

Autumn Bird and the Runaway

Written by Melanie Florence and Richard Scrimger

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Two kids from different worlds form an unexpected friendship.

Cody's home life is a messy, too-often terrifying story of neglect and abuse. Cody himself is a smart kid, a survivor with a wicked sense of humour that helps him see past his circumstances and begin to try to get himself out.

Autumn is, quite literally, on the other side of the tracks from him. Her home life is loving and secure, and she is "in" with the popular girls at school, even if she has a secret life as a glasses-wearing, self-professed comic book nerd at home. And even if the pressure to fit in at school requires hours of time spent making herself look "perfect."

Returning home from a movie one evening, Autumn comes across Cody, face down in the laneway behind her house. All Cody knows is that he can't take another beating from his father like the one he just narrowly escaped. He can't go home, but he doesn't have anywhere else to go either. Autumn won't turn her back on him, even if they never really were friends at school. She agrees to let him hide out in her dad's art studio at night.

Over the next couple of days of Autumn sneaking Cody food and bandages, his story comes out. And so does hers.

Told in alternating narratives, *Autumn Bird and the Runaway* is a breathtaking collaboration by two of Canada's finest writers of books for young readers. Infused with themes of identity, belonging and compassion, it's a story that reminds us that we are all more than our circumstances, and we are all more connected than we think.

Content/Discussion Themes

Unlikely friendships, homelessness, identity, social justice, activism, peer pressure, child abuse, violence, runaways, hunger, Indigenous culture, art, compassion, empathy, sexuality, popularity, bullying, racism, and community involvement

Beatrice and Croc Harry

Written by Lawrence Hill

Published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

Beatrice, a young girl of uncertain age, wakes up all alone in a tree house in the forest. How did she arrive in this cozy dwelling, stocked carefully with bookshelves and oatmeal

accouterments? And who has been leaving a trail of clues, composed in delicate purple handwriting?

So begins the adventure of a brave and resilient Black girl's search for identity and healing in bestselling author Lawrence Hill's middle-grade debut. Though Beatrice cannot recall how or why she arrived in the magical forest of Argilia—where every conceivable fish, bird, mammal and reptile coexist, and any creature with a beating heart can communicate with any other—something within tells her that beyond this forest is a family that is waiting anxiously for her return.

Just outside her tree-house door lives Beatrice's most unlikely ally, the enormous and mercurial King Crocodile Croc Harry, who just may have a secret of his own. As they form an unusual truce and work toward their common goal, Beatrice and Croc Harry will learn more about their forest home than they ever could have imagined. And what they learn about themselves may destroy Beatrice's chances of returning home forever.

Content/Discussion Themes

Gun violence, trauma, fantasy, unlikely friendships, resilience, identity, memory loss, class, discrimination, violence, leadership, family, racial prejudice, bullying, hatred, stereotyping, self-esteem, social justice, justice, literacy, diversity, and excellence

A Bucket of Stars

Written by Suri Rosen

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

A story of two kids trying to save the world they know and heal the families they have. It's the summer of 2003 and thirteen-year-old astronomer Noah Cooper has just moved to Queensport, a small town with a vast amateur sky full of stars. There he meets Tara Dhillon, a lonely girl and aspiring filmmaker. When the two team up to produce an astronomy movie and enter a film contest, they discover a secret plan to turn their rural hamlet into a huge subdivision. Noah and Tara must use their unique skills to identify the culprits who plan on paving over the historic county — and try to save the infinite beauty of the stars. As if that's not enough to have at stake, Noah needs to win the prize money to buy a new telescope for his unemployed father — an ex-astronomer who's almost given up on the stars, as well as life on Earth. Touching on themes of activism, environmental anxiety and mental health, *A Bucket of Stars* will have readers cheering for Noah, a boy whose head is in the stars, and Tara, a girl who lives in a world of digital images — and their special bond that just might mend the world around them.

