What Is the Teachers’ Choices Project?

The Teachers’ Choices logo that Chris Van Allsburg created (see below) 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 exceptional for curriculum use. Parents, also, will find here books good for reading aloud and for help answering questions prompted by tours to a farm, aquarium, or museum and by other shared family activities such as television viewing.

The participants who wrote the annotations are identified by their initials following the review. Their full names can be found in the sidebar at the end of the Choices list.
**The Best Story**


A young girl who plans to enter The Red Brick Library story contest seeks her family members’ opinions about what makes a good story. Dad suggests action, brother says humor, Aunt Jane advises drama, and cousin Anika recommends romance. None of these produce a satisfying story the girl can believe in. Finally, her mother suggests that the best story is one that comes from the heart. This book is a good lesson about what’s important in life and also a helpful read-aloud for children working on voice in narrative writing. (PK)

**Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation**


*Boycott Blues* is a sophisticated depiction of the 1955 Civil Rights movement in Montgomery, Alabama. Using the imagery of a hound dog as the oppressed Southerner and Jim Crow as the evil aspect of segregation, this historical story is told using blues rhythm as the backdrop. Readers will be drawn into the lives of men and women of that era and into Southern traditions. The book jacket suggests this book for ages 5–8; it would also be appropriate for audiences aged 8–11. It is an excellent read-aloud. (TF)

**First Dog Fala**


Fala, a Scottish terrier that became President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s best friend, is the focus of this story. Set in a tumultuous time period for the United States, this beautifully illustrated picture book provides a heartwarming look at FDR as he leads the country before and during war. This book could be part of a unit on pets, friendship, or presidents. (CD)

**Frogs**


This book is a must-have for the nature enthusiast or lover of all things amphibious. The frog family is revealed in rainbow-colored splendor with highlighted color text and eye-catching nature photography. Amazing close-ups and fold-out spreads invite the reader to meet and greet the main characters and study the anatomy, behavior, and reproduction of the species. Bishop shares his treks through swamps and woods and raises frogs at home to study the amazing creatures. This is a terrific nonfiction text with countless connections to the world of science. (MM)

**Grace for President**


After noticing that all U.S. presidents have been men, Grace begins her campaign to become the first female president by running in her school election. This outstanding picture book is a winner for social studies. It offers a clear explanation of the Electoral College and how votes by individuals translate to electoral votes. It is intended for ages 5–9, but it could be used to review the electoral process with older students. The inspirational message, “the best person for the job,” is a good springboard for class discussions on sexism and racism in politics. (STW)

**Looking Closely Along the Shore**

Frank Serafini. Toronto, ON: Kids Can Press.

The up-close photographs of plants and animals found at the seashore make you begin to wonder as soon as you open the pages of this fabulous book. As you are looking at the up-close photographs, the imagination begins to run free and wild, and then you turn the page and discover the whole picture! The featured plants and animals are accompanied by detailed and fact-filled descriptions. This book is a great read-aloud for children in any grade. It offers excellent support for a science curriculum and studies of shoreline ecosystems. (AK)
**Manfish: A Story of Jacques Cousteau**  

Jacques Cousteau realized his childhood dream when he invented the Aqua-Lung and swam through the ocean into a world man had not yet explored. When ocean life began dying, Cousteau realized that man was unintentionally destroying this beautiful habitat. Filmmaking became Cousteau's method of educating people about the harm pollution caused in the ocean environment. *Manfish* is an excellent read-aloud to enhance a study of the ocean or to read in conjunction with biographical studies. (TC)

**Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai**  

This true story from Kenya tells of one woman's determination to save the Kenyan environment after devastation caused by poor farming practices and cultural changes. Maathai, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, started the Green Belt Movement, which focuses on planting trees and protecting the environment. This story can be used to teach perseverance, environmental issues, and problem/solution strategies. Students can learn about another culture and enjoy the charming watercolor illustrations. This intriguing story shows how a simple plan can have an impact on a whole country. (CR)

**Two Bobbies: A True Story of Hurricane Katrina, Friendship, and Survival**  

From the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina come many inspiring stories of human friendship, love, and heroism. *Two Bobbies* provides a heartwarming counterpoint from the animal world. In this story, a cat and dog befriend each other in the chaos that is post-Katrina New Orleans. When rescued, the animals refuse to be separated. It was discovered that the cat is blind. A touching true story for any age, illustrating the power of friendship. (JM)

**Yoko Writes Her Name**  

Yoko, a kindergartener, is proud that she can write her name in Japanese. When Mrs. Jenkins asks Yoko to demonstrate, Olive and Sylvia declare it "scribbling." They criticize her Japanese numbers as "just lines" and her book sharing as "pretend reading," because she reads back to front. They gossip that she will not graduate. But Angelo asks to learn her "secret language" and, in turn, he teaches her English. Eventually, friendship diminishes the cultural differences as other classmates learn Japanese. By graduation, their names appear in two languages on their diplomas. (PK)
Abe’s Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln
In this beautifully illustrated story of Abraham Lincoln, the author uses actual excerpts from Lincoln’s letters, newspaper interviews, and speeches to help tell his story. From reading the story, one is made aware of President Lincoln’s compassion, love of reading, and heartfelt words. Lincoln valued education and honesty. This book provides important dates in his life, other books to read, and websites to learn more about Abraham Lincoln. This is a great resource for classrooms and a wonderful read-aloud book. (BL)

