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Booklist Reader

Booklist
Leading book discovery
March 2026

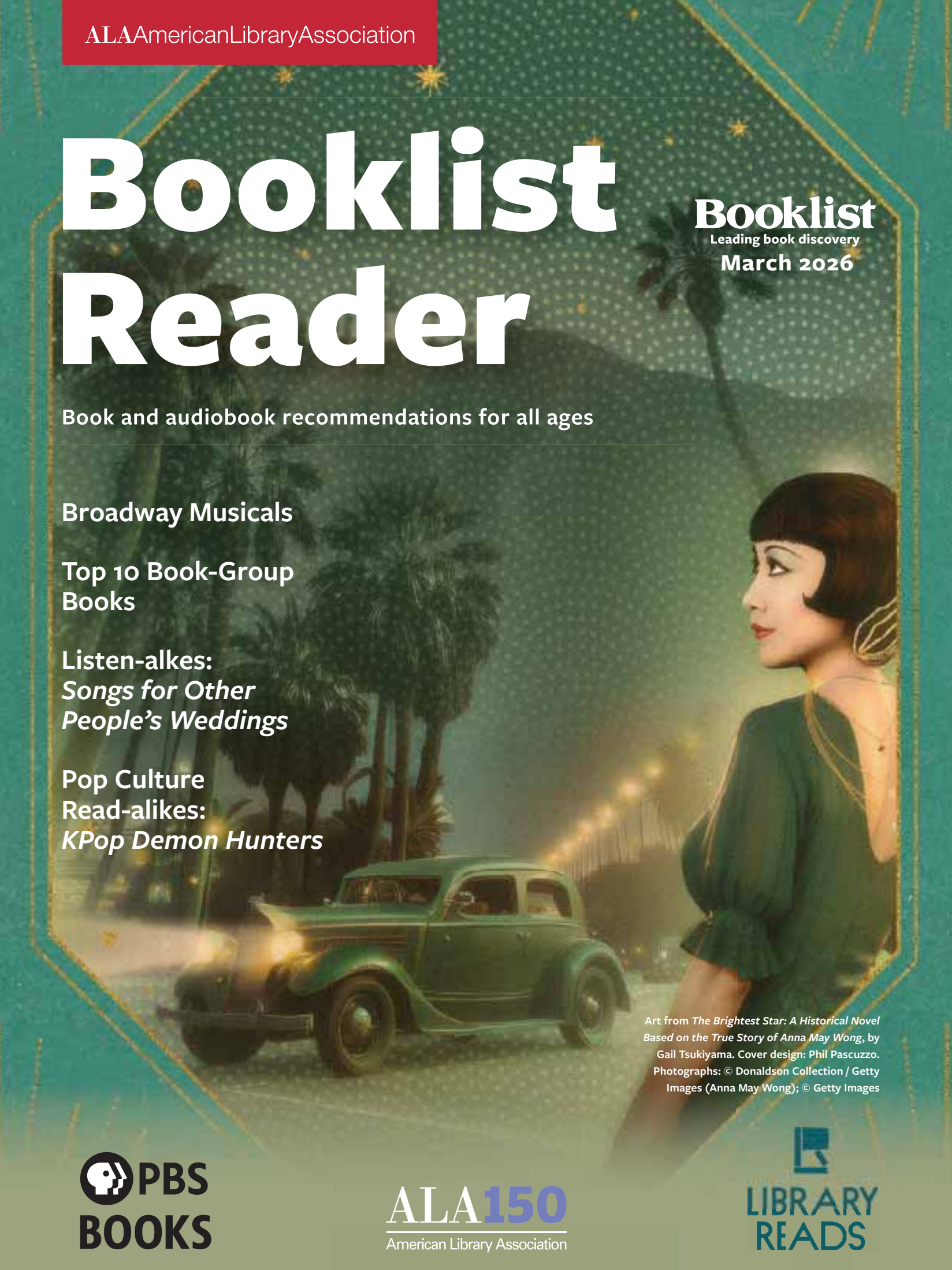
Book and audiobook recommendations for all ages

Broadway Musicals

Top 10 Book-Group Books

Listen-alikes: *Songs for Other People's Weddings*

Pop Culture Read-alikes: *KPop Demon Hunters*



Art from *The Brightest Star: A Historical Novel Based on the True Story of Anna May Wong*, by Gail Tsukiyama. Cover design: Phil Pascuzzo. Photographs: © Donaldson Collection / Getty Images (Anna May Wong); © Getty Images

PBS BOOKS

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Art from *The Brightest Star: A Historical Novel Based on the True Story of Anna May Wong*, by Gail Tsukiyama. Cover design: Phil Pascuzzo. Photographs: © Donaldson Collection / Getty Images (Anna May Wong); © Getty Images. With the permission of the publisher, HarperVia, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

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From the Publisher

As usual, we present a bounty of recommendations in this issue, but I'm focused on the musical entries. See "Broadway Musicals" by Donna Seaman (p.4) and "*KPop Demon Hunters*" by Kelly Ferreira (p.24). Years ago, I was a professional French Horn player, and now, motivated by these reading recommendations and life in general, I have a desire to dust off my horn and get back to my roots. Classical music has influenced me since I was about 13! And my interest in *KPop Demon Hunters*? Simple. My daughter is obsessed! I hope you enjoy this issue of *Booklist Reader* as well and even find inspiration here to get back to your roots.

—George Kendall
gkendall@ala.org

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Top 10

Arts Books

These outstanding art books cast light on film and television history, musical innovation and pop triumphs, and a long-cloaked force in surrealism.

Art from *This Is Rhythm*.

American Noir Film: From The Maltese Falcon to Gone Girl. By M. Keith Booker. 2024. Rowman & Littlefield.

Booker's riveting history tracks American film noir from the influence of exiled German filmmakers and French critics through the now-classic first wave to neo-noir films, such as *Chinatown* in 1974, and revisionary noirs, including *Basic Instinct* (1992).

Black in Blues: How a Color Tells the Story of My People. By Imani Perry. 2025. Ecco.

Perry offers an impressionistic cultural history of the African diaspora through its connections to the color blue in music, dance, folklore, art, and literature.

Burning Down the House: Talking Heads and the New York Scene That Transformed Rock. By Jonathan Gould. 2025. Mariner.

Gould begins this finely detailed history of an era-defining band in June 1975, when Talking Heads made its professional debut at CBGB on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Carson the Magnificent. By Bill Zehme and Mike Thomas. 2024. Simon & Schuster.

Zehme and Thomas offer a richly researched portrait of the legendary host of *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, who was at the helm from 1962 to 1992 and was beloved for his disarming charm and sardonic humor.

Desi Arnaz: The Man Who Invented Television. By Todd S. Purdum. 2025. Simon & Schuster.

Purdum gives gifted performer and comedian Arnaz his due as a savvy businessman and bold artistic innovator who helped shape the early days of television, most significantly with the revolutionary, still-cherished 1950s comedy *I Love Lucy*.

Art from *Desi Arnaz*.

Hit Girls: Britney, Taylor, Beyoncé, and the Women Who Built Pop's Shiniest Decade. By Nora Princiotti. 2025. Ballantine.

Princiotti explores how major technological and social shifts in the 2000s led to women artists, for once, comprising over half of the 25 top-grossing performers.

Lorne: The Man Who Invented Saturday Night Live. By Susan Morrison. 2025. Random.

Saturday Night Live is a veritable institution, inspiring Morrison to incisively portray the powerful man behind it all, the brilliant, enigmatic, and influential Lorne Michaels.

Sublime Light: Tapestry Art of DY Begay. Ed. by Cécile R. Ganteaume and Jennifer McLerran. 2024. Smithsonian.

A fluency in color and "reverence for life" distinguishes the fiber creations of renowned Diné artist Begay, a fifth-generation weaver, whose tapestries and life are illuminated in this beautiful volume.

Surreal: The Extraordinary Life of Gala Dalí. By Michèle Gerber Klein. 2025. Harper.

As Klein documents in this landmark biography, Salvador Dalí would not have been an international sensation without his more-sophisticated wife, manager, muse, and soulmate, Gala.

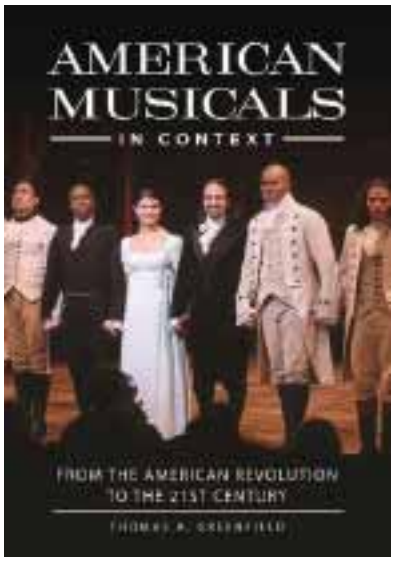
This Is Rhythm: Ella Jenkins, Children's Music, and the Long Civil Rights Movement. By Gayle F. Wald. 2025. Univ. of Chicago.

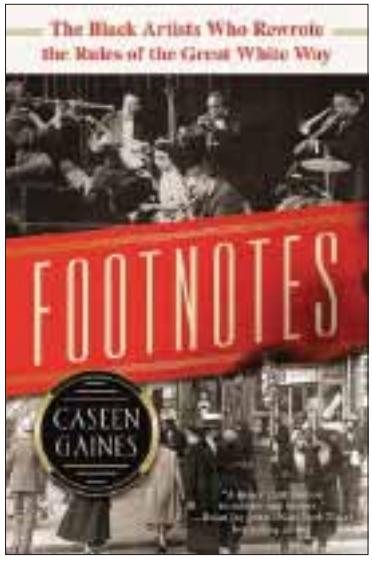
Wald recounts the singular life of Ella Jenkins (1924–2024), beloved "First Lady of Children's Music" and civil rights activist who revolutionized children's music and music education.

Broadway Musicals

by Donna Seaman

The Broadway musical is beloved for its dynamic mix of artistry and entertainment and of story, music, stars, visual splendor, and overall pizzazz. As we mark the eleventh anniversary of the (let's just go with it) revolutionary *Hamilton*, these histories and memoirs offer social context and behind-the-scenes revelations.





American Musicals in Context: From the American Revolution to the 21st Century. By Thomas A. Greenfield. 2021. ABC-CLIO.

This readable and illuminating reference features the playbooks of 20 musicals that are based on events in U.S. history and first performed between 1925 and 2016. Such hits as *Hair*, *Hamilton*, and *1776* are here, along with *I'd Rather be Right*, *Shenandoah*, and *Warpaint*. Greenfield summarizes the plot, historical source, and political viewpoint of each play; profiles playwrights, composers, performers, musicians, and producers; and chronicles each musical's critical reception.

Failing Up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher, and Never Stop Learning. By Leslie Odom, Jr. 2018. Feiwel and Friends.

Tony and Grammy Award–winning Odom, who performed in *Rent* at age 17, is best known as the original actor in the role of Aaron Burr in the hip-hop musical sensation *Hamilton*. In this memoir/self-help book, he shares his experiences and bestows sage advice for aspiring performers and anyone struggling to pursue a passion.

Footnotes: The Black Artists Who Rewrote the Rules of the Great White Way. By Caseen Gaines. 2021. Sourcebooks.

The remarkable story of the 1921 trailblazing, all-Black musical, *Shuffle Along*, is explored by pop-culture historian Gaines, who introduces the innovative creators Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Flournoy Miller, and Aubrey Lyles and captures the historic moment and the many issues involved.

How Sondheim Can Change Your Life. By Richard Schoch. 2024. Atria.

Schoch pays lively and expert tribute to one of the gods of musical theater by considering 13 of Sondheim's shows, from 1959's *Gypsy* to 1979's *Sweeney Todd* to 2023's *Here We Are*, discussing the songs and characters and parsing each show's overall meaning amidst coverage of productions and performers.

In the Heights: Finding Home. By Lin-Manuel Miranda and others. 2021. Random.

The radical idea for a musical combining rap and salsa came to Lin-Manuel Miranda when he was a college sophomore, propelling him to work diligently for 21 years against great odds to create *In the Heights*, his paean to his beloved home, New York City's Washington Heights. Each stage of development and collaboration is candidly described and documented in this ebullient scrapbook.

The In-Between: Intimate and Candid Moments of Broadway Stars. By Jenny Anderson. 2025. Applause.

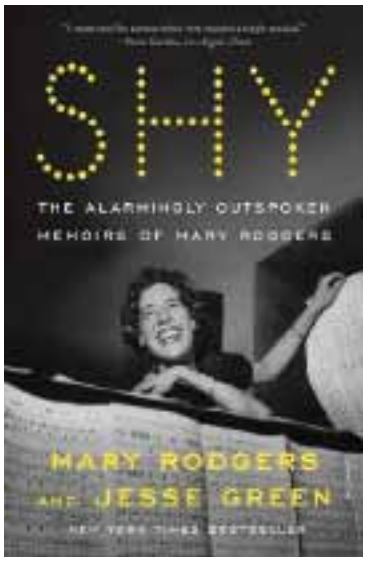
In the theater, the in-between moments are those in which actors warm up, don their costumes, apply makeup, and calm their nerves before hitting the stage. Jenny Anderson's stunning photographs capture these private interludes at such shows as *Hamilton*, *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *Kinky Boots*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Waitress*, and *Hadestown*, while her subjects include Patti LuPone, Jonathan Groff, Ben Platt, Leslie Odom Jr., Kelli O'Hara, and Chita Rivera.

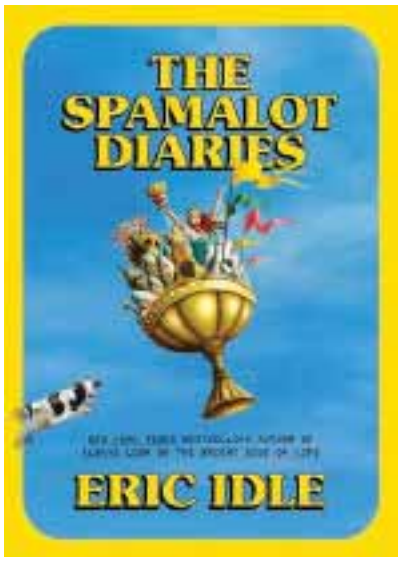
Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Education of an Artist. By Daniel Pollack-Pelzner. 2025. Simon & Schuster.

