



Forest Of Reading
Awards

Blue Spruce 2025 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



Asha and the Toymaker

Written and Illustrated by Sakshi Mangal

Published by Kids Can Press

Asha's Papa makes and sells wooden toys to pay for her to go to school. But Papa struggles to find buyers. And this makes him worry. He worries Asha's life will also be a struggle unless she focuses on her schoolwork, which he never had the chance to do. Can Asha's art help Papa? Will he let her try? Author and illustrator Sakshi Mangal drew inspiration from her childhood in India for this sweet picture book. It celebrates the life-changing power of art in the real world, and offers children an opportunity to explore the concept of color and the influence of the visual arts in their everyday lives. Asha's touching generosity and resourcefulness also show how even a very young child can make a difference and provide a wonderful character education lesson on initiative.

Content/Discussion Themes

Family, Resourcefulness, Creativity

The Blue Bowl

Written and Illustrated by Flo Leung

Published by Owl Kids Books

Max loves his family's Cantonese meals, like steamed rice and gai lan greens with oyster sauce, homemade dumplings, and scallion bread. But sometimes he can't help thinking about French fries, tacos, and ice cream with rainbow sprinkles. For his birthday dinner, Max is really hoping for spaghetti and meatballs, but instead he and his family are headed to Maa Maa and Ye Ye's house for a celebration dinner—and Max is pretty sure that spaghetti won't be served in the familiar blue bowls that came all the way from Hong Kong with his grandparents. But Max is delighted to discover that his understanding family has discovered a way to bring two cultures together with delicious dishes that are a combination of all the foods he loves.

Content/Discussion Themes

Family, Identity, Old and New Traditions

Harold the Iceberg Melts Down

Written by Lisa Wyzlic

Illustrated by Rebecca Syracuse

Published by RAI Feiwel and Friends

Harold is an iceberg... lettuce. (But he doesn't realize the "lettuce" part because part of his sticker has ripped off.) So one day when he sees a documentary about how the icebergs are melting, Harold starts to worry, thinking that he's melting too. As his anxiety grows and grows, and he tries to find a way to stop melting, his fellow food friends try to help him cool down in a different way.

Content/Discussion Themes

Climate Change, Mental Health and Well being, Anxiety, Friendship, Self Care

If You See a Bluebird

Written by Bahram Rahman

Illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard

Published by Pajama Press

Although his family is safe in their new country, Ali finds himself wishing he could go back to Afghanistan. A day spent picking blackberries with Nana reminds him of their old house with the mulberry tree he loved, and the day the soldiers came. He recalls their nighttime flight and the crowded buses and airplane that took him to this beautiful but unfamiliar place. When Ali and Nana spot a bluebird, she tells him to make a wish. Ali wishes to go home, but, as he comes to learn, home is not a place. Home is the love his family has for each other.

Content/Discussion Themes

Family, Immigration, Connections

The Little Regent

Written by Yewande Daniel-Ayoade

Illustrated by Ken Daley

Published by Owl Kids Books

After the king of a West African village dies, his eight-year-old daughter Abioye is made the temporary ruler, or regent, until a new king is chosen. The chiefs scoff at this decision—a little girl can't be regent! Even Abioye herself doubts whether she's up to the task. But her late father's words of wisdom comfort and guide her: Those who will rule must first learn to serve. The next day, amid meetings about taxes and titles, Abioye keeps her eyes and ears open for ways to serve her people. When she hears about their dried-up well, their leaky boats, and their hungry children, she decides to devote herself to helping the villagers instead of attending stuffy

meetings with the chiefs. With her ideas and support, the village flourishes. But as the villagers praise her leadership, the chiefs complain that she is abandoning her duties, and announce that it's time for a new king. When the time comes for the villagers to vote for their new ruler, they reject all the other candidates and crown Abioye instead, making her the first female king the village has ever had!

Content/Discussion Themes

Leadership, Family, Community, Traditions

Lost Stick

Written and Illustrated by Anoosha Syed

Published by PRHC Viking Books

Milo loves to make his owner Louise happy because she's his favorite person in the world. While they're strolling through the park one day, Louise picks a twig up off the ground and says to Milo, "This is Stick". She throws Stick across the grass and Milo excitedly brings it back to her. Milo doesn't know why they do this over and over again, but he knows that he can put a smile on her face by running after Stick. So, when Louise throws Stick a little too far, Milo is determined to go the distance too. Milo starts searching all over the neighborhood for Stick—while Louise simultaneously searches for Milo—but there's one problem: all the sticks look the same! Which one is Louise's stick? Milo sets out on a grand adventure for a little pup, and while his quest takes him all over the globe, he learns that home is where he really wants to be.

Content/Discussion Themes

Pets, Friendship, Perseverance

Mandeep's Cloudy Days

Written by Kuljinder Kaur Brar

Illustrated by Samrath Kaur

Published by Annick Press

Spending time with her dad makes Mandeep's days shine. They have cha parties, perform Bhangra shows, and best of all, they write jokes together in her favorite unicorn journal. But when Dad starts a job as a truck driver, he starts being away from home most of the week. Without Dad, storm clouds start taking over Mandeep's sunny days, casting a shadow on all the things she used to love doing. Can anything help Mandeep feel better?

Content/Discussion Themes

Feelings and Emotions, Family, Social Emotional Learning

More Than Words: So Many Ways to Say What We Mean

Written and Illustrated by Roz MacLean

Published by RAI Henry Holt & Company

Nathan doesn't say much. He sure has a lot on his mind, though. At school, Nathan quietly observes the ways his peers communicate. Even when they're not talking, they're expressing themselves in all sorts of ways! By witnessing the beauty of communication diversity, Nathan learns and shows his classmates the essential lesson: Not only does everyone have something to say, but seeking to understand one another can be the greatest bridge to friendship and belonging.

Content/Discussion Themes

Understanding, Empathy, Communication, Connections with others

Still My Tessa

Written by Sylv Chang

Illustrated by Mathias Ball

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Evelyn is worried about Tessa. Tessa doesn't want to play the same games they used to play together, but Evelyn is determined to find new ways to connect with her older sibling. And she is also learning to see Tessa as a non-binary person by learning to use new pronouns for them. Evelyn learns very quickly that it isn't hard, but she sees that others still find it difficult. Through the course of this heartfelt story, Evelyn reaffirms her connection to her sibling and shows those around them how to make the effort to support Tessa - with love. Back matter includes information on gender and ways to be a kind and effective ally.

Content/Discussion Themes

Gender Identity, Non-Binary, Pronouns, Siblings, Allyship

When the Stars Came Home

Written by Brittany Luby

Illustrated by Natasha Donovan

Published by Manda, Little Brown & Company

When Ojiig moves to the city with his family, he misses everything they left behind. Most of all, he misses the sparkling night sky. Without the stars watching over him, he feels lost. His parents try to help, but nothing seems to work. Not glow-in-the-dark sticker stars, not a star-shaped nightlight. But then they have a new idea for how to make Ojiig feel better — a special quilt

stitched through with family stories that will wrap Ojiig in the warmth of knowing who he is and where he came from. Join this irresistible family as they discover the power of story and tradition to make a new place feel like home.

Content/Discussion Themes

Family, Connections, Traditions, Storytelling, Belonging