



2025 Silver Birch Express Nominees Annotations – Annotations and Content



Always Beginning

Written by Candace Savage

Illustrated by Rachel Wada

Published by Greystone Books

For kids with big questions comes a mesmerizing celebration of the universe and our place in it, perfect for STEM learning.

The story of the universe is enough to send our minds spinning with wonder! This awe-inspiring picture book explores the science behind the start of our universe and how we came to be a part of it, from the Big Bang and the beginning of life on Earth all the way up until today.

Designed for readers 4-8, *Always Beginning* includes:

- Science-based information on how the world was created, and how life on Earth started
- Facts about our solar system and the Big Bang.
- Backmatter explaining the science, including a timeline of the origins of the universe through the ages of fish, reptiles, mammals, and humans.

Told with reassuring warmth and mesmerizing art, *Always Beginning* captures the immensity and strangeness of our galaxy.

Content/Discussion Themes

Solar system, origins of the universe, Big Bang theory, STEAM

Birds on the Brain

Written by Uma Krishnaswami

Illustrated by Julianna Swaney

Published by Groundwood Books

The sequel to the award-winning *Book Uncle and Me* features bird lover Reeni and her quest to save her city's bird count event when the mayor tries to shut it down.

Reeni is wild about birds! So when she and her best friend, Yasmin, have to pick a survey topic for a school project, asking their neighbors what they know about birds is an obvious choice. They are shocked to learn that no one — not one single person! — has heard about Bird Count India and the major event it is about to launch all over the country. Thousands of birdwatchers will be out counting birds as part of a global movement. Global

means world, and isn't this city part of the world? How come people don't seem to care about the threats to city birds? And why is the mayor intentionally thwarting their city's bird count event?

Reeni and Yasmin enlist help from Book Uncle, Reeni's family and even their school bus driver. They must get people interested in the bird count, get them to ask the city government to support the event. After all, what's good for the birds is good for all of us ... right?

A funny, triumphant story about learning to advocate for both the human and non-human inhabitants of your community.

Content/Discussion Themes

Environmental issues, classism, environmental activism, telling the truth

Dragon on the Loose

Written by Marty Chan

Illustrated by Grace Chen

Published by Orca Book Publishers

When eleven-year-old Hailey and her friend Kyle make a wish on a Chinese lion statue, they accidentally bring a dragon to life.

Scared at first, the kids soon realize that Zhu the dragon means them no harm, and they show the dragon around their city. It's all fun and games until Animal Control gets wind of a wild creature on the loose. The kids have to find a way to send their new friend back home before she's taken away.

Content/Discussion Themes

Magical adventure, Chinese culture, friendship, quest, grieving

Ghost Girl

Written by Brooke Carter

Illustrated by Alyssa Waterbury

Published by Orca Book Publishers

Ten-year-old Sly is spending the weekend with their fortune-telling grandmother at the mysterious Madsen Mansion.

It's Samhain, a time when the spirits can cross over into the living world, and the old mansion has secrets whispering in the rafters and unused rooms. When Sly and their grandmother hear a voice calling, Sly unlocks a cabinet that reveals a ghost girl who is trapped in a mirror. Then they accidentally speak the words of the spell that enchanted the girl in the first place, and Sly and their grandmother risk being imprisoned in the mirror

as well. With the clock ticking till the end of Samhain, it's up to Sly to solve the ghost's riddles and puzzles and locate a long-lost book of spells in hopes of freeing them all.

Content/Discussion Themes

Haunted house, ghosts, riddles, clues, supernatural

Lost and Found: Based on A True Story

Written and Illustrated by Mei Yu

Published by Union Square Kids

“This bright and bubbly early reader graphic novel, based on debut creator Yu’s own immigration story, validates the sometimes overwhelming nature of learning an unfamiliar language as a child in a new country.”
—Publishers Weekly

Being the new kid in school is scary enough. But imagine what it would be like if you were the new kid in a new school, in a new country. That’s exactly the situation Mei Yu finds herself in when her family moves from China to Canada. As she navigates her new school, she discovers a unique way to learn English and makes a new friend along the way in this heartwarming story based on the author’s own experiences.

Content/Discussion Themes

Immigration, multi language learners, being the new kid at school

Odd Couples: A Guide to Unlikely Animal Pairs

Written by Maria Birmingham

Illustrated by Raz Latif

Published by OwlKids Books

A fun and engaging guessing game that demonstrates how even the most unusual animal pairs can be two of a kind.

Hummingbirds and giraffes, sharks and snails, meerkats and bees ... at first glance, these pairings may seem as different as can be. But guess what? Hummingbirds and giraffes are both hummers, sharks and snails both have thousands of sharp teeth, and meerkats and bees are both huggers.

