



 Natalie's Book Recs

January Newsletter

Happy New Year!

I've always been kind of a wet blanket to the New Year's festivities in my family. Without fail—and much to the annoyance of my energetic younger siblings—I always seem to find myself passed out and snoring before midnight.

This year, I was determined to make it there. By about 10 o'clock, the beehive in my head had started to swarm. By 11, brain function was down to about 5 percent. Still, I am proud to report that I made it all the way to the Martinelli's and have resolved never to do that again.

My other favorite New Year's resolution is—surprise, surprise—to read lots and lots of books.

Anyway, I hope you've all enjoyed the past few weeks of holidays and have a 2021 full of good reads.

Love,
Natalie Tate

Favorite Books of the Month

Picture Books Ages 3–8

This Way, Charlie. Caron Levis, illus. Charles Santoso.

The Bear in My Family. Maya Tatsukawa.

Bedtime Bonnet. Nancy Redd, illus. Nneka Myers.

Two Dogs on a Trike. Gabi Snyder, illus. Robin Rosenthal.

Early Chapter Books Ages 5–9

Willa the Wisp. Jonathan Auxier, illus. Olga Demidova.

Fox & Rabbit Make Believe. Beth Ferry, illus. Gergely Dudas.

Wildlife on Paper: Animals at Risk Around the Globe. Kunal Kundu.

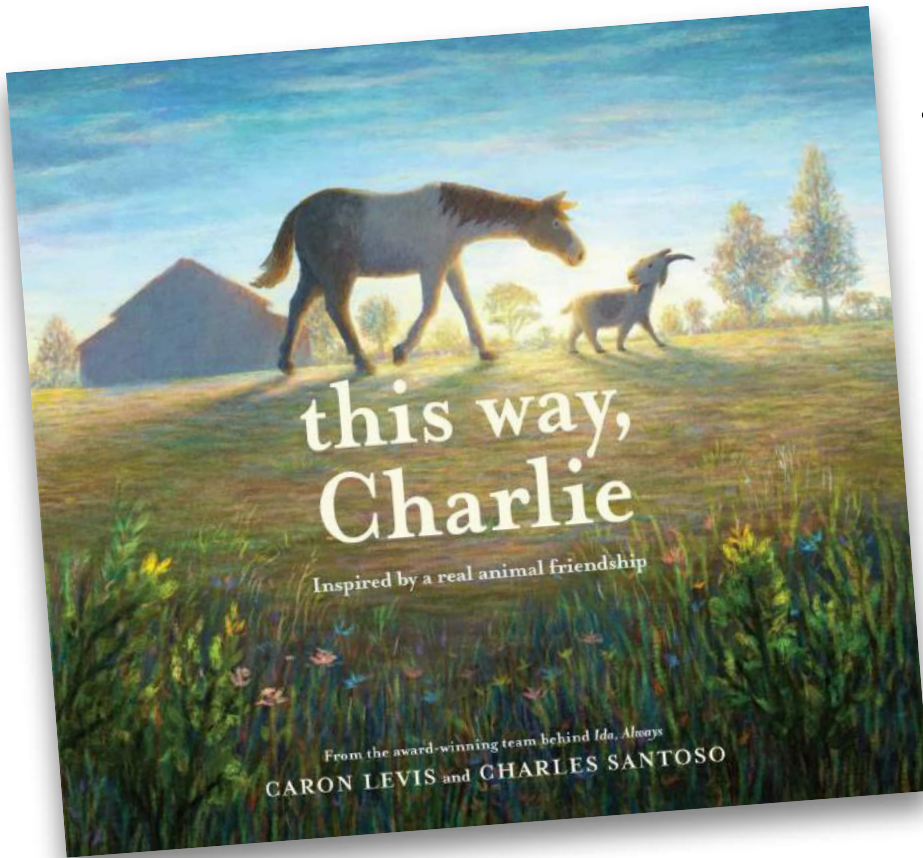
Middle Grade Reads Ages 8–12

Otto P. Nudd. Emily Butler.

