

June 2023

Great Lakes Great Books: Making Classroom Connections

Lynette Suckow

Peter White Public Library, lynette.suckow@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Suckow, Lynette (2023) "Great Lakes Great Books: Making Classroom Connections," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 55: Iss. 3, Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol55/iss3/12>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Great Lakes, Great Books: Making Classroom Connections

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette
Marten Suckow**

Teachers may sometimes look at the GLGB list and wonder: “How can I use these books in the classroom?”

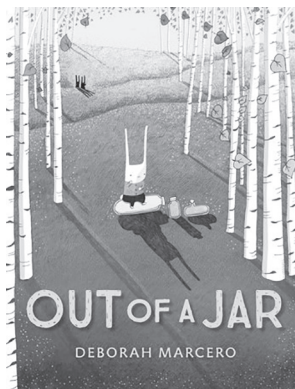
In a time where socio-emotional learning is more important than ever, this year’s list is full of titles that can be used to sort out emotions, inspire writing prompts, use word play to extend language arts, open a discussion about bullies, or use nonfiction material to compare methods of research. Besides these suggestions, many other titles could be starting points for classroom curriculum ideas.

The GLGB committee met in January, after months of reading as many teen and children’s books as possible, in order to select forty interesting and age-appropriate titles for recommendation to K-12 classrooms. Teachers and librarians were encouraged to provide students with books from their grade-level lists and allow them to vote on their favorites.

Great Lakes Great Books is just one way that Michigan Reading Association promotes student participation in the reading process. New materials are traditionally released at the Michigan Reading Association Annual Conference, each March, and can be found on the website around the same time. Look for a classroom ballot, printable poster, last year’s winning titles, and the opportunity to nominate your favorite new book at www.michiganreading.org under the Awards tab.

Most importantly, teachers and students will want to

read through the entire GLGB list, just for the fun of connecting with—and reading—a good book.



Out of a Jar (Penguin Random House, 2022), written and illustrated by Deborah Marcero, is the continuation of 2020’s *In a Jar* that features Llewellyn, a little rabbit, and his passion for collecting interesting objects from nature and storing them in jars. His collection

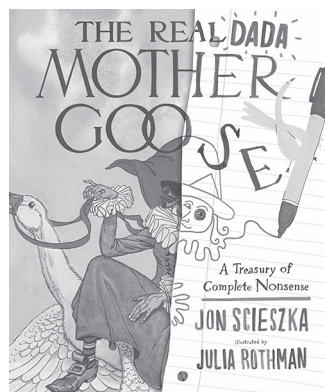
wasn’t limited to physical objects, but included more elusive items, such as the color of sunset, the newness of spring, and the sound of the ocean. The mood-enhancing illustrations are simple at first glance, but full of pattern and detail. The same artistic style follows Llewellyn to this story, where he also begins to store his feelings in jars, instead of dealing with his emotions. He soon had jars full of fear, sadness, excitement, anger, joy, and disappointment. When Llewellyn ran out of storage space to keep those bottled-up emotions, he accidentally broke a few of the jars. He was overwhelmed by experiencing all the emotions at once, leading him to decide that it would be easier to share emotions as they occur. By choosing a very literal way to talk about “bottled-up” feelings with the jar motif,

Marcero has created a pathway to talk about emotions with children.



The Sweetest Scoop: Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Revolution (Abrams Books, 2022) by Lisa Robinson leads readers through the history of Ben & Jerry's iconic business model. Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, who met when they were twelve years old,

were regular kids who both loved to meet up and find places serving delicious food. Their friendship endured throughout high school and college, extending into their individual business failures after that. When Ben and Jerry decided to go into business together, their plan was to make ice cream and sell it in college towns where they would have a good supply of customers. After years of experimenting with flavors and ice cream names, Ben & Jerry's ice cream has become a national brand and a mainstay in American freezers. Humorous sidebars—dominated by cartoon cows—grace the pages. There are plenty of ice cream jokes scattered throughout the book to delight young joke tellers. Watercolor illustrations by Stacy Innerst are muted, but pop with color where needed in order to tell this unique rags-to-riches story of making a successful business that uses its profits to support social issues. The author includes informational notes and a timeline at the back of the book.



