

Red Maple 2027 Nominees – Annotations and Content

Absolutely No Body Parts

Written by Valerie Sherrard

Published in 2026 by DCB Young Readers

200 pages

Can't face cleaning out your garage, shed, basement, or attic? Call Gross Busters Nick and Khenan, and they'll take care of the disgusting chores you've been dreading! What starts out as a summer job to earn a quick buck for hockey tickets quickly grows into a bustling cleaning business. Everyone in Glummingford, it seems, needs someone to sort through their hoarder stash, tackle their rotting rubble, or manage their sidewalk sale. With jobs pouring in from all over town, Nick and Khenan have no choice but to hire a helper in Florrie, an eccentric eleven-year-old who doesn't mind wading through foul heaps of trash — in fact, she loves it! Then, on a job, the Gross Busters expose a hidden secret that sends shockwaves through the whole town, stirring up tension, gossip, fear, and a much bigger mess than any of them could've ever expected.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Realistic fiction, mystery, humour, entrepreneurship, poverty, bullying, community-building, friendship, work experience, commitment, determination, finances, child abuse, family, old age, loneliness, scientific discovery, poverty, substance abuse, redemption, trauma, first love, and grief.

Among Ghosts

Written by Rachel Hartman

Published by OwlKids Books

Set in the world of *New York Times* bestseller *Seraphina*, a boy on the run from a dragon — among other dangers — seeks refuge in a haunted abbey in this wholly original ghost story about what haunts us, and what connects us.

A few things to know about the town of St. Muckle's: It's too out-of-the-way to interest greedy lords, and too damp and muddy for marauding dragons to burn. And anyone, from a humble serf to a runaway nun, may earn their freedom by living for a year and a day within the town walls. Seven years ago, Charl and his mother fled to St. Muckle's and made it their safe-haven, building a new life in this so-called Peasant's Paradise. But when Charl sees something impossible — a ghost — soon the embers of his past

are threatening to engulf his world in flame. A tragic accident is quickly followed by murder, a deadly plague, and a mercenary dragon.

Charl manages to escape to an abandoned abbey outside of town, but finds no safety within those ruined walls. A treacherous nun, a chorus of murdered girls, and the fearsome Battle Bishop await, ready to ensnare him in a complex web of history, magic, and fate. For some things should never be forgotten, however much they haunt us, and Charl will need all his wisdom and resiliency if he is to fight for the world he knows . . . and the people he calls home.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Medieval fantasy fiction, dragons, devilish lords, abusive spouses, bullies, numerous ghosts, pandemic, murder, trans and gay characters, killing with swords, magic.

The Book of Jupiter

Written by Robin Stevenson

Published in 2026 by Kids Can Press

220 pages

For fans of *The Wrong Way Home* and *My Life with the Liars*, this gripping coming-of-age story follows a girl who must wrestle with what to do when she realizes she's lived almost her entire life inside a cult.

Thirteen-year-old Ara lives in an isolated community called Jupiter Station with her family. They abide by the teachings of Father Jupiter, their self-appointed leader, and follow the strict rules laid out in his Book of Jupiter. Ara has always believed what she's been taught, including Father Jupiter's prophecy that the family will soon become stardust and "Ascend to the planet Jupiter," where they'll live together forever. But when her older brother Leo reveals his doubts about Father Jupiter, particularly his story about how they became part of the family, Ara must decide what to do, as she starts to realize he may be right.

Award-winning author Robin Stevenson has written a chilling tale of awakening that readers won't be able to put down. The gripping story with unexpected plot twists will keep readers guessing to the very end. The fictional world is based on the author's research of real-world cults, providing fascinating insight into how cults function and how a person's perceptions of reality can be skewed. Ara's struggle will raise questions for readers about trusting one's instincts and what truths are worth uncovering.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Religious cults, murder, family, love, corrupting influence of power, self-discovery, personal transformation, belonging, justice, moral choice, coming of age, friendship,

community, caring for a baby, conversion, truth vs. lies, terrorist plots, death, sustainability, beliefs, conformity, and grief.

