



Forest Of Reading
Awards

White Pine 2023 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



We are pleased to present a collection of titles that celebrate being true to your own self, overcoming adversity, and standing up for what you believe in.

Our protagonists make no excuses, nor do the strong supporting casts featured in each title.

We take our readers across the country - indeed the world - moving backwards and forwards in time, to explore the contemporary social issues of the moment.

Featuring contemporary coming-of-age stories, fantasies that chart new territory, a super-hero graphic novel, a novel in verse, and a chilling thriller, these stories will speak to all readers.

Blood Scion

Written by Deborah Falaye

Published by HarperTeen

This is what they deserve. They wanted me to be a monster. I will be the worst monster they ever created.

Fifteen-year-old Sloane can incinerate an enemy at will—she is a Scion, a descendant of the ancient Orisha gods.

Under the Lucis' brutal rule, her identity means her death if her powers are discovered. But when she is forcibly conscripted into the Lucis army on her fifteenth birthday, Sloane sees a new opportunity: to overcome the bloody challenges of Lucis training, and destroy them from within.

Sloane rises through the ranks and gains strength but, in doing so, risks something greater: losing herself entirely, and becoming the very monster that she abhors.

Following one girl's journey of magic, injustice, power, and revenge, this deeply felt and emotionally charged debut from Deborah Falaye, inspired by Yoruba-Nigerian mythology, is a magnetic combination of *A Song of Wraiths and Ruin* and *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* that will utterly thrill and capture readers.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Nigerian/Yoruban mythology, bravery, violence, colonialism, survival, resilience, racism, child soldiers, self harm (cutting), positive supportive relationships, mental health, human trafficking, friend and family networks

Daughter

Written by Kate McLaughlin

Published by Raincoast

Scarlet's life is pretty average. Overprotective mom. Great friends. Cute boy she's interested in. And a father she's never known – until she does.

When the FBI shows up at Scarlet's door, she is shocked to learn her father is infamous serial killer Jeffrey Robert Lake. And now, he's dying and will only give the names and locations of his remaining victims to the one person, the daughter he hasn't seen since she was a baby.

Scarlet's mother has tried to protect her from Lake's horrifying legacy, but there's no way they can escape the media firestorm that erupts when they come out of hiding. Or the people who blame Scarlet for her father's choices. When trying to do the right thing puts her life in danger, Scarlet is faced with a choice – go back into hiding or make the world see her as more than a monster's daughter.

Kate McLaughlin's *Daughter* is a novel about trying right deadly choices that were never yours to begin with.

Content/ Discussion Themes

True crime, resilience, drug and alcohol use (underage), violence, sexual violence, necrophilia, determination, personal choices

Decoding Dot Grey

Written by Nicola Davidson

Published by Nimbus Publishing Limited

A heartfelt YA coming-of-age novel set in an animal shelter from the award-winning author of *In the Wake*, exploring grief, first love, and growing pains.

Eighteen-year-old Dot Grey doesn't hate people; she's just not especially fond of their company. It's 1997, and she's just left home in favour of a dank, cold basement, where she lives with several small animals, including a chorus of crickets, a family of sowbugs (they came with the apartment), a hairless rat, and an injured crow.

Her job at the animal shelter is her refuge — so long as she can avoid her father's phone calls. He's trying to get Dot to visit her mother, but Dot knows there's no point. No one ever understood her like her mum, who helped Dot channel her vibrating fingers into Morse code, their own private language. But her bright, artistic mother was terribly injured a year ago and Dot can't reach her, even with her tapping fingers. Left with only a father who refuses to face the truth, she focuses on saving the little lives at the shelter.

When Joe starts working there, everyone thinks he has a crush on Dot. Dot thinks he's just awkward and kind. He shows his good heart when they rescue an entire litter of puppies together, and Dot finds herself warming up to him. But Joe waits too long to tell her his deepest secret, and soon she is forced to deal with two losses. In the end, Dot's weird way of looking at the world is the one thing that will, against the odds, help her connect with it.