Featuring eight unexpected animal pairings, this informative and entertaining book gives readers an implicit lesson in empathy, highlighting that we are all more alike than we think.

Written in an interactive question-and-answer format perfect for reading out loud, *Odd Couples* is full of nonfiction fun with lots of visual humour and appeal.

Content/Discussion Themes

Animals, Biology, animal features, comparisons of ways that animals and humans are alike

Operation Cupcake

Written and Illustrated by Bambi Edlund

Published by Kids Can Press

In this hilarious story about a couple of clever mice on a quest for a tasty treat, readers get a “paws-on” introduction to six simple machines.

Ginger and Mac are pros at snatching up delicious tidbits and bringing them back to their cozy mousehole to eat. Today, though, their mission is complicated. Their target is an especially aromatic vanilla cupcake with pink buttercream frosting. Only, it's (a) too big for them to carry, (b) on a high counter within leaping distance of both the resident cat and dog and (c) under a heavy glass cake dome. Luckily, these mice love nothing more than solving a challenging problem (except maybe eating buttercream frosting!). Ginger is sure they can use simple machines to get the job done. But is she right?

Bambi Edlund has created a fun way to teach children about the basic concepts of mechanical physics. Ginger and Mac's adventure story is told in panels with dialogue boxes, while the science behind how simple machines work is explained throughout the story in fully illustrated sections that never interrupt the flow of the narrative. The result is a highly entertaining book that gives readers a clear and easy-to-understand overview of the six simple machines – inclined plane, lever, pulley, wheel and axle, screw, and wedge – and how they make life easier. It's sure to inspire readers to search for examples of simple machines that exist all around them. With loads of hands-on activities that can be done at home or in the classroom, this is an excellent choice for teaching elementary physics and engineering.

Content/Discussion Themes

Engineering, Simple Machines, Physics, STEAM, Inquiry Process, Baking

The Salma Series 03: Salma Joins the Team

Written By Danny Ramadan

Illustrated by Anna Bron

Published by Annick Press

Salma dreams of becoming a champion swimmer like her hero, Olympian Yusra Mardini. So when she signs up for her school's swim club, it feels like her dreams could come true . . . until mean comments from older girls at the pool and women at her mosque spark body image and self-esteem issues. But with the help of her close friends and family—the team that always has her back—Salma is ready to claim her place in the pool.

Content/Discussion Themes

Water sports, Muslim, swimming, Social Emotional Learning

Sarah Ponakey, Storycatcher and Âhâsiw's Forest Powwow

Written By Sita MacMillan

Illustrated by Azby Whitecalf

Published by Annick Press

Sarah Ponakey has moved to the city from her home community with her mom and it's the pits! She misses her Kôhkom, her best friend Eden, and the forests around her community. She's had a hard time making new friends at school but at least she keeps in touch with Eden through meticulously written letters with very big words. After a particularly tough day where she nearly loses her favorite stuffed animal, Âhâsiw, and is brushed off by her mom, Sarah finds herself transported to a magical forest powwow . . .

Accompanied by a life-sized Âhâsiw in his beautiful regalia, Sarah watches in excitement as a chipmunk emcees, and bears play the host drum at her first ever powwow. The more she sees, the more her confidence grows. As she joins in the celebration, Sarah discovers that she can connect to her Cree culture no matter where she is. Her Kôhkom's going to love this story! Âhâsiw's Forest Powwow, the first book from debut children's author Sita MacMillan, features Cree words throughout the story and a note to the reader. Azby Whitecalf's dynamic illustrations bring life to this warm, charming, and funny introduction to Sarah Ponakey, the storycatcher.

Content/Discussion Themes

Indigenous, making friends, bedtime & dreams

Whales and Us: Our Shared Journey

Written by India Desjardins

Translated by David Warriner

Illustrated by Nathalie Dion

Published by Orca Book Publishers

In the course of history, humans have had a negative impact on the lives of whales.

There are many stories and legends about whales. Humans have long been fascinated by these majestic creatures. Maybe it's their immense size or their mysterious songs. But how many of the stories are true? What do we really know about whales? And are we a threat to these creatures that captivate us?

Author India Desjardins offers a glimpse into the lives of whales—their history, environment, biology and behaviour. She explores our relationships with whales and the dangers that threaten their existence, and she shares what we can do to help keep them safe. *Whales and Us* is a beautifully illustrated tribute to these fragile giants and a powerful call to action, with the hope that they will never stop roaming the world's oceans.

Content/Discussion Themes

Whales, Ocean Life, Ecosystems, Water Sustainability, Effects of Human Life on Living Things