Lin-Manuel Miranda is "a cultural omnivore," observes Pollack-Pelzner in this insightful look into Miranda's complex, magpie mind and insatiable curiosity, synthesizing his Puerto Rican heritage with hip-hop and American history, artistic development, struggles, and phenomenal success.

Putting It Together: How Stephen Sondheim and I Created Sunday in the Park with George. By James Lapine. 2021. Farrar.

Sunday in the Park with George dramatizes the creation





of painter Georges Seurat's masterpiece, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. Lapine, whose honors include Tony, Drama Desk, Pulitzer, and Peabody awards, recounts the creation of the landmark musical with Stephen Sondheim, the start to a phenomenal collaboration.

Shy: The Alarmingly Outspoken Memoirs of Mary Rodgers. By Mary Rodgers and Jesse Green. 2022. Farrar.

Mary Rodgers, the daughter of Broadway composer Richard Rodgers, had only one real musical success, the 1959 show, *Once upon a Mattress*. But her best-selling children's novel, *Freaky Friday*, was spun off into movies and TV shows, and Rodgers knew everyone on Broadway and tells many remarkable tales.

Singular Sensation: The Triumph of Broadway. By Michael Riedel. 2020. Simon & Schuster/Avid Reader.

New York theater critic Riedel considers the 1990s "a decade of profound change on Broadway" and here pulls back the curtain on some of its most popular shows, including Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard*, the phenomenon that was *Rent,* the 1992 revival of *Guys and Dolls,* Edward Albee's comeback, the story of *Angels in America*, and much more.

Slow Train Coming: Bob Dylan's Girl from the North Country and Broadway's Rebirth. By Todd Almond. 2025. Bloomsbury Academic.

Slow Train Coming, named after one of Bob Dylan's "born again" albums, starts out as a memoir, but singer, composer, and actor Almond, who debuted on Broadway playing Elias in Conor McPherson's musical adaptation of Dylan's "Girl from the North Country," decided to interview everyone involved in the show to more fully understand his experience.

Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway Revolution. By Todd S. Purdum. 2018. Holt.

Although the biographies of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein are threaded throughout, Purdum is more focused on the music and how this most successful of writing duos crafted some of the finest musicals to grace the American stage, including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The Sound of Music*.

The Spamalot Diaries. By Eric Idle. 2024. 208p. Crown.

Bringing *Spamalot*, the musical based loosely on the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, to the Broadway stage was no easy feat, as Idle, who wrote the playbook, with John Du Prez composing the score and Mike Nichols directing, recorded in his diary, noting the joys, frustrations, and unexpected moments of discovery.

Theater Kid: A Broadway Memoir. By Jeffrey Seller. 2025. Simon & Schuster.

Producer Seller is the recipient of 22 Tony Awards and has the distinction of being the only producer of two Pulitzer Prize–winning musicals (*Rent* and *Hamilton*). He blends personal and professional stories in this forthright and compelling theater memoir.

Voice Lessons: A Sisters Story. By Cara Mentzel. 2017. St. Martin's.

Idina Menzel had an adoring fan long before she became famous for being the voice of Elsa in *Frozen*, and Elphaba in *Wicked*, even before she was Maureen in *Rent*: her little sister, Cara. In this loving memoir, Cara Mentzel details her relationship with Idina, including moving accounts of being at her sister's side at Broadway opening nights and awards ceremonies; she also tells her own story.

Reserve These Reads

Adult

Get your hands on these hotly anticipated books, all out this month.

Fiction

The Bookstore Diaries. By Susan Mallery. MIRA.
A bookseller with a need to control everything—despite the best efforts of her ex, her sister, and the handsome contractor she hired to keep her sister in town—finds herself inadvertently becoming the keeper of her small town's secrets in the latest feel-good novel from best-selling Mallery.

Daughter of Egypt. By Marie Benedict. St. Martin's.
Benedict again shines a light on women ignored by history in this tale of Lady Evelyn Herbert, one of the archaeologists who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt in the 1920s, and, 3,000 years earlier, Hatshepsut, Egypt's overlooked female pharaoh.

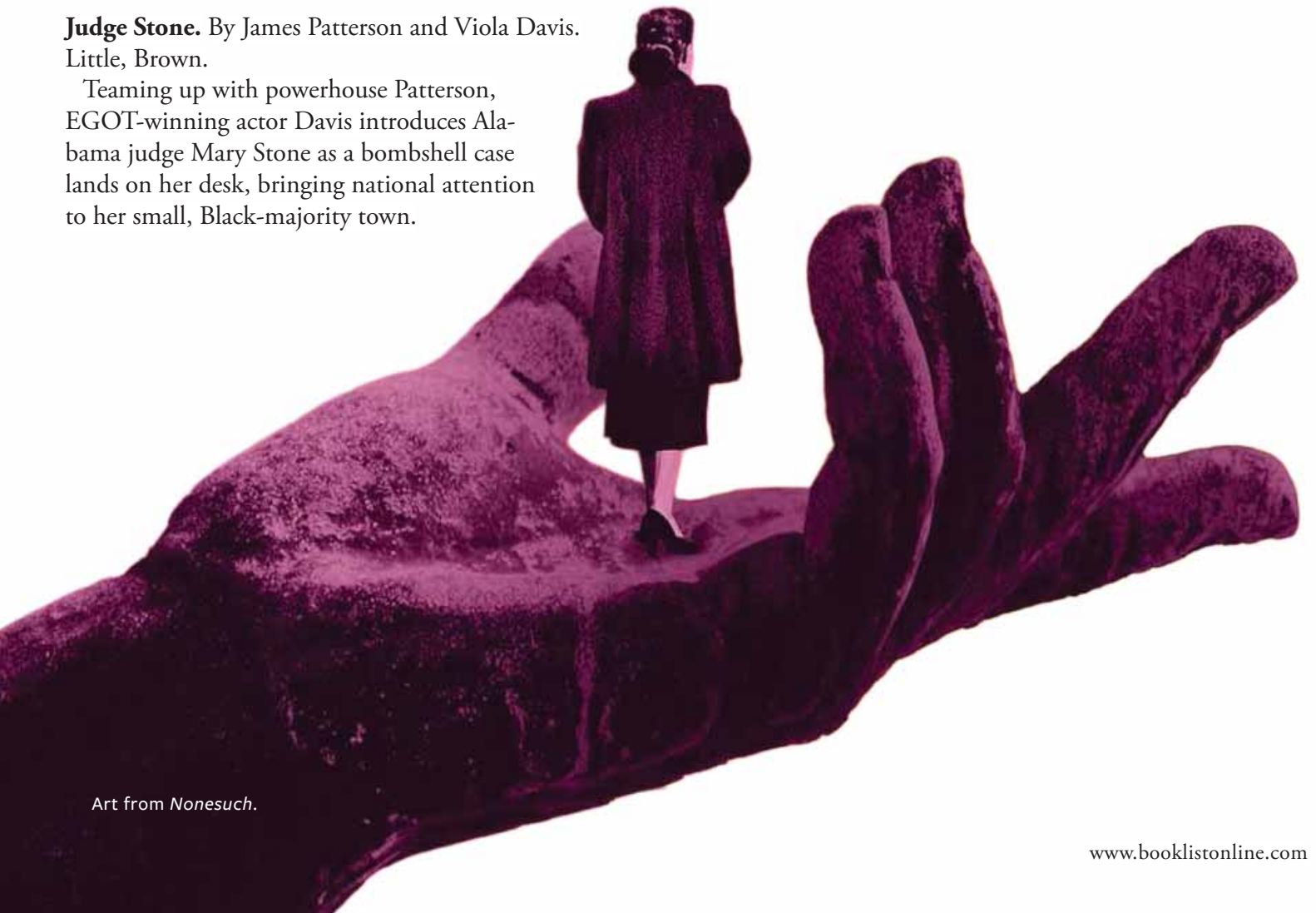
Judge Stone. By James Patterson and Viola Davis. Little, Brown.
Teaming up with powerhouse Patterson, EGOT-winning actor Davis introduces Alabama judge Mary Stone as a bombshell case lands on her desk, bringing national attention to her small, Black-majority town.

The Keeper. By Tana French. Viking.
In the final book in the Cal Hooper trilogy, featuring a retired Chicago cop in a small village in Ireland, a local girl goes missing and her body is found by townsfolk who braved the brutal night for the search, and who then turn on one another as the investigation begins.

Lady Tremaine. By Rachel Hochhauser. St. Martin's.
This debut, described as *Bridgerton* meets *Circe*, reimagines *Cinderella* through the eyes of the allegedly evil stepmother, presenting a new perspective on a familiar story with vivid descriptions that keep the grim in this fairy tale.

Lake Effect. By Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney. Ecco.
D'Aprix Sweeney made a real splash with her debut, *The Nest* (2016), and her third novel explores the repercussions of an impulsive decision in the 1970s and how it reverberated through a daughter's life as she returns home to Rochester, New York.

Nonesuch. By Francis Spufford. Scribner.
The next historical novel from prize-winning Spufford incorporates fantasy and time travel, telling the tale of a woman charged with an almost-impossible task during the London Blitz.



Art from *Nonesuch*.

Python's Kiss. By Louise Erdrich. Harper.

In her first story collection in almost two decades, Erdrich saturates her tales with intense emotions, wit, artistry, and wisdom, portraying a bus driver piloting a full school bus through a 1923 blizzard, a future rife with corporate privilege, a girl sent to live with her flinty grandparents while her mother has a baby, and more.

Seasons of Glass and Iron. By Amal El-Mohtar. Tor.com.

From Hugo Award–winning sf/f author El-Mohtar, whose popularity transcends genre boundaries, comes an esoteric story collection set in other worlds, featuring a woman with iron shoes making her way up a glass hill, an artisan painstakingly carving dreams into amethysts, and a wife crafted for a prince out of flowers.

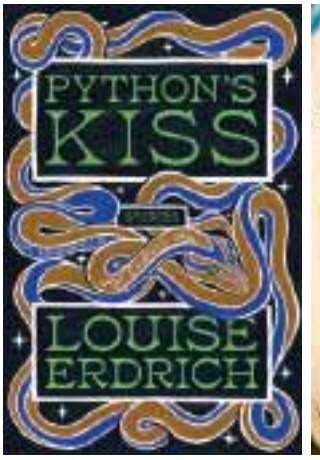
This Kingdom Will Not Kill Me. By Ilona Andrews. Tor.

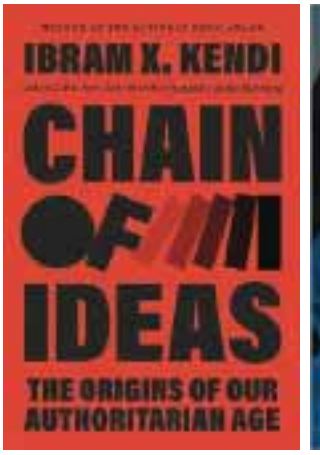
In this epic-fantasy series starter, a woman wakes up in a city that is strangely familiar—it's the setting of her favorite epic fantasy series, which she has been rereading while she waits for the author to finish the last installment. She and a motley crew must band together to save the kingdom.

Want to Know a Secret? By Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen.

Best-seller McFadden, whose addictive, propulsive books are catnip for thriller readers, here presents the story of a YouTuber whose picture-perfect life is threatened by someone who wants to reveal her secrets. The premise is simple, but the twisty plot is anything but.

Art from *Kids, Wait till You Hear This!*





Nonfiction

Chain of Ideas: The Origins of Our Authoritarian Age. By Ibram X. Kendi. One World.

The National Book Award–winning historian here takes on the origins and spread of "the great replacement theory," and how folks can protect democracy from this threat.

Kids, Wait till You Hear This! By Liza Minnelli. Grand Central.

The first autobiography from an actor and singer (and EGOT winner) who needs no introduction!

Phases. By Brandy. Hanover Square.

Multiplatinum singing-sensation Brandy recounts the highs and lows of a life lived in the spotlight, going from singing in Mississippi churches to acting in TV's *Moesha* and *Cinderella*.

Stand. By Cory Booker. St. Martin's.

Senator Booker expands on his history-making 25-hour speech to the Senate in early 2025 with a message to all Americans about standing against injustice.

You with the Sad Eyes. By Christina Applegate. Little, Brown.

Actress Applegate tells stories from her childhood in L.A.'s Laurel Canyon, her early years of stardom, her many iconic roles, and her life after being diagnosed with M.S.

March 2026

The Top Ten Adult Fiction and Nonfiction Chosen Monthly by America's Library Staff

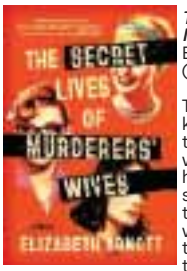
Find out more at www.LibraryReads.org

No Matter What: A Novel
Cara Bastone
(Dial Press Trade Paperbacks)

TOP PICK

Roz and Vin have been married 8 years, but a a terrible accident ripped their lives apart and left them reeling. This story is their slow journey back to one another. No tropes here—this romance is quiet and ordinary, and in that it's so powerful. It's a beautiful exploration of how even the strongest relationship can fracture, and how we repair and recover from damage. It's also a love letter to drawing and art, to storytelling and friendships, to how we care for each other, and how we damage one another.

—Nyssa Fleig, Salt Lake County Library, UT
NoveList read-alike: *Left of Forever* by Tara DeW



The Secret Lives of Murderers' Wives
Elizabeth Arnott
(Berkley)

Three wives of convicted killers, fighting the guilt that they didn't know what was happening with their husbands, band together to search for a killer. Following the trend of stories of brave women that society doesn't take seriously, this is a tightly woven crime novel with a bang of an ending.

—Kimberly McGee, Lake Travis Community Library, Austin TX
NoveList read-alike: *Good Husbands* by Cate Ray

Two Kinds of Stranger
Steve Cavanagh
(Atria)

Conman-turned-attorney Eddie's reputation precedes him. When Elly, a TikTok star, is convicted of a double murder she didn't commit, she requests his help to prove her innocence but he soon realizes he may have gotten more than he bargained for. When the case hits a little too close to home, he relies on his maybe not very legal skills to save her life.

—Jessica Heatherly, Kingston Public Library, TN
NoveList read-alike: Jack Swyteck series by Michael Grippando

This Story Might Save Your Life
Tiffany Crum
(Flatiron Books: Pine & Cedar)

Joy and Benny are the perfect podcasting team, best friends who explain to listeners how to survive life-threatening situations. But when Joy and her husband go missing, it's time for long-held secrets to be revealed. A compelling mystery with a likable pair at its heart—readers will keep turning the pages to find out if a happy ending awaits.

