

KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge 2022 Fall Newsletter



To my KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge Community,

As we begin a new year, let this letter be a personal reminder that your local KSLA chapter exists as a resource to support you as you foster a positive learning environment for your students. KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge seeks to continue uplifting our members professionally, and I am thrilled for our membership to access the programming our local chapter has curated for this academic season. This year, at KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge, we want to uplift you professionally and encourage you to begin to use or to continue to use reading as a tool to fuse academic instruction with social-emotional development. Reading and writing classrooms can engage readers through rigorous and meaningful literacy work to enrich critical thinking skills and ultimately to give students the tools to make sense of our world and their place in it. Bridging the gap between academics and social-emotional development through intentional literacy instruction nurtures the whole child. When we teach considering the whole child, we foster a positive learning experience and provide learners with the tools they need to navigate a changing world.

As educators, we can find ourselves overwhelmed by needs that were sparked or exacerbated by global crises that continue to affect the students and families we serve. Taking a few instructional moments each day that will allow readers to engage in deep thinking and discussion can empower students and renew our professional joy! If you haven't started integrating social-emotional development into your literacy instruction, consider an added discussion to texts you already read or new texts that highlight how characters manage their emotions, make caring decisions, show empathy, or build healthy connections with other characters. A discussion about any of these topics can increase engagement, deepen the ability to think critically, and give students a sense of belonging in our school communities.

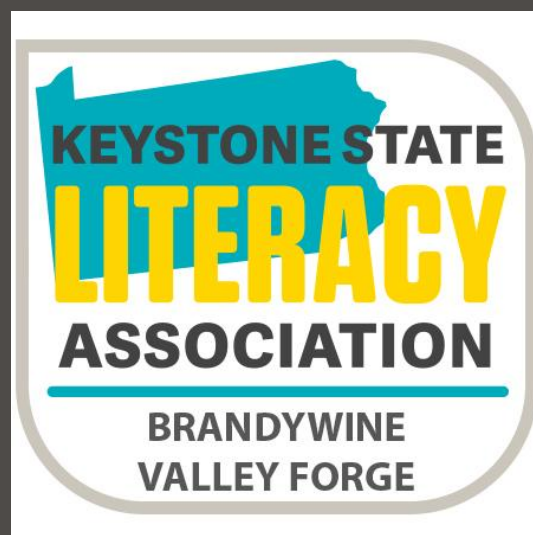


KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge is a place for teachers to find professional learning and support. During the 2022-2023 school year we are featuring programs that are aligned with the well-being of you and your students. Our next program will feature Dr. Pam Kastner who will return to share her knowledge of the science of reading. During this session, we will strengthen our knowledge of foundational literacy skills that our students will need to confidently read the rigorous texts that anchor rich classroom discussions. Later in the year, Lynne Dorfman & Brenda Krupp will facilitate a session that highlights read alouds and book clubs. Their approach is designed to center our students in literary response and book choice in our classrooms. The presenters will model student led book clubs and book talk that critically evaluate the texts. Finally, author Kate Walton will facilitate a session about the social-emotional challenges of teens. Kate will share her process for writing and discuss how teen social emotional challenges are addressed in her contemporary YA novels.

Please join us for the online learning sessions mentioned above by visiting our [website](#) for information and links to these programs and many other in-person and virtual professional learning opportunities that offer Act 48 credit in addition to networking opportunities. We hope to see you soon!

To reading and wellness,

Renee Jacobs, Ed.D
Literacy Specialist
KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge President



STEM INFUSED Literacy:

A KSLA Brandywine Event at CCIU

By Lynne R Dorfman

Emily Trace, Ryan Kaiser, and Amy Crider from Greencastle-Antrim School District delivered an incredible hands-on workshop on Saturday, October 15th at the CCIU from 9 to noon. They work together to find simple ways to find simple and effective ways to incorporate STEM into literacy instruction, often using authentic and diverse mentor texts.

The team defined STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) as:

- Authentic learning experiences
- Hands-on explanation
- Asking questions
- Noticing things & making connections in real time
- Fun! Engaging learning!