With breakneck wordplay and the most motley of crews — human and otherwise *Decoding Dot Grey* is a tender and delightful novel from the award-winning author of *In the Wake*.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Neurodivergence, family, mental health struggles, gravely ill family members, animal euthanasia, forgiveness, personal journey

I am Not Starfire

Written by Mariko Tamaki and illustrated by Yosji Yoshitany

Published by DC Comics

Seventeen-year-old Mandy, daughter of Starfire, is NOT like her mother. Starfire is gorgeous, tall, sparkly, and a hero. Mandy is NOT a sparkly superhero. Mandy has no powers, is a kid who dyes her hair black and hates everyone but her best friend Lincoln. To Starfire, who is from another planet, Mandy seems like an alien, like some distant angry light years away moon.

And it's possible Mandy is even more distant lately, ever since she walked out on her S.A.T.s. Which, yeah, her mom doesn't know.

Everyone thinks Mandy needs to go to college and become whoever you become at college, but Mandy has other plans. Mandy's big plan is that she's going to move to France and...do whatever people do in France. But then everything changes when she gets partnered with Claire for a school project. Mandy likes Claire (even if she denies it, heartily and intensely). A lot.

How do you become the person you're supposed to be when you don't know what that is? How do you become the person you're supposed to be when the only thing you're sure of is what you're not?

When someone from Starfire's past arrives, Mandy must make a choice: give up before the battle has even begun, or step into the unknown and risk everything to save her mom. *I am Not Starfire* is a story about teenagers and/as aliens; about knowing where you come from and where you are going; and about mothers.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Humour, super-heroes, body positivity, self-esteem, culture clash, generational conflict, bullying, anxiety, swearing, violence, immigrant experience, being true to yourself, parenting

Iron Widow

Written by Xiran Jay Zhao

Published by Penguin Teen Canada

The boys of Huaxia dream of pairing up with girls to pilot Chrysalises, giant transforming robots that can battle the mecha aliens that lurk beyond the Great Wall. It doesn't matter that the girls often die from the mental strain.

When 18-year-old Zetian offers herself up as a concubine-pilot, it's to assassinate the ace male pilot responsible for her sister's death. But she gets her vengeance in a way nobody expected—she kills him through the psychic link between pilots and emerges from the cockpit unscathed. She is labeled an Iron Widow, a much-feared and much-silenced kind of female pilot who can sacrifice boys to power up Chrysalises instead.

To tame her unnerving yet invaluable mental strength, she is paired up with Li Shimin, the strongest and most controversial male pilot in Huaxia. But now that Zetian has had a taste of power, she will not cower so easily. She will miss no opportunity to leverage their combined might and infamy to survive attempt after attempt on her life, until she can figure out exactly why the pilot system works in its misogynist way—and stop more girls from being sacrificed.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Feminism, Chinese myths and legends, empowering, imaginative, violence (including sexual violence), alcoholism, forced addiction, consensual polyamory, mutilation (foot binding), mental illness, inclusive, accepting, rich cultural foundation

A Magic Steeped in Poison

Written by July I. Lin

Published by Feiwel and Friends

I used to look at my hands with pride. Now all I can think is, "These are the hands that buried my mother."

For Ning, the only thing worse than losing her mother is knowing that it's her own fault. She was the one who unknowingly brewed the poison tea that killed her—the poison tea that now threatens to also take her sister, Shu.

When Ning hears of a competition to find the kingdom's greatest shennong-shi—masters of the ancient and magical art of tea-making—she travels to the imperial city to compete. The winner will receive a favor from the princess, which may be Ning's only chance to save her sister's life.

But between the backstabbing competitors, bloody court politics, and a mysterious (and handsome) boy with a shocking secret, Ning might actually be the one in more danger.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Feminist, inclusive, rich cultural foundation, death, violence, poisoning, bullying, ceremony, politics

River Mermaid

Written by Christy Goerzen

Published by Crwth Press

Mercedes lives for art. Her mother is a famous sculptor, and since she was a small child Mercedes has dreamed of following in her mother's footsteps. But it's hard living in the shadow of a legend. And when Mercedes's application at a prestigious art school is rejected, she is devastated and walks away from her art.