—Mara Bandy Fass, Champaign Public Library, IL
NoveList read-alike: *Listen for the Lie* by Amy Tintera

Lady Tremaine
Rachel Hochhauser
(St. Martin's Press)

This Cinderella retelling is particularly powerful at portraying the challenges of motherhood and surviving in the world as a woman. The dissection of what traumas and choices create a villain are a fascinating character study, and readers will love that Lady Tremaine is given depth beyond the stereotypical evil stepmother trope— after all, everyone is a villain in someone else's story.

—Kara Seal, Arapahoe Libraries, CO
NoveList read-alike: *Malice* by Heather Walter

It Girl: A Novel
Allison Pataki
(Ballantine Books)

A compelling fictionalized story based on the life of Gibson girl and Gilded Age "It Girl," Evelyn Nesbit. The author writes masterful historical fiction that illuminates exceptional women: their lives, their hopes, their triumphs and downfalls. Highly recommended!

—Karen Troutman, LibraryReads Ambassador, IN
NoveList read-alike: *Laura Lamont's Life in Pictures* by Emma Straub

Innamorata
Ava Reid
(Del Rey)
Haunting and atmospheric, this gothic tale of necromancy, revenge, and forbidden love will draw readers in. Lush writing, eerie vibes, and with a heroine torn between duty and desire. Darkly beautiful!

—Emily Snodgrass, Rogers Public Library, AR
NoveList read-alike: The Bone Orchard by Sarah A. Mueller

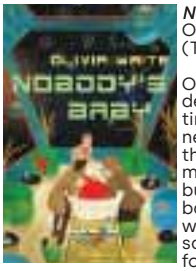
Lake Effect: A Novel
Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney
(Ecco)
In 1977, Nina and Finn begin an affair and make difficult choices that will ripple through their families and small community for years to come. Twenty-five years later, Nina's eldest daughter makes a selfish choice that sends shock waves from Manhattan back to Rochester. Keenly and sensitively written, readers will have great compassion for these women despite their choices.

—Jennifer Winberry, Hunterdon County Library, NJ
NoveList read-alike: *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett

You Should Have Been Nicer to My Mom
Vincent Tirado
(William Morrow)

This slow, luxuriously-paced gothic hinges on toxic family relationships. When Papi Ramon dies, the reading of the will mentions a demon among the family. Fans of *Knives Out* or *The House of Usher* will want to give this one a try!

—Adam Lopez, Lawrence Public Library, KS
NoveList read-alike: *They Drown Our Daughters* by Katrina Monroe



Nobody's Baby
Olivia Waite
(Tordotcom)

Our favorite "old lady" scifi detective is back at it, this time solving the mystery of a new baby on board (when that should be impossible on many levels!) A quick read, but Waite does a great job balancing a heck of a lot of world-building, with a satisfying mystery, and forward emotional movement by the heroine.

—Casey Chwiecko, Lincoln Public Library, MA
NoveList read-alike: The Investigations of Mossa and Pleiti series by Malka Older

Bonus pick:

Seasons of Glass and Iron: Stories
Amal El-Mohtar
(Tordotcom)

Notable Nonfiction:

The Beginning Comes After the End: Notes on a World of Change
Rebecca Solnit
(Haymarket Books)

Be sure to check out our social media for the Bonus Pick annotations!

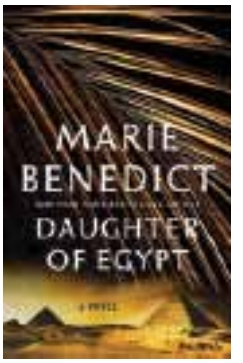
Made in LibraryAware - www.libraryaware.com

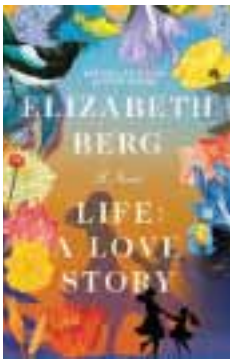
March 2026

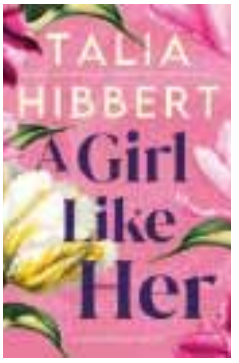
HALL OF FAME TITLES

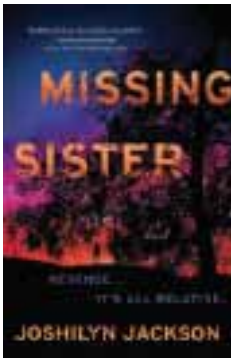
The LibraryReads Hall of Fame designation honors authors who have had multiple titles appear on the monthly list since 2013.

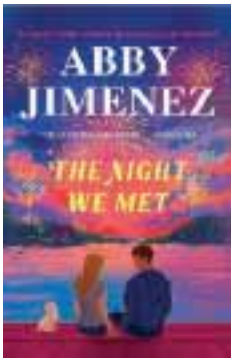
Find out more at www.LibraryReads.org/HOF

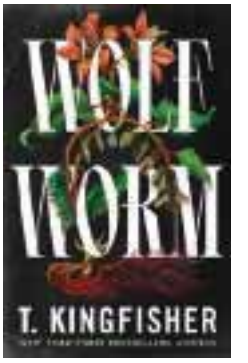












10 Questions

Lauren Okie

by John Charles

Lauren Okie studied English and American Literature at New York University. When she's not mining old traumas or blocking sex scenes on the backs of grocery lists, Lauren works as a copywriter. Originally from Miami, she lives with her husband and daughter in the Los Angeles area.

1. Who is Lauren Okie when she is at home?
A bit of a hot mess? I'm a mom to a six-year-old, and I'm definitely stretched a little thin right now, but I'm trying to soak up every minute anyway. The average day, for me, involves a workout in the morning with my husband while my daughter eats a bagel in the garage and yaps with us, followed by school drop-off, copious amounts of coffee, and then a bit of doom scrolling on my phone. Once I realize neither my next manuscript nor my regular copywriting work is going to finish itself, I'll lock in and get going on that.

2. What can you tell us about **The Best Worst Thing***?*
I mean, I could tell you a million things about this novel—and believe me, I would. But I think, if nothing else, I'd like to introduce *The Best Worst Thing* as a modern love story. The novel follows a 32-year-old infertility podcaster named Nicole who, mere hours after a Hail Mary embryo transfer to her surrogate, discovers her husband is having an affair. Heartbroken and very, very drunk, she finds herself standing on the doorstep of a former colleague she never could quite forget: Logan. As their connection from the past is slowly reinvestigated in a secondary timeline, their present relationship hits the ground running. Fortunately, Logan's kind, playful demeanor is a fantastic distraction from the dumpster fire that has become Nicole's once-perfect life . . . at least at the very start.

If you pick up *The Best Worst Thing*, my hope is you'll get everything you love and expect from a romance novel—banter, tension, drama, spice—while also encountering authentic representation of some very real themes, including infertility, infidelity, and starting over in your thirties.

3. What five words best describe **The Best Worst Thing***?*
Hot. Sad. Funny. Honest. Hopeful.

Can I have a bonus phrase? If so, I'd say, "full of yearning." It really is a yearn fest.

4. What is it about the second chance at romance trope you found intriguing as an author?
I'm of the opinion that, inherently, second-chance romances give writers and readers the gift of instant high stakes. When you are working with characters who've

already hurt each other in the past, either directly or inadvertently, every scene is flush with meaning. There are unlimited memories to explore or pains to unpack, and your characters must grapple with these realities on every page.

5. Can you talk about why it is important for you (and other readers) to see women like yourself reflected in the pages of romance fiction?

So, I have an infertility story that's very similar to my protagonist, Nicole's. Fortunately, I also had a fantastic husband who was always right by my side, including during the months and years I was so plagued by depression, anger, and loneliness that I tried to push him away. But I do remember thinking, knowing I couldn't carry my own children, if it weren't for him, who would ever love me now?

And that ultimately became the underlying, scraping question of the novel. Who could ever love Nicole now? She's broken, she's been discarded, betrayed. Her body doesn't work. She's got nothing that's really, truly hers.

Is that how a woman is defined, actually? No. Of course not. Not all women want children. And that is completely okay. But Nicole wanted children desperately, and now, she has no self-worth. She emerges from this season of her life absolutely gutted and with no sense of who she really is. The book follows along as she puts herself back together again, piece by piece, with Logan and a few great friends by her side.

I also think, on top of Nicole's personal journey here, it's just so important to see women who are grappling with motherhood also actively crave love and passion. We do not stop desiring these things when we become parents. We don't cease to be sexual beings just because we want or have children. We don't forget how to flirt or kiss or want or be wanted. Women can be a thousand different things from one minute to the next, and every time I see that truth reflected in a book, I'm thrilled.

6. What are the books that made you fall in love with romance fiction?

There are a thousand books that made me fall in love with romance, but I can't pinpoint the one that pushed me over the edge. Two modern titles I always recommend are Katie Cotugno's *Birds of California* and Tia Williams' *Seven Days in June*.

7. What role have libraries played in your life?

Core memory alert! I grew up in Miami, and the Coral Gables branch of the county's library was my favorite place on earth. It's this gorgeous, ivy-drenched stone building, and to me, a kid, it felt like stepping foot into a castle. My mom used to bring me on Saturday mornings to go to a kids' event and then borrow a new book.

We had a connection to the librarian there, a woman named Regina. I can't remember the specifics, but I think Regina was dating my grandparents' former babysitter's son? Whatever it was, it felt like magic because Regina knew me. She'd always have a book pulled for me or ask me what I was interested in reading. I'd serve up some impossibly specific answer—a cat goes on a mission to save his friends from an army of evil walnuts, something like that!—and she'd laugh and find me the closest book she could think of.

The point is: that library felt like such a safe place to be a weird little kid, and I was a very weird little kid.

8. What is the best piece of life advice you have been given?

This advice was actually given to a close friend of mine, and then repeated to me during a yap session, but it's so good I quote it all the time. "Go where it's warm." It was initially said to my friend about making friends as an adult, but I think it can be applied to pretty much anything. I try to keep it in mind when I'm making career decisions, choosing where to channel my (limited) energy, and even picking a table at a coffee shop.

9. What is next for you as an author?

I have another book coming out! *Tropesick*, my sophomore novel, will be published in June of 2026. It's another hard-fought love story that's going to deliver on the beats of a romance novel while tackling a few very big themes.

Essentially, it's about an all-grown-up girl next door who's forced to ghostwrite a romance novel alongside her brother's best friend. The subversion, though, is that Katie and Tyler haven't seen or spoken to each other since the overdose death of Katie's older brother eight years ago. On top of that, the best-selling, reclusive author hosting Katie and Tyler at her secluded Hamptons estate for the summer is remarkably strange—and appears to be keeping a few secrets of her own.

10. How can readers learn more about you and your books?

I'm very active on Instagram, so that's the best place to find me! @laurenokieauthor

Otherwise, my website and Substack are great, too!

Spanish Sure Bets: Winter 2026

by Sara Martínez

As many of our Spanish-reading and immigrant communities face threats and trauma, we offer this list of recent titles confident that you will find something here that challenges, uplifts, educates, and brings a spirit of hopeful resistance. Finding joy in a book that resonates can be a respite, a way to counter the negative forces.

Nonfiction

Cartas de amor y rebeldía / Letters of Love and Rebellion. By Lydia Cacho. Debolsillo.

From her diaries, correspondence, photos, and memorabilia, Mexican journalist, feminist, and human-rights activist Cacho crafted an intimate and unflinching look at the oppressive Mexican government she grew up with and its violent consequences, while also revealing a life dedicated to passion and poetry.

Cómo destruir una democracia / How to Destroy a Democracy. By Daniel Matamala. Planeta Mexico.

Beginning with Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro, Matamala uses his wide-ranging reportage on coups, electoral campaigns, and economic and social crises to take a deeper look at the strategies shared by charismatic leaders throughout the Americas.

Educar con cerebro. Hábitos y herramientas de crianza y neuroeducación para crecer con salud mental y emocional / Educate Mindfully: The Practices and Tools of Parenting and Mindful Education for Healthy Mental and Emotional Growth. By Elvira Perejón. Grijalbo.

The authors maintain that understanding how the growing brain works makes raising children easier, and that mindful education and respectful child-rearing provide children with the tools they need to mature with self-confidence and live and feel fully.

Espiritus, fantasmas y mundo sobrenatural / History of Ghosts, Spirits and the Supernatural. DK.

This illustrated guide to the global history of ghosts and the supernatural details the many ways spirits and the spirit world have been depicted in myth and religion, folklore, art, and literature.

El método Taylor Swift: Y otros antimanuales de innovación extrema para potenciar tu negocio / The Taylor Swift Method. By Nicolás Pimentel. Conecta.

What exactly is "massive intimacy," Taylor Swift's best-kept secret? Marketing professional Pimentel leads readers through this new frontier of marketing, innovation, and communication.

Un poder diferente / A Different Kind of Power. By Jacinda Ardern. Plaza & Janés.

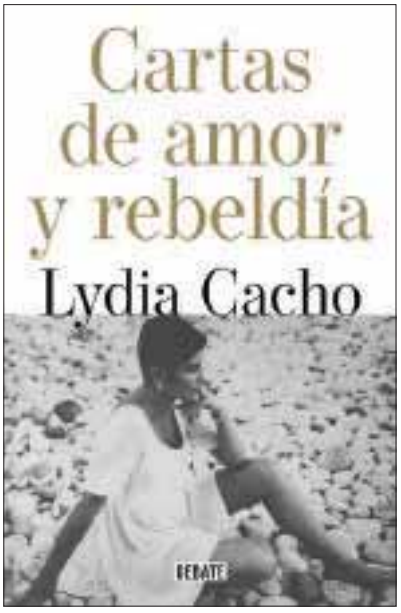
Ardern, the ex-Prime Minister of New Zealand, one of the youngest of world leaders and the second to give birth while in office, has written a profoundly personal and inspiring memoir about how she enacted a new compassionate and effective mode of global leadership.

Posmacho alfa: Arquetipos de valor para hombres de otra era / Post-macho Alpha: Archtypes of Valor for Men of a New Time. By Nicko Nogués. Grijalbo.

