Falk School Library
Gift Book List: 2015-16

Each entry below includes author’s name, title, the number of pages in the book, the price, and a brief summary or notes excerpted from Booklist or the publisher. All listed books have been purchased for the library and may be selected as gift books. We use the collected funds to purchase new books that may appear on future lists.

You may donate a book to commemorate special times or persons: birthdays, holidays, grandparents, or teachers. We place appropriate bookplates in the books, and names are listed in the Library Gift Register. We also send notes of acknowledgment to the honorees. Please note: Additional titles are available for browsing in the library – let us know when you would like to come in.

Books for Younger Readers

Asim, Jabari. Fifty Cents and a Dream : Young Booker T. Washington. 40 p. $17. In this handsome picture-book biography, the focus is on an amazing achievement in Washington’s youth, when he walked 500 miles from his West Virginia home “without a single penny in his pocket” to make it to school. Asim tells the story in spare free verse... Collier’s dramatic, unframed illustrations in watercolor and collage include the unforgettable image of the young Washington staring through a window at white kids in the classroom. Booklist

Bingham, Kelly. Circle, Square, Moose. 40 p. $18. Why can’t a book about shapes also be about animals? There’s no good reason that the irrepresible Moose can think of, so he takes it upon himself, with the help of Zebra and a triangle-eared cat, to liven up the narrator’s attempt at teaching concepts. Even kids who already know their shapes may start to buy Moose’s attempts to convince everyone that he’s a rectangle and makes a better diamond than anything on an old queen’s crown. He’s just so enthusiastic, who cares that he constantly interrupts the rhyme, and by the time readers learn about curves, things are really tangled up? Booklist

Ferry, Beth and Tom Lichtenheld. Stick and Stone. 32 p. $17. Stick, a stick, is lonely. Stone, a stone, is too. They meet and become friends. The end! In the hands of Ferry and Lichtenheld, however, this nearly plotless affair becomes a thing of off-the-charts adorability. For starters, just look at them: Stone (described as “a zero” because of his shape) is a brown lump, while Stick (described as “a one”) is a stubby-limbed fella with a tall twig head topped by a leaf. They both have dots for eyes and dashes for mouths, all of which go giddy after they meet. [T]hese two characters are a delight to know (at the end, quite cleverly, they form “a perfect 10”), and the irresistible cadence of the text should make this a repeat favorite. Booklist

Hesse, Karen. Spuds. 32 p. $15. This title features young people on a secret mission: a trio of siblings who yearn for a hearty meal and relief for their overworked mother. Watson’s quiet, earth-toned images set the story in the past and in a poor, rural setting, where the kids hatch a plan to steal potatoes from a farmer’s field after his harvest. The subtlety in Hesse’s spare, regional poetry is beautifully extended in Watson’s uncluttered pictures, which convey the thrilling, frosty, moonlit adventure and then the glowing warmth of the family’s shared meal at the end. Booklist Starred

Heos, Bridget. Counting Change. 24 p. $21. One title from the Math World series in which readers are walked through a basic math concept via a fictional story that makes the process feel less like work. Explanations are built into the dialogue, and the characters and scenarios are realistic and relatable. In Counting Change, Aiden helps his friend Mason with his yard sale. The stories typically end on an upbeat note, with a silly joke or clever ending. The illustrations, focusing on ethnically diverse characters, add great charm. Booklist

Jenkins. Creature Features. 32 p. $18. In a question-and-answer format, each animal speaks in the first person to explain the purpose of its bizarre features. When asked, “Have you ever thought about getting braces?,” the toothy mole rat replies, “Not really. I dig tunnels through the earth with my teeth.” Two show-stopper portraits are the pink-tinted blob fish’s smashed head against a brilliant azure background and the toothless horned frog’s head with its “ginormous” mouth. The flat, brightly colored backgrounds make the nuanced cut-paper and collage faces pop. Booklist

Rappaport Doreen. To Dare Mighty Things : the Life of Theodore Roosevelt. 44 p. $18. Theodore Roosevelt’s big ideas and big personality come together in this splendid picture-book biography. Readers will be drawn into the book by the laughing portrait on the cover. Inside, they will be hooked by Rappaport’s portrait of young “Teedie,” a sickly child who is nonetheless high-spirited and curious about everything, and determined to do as his father insists: make over his body so that it is as strong as his mind. Two-page spreads convey Roosevelt’s wide-ranging interests and experiences—such as charging up San Juan Hill and isolating himself in the Dakota territory. Booklist Starred