Emily, Amy, and Ryan provided a solid rationale for STEM infused literacy. STEM amplifies students' learning, builds vocabulary, fosters teamwork and collaboration, and helps students engage in creative thinking and problem solving. It builds resilience and determination in students while giving them myriad opportunities to experiment and try out new things. STEM makes cross-curricular connections and deepens students' self-knowledge as well as their understanding of others' perspectives.

Emily and Amy have secured a grant which allows them to work in local libraries, YMCAs, and with preservice teachers at Shippensburg as well as pushing into classrooms in their school district to work with teachers and students to build STEM infused literacy opportunities into their experiences for this year. They hope opportunities will be expanded into the following years. Amy is a K-2 librarian and Emily serves the district as a K-2 STEM teacher. Ryan is a 4th grade learning lab teacher and is certified in gamification and project -based learning.

At the Saturday session, we formed teams of four and were given the task to build a tower using a rubber band with four strings attached. We were told not to touch the rubber band or cups with our hands. We could only manipulate the string we held. Halfway through the rule changed, and we could gesture but not talk to each other. It was so engaging! After time was called, we talked about the value of reflection, oral and/or written. The team asked us to consider these questions with our students:

- Where did you have to use collaboration? Creativity? Communication? Critical thinking skills?
- What would you change? What could you change?
- What is your goal?
- How did you get there?



Ryan talked about authentic texts for STEM and said they do not have to be STEM related to connect with a STEM lesson. One example was *Our Table* by Peter Reynolds. So much can be done with this book to plan with cross-curricular intention. Students can work with manipulatives to do many of the activities listed here:

- family and feelings
- engineering and building
- balancing objects on a table
- food groups and counting
- comparing shapes of tables
- testing the stability of the table you build
- introduce perimeter and area
- research cultural traditions
- invite a speaker to talk about historical traditions around a table
- code a robot to travel under your table



Participants had a chance to talk with the facilitators on a one-on-one basis while we traveled around the room to view containers filled with manipulatives and examine the collection of picture books that work well with STEM infused literacy and cross-curricular activities. Educators were very enthusiastic about this workshop and suggested that we bring them back again. They were recommended for KSLA Conference 2023 in Hershey. It was a morning well spent! Thank you, Emily, Amy, and Ryan!





KSLA BRANDYWINE VALLEY FORGE

FREE, FREE, FREE!!!

Annual Book Fair



Saturday, November 19th

Barnes & Noble

**Broadcasting Square Shopping Center,
2751 Paper Mill Rd, Wyomissing, PA 19610**

ID#

12632501



*Children's activities,
coloring, crafts &
scavenger hunt*

**Store hours: 9am to 9pm
Activity hours: 10am to 6pm**

Featuring author Pamela M. Tuck

**Elementary
Keystone to
Reading Book
Awards table**

**10am to
12noon**

**Author
Engagement**

**12:30, 2pm &
3:30**

**Middle/HS
Keystone to
Reading Book
Awards table**

4-6pm



Science of Reading Part II

Sat, January 21, 2023

Virtual Workshop - 9 am - 12 pm

Presenter: Dr. Pam Kastner

Last year Dr. Kastner joined us to explore the foundational frameworks that underpin the science of reading and the language systems of the English language. In this second session, she will continue the exploration of these tenants of the science of reading with a focus on spelling assessment and instruction. This program will offer time for participants to share and to discuss instructional ideas from the workshop.

How to Motivate Readers Through Booktalks & Book Clubs

Wed, March 8, 2023

Virtual Workshop - 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Lynne Dorfman & Brenda Krupp

Classroom communities are built through conversation where enthusiasm and struggle are shared. This presentation highlights read alouds, book chats, and book clubs to help students become the driving force of literary response and book choice in your classroom. See student-led book clubs, watch readers book talk books to their peers, and consider ways to use read alouds that can develop greater cognitive skills as they learn to engage with and critically evaluate the texts that they read through shared reading and writing experiences.