With the old concept of masculinity in crisis, Nogués invites men to embody a new type of manhood, using archetypes to guide readers toward building masculinity based on care, connection with nature, courage, love, a redefinition of strength, emotional well-being, and an open mind.

Se regalan dudas / They're Giving Away Doubts. By Lety Sahagún and Ashley Frangie. Grijalbo.

Sahagún and Frangie, creators of the most-followed podcast in Mexico and one of the most popular in the Spanish-speaking world, from which they took the title of their first book, share their and their listeners' thoughts about love, sexuality, relationships, the body, faith, and so much more.



Los 7 pilares del amor propio. Cómo forjar una relación profunda y enriquecedora con uno mismo / The Seven Pillars of Self Love. By Walter Riso. Planeta.

With a practical yet profound approach, sagacious Riso introduces seven fundamental pillars for strengthening self-love, from self-knowledge and compassion to the importance of boundaries and aligning self-love with personal values.

Fiction

El café de la luna llena / The Full Moon Café. By Mai Mochizuki. Plaza & Janés.

This charming Japanese fantasy full of music, astrology, delicious desserts, and incredible illustrations brings five characters to a magical café that appears under a shining Kyoto moon and offers a transcendent message about the power of kindness.

Cómo desaparecer completamente / How to Disappear Completely. By Mariana Enriquez. Anagrama.

In this unsettling novel, a listless 16-year-old in Barcelona who needs to get away from himself and his dysfunctional family tries to decipher the diary his brother left him, a kind of sacred text featuring Kurt Cobain, Nick Cave, and Patti Smith.

Un crucero de ensueño / Total Dreamboat. By Katelyn Doyle. Tr. by Nieves Calvino Gutiérrez. Titania.

Hope is in need of a break. Felix can't refuse the surprise cruise tickets his parents give him. When they meet at check-in, their initial attraction leads to a fling, but their emotional baggage catches up with them, causing them to struggle to navigate the stormy seas of love in paradise.

El loco de Dios en el fin del mundo / God's Madman at the End of the World. By Javier Cercas. Literatura Random.

Cercas, a Spanish crime writer and atheist, takes the opportunity to interview Pope Francis on a plane to Mongolia in this unique work of autofiction that includes a fascinating discussion of faith, eternity, and humanity.

Una mano invisible: Piña y Mal de altura / An Invisible Hand: Pineapple and Altitude Sickness. By Gonzalo Maier. Literatura Random.

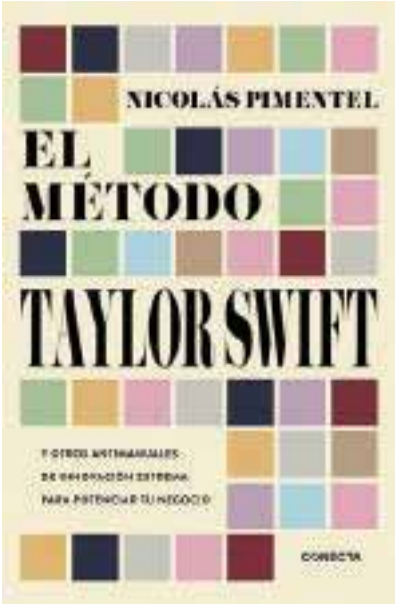
Two recent novels by Chilean writer Maier. In *Pineapple*, the ghost of a recently deceased art critic visits an artist applying for public funds and fellowships. In *Altitude Sickness*, a philosophy professor becomes alienated from his life while teaching a course on ethics for a businessman found guilty of corruption.

El mexicano de Buchenwald / The Mexican of Buchenwald. By Julio Godínez. Booket México.

Only one of two Mexican prisoners in the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald, José Luis Salazar and Juan Rodrigo del Fierro, will be repatriated to Mexico, so they decide to escape together, enlisting prisoners to organize an uprising in this novel based on a true story.

Que entierren nuestros huesos en la medianoche / Bury our Bones in the Midnight Soil. By V.E. Schwab. Umbriel.

This immersive horror-thriller-fantasy features magic, vampires, and queer identity and stars three far-flung protagonists: Maria in 1532 Santo Domingo de la Calzada, Charlotte in 1827 London, and Alice in 2019 Boston.



Art from *Burma Sahib*.

Reading and Listening Together: Print and Audio Discussion Standouts

by *Booklist* Adult and Audio Editors

The *Booklist*-reviewed titles below, enticing for both readers and listeners, glow in both formats and are sure to jump-start conversations in book groups and among your family members and friends. We're spotlighting books that have been adapted for the screen, memoirs, biographical fiction, psychological thrillers, novels with cross-generational appeal, and novellas for quick reads.

Adaptations

From true classics to a rock 'n' roll memoir, a national true-crime obsession, and one of the most anticipated sequels of all time, each of these titles has an adaptation or related movie or TV series newly or soon-to-be available.

The American Revolution: An Intimate History. By Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. 2025. Knopf. Audio read by a full cast. Random House Audio.

Blood on Their Hands: Murder, Corruption, and the Fall of the Murdaugh Dynasty. By Mandy Matney and Carolyn Murnick. 2023. Morrow. Audio read by Mandy Matney. HarperAudio.

Born to Run. By Bruce Springsteen. 2016. Simon & Schuster. Audio read by the author. Simon & Schuster Audio.

The New Annotated Frankenstein. By Mary Shelley. Ed. by Leslie S. Klinger. 2017. Norton/Liveright.

Frankenstein with the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. By Mary Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Read by Clive Hayward and Alison Larkin. 2017. Alison Larkin Presents.

The Odyssey. By Homer. Tr. by Daniel Mendelsohn. 2025. Univ. of Chicago. Audio read by Daniel Mendelsohn. 2025. Univ. of Chicago.

The Testaments. By Margaret Atwood. 2019. Doubleday/Nan A. Talese. Audio read by a full cast. Books on Tape.

Extraordinary Lives

Humble, sometimes hilarious, encouraging, heartbreaking, and fascinating, these memoirs offer many opportunities for rich discussion and meaningful reflection.

Destroy This House. By Amanda Uhle. 2025. Summit. Audio read by Rebekkah Ross. Simon & Schuster Audio.

A Flower Traveled in My Blood: The Incredible True Story of the Grandmothers Who Fought to Find a Stolen Generation of Children. By Haley Cohen Gilliland. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Avid Reader. Audio read by Alejandra Reynoso. Simon & Schuster Audio.

How to Lose Your Mother: A Daughter's Memoir. By Molly Jong-Fast. 2025. Viking. Audio read by the author. Books on Tape.

A Marriage at Sea: A True Story of Love, Obsession, and Shipwreck. By Sophie Elmhirst. 2025. Riverhead. Audio read by Marisa Calin. Books on Tape.

Spellbound: My Life as a Dyslexic Wordsmith. By Phil Hanley. 2025. Holt. Audio read by the author. Macmillan Audio.

The True Happiness Company. By Veena Dinavahi. 2025. Random. Audio read by the author. Books on Tape.

Historic Lives Reimagined

Those of you who are curious about the lives of historical figures but aren't inclined to pick up a biography will find

pleasurable alternatives in these illuminating and compelling biographical novels about trailblazers ranging from actresses to a writer, president, barrier-breaking business woman, and nurse.

The Brightest Star. By Gail Tsukiyama. 2023. HarperVia. Audio read by Cindy Kay. 2023. HarperAudio.

Burma Sahib. By Paul Theroux. 2024. Mariner. Audio read by Charlie Anson. 2024. HarperAudio.

From Dust to Stardust. By Kathleen Rooney. 2023. Amazon/Lake Union. Audio read by Xe Sands. 2023. Brilliance.

The Perilous Adventures of the Cowboy King: A Novel of Teddy Roosevelt and His Times. By Jerome Charyn. 2019. Norton/Liveright. Audio read by Danny Campbell. 2019. HighBridge.

A Right Worthy Woman. By Ruth P. Watson. 2023. Atria. Audio read by Janina Edwards. 2023. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Flight of the Wild Swan. By Melissa Pritchard. 2024. Bellevue. Audio read by Jayne Entwistle. 2024. HighBridge.

Psychothrillers, qu'est-ce que c'est?

The book group that gets uncomfortable together will definitely have something to talk about. Across general, historical, and crime fiction, with even a bit of horror, these psychologically tense novels will leave you desperate to discuss them with other readers.

Cross My Heart. By Megan Collins. 2025. Atria. Audio read by Gail Shalan and Chris Andrew Ciulla. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Daughter of Mine. By Megan Miranda. 2024. Simon & Schuster/Marysue Rucci. Audio read by Inés del Castillo. Simon & Schuster Audio.

The Mad Wife. By Meagan Church. 2025. Sourcebooks/Landmark. Audio read by Susan Bennett. Recorded Books.

One of Our Kind. By Nicola Yoon. 2024. Vintage. Audio read by Nicole Lewis. Books on Tape.

The Southern Book Club's Guide to Slaying Vampires. By Grady Hendrix. 2020. Quirk. Audio read by a full cast. 2025. GraphicAudio.

The Uproar. By Karim Dimechkie. 2025. Little, Brown. Audio read by Justin Price. Hachette Audio.

When No One Is Watching. By Alyssa Cole. 2020. Morrow. Audio read by Susan Dalian and Jay Aaseng. HarperAudio.

Reading with Teens

Discussable cross-generational reads and listens are precious. Here are two suspenseful and richly provocative climate-fiction action tales, a witty romance, a thriller set on a college campus and a novel set at a California high school, and two novels about remarkable teens in challenging situations.

All the Water in the World. By Eiren Caffall. 2025. St. Martin's. Audio read by Eunice Wong. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Great Big Beautiful Life. By Emily Henry. 2025. Berkley. Audio read by Julia Whelan. 2025. Books on Tape.

Never Saw Me Coming. By Vera Kurian. 2021. Park Row. Audio read by Brittany Pressley. 2021. HarperAudio.

Our Beautiful Boys. By Sameer Pandya. Ballantine. Audio read by Shahjehan Khan. 2025. Books on Tape.

Sweetness in the Skin. By Ishi Robinson. 2024. Harper. Audio read by Deja Bowens. 2024. HarperAudio.

Swift River. By Essie Chambers. 2024. Simon & Schuster. Audio read by Shayna Small and others. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Wild Dark Shore. By Charlotte McConaghy. 2025. Flatiron. Audio read by Cooper Mortlock and others. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Short but Discussably Sweet

Sometimes book groups just don't have time to dig into *War and Peace*. These novellas are the perfect solution. They feature a robot-owned noodle shop, a haunting historical adventure, a girl piecing together a family history, three adventurous young women in Paris, post-apocalyptic librarians, and the dark side of social media.

Automatic Noodle. By Annalee Newitz. 2025. Tor.com. Audio read by Em Grosland. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Clear. By Carys Davies. 2024. Scribner. Audio read by Russ Bain. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Foster. By Claire Keegan. 2022. Grove. Audio read by Aoife McMahon. 2022. HighBridge.

Martita, I Remember You. By Sandra Cisneros. Tr. by Liliana Valenzuela. 2021. Vintage. Audio read by Sandra Cisneros and others. 2021. Books on Tape.

Upright Women Wanted. By Sarah Gailey. 2020. Tor. Audio read by Romy Nordlinger. 2020. Tantor.

We Had to Remove This Post. By Hanna Bervoets. Tr. by Emily Rault. 2022. HMH. Audio read by Khristine Hvam. 2022. HarperAudio.

Top 10

Book-Group Books

The top ten most discussable books cover topics like science and nature, the beauty industry, and the infinitely complicated dynamics of family.

Art from *Squirrel*.

Nonfiction

Everything Is Tuberculosis: The History and Persistence of Our Deadliest Infection. By John Green. 2025. Penguin/Crash Course.

After meeting 17-year-old Sierra Leonean Henry, Green became obsessed with tuberculosis, and the result is an accessible, insightful exploration of a disease that has killed over a billion people in the past 200 years.

The Great Contradiction: The Tragic Side of the American Founding. By Joseph J. Ellis. 2025. Knopf.

In this fresh history of the nation's founding, historian Ellis shares the voices of abolitionists, ministers, and writers to examine the Founders' failure to end slavery and prevent violence and conquest against Native peoples.

Mother Mary Comes to Me. By Arundhati Roy. 2025. Scribner.

Roy's stunning, far-ranging chronicle portraying two strong-willed women—herself and her activist mother—fighting for justice and truth is perfect for book groups interested in complicated family dynamics.

Squirrel: How a Backyard Forager Shapes Our World. By Nancy Castaldo. 2025. Island.

Readers will gain a new appreciation for the ubiquitous squirrel with scattered research and amusing anecdotes on common varieties and endangered species, ideal for a walking book group.

Submersed: Wonder, Obsession, and Murder in the World of Amateur Submarines. By Matthew Gavin Frank. 2025. Pantheon.

This scintillating investigative work turned into a true-crime story when a journalist was murdered by a member of the personal submersible community, a world rife with misogyny and catastrophic megalomania.

Fiction

Boy from the North Country. By Sam Sussman. 2025. Penguin.

A young man returns home to help his mother through chemotherapy and learns about her crossing paths with Bob Dylan in a lyrical novel about a son's evolving understanding of his mother's love and sacrifice.

Ghost Fish. By Stuart Pennebaker. 2025. Little, Brown.

Compelling prose combines with a unique concept in this haunting and memorable novel about a woman, 23 and alone, whose late sister returns to her life as a ghostly fish.

Keeper of Lost Children. By Sadeqa Johnson. 2026. Simon & Schuster/37 Ink.

Set between post-WWII Germany and 1960s America, this brilliant novel intertwines three stories to explore the real experiences of mixed-race children abandoned after the war, blending emotional storytelling with emotional depth.

Ravishing. By Eshani Surya. 2025. Grove/Roxane Gay.

A woman uses a revolutionary new beauty cream, not knowing that her estranged older brother works for the cream's creator, in a timely takedown of the beauty industry that is also a nuanced look at the pressures to assimilate.

Some Bright Nowhere. By Ann Packer. 2025. Harper.

A man caring for his wife, who is dying of cancer, is thrown for a loop by her final request in a deeply involving novel that is a suspenseful and radiant reckoning with love, sorrow, and the everlasting mystery of death.

Top 10

Book-Group Books on Audio

Whether selecting for an audiobook-focused book club or just seeking a title with a recommendable audio edition, this list will fit the bill with discussable content and narration.