Young Adult Reads Ages 13+

Dragon Hoops. Gene Luen Yang.

Dancing at the Pity Party. Tyler Feder.

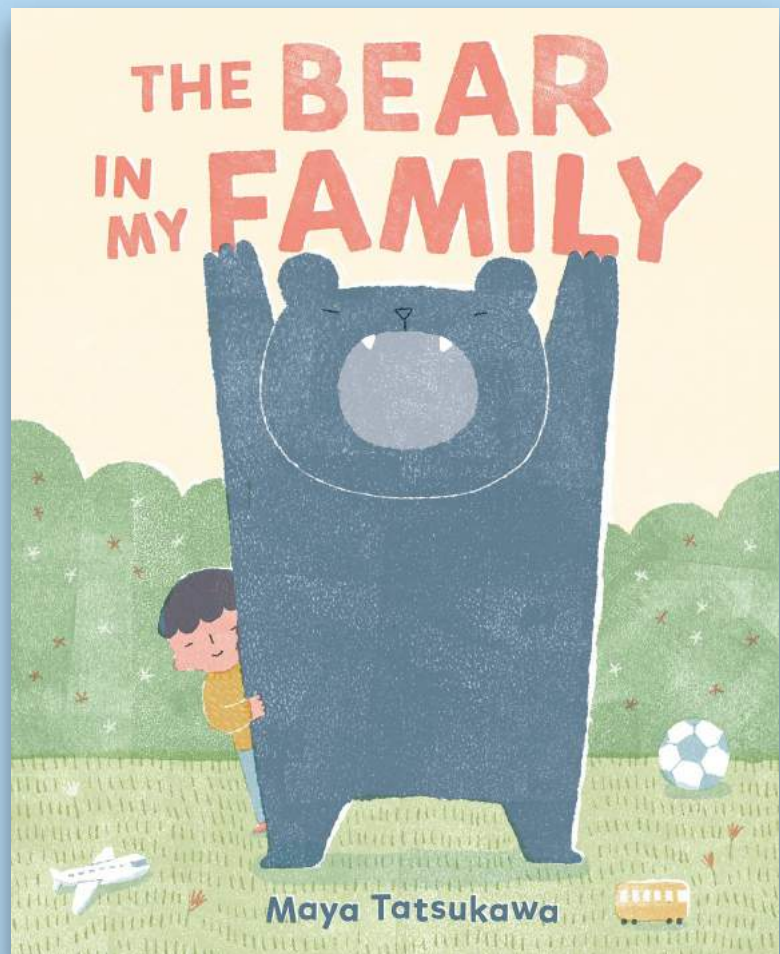


Jack the goat has always been a loner at the Open Bud Ranch and he's not about to change his mind—not even for the new horse, Charlie. But as Jack watches Charlie bump into just about everything, he realizes that Charlie's eyesight isn't so good. Although Jack is scared to introduce himself to the new horse, he decides to show him the way to the yummiest field in the Open Bud Ranch and a beautiful friendship between goat and horse is born.

Based on a true story, *This Way, Charlie* has gorgeous illustrations and a heartfelt message that—I'll admit—made me a little bit misty-eyed. Because of its page and word length, this book is probably most suitable to ages 5 and up.

The narrator of this book—a little boy—has to live with a messy, angry, strong, loud bear. The boy explains that the bear isn't easy to get along with, but for some reason, his parents don't seem to notice how weird it is that he has a bear for an older sibling! But when bullies come around to pick on the poor narrator, he decides that maybe having a bear in his family isn't so bad after all . . .