Try as she does, she finds it hard to build a life as a regular teen. And when life serves her a traumatic situation, her art is the only thing that will pull her through.

An exploration of grief and self-acceptance, this novel-in-verse celebrates the healing power of creativity.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Loss of a loved one (parent), death, grief and bereavement, allusion to sex, setting (BC), art artists and the artistic identity, novel in verse, interpersonal relationships

The Summer of Bitter and Sweet

Written by Jen Ferguson

Published by Heartdrum

In this complex and emotionally resonant novel, debut author Jen Ferguson serves up a powerful story about rage, secrets, and all the spectrums that make up a person—and the sweetness that can still live alongside the bitterest truth.

Lou has enough confusion in front of her this summer. She'll be working in her family's ice cream shack with her newly ex-boyfriend—whose kisses never made her feel desire, only discomfort—and her former best friend, King, who is back in their Canadian prairie town after disappearing three years ago without a word.

But when she gets a letter from her biological father—a man she hoped would stay behind bars for the rest of his life—Lou immediately knows that she cannot meet him, no matter how much he insists.

While King's friendship makes Lou feel safer and warmer than she would have thought possible, when her family's business comes under threat, she soon realizes that she can't ignore her father forever.

Content/ Discussion Themes

Complex, challenging, strong female protagonist, intergenerational trauma, sexual harrasment, intimate partner abuse, rape, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-black racism, mental health, substance abuse, physical violence, self-injury, drugs, positive supportive relationships, friend and family networks

Twice as Perfect

Written by Louisa Onome

Published by HarperCollins

She thinks the only things worth doing are those that will lead to success.

For seventeen-year-old Adanna Nkwachi, life is all about duty: to school and the debate team, to her Nigerian parents, and even to her cousin Genny as Adanna helps prepare Genny's wedding to Afrobeats superstar Skeleboy. Because ever since her older brother, Sam, had a fight with their parents a few years ago and disappeared, *somebody* had to fill the void he left behind. Adanna may never understand what caused Sam to leave home, but the one thing she knows is that it's on her to make sure her parents' sacrifices aren't in vain.

One day, chance brings the siblings together again and they start working to repair their bond. Although she fears how their parents will react if they find out, Adanna's determined to get answers about the night Sam left—Sam, who was supposed to be an engineer but is now, what, a poet? The more she learns about Sam's poetry, the more Adanna begins to wonder if maybe her own happiness is just as important as doing what's expected of her.

Amid parental pressure, anxiety over the debate competition, a complicated love life, and the Nigerian wedding-to-end-all-weddings, can Adanna learn, just this once, to put herself first?

Content/ Discussion Themes

Anxiety, light hearted, rich cultural foundation, immigrant experience, family vs personal expectations, being true to yourself

The Wrong Side of the Court

Written by H. N. Khan

Published by Penguin Teen Canada

Fawad has big dreams about being the world's first Pakistani to be drafted into the NBA. A first-generation Pakistani coming-of-age story for fans of David Yoon and Ben Philippe.

Fifteen-year-old Fawad Chaudhry loves two things: basketball and his mother's potato-and-ground-beef-stuffed parathas. Both are round, and both help him forget about things like his father, who died two years ago, his mother's desire to arrange a marriage to his first cousin, Nusrat, back home in Pakistan, and the tiny apartment in Regent Park he shares with his mom and sister. Not to mention his estranged best friend Yousuf, who's coping with the shooting death of his older brother.

But Fawad has plans: like asking out Ashley, even though she lives on the other, wealthier side of the tracks, and saving his friend Arif from being beaten into a pulp for being the school flirt, and making the school basketball team and dreaming of being the world's first Pakistani to be drafted into the NBA. All he has to do now is convince his mother to let him try out for the basketball team. And let him date girls from his school. Not to mention somehow get Omar, the neighborhood bully, to leave him alone . . .

Content/ Discussion Themes

Violence, swearing, assault, child abuse, stealing, bullying, sex talk, racism, strong male characters, authentic and relatable, engaging storyline, poignant, immigrant experience, hopeful