Author Event: Social Emotional Challenges of Teens

Wed, April 19, 2023

Barnes & Noble in Exton in person - 6 pm - 7 pm

YA Author Kate Walton

Kate will share her process for writing—the why and the how. She'll discuss the teen social emotional challenges addressed in her contemporary YA novels CRACKED, EMPTY, and ULTIMATUM. The author will also highlight powerful yet practical ways to use her novels for class discussion/writing to open students' hearts and minds.

CHAPTER AWARDS

by Rose Cappelli, Awards Chair

KSLA annually recognizes local chapters that organize and conduct well-rounded programs serving chapter members, the community, and the state. To earn the KSLA Chapter Leadership Award, local chapters must meet criteria in the areas of organization, membership, professional development, finance, strategic planning, and dissemination of information. Chapters who meet these criteria may also apply for the KSLA Distinguished Chapter Award which includes the completion of additional activities in areas such as international support, community reading projects, scholarship, literacy advocacy, and support for professional development at the state level.

As chairperson of the Awards Committee, I am pleased to announce that KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge achieved both the KSLA Chapter Leadership Award and the KSLA Distinguished Chapter Award for 2021-2022. The awards will be presented at the 2022 KSLA Conference in Hershey.

Thank you to our leadership team and members for your support in achieving these important goals.



SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS FOR KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge

By Glendia Kennedy

Every two years, KSLABVF selects a deserving board member who has dedicated herself in serving this literacy association. We give tribute to that member with **THE JANE DULIN SERVICE AWARD**, established when the Chester County Reading Association decided that service to the organization needed to be recognized. We continue this tradition with our merger with Tri County which began July 1, 2019. The pandemic forced us to ignore the 2020 award so this year at our first in-person meeting at CCIU, we honored one board member for 2020 and one for 2022. Each received an engraved clock. These admired women have spent countless hours volunteering to make our organization stronger through literacy projects and fundraising to support those projects in our counties. Both are enthusiastic advocates for literacy and continue to spread the word about this worthy group of educators.

The first recipient has been a member of KSLA for at least two decades. She uses her background as a reading specialist in the Perkiomen Valley School District and is a dedicated teacher and advocate for children there. She has served as president for Tri County for **numerous** years and planned many Literacy Fests for her council. She is currently secretary and newsletter editor of KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge. Her quiet sense of humor, loyalty, and knowledge has been appreciated at board meetings. Not only is she active here at our local chapter, but she is the Region VI Director for KSLA. **We congratulate Andrea Mumford with the 2020 Jane Dulin Service Award.** Her husband, Jason, was present to honor her. He knows how hard she works for us.



Our 2022 recipient of The Jane Dulin Service Award has also been an active member of KSLA and KSLABVF for over 20 years. She is presently the Author Chair of the KSLA conference committee and is the Corresponding Secretary of KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge. She has been president of KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge and has led the fundraising committee. She is currently teaching 4th grade at Montgomery School and encourages teachers there to become members. She is a “worker bee” and will help anyone who is in need in the name of literacy. The generosity of her time and energy and her kindness is greatly appreciated by this community. **We congratulate Rosemarie (Ro) Batson as the recipient of the 2022 Jan Dulin Service Award.** Her husband, Joe, attended this meeting to honor her. He and their family can attest to her volunteer hours.



COMMUNITY LITERACY PROJECTS

KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge chapter conducts many and varied community projects which enhance the literacy of children and adults in Berks, Chester, and Montgomery counties. These projects are described below. Volunteers from among our chapter members, both actively teaching and retired, are the backbone of our projects. KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge welcomes your help with these projects. If interested in becoming active with one or more of these projects or wish to make book/monetary contributions, contact Jane Schultz, treasurer at kslabvf@gmail.com

BABY BOOK PROJECT *(Montgomery County)*

Parents of newborns at Einstein Hospital receive a new book and parent brochure with tips about reading to their child.

COURT CHILD CARE CENTER *(Montgomery County)*

Drop-in childcare provides an alternative to children living the experience of courtroom business first-hand. KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge supports the learning center with the donation of reading materials for children from infancy through school-age.

