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 United States 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 2003–2004 field test were Mary Ellen Redden, Batavia, New York (trainee: Marion DePierro, Billerica, Massachusetts); Sharon Olson, The Dalles, Oregon; Ally McArdle, Stoughton, Wisconsin; Suzanne Jensen, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; Joy Frerichs, Chatsworth, Georgia (trainee: C. Denise Johnson, Chesapeake, Virginia); Gudrun Godare, Tucson, Arizona; and Stan Steiner, Boise, Idaho (trainee: Lynda Hawkes, Rexburg, Idaho). Diane C. Nielsen, Lawrence, Kansas, 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 2004 but is forthcoming. Publishers furnished price information as of late spring 2004; 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**

**Around One Cactus: Owls, Bats and Leaping Rats**

Detailed illustrations and rhyming text present information about the saguaro cactus and some of the animals, birds, and reptiles that share the U.S. Sonoran desert habitat. The rhyming meter invites readers (or listeners) to discover a wealth of facts about the seven particular creatures that are depicted in the illustrations. In-depth field notes and additional sources for ecology study are included. CU: Captivating and realistic artwork combined with detailed text supports the curricular areas of ecology, animals, habitat, desert life, poetry, and U.S. geography. AM


**Boxes for Katje**
Candace Fleming. Ill. Stacey Dressen-McQueen.

Boxes are purveyors of surprises in this heartwarming tale of how a friendship between two girls expanded to include their hometowns. After World War II, Katje, a Dutch girl, received a box of much-needed supplies from an American girl. Katje shared her bounty with friends and neighbors. Subsequent boxes from America helped Katje’s destitute town survive a severe winter. To thank the Americans, a box of Dutch tulip bulbs was eventually sent across the ocean, cementing the message that although war tears countries apart, friendship and sharing can unite them. CU: This book not only demonstrates how U.S. children helped Europeans during World War II but also can be connected to discussions of the role children can and do play today in reaching out to others around the world. JF


**The Elves and the Shoemaker**
Retold and ill. by Jim LaMarche.

This stunningly illustrated retelling closely follows the Grimm brothers’ classic tale of elves working to save a poor, kindly shoemaker and his wife. LaMarche’s illustrations, done in acrylic washes with colored pencils, create a sense of shimmering warmth. CU: This beautiful book is a great read-aloud because the drawings of the elves are larger than in most versions and easy to share with students. It can be compared and contrasted to other versions of the story or used as part of a unit on fairy tales. DJ


**How Groundhog’s Garden Grew**
Lynne Cherry. Ill. by the author.

Squirrel teaches Little Groundhog the ins and outs of planting and maintaining a garden. The dedication page documents Cherry’s research for the detailed illustrations of plants, animals, and insects found in the story. An author’s note provides further information on gardening. CU: Narrative text in a picture-book format supports gardening curriculum and life cycles of plants. There are excellent examples of cooperation and friendship. SJ
My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up With the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Christine King Farris. Ill. Chris Soentpiet.
Farris presents a sensitive view of her younger brother, Martin, as she tells of his fun-loving nature, connection to family, eagerness to learn, and intense desire to make a difference in the world. This is a sister’s personal tribute to the man who would become the leader of the U.S. Civil Rights movement. Soentpiet’s illustrations provide lively and detailed portraits of King’s life and times. CU: This book is an excellent model for teaching personal narrative, discussing the issues of segregation from a child’s perspective, and showing how goals can be reached through focus and dedication. GG

My Brothers’ Flying Machine: Wilbur, Orville, and Me
Jane Yolen. Ill. Jim Burke.
Most people know of Orville and Wilbur Wright, but few know about their family. Orville and Wilbur’s legacy was made possible by the encouragement and support of their sister, Katherine, who took over the household responsibilities after their mother’s death. Yolen has carefully researched and constructed this story from Katherine’s point of view. Katherine became a teacher, and in 1981 the Gates Learjet Corporation established a memorial award in her name. CU: This book lends itself to a study on women in aviation. SS