Automatic Noodle. By Annalee Newitz. Read by Em Grosland. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

This brief but memorable near-future sf cozy offers thoughtful robots running a café for war-weary San Franciscans who often display more humanity than their flesh and bone neighbors. Grosland's ability to help listeners understand the personality of each robot is entrancing.

Big Chief. By Jon Hickey. Read by Shaun Taylor-Corbett. 2025. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Attorney Mitch is in the thick of relationship drama and tribal politics. Taylor-Corbett (Blackfeet) narrates as if Mitch's story is his own, embodying all of the yearning, cynicism, and code-switching of Mitch's small-town environs.

The Gales of November. By John U. Bacon. Read by Johnny Heller. 2025. Recorded Books.

The sinking of the *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald* 50 years ago is back in public consciousness. Heller is a great explainer and a compassionate voice for the dead, and shifts his pacing to help listeners absorb detail, emotion, and the gravity of tragedy.

More or Less Maddy. By Lisa Genova. Read by Tessa Albertson. 2025. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Albertson's narration of the latest from the author of *Still Alice* (2009) is crucial to understanding the mindset of young Maddy as she begins to experience and learns to manage (or not) her bipolar disorder.

Pick a Color. By Souvankham Thammavongsa. Read by Zoe Doyle. 2025. Hachette Audio.

Japanese Canadian actor Doyle has a deftly layered voice that ciphers an impressive emotional range, from numbed to enraged, as she portrays a group of nail techs, all of whom wear a name tag that says "Susan."

The Secret History of the Rape Kit: A True Crime Story. By Pagan Kennedy. Read by Claire Danes. 2025. Books on Tape.

Book groups unafraid of difficult topics will be well rewarded with this audio that blends true crime and hidden history. Danes' narration is impressively visceral.

So Far Gone. By Jess Walters. Read by Edoardo Ballerini. 2025. HarperAudio.

Ballerini's narrations are always worth seeking out. Here, he employs his ample skill to get into the perspective of disillusioned, off-grid, curmudgeonly former-journalist Rhys, who is thrust back into family drama and politically driven conflict.

The Sound and the Fury. By William Faulkner. Read by a full cast. 2025. Blackstone.

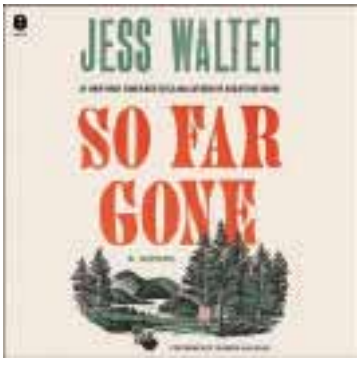
Audio is an excellent way to experience the classics, especially those that rely so much on voice, as does Faulkner's masterpiece. The full cast helps listeners understand each distinct perspective and provides much to discuss beyond the text itself.

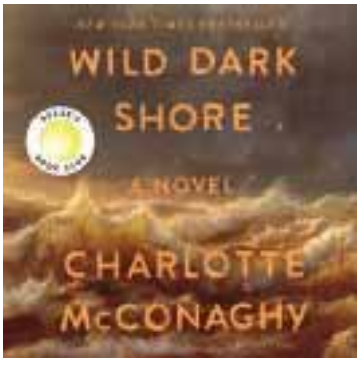
Soundtrack. By Jason Reynolds. Read by a full cast. 2025. Listening Library. Gr. 7–10.

Audiobook discussion groups must not miss Reynolds' audio-exclusive novel. Experiencing this music- and sound-forward full-cast narration is essential to keeping a finger on the pulse of what is happening with audiobook innovations.

Wild Dark Shore. By Charlotte McConaghy. Read by a full cast. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Broadly discussable and encompassing climate change, mystery, coming-of-age, and a romance encased in a dire situation, this is a poignantly cast narration. Listeners will hear each character's passion bursting through his or her isolation.



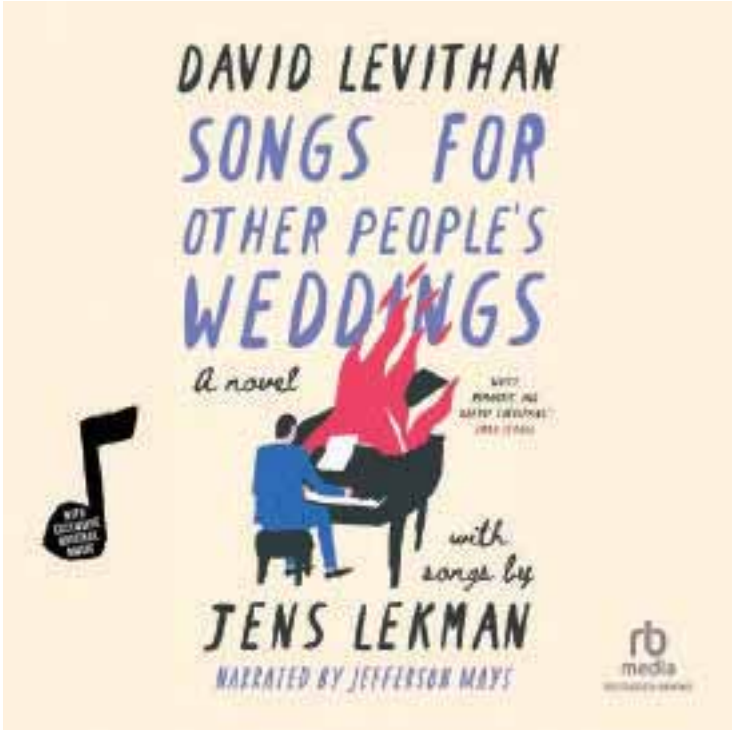


Listen-alikes

Songs for Other People's Weddings

by Heather Booth

Books about music and musicians are nothing new, but what David Levithan and Jens Lekman have done in the audiobook version of *Songs for Other People's Weddings* is new, notable, and brings readers an experience they can only get through this format. It's an unexpected and welcome treat for the audio production to offer this richness. For listeners seeking other books with supporting musical enhancements, try any of these tuneful works of fiction and musical memoir.



Broken Horses. By Brandi Carlile. Read by the author. 2021. Books on Tape.

Carlile's warm and evocative voice carries the same raw honesty as her music, but it's the music itself that makes this book so powerful. She recorded new acoustic versions of more than 30 songs for the audiobook. Between chapters, she sings the songs that impacted each period of her life.

Circumstances Affecting the Heat of the Sun's Rays. By Amanda Quaid. Performed by a full cast. 2025. L.A. Theatre Works.

Amateur but astute scientist Eunice Foote's life makes for a fascinating play and a marvelously dramatic audio production. Vigorous string music separates the scenes, effectively indicating Foote's unending work and focus. A significant contribution to works on early feminism and a commentary on ecology and the industrial revolution, all with a memorable musical backdrop.

Fractal Noise. By Christopher Paolini. Read by Jennifer Hale. 2023. Macmillan Audio.

This sf thriller and prequel in Paolini's Fractalverse series is audibly enhanced in many ways. But it is the song by character Talia, sung in narrator Hale's bittersweet tones, that delivers the book's emotional wallop.

Miracle and Wonder: Conversations with Paul Simon. By Malcolm Gladwell and Bruce Headlam. Read by a full cast. 2021. Pushkin.

Those who enjoyed the singer-songwriter insights of Levithan and Lekman's *Songs* will appreciate the deep dive Gladwell and Headlam take into the musical mind of Simon. Listeners get a front-row seat to the creative process and will hear snippets of music across decades of work.

My Name Is Barbra. By Barbra Streisand. Read by the author. 2023. Books on Tape.

The icon tells the story of her life as a media sensation from her Brooklyn beginnings. Her voice is familiar and comfortable, but beyond her capable reading, what really elevates this to star status are the clips from such familiar songs as "Silent Night," "Happy Days Are Here Again," and "Stoney End."

Soundtrack. By Jason Reynolds. Read by a full cast. 2025. Listening Library. Gr. 7–10.

The audio-exclusive title from Reynolds is a celebration of music and song, shifting our concept of what an audiobook can be. Stuy moves in with his Uncle Lucky and builds a band that leads to musical success. Grammy–winning composer Justin Ellington crafts a score to back the adventure, and soundscapes bolster this triumphant, audio-first story.

Whale Fall. By Elizabeth O'Connor. Read by a full cast. 2024. Books on Tape.

O'Connor's debut is written with lyricism woven into the fabric of its story of Manod, a young woman on the precipice of awareness when ethnographers descend on her isolated Welsh island. Gwyneth Keyworth leads a wondrous full-cast performance, definitively embodying young Manod—hopeful, disillusioned, determined—as she scrutinizes, ponders, plans, and even sings (!) through O'Connor's raw, spare gem of a book.

Listen Up

New Narrators of Note

by Heather Booth

Audiobook production and consumption are booming, a boon for new narrative voices. While we keep hearing big declarations about the power of AI to deliver text more quickly than ever, the power of the human voice is what keeps listeners coming back to audiobooks again and again. Among the many human voices we heard this year, these new narrators particularly stood out, leaving our audio team eagerly awaiting their forthcoming work.

Andre Giles

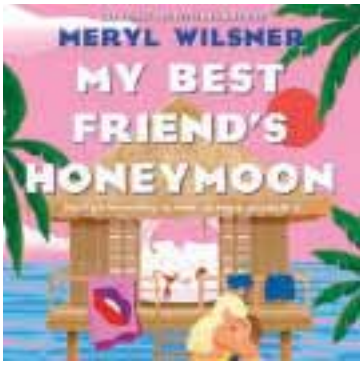
Dominion. By Addie E. Citchens. Read by a full cast. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

With his experience in voicing projects for Marvel and productions for young readers, Giles is no newcomer to narration. But his role in the powerhouse narrative cast of Citchens' debut is a notable entry into the world of audiobooks. He holds his own among such great narrators as Dion Graham and Bahni Turpin with his quietly dark presentation of charismatic Wonderboy.

Blair Baker

My Best Friend's Honeymoon. By Meryl Wilsner. Read by Blair Baker and Emily Shaw. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

We first heard Baker in last year's short-story collection, *Save Me Stranger* by Erika Krouse. Here, in Wilsner's first rom-com with a nonbinary main character, Baker has a broader canvas upon which to paint a character with nuance, humor, and heart and to showcase a rich and simmering voice.



Cia Court

Best Offer Wins. By Marisa Kashino. Read by Cia Court. Nov. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Court is a lifelong animation and gaming fan who converted her passion into a profession, providing narration in games like *League of Legends* and *Among the Sleep.* Her work emphasizes strong, complex female characters, which is certainly on full display in her voicing of the complex Margo Miyake in *Best Offer Wins*, a 2025 Top 10 First Novel on Audio.

James Aaron Oh

The Emperor of Gladness. By Ocean Vuong. Read by James Aaron Oh. 2025. Books on Tape.

What a debut for classically trained actor Oh! His achingly beautiful narration of Vuong's second novel creates a remarkably multilayered soundtrack, imbuing each character with unique vocal qualities that make an unforgettable novel even more striking.

Kevin Iannucci

That's Not How it Happened. By Craig Thomas. Read by a full cast. 2025. Harlequin.

The actor from the Woody Harrleson film *Champions* joins with cast members from *How I Met Your Mother* in the audio version of Emmy-winning Thomas' debut novel. Iannucci voices Emmett, a character who has Down syndrome like the actor, lending a powerful voice and genuine representation to the story.

Zachary Chastain

Great Disasters. By Grady Chambers. Read by Zachary Chastain. 2025. Books on Tape.

After he was one voice in a large and lauded cast in last year's *The History of Sound* by Ben Shattuck, Chambers' collection of linked stories offers Chastain an opportunity to shine. Voicing six friends aging into adulthood whose lives each take a distinct path, he allows each to sound reflective while retaining his or her individuality.

PBS BOOKS

Conversations, Classics, and American Stories

PBS BOOKS READERS CLUB

Where Stories Begin—and Continue

March on PBS Books is a celebration of storytelling in all its forms—from classic literature reimagined for the screen to contemporary voices rooted in place. Join us for live conversations, literary journeys, and programs that invite readers to look deeper, read further, and engage more fully with the stories shaping our shared cultural life.

Featuring Debbie Horsfield, Head Writer of *The Forsytes*

Live Event: March 25 | 8:00 p.m. ET

Watch on: PBS Books Facebook Live, PBS Books YouTube, pbsbooks.org, and the PBS App

PBS Books Readers Club is thrilled to welcome one of Britain's most celebrated television writers, Debbie Horsfield (*Poldark*), for an exclusive conversation about *The Forsytes*, the highly anticipated Masterpiece drama inspired by John Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga novels.

The Forsytes is a sweeping Victorian-era drama centered on a powerful family bound by wealth, tradition, and social expectation. As fortunes rise and fall, family members are tested by love, ambition, and betrayal—forcing each generation to confront the same enduring question: do you adhere to duty, or do you follow your heart?

In this Readers Club conversation, Horsfield shares how she approached this bold reimagining—creating both a prequel and a re-examination of Galsworthy's world. By bringing the women of the Forsyte family to the foreground, the series offers a fresh entry point into the story while revealing the personal costs of privilege in late-Victorian England. The result is a lush, emotionally rich epic filled with romance, conflict, and unforgettable characters.

American Stories: A Reading Road Trip

March Lineup with PBS Books & the Library of Congress

The literary journey continues this March with American Stories: A Reading Road Trip, a weekly PBS Books series created in partnership with the Library of Congress. Each stop highlights voices shaped by place, history, and imagination—revealing how regional stories contribute to the broader American narrative.

March Stops:

- March 4 | Arkansas — The Natural State inspires lyrical storytelling rooted in landscape, memory, and community.
- March 11 | Iowa — A state celebrated for its literary legacy, where bold ideas and thoughtful craft continue to shape writers and readers alike.
- March 18 | Nevada — From wide-open desert to neon-lit streets, Nevada's literary voices illuminate fresh perspectives from the American West.
- Join us Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m. ET for PBS Books Facebook Live events, or catch up anytime on the PBS Books YouTube channel, the PBS App, or pbs.org.

Learn more: pbsbooks.org/readingroadtrip

Program Highlights

March 2026 | Masterpiece & PBS Documentaries

Watch It. Read It. Discuss It.

The stories coming to PBS that began on the page

This spring, PBS invites viewers to experience sweeping literary adaptations and a landmark documentary rooted in the written word. From Victorian-era drama and classic revenge to the enduring voice of Henry David Thoreau, these programs offer rich opportunities to watch, read, and explore the ideas behind the stories.

