

2021 BEST OF THE BEST BOOKLIST

5TH THROUGH 8TH GRADE

Accused: My Story of Injustice by Adama Bah

-Have you ever been accused of something? How about terrorism? Accused is a nonfiction middle grade first person account of the experiences of Adama Bah, a 13 year old growing up in East Harlem.

Amari and the Night Brothers by B. B. Alston

-A fantastical tale of a 12 year old African American girl recruited by a secret organization in a supernatural world to expose the misdeeds occurring at the magical training camp, that will also, ultimately reveal the case of her missing brother. With passion, action and determination Amari jumps into this realm daringly, what will she discover?

Artie and the Wolf Moon by Olivia Stephens

-When Artie sneaks out to photograph the next full moon and stumbles upon an enormous wolf, she doesn't expect it to be her mom. As she unravels her family's story and discovers more about the line of werewolves she is descended from, she must confront the true danger lurking in the shadows-- vampires.

Black Boy Joy by Kwame Mbalia

-A beautiful anthology for middle-graders that is beautifully and unapologetically written, allowing anyone, regardless of age, sex or race, to feel a sense of pride and joy in being true to themselves.

Fast Pitch by Nic Stone

-In this middle grade realistic fiction novel, Shenice "Lightning" Lockwood the captain of her softball team is tasked with clearing the name of her grandfather while also attempting to be the first all-black team to win a championship title.

Forever This Summer by Leslie Youngblood

-The sequel to Youngblood's Love Like Sky follows sisters Georgie and Peaches as they connect with extended family in small-town Louisiana. While caring for an ailing great-aunt, the sisters meet a foster child named Markie who wants to find her birth mother. Along the way, all three girls learn that the answers to some questions are not as easy as they may think.

Good Night Stories For Rebel Girls: 100 Real Life Tales of Black Girl Magic by Lilly Workneh, Jestine Ware, Diana Odero, and Sonja Thomas

-Exclusively featuring the work of Black female and nonbinary contributors, this installment of the Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls series dedicates itself to uplifting 100 #BlackGirlMagic stories and empowering young readers to be inspired by them.

*Books that appear on this definitive list are written and illustrated by Black authors and artists with a copyright date of 2021. Through stories and informational text, these books celebrate the black experience and most importantly the black community. These selections will be enjoyed by students, families and caregivers alike. Feel free to share this list with teachers, fellow librarians and community members within your networks.

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Legacy: Women Poets of the Harlem Renaissance by Nikki Grimes

–Nikki Grimes takes a word from each line of an existing poem and uses them as the last word of each line in a new poem to create wholly original poems based on the works of some little known women poets of the Harlem Renaissance. Each poem is paired with art from talented female African-American illustrators. Together the words and illustrations bring these poets to life and add them to the Harlem Renaissance literary history.

Make Your Own Money: How Kids Can Earn It, Save It, Spend It, and Dream Big, with Danny Dollar, the King of Cha-Ching by Ty Allan Jackson

–Danny Dollar teaches young children about money through exercises and example that they have the power to control their present and future financial success. Danny explains that with hard work and a plan that kids today can earn their own "cha- ching". Danny also explains the importance of giving back to your community and to always dream big.

Miles Morales: Shock Waves by Justin A. Reynolds

–Want to feel like you can change the world? Meet Miles, student at Brooklyn Vision Academy by day, and Spiderman in training by night. Creating balance between family, friends, community and all things Spidey. Miles is entrenched in a battle that forces him to realize change can and must be made by all, whether you are a big time corporation or an individual trying to be closer to those you love.

Ophie's Ghost by Justina Ireland

–When Ophelia Harrison's father saves her and her mom from the white lynch mob that murdered him, she discovers her ability to communicate with ghosts. They flee to Pittsburgh, where she soon realizes Daffodil Manor and the family she works for is haunted by the ghosts of the past, a deep sadness, and an unsolved mystery. Now the ghosts want something from her-- and they won't rest until they get it.

Partly Cloudy by Tanita S. Davis

–Madalyn looks forward to a fresh start. Moving in with her great-uncle, Papa Lobo, and switching to a new school is just the first step. But, Madalyn discovers she's the only Black girl in her class, and although her classmates are friendly, they make assumptions about her that creates conflict. When a fire threatens her community, Madalyn learns more about being neighborly and having tough conversations with neighbors

Playing the Cards You're Dealt by Varian Johnson

–This books explores themes of toxic masculinity and family legacy in a hopeful story of one boy discovering what it really means to be a man through playing the game Spades.

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Root Magic by Eden Royce

-In this fantastic and strong coming-of-age story grounded in a vibrant cultural heritage, a Black American tween learns about her family's connection to conjure magic and human evil in South Carolina in the 1960s.

Take Back the Block by Crystal D. Giles

-Wes, a sixth grader, enjoys living in his neighborhood. However, finds himself in the midst of arguments and protests when a real estate developer makes an offer to buy his neighborhood. Wes isn't about to give up the only home he's ever known. But can he and will he before it's too late?

The 1619 Project: Born on the Water by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renee Watson

-This stirring, beautifully-illustrated book is a companion to the groundbreaking 1619 Project. A grandmother comforts and educates her granddaughter, who is upset about her inability to finish a family tree project, on the history of Black people in the United States and their journey there via the Middle Passage. The book is a testament to the history and tenacity endemic to the Black experience, as well as a reassurance to children that they have a rich culture and history. The symbolism of water as both a conduit and a recurring motif in the Black experience is a powerful addition.

