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 examples 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 2000–2001 field test were Marjorie Arnett, Redlands, California (trainee: Leslie Disbrow, Anchorage, Alaska); Anna Heatherly, Little Rock, Arkansas (trainee: Janelle Mathis, Denton, Texas); Diane Nielsen, Lawrence, Kansas (trainee: Mary Shoop, Manhattan, Kansas); Judy O’Brien, Dowagiac, Michigan (trainee: Joyce Hamon, Evansville, Indiana); Carole Monlux, Missoula, Montana; Margaret Deitrich, Clarksville, Tennessee; and Andrea Davis, Charlestown, Rhode Island. Carol Lynch-Brown, Tallahassee, Florida, and Gwen Taylor, Lewiston, Idaho, coordinated the project.

Annotations contain bibliographic data, including ISBN (International Standard Book Number), number of pages, and price. If a book 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 2001 but is forthcoming. Publishers furnished price information as of late spring 2001; 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.
Primary

Bumblebee at Apple Tree Lane
Laura Gates Galvin. Ill. by Kristin Kest.

Realistic illustrations and informative text make Bumblebee at Apple Tree Lane a splendid addition to the Smithsonian Institution’s Backyard series. The text follows the life of Bumblebee from the time she awakens from hibernation in spring in rural New England, USA, through the fall when she hibernates again. This wildlife storybook makes the life cycle concept accessible even to the very young. CU: This would be an excellent read-aloud to accompany textbook descriptions of insect life cycles. It uses familiar environments to illustrate the scientific concept. An audio cassette is included for the classroom listening center. MA

Crazy Horse’s Vision
An inspiring story of a young Native American Lakota boy named Curly who seeks a vision to help his people and becomes the great warrior, Crazy Horse. Readers will better understand this courageous leader as they learn of his childhood experiences when he defied traditional customs to defend his people. Compelling illustrations of authentic paintings by a member of the Standing Rock Sioux nation extend reader comprehension. CU: Author and illustrator endnotes give extensive background information. This book makes a strong addition to Native American studies and is easily adaptable to all grade levels. JO

Giant Octopuses
Christine Zuchora-Walske. Ill. with photographs by Fred Bavendam.
The cover illustration of a giant octopus on the ocean floor draws young readers to this beginning-to-read book. In a question/answer format with close-up color photos for support, facts about the giant octopus’s physical make-up, eating habits, and development from egg to adult are clearly conveyed. Valuable features include key terms (italicized and defined in context), a glossary, and a “Hunt-and-Find” introduction to the concept of an index. CU: In addition to use in a unit on the sea, this series book provides a source of well-written material for instructing beginning readers in strategies for reading expository text. DN

Growing Seasons
Elsie Lee Splear. Ill. by Ken Stark.
This biographical picture book tells of four sisters growing up on a family farm in northeastern Illinois, USA, in the early 20th century. Each double-page spread features a different aspect of farm life throughout the year. The text is accompanied by casein paintings that capture the beauty of the time and place. CU: Students could compare family roles, daily life, household conveniences, and other aspects of life in the “olden” days with the present time. JH

Illustration copyright © 2000 by Isaac Millman. Used by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux from Moses Goes to School by Isaac Millman.
100th Day Worries
Margery Cuyler. Ill. by Arthur Howard.
What a perfect picture book! 100th Day Worries combines the common anxiety of students about school assignments with simple, appealing math and wraps it all up with a lesson on love. The appealing central character, first grader Jessica, is a born worrywart whose worrying prevents her from taking action. But Jessica’s family rallies to help her with a school project that celebrates the 100th day of school. Amusing, colorful illustrations match the mood of the story. CU: This is a delightful read-aloud for primary grades, especially first grade. The central message will allay any fears young students may harbor about that “big assignment.” The book is an especially good tie-in to basic math skills, specifically addition. AD

Moses Goes to School
Isaac Millman. Ill. by the author.
On their first day back to school Moses and his classmates eagerly share stories about the summer, write letters to penpals, and learn a new song. It’s a typical first day except that all the students are deaf or hard of hearing and communicate using American Sign Language. Moses demonstrates the difficulty of writing to his penpal when his first language is not spoken. Insets diagram how the class signs simple sentences and “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” CU: This excellent introduction to ASL can challenge students to research more about it, to learn to sign another song, or to interview someone who signs. Students can replicate the signs by following the simple diagrams provided. MS