CHILDREN'S LITERACY OUTREACH *(Chester County)*

KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge supports two community service projects through distribution of books. Books are provided to children and mothers residing in a local shelter sponsored by Friends Association. Books are also distributed to CVIM (*Community Volunteers in Medicine*) for their waiting area. Donations of gently used books and monetary contributions to purchase new books are gratefully accepted.

PRESCHOOL LITERACY PROJECT *(Berks, Chester County, and Montgomery)*

This ongoing project supports KSLA's "Keystone to Reading Book Award". This year, for the first time, the project is expanding into both Berks and Montgomery counties. Retired KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge members visit preschools and kindergartens to introduce books and collect children's votes.

YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM *(Chester County)*

The Chester County Intermediate Unit's Young Parents program provides support services to pregnant and parenting students. One of the services includes instruction in child development. KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge is in the planning stages of developing a partnership with the CCIU's Young Parents Program to help highlight the benefits of literacy in early childhood through the distribution of baby board books and pamphlets on the importance of reading to your child.



KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge Supports International Projects



Arise Rwanda

Arise Rwanda is established as an organization to transform the Boneza community by bringing it out of extreme poverty with focuses on education, clean water, healthcare, Pastoral care, and economic development. Beginning in 2011 with a feeding program, they currently educate hundreds of students between seven preschools and Boneza's first high school, Kivu Hills Academy.



Pearl S. Buck Foundation

Pearl S. Buck served over 88, 00 children in 2020 through their international programs. Welcome Workplace is a cross-cultural competency program designed to help schools, businesses, and organizations establish an environment embracing diversity and inclusion. They offer intercultural competency assessments and interventions and diversity and inclusion programming. There are programs to sponsor a child, attend cultural camps, and opportunities to be part of high school leadership programs.



Pearl S. Buck International

Fundraising Projects 2022-2023

By Jane Schultz, Fundraising Chair

Boscov's Friends Helping Friends Event – October 19, 2022

Brandywine Valley Forge once again participated in Boscov's "Friends Helping Friends" fundraiser event. **The program was held in-store on October 19th.** For a \$5.00 donation, customers received a 25% off shopping pass toward purchases all day and an entry into a \$100 Boscov's gift card raffle. Thank you to all who supported this fundraising event. The money raised from this event will help support KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge's literacy projects in our communities.

Honey Baked Ham Year-Long Fundraiser

KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge is also pleased to participate in the Honey Baked Ham gift card incentive again this year. When you purchase a Honey Baked Ham plastic or e-card gift card online, through the link below, 20% of your sale will go directly to KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge to support its numerous literacy projects in the community. Honey Baked Ham gift cards make the perfect gift around the holidays or anytime, for that matter. The gift card is good for the purchase of any product online or in-store at Honey Baked Ham, and they never expire! Thank you in advance for your kind consideration of this fundraiser. [Click here](#) to purchase Honey Baked Ham gift cards.

Barnes & Noble In-Store Book Fairs

Our second annual fall Book Fair is taking place on Saturday, November 19th at the Wyomissing Barnes & Noble store. There will be fun activities, an author visit by Pamela Tuck, and displays of the Keystone to Reading Book Award collections accompanied by Rose Cappelli, Glendia Kennedy, Aileen Hower, and Emily Reed. Be on the lookout for upcoming additional information and requests for volunteers.

New this year is a spring Book Fair, which will take place in-store at the Exton Barnes & Noble store on April 19, 2023. There will also be an online purchasing opportunity for one week. Plan to join in the fun and welcome author K. M. Walton. More details will be sent to you electronically early in 2023!

