



Forest Of Reading
Awards

Red Maple 2023 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



Batter Royale

Written and Illustrated by Leisl Adams

Published by Abrams

In this fun graphic novel, a talented young chef is selected to participate in a baking reality show and finds herself mixed up in spicy competition, bitter rivalry, and sweet romance. In Leisl Adams's debut graphic novel, *Batter Royale*, an aspiring amateur baker enters the toughest, ugliest, most fearsome fight she'll ever experience: a baking reality show.

When seventeen-year-old small-town waitress Rose impresses a famous food critic, she and her best friend, Fred, find themselves thrust into the tough world of competitive baking. The contest is an intense ten days of bizarre challenges, and the competition is cutthroat. Some competitors are willing to lie, cheat, and sabotage their way to the top. Rose may be in over her head, but she is determined to show that she can become a top chef. *Batter Royale* is a fish-out-of-water style romantic comedy about climbing out of the circumstances you're in and making your dreams come true.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Romance, coming of age

The Bear House

Written by Meaghan McIsaac

Published by Holiday House

In a gritty medieval world where the ruling houses are based on the constellations, betrayal, intrigue, and a king's murder force the royal sisters of the Bear House on the run!

Moody Aster and her spoiled sister Ursula are the daughters of Jasper Lourdes, Bear Major and high king of the realm. Rivals, both girls dream of becoming the Bear queen someday, although neither really deserve to, having no particular talent in...well, anything.

But when their jealous Uncle Bram murders their father in a bid for the crown, the girls are forced onto the run, along with lowly Dev the Bearkeeper and the half-grown grizzly Alcor, symbol of their house. As a bitter struggle for the throne consumes the kingdom in civil war—and attracts demonic attention from even darker powers—the sisters must rely on Dev, the bear cub, two mysterious princes from opposing houses, and each other to survive... and find wells of courage, cunning, and skill they never knew they had.

For there are many houses in the Bear Highen—the House of the Hemoth Bear, the House of the White Bear, the House of the Ox, the House of the Lion, the House of the Lynx, the House of Hounds, the House of the Blue Giraffe, and the House of the Shadow Dragon—each of them guided and protected by a ferocious namesake beast. But only one can rule.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Violence, death of a family member, fantasy

Eight Days

Written by Teresa Toten

Published by Scholastic Canada

How do you face a heartbreaking past?

One day at a time.

Or as Aggie says, one crisis at a time.

In Teresa Toten's compelling new novel *Eight Days*, Samantha finds out that the mother she thought had died years ago has actually just passed away. Added to this charged secret is her recovering alcoholic grandfather's strange behaviour and sudden insistence that he take Sami back to Chicago to retrieve her mother's body.

Luckily, Sami's beloved neighbour and surrogate mother figure, Aggie, insists on coming on the road trip, bringing along her quirky sense of humour and fantastic wig collection.

The eight-day journey takes us from Toronto to Chicago and back again, as Sami, an American living with her grandfather in a Muslim-dominated apartment complex in Toronto, struggles to find out who she is and where she belongs.

Infused with warmth and love, even as family struggles and secrets are torn open, *Eight Days* is ultimately about forgiveness and strength in community. It is truly a novel for our times.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Mental Health - Anxiety, death of a family member, drug abuse, alcoholism

Let the Monster Out

Written by Chad Lucas

Published by Abrams

Bones Malone feels like he can't do anything right in his new small town: He almost punched the son of the woman who babysits him and his brothers, he's one of the only Black kids in Langille, and now his baseball team (the one place where he really feels like he shines) just lost

their first game. To make matters worse, things in town are getting weird. His mom isn't acting like herself at all—she's totally spaced out, almost like a zombie. And then he and his brothers have the same dream—one where they're running from some of their deepest fears, like a bear and an eerie cracked mirror that Bones would rather soon forget.

Kyle Specks feels like he can never say the right thing at the right time. He thinks he might be neurodivergent, but he hasn't gotten an official diagnosis yet. His parents worry that the world might be too hard for him and try to protect him, but Kyle knows they can't do that forever. Even though he's scared, he can't just stand by and do nothing while things in this town get stranger and stranger, especially not after he and Bones find a mysterious scientist's journal that might hold answers about what's going on.

But when faced with seemingly impossible situations, a shady corporation, and their own worst nightmares, will Kyle and Bones be brave enough to admit they're scared? Or will the fear totally consume and control them?

Content/ Discussion Themes

Neurodivergence, unlikely friendships, baseball, mind control

On the Line

Written by Paul Coccia and Eric Walters

Published by Orca Book Publishers

Thirteen-year-old basketball star Jordan Ryker feels like his life is falling apart. All Jordie wanted was for his parents to stop fighting. Soon, he gets his wish. His parents separate and then his dad announces he's gay. Shocked, Jordie struggles with how to process all this. His dad taught him everything he knows about basketball, and there's an important championship game coming up. He needs him more than ever. But Jordie feels like his dad has abandoned his family. He doesn't want anything to do with him now and he definitely doesn't want to meet his dad's new boyfriend. It takes a new girl with wicked basketball skills and a revelation from his best friend to help Jordie realize that while some things change, other things never do.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Homophobia, Sexism, basketball, feminism

The Ribbon Leaf

Written by Lori Weber

Published by Red Deer Press

In Nazi Germany, friendship between an Aryan German girl and a Jewish German girl is strictly verboten, and an act of kindness might mean death. Sabine and Edie have been best friends since Kindergarten. Then Kristallnacht hits in 1938, shattering Jewish shop windows,

synagogues, and their friendship. The girls, who once dreamed of stardom together, now take different paths — Edie escapes to Canada, and Sabine remains to experience life in her Nazi-controlled southern German town, eventually rescuing and supporting Edie's beloved Papa who poses as Sabine's grandfather.