The Highest Tribute: Thurgood Marshall's Life, Leadership, and Legacy by Kekla Magoon

-Kekla's text and Laura's illustrations presents a wonderful biography about Thurgood Marshall, who fought for equality during the Civil Rights Movement and served as the first Black justice on the Supreme Court.

The People Remember by Ibi Zoboi

-Beautifully illustrated and lyrically written, Zoboi and Lewis tells the journey of African descendants in America by connecting their history to the seven principles of Kwanzaa. It begins in Africa, where people were taken from their homes and families and were shipped to America.

The Swag in the Socks by Kelly J. Baptist

-Xavier is so close to being great and the Scepter League could get him there. Everyone in his family has been a part of the club and now maybe he will be a member as well. Hopefully with the addition of the socks from his uncle and the notes he's been receiving he will find his way.

The Year I Flew Away by Marie Arnold

-Gabrielle thinks she has to give up being Haitian to be American. After being teased in school and trying to fit in she slowly begins to give up pieces of her culture until she doesn't recognize herself. The Year I Flew Away reminds us that being American means being yourself.

2021 BEST OF THE BEST BOOKLIST

9TH THROUGH 12TH GRADE

African Icons: Ten People Who Shaped History by Tracey Baptiste

-In this heavily researched compendium of ten remarkable Africans who shaped history, Tracey Baptiste aims to correct inaccurate perceptions of African history and establishes a compelling case against starting the narrative of Black History we teach to children with slavery. Enhanced by Hillary D. Wilson's illustrated portraits, Baptiste weaves and engrossing chronicle that focuses on history that has too often been untold.

Angel of Greenwood by Randi Pink

-This love story finds opposites Isaiah and Angel working together on a mobile library. Isaiah, a covert but avid reader is a follower of W.E.B Dubois and known as a troublemaker. Angel is a high achiever who follows the teachings of Booker T. Washington. When their prosperous town is viciously attacked, Isaiah and Angel come to understand that there are threats to Black unity that are far greater than differing philosophies.

Concrete Rose by Angie Thomas

-Thomas builds on the plot of her groundbreaking debut novel *The Hate U Give* with this equally gripping prequel, expanding on the characters and history of the first book's highly authentic world with the same thoughtful and nuanced writing style that has made her an instant success.

Beasts of Prey by Ayana Gray

-Koffi is an indentured servant who cares for the notorious Night Zoo. Ekon is destined to become a Son of the Six. But Ekon encounters the Shetani, a vicious monster. Koffi's power ultimately saves Ekon, but his choice to let her flee dooms his hopes of becoming a warrior. Ekon vows to hunt the Shetani and together Ekon and Koffi form a tentative alliance. The hunt begins.

Black Birds in the Sky: The Story and Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre by Brandy Colbert (9th through 12th)

-Brandy Colbert examines the account of the most horrific and deadly acts of racial violence in U.S. history. Using primary documents, anecdotal accounts, and other information, Colbert tries to answer the question why this event happened and how did this event happened

Blackout by Dhonielle Clayton & Tiffany D. Jackson & Nic Stone & Angie Thomas & Ashley Woodfolk & Nicola Yoon

-When the power in New York City suddenly goes out, 6 different intertwined teen love stories emerge with themes of honesty, forgiveness, grief, acceptance, and openness

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Blood Like Magic by Liselle Sambury

-In this realistic sci-fic novel Voya a teenage witch with Trinidadian heritage must kill her first love to save her family and receive all of her powers. There's one problem. She's never been in love before. She has a month before the ritual takes place to find her true love, fall in love, and then kill them to ensure her family's powers and her own are safe.

Chlorine Sky by Mahogany Browne

-A coming of age book in verse follows the twists and turns of coming out of your sister's shadow, a new relationship, and finding out who your friends really are.

Excuse Me While I Ugly Cry by Joya Goffney

-Quinn journals EVERYTHING! From her favorite songs to her regrettable lies to her deepest fears. When her journal falls into the wrong hands she's given an ultimatum: complete her high school bucket list before graduation or her entire journal goes public

Happily Ever Afters by Elise Bryant

-The diverse cast of characters and the fullness of the protagonist's voice, along with her well-rounded familial, platonic, and romantic relationships, will speak to many readers. For romantics of all ages, especially those who seldom see themselves in lead roles.

Instructions for Dancing by Nicola Yoon

-When Evie Thomas sees a couple kisses, she also sees their romantic fate, and sometimes it is unpleasant. Now, Evie doesn't believe in love, especially if it means heartbreak. However, Evie ends up at a dance studio. She eventually falls for X, her dance partner. Evie sees the fate of this romance, and is left wondering if love is worth the risk.

Josephine Against the Sea by Shakirah Bourne

-Set on the island of Barbados, this moody fantasy novel follows Josephine, girl who is deeply attached to her widower father. The aspiring cricket player has successfully kept any potential stepmothers at bay. That is, until she meets Mariss, a strange woman whom Josephine suspects of being a sea creature out to steal her father's heart.

Kneel by Candace Buford

- Russell Boudreaux, a tight end on the varsity's team, wants to play on the national level. When his best friend is unfairly arrested and kicked off the team, Russell has a difficult choice. He decides to kneel during the national anthem and he becomes a target for hatred. With the help of his best friend and an unlikely ally, Rus will fight for his dreams...and for justice.

Long Division by Kiese Laymon

-After City Goldson's breakdown during a quiz contest goes viral he is sent to stay with his grandmother. There he embarks on a time bending journey and the only constant is City and a book with a mysterious author named Long Division.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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