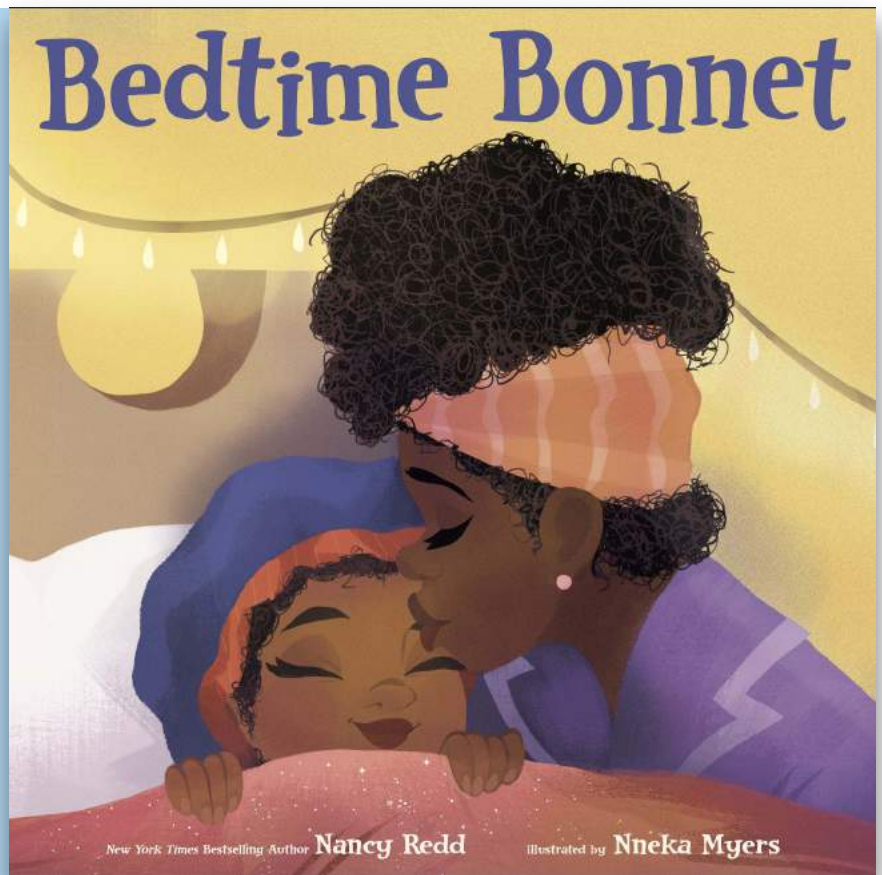
Cute and fun with a twist ending that made me laugh out loud, this story was so relatable that it felt almost like it was based on my own childhood full of little bears!



Picture Books

This story's narrator is a little girl who fills us in on her family's bedtime hair routine: Dad wears a cap to bed, Mom uses a scarf, Brother wears a durag, Sister wraps her hair, Grandpa shaves his head, and the narrator wears a bonnet over her braids. But tonight, she can't seem to find her bonnet anywhere! Where in the world could it be?

This book isn't about to win any awards, but I loved both the positive, loving family interactions and the big reveal to the "mystery" of the missing bonnet.



"One dog stands alone. Two dogs on a trike. Three dogs on a scooter." So begins the counting book of dogs who zoom around on all sorts of transportation. But when the dogs finally realize that they're being followed by one sneaky cat, they're just as quick to jump ship (or train or car or metro) as they were to board.

This book is perfect for any child who loves animals, transportation, counting, or silly surprises.