GO: Stories

Written by Deborah Ellis

Published in 2026 by Groundwood Books / House of Anansi Press

226 pages

From Deborah Ellis, the bestselling author of *Sit* and *Step*, comes a new short story collection about the moments when the adult world disappoints, and it's time to pick up ... and Go.

Brodie's parents and brother expect him to step up for Team Family, even when Team Family has no intention of returning the favor. Joanie is left to take a city bus for the first time with her impossibly cranky grandmother and learns to stand up for what she wants. Alone in a foreign country, without money, shelter or papers, Liberi steals an expensive purse from a tourist and then figures out what to do with his feelings of guilt. Bastien, the foster kid no one wants, discovers his own inner strength when a wildfire ravages the town. And Kelsey and his brother find themselves robbing graves in the middle of the night, but for the best possible reason.

When the grownups turn their backs, the kids in these stories find a way to go forward. Sometimes it takes a little magical thinking. Sometimes a small act of bravery. Sometimes extending a hand to someone else. But always a realization that there is somewhere to go, if you pay attention, take action and refuse to give in to the dark.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Short stories, resilience, self-worth, determination, diverse locations (rural America, remote China, Philippines), juvenile detention, humiliation, homelessness, emotional abuse, impossible relatives, cruelty, immigration, deception, persecution, foster families, and poverty.

The Inbetweens [graphic novel]

Written and illustrated by Faith Erin Hicks

Published in 2026 by First Second Books

240 pages

A new tween graphic novel by bestselling author Faith Erin Hicks. Perfect for fans of *Sweet Valley Twins* and *Ride On!*

Twin sisters Ash and Sloane are headed to animation camp—where their courage, drive, and sisterly bond will be put to the test!

Twin sisters Sloane and Ash are two peas in a pod, and they do everything together: watch movies, attend classes, and most importantly, draw! So when the summer animation classes of their dreams are about to start, they can barely contain their excitement!

Well...Ash is excited but Sloane is surprised to find she isn't as jubilant about it, which makes no sense, since she loves art. Meanwhile, Ash discovers that just because you love something, doesn't mean you'll automatically be good at it, and she struggles under the weight of her own expectations and those of her teacher's. Soon, the trials of challenging classwork and new friendships drive a wedge between the twins. Can their bond survive the summer?

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Realistic fiction, graphic novels, twin dynamics, #ownvoice, queer, coming of age, art camps, fear, self-doubt, friendship, acceptance, 2SLGBTQI+, old age/dementia, anxiety, and BIPOC.

Lydia Cooper is a Lie

Written by Meaghan McIsaac

Published in 2026 by Aladdin Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division

305 pages

A girl who doesn't know she's in witness protection accidentally reveals her identity and puts her life in danger in this twisty upper middle grade thriller.

For as long as Lydia can remember, it's been her and her dad against the world. But while she loves him, her dad is so overprotective. Well-versed in the dangers of the internet from his job in cybersecurity, he refuses to let Lydia be online without heavy parental controls, and social media is out of the question.

One day, when all Lydia's friends are invited to a movie night at her crush's house—except her because she's not in the group chat—Lydia gets fed up with her dad's rules and makes a social media account. Then an armed intruder shows up at her home. Clearly, there's more to her family's past than she knows.

On the run and separated from her dad, Lydia will need to uncover the secrets her dad has been keeping if she wants to reunite with him. But how can Lydia know who to trust along the way when she doesn't even know who she is?

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Suspense fiction, social media, witness protection programs, family secrets, fathers and daughters, cyber security, popularity, violence, guns, cybercrime, intrigue, betrayal, guilt, and abandonment.

Sam

Written by Eric Walters

Published in 2025 by DCB Young Readers, an imprint of Cormorant Books Inc.

225 pages

Redheaded and orphaned Sam can't seem to stay out of trouble. His latest incident — defending himself by hitting the high school quarterback in the face with a can of soda — lands him in the Johnson “Blue Gables” Juvenile Center while he awaits trial. Sam needs to keep his nose clean, but can he control his temper when he's targeted by a long-term Gables resident?

When Sam is given a reading assignment, he thinks he'll have no interest in a classic book about another redheaded orphan. But he soon realizes that he's found a kindred spirit in the book, and maybe even an unexpected source of hope.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Juvenile detention system, foster care, grief, trauma, friendships, justice, revenge, anger, resilience, forgiveness, empathy, literature, counselling, education, bullying.