Content/Discussion Themes

Mental health, environment, neurodivergence, unemployment, family relationships, activism, death of a mother, alcohol, gun shot, astronomy, grief, film-making, and corporate greed

The Druid's Call (Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves Prequel)

Written by E.K. Johnston

Published by Random House Worlds

For as long as she can remember, Doric has felt alone. Abandoned by her human parents, she

wandered for years before being taken in by a community of Neverwinter Wood-elves. But her horns and tail proclaim a tiefling heritage, and even among the kindest of elves, her fledgling druidic abilities mark her as different from the rangers around her. As humans begin to encroach farther and farther into the once pristine woods, Doric knows she needs to master her druidic capabilities if she is to be any help to her adopted family. With no means of helping Doric themselves, her guardians see no choice but to send her somewhere she can come into her own.

Tucked among the ancient pines of the Ardeep Forest hides the Emerald Enclave, an order of warriors tasked with preserving the natural world. They fight to maintain balance between the forces of the wild and civilization, and in doing so, protect the sanctity of each.

Among their order, Doric begins to find power in her differences. But not all her fellow initiates are so capable of new growth, and as her training continues, Doric is forced to confront the very beliefs that brought her into the Enclave's fold. If she's going to protect her home, she'll have to reckon with her people, her power, and the walls she's built to keep herself safe from both.

Content/Discussion Themes

Movie tie-in, fantasy, coming of age, magic, environment, fantasy table-top role-playing game connections, sustainable living, adventure, strong female protagonist

The Fort

Written by Gordon Korman

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

From the bestselling author of *RESTART*, the story of a middle-school "band of brothers" -- five friends who need to stick together after they set up a hideout in an abandoned bomb shelter and discover that the only way to be true friends is to reveal their secrets and help each other out.

The morning after Hurricane Leo rips through the town of Canaan, residents awaken to widespread destruction -- power outages, downed branches, uprooted trees, broken windows and damaged roofs. Four eighth-grade friends -- Evan, Jason, Mitchell, and CJ -- meet to explore the devastation. The tight-knit group is dismayed to find that Evan has brought along a stray -- Ricky, who is new to their town and school and doesn't have any friends yet.

Ricky is the one to find the strange trap door that's appeared in the middle of the woods -- the door to an old bomb shelter, unearthed by the hurricane. Inside, the boys find a completely intact underground lair, complete with electricity, food, and entertainment (in the form of videocassettes). The boys vow to keep the place's existence to themselves.

Things soon get tense. Some bad locals keep snooping around. What started out as a fun place to escape soon becomes a serious refuge for one of the kids who is trying to avoid an abusive home situation. In order to save the shelter, the friends must keep its secret... and in order to save themselves, they're going to have to share their individual secrets, and build the safest place they can.

Content/Discussion Themes

Abuse, friendships, neurodivergence, bullying, step-fathers, divorce, OCD, hurricane aftermath, drug addiction, child abandonment

Into the Bright Open: A Secret Garden Remix

Written by Cherie Dimaline

Published by Feiwel & Friends

In the Remixed Classics series, authors from marginalized backgrounds reinterpret classic works through their own cultural lens to subvert the overwhelming cis het, white, and male canon. This queer YA reimagining of *The Secret Garden* subverts the cis het and white status quo of the original in a tale of family secrets wonderful and horrifying.

Mary Lennox didn't think about death until the day it knocked politely on her bedroom door and invited itself in. When a terrible accident leaves her orphaned at fifteen, she is sent to the wilderness of Georgian Bay to live with an uncle she's never met.

At first, the impassive, calculating girl believes this new manor will be just like the one she left in Toronto: cold, isolating, and anything but cheerful, where staff is treated as staff and never like family. But as she slowly allows her heart to open like the first blooms of spring, Mary comes to find that this strange place and its strange people—most of whom are Indigenous—may be what she can finally call home.

Then one night Mary discovers Olive, her cousin who has been hidden away in an attic room for years due to a "nervous condition." The girls become fast friends, and Mary wonders why this big-hearted girl is being kept out of sight and fed medicine that only makes her feel sicker. When Olive's domineering stepmother returns to the manor, it soon becomes clear that something sinister is going on.

With the help of a charming, intoxicatingly vivacious Metis girl named Sophie, Mary begins digging further into family secrets both wonderful and horrifying to figure out how to free Olive. And some of the answers may lie within the walls of a hidden, overgrown and long-forgotten garden the girls stumble upon while wandering the wilds...