The Forsytes | Season 1

Premiering Sunday, March 22, 2026 | 9/8c on Masterpiece on PBS

About the Series

Desire, ambition, and betrayal simmer at the heart of *The Forsytes*, a sumptuous new period drama inspired by John Galsworthy's classic The Forsyte Saga. Reimagined by acclaimed writer Debbie Horsfield (*Poldark*), the series explores the lives, loves, and moral conflicts of a wealthy Victorian stockbroking family—caught between tradition, duty, and the pursuit of personal happiness.

Set in the years leading up to Galsworthy's novels, *The Forsytes* introduces a new generation of viewers to the tensions that define family, class, and love in a rapidly changing world. The ensemble cast includes Francesca Annis, Stephen Moyer, Tuppence Middleton, Eleanor Tomlinson, Jack Davenport, and Joshua Orpin, with Susan Hampshire—star of the iconic 1967 BBC adaptation—appearing in a special role.

Read-alikes:

- ***The Forsyte Saga*** — John Galsworthy
- ***In Chancery*** — John Galsworthy
- ***To Let*** — John Galsworthy

The Count of Monte Cristo

Coming to Masterpiece on PBS | Sunday, March 22, 2026 | 10/9c

Streaming on PBS Passport beginning March 22

Betrayal. Imprisonment. Revenge. Alexandre Dumas's timeless tale returns in a lush new Masterpiece adaptation starring Sam Claflin as Edmond Dantès, a young sailor falsely accused of treason and torn from the woman he loves. After years in a nightmarish prison, Dantès escapes, discovers a hidden fortune, and reinvents himself as the enigmatic Count of Monte Cristo—determined to exact justice on those who destroyed his life.

Also starring Jeremy Irons and Ana Girardot, this gripping series explores whether vengeance can truly heal old wounds—or if love and mercy still have a place in the pursuit of justice.

Read-alike:

- ***The Count of Monte Cristo*** — Alexandre Dumas

PBS Celebrates Henry David Thoreau

A New Three-Part Documentary Event | Airing March 30–31, 2026 | 9:00 p.m. ET

Executive produced by Ken Burns and Don Henley and narrated by George Clooney, *Henry David Thoreau* is the first full-length documentary devoted to one of America's most influential writers and thinkers. Voiced by Jeff Goldblum, Thoreau's words come alive as the film traces his journey through antebellum New England and the moral crises that shaped his work—slavery, industrialization, war, and environmental degradation.

Drawing from Thoreau's essays, journals, and landmark works such as Walden and Civil Disobedience, the film explores enduring questions about conscience, citizenship, nature, and how to live an authentic life. Featuring insights from leading scholars, writers, and environmental voices, the series situates Thoreau's ideas within both his own time and our present moment, as the nation approaches its 250th anniversary.

Read-alikes:

- ***Walden*** — Henry David Thoreau
- ***Civil Disobedience*** — Henry David Thoreau
- ***The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*** — Henry David Thoreau

Watch on PBS. Stream with PBS Passport. Discover more at PBS Books.

Podcast Connection

by Heather Booth

Shake up your podcast feed with an audiobook! Fiction, nonfiction, self-help, memoir, and more all make great listening for podcast fans.

If you like *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, listen to...

Back After This. By Linda Holmes. Read by the author. 2025. Books on Tape.

Podcast-host Holmes' third contemporary romance showcases her great writing chops, her insight into the world of podcasting, *and* her own voice! In order for Cecily to have a crack at finally creating the podcast she dreams of—well-researched portraits of the mothers of famous people—her boss insists that she first produces one with a relationship influencer who puts Cecily's lackluster dating life in her crosshairs.

If you like *Podcrushed*, listen to . . .

Crushmore: Essays on Love, Loss, and Coming-of-Age. By Penn Badgley and others. Read by the authors. 2025. Simon & Schuster Audio.

The trio behind the popular podcast *Podcrushed* has penned a compelling and introspective collection of essays. All are authored and narrated by the familiar voices of Penn Badgley, Sophie Ansari, and Nava Kavelin. Humor, empathy, and reflection come through the narration as the three explore themes such as identity, vulnerability, and personal growth, all framed through the lens of adolescence and early adulthood. Ideal for listeners of memoirs and *The Moth Radio Hour.*

If you like *This American Life*, listen to . . .

The Eyes of Gaza: A Diary of Resilience. By Plestia Alaqad. Read by the author. 2025. Hachette Audio.

After earning her media and journalism degree abroad, Alaqad returned to her homeland "to show the world Gaza through my eyes." As war raged, she turned her social media into an intimate diary of life trapped in the brutality of wartime. Just as important, Alaqad unyieldingly celebrates life: "*Only in Gaza; / Despite the pain, / People remain. / Not just survivors, / But warriors.*" Alaqad's youthful, rhythmic voice is a beacon of resilience and will appeal to *TAL*'s thoughtful listenership.

If you like *A Way With Words*, listen to . . .

Friends with Words: Adventures in Languageland. By Martha Barnette. Read by the author. 2025. Dreamscape.

Word aficionados will find this an interesting approach to the evolution of language over time. Barnette shares her journey into linguistics and explores the etymology of popular speech. Written in the style of a memoir and presented in the format of a podcast with humor and pleasant vocal intonations, this is a compelling listen for word lovers.

If you like *Beth's Dead*, listen to . . .

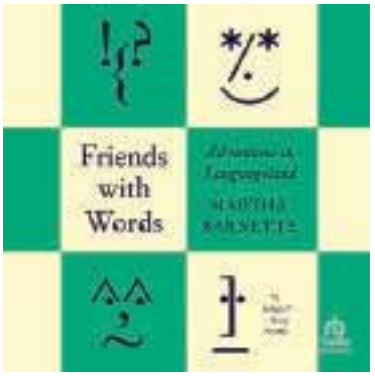
This Story Might Save Your Life. By Tiffany Crum. Read by Julia Whelan and Sean Patrick Hopkins. 2026. Macmillan Audio.

An ideal audiobook for fans of twisty thrillers and true-crime podcasts. Joy and Benny are inseparable best friends and cohosts of a wildly popular podcast (its title is the same as the book's title). When Joy and her husband, Xander, suddenly disappear, Pandora's box bursts open, and secrets begin to gush out. Performances and production sound like an actual podcast, complete with authentic samples woven into the narrative.

If you like *The Slowdown*, listen to . . .

A Suit or a Suitcase. By Maggie Smith. Read by the author. 2025. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Smith's viral poem, "Good Bones," gave many of us a moment to pause and recognize the goodness in the small things in life. Similarly, her podcast, which is cosponsored by American Public Media and The Poetry Foundation, gives listeners a brief moment of poetry and reflection each day. Her new collection of poems offers listeners the same sort of experience as it delves into personal moments.



Manga Essentials

Crafts & Hobbies

by Sara Smith

Many books blend manga and nonfiction storytelling styles when it comes to information on hobby topics such as cosplay creation, cooking, traveling, drawing, or gardening. Authors may use manga chapters as a throughline between informational text or choose to convey information entirely in manga form. Check out these books on popular hobby topics that use manga storytelling.

Cosplay

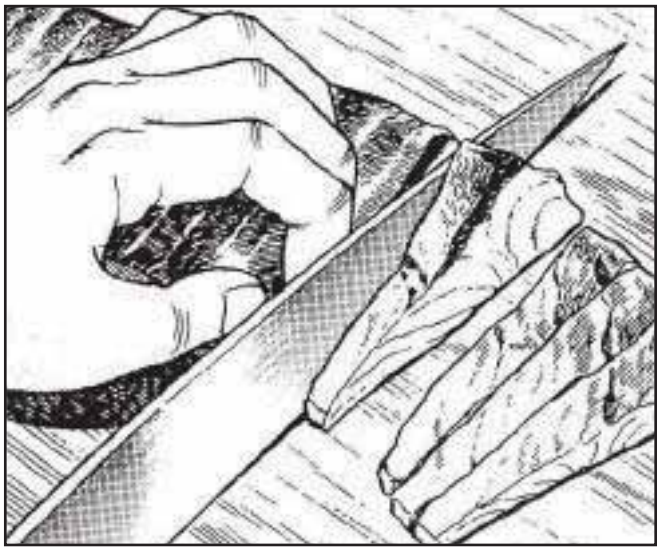
Cosplay Basics: A Beginners Guide to the Art of Costume Play. By Yuki Takasou & RUMINE. 2015. One Peace. Gr. 7–12.

Both authors enjoy cosplay in Japan and created this beginner's guide to induct the cosplay-curious into the hobby. Each section is introduced with a manga chapter following two friends—one an experienced cosplayer, the other a beginner. While some web resources have since become defunct, the remaining tips and tools are useful on their own. Some advice specific to readers in Japan won't be as useful for North American readers, but there's plenty of helpful and insightful advice for both beginners and cosplayers who have already made a few costumes.

Manga Guides/Food

The Manga Guide to Japanese Food: Everything You Want to Know About the History, Ingredients and Folklore of Japan's Unique Cuisine. By Hiroshi Nagashima. Art by Megumi Osaki. 2024. Tuttle. Gr. 9–12.

Nagashima and Osaki combine manga with nonfiction chapters to cover Japanese culinary history. As readers follow high-schooler and aspiring chef Manabu, they'll discover historical information on Japan's rice culture, seafood farming, domestication of mold, discovery and development of umami, and the globalization of sushi. Tuttle has a wealth of other similar manga guides in its catalog, such as *The Manga Guide to Organic Vegetable Gardening,* as well as how-to-draw-manga titles.



Art from *Oishinbo.*

Oishinbo. By Tetsu Kariya. Art by Akira Hanasaki. 2009–10. Viz. Gr. 9–12. 7 volumes.

Each book in this series focuses on a different element of Japanese cuisine and culture through the eyes of food journalist Yamaoka. Unfortunately, Yamaoka continuously runs into his estranged father, a famous gourmet who is determined to sabotage Yamaoka's article. These manga are fairly dense with some elevated vocabulary, and given that Yamaoka is an adult sampling restaurants, alcohol is present throughout.

Art from *Saturday AM Presents How to Draw Diverse Manga.*

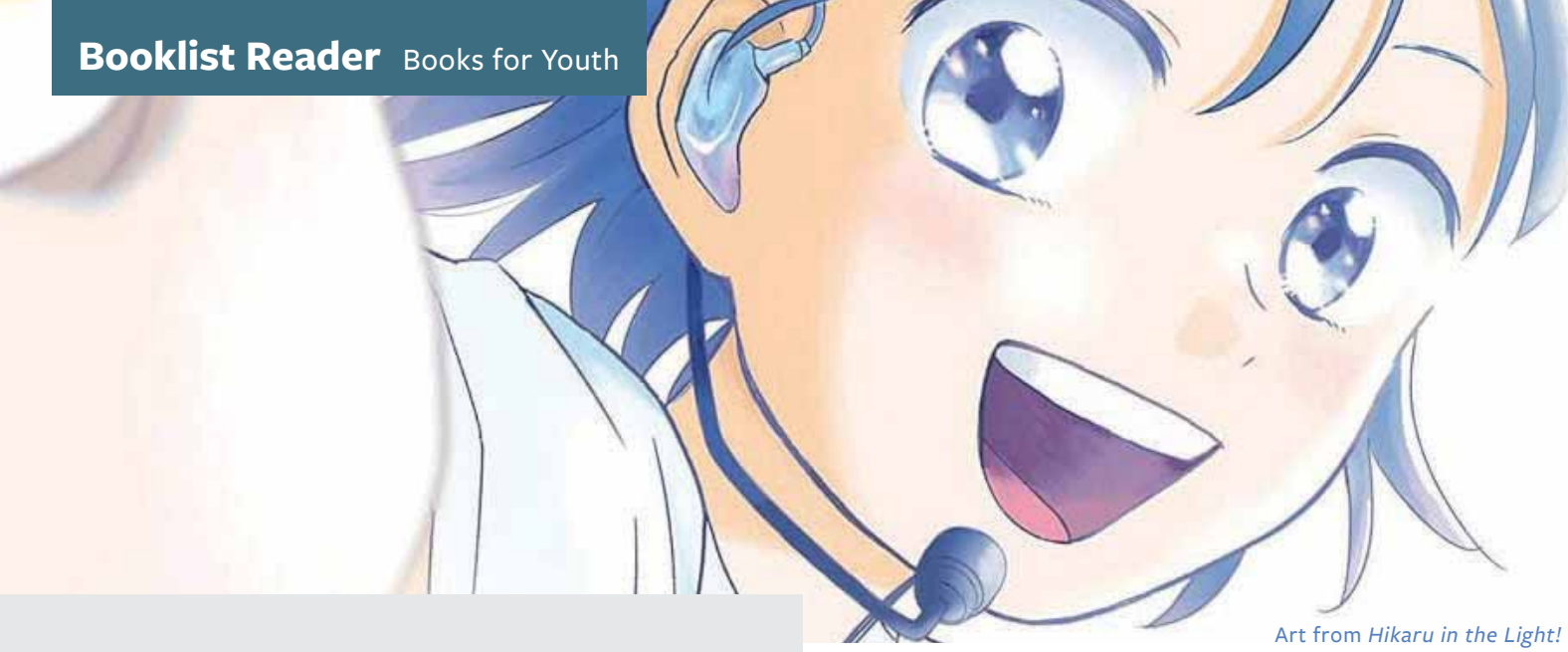
Art

Making Manga: The Saturday AM Way. By Saturday AM. Illus. 2025. Quarto/Rockport. Gr. 9–12.

From world building to creating compelling characters to artistic choices, this guide is packed with information from creators who are writing, illustrating, and publishing manga and have been honing their craft for years. Starting each chapter is a gag manga featuring characters who are struggling to write their own manga.

Saturday AM Presents How to Draw Diverse Manga. By Saturday AM. illus. 2022. Quarto/Rockport. Gr. 9–12.

While there are many important and informative guides on drawing manga available on the market, this guide provides valuable insight into crafting diverse characters outside of the norm seen in Japanese illustrative style. Illustrators provide details on how to accurately depict full lips, round noses, and a variety of textured hair types, in easy-to-replicate techniques.