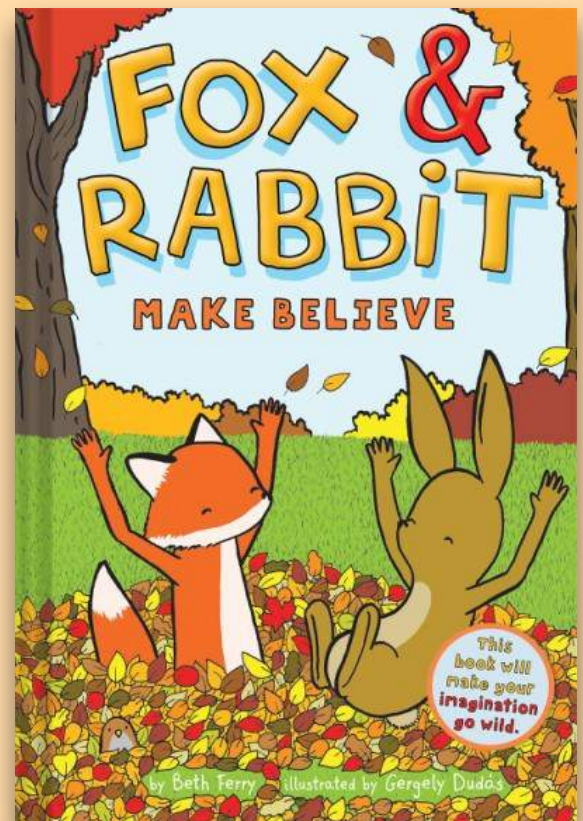


Auggie works at the Fabled Stables where his job is to care for its magical animals—strange creatures like the Hippopotamouse, the Gargantula, and the Long-Beaked Curmudgeon. Auggie likes what he does at the stables, but he's troubled by his lack of friends. His only companion is Fen, the magical Stick-In-The-Mud, but Fen isn't exactly friendship material. When Auggie is tasked with saving a new creature, Willa the Wisp, from evil hunters, he'll need the help of real friends to keep her safe from harm—if he can find some . . . or maybe they've been hiding in plain sight all along.

With colorful illustrations and charming characters, *Willa the Wisp* is a great early chapter book read-aloud. It's the first book in a planned chapter-book series. The next one, *Trouble with Tattle-Tails*, is scheduled for release in mid-May.

With the money made from selling lemonade, Fox hopes to buy an ice cream shop. But when Rabbit informs Fox that there's not quite enough money for that, the two set off to buy ice cream cones instead. The next few chapters find them in a bubblegum blowing contest (where things get a little sticky), at the park (where they embark on imaginary adventures), and in a seemingly endless corn maze (where having a bird for a friend really comes in handy).