Animal Heroes: True Rescue Stories
Sandra Markle. Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook.
Animal Heroes is a collection of amazing true-life tales that will be sure to fascinate animal lovers of all ages. The human–animal connection for each story evokes heartfelt emotions. There is a bonus of scientific information about each animal. Color photographs, short explanations of each disaster or danger, a glossary, an index, source notes, and bibliography will entice the reader to explore these topics in greater detail. This book is recommended for grades 3–8. (TF)

Birds on a Wire: A Renga ’Round Town
An unnamed community, characteristic of small-town USA, is beautifully brought to life through an ancient form of poetry called renga, meaning “linked verse.” Like a haiku, a renga is an ancient Japanese verse form that is traditionally written by two poets. The authors’ use of precise, yet soothing, details and the use of this new, but actually very old, form of poetry opens up endless writing possibilities for students in upper elementary classes, middle school, and even high school. (SM)

Colonial Voices: Hear Them Speak
Join the printer’s errand boy as he delivers an urgent message to various establishments in Boston on December 17, 1773. At each stop, the reader is introduced to different occupations such as the Printer, the Baker, and the Midwife. Free-verse poetry reveals each citizen’s feelings about the pending revolution. Detailed watercolor and ink drawings add visual interest; historical notes and suggestions for further reading provide support for the teacher and young scholar alike. The text would lend itself to Readers Theatre and a study of Colonial America. (JH)

Eleven
After finding a mysterious box in the attic on his 11th birthday, Sam begins to uncover a mystery that leads him to believe he may have been kidnapped and reported missing, and may not even be living with his true family. While secretly struggling with this possibility, as well as the fact that he cannot read, Sam enlists the help of a newfound friend at school. Both friends struggle to fit in at school and to discover the truth about Sam’s past. They form a bond and find some much-needed answers. (JH)

Lady Liberty: A Biography
Through the voices of many, the story of the Statue of Liberty is brought to life. Each character provides a piece of the history, starting with Laboulaye’s dream of a birthday gift for America, through the painstaking creation and construction on both continents, and ending with immigrants and their memories of Lady Liberty. This book would be a wonderful addition to any American History lesson. (CD)
March On! The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World

Told by Martin Luther King Jr.’s sister, this is a behind-the-scenes look at the famous march on Washington and King’s preparations for his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Bold, bright illustrations help convey the message. This book will enrich studies of African American history, the Civil Rights movement, and the life of Martin Luther King Jr. in mid- to upper elementary grades. Pair this book with Doreen Rappaport’s Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (STW)

A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams

Based on the life of poet William Carlos Williams, this book paints a beautiful picture with the text and the mixed media used in the illustrations. After growing up and becoming a successful doctor, Williams still made time for his love of poetry. A timeline is included that simultaneously dates events in Williams’ life with world events and the publication dates of his poetry. This book would be a great addition to any poetry, history, or art lesson. (JH)

When the Wolves Returned: Restoring Nature’s Balance in Yellowstone

Yellowstone National Park has a delicate habitat that was upset when hunters began killing wolves. By 1926, there were no wolves left at the top of the food chain. As a result, other species began to disappear and vegetation in the park suffered. Beautiful photographs by a father–daughter team enhance the telling of the wolves’ return to Yellowstone. This book makes a wonderful curriculum connection with studies about habitat and environment, particularly in the elementary and middle grades. (TC)

Yuki and the One Thousand Carriers

The journey on the Takaido Road, as told through a 6-year-old’s haiku poetry, gently teaches the customs and culture of 17th- and 18th-century Japan. Yuki travels 300 miles with her parents and one thousand carriers. This is a requirement Yuki’s father, a Japanese provincial governor, must honor. Watercolor pictures and descriptive writing help to illustrate the scenic landscape from Kyoto, where the shogun rule, to Edo (Tokyo), the home of the emperors. This book provides great support for teaching about East Asia. (MB)
The Boy Who Dared
Susan Campbell Bartoletti. New York: Scholastic.
Helmuth Hubener is a Mormon boy growing up during Hitler’s ascent to power. This fictionalized account is based on the real life of Hubener, a member of the Hitler Youth. Hubener felt compelled to speak the truth about the Nazi atrocities and lies after he witnessed the brutalization of the Jews and those Germans who questioned Hitler’s regime. This book is told through Hubener’s flashbacks as he sits in his prison cell. The story is an example of individual perseverance at any cost and ties in to social studies curriculum. (CR)