Suki’s Kimono
Chieri Uegaki. Ill. Stéphane Jorisch.
Bright watercolors bring life to this primary-level story about every child’s dream of being accepted. Young and old will enjoy the tale of a girl who longs to be respected for who she is. Suki has a Kimono given to her by her obachan (grandmother). She longs to wear it because of the sweet memories it evokes of a special time with her grandmother. Suki finds that being herself is good enough. CU: This story is an excellent springboard to a discussion about decision making and staying true to one’s choices. The illustrations are useful to show different techniques of watercolor. LH

Swing Around the Sun
This poetry book is a wonderful way to introduce the seasons of the year to young students. The poems are short, descriptive, and accompanied by illustrations demonstrating different artistic styles. There are seven poems for each season, each set with its own distinct mood. This title is a must have for classrooms and libraries. CU: Use it as an enjoyable way to introduce a unit on weather in the lower grades. Compare and contrast the different illustrations and impart a love of poetry. MD

We All Went on Safari: A Counting Journey Through Tanzania
Laurie Krebs. Ill. Julia Cairns.
Using rhythm and rhyme, the author describes the adventures of Maasai children as they count animals in the grasslands of Tanzania. The book also teaches the numbers 1 to 10 in Swahili. In the style of Barefoot Books, factual pages on the animals, the Maasai people, and the country of Tanzania are provided to inspire further research. The illustrations contrast the bright colors of the Maasai clothes with the lush greens of the African grasslands. CU: This book can
be used as a counting book and to expose children to the culture and geography of Tanzania. MR


You Can’t See Your Bones With Binoculars:
A Guide to Your 206 Bones
Fact-checked by a medical doctor, this light-hearted look at the skeletal system combines interactive reading fun and solid information. Actual X-rays overlay the humorous cartoon characters who invite readers to feel their bones and make the connections from cranium to phalanges. CU: Introductory-level information provides a guided tour of the human skeletal system. SO


Intermediate

Justine Ciovacco, Kathleen A. Feeley, and Kristen Behrens.
Did you know that, in the United States, Wyoming has approximately five people per square mile compared to Rhode Island’s 1,003 people per square mile? Did you know that Hawaii is the only state to have two official languages (English and Hawaiian)? Find interesting facts about all 50 states in this intermediate information-packed atlas. CU: It’s a great resource for classrooms, libraries, and homes. The pictures are authentic and interesting. LH


First to Fly
Peter Busby. Ill. David Craig.
This story brings to life the struggle, determination, and perseverance of Orville and Wilbur Wright and includes a wealth of period photographs and detailed diagrams. The visually appealing illustrations enhance the flow of the story, while pictures provide captivating information. Supporting text includes a timeline of important dates and a bibliography of additional resources with websites for further research. CU: This book is full of information about the history and scientific principles of the Wright brothers’ work. AM


Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez
Kathleen Krull. Ill. Yuyi Morales.
After Cesar Chavez’s family lost their home, they were forced to join the legions of migrant workers in California. The lack of such basic human necessities as shelter, food, and respect would eventually lead Chavez to fight for change. Believing that non-violence was the best weapon, he led the fledgling members of the National Farm Workers Association on a march to Sacramento. As the march progressed, thousands joined, and Chavez signed the first contract for farm workers in U.S. history. CU: This book would enrich study of the struggle for equal rights in the United States and be a valuable addition to biography and hero and heroine study. JF


How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning
Rosalyn Schanzer. Ill. by the author.
This cleverly conceived book provides an overview of the accomplishments and inventions of the famous colonist, Benjamin Franklin. It focuses specifically on Franklin’s curiosity about electricity, including his famous kite-flying experiment and his invention of the lightning rod. Schanzer’s use of vibrant dyes and ink lines creates a comic, cheerful tone. CU: The extensive author’s note at the end of the book along with Franklin’s diagrams and notes on the endpapers will add to a unit on the American Revolutionary War period, colonial times, or famous inventors. DJ