Schaefer, Lola M. Lifetime : The Amazing Numbers in Animal Lives. 33 p. $18. Schaefer combines her interest in animals and her fascination with numbers, using sparse text to introduce both animals and a numerical fact about a specific characteristic of each animal. It takes a bit to realize that Neal’s illustration for each animal matches the number Schaefer uses in the text. For instance, the illustration for sea horses has 1,000 “teeny-weeny, squiggly-wiggly baby sea horses.” As part of the back matter, Schaefer adds detailed information about each animal and its life span, how she calculated the estimations she uses throughout the book, two animal math problems to solve, and more. Booklist
Schmidt, Annie M. G. A Pond Full of Ink. 32 p. $14. “Would you like to come out walking?” said the table to the chair, “I’ve been standing here forever, and I’d like to take the air.” This collection of translated story poems from the beloved Dutch author Schmidt is poignantly illustrated by Schmidt’s compatriot Posthuma. The combination of collage and ink illustrations delight and soften dire situations with both subtle tones as a backdrop for text and deep color hues in double-page spreads. Schmidt’s blend of loony characters, bizarre adventures, and anthropomorphism offers a poetic experience reminiscent of Edward Lear. Booklist

Wilson, Karma. Bear Sees Colors. 26 p. $13. As Bear strolls outdoors, his friend Mouse rides along on top of his head. Suddenly Bear sees blue! / Blue flowers / by the trail. / Blue berries. / Blue pail. / Blue, blue, EVERYWHERE! / Can you spy blue with Bear? Wilson juggles rhythm and rhyme with ease in verses celebrating blue, red, green, yellow, and (for a nice change) brown. The engaging text leaves plenty of room for audience participation, while the large-scale, colorful acrylic paintings show up well from a distance... Booklist

Books for Slightly Older Readers

Barnett, Mac and John Iory. The Terrible Two. 214 p. $12. Miles Murphy isn’t happy about moving to small Yawnee Valley (Welcome sign: “Come look at our cows”) or leaving his friends, but he is determined to be his school’s number one prankster, the title he proudly held at his old school. He is facing serious competition, however, when an anonymous trickster delays the first day of school by blocking the school’s entryway with the principal’s car. Worse, Principal Barkin blames Miles and pairs him with goody-two-shoes Niles Sparks; then he is targeted by bully Josh. Undaunted, Miles focuses on achieving premiere prankster status, but he is continually thwarted. Thus begins a rivalry of pranking one-upmanship, but perhaps an alliance is better—and ultimately rewarding in multiple ways. Booklist

Cooke, Tim. The Victorians. 23 p. $22. Posing as magazines one might pick up at the supermarket, the At Home With... series seeks to make periods in world history accessible through quick facts, informal writing, and plenty of photos and illustration; first-person writing also serves to make the information more engaging. Victorians pays particular attention to the dirt and dangers of city life, inventions (steam trains and ships), the allure of America, and the rise of department stores. Booklist

Demi. Muhammad. 42 p. $18. This biography of the prophet Muhammad reflects the literary and artistic traditions of the Islamic world. Like most Arab texts, it begins with the words, “In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate”, and an Arabic honorific always follows Muhammad’s name. The readily understandable narrative tells the stories of Muhammad’s life as Muslim children hear them, beginning with his birth in Mecca and ending with the declaration that although Muhammad has died, God never will. In keeping with Islamic artistic tradition, the paintings do not portray the face or body of the Prophet; instead they show his silhouette in gold leaf. With dramatic scenes extending past the borders of the intricately patterned frames, Demi weaves together selections from the Qur’an and an overview of Islam in this excellent retelling of the Prophet’s life that combines beauty and scholarship. Booklist

Egan, Kate with Magician Mike Lane. The Disappearing Magician. 150 p. $14. Mike’s magic tricks have helped him learn how to focus, earn extra credit, improve his reputation and stand up for himself. But his new confidence is about to face its biggest challenge yet - the school talent show! Mike signs up immediately. After all, what magician would pass up the chance to perform on a real stage? But then, he learns that Nora, his friend and trusted magician’s assistant, has a massive case of stage fright. And Jackson will be sitting in the audience, just waiting to cause trouble... If things keep going wrong, Mike might need a magic trick to help him disappear! From the Publisher.