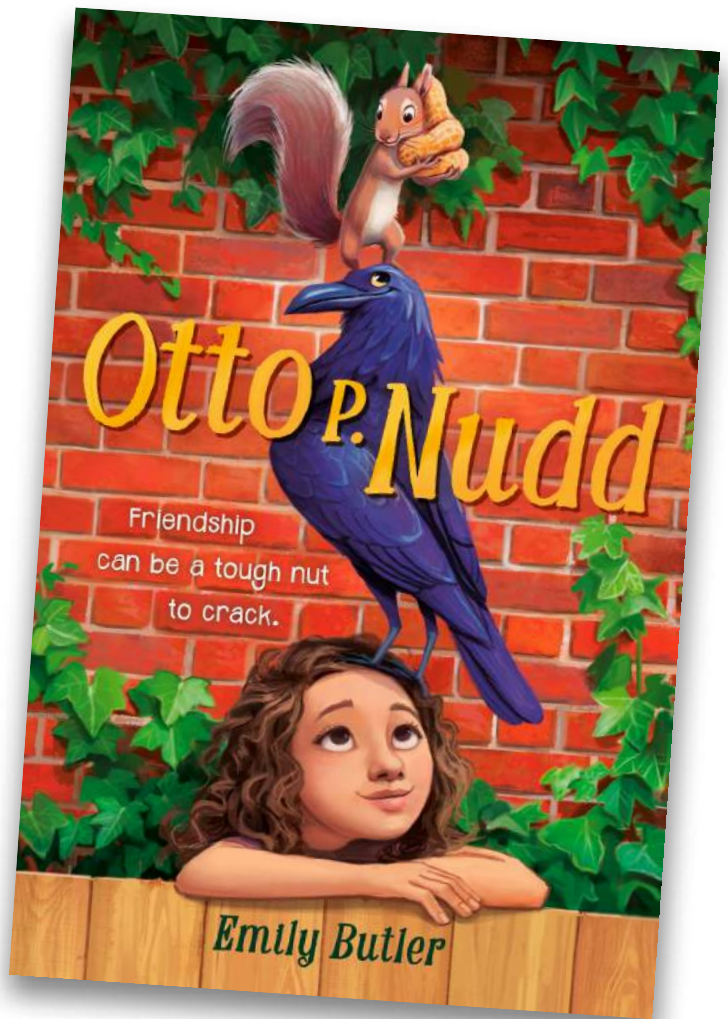
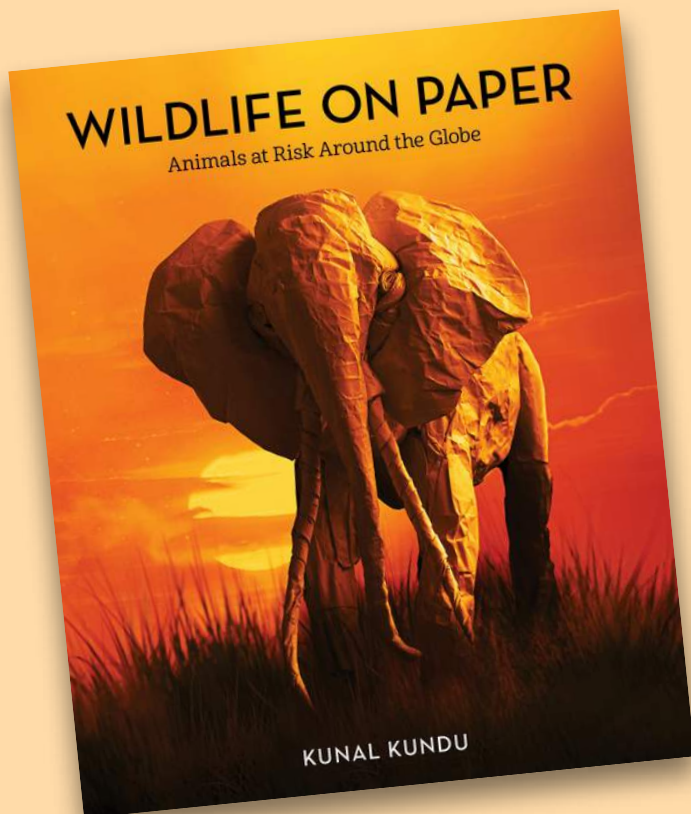
With characters like Sparrow who eats like a bottomless pit and Fred Tortoise who arrives on the last page of every chapter, this book is delightfully funny and a perfect introduction to graphic novels for young readers. This is the second book in the *Fox & Rabbit* series but can be read without reading the first (which is good too, but I like this second one better). The third book is scheduled for release in late April.



Nonfiction meets art in *Wildlife on Paper*, a unique information book for young readers which includes 16 of the world's endangered animals from around the globe. Using his own distinct artistic style inspired by watching his infant son crumple up paper, author and illustrator Kunal Kundu morphs wrinkled paper into animal sculptures accompanied by interesting animal facts.

Did you know, for example, that the pangolin is the only mammal that has scales? Or that the Bengal tiger can grow to be up to 10 feet long? Or that the polar bear is the only bear that doesn't hibernate?