Rabbits, Rabbits, & More Rabbits
Gail Gibbons. Ill. by the author.
Wild and tame, dwarf and regular size, upright- and lop-ear, long and short fur are all useful characteristics in learning the different breeds of rabbit. How do rabbits warn one another of danger, and how fast can they run? The text, illustrations, and diagrams provide fascinating facts about the history, legends, and care of rabbits. CU: Detailed information for inside and outside care is provided. A classroom rabbit would be ideal for developing responsibility, recording observations in learning logs, and writing stories and poems with rabbit characters. Connections can be made with other rabbit books, such as Bunnicula by Deborah and James Howe or The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter. MD

Wemberly Worried
Kevin Henkes. Ill. by the author.
In this delightful picture book Wemberly joins other memorable mouse characters who deal successfully with realistic problems. As school begins, Wemberly, whose many worries range from playground safety to wondering if she’ll shrunk in the bath, begins to worry about school. Happily, her concerns are put aside on the first day as she meets another child much like herself. CU: Teachers and parents will find this book useful to show that we all have worries when facing new situations. JM

Yoshi’s Feast
Kimiko Kajikawa. Ill. by Yumi Heo.
Handmade paper illustrations of pencil, oil, and collage enhance this Japanese tale. Yoshi, a fan maker,
loves the smell of the eels his neighbor Sabu broils. However, his love for the sound of money jingling in his moneybox prevents him from buying any of the eels, and instead his meals consist of boiled rice. Sabu attempts to charge Yoshi for the eels he has smelled. Yoshi responds by hatching a plan that benefits them both. CU: This book lends itself to classroom extensions related to conflict resolution, Japanese culture, friendship, problem solving, art, and paper making. CM


Intermediate

The Butterfly
Patricia Polacco. Ill. by the author. Inspired by events during the Nazi occupation of France, this book is based on the true story of a friendship between two young French girls, one Christian and the other Jewish. Readers will gain an understanding of the selfless acts of the people in the French Resistance and Underground during World War II. Throughout this book, the papillon butterflies are a symbol of freedom and hope—a symbol of things that, during the Nazi regime, were denied those of Jewish descent. CU: This is a thought-provoking read-aloud for use with all grades. After reading, a follow-up discussion would be a great way to reinforce the book’s lessons. The Butterfly would be a wonderful addition to an author study and units on friendship or World War II. LD


Dreaming of America: An Ellis Island Story
Eve Bunting. Ill. by Ben F. Stahl. This is the story of Annie Moore, the first U.S. immigrant to be processed through Ellis Island. Most of the book is based on historical documents, with the author only embellishing small details of this charming story of a young Irish girl sailing to America with her two brothers to be reunited with their parents in New York. Bright, realistic watercolors bring Annie and her brothers to life, and several small insets provide historical sources such as photographs of the ship, its manifest, Ellis Island, and Cork, Ireland, Annie’s and her brothers’ point of departure. CU: This read-aloud fits perfectly with the study of immigration and Ellis Island. Because most of the book has been written using primary source materials, students might be encouraged to do the same with their own research. AD


The Forest in the Clouds
Sneed B. Collard III. Ill. by Michael Rothman. “From east to west the tropical trade winds blow, sucking up moisture like dry, thirsty lungs from the warm Caribbean Sea.” So begins this engaging guided visit with some of the exotic plants and animals that live in the tropical cloud forests of Costa Rica. In addition to the descriptive text, lush acrylics, and map, the book includes a discussion of ecological threats to the area. CU: It will enhance the geography curriculum and make an unfamiliar ecosystem more understandable. A good companion book to The Most Beautiful Roof in the World by Kathryn Lasky and to At Home in the Rain Forest by Diane Willow, it’s also a good read-aloud to introduce longer works with tropical settings such as Dance for the Land by Clemence McLaren. MA


It’s Raining Pigs & Noodles
Jack Prelutsky. Ill. by James Stevenson. These creative and witty poems will entertain and amuse children and adults. All readers will find poems they can relate to and poems to make them laugh. The use of shapes, mazes, designs, and silliness will draw young readers in, and they’ll want to read more. Prelutsky’s style gets students to enjoy reading poetry. CU: This book will enhance a poetry-writing lesson or unit. The wit, puns, and
Miss Alaineus: A Vocabulary Disaster
Debra Frasier. Ill. by the author.

