



## Silver Birch Express 2024 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



### ***Boobies***

Written and Illustrated by Nancy Vo  
Published by Groundwood Books

“You have just opened a book about boobies.”

Meet the Blue-footed Booby, who does not have any boobies at all, since only mammals have boobies. We learn that mammals have boobies to feed babies — even though milk can also come from plants. And did you know that boobies, or breasts, vary from person to person, that boobies change over time, and that different animals have different numbers of boobies? Witty and wide-ranging, this eye-opening picture book goes on to explore connections between boobies and mountains, boobies and ancient art and, of course, boobies and you!

Nancy Vo’s latest creation is fresh and funny, while serving up just the right amount of fact. Punchy prose is complemented by striking stencil art in a retro palette, making this the perfect gift for curious young children, older children getting to know their bodies, and anyone ready to boldly celebrate boobies!

#### **Content/Discussion Themes**

Animals, Mammals, Birds, Female Breasts

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### ***Deep Deep Down: The Secret Underwater Poetry of the Mariana Trench***

Written by Lydia Lukidis and Illustrated by Juan Calle Velez  
Published by Capstone Editions

Deep, deep down, at the very bottom of the ocean, lies a secret world. Through lyrical narration, this spare-text STEM picture book takes readers on a journey to a place very few humans have ever been—the Mariana Trench. The imagined voyage debunks scary myths about this mysterious place with surprising and beautiful truths about life at Earth’s deepest point. *Deep, Deep Down* shows a vibrant world far below, and teaches readers how interconnected our lives are to every place on the planet.

#### **Content/Discussion Themes**

Nature, oceans, sea animals, Mariana Trench

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### ***The Journal of Anxious Izzy Parker***

Written by Alma Fullerton and Illustrated by Beena Mistry  
Published by Second Story Press

Izzy wants to be a lion. But mostly, she feels like a mouse.

Eight-year-old Izzy Parker's biggest problem is feeling anxious and afraid. Her mom's decision to move them across the country to Prince Edward Island didn't help. Izzy worries she will say the wrong thing or laugh at the wrong time, and none of the kids will want to be her friend. Sometimes, it's so hard to be Izzy that she can't breathe.

In her honest, awkward, and anxious journal, Izzy writes down the story of her life and how she is trying to be a little less afraid. The good news: things might not be as bad as they seem. Even better? They will soon have a small, furry new family member—an emotional support dog named Gandalf!

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Anxiety, being yourself, making new friends

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***Mehndi Boy***

Written by Zain Bandali and Illustrated by Jani Balakumar

Published by Annick Press

Tehzeeb drew curvy clouds, grand galaxies, squirmy squiggles, and delicate dots. He made charming checkerboards and even perfected paisleys. His practice was finally paying off!

The first time Tehzeeb tries mehndi, his passion for the art form blossoms. Soon, he's creating designs for all his friends and family and dreams of becoming the most in-demand mehndi artist in town. So Tez is hurt and confused when his favourite uncle tells him mehndi isn't for boys. His art brings people joy. How could it be wrong? Tehzeeb doesn't want to disappoint his uncle. But when a crisis before his cousin's wedding puts his talents to the test, Tehzeeb must find the courage to be his true creative self.

Jani Balakumar's expressive, vibrant illustrations bring Tehzeeb's designs—and his community—to life. This charming, affirming story by debut author Zain Bandali will have you celebrating creativity, artistic expression, and being unapologetically yourself.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Cultural gender norms, being yourself

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***The Nguyen Kids 03 The Mystery of the Painted Fan***

Written by Linda Trinh and Illustrated by Clayton Nguyen

Published by Annick Press

When I shut the door, I hold my painted fan. I breathe in and out. I wonder . . . will Grandma Nội help me?

Thoughtful and creative, Jacob is tired of being the baby of the family. He is ready to fully express himself in all of the ways that feel right to him, but not everyone seems as eager to accept change—even his own parents. He still loves hockey, yet he also wants to try something new, even if others may not understand. Confused and frustrated, Jacob turns to the beautiful fan his Grandma Nội gave him, which features all of the Vietnamese zodiac animals. With the mysterious fan and memories of Grandma guiding him, Jacob finds the power to remain true to himself, and show his family who he could be.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Cultural gender norms, being yourself, bullying

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***Rock? Plant? Animal? How Nature Keeps Us Guessing***

Written by Etta Kaner and Illustrated by Brittany Lane

Published by Owlkids

Can you tell the difference between a rock, a plant, and an animal? While it might sound simple, the vast diversity of life on Earth can throw us some serious curveballs! Sometimes, what looks like a plant is actually an animal. Other times, what looks like an animal is actually a plant! Even things that look like living creatures can turn out to be unique rocks.

