit of clothing worn by immigrants. Oil painting illustrations combine with the author’s prose to tell the story of a Russian immigrant family that journeys to America in the early 1990s. Their greatest fear is that they will be turned back at the Ellis Island inspection station. Author and historic notes provide facts about this time in history and background on Ellis Island. CU: Use this book as a read-aloud for social studies and multicultural units. It’s a springboard for further study of the immigrant experience. CM

Molly Bannaky
Alice McGill. Ill. by Chris K. Soentpiet. Beautiful watercolors help tell the story of Molly Walsh, a young English woman in the 1600s who was saved from the gallows (for stealing a bucket of milk) by her ability to read. As the story of her life unfolds, the reader follows Molly to America where she works and later buys a slave, Bannaky, to help her turn her stake of wilderness into a farm. Later she frees him, and eventually the two marry, build a successful 100-acre farm, and have four daughters. CU: Investigating the life of Benjamin Banneker, Molly’s grandson (a noted scientist and mathematician), would be an interesting activity. Historical notes provide ideas for other research projects. This excellent read-aloud creates numerous opportunities for discussion. GT

Puffins
Susan E. Quinlan. Ill. with photographs by Bud Lehnhausen.
A team of author and nature photographer presents readers with a rich introduction to the life of this unusual seabird. The well-organized text presents key information about the puffin (e.g., variety, physical features, food, habitat). The many close-up photographs and drawings support explanations of unusual features, such as the bird’s ability to inflate and deflate its own “life jacket.” CU: This book would be an uncommon addition to two common unit topics: birds and oceans. The boldface headings, parentheses, and italics provide teachers with “think-aloud” material to demonstrate the use of such aids to unlock the meaning of unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary. Included are a table of contents, a glossary, and an index. DN

Slime, Molds, and Fungi
Elaine Pascoe. Ill. with photographs by Dwight Kuhn.
Visually arresting and intellectually stimulating, this is an excellent addition to the Nature Close-Up series.
Advanced

Eleanor’s Story: An American Girl in Hitler’s Germany
Eleanor Ramrath Garner. Ill. with photographs.

Eleanor Ramrath Garner’s story is a new look at Nazi Germany from a child’s point of view. This autobiography tells about growing up in Berlin during World War II. Eleanor’s family originally live in New Jersey, but her father, a German immigrant, cannot find work in the United States because of the Great Depression. In 1939 he is offered a job in Germany for 2 years. When war breaks out, the family is trapped, and 2 years stretch into 7. They do not support Hitler or the Nazi regime and must constantly be on guard about what they say and do. The search for food and survival is so intense that Eleanor seems not to understand some of the activities around her—especially at the concentration camps. The family survives and eventually returns to the U.S. CU: This book offers an elaborate description of one of the most tumultuous and frightening times in history. Maps permit a deeper examination of German geography, and family photos provide an authentic flavor of the period. AH Peachtree. 268 pp. ISBN 1-56145-193-2. US$14.95.

Extraordinary Women of the American West
Judy Alter. Ill. with photographs.

This unique study of the U.S. West chronicles the exploits of more than 50 women, past and present. Short biographical sketches are arranged chronologically, and this interesting array of women includes an Indian guide, a gambler, a missionary, an author, a physician, a cowgirl, a pilot, a crusader, and a legislator. CU: Throughout the school year teachers can use single vignettes as read-alouds to inspire students to learn more about different periods of U.S. history. Students could select one woman to study in more depth for a research task, and they could also use the sketches as models to research, develop, and write about a prominent person in their own community. CL-B

In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Survivor
Irene Gut Opdyke with Jennifer Armstrong.

As a young girl the Polish author imagined herself caught up in heroic struggles...saving lives, sacrificing herself for others, and being destined to have righteous adventures. Gut’s compelling memoir vividly recounts how fantasy soon became harrowing reality. But going from candy-striped Red Cross volunteer to being resistance fighter, smuggler of Jews, and defier of Germany’s SS and Nazis did not happen all at once. While Gut worked as a dining servant to German officers, she smuggled people from the work camp to the forest and hid Jews in the basement, always putting her own safety at risk. She is doomed to remember the atrocities of the Holocaust and intimately retells them for the reader...lest we forget. CU: End notes provide Polish and German pronunciation guides as well as historical background on the changing political landscape from 1939 to the end of World War II. Maps of places of importance in the text and photographs of the author, her family, and the friends she rescued are included. JO Knopf, Random House. 258 pp. ISBN 0-679-89181-1. US$18.00; CAN$23.00. Library ed., ISBN 0-679-99181-6. US$18.00. Paper ed., F.

