

Windows on the world with USBBY's outstanding international books

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Abstract

This paper explains the purpose of the Outstanding International Books (OIB) Committee of the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY), the available resources on the USBBY OIB site (http://www.usbby.org/list_oibl.html), and highlights selected titles from the 2015 list. Celebrating its tenth anniversary, the OIB Lists have represented some of the most outstanding international books published, providing a range of titles appropriate for children from birth to 18 years of age. Titles were first published in another country and language before being distributed in English throughout the U.S. Some of the countries where these books originated include Australia, France, India, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The paper includes an annotated bibliography of the 2015 OIB Book list for librarians who wish to have a selection aid when purchasing books for their school libraries.

Keywords: Children's literature, Young Adult literature; International literature, Multicultural literature, Collection development

Introduction

Books unite us, expand our horizons, help us understand differences and similarities, and can guide us to enhanced empathy for others. In helping us to understand others, books also help us to understand ourselves. According to Wolk (2009), quality literature can offer young people opportunities to "humanize other countries and cultures . . . and connect across

oceans” (p. 669). International books can do all of these things, and often extend the depth of concepts, ideas, and connections across boundaries and oceans by opening windows on the world.

An international book, according to the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY), is “a book published or distributed in the United States that originated or was first published in a country other than the U.S.” (USBBY, n.d.). In the United States, many of the publishers that are familiar to us, such as Scholastic, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and others, purchase rights from publishers from various countries around the world and include international books on their lists. Additionally, publishers such as Groundwood in Canada, and Tara in India, distribute books for young people in the United States and to other countries and areas of the world such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Europe, and Canada.

The first Outstanding International Books (OIB) list was published in 2006. Here we highlight the 2015 list, which is the 10th annual list, honoring books published, distributed, or released in the U.S. in 2014.

On this current 2015 list are 42 books selected from over 375 books submitted by publishers to the OIB committee. Of these 42 titles, 11 are recommended for U.S. grades pre-school through grade 2 (which equates to the very youngest child to children age 7); 14 books for grades 3 to 5 (ages 8-10); 11 books for grades 6-8 (ages 11-14); and 6 books for grades 9-12 (ages 15-18). These age/grade levels are suggestions and are intended only as broad guidelines. The titles include picture storybooks, wordless books, informational books, graphic novels, poetry, folktales, and fiction (novels). The books originated in countries such as Sweden, Canada, The Netherlands, India, the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Belgium, and Australia. All of the books are in English, either having been originally written in English, or they were translated into English.

International Books in the United States

International books have historically been available to U.S. children. Children’s literature scholar Leonard Marcus (2010) states that during the early 1900s, U.S. public libraries “stocked picture books imported not only from Mother England but also from France, Germany, Sweden, Russia, and Czechoslovakia” (p. 43). He reasons that library holdings included these imported books “as a service to their immigrant populations but also to give native-born children their first window onto ‘other lands’ (p. 43). After World War II, Marcus explains that “an upsurge in enthusiasm for American editions of foreign picture books accompanied the founding of the Zurich-based International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and Munich’s International Youth Library, two institutions aimed at promoting global understanding through children’s books” (Marcus, 2010, p. 46). At this time, national sections of IBBY were established in many countries around the world. In the 1960s, the U.S. established its section of IBBY, known as USBBY, and the annual OIB list has become one of the premier projects of USBBY.

Selection Criteria

USBBY has established criteria for international books to be considered “outstanding.” These criteria (which can also be found on the USBBY website) include:

- Books that represent the best of children’s literature from other countries

- Books that introduce readers in the United States to outstanding authors and illustrators from other countries
- Books that help children in the U.S. see the world from other points of view
- Books that provide a perspective or address a topic otherwise missing from children’s literature in the U.S.
- Books that exhibit a distinct cultural flavor
- Books that are accessible to readers in the U.S.

Additionally, criteria for evaluating the content and presentation of international books include:

- Artistic and literary merit
- Originality or creativity of approach
- Distinctiveness of topic
- Uniqueness of origin
- Qualities that engage and appeal to children (USBBY, n.d.)

Not every book selected for the OIB lists meets every criterion. However, members of the OIB committees use these criteria when examining and discussing the books for the final selections.