Chains
As the Revolutionary War patriots fought for their freedom under the banner of “all men are created equal,” a stark dichotomy was created as slaves lived and died beside their masters. Isabel, a 14-year-old slave, struggles to come to terms with this injustice. She must overcome heartbreak when her younger sister Ruth is sold. The stark horrors of slavery and war are brilliantly illustrated by Anderson. Chains would be a superb read-aloud for upper elementary, middle, or high school students studying the Revolutionary War. (JM)

The Freedom Business
With the 1798 primary source text of Venture Smith’s A Narrative of the Life & Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa on the left-hand page and Nelson’s poems in Smith’s voice on the right-hand page, the reader has an extraordinary look through the eyes of the first man to document his capture and life as an American slave. Details are given to show how Venture bought his freedom. Slaves were a business commodity, bought and sold; that business was triumphantly reversed when Venture paid $500 for his freedom and declared, “I own myself.” (PK)

Great Peacemakers: True Stories From Around the World
Ken Beller and Heather Chase. Sedona, AZ: LTS.
This book provides a great collection of stories from 20 inspiring individuals who deliberately chose peace to be a guiding force in their lives. The authors break the stories into five paths of peace: choosing nonviolence, living peacefully, honoring diversity, valuing all life, and caring for the planet. These stories will hopefully help to expand peace and hope throughout our world. (BL)

The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary
Using a scrapbook format, this well-told, dual biography portrays a comprehensive look at the lives and times of Abraham and Mary Lincoln. Filled with photographs, clippings, letters, cartoons, and pictures of archival documents, it details the humble beginnings of Abraham and his journey to the White House as well as Mary’s own upbringing and her role in American history. This book will prove to be an excellent resource for readers ages 10 to adult as well as a valuable tool for U.S. history teachers. (TF)

Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out
Created by 108 renowned authors and illustrators and the National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.
This eight-year project combined the talents of 108 authors and illustrators to help the National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance promote historical literacy. This book offers readers of all ages, but especially readers in upper elementary grades, 200 years of American history as seen through the eyes of people who have lived in the White House. Different stories, speeches, and personal reflections will encourage students to learn more about the United States’ history, heritage, and rich culture. (SM)
**A Thousand Never Evers**  
Set in Mississippi in 1963 and narrated by a young African American girl, this novel spotlights the racial injustices that were commonplace during the Civil Rights movement. Addie Ann Pickett’s father is dead, her older brother is missing, and her beloved uncle is about to be lynched for a crime he did not commit. Addie must find the courage to fight for what is right. The story provides insights about the role of ordinary citizens during the struggle for civil rights. A timeline and bibliography give scholarly support to the fictional account. (JH)

**Washington at Valley Forge**  
George Washington’s battle at Valley Forge becomes real in this book. Through well-written text, historic works of art, and primary sources, the reader can understand Washington’s feelings and actions. The suffering of the men, the heroics of the people, and the strategy of the battles are shared in this book. *Washington at Valley Forge* would be an excellent book to use in middle school and upper elementary when teaching the Revolutionary War and the life of George Washington. (AK)

**We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball**  
The author/illustrator of this powerful book shares his love for the history of the Negro Leagues in exquisite oil paintings that show the spirit, pride, and determination of these athletes. Narrated as one voice that speaks for many, the reader is given the opportunity to spend time with not only the well-known but also the unknown players of the Negro Leagues. This book would be a wonderful resource for African American history, the Civil Rights movement, or a sports unit. (CD)

**What the World Eats**  
The author and photographer visited 25 families in 22 countries, including the United States, to create this book. A family photo with one week’s display of food introduces each four- to six-page entry. Each entry looks at the quantity, cost, health benefits, and types of food eaten as well as cooking and food preservation methods. Maps, charts, and graphs share a wealth of information. Interspersed are photo galleries on related topics such as kitchens and fast food. This book offers great curriculum connections for social studies, health education, and mathematics. (STW)
Thank You to the Teachers’ Choices Coordinators and Trainees

The books that make the Teachers’ Choices list are selected through a field test in the United States of more than 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. Ratings from the seven regions are collated to produce the national list.

Regional coordinators for the 2008–2009 field test were Susan White, Wilmington, Delaware; Cathy Denman, Titusville, Florida; Joyce Hamon, Evansville, Indiana; Anne Klausing, Cloverdale, Ohio (trainee, Susan Meyer, Evansville, Indiana); Patrice Kraus, West Des Moines, Iowa (trainees, Jan McConnell, Shawnee, Kansas, and Cheryl Roberts, Overland Park, Kansas); Marci Mitchell, Mission, Texas (trainee, Tanna Clark, Hot Springs, Arkansas); Jessica Hollon, Douglas, Wyoming; and Tonya Freeman, Eagle River, Alaska (trainee, Barbara Low, Medford, Oregon). Suzanne Jensen, Leawood, Kansas, coordinated the project.

For more information on Teachers’ Choices or to learn how to become involved, visit www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/TeachersChoices.aspx.