Skygull Calamity

Written by Bronwyn Fairchild

Published in 2026 by Annick Press

300 pages

Mortal Engines meets Impossible Creatures in a rollicking steampunk adventure where a boy sets out to save his city in the sky from climate disaster.

When Blue fails to get into the Zephyr Academy, humiliating himself and losing his dream of becoming a famous pilot, he doesn't think things can get any worse. Then, forced to take a dead-end apprenticeship with the erratic local weathermaster, he learns a devastating storm is headed for Nova City and the authorities are covering it up. A braver kid would try to warn people, but Blue just wants to keep his head down. At least until the weathermaster's flying ship comes under attack and Blue finds himself untethered, loose to the winds, alone except for a mysterious stowaway named Tate. As the threatening weather intensifies, Blue and Tate seek its source, desperate to save their home. But Blue's not sure he can trust this girl who seems to be keeping secrets. He's even less sure he can trust himself after all his failures, especially when a terrifying

discovery puts their mission—and their lives—at risk. Immersive and action-packed, this imaginative debut celebrates everyday bravery and the courage it takes to be your true self.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Steampunk adventure, family relationships, friendship, bullying, acceptance, anxiety, neurodiversity, betrayal, bravery, loyalty, scientific discovery, climate change, power struggles, air/water travel, emotional struggles, and privilege.

Something's Up with Arlo

Written by Matteo L Cerilli

Published in 2025 by HarperCollins

304 pages

A spooky-sweet middle-grade novel about remembering the past in order to brave the future, for fans of Anne Ursu.

Twelve-year-old Emily Nero's best friend is a ghost.

For as long as Nero can remember, she's been "haunted" by Arlo. He's always had her back, especially as Nero navigates her never-impressed parents, and being the "weird girl" at school. When Nero earns the chance to start Grade 7 at a prestigious private school, she's hopeful that things will change for the better.

But on Nero's first day at her new school, something's up with Arlo, something very wrong: her best friend has suddenly turned on her. Glitching electronics, flickering lights, bad smells, and cold drafts are only the beginning. Arlo is changing into something scary. It's up to Nero to find out why, and how to help him, even as the answers bring her hauntingly close to home.

Spooky and sweet in turns, this debut middle grade combines Italian witchcraft, fraught families, and friendships old and new to explore the stories we tell ourselves, and the courage it takes to make our truths heard.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

Ghost stories, bullying, parent-child relationships, friendship, anger, sexual identity, gender roles, communication, empathy, anxiety, loneliness, change, jealousy, inter-generational trauma, ghost hunting, paranormal, death.

The Vanished Ones

Written by Chad Lucas

Published in 2025 by Amulet Books, a registered trademark of Harry N. Adams, Inc.

336 pages

From award-winning author Chad Lucas comes an enthralling new story about a strange island where boys go missing—and the two boys intent on uncovering the truth about it.

On Rhodenroode Island, a remote colony of the Homeland, there sits a Mission on the Hill, where boys are taken in and taught the ways of the faith.

Darian is the only trainee of his race there, and he doesn't remember how he came to the Mission. All he remembers are brown hands and the belly of a ship. Life among the other boys and the cantankerous Brothers is not always easy, but Darian is determined to live up to the lofty calling the leaders of the Mission have laid out for him: that one day he will carry the Sacred Word to places it has yet to reach.

But when another trainee at the Mission disappears—the latest in a string of vanishings—Darian is determined to solve the mystery that begins to shake his faith in what he's always been taught.

When he and his friend Micah sneak away from the Mission and head east to see what they can learn about the rebel sect supposedly responsible for the vanishings, they discover that the island holds far more secrets than they ever could have imagined—and somehow, they must save the other boys at the Mission from a danger that's even greater than they realized.

Content/ Discussion Themes:

This book discusses children experiencing harm in the care of a religious institution, including brief depictions of physical violence; other themes: Afrofuturist, anti-colonialism, dystopian, adventure quest, disinformation, authoritarian leaders, the importance of history, justice, cruelty, discipline, racism, community, same sex relationships, and individuality.