Worldwide importance of USBBY outstanding international books

While the books on the OIB lists are selected to emphasize international literature for young people in the U.S., there are compelling rationales for using these books globally. The books provide multiple ways of presenting readers with windows on the world, regardless of where in the world the readers and the windows may be. Some of the reasons the OIB lists have world-wide relevance is they can present: perspectives for understanding the world; views of life within cultures; unique topics; universal human emotions; exceptional artistic styles; and opportunities for enhanced English language study. Furthermore, the lists include books created by internationally known and/or award-winning authors and illustrators.

A selection of books from the 2015 USBBY OIB list exemplify these concepts. Original countries of publication are included in parentheses.

- *OIB books can present perspectives for understanding the world*
 - *Norman, Speak!* by Caroline Adderson and illustrated by Qin Leng (Canada) tells the story of a dog named Norman adopted from an animal shelter. His new family believes he isn’t smart because he doesn’t seem to understand or learn commands. Yet when a man in the park who is speaking Chinese calls his dog, Norman responds too! What is the solution for Norman’s family? Learn Chinese, of course, so they can communicate with their quite intelligent dog.
 - Rather than merely stating statistical ideas and concepts about the world, David J. Smith presents world concepts in child-friendly ratios, in *If . . . : A Mind-Bending New Way of Looking at Big Ideas and Numbers*, illustrated by Steve Adams (Canada). Each double-page spread begins with “If,” such as “If the history of the last 3000 years were condensed into one month . . .” (Smith, n.p., 2014), which is followed by a calendar depicting significant events on certain days, such as when the Great Wall of China was built, (8th day), and when the dodo bird went extinct (27th day). Other

ratios represent the world's wealth, the planets, food produced in the world, and additional concepts made manageable and thoughtfully illustrated.

- In *The Story of Buildings: From the Pyramids to the Sydney Opera House and Beyond*, author David Dillon and illustrator Stephen Biesty (UK) explore world history through a fascinating examination of famous buildings and their architectural styles. Just a few of the buildings included are the Taj Mahal in India, the Forbidden City in China, Notre Dame in France, and the city of Saint Petersburg in Russia.
- *OIB books can present views of life within cultures*
 - In *Not My Girl*, co-written by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, and illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard (Canada), we learn of a young girl's dilemma after coming home from her residential school and no longer feeling comfortable with her family in the Inuvik Region of the Northwest Territories in Canada.
 - *Migrant*, by José Manuel Mateo and illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro (Mexico), is printed in the style of a pre-Hispanic codex (accordion format), with text on the left side of the page and a continuous black-and-white illustration on the right. One side is in Spanish and the other in English. It tells the story of a young boy whose father leaves their Mexican village, and soon after, the boy and his mother take a dangerous journey to the United States.
 - *Dreaming In Indian*, edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale (Canada) contains essays, poems, songs, and other formats and artwork by young adults and others from Aboriginal, Inuit, and other Native peoples in North America. The youth confront racism, identity issues, and their heritages.
- *OIB books present unique topics*
 - *Before After*, by Anne-Margot Ramstein and Matthias Arégui (UK, and previously in France), is a wordless book presenting pairs of images that connect sequentially. A slingshot is followed by a broken window, a stalk of wheat is followed by a loaf of bread, a pigeon is followed by an air-mail letter—and these are just a few of the clean and colorful images in this 176-page book.
 - A unique graphic novel format, *Marx: An Illustrated Biography* by Corinne Maier and illustrated by Anne Simon (UK, originally from France), captures how this philosopher, writer, and influential socialist was also a fallible human being.
 - Set in London during World War I, a young boy, Alfie, worries that his soldier father has been killed after his letters stop arriving. When Alfie accidentally discovers that his father is in a London hospital, he sets out find him, only to discover that his shell-shocked father no longer recognizes him. *Stay Where You Are & Then Leave* by John Boyne (UK) describes the people left behind in war.