Art from *Hikaru in the Light!*

Pop Culture Read-alikes

KPop Demon Hunters

by Kelly Ferreira

KPop Demon Hunters dominated the cultural zeitgeist this past year, enchanting viewers and smashing movie and music records with the undeniable power of its catchy tunes. The film follows a magical girl group tasked with sealing the Honmoon, a mystical barrier that prevents demons from entering the human world. A sequel is already in the works, but until it arrives, the following middle-grade and young-adult titles should help scratch the itch for fans of K-pop, demon hunting, magical girl groups, and the power of song.

Art from *Anzu and the Realm of Darkness.*

K-Pop Stardom

Girl Crush, v.1. By Midori Tayama. Art by the author. 2025. VIZ Media. Gr. 7–12.

Embracing K-pop's movement and style through bold lines and stylistic composition, this manga follows angry outcast Tenka as she competes with a rival classmate for K-pop stardom.

Hikaru in the Light! By Mai Matsuda. Art by the author. 2025. Scholastic/Graphix. Gr. 3–7.

In this gentle, full-color manga focused on friendship and self-determination, Hikaru dreams of becoming a pop star, but it's a far cry from her family's bathhouse.

Seoulmates. By Susan Lee. 2022. Harlequin/Inkyard. Gr. 8–11.

After reuniting with childhood bestie and K-drama star Jacob Kim, Hannah explores the Korean heritage she had been rejecting. A touching romance about identity and internal growth.

Skylar and the K-Pop Principal. By Luan Goldie. 2025. Candlewick/Walker. Gr. 4–7.

A Freaky Friday–like body-swap with her principal gives Skylar the power to promote her favorite K-pop group—until she learns that adult freedoms come with responsibilities.

Somewhere Only We Know. By Maurene Goo. 2019. Farrar. Gr. 9–12.

K-pop star Lucky is debuting in America, and all she wants is a hamburger. After sneaking out of her hotel incognito, she pairs up with undercover tabloid reporter Jack, and sparks fly.

Wish upon a K-Star. By Kat Cho. 2025. Disney/Hyperion. Gr. 9–12.

A K-pop idol and a K-drama star with a thorny history are forced together in a celebrity faux-marriage show, where the ice slowly thaws and romance blooms.

Demon Hunting

Anzu and the Realm of Darkness. By Mai K. Nguyen. Art by the author. 2024. Viking. Gr. 3–7.

After an awkward social encounter, Anzu runs away and ends up in Yomi, the Shinto underworld, where a goddess tries to convince her to stay forever.

Aya and the Star Chaser. By Radiya Hafiza. Illus. by Kaley McKean. 2025. Pan Macmillan/Macmillan Children's. Gr. 4–7.

In this Bengali gothic fairy tale, Aya gains powers after being struck by a shooting star and must unravel her family history in order to conquer a mysterious evil and its sinister creatures.

Bashir Boutros and the Jewel of the Nile. By George Jreije. 2025. Harper. Gr. 4–7.

After happening upon a golden ring inhabited by a jinn, Bashir and his awakened aura must overcome a demon lord in order to save his imprisoned parents.

Illusions of Fire. By Nisha Sharma. 2025. Union Square. Gr. 9–12.

In this fast-paced continuation of the Mahabharata, a Hindu epic, two archers discover their similar lineages to gods and demons and band together to save the universe.

The Scorpion and the Night Blossom. By Amélie Wen Zhao. 2025. Delacorte. Gr. 9–12.

Tired of watching her family suffer, Àn'yīng travels to the celestial realm to compete in the deadly Immortality Trials, hoping to win the immortality pill for her ailing mother.

Magical Girl Groups

The Assassin's Guide to Babysitting. By Natalie C. Parker. 2025. Candlewick. Gr. 7–12.

In this inspired mash-up of 1994's *The Professional* and children's classic *Spy Kids*, Tru and her resourceful group of friends must protect an infant with a rare, dangerous Talent.

Crystal Cadets. By Anne Toole. Art by K. O'Neill and Paulina Ganucheau. 2024. Oni. Gr. 4–7.

After the Darkness puts her parents in a coma, Zoe learns she's the Diamond Cadet and seeks out the rest of the Crystal Cadets to fight off Emmy and her evil forces.

Donutella Hamachi and the Library Avengers. By Kim Chi and Stephan Lee. Illus. by Utomaru. 2025. Candlewick/Walker. Gr. 4–7.

With the help of a comic-book drag superhero, seventh-grader Jae Han and his team of quirky outsiders must face an evil mayor's dastardly plot to tear down the library and build a mall.

Art from *Crystal Cadets*.

The Power of Song

Keynan Masters and the Peerless Magic Crew. By DaVaun Sanders. 2023. Harlequin/Inkyard. Gr. 5–7.

At Peerless Academy, Keynan learns that magic comes from using art, music, poetry, and dance together. His efforts to hone his lackluster hip-hop lyrics drive this tumultuous tale.

Muse Squad: The Cassandra Curse. By Chantel Acevedo. 2020. Harper. Gr. 3–6.

Callie and her friends, reincarnations of the nine muses dubbed the Muse Squad, must protect a classmate fated to change the world (and save Florida).

Sofi and the Bone Song. By Adrienne Tooley. 2022. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry. Gr. 7–10.

In this sweet, magical sapphic romance, Sofi loses the inheritance of her father's prominent musician title to her rival—and eventual love interest—Lara.

Steven Universe: Harmony. By S. M. Vidaurri. Art by Mollie Rose and Meg Casey. 2019. Kaboom! Gr. 4–7.

When Homeworld agents activate an ancient technology called the Harmony Core, Steven and the Crystal Gems must find a way to stop it before Earth is destroyed.

Suncatcher. By Jose Pimienta. Art by the author. 2020. Random/RH Graphic. Gr. 8–10.

Beatriz learns that her grandfather made a deal with a demon for musical talent, and the only way to free his soul from his old guitar is to play the perfect song.

Reserve These Reads

Children & Teens

Get your hands on these hotly anticipated books, all out this month.

Older

Heiress of Nowhere. By Stacey Lee. Simon & Schuster/Sarah Barley. Gr. 9–12.

Acclaimed author Lee keenly captures WWI, Indian boarding schools, Chinese immigrant labor, whale folklore, and more in this historical inheritance mystery set on a remote island in Washington.

Middle

Hafsa's Way. By Aisha Saeed. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. Gr. 5–8.

In the latest from the author of best-selling *Amal Unbound*, Hafsa is determined to one day be a doctor, despite resistance from her community and family.

Last Known Address: The Stumbling Stones of Europe. By Kathy Kacer. Second Story. Gr. 4–8.

Kacer takes an intriguing approach in her latest offering, which focuses on the Stolpersteine Project, an international, public artwork memorializing victims of the Holocaust across Europe.

My Bicentennial Summer: True Adventures from the Most Epic Family Road Trip of All Time. By G. Neri. Illus. by Corban Wilkin. Candlewick. Gr. 2–5.

Neri harks back to 1976, describing the notable events of the seven-week road trip his family took from L.A. to DC and back to celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial.

The Unlikely Tale of Chase & Finnegan. By Jasmine Warga. Balzer+Bray. Gr. 3–7.

A rescue dog helps an anxious cheetah cub perform at the zoo in this powerful friendship story from best-selling, award-winning Warga.

When Tomorrow Burns. By Tae Keller. Random. Gr. 3–7.

As a trio of friends grapple with life in seventh grade, they realize that the book of prophecies they discovered when they were little is proving to be very real.

Art from *The Unlikely Tale of Chase & Finnegan.*

Young

The Animals Speak: The Lakota Way. By S. D. Nelson. Illus. by the author. Tr. by Dakota Goodhouse. Abrams. PreS–Gr. 3.

Award-winning Nelson teaches young readers about the Lakota Way, introducing a series of animals and teaching the virtues and values reflected by their behavior.

Bartleby. By Matt Phelan. Illus. by the author. Farrar. PreS–Gr. 1.

This quiet young character's name and remarks reference a Herman Melville short story, but even without any knowledge of that connection, *Bartleby* will win the hearts of children and grown-ups alike.

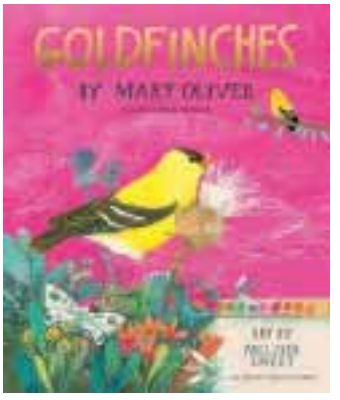
The Future Book. By Mac Barnett. Illus. by Shawn Harris. Knopf. PreS–Gr. 3.

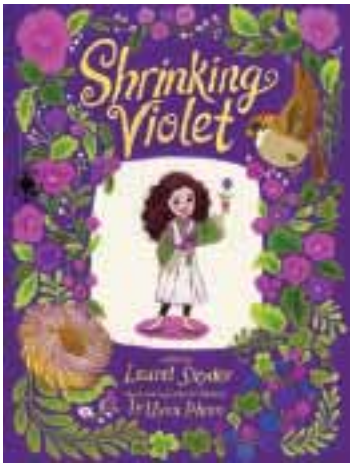
This interactive picture book from acclaimed duo Barnett and Harris takes readers into the future, when many things are different—and incredibly silly.

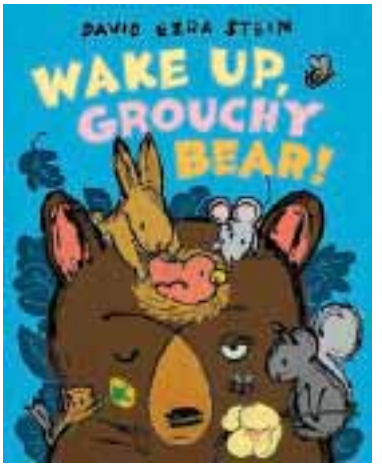
Goldfinches. By Mary Oliver. Illus. by Melissa Sweet. Viking. K–Gr. 3.

Sweet's vibrant, textured collage illustrations bring young readers the joy and wonder of nature, as expressed by Pulitzer Prize winner Oliver's ode to goldfinches.

Art from *Bartleby*.







The Heart of Our Home. By Janelle Washington. Illus. by the author. Roaring Brook. PreS–Gr. 3.

This picture-book debut from Caldecott Honoree Washington celebrates family memories by centering a household's kitchen table.

The Littlest Elephant: A One and Only Ruby Story. By Katherine Applegate. Illus. by Lita Judge. HarperCollins/Storytide. PreS–Gr. 3.

This spinoff of Applegate's best-selling One and Only series introduces readers to young Ruby the elephant, who is struggling with her coming of age.

Shrinking Violet. By Laurel Snyder. Illus. by LeUyen Pham. Chronicle. K–Gr. 3.

In this sparkling modern fairy tale from a pair of multi-award-winners, Violet, who literally shrinks when she feels afraid, must face her fears to save her friend.

Wake Up, Grouchy Bear! By David Ezra Stein. Illus. by the author. Clarion. PreS–Gr. 3.

Through clever use of color and movement, Caldecott Honor winner Stein's endearing acrylic, gouache, and photocopied illustrations capture the distinct atmospheres of the changing seasons around a hibernating bear.

High-Demand Read-alikes

My Friend the Paintbrush

by Sarah Hunter

Marcus Pfister's *The Rainbow Fish* is a childhood staple for many, and his latest picture book, *My Friend the Paintbrush*, which comes out this month, offers a retrospective of some of his work and describes in jaunty rhyme how he uses his paintbrush—"my friend"—to create his beloved artwork. The following titles offer both glimpses of the art-making processes of other picture-book illustrators and general odes to the joy of playful creativity in all its forms.

Art from *Masterpiece Mix.*

Any Questions? By Marie-Louise Gay. Illus. by the author. 2014. 60p. Groundwood. PreS–Gr. 1.

Prolific children's book author and illustrator Gay is often inundated with questions from readers, and that's the inspiration for this playful, exuberant book about her artistic process, which comes across as a delightfully disordered work in progress.

The Book of Mistakes. By Corinna Luyken. Illus. by the author. 2017. 56p. Dial. K–Gr. 2.

The juxtaposition of mistakes and opportunity is the through line of this original offering that gives children a new way to think about the creative process. Each turn of the oversized snow-white pages adds a fresh detail to the ink painting slowly being constructed.

Draw! By Raul Colón. Illus. by the author. 2014. 40p. Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman. PreS–K.

Based on Colón's own childhood imaginings, this wordless art safari takes a young artist on a journey to Africa, during which each new drawing leads to ever more adventure, imagination, and creative joy.

Ideas Are All Around. By Philip C. Stead. Illus. by the author. 2016. 48p. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter. Gr. 1–3.

Stead, author of *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, offers a contemplative look at creativity in this gorgeously illustrated book about taking a meandering walk while everyday occurrences spark all sorts of new and interesting ideas.

If You Find a Leaf. By Aimée Sicuro. Illus. by the author. 2022. 40p. Random. PreS–Gr. 1.

This dreamy exploration of infinite creative possibilities features an amazing combination of artistic techniques (watercolor, photography, and collage, for instance), resulting in a cacophony of colors and textures, including the eponymous bits of foliage.

Izzy Paints. By Tim Miller. Illus. by the author. 2022. 40p. HarperCollins. PreS–Gr. 1.

A trip to the art museum inspires koala Izzy to try their hand at painting, and after feeling stumped about where to start, they try a wide variety of techniques and, feeling the freedom of playing with lots of ideas, make something bold and vibrant to share.

Masterpiece Mix. By Roxie Munro. Illus. by the author. 2017. 32p. Holiday. PreS–Gr. 2.

Munro shares her artistic process in this eye-catching picture book. After asking "what should I paint?" inspiration comes from both famous artworks and her immediate surroundings, which cleverly make their way into her finished piece.

My Pen. By Christopher Myers. Illus. by the author. 2015. 32p. Disney/Hyperion. PreS–Gr. 1.

This spare book demonstrates how much power creativity grants the illustrator—he draws a giant man, for instance, then shrinks that man down to fit in a girl's hand. Addressing both the realities of failure and the pleasures of making art, this is an empowering ode to creativity.

My Pencil and Me. By Sara Varon. Illus. by the author. 2020. 48p. First Second. Gr. 1–3.

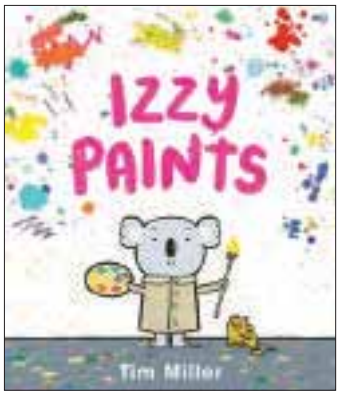
Varon traces her process from first tentative scribblings to finished story starting with the advice of her special, animated pencil. After their collaboration leads to cheery publishing success, she and her pencil head back to the drawing board for more.