The Real Dada Mother Goose: A Treasury of Complete Nonsense by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Julia Rothman (Candlewick, 2022) is an excellent example of how a widely accepted piece of children's literature can be upended by an author who loves

wordplay and has a unique way of viewing a story. Using six well-known Mother Goose nursery rhymes, the author updates them with Morse Code, musical notation, Egyptian hieroglyphs, newspaper reporting, and word definitions, all while transforming them into postcards, comic strips, haiku, and a crossword puzzle. Readers will enjoy reading the rhymes and watching them morph into creative new formats. Rothman's unleashed illustrations enrich the reading experience with thought-provoking visuals of each concept.



Tin Man by Justin Madson (Abrams, 2022) reveals a dystopian version of a future where robots exist alongside humans. Besides the title and a tornado, readers will find several more allusions to *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900) in this coming-of-age tale of Solar and her brother Fenn. Solar,

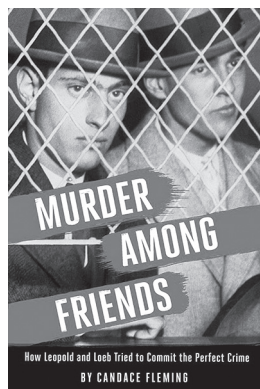
a senior in high school, has fallen in with a gang of rude, destructive teens. She misses her recently deceased grandmother, constantly argues with her mom, and is questioning her life plan. Meanwhile, Fenn discovers a metal robot during his daily round of checking out local junkyards. He misses working on the spaceship project that Solar started with him and is happy to have found someone to fill that void. He quickly makes friends with Campbell, a tin woodsman who left his home in the forest to look for the electronic heart he saw in an advertisement. When he gets the heart to work, Campbell is wondering if having a heart, and all the emotions it brings with it, is a fair trade for the predictable life he left behind. This sweet graphic novel is easy to follow, incorporating conversation bubbles into the illustrations alongside the visual impact of using no words at all.

Hollow Fires by Samira Ahmed (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2022) is steeped in suspense surrounding Safiya Mirza, a teen journalist who finds the dead body of a fellow student. She's already in trouble with the school principal for her sensational style of

Must Read Texts



investigative reporting that sometimes reveals what the school would rather leave hidden. But this discovery is too important to cover up. Safiya tells her tale by alternating chapters with Jawad, the murdered boy. Safiya, who is of Indian ethnicity, and Jawad, born of Iraqi parents, share similar immigrant stories and have a long-forgotten connection from childhood. As Safiya looks for answers to Jawad's murder, she finds herself attracted to one of the very affluent students at the school, not knowing how his reckless lifestyle will collide with hers. Inspired by the 1924 kidnapping and murder of a 14-year-old boy by two young college students, this story is a companion to the following title.



Murder Among Friends: How Leopold and Loeb Tried to Commit the Perfect Crime

by Candace Fleming (Anne Schwartz Books, 2022) marks May 21, 1924, as the day that changed history for two Chicago teens and everyone who knew them. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, both from prominent Jewish

families and already in college because of academic excellence, plan the "Crime of the Century." After gathering all the equipment necessary to abduct and kill someone, they choose 14-year-old Bobby Franks, a second cousin to Richard, as their victim. Bobby and Richard were friends and often played tennis together, which adds to the callous nature of this crime. The murder ended up less than perfect, landing Nathan and Richard in jail. A very public trial ensued, with the famous defense lawyer Clarence Darrow taking the case. Could Leopold and Loeb plead insanity, or were they outright psychopaths? This is a fast-paced story with a look into the minds of killers who could be your next-door neighbors. The story is well-documented

with 50 pages of primary sources and photograph citations, plus an index in case you want to retrace specific pieces of the crime and subsequent trial proceedings.

Author Biography

Lynette Marten Suckow is a Reference Librarian at Peter White Public Library in Marquette, MI where she teaches people how to make the transition from print to digital literacy. She holds a master's degree in education from Northern Michigan University and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member for the past twelve years. She can be reached at <lynette.suckow@gmail.com>.