- *OIB books may present universal human emotions*
 - In *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, by Chieri Uegaki and illustrated by Qin Leng (Canada), Hana demonstrates confidence and a willingness to do her best. Young Hana's brothers laughed at her when she signed up to play her violin in the talent show. At the show, Hana compared the screeches from her violin to the sounds from a crow, her neighbor's cat, rain on an umbrella, and other sounds. Back at home, her brothers requested an encore.
 - *The Lion and the Bird* (Canada), written and illustrated by Marianne Dubuc and translated by Claudia Bedrick, is a picture storybook with minimal text featuring a Lion who finds an injured bird, cares for the bird over the winter, and when spring arrives, the bird takes flight. Lion is sad during summer without his friend, but fortunately, there is more to the story of this friendship.
 - Zeina Abirached, born in Lebanon in 1981 during the Lebanese Civil War, presents events from her childhood in the graphic novel *I Remember Beirut* (France), translated by Edward Gauvin. Abirached's insight gives a look at the resilience of the human spirit.
- *OIB books may present unique artistic styles*
 - Princesse Camcam, creator of *Fox's Garden* (France), used layered paper and created shadow box scenes to add depth to this wordless story of a fox who seeks shelter but is turned away by humans, until she meets a young boy who extends kindness.
 - *Anna's Heaven* (Norway), written and illustrated by Stian Hole and translated by Don Bartlett, is the conversation between a daughter and her father as they prepare to attend the mother's funeral, and the daughter imagines what heaven is like. Hole's surreal and fanciful images, with detail and color, plus unique surprises such as an image of Elvis Presley, are a playground for the eyes and brain.
 - On a train trip, author/illustrator Amrita Das sees two poor girls, one with a disability who is selling fruit from a cart. Using detailed art in the Mithila folk art style of traditional designs from India, Das ponders life and how one must "take what we have, go our own ways and try to make the most of it" (Das, 2014, n.p.) in *Hope Is A Girl Selling Fruit* (India).
- *OIB books offer opportunities for English language study*

English language learners can benefit from the OIB books since all were written in English or translated into English. Some readers will have background knowledge of the settings and locations of certain books, which contributes to comprehension. And, the titles that have been translated into English offer opportunity for readers to compare issues of translation between the original language and the English version. A few suggested titles include:

 - *A Pond Full of Ink*, a book of poetry by Annie M. G. Schmidt and illustrated by Sieb Posthuma, was originally written in Dutch, and was translated into English by David Colmer (The Netherlands). The poems are brief stories, and comparing the original Dutch version –*Een vijver vol inkt*—to the English translation would add to

understandings of word meanings as well as critical thinking about David Colmer's word and grammar choices.

- Originally written in German, a mouse named Lindbergh escapes predatory owls in Germany by creating a flying machine, in *Lindbergh: The Tale of a Flying Mouse*, by Torben Kuhlmann and translated by Suzanne Levesque (Germany).
 - The novel *I Love I Hate I Miss My Sister*, by Amélie Sarn (France) was translated from French to English by Y. Maudet. Two sisters in a Muslim family living in France are opposites. Sohane, more conservative than her outgoing and fashion-minded younger sister, reflects on their relationship after her sister meets tragedy.
- *Many books, authors, and illustrators of OIB books have received worldwide acclaim*
The OIB lists represent some of the best books in the world for children and young adults. The 2015 list is sprinkled with award-winning authors and illustrators, and many of the titles have received additional honors and awards. Here are a few of the most significant honors and awards for books, authors, illustrators, and even a publisher:
- *Before After*, by Anne-Margot Ramstein and Matthias Arégui was originally published as *Avant Après* by Albin Michel Jeunesse in 2013. *Avant Après* received the BolognaRagazzi Award for Non Fiction at the Bologna Book Fair in Bologna, Italy, on March 30, 2015.
 - Chris Haughton, author/illustrator of *Shh! We Have a Plan*, received the 2015 Ezra Jack Keats Book Award for New Illustrator in the U.S., and the book has received numerous additional awards including the Book Award in the Specsavers Children's Book of the Year, Junior category.
 - Chieri Uegaki, author of *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, received the 2015 Ezra Jack Keats Books Award for New Author in the U.S. Qin Leng, illustrator of this book, was nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for illustration in Canada.
 - Marianne Dubuc, the author/illustrator of **Le Lion et l'oiseau**, or *