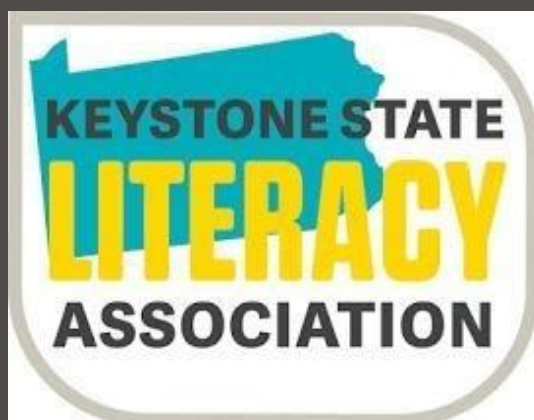


Annette T. Rabin Scholarship

Each year KSLA Brandywine Valley Forge presents a \$500.00 book scholarship to a graduating senior. The Annette T. Rabin Scholarship is in the memory of the original Chester County Reading Association founding president.

This scholarship is open to any graduating senior from the Brandywine Valley Forge membership area (Chester, Montgomery, and Berks counties). The applicant must demonstrate an outstanding academic record, maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher and include a written essay. It is required that the student be accepted into an institute of higher learning for the fall after graduation with a major in education.

Information for the scholarship is available on our website - [Click here](#) - and is sent annually to guidance counselors in our membership area.



Save the Date!

KSLA 55th Annual Conference

Literacy Lessons

November 27 - 29, 2022

Hershey Lodge and Convention Center

Hershey, PA

Visit KSLA'S website: [KLSA Conference Information](#)



2022 KSLA Conference

Featured Authors

School Visit Information

Are you looking for an author to come to your school in 2022 or 2023? These authors will be featured at the KSLA 2022 Conference November 27 -November 29, 2022 and are interested in school visits.



Jennifer Donnelly - KSLA Keystone to Reading Book Award Winner for her high school level book, *Poisoned*, Jennifer Donnelly writes historical fiction and fantasy for middle grade, young adult, and adult readers. A recipient of the Carnegie Medal, the L.A. Times Book Prize and a Michael L. Printz Honor, Jennifer's titles also include *Stepsister*, *A Northern Light*, *Revolution*, *These Shallow Graves*, *Fatal Throne*, the *Waterfire Saga*, *Lost in a Book*, and *The Tea Rose* trilogy. She has also written a children's picture book, *Humble Pie*. Contact Jennifer through her website or social media channels about school visits.

<https://www.jenniferdonnelly.com/>

jen@jenniferdonnelly.com

@jenwritesbooks -- Insta, Twitter, Facebook



Matthew Landis- On school visits, local author and educator, Matthew Landis, can provide grade-level assemblies, writers' workshops, and small group "author cafes." Matthew shares about his writing journey, story-building, prose techniques, and helping students find amazing stories to love reading during his visits to schools. Some of his books include: *Operation Final Notice*, *The End of the World As We Know It*, and *The Not So Famous Letters of Private Nobody*, just to name a few. Schedule a school visit via Matthew's Website.

<http://www.matthew-landis.com/>

author.matthewlandis@gmail.com



Alison Green Myers - Alison Green Myers is an avid reader, poet, and writer. She has served as a classroom teacher, literacy coach, curriculum writer, and school director. She is the Program Director for the [Highlights Foundation](#), a National Writing Fellow, and an active member of the Society of Children's Books, Writers, and Illustrators. *A Bird Will Soar* is her first book for middle grade readers and is the recipient of the [2022 Schneider Family Book Award](#). Alison would love to visit your school, library, or organization.

<https://alisongreenmyers.com/>
allisongreenmyers@gmail.com



Jerry Pallotta - Author Jerry Pallotta says that the best part of being an author is visiting schools and interacting with students and teachers. Jerry is the author of many children's books, especially the *Who Will Win* series, *Ocean Cousins*, *The Ocean Alphabet Book*, *F is for Fenway*, and many more. Check out his website for more information about school visits.

<https://jerrypallotta.com/>
sheila@jerrypallotta.com



Jordan Sonnenblick - A former teacher, Jordan writes books about children and teenagers. He also does author visits to elementary and middle schools. Some of Jordan's books include: *The Boy Who Failed Show and Tell*; *Drums, Girls & Dangerous Pie*; *Zen and the Art of Faking It*; and *Dodger and Me*; just to mention a few. Jordan has written a book a year since his teaching days. He can be reached to schedule a school visit via his website.