Even though the girls are separated, the yellow ribbon that once decorated their identical dresses binds the girls' families in ways that contradict Nazi ideology. Throughout the seven long years of WWII, Sabine confronts how far courage can take her, while Edie finds her own strength to deal with leaving her father behind, integrating into a new country, and coming to terms with her sexual orientation. Each girl comes of age, experiencing first loves, loss, and joy. Without knowing how the other is doing across the ocean, they keep hope alive that their bond of friendship remains.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Antisemitism and propaganda, War - World War II, death, starvation, friendship, immigration

Sorry for Your Loss

Written by Joanne Levy

Published by Orca Book Publishers

Evie Walman is not obsessed with death. She does think about it a lot, though, but only because her family runs a Jewish funeral home. At twelve, Evie already knows she's going to be a funeral director when she grows up. So what if the kids at school call her "corpse girl" and say she smells like death? They're just mean and don't get how important it is to have someone take care of things when your world is falling apart. Evie loves dusting caskets, polishing pews, and vacuuming the chapel—and on funeral days, she dresses up and hands out tissues and offers her condolences to mourners. She doesn't normally help her parents with the grieving families directly, until one day when they ask her to help with Oren, a boy who was in a horrific car accident that killed both his parents. Oren refuses to speak and Evie, who is nursing her own private grief, is determined to find a way to help him deal with his loss.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Death of a family member, death of a friend, friendship

Children of the Fox: Thieves of Shadow, Book One

Written by Kevin Sands

Published by Puffin Canada

Five kids with unusual talents are brought together to commit an impossible crime in the first book in a thrilling new heist series from the bestselling author of *The Blackthorn Key*.

A magic-infused fantasy that brings together a ragtag group of kids to pull off a crime so difficult, countless adults have already tried and failed. Lured by the promise of more money than they've ever dreamed of, five young criminals are hired to steal a heavily guarded treasure from the most powerful sorcerer in the city. There's Callan the con artist, Meriel the expert at acrobatics (and knives!), Gareth the researcher, Lachlan who can obtain anything, and Foxtail, whose mysterious eyeless mask doesn't hinder her ability to climb walls like a spider. Though their shadowy backgrounds mean that they've never trusted anyone but themselves, the five must learn to rely on each other in order to get the job done.

But as Callan has been warned most of his life, it's best to stay away from magic. It can turn on you at any moment, and make you think you're the one running the con game, when in reality you're the one being fooled. Faced with these unsurmountable odds, can the new friends pull off this legendary heist, or has their luck finally run out?

Content/ Discussion Themes

Fantasy, heists, magic, unlikely friendships

Under the Iron Bridge

Written by Kathy Kacer

Published by Second Story Press

It's 1938 in Dusseldorf, Germany, and Paul is feeling pressured to join the Hitler Youth. The last thing he wants to do is march around with a bunch of bullies, supporting the Gestapo and abusing the city's Jews, but even Paul's parents think he should go along with his classmates in order to keep himself safe.

Just when he's starting to despair, Paul meets the Edelweiss Pirates, a group of teenage boys and girls who are working to undermine the growing power of the Nazis. When he joins the rebel organization, he finds out just how hair-raising and dangerous it is to sabotage the Third Reich and rescue Jews wherever they can. But choices have consequences, and during the terrifying violence of Kristallnacht, Paul must step out of the shadows and make a life-changing decision.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Antisemitism and propaganda, War - World War II, moderate violence, resistance

Walking in Two Worlds

Written by Wab Kinew

Published by Tundra Books

An Indigenous teen girl is caught between two worlds, both real and virtual, in the YA fantasy debut from bestselling Indigenous author Wab Kinew. Perfect for fans of Ready Player One and the Otherworld series.

In the real world, Bugz is a shy and self-conscious Indigenous teen who faces the stresses of teenage angst and life on the Rez. But in the virtual world, her alter ego is not just confident but dominant in a massively multiplayer video game universe.

Feng is a teen boy who has been sent from China to live with his aunt, a doctor on the Rez, after his online activity suggests he may be developing extremist sympathies. Meeting each other in real life, as well as in the virtual world, Bugz and Feng immediately relate to each other as outsiders and as avid gamers. And as their connection is strengthened through their virtual adventures, they find that they have much in common in the real world, too: both must decide what to do in the face of temptations and pitfalls, and both must grapple with the impacts of family challenges and community trauma.

But betrayal threatens everything Bugz has built in the virtual world, as well as her relationships in the real world, and it will take all her newfound strength to restore her friendship with Feng and reconcile the parallel aspects of her life: the traditional and the mainstream, the east and the west, the real and the virtual.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Self harm, Bullying, Family member with serious illness, Indigenous virtual reality influencer