Little Women
Louisa May Alcott. Adapted by Jane E. Gerver. Ill. by Chris Molan.

This adaptation of the well-loved classic highlights the major events from the full-length novel. The inci-
Christensen. Craig Crist-Evans. Ill. by Bonnie A. Boy’s Civil War Journal

Tennessee, to Virginia, and finally to
tries trace their experiences from
verse. The first-person journal en-
Civil War and their journey in free
join the Confederate Army in 1863.
Their home on a Tennessee farm to
This somber story is about a 13-

Ages or to emphasize the theme of

recommended for Grades 5 and 8 to
accompany study of this time in U.S.

The book could be used as a read-
aloud during the study of the Middle

It’s a fast-paced historical novel rich
over the Kingdom of Pergamontio.

It’s a fast-paced historical novel rich
in background on medieval life and

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This novel pro-
vides background for discussing how
culture and cultural traditions shape
us. It could be compared with other
stories of young people rebelling
against the traditions of their cul-
ture, such as Catherine, Called Birdy
by Karen Cushman or The True
Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by
Avi. MA

In early 20th-century China, Ailin
rebels against the ancient traditions
of her class and heritage by refusing
to have her feet bound. Her family,
originally indulgent of their
youngest daughter, withdraw their
support when the family of her in-
tended husband break the marriage
contract. Realizing just how power-
less she is as a girl from a good fam-
ily with no prospect of marriage in
Chinese society, Ailin seeks a way to
make her own living. Namioka, au-
thor of the Yang family series, has
written an unforgettable story of the
spirited Ailin. CU: This novel pro-
vides background for discussing how
culture and cultural traditions shape
us. It could be compared with other
stories of young people rebelling
against the traditions of their cul-
ture, such as Catherine, Called Birdy
by Karen Cushman or The True
Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by
Avi. MA

ed., F.

A Time Apart
Diane Stanley.

Life was good in Houston, Texas, for
13-year-old Ginny until her mother’s
cancer diagnosis meant many trips
to the hospital for treatment. This
was the opportune time for Ginny to
visit her estranged dad in London,
England. Upon arrival, Ginny is in-
formed that dad is part of a group
living at a re-created Iron Age farm
(800 BC) for a 1-year archaeology
experiment. This frightened, con-
fused teenager becomes part of an
experiment that teaches her about a
period in history as well as about her
own inner strength, determination,
and creativity. CU: Research the
Iron Age encompassing all content
areas, check current archaeological
dig sites, and present methods used
to treat cancer. MAD

When I Was Your Age. Volume Two:
Original Stories About Growing Up
Ed. by Amy Ehrlich. Ill. with photog-

This is a unique collection of
coming-of-age stories by some of
America’s favorite writers for young
adults. Each author focuses on a piv-
otal event, or series of events, from
childhood that has lingered and
shaped her or his view of the world.
The rich figurative writing is acces-
sible to most 13-year-old readers
both in content and style. The
poignant stories contain a healthy
sampling of both humorous and
troubling memories. CU: Perfect
read-alouds, these stories are real
life-not sugarcoated fiction-from
Paul Fleischman’s hilarious account of being exceptionally short in high school to Karen Hesse’s chilling memory of discovering the neighbor children are being abused. These excellent models for memoir writing may be read individually throughout the year. They also give interesting background on these popular YA authors’ lives, if students are reading a novel by one of them. AD

William Shakespeare & the Globe
Aliki. Ill. by the author.
In true Aliki style, information-rich text and detailed illustrations harmonize to give readers an organized introduction to Shakespeare’s life, work, and times; to common and famous people; and to events and architecture in London. The last “Act” (chapter) of the book brings us into the 20th century with the story behind an American’s effort to reconstruct the Globe Theater. The book ends with several useful lists including words and expressions commonly used today, such as “flea bitten” and “in my heart of hearts,” that originated in Shakespeare’s plays. CU: Curriculum connections to this book include the study of Shakespeare, theatrical history, British history, and word origins. DN


Offprints of this annotated 2000 Teachers’ Choices list (publication 9108) are available from the International Reading Association. The list is available for viewing in PDF format at www.reading.org/choices. Order bulk copies online at bookstore.reading.org or by phone with a credit card, call (in the U.S. and Canada only) 1-800-336-READ, ext. 266, or send order to Order Department, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA.

The International Reading Association (IRA) is a nonprofit, professional organization of classroom teachers, reading specialists, administrators, teacher/educators, reading researchers, parents, librarians, psychologists, and others interested in improving reading instruction and promoting literacy worldwide. The Association encourages the study of the reading process, research, and better teacher education. It promotes the development of reading proficiency to the limit of each person’s ability and an awareness of the need for and importance of reading.

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www.reading.org