<https://www.jordansonnenblick.com/>
jordansonnenblick@rcn.com



Todd Tarpley - KSLA Keystone to Reading Preschool Book Award Winner for *Library Books Are Not For Eating*, along with illustrator, Tom Booth - Todd's seventeen books include *Beep! Beep! Go to Sleep!*, a 2016 ALA/ALSC Notable Book, and *Naughty Ninja Takes a Bath*, which spent several days as the #1 children's book on Amazon. He is also the author of seven books for the Dr. Seuss franchise and is one of few people other than Dr. Seuss to write in the voices of the Cat in the Hat and the Lorax. Contact Todd through his website to schedule a school visit. *Love is a Story* is coming in December 2022.

<https://toddtarpley.com/>
toddtarpley1@gmail.com



Alexandra Villasante - Alexandra Villasante has always loved telling stories—though not always with words. She has a BFA in Painting and an MA in Combined Media. Her debut Young Adult novel, *The Grief Keeper*, was a Fall 2019 Junior Library Guild Gold Selection and winner of the 2020 Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ Children's Literature/Young Adult Fiction. She's a contributor to two Young Adult short story anthologies, *All Signs Point To Yes* (Harper Collins/Inkyard) and *Our Shadows Have Claws* (Algonquin). When she's not writing or painting, Alexandra works for the Highlights Foundation. To set up a school visit, contact Alex through her website.

<https://alexandravillasante.com/>
avillasante@gmail.com



Steven Grier Williams - Steven is a local fantasy author, avid traveler, and cook. *Skadi* is his debut novel, which plunges the reader into the world of Norse Mythology. His new book, *Thyra*, also about Norse mythology, has been available since August 31, 2022. For school visit information, contact Steven via his website.

<https://stevengrierwilliams.com/>
stevengrierwilliams@gmail.com

Membership update


The BVF Membership Committee has set a goal to increase membership 5% this year. We plan to reach out to more staff in Berks County and college professors in an effort to grow our literacy community. We will also be sharing the newly designed KSLA membership brochure (attached) which summarizes the benefits to being a KSLA member. BVF currently has 86 members. [Click here to join or renew your membership.](https://ksla.wildapricot.org/kslamembership@gmail.com)

Join the

Keystone State Literacy Association

Membership Benefits

- Wednesday Webinars on various literacy topics
- Teachers As Readers monthly book discussions
- Online literacy resources
- Subscription to Pennsylvania Reads (yearly publication)
- Opportunity to join statewide literacy task forces
- Professional networking
- Grant Opportunities
- Discounted registration to annual conference
- Local chapter membership with access to many more professional learning offerings and resources



Students
\$15
Retirees
\$20
Current Educators
\$40



Providing leadership in literacy and education in the Commonwealth

<https://ksla.wildapricot.org/kslamembership@gmail.com>

Book Recommendations

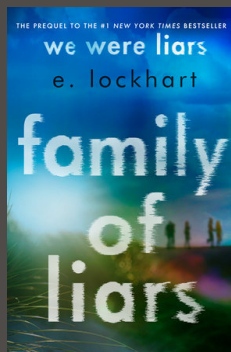
Hollow Fires by Samira Ahmed



The author of Internment has done it again! Hollow Fires is a gripping, realistic story of a high school girl who dreams of being a journalist and having her first crush. When Safiya discovers the murdered body of a boy she knows, her life is uprooted and she is plagued by his voice in her head pleading for justice. Samira Ahmed delivers an action-packed plot with a realistic dose of racism and skewed perspectives- ones too commonly held in American society. Don't miss this thriller with a twist and an essential message.

<https://samiraahmed.com/book/hollow-fires/>

Family of Liars by E. Lockhart



In this book, the prequel to We were Liars, the Sinclairs are back and more dramatically tragic than ever! We were Liars is narrated by the eldest Sinclair who provides the backstory to her dysfunctional family as well as the rationale for the “why.” Lockhart’s complex characters draw you in, and before you know it, you are laughing, grieving, wondering and empathizing with the Sinclairs.