Sage, a fifth grader home with the flu, gets her vocabulary homework over the phone and misinterprets one of the words. She thinks it is Miss Alaineus. She invents a definition and draws a picture to go with it. She’s mortified when she realizes her mistake in class but overcomes her embarrassment in the annual vocabulary parade. The eye-catching illustrations were created from supplies the author found in her daughter’s school desk. CU: The book contains clever ideas for teaching vocabulary and models good use of alliteration and word play. The humor makes it a great read-aloud for intermediate grades. JH


Tiger Math: Learning to Graph From a Baby Tiger
Ann Whitehead Nagda and Cindy Bickel. Ill. with photographs.

This is the story of an orphaned Siberian tiger, T.J., born at the Denver Zoo (Colorado, USA) and raised by the zoo staff. The book simultaneously introduces basic graphs (picture, line, bar, and pie). Readers follow T.J.’s story of survival after his mother’s death as they read the right-hand pages. Graphs on the left-hand pages chart information about tigers of the world and this tiger’s weight and food consumption over the course of the first weeks, and then years, of his life. The text is supported by color photos of T.J. with the zoo staff. CU: Teachers will find this book a great help in teaching graphing and the concept that the same information can be presented in more than one way. DN


Uncle Sam and Old Glory: Symbols of America
Delno C. West and Jean M. West. Ill. by Christopher Manson.

Intricate colored woodcuts and lively text combine to tell the story behind 15 symbols that have come to represent the United States, freedom, and democracy. Surprising details reveal how and why the U.S. is associated with such diverse symbols as the buffalo, log cabins, the Liberty Bell, “Yankee Doodle,” the bald eagle, the Stars and Stripes, and Uncle Sam. CU: Research a historical event connected with these symbols or the story behind another patriotic symbol. Create a first-person narrative that exposes the personal and emotional impact this symbol might have—such as seeing the Statue of Liberty through the eyes of an immigrant. MS


Weaver’s Daughter
Kimberly Brubaker Bradley.

The Baker family lives in what was the Southwest Territory of the U.S. in the late 1700s. Lizzy, the middle daughter, is sickly and suffers a near-death illness each fall. The doctor and midwife try various remedies, but none really helps. So Lizzy is weak and barely able to breathe. These spells prevent her from doing her job of getting the wool ready for Ma to weave. The family cares for her but the worry about the length of Lizzy’s life is constant. CU:
Research and design a time line for the treatment of asthma from the 1700s to the present. Study the medical profession focusing on the type and length of training now and in the 1700s. Midwifery has regained popularity, and this field of medicine can also be researched. Interview a present-day midwife. MD

The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark
Carmen Agra Deedy. Ill. by Henri Sørensen.
This moving picture book is built around the widely reported, but undocumented, history of King Christian of Denmark during World War II. Readers are introduced to Danish citizens during the Nazi occupation and the actions of their king who defied a Nazi order to fly the German flag over the Danish capitol building. When the Nazis ordered the Jews to wear yellow stars to identify them, the king rode out on his horse wearing a yellow star, too. All Danes followed his example and also wore yellow stars. Many Danish Jew’s lives were saved. Whether the story is truth or legend may not be that important, but it is symbolic of the loyalty and fearless spirit of the king and his people. CU: The author separates fact from fiction at the end of the book. In the author’s notes, the question “What if we could follow the example today against violations of human rights?” could be an important discussion point for studies about World War II and the Holocaust. AH

Advanced

Aria of the Sea
Dia Calhoun.
In an island kingdom where healers, sea voyages, and aristocracy are part of life’s daily culture, Cerinthe, a 13-year-old commoner, dreams of becoming a royal dancer. Her skilled dancing takes her on a journey from being a folk healer to realizing the possibilities of achieving the goal of being a royal dancer. Cerinthe finds herself torn between the two careers. The conflicts she encounters help her realize the power within herself as she makes life decisions. One decision about a young man adds some romance to the story. CU: With a strong female protagonist of high integrity, this book invites intensive discussion concerning motivation and decision making. The mystical, fantasy context captures interest, and readers are reminded that success comes from within. JM

Fever 1793
Laurie Halse Anderson.
This book is powerful historical fiction about the post–Revolutionary War period in the United States. Set in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1793, the story features 16-year-old Matty. The facts and emotions of Philadelphia’s horrifying yellow fever epidemic are woven with the emergence of Matty’s womanhood.