Grabenstein, Chris. The Island of Dr. Libris. 242 p. $15. Billy Gillfoyle is not thrilled at the prospect of spending his summer stuck at Dr. Libris’ weird lake cabin with his mom, who’s too busy finishing her dissertation to entertain him. Throw in a neighborhood bully and the potential of his parents splitting up, and Billy’s summer is off to an awful start. But when the characters in the books he reads start coming to life—from Hercules to Robin Hood to Pollyanna—Billy’s summer quickly goes from dull to adventurous, even dangerous. Effortlessly readable and a whole lot of fun. Booklist

Harrington, Karen. Courage for Beginners. 289 p. $15. For Mysti Murphy, being in seventh grade takes enormous courage. Her agoraphobic mother never leaves the house; her father falls from a tree and is hospitalized in a coma; and her best and only friend is “conducting a social experiment,” ignoring and even making fun of her at school. From her father, Mysti has learned to deflect difficulties with humor, but from her mother, she has learned fears—for instance, it takes Mysti more than a month to think of solving the family’s food problem by walking to a nearby store. Mysti often sees herself as a character in a book, and such thoughts are italicized to create scene-setting narration. Booklist starred

Jennings, Ken. Maps and Geography. 160 p. $17. Jeopardy! champ and author Jennings, arranges the trivia in chapters that lightly satirize a school-day schedule, including a lunch period offering an ingenious and easy recipe for an edible map, a craft project in art class, and an official certification exam before the dismissal bell. Cartoon illustrations, inset boxes, and Jennings’ jokey patter break each fact-stuffed page into delicious wonder-bites, each as satisfying as the next: Papua New Guinea’s flag was designed by a 15-year-old, a fear of maps is called cartophobia, and so on. Games, pop quizzes (including an encoded answer key and cipher to solve it), jokes, mnemonic devices, and suggestions for field trips are included. Booklist starred
MacLachlan, Patricia. Waiting for the Magic. 143 p. $16. Shortly after William and Elinor’s father walks out on the family, their mother takes them to an animal shelter, where they adopt four dogs and a cat. Early on, four-year-old Elinor can understand what the animals are saying, and after a while, Max (a fifth-grader) can, too. When their father hears that a baby is on the way, he rejoins the family and begins to heal emotionally. Suddenly, the magic of understanding animal speech extends to him and, in the end, to his wife. The magic of understanding animal speech seems minor compared with the magical idea that adding four dogs, a cat, and a baby will bring an absent father home and heal a broken family. Booklist

Mulder, Michelle. Every Last Drop: Bringing Clean Water Home. 48 p. $18. Mulder begins this book by relating her personal experience with the topic, including a severe illness after drinking contaminated water in Peru. She then looks at the management of clean water and sewage throughout history, from the earliest wells in Cyprus to the Minoans’ first flush toilets (unfortunately forgotten when they were conquered by the Mycenaeans). Amazing global initiatives include filtering arsenic-contaminated water in Bangladesh with iron nails, harvesting fog to gather fresh water in Chile, and more. Booklist

Pinkney, Andrea. Davis. The Red Pencil. 308 p. $17. As Amira’s twelfth birthday approaches, she finds herself distracted from her daily responsibilities on the family farm: doing chores; looking after her little sister, Leila, who was born with special needs; and caring for her little lamb, Nali. She dreams of school, but that is not the traditional way for girls in Sudan. Life is hard, with scarce food, distant water, and the looming obligation of marriage and motherhood. Still, she scratches out her thoughts and dreams in the dirt with a precious twig, wishing. Then the Janjaweed arrive and decimate the village in an attack that kills her father and Nali. After the remaining family members relocate to a refugee camp, Amira’s spirit is sorely tested, but the gift of a pad and a red pencil restores her sense of agency and offers the promise of learning. Ultimately, this is an inspirational story of the harrowing adversity countless children face, the resilience with which they meet it, and the inestimable power of imagination and learning to carry them through. Booklist starred