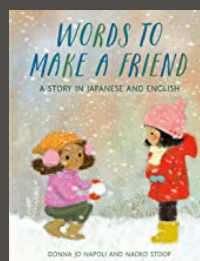
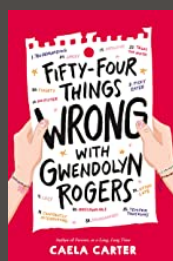
<http://www.emilylockhart.com/familyofliars>

Fifty-Four Things Wrong With Gwendolyn Rogers – Caela Carter

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (2021)

Fiction; Ages 11-13

“Gwendolyn knows she shouldn’t have opened the school assessment about her behavior, but because she did, she knows there’s nothing actually wrong with her. She’s just a lazy, socially inept, defiant, whiny 11-year-old girl—not to mention the other 50 items on the report that she writes down and studies. Gwendolyn can’t ever remember her pencil, forgets her homework, lashes out violently, and she’s always, always in trouble. She feels balanced when she’s with horses, but she’s lost horse privileges ever since she had a scary, unexpected tantrum following the advice of a terrible therapist. At least she’s got Tyler, the half brother she only recently learned about. Tyler’s got a diagnosis of ADHD but still sometimes acts out despite treatment. But how come the teachers never call Tyler’s mom when he’s bad? Or the moms of any of the misbehaving boys, for that matter? Why are teachers so unhelpful and sarcastic? Gwendolyn’s mother finally gets her a good therapist, and as Dr. Nessa walks them through diagnosis, bad medication reactions, adaptation, and fighting ableism, their pain and epiphanies are gut-wrenchingly genuine...”



Words to Make a Friend: A Story in Japanese and English

Donna Jo Napoli and Naoko Stoop

Random House Studio (2021); Ages 4-7

Readers might be tempted to flip past the front matter to the start of the story. But take time to linger over the evocative endpapers that show a big yellow moving truck parked outside a blue and white house in a snowy landscape. An adult and a child, both with pale skin and black hair, are standing on the porch, about to open the door. Turn the page, and there is another adult-and-child pair, both with brown skin and dark hair, bringing their new neighbors a gift of food. Like many friendships, this story builds slowly, one interaction at a time, urging readers to savor each moment. The first child speaks Japanese and the second, English; yet their intent and interactions are seemingly understood, facilitated by snowy-day play and bilingual conversation. Eventually the cold pushes them inside to enjoy Japanese tea, a treat, and origami. Stoop’s captivating mixed-media illustrations depict dramatic perspectives even in the kids’ first meeting, their bold, bright figures striking against a pastel snowy scene. Napoli’s spare text trusts primarily English-speaking readers to derive sufficient meaning from the bilingual spreads while lacking the scaffolding to facilitate deeper cultural comprehension for both kids. Notes from author and illustrator each offer depth and background as well as insight into their artistic partnership.

Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know - Samira Ahmed

Soho Teen (2020)

Ages 14+



Khayyam Maquet, a 17-year-old rising high school senior, wallows in self-pity during her family's annual summer trip to Paris.

Her failed essay contest entry chasing a theory about a lost Delacroix painting gifted to Alexandre Dumas dashed her hopes of impressing her dream art school. When Khayyam perhaps too coincidentally meets the sixth-great-grandson of Dumas himself, also called Alexandre Dumas, they embark on a quest to find the lost painting of a mysterious raven-haired woman. The narration alternates between Khayyam, a conflicted teen who falls for present-day Alexandre while she is still hung up on her noncommittal boyfriend back home in Chicago, and Leila, the beautiful, mystical Muslim subject of the painting who lived during the 19th century as a concubine to an Ottoman pasha and yearned for freedom and to be with her true love. Ahmed (Internment, 2019, etc.) explores weighty themes including Orientalism, women silenced by history, and the responsibility of sharing their unheard voices as Khayyam grapples with who has the right to tell someone's story. Familiar teen romance and angst, including flip-flopping on feelings and motivations, mix with academic discoveries and intrigue in this fast-paced, if at times dense, mystery. Khayyam is an American Muslim teen with French and Indian parents; the novel explores her biracial and bicultural identities.