Content/Discussion Themes

Racial oppression, family relationships, stepmothers, family secrets, indigenous slurs, 19th century Canada, Metis culture, grief, bullying, stereotyping, gardening, poisons, same-sex relationships, homeschooling, urban life, child abuse, friendship, and the Northern Ontario environment

The Last Saxon King (A Jump in Time Novel: 1)

Written by Andrew Varga

Published by Imbrifex Books

One jump to save all time.

Life is progressing normally for sixteen-year-old Dan Renfrew when he accidentally transports himself to England in the year 1066. He soon realizes that he's trapped there, and that's not his only astonishing discovery. Dan learns that he's descended from a long line of time jumpers—secret heroes who travel to the past and resolve glitches in the time stream that threaten to alter subsequent history. The only way Dan can return home is to set history back on its proper course in the Anglo-Saxon age. This is no easy task. A Viking horde is ravaging

England in the north while a Norman army threatens to invade from the south. In between and desperately struggling to hold on to his throne is Harold Godwinson, the newly-crowned English king. Dan is fighting to ensure that events play out correctly when he finds himself plunged into an even more lethal conflict. To save history, Dan must battle a band of malevolent time jumpers whose lust for wealth and power threatens the entire future of the world.

Content/Discussion Themes

Death of a parent, British history, time-travel, war, killing in hand-to-hand combat, romance, coming of age

Seeker of the Fox: Thieves of Shadow (Book 2)

Written by Kevin Sands

Published by Puffin Canada

A dying friend, a terrible bargain, an underwater quest, and dangerous magic . . . this adventure picks up right where *Children of the Fox* leaves off.

Rule number one: Never mess with magic. Even so, a life-or-death situation calls for Callan and his criminal friends to make a deal with the Eye—the sinister, sentient artifact they stole from a sorcerer. Something precious in exchange for a future task, and the gang has no choice but to agree. The cure—and their part of the deal—lies with the Dragon's Teeth, a pair of swords with extraordinary powers, and the search for them leads the thieves on a quest that will unravel the mystery of the Eye.

Content/Discussion Themes

Unlikely friendships, adventure, hero quests, resurrection, magic, mystery, mischief, magical elements

Simon Sort of Says

Written by Erin Bow

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Simon O’Keeffe’s biggest claim to fame should be the time his dad accidentally gave a squirrel a holy sacrament. Or maybe the alpaca disaster that went viral on YouTube. But the story the whole world wants to tell about Simon is the one he’d do anything to forget: the story in which he’s the only kid in his class who survived a school shooting.

Two years after the infamous event, twelve-year-old Simon and his family move to the National Quiet Zone—the only place in America where the internet is banned. Instead of talking about Simon, the astronomers who flock to the area are busy listening for signs of life in space. And when Simon makes a friend who’s determined to give the scientists what they’re looking for, he’ll finally have the chance to spin a new story for the world to tell.

From award-winning author Erin Bow, *Simon Sort of Says* is a breathtaking testament to the lasting echoes of trauma, the redemptive power of humour, and the courage it takes to move forward without forgetting the past.

Content/Discussion Themes

Unlikely friendships, mental health, trauma, humour, PTSD, anxiety, homeschooling, school shootings, bullying, friendship, family relationships, astronomy, physics, Catholicity, farming, funerals, autism, rabies, media harassment, panic attacks, and empathy.

Squire (A Graphic Novel)

Written by Nadia Shammass, illustrated by Sara Alfageeh

Published by Quill Tree Books, HarperAlley, imprints of HarperCollins

Aiza has always dreamt of becoming a Knight. It's the highest military honor in the once-great Bayt-Sajji Empire, and as a member of the subjugated Ornu people, Knighthood is her only path to full citizenship. Ravaged by famine and mounting tensions, Bayt-Sajji finds itself on the brink of war once again, so Aiza can finally enlist in the competitive Squire training program.

It's not how she imagined it, though. Aiza must navigate new friendships, rivalries, and rigorous training under the unyielding General Hende, all while hiding her Ornu background. As the pressure mounts, Aiza realizes that the "greater good" that Bayt-Sajji's military promises might not include her, and that the recruits might be in greater danger than she ever imagined.

Aiza will have to choose, once and for all: loyalty to her heart and heritage, or loyalty to the Empire.

Content/Discussion Themes

Coming of age, ethnic oppression, Arabic culture and history, female empowerment, military culture, betrayal, loyalty, friendship, war, resilience, honour, and justice.