Yasuda, Anita. Astronomy : Cool Women in Space. 106 p. $18. The women featured in this Girls in Science series share more than a passion for science, technology, engineering, and math. Starting at a young age all were discouraged from pursuing paths in STEM fields. These books seek to rectify this oversight by encouraging today’s girls to consider special topics in science and technology. Astronomy: Cool Women in Space highlights Nancy Grace Roman, also known as the “mother of Hubble” for her role in the development of the Hubble Space Telescope; Maggie Aderin-Pocock, a black British planetary scientist, educator, and presenter on the show The Sky at Night; and Andrea Ghez, an astronomer and physicist who researches black holes. Booklist

Books for Older Readers

Aronson, Marc. The Griffin and the Dinosaur. 48 p. $17. In a tribute to the thrill of archaeological discovery, Aronson retracts coauthor Mayor's search for evidence to support the idea that griffins and other monsters in ancient Greek mythology were inspired by dinosaur fossils. That search begins in a library (what better place?) and leads through clues carefully gathered from art and folklore of the Greek islands, the remote gold fields of the ancient Scythians, and all the way to the renowned fossil beds of Mongolia’s Flaming Cliffs. Plenty of on-site sketches, photos of artifacts, and artist's conceptions from Muller add dynamic visual elements to the tale; the maps and resource lists at the end will provide avenues for further study of the tantalizing links “between,” as the subtitle puts it, “myth and science.” Booklist

Brimner, Larry Dane. Strike! : The Farm Workers’ Fight for Their Rights. 172 p. $17. This informative volume offers a detailed, nuanced discussion of the man and the California agricultural workers’ movement. The story begins in 1965, with Filipino farm workers leaving the vineyards to strike for better wages and living conditions. Next, Brimner follows Chávez as he grows up in a family of migrant workers, becomes an organizer, and leads the National Farm Workers of America for many years, using tactics such as strikes, boycotts, and fasting. The book includes many black-and-white photos, stylized illustrations, sidebars, and quotes (in Spanish and English). Though portraying Chávez as hardworking, inspirational, and effective, the book also shows him as a controversial leader who, later in life, could be high-handed in directing what “his” union would do. Brimner also credits the contributions of Larry Itliong, from the Filipino movement, as well as Dolores Huerta and others within the NFWA while placing events within the political and social context of their turbulent times. Booklist starred

Holzcr, Tracy. The Secret Hum of a Daisy. 312 p. $15. Holzer writes about the common theme of loss, but creates quite an uncommon character who must deal with the sudden death of her mother, and moving in with a grandmother she has never met. Grace’s mother leads them on a nomadic life of moving from one place to another, always searching for just the right home, until her untimely death. Grace must then find a way to get to know and forgive her grandmother who has always been a stranger in her life. She soon discovers that her mother has left her one more treasure hunt. The clues take her deep inside her family’s past and unlock memories that finally give her the stability and roots she has always been craving. More than simply a book about grief and the death of a parent, Grace’s story is about the search for identity. School Library Journal
Kanefield, Teri. *The Girl from the Tar Paper School*. 56 p. $18. Barbara Rose Johns is not a household name, but she is one of the most important players in the early days of the civil rights movement. In 1951, 16-year-old Johns organized a series of peaceful demonstrations to draw attention to the substandard education she and classmates were receiving in their segregated “tar paper” schools, one-room shanties with leaky roofs and no heat. Drawing on inspiration from a favorite teacher and with the support of her family, Johns planned and led a strike at the school that garnered both positive and negative attention from the press and from peers. The demands that Johns made, including equality in educational facilities, would soon after be argued before the United States Supreme Court in the seminal case of Brown v. Board of Education. Kanefield’s text manages to create a story that is genuine and can serve as an example to any young person battling an injustice. *Booklist*