Oh, Olive! By Lian Cho. Illus. by the author. 2023. 40p. HarperCollins/Katherine Tegen. PreS–Gr. 2.

Olive's artist parents make precise, staid, rule-following artwork. Not Olive, though: her messy, colorful paintings upend her parents' ideas of "serious" art, and her untamed style inspires her friends to follow their own creative impulses, to undeniably wonderful results.

Sometimes You Find a Dragon: Find Your Dragon. Find Your Creativity. By Viviane Schwarz. Illus. by the author. 2025. 32p. Candlewick. PreS–Gr. 2.

A cast of kids finds dragons in a wide variety of objects—



branches and leaves, swoops of watercolor, booming beats of a drum—in this artful depiction of an esoteric set of feelings that nicely captures the freewheeling, open-ended nature of creative play.

What If . . . By Samantha Berger. Illus. by Mike Curato. 2018. 40p. Little, Brown. K–Gr. 3.

As a young artist sits down to consider her work, she wonders what would happen if her pencil disappeared? Her paper? Her desk? At every turn, she knows she'd find some way to create, since art isn't just about the tools. An inspiring exploration of the unstoppable spirit of creativity.

Art from *My Pencil and Me.*

A Conversation

Brian Lies

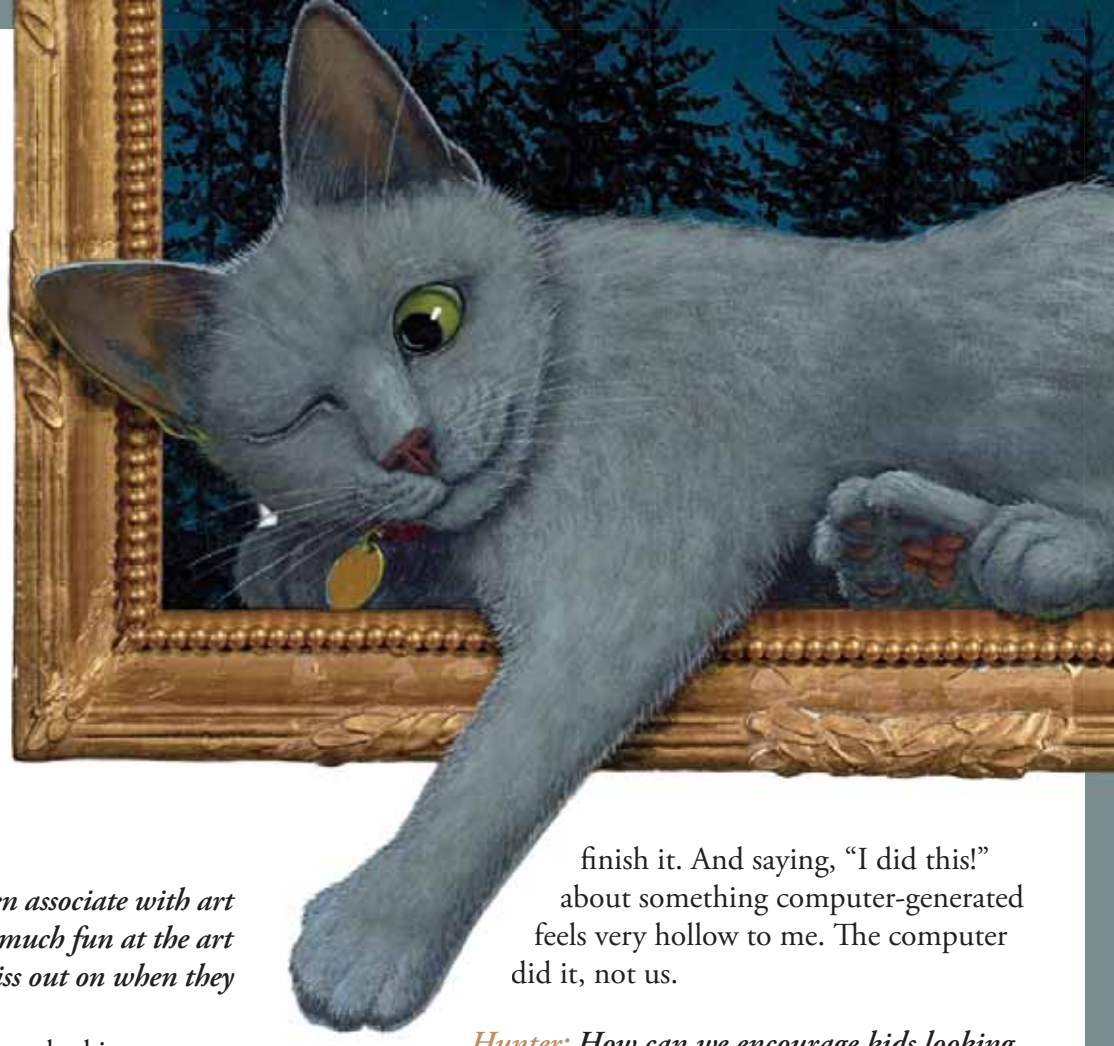
by Sarah Hunter

Author/illustrator Brian Lies is well known for his expressive paintings, such as in the Caldecott Honor book *The Rough Patch* (2018), but *Cat Nap*—one of our Top 10 Arts Books for Youth—is a big departure from his usual techniques. There are still paintings in his signature style, of course, but the bulk of the illustration is composed of captivating recreations of artworks from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, employing such techniques as bas-relief, wood carving, gilding, and stained glass—all of which Lies made by hand. It's a playful introduction to art history but also a staggering work of creativity. Read on for more insight into Lies' techniques and inspiration, as well as the importance of encouraging kids to value the process of making art, not just the finished product.

Hunter: ***The illustrations in this book are unlike anything you've published before; what inspired this new medium—or, more accurately, media?***
Lies: Like most stories, *Cat Nap* grew out of an idea. Our Russian blue mix cat, Dylan, disappeared one day, and we searched through the entire house for him, worried that he'd gotten outside. We didn't find him, but a few hours later, he sauntered into the room, his whiskers covered with cobwebs. We joked that he'd found a wormhole in time and space and then thought he'd traveled back to ancient Egypt, where cats were revered.

That morphed into a question: Could that journey be the basis for a picture book? It would be fun to have him interacting with Egyptian art! The more I thought about the idea, the more ambitious it became. People have told stories of a character interacting with art before, but a really fun challenge would be to remake the pieces of art the character interacts with *in the original materials*, or as close as I could get. I broadened the concept so that Kitten (as he's known in the book) meets a variety of artworks in 2D and 3D, from as wide a cultural range as could fit in a picture book.

Hunter: ***You picked an intriguing variety of works for the story. What specifically drew you to those artworks?***
Lies: When I'd decided that the "setting" for the Kitten's journey would be The Metropolitan Museum of Art, I took several trips there, just searching for pieces I liked.



Emma Van Name, a delightfully weird 1805 portrait of a little girl standing next to an enormous goblet full of berries, was an immediate choice. So was the Mblo Portrait Face Mask, with a bird perched on a woman's head, because the bird seemed so full of life and about to talk. I did initially choose a number of pieces that I ended up leaving out—one was Degas' famous sculpture *La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans*, partially because the girl in the tutu is so recognizable that it almost felt like a cliché or a parody to have Kitten interacting with her. And that sculpture alone would have taken me many months to recreate.

Hunter: **Play** ***is not a word people often associate with art museums, but you're clearly having so much fun at the art museum; what do you think people miss out on when they take art museums too seriously?***

Lies: I think art museums can be approached in many ways—as a place to study psychology and the history of human thoughts and practices and a place to take simple joy in elemental things like color and texture and flights of fancy. Museums can seem starchy and forbidding (and sometimes they HAVE to be—I once witnessed a man picking with his pinky fingernail at the thick paint of Jamie Wyeth's 1970 *Portrait of Pig* at the Brandywine Museum!!!). But as long as you're behaving properly, the experience of visiting a museum can be playful, especially with kids. It's the ideal location for a killer game of "I Spy with My Little Eye!"

Hunter: **Cat Nap** ***has an excellent author's note emphasizing the importance of finding satisfaction and joy in the process of learning to make art, even if you're not great at it at the start. I'm sure you've felt this way about making art for a long time, so why was it important to add that note to this book in particular?***

Lies: My editor, Virginia Duncan, suggested the "how it was made" note. "Otherwise, people will think it was just done on the computer," she said. It's important to me that young readers know this stuff was all *made* by me, not *prompted* in an image generator, because I firmly believe that if someone like me could make the artworks in the book, other people can, too. And while having something to show that you're proud of is important, the kind of engagement and joy you get from *making* the thing is vital. If you're not engaged, you're going to give up before you finish it. And saying, "I did this!" about something computer-generated feels very hollow to me. The computer did it, not us.

Hunter: ***How can we encourage kids looking at art to change their thinking from "I could never do that" to "I want to try doing that!"?***

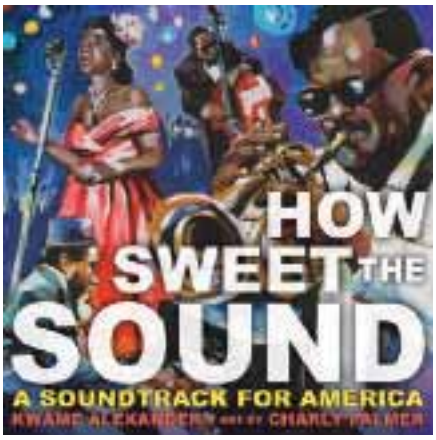
Lies: I think one way is to ask kids questions like, "How do you think the artist made this? What would *you* do differently if you made this? Can you think of anything you'd add or take away?" Another way is to make art materials easily available to kids—give them a whole ream of inexpensive printer paper to do whatever they want with. Make an art-friendly space in the house. Let the kids get bored by turning off the screens. I think if we're constantly amused by TV and phones and computers, there's no impetus to be creative. Much of my early creativity came out of boring summer days, when the only thing to do was make stuff up. You've got to create a void for kids to fill with their own thoughts and inspiration.

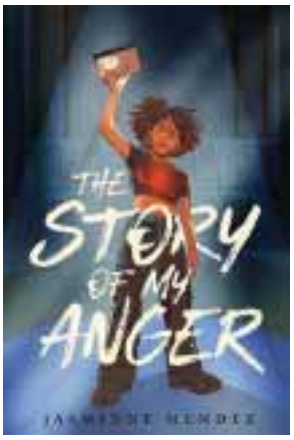
One other challenge is that if we adults don't make things ourselves, if we think "heck—I can't even draw a stick figure!" it will be even harder to encourage our kids to do the things we're not comfortable doing. That's where librarians come in—there are endless inspiring "how to" books out there and books showing art in a colorful way. And it's important to just let kids *play* with art materials, as well as talking with them about what they made and encouraging their experimentation rather than giving hollow praise (kids *know* it doesn't really look like a lion!). It doesn't have to be good, but it has to be *started*. It takes time to arrive at that proud moment of "I made that!"

Top 10

Arts Books for Youth

Finding joy and expression through creating or performing art is a common theme among these top 10 books about the arts.





Candle Island. By Lauren Wolk. 2025. Dutton. Gr. 5–8.

Lucretia and her mother endeavor to adjust to their new life on Candle Island and find acceptance among the prickly locals.

Cat Nap. By Brian Lies. Illus. by the author. 2025. Greenwillow. PreS–Gr. 3.

A cat chases a mouse through a series of meticulously constructed artworks in this breathtaking book that emphasizes the delight and satisfaction of making art by hand.

The Glass Pyramid: A Story of the Louvre Museum and Architect I. M. Pei. By Jeanne Walker Harvey. Illus. by Khoa Le. 2025. Atheneum. Gr. 1–3.

Inviting text and airy illustrations combine in this thoughtful introduction to one of I. M. Pei's most iconic constructions, the redesigned entrance to the Louvre.

How Sweet the Sound: A Soundtrack for America. By Kwame Alexander. Illus. by Charly Palmer. 2025. Little, Brown. PreS–Gr. 2.

Stirring verse and exuberant artwork bring the history of American music to life, from its roots in Africa to its dynamic present.

The Music Inside Us: Yo-Yo Ma and His Gifts to the World. By James Howe. Illus. by Jack Wong. 2025. Abrams. K–Gr. 5.

This beautifully illustrated book introduces children to cellist Yo-Yo Ma and his hope of uniting people around the world through their music.

Ra! Ta! Ma! Cue! By Howie Shia. Illus. by the author. 2025. Annick. K–Gr. 3.

A group of brave children drum their way across the countryside to rescue their parents in this dynamically illustrated story about the power of rhythm.

Rap It Up! By Carole Boston Weatherford and Jeffrey Boston Weatherford. Illus. by Ernel Martinez. 2025. Holt. K–Gr. 3.

This cheery knockout, featuring vivid, energetic, graffiti-filled collages, celebrates the joy of writing and performing original rap pieces.

The Reel Wish. By Yamile Saied Méndez. 2025. Lee & Low/Tu .Gr. 4–8.

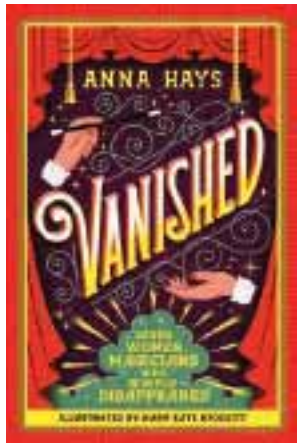
When Flor has a panic attack during her opening-night performance, it takes careful work and a new way of appreciating dance for her to find joy in the art form again. Also available in Spanish.

The Story of My Anger. By Jasminne Mendez. 2025. Dial. Gr. 8–12.

Increasingly furious over acts of racial prejudice, Yulieta turns to guerrilla theater to incite social change. Simultaneously released in a Spanish edition by Mendez.

Vanished: Seven Women Magicians Who Simply Disappeared. By Anna Hays. Illus. by Mary Kate McDevitt. 2025. Random/Bright Matter. Gr. 4–7.

Mystery, wonder, and magic await in this biography of seven women who led their lives and took to the stage on their own terms.



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