Young readers are encouraged to challenge their pre-existing ideas about the natural world in this engaging nonfiction book set up as a scientific guessing game, filled with lively illustrations and fun facts.

Each spread features a realistic illustration of either a puzzling critter, a perplexing plant, or a special stone. Every picture is accompanied by a simple prompt: rock, plant, or animal? The answer is revealed by turning the page to discover a beautifully detailed scene and a brief description of the “species.” Even for the most esteemed naturalists, the answers are hard to believe! *Rock? Plant? Animal?* lets its readers be detectives, encouraging curiosity and embracing surprise.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Animals, plants, adaptations, biology, botany

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***The Salma Series 02: Salma Writes A Book***

Written by Danny Ramadan and Illustrated by Anna Bron

Published by Annick Press

Salma is going to be a big sister! She’s determined to be the best sister ever, so she sets out to write the ultimate guidebook to siblinghood. But the more Salma learns about siblings, the more confused she gets, especially since her mama is fighting with her own brother, Khalou Dawood,

about who he loves. Can Salma figure out what it means to be a good sister before the baby arrives?

**Content/Discussion Themes**

New sibling arriving, cultural expectations of sexuality, being yourself

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***The Secret Pocket***

Written by Penny Janicki and S.K. Ali Illustrated by Carrielyn Victor

Published by Orca Book Publishers

The true story of how Indigenous girls at a residential school sewed secret pockets into their dresses to hide food and survive.

Mary was four years old when she was first taken away to the Lejac Indian Residential School. It was far away from her home and family. Always hungry and cold, there was little comfort for young Mary. Speaking Dakelh was forbidden and the nuns and priest were always watching, ready to punish. Mary and the other girls had a genius idea: drawing on the knowledge from their mothers, aunts and grandmothers who were all master sewers, the girls would sew hidden pockets in their clothes to hide food. They secretly gathered materials and sewed at nighttime, then used their pockets to hide apples, carrots and pieces of bread to share with the younger girls.

Based on the author's mother's experience at a residential school, *The Secret Pocket* is a story of survival and resilience in the face of genocide and cruelty. But it's also a celebration of quiet resistance to the injustice of residential schools and how the sewing skills passed down through generations of Indigenous women gave these girls a future, stitch by stitch.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Residential school history, resistance, survival, Indigenous People, colonization

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***The Skull (Canadian Edition): A Tyrolean Folktale***

Written and Illustrated by Jon Klassen

Published by Candlewick

Jon Klassen's signature wry humor takes a turn for the ghostly in this thrilling retelling of a traditional Tyrolean folktale.

In a big abandoned house, on a barren hill, lives a skull. A brave girl named Otila has escaped from terrible danger and run away, and when she finds herself lost in the dark forest, the lonely house beckons. Her host, the skull, is afraid of something too, something that comes every night. Can brave Otila save them both?

Steeped in shadows and threaded with subtle wit—with rich, monochromatic artwork and an illuminating author’s note—*The Skull* is as empowering as it is mysterious and foreboding.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Folk tale, spooky, violence

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***Tadpoles***

Written and Illustrated by Matt James

Published by Neal Porter Books

One rainy morning, a father and son bond over a walk through a field full of freshly formed ponds teeming with tadpoles.

In this tender reflection on the fleeting rhythms of the natural world and the enduring love of family, a boy and his father spend a morning exploring an ephemeral pond, a delicate nursery formed by rainfall, perfect for sheltering tadpoles from predators as they grow. The boy’s father doesn’t live with him anymore, and the ponds may only be temporary, but together they make memories that just might last a lifetime.

With *Tadpoles*, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award-winning author and illustrator Matt James draws from his own memories as a parent and as a child to tell a wistful story that will be instantly recognizable to any family sharing memories of exploring together. For an extra treat, additional material at the back of the book enthusiastically outlines the habitats and life cycles that make up these special amphibian spaces.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

Family relationships, changing family dynamics, nature, amphibians, tadpoles, life cycle