Rylant, Cynthia. *God Got a Dog*. 36 p. $16. This slim volume of 15 poems focuses on what God does. Each poem title is a declarative sentence with a strong verb: “God woke up.” “God went to beauty school.” And tenderly, “God found God.” The free verse suggests faces of God that probably won’t be familiar to Sunday school students. For instance, when “God went to India,” it was to see elephants, one of the best things he has made. Elephants know how to mourn, as God does, because he has lost everything. When “God got a boat,” she is surprised to discover how much sense her creation makes, far more so than looking at Earth from far away. And after “God went skating,” it’s clear that the occasional invincibility God feels is matched by a willingness to try new things. In this interpretation, God and humans are cocreators of an evolving world. God didn’t think she had time for a dog. But she got one anyway. *Booklist starred*

Scott, Michael. *The Alchemyst*. 375 p. $15. When 15-year-old twins Josh and Sophie inadvertently become involved in a plot to steal the *Codex* from their friend Nick Fleming (aka Nicholas Flamel), they are propelled into a fantasy world of golems, werebeards, and many other creatures that inhabit the netherworld between good and evil. Also known as the *Book of Abraham the Mage*, the *Codex* contains the secret formula for eternal youth, but that’s just one of the book’s wild powers that fuel the twins’ adventures. Readers will actively root for the good guys in this exhilarating fantasy—if they can figure out who they are. *Booklist*

Shusterman, Neal and Eric Elfman. *Tesla’s Attic*. 246 p. $17. Everything changed after the toaster hit Nick on the head. It fell from an attic full of junk in the ramshackle Victorian house in Colorado Springs that 14-year-old Nick, his father, and younger brother have moved into from Tampa. Nick disposes of most of the things in the attic at a garage sale. What begins as a story about a adolescent boy coming to terms with his mother’s death—and his guilt about the house fire that took her—quickly takes a turn for the supernatural and sinister as Nick discovers that the items he sold are the magical inventions of Nikola Tesla. And he must recover them before they fall into the hands of a murderous secret society, the Accelerati. *Booklist*

Turnage, Sheila. *The Ghosts of Tupelo Landing*. 352 p. $9. In Tupelo Landing, North Carolina, Mo and her friend Dale (aka the Desperado Detective Agency) have mysteries to solve. Each question they answer leads to another: Who was the girl whose ghost haunts the dilapidated Old Tupelo Inn, which operated from 1880 to 1938? How did she die? Who killed her? Why does she still haunt the inn? When a sixth-grade history project sends Mo, Dale, and their classmates out to interview elderly residents, the pieces of the puzzle gradually move into place—with an occasional nudge from the ghost herself. The intrepid Mo LoBeau, who narrates the story, gives full credit to her best buddy, the occasionally trepid Dale, and slowly warms up to Harm, an initially cocky newcomer whose family history is intertwined with the mystery. *Booklist starred*

White, J. A. *The Thickety: The Whispering Trees*. 171 p. $15. The menacing Thickety is forbidden, but it’s safer for Kara and her little brother, Taff, than staying in the village, now that it’s being controlled by a vicious witch. As soon as Kara and Taff step inside, however, they face the terrifying presence of Sordyr, the forest demon who controls the Thickety and is infecting its denizens with a mysterious plague, which transforms peaceable creatures into malignant jumbles of branches, thorns, and clods of dirt. The only person who comes to Kara and Taff’s rescue is the infamous Mary Kettle, a witch banished to the Thickety for killing dozens of children to enchant magical toys. Mary seems to have redeemed herself and helps Kara shape her unique power to communicate with animals, but can she really be trusted? Crosses and double-crosses abound and the twisted plot is perfectly matched by the twisted atmosphere. *Booklist starred*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. 336 p. $15. What is this book about? In an appended author’s note, Woodson says it best: “my past, my people, my memories, my story.” The resulting memoir in verse is a marvel, as it turns deeply felt remembrances of Woodson’s preadolescent life into art, through memories of her homes in Ohio, South Carolina, and, finally, New York City, and of her friends and family. Small things—ice cream from the candy store, her grandfather’s garden, fireflies in jelly jars—become large as she recalls them and translates them into words. She gives context to her life as she writes about racial discrimination, the civil rights movement, and, later, Black Power. But her focus is always on her family. Her mother cautions her not to write about her family, but, happily, many years later she has—and the result is both elegant and eloquent, a haunting book about memory that is itself altogether memorable. *Booklist starred*