Interesting and informative primary source quotes at the beginning of each chapter and an appendix with fascinating historical information bring this period of history to life for readers. CU: An excellent read-aloud with a strong female protagonist, this book can be the basis of a social studies unit on the post–Revolutionary War era. CM

Forgotten Fire: A Novel
Adam Bagdasarian.
This work of historical fiction is set during the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Spurred to write this book after hearing about his great-uncle’s experiences during that era, the author creates a sympathetic yet strong central character. At the beginning, 12-year-old Vahan is the compliant son of a wealthy, happy family, but he soon experiences terrible loss and hardship. In the face of gross inhumanities, Vahan discovers reserves of strength and courage—the “fire” he did not know he had. CU: With the study of the Holocaust a part of many eighth-grade curriculums, this story of the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks, a long overlooked segment of history, lets
students know that horror is not an isolated event in history. AD


Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women
Catherine Thimmesh. Ill. by Melissa Sweet.

The end papers list inventions by females from 3000 B.C., when Hsi-ling-shi of China worked with silk, to 1995, when Suzi Havens developed exercise equipment. The text highlights other women and their creations—from chocolate chip cookies to windshield wipers—and how they succeeded despite obstacles placed in their way. Included are addresses and Web pages for the patent office and organizations to encourage students to engage in “what if” creativity. CU: Research the names listed on the end pages that are not included in the text. Learn about women who were the first to accomplish other feats in politics, humanities, space, or sports. MD

Give Me Liberty! The Story of the Declaration of Independence
Russell Freedman. Ill. with prints and photographs.

Well-researched facts, fascinating anecdotes, and interesting explanations describe the events from 1773–1776 that led up to the approval of the Declaration of Independence in the U.S. A lively text and interesting photos capture the personalities and politics behind the framing of the document. CU: The book is an excellent resource for a social studies unit on the Revolutionary period in U.S. history, and the narrative style would work as a read-aloud to introduce the period of study. An extensive index makes it a valuable research tool. CM

Kid’s Almanac of Geography
Alice Siegel and Margo McLoone. Ill. with photographs.

This innovative geographical resource is filled with full-color photos, maps, charts, and graphs. The table of contents is easy to follow, and the facts are presented in a manner that encourages browsing just for fun. Chapters include information on unique animals, money, foods, biomes, religions, languages, and celebrations around the world. CU: This book is a must-have for elementary and middle school libraries. However, its real value is as part of the classroom library. It gives students and teachers instant access for geographic questions. The special fact boxes and map-based entries reinforce geography concepts and map-reading skills. MA

Lives of Extraordinary Women: Rulers, Rebels (and What the Neighbors Thought)
Kathleen Krull. Ill. by Kathryn Hewitt.

Readers will delight in getting exactly what the title offers. Inspiration triumphs over attitudes and adverse conditions as this book chronicles 20 female political movers and shakers from around the world. Electrifying personalities, from the most hated to most beloved heroines, are each portrayed concisely. The women include the good, the bad, and some who are both. All inspire awe at the power of women throughout history. CU: Historical perspectives of life from 69 B.C. to the present are useful in supplementing social studies lessons with interesting biographical sketches. A list of further readings strengthens this resource for women’s and historical studies for readers of either sex. JO

My America: A Poetry Atlas of the United States
Selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins. Ill. by Stephen Alcorn.
Words of contemporary and past poets celebrate the geographic features, cultural diversity, and monuments of the United States. The atlas is organized by region; each one starts with a map and facts about its states, capital cities, natural wonders, and significant events. Seven regions and Washington, D.C., are featured, each one followed by poems about that area. The texture-rich illustrations provide another vehicle for discussion. CU: Study of the regions of the U.S. is a natural connection. Students could be challenged to find other poems that represent and extend understanding of the U.S. and other countries. DN

Nory Ryan’s Song
Patricia Reilly Giff.
Set in Maidin Bay on the west coast of Ireland in 1845, this story of the Great Hunger, or potato famine, is told through the eyes of 12-year-old Nory Ryan. The author presents the realities of hunger and injustice in this devastating chapter in Irish history. However, Nory’s courage, resourcefulness, and the bonds of family and neighbors show readers another side of this tragic time—the story of resilience. CU: This book would contribute to studies of immigration and family history. A model for the historical research process with elements of oral history and the use of primary and secondary sources is included. DN

The Truth About Great White Sharks
Mary M. Cerullo. Photographs by Jeffrey L. Rotman; Ill. by Michael Wertz.
The author, a marine educator, examines what is known about great white sharks, including physical characteristics, behaviors, feeding habits, the difficulty of studying them, and their potential to provide medical benefits for humans. The book contains underwater photos and interesting graphics. Special sidebars offer information such as how to measure a great white shark. A glossary, bibliography, and index are included. CU: This book would support thematic units on ocean life. While some graphics appear elementary, the book’s detailed scientific information is definitely for older readers. AH