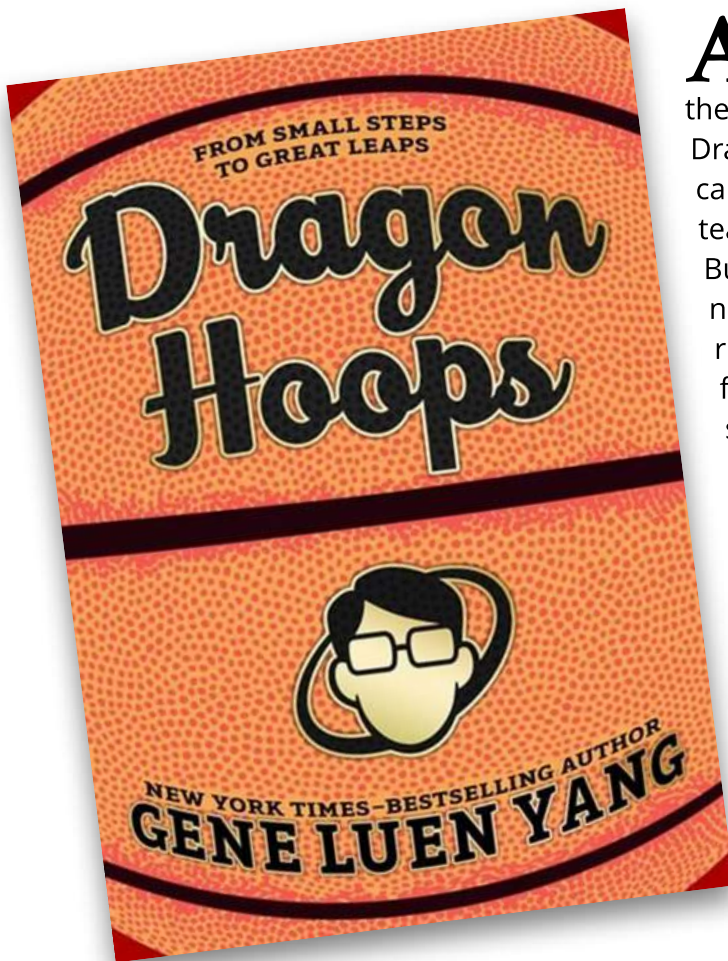
This book is quite short, but budding artists and animal enthusiasts will find it an exciting resource. The publishers recommend this book for 6- to 9-year-olds.



Otto is a pretty amazing bird (if he says so himself). He's an inventor who helps Old Man Bartleby create all sorts of amazing contraptions. He's also the self-proclaimed leader of the "lesser animals" in his neighborhood—like that no-good squirrel, Marla, who needs to be taught her place! But when Bartleby's latest invention puts the old man in danger, Otto will have to rally the neighborhood animals to save his friend . . . if he can make amends for the way he's treated them before it's too late. And with some extra help from Pippa, the human girl, Otto's rescue plan just might work.

Otto P. Nudd is the one middle-grade I read this month that 's good enough to put in this newsletter—but, *WOW*, is it good! In fact, it went right to the top of my list of favorite middle grade books ever. It's rare to find a book that can entertain both kids *and* adults, but *Otto P. Nudd* does it perfectly. With spectacular writing, lovable characters, and lots of humor, Emily has created a middle-grade that kids will love. And if you're looking for a book to read aloud with your child, this is it.

Middle Grade Pick (Ages 8–12)



After a whopping 8 state championship losses for the men's basketball team at O'Dowd High School, the Dragons might finally win it all this year. No one could care less than Mr. Gene Yang, the school's math teacher. In fact, Gene hates all sports with a passion. But after penning several highly successful graphic novels, he's afraid his well of storytelling creativity has run dry. So in desperation, and with some prompting from his students, he decides to look into the school's so-called "legendary" basketball team. As Yang gets to know the head coach, the players, and the history of basketball, he—the man who always hated sports—begins to find himself much more invested in the game, and in the Dragons, than he cares to admit.

Somehow, Yang manages to make this 466-page-long story of himself—a nerd who suddenly takes an interest in the men's basketball team—into a really wonderful graphic novel. It's engaging, it's funny, and, at times, it's touching too. Whether you're a sports fan or a school geek, you'll find lots to enjoy in *Dragon Hoops*.

What do bagels, moms, winks, nonchalant thrill rides, Mary Poppins, and funeral bingo all have in common? I'll give you a hint—they're all found in the graphic memoir to our right.

No, this isn't just another of those really sad books about cancer that leaves a person three Kleenex boxes shorter than they were when they started. This is a book about a girl who had a really beautiful relationship with a really wonderful mom. It's also about how much losing her to cancer as a sophomore in college *really, really stunk*. And it's about the nuanced, funny, somber, awkward, beautiful experiences that come with being part of the Dead Mom Club in a society that's not always very good at mourning with those who mourn.

Dancing at the Pity Party is an excellent piece of writing that validates grief with comfort and humor, and teaches its readers how to be the kind of empathetic people that our world will always need. In short, this is a book for everyone.

