



Forest Of Reading
Awards

Blue Spruce 2023 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



Abuelita and Me

Written by Leonarda Carranza and Illustrated by Rafael Mayani

Published by Annick Press

Spending time at home with Abuelita means pancakes, puddle-jumping, and nail-painting. But venturing out into the city is not always as fun. On the bus and at the grocery store, people are impatient and suspicious—sometimes they even yell. Sad, angry, and scared, the story's young narrator decides not to leave home again . . . until a moment of empowerment helps her see the strength she and Abuelita share when they face the world together. Warm, expressive illustrations by Rafael Mayani highlight the tenderness in Abuelita and the narrator's relationship.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Aggression and racism, microaggressions, intergenerational relationships

Are You a Cheeseburger?

Written and Illustrated by Monica Arnaldo

Published by Katherine Tegen Books

Grub is a lonely racoon. Rumbling in the trash. Looking for food. Seed is, well, a seed! Patiently waiting in the trash. Hoping someone will plant it. When the two finally meet, they realize they might be able to help each other! Grub has just one big question first: What will Seed grow? Could Seed grow Grub's favorite food, mouthwatering cheeseburgers? Seed isn't sure what a cheeseburger is exactly, but . . . maybe!

And so begins a hilarious friendship following two unlikely strangers learning more about the other and discovering the pressure that comes with fulfilling expectations. Author-illustrator Monica Arnaldo will leave readers giggling and clamoring for more in this charming story that celebrates the unexpected—and how the most special friendships bloom only when we are unapologetically ourselves.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Friendship, patience, discovery, wonder, authenticity

Be a Good Ancestor

Written by Leona Prince and Illustrated by Carla Joseph

Published by Orca Book Publishers

Rooted in Indigenous teachings, this stunning picture book encourages readers of all ages to consider the ways in which they live in connection to the world around them and to think deeply about their behaviors.

Addressing environmental issues, animal welfare, self-esteem and self-respect, and the importance of community, the authors deliver a poignant and universal message in an accessible way: Be a good ancestor to the world around you. Thought-provoking stanzas offer a call to action for each one of us to consider how we affect future generations. Every decision we make ripples out, and we can affect the world around us by thinking deeply about those decisions.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Environmental responsibility, personal responsibility, animal welfare, self-esteem, self-respect, community

Bharatanatyam in Ballet Shoes

Written by Mahak Jain and Illustrated by Anu Chouhan
Published by Annick Press

Paro comes from a dancing family. At home, she dances Bharatanatyam with her mom, and now she's excited to learn ballet. But what if she can't dance like the other kids in her class? Ballerinas move like fairies, while Bharatanatyam dancers seem like queens. Paro can't be both...can she? Anu Chouhan's vibrant, energetic illustrations emphasize themes of creative flexibility and navigating the intersections of different cultural identities.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Self-esteem, intercultural experience, different ways of being and knowing, identity, embracing uniqueness

Friends are Friends, Forever

Written by Dane Liu and Illustrated by Lynn Scurfield
Published by RAI Henry Holt & Co

A picture book based on the author's own immigration story, the infinite impact of friendship, and passing on love and kindness around the world.

On a snowy Lunar New Year's Eve in Northeastern China, it's Dandan's last night with Yueyue. Tomorrow, she moves to America. The two best friends have a favorite wintertime tradition: crafting paper-cut snowflakes, freezing them outside, and hanging them as ornaments.

As they say goodbye, Yueyue presses red paper and a spool of thread into Dandan's hands so that she can carry on their tradition. But in her new home, Dandan has no one to enjoy the gift with—until a friend comes along.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Friendship old and new, migration, tradition, what it means to honour the past and also move forward

Granny's Kitchen

Written by Sadé Smith and Illustrated by Ken Daley

Published by Feiwel and Friends

Shelly-Ann lives with her Granny on the beautiful island of Jamaica. When Shelly-Ann becomes hungry, she asks her Granny for something to eat. Granny tells her “Gyal, you betta can cook!” and teaches Shelly-Ann how to get in touch with her Jamaican roots through the process of cooking.

As Shelly-Ann tries each recipe, everything goes wrong. But when Granny is too tired to cook one morning, Shelly-Ann will have to find the courage to try one more time and prepare the perfect Jamaican breakfast.

Content / Discussion Themes

Perseverance, cooking, intergenerational relationships, courage

Meena's Mindful Moment

Written by Tina Athaide and Illustrated by Åsa Gilland

Published by Page Street Kids

Meena is excited to visit Dada and explore all the exciting sights and sensations of his home with him. But Meena has so much energy, it becomes a whole imaginary character she calls her hurly-burly hullabaloo. Wherever Meena goes, her hurly-burly hullabaloo goes too. Together they're never calm, as they run and cartwheel and make a lot of noise!

But when Meena makes a mess, her grandfather is there to teach her how to handle it with deep breaths and meditative poses—after all, he has a hurly-burly hullabaloo too.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Intergenerational relationships, mindfulness, gentle interventions for busy minds and bodies

Rodney Was a Tortoise

Written by Nan Forler and Illustrated by Yong Ling Kang

Published by Tundra Books

Bernadette and Rodney are the best of friends. Rodney's not so good at playing cards, but he's great at staring contests. His favorite food is lettuce, though he eats it VERRRRRY SLOOOOOWLY. And he's such a joker! When Bernadette goes to sleep at night, Rodney is always there, watching over her from his tank.

As the seasons pass, Rodney moves slower and slower, until one day he stops moving at all. Without Rodney, Bernadette feels all alone. She can't stop thinking about him, but none of her friends seem to notice. Except for Amar.

Content / Discussion Themes

Gentle introduction to topic of death, friendship

A Sky-Blue Bench

Written by Bahram Rahman and Illustrated by Peggy Collins

Published by Pajama Press

It's Afghan schoolgirl Aria's first day back at school since her accident. She's excited, but she's also worried about sitting on the hard floor all day with her new prosthetic "helper-leg."

Just as Aria feared, sitting on the floor is so uncomfortable that she can't think about learning at all. She knows that before the war changed many things in Afghanistan, schools like hers had benches for students to sit at. If she had a bench, her leg would not hurt so much. The answer is obvious: she will gather materials, talk to Kaka Najar, the carpenter in the old city, and learn to build a bench for herself.

In *A Sky-Blue Bench*, Bahram Rahman, author of *The Library Bus*, returns again to the setting of his homeland, Afghanistan, to reveal the resilience and resolve of young children—especially young girls—who face barriers to education. Illustrator Peggy Collins imbues Aria with an infectious spunkiness and grit that make her relatable even to readers with a very different school experience. An author's note gently introduces an age-appropriate discussion of landmines and their impact on the lives of children in many nations, especially Afghanistan, which has the highest concentration of landmines of any country in the world.

Content / Discussion Themes

Perseverance, disability, accessibility, brief mention of landmines

That's Not My Name!

Written and Illustrated by Anoosha Syed

Published by Viking Books for Young Readers

Mirha is so excited for her first day of school! She can't wait to learn, play, and make new friends. But when her classmates mispronounce her name, she goes home wondering if she should find a new one. Maybe then she'd be able to find a monogrammed keychain at the gas station or order a hot chocolate at the cafe more easily.

Mama helps Mirha to see how special her name is, and she returns to school the next day determined to help her classmates say it correctly—even if it takes a hundred tries.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Self-esteem, importance of names, identity, belonging