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Liberty Street
Candice Ransome. Ill. Eric Velasquez.
Set prior to the U.S. Civil War in Fredricksburg, Virginia, this is a fictional account of life for slaves in smaller towns and cities. On Sunday afternoons, the slaves traveled the worn path known as Liberty Street to go visiting. A dilemma arises when Kezia, the main character, is to be bonded out to another family. Unable to earn enough money to buy her daughter’s freedom, her mother takes a risk and helps Kezia escape through tunnels under the streets and homes in Fredricksburg. CU: Picture-book format details slave life in towns and cities. Author’s note includes historical facts. SJ

River Boy: The Story of Mark Twain
William Anderson. Ill. by the author.
In this anecdotal biography, the young Sam Clemens is shown as both mischievous and adventurous. Clemens had the ability to turn his eager curiosity about the world into entertaining stories with his natural talent as a raconteur and writer. Illustrations by the author convey the spirit of the time. CU: Use this book as a part of an author study, to introduce the genre of biography, and to show how narrative writing can be both entertaining and informative. GG

Sacagawea
Sacagawea’s contributions to the Corps of Discovery are included in this biographical tribute to a Native American woman. Remarkable oil paintings enhance the text, which includes a discussion of the spelling of Sacagawea’s name and the theories surrounding her death. CU: Many websites, additional sources, and landmarks worth exploring enhance this book, which was published in time for the 200th anniversary of the journey of Lewis and Clark. SS

A Voice of Her Own: The Story of Phillis Wheatley, Slave Poet
Kathryn Lasky. Ill. Paul Lee.
Lasky delights with a picture-book biography of Phillis Wheatley that encompasses her journey from slavery to her becoming the first African American woman to publish a book. Rich historical details are woven by the author, and vibrant illustrations bring the story to life. CU: The book lends itself to discussions about slavery and freedom. MD


The Warriors
Joseph Bruchac.
The author draws from his Native American heritage in this story of cultural contrasts. Jake Forrest reluctantly must leave the Iroquois reservation, where he loves to play lacrosse, to live with his mother near Washington, DC. Jake’s athletic ability wins over his teammates at his new boarding school, but their misunderstanding of the game and of Jake’s Native American background creates a wall between the boy and his affluent classmates that only a tragedy can tear down. CU: The author shares the richness of the Native American culture through stories and the game of lacrosse. MR

Weather! Watch How Weather Works

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A delightful sister and brother team up to explore and write about their interactions with a variety of weather topics in this informative science text. The fantastic facts, startling statistics, and irresistible experiments and projects will excite readers of all ages. Like a nimbostratus cloud, this book bursts with weather-related photographs, diagrams, folklore, history, and literary quotes. CU: Stand-alone chapters include hands-on knowledge for the study of the atmosphere, wind, sunshine, clouds, rain, thunder and lightning, snow and ice, and weather prediction.

SO


Advanced

DK Geography of the World: The Essential Family Guide to Geography and Culture
Simon Adams, Anita Ganeri, and Ann Kay.
An overview of the nations of the world, organized by the six continental areas, provides detailed geographic and cultural information. Each continent is represented by a physical and political map, including facts about the people, holidays, foods, industry, cities, tourism, and more. A guide in the front gives a detailed explanation of how to use this book. Text boxes and captions present information in an easy-to-use format. CU: This book would be most helpful for students and individuals looking for current information about the countries of the world. AM


Fight On! Mary Church Terrell’s Battle for Integration
Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin.
Born in 1863, Mary Church Terrell devoted her life to obtaining civil rights for African Americans. Blessed with more education than most women of her time, Terrell felt obligated to help better the lives of those around her. She became the first African American woman to be appointed to the Board of Education in Washington, DC, a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the first president of the National Association for Colored Women. CU: This rich text illustrates an often neglected, yet very important, part of the history of the African American struggle for equality. It should be included in any hero and heroine study units. JF


For Freedom: The Story of a French Spy
Kimberly Brubaker Bradley.
This fast-paced thriller instantly pulls the reader into the story of 13-year-old Suzanne David as Germans invade her hometown of Cherbourg, France, in 1940. Suzanne, a budding opera singer, first experiences the Nazi occupation when an air raid literally drops a bomb right in front of her. Suzanne risks her life to become a spy, transporting encoded messages for the Allies. CU: Based on a true story, this novel is a rare look into the French resistance during World War II. DJ


Hana’s Suitcase
Karen Levine.
Hana Brady, a Czechoslovakian girl, was one of 15,000 Jewish children to pass through Theresienstadt before dying at Auschwitz during the Holocaust. Alternate chapters share Hana’s story and Fumiko Ishioka’s search for Hana’s identity. In March 2000, Ishioka, curator of the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center, received a suitcase labeled with Hana’s name and “Waisenkind,” the German word for orphan. Hana’s story unfolds through Ishioka’s determined research. CU: This book supports study of the Holocaust and illustrates the need for global


In Defense of Liberty: The Story of America’s Bill of Rights
Russell Freedman.
The historical origins of the U.S. Constitution’s first 10 amendments and continuing challenges to their meaning and application provide the material for this book about American history. Photographs, drawings, an index of Supreme Court cases, and a bibliography enhance Freedman’s thoroughly researched text. CU: This work lends strong support to the study of American history, both in the historical context and in the contemporary application of history. A springboard to further research is facilitated by the author’s questions. GG


Iqbal
Francesco D’Adamo.
This compelling true story of a contemporary childhood hero features Iqbal Masih, a young boy who was sold into the rug and carpet industry in Pakistan. Life-threatening labor conditions for Iqbal and other children propelled him to escape and tell their story. His heroic efforts gained international attention. Iqbal’s life tragically ended at age 12, but his legacy continues. CU: This book includes information on child labor and human rights. Have students use those resources to research selected imports and track labor conditions. SS


The River Between Us
Richard Peck.
Focusing on emotions different than those covered in his award-winning book A Year Down Yonder (2002, Puffin), Peck uses this story to tell of love, courage, determination, and the will to fight for what one believes. The story takes place during the U.S. Civil War, when passions ran high and were often challenged. This story of friendships, family, and pride will inspire advanced readers and give them a unique view of that time. CU: A wonderful supplement to social studies texts about the U.S. Civil War, the book will help students make personal connections. Colorful characters draw the reader into the real-life drama of war. LH


Seaward Born
Lea Wait.
Wait tells the story of 13-year-old Michael, a slave who escapes from his owners and flees to New England. Michael soon learns how difficult it is for African Americans, even in the land of the free. The author uses well-drawn historical settings to show the reader what life was like for African Americans in the early 1800s. CU: A great read-aloud, this book includes historical notes and a bibliography. MD


Shutting Out the Sky: Life in the Tenements of New York, 1880–1924
Deborah Hopkinson.
Through the voices of five children, Hopkinson relates stories of immigrants who came to the United States from Europe to escape poverty and start anew.
Scratching out a meager existence and becoming Americanized while still maintaining their own culture became basic requirements for survival. **CU:**

_Units on immigration and naturalization, women’s rights, and child labor could be enhanced by this book._ **MR**


**The Traitor**
Laurence Yep.

_This is the fourth title in the Golden Mountain Chronicles series, an intergenerational story of the Young family from China and their lives in America. This book is set in 1885 and based on a true event, described as one of the worst race riots in U.S. history. It is the story of an illegitimate “Western” boy and his only friend, Chinese American Joseph Young. Joseph’s father is a coal miner. Told in alternating chapters, the book describes how the boys struggle to survive the poverty and harsh conditions of a Wyoming Territory mining town amidst hate and prejudice._ **CU:** _This historically accurate account of the Rock Springs massacre illustrates the cruelty of prejudice and the benefits of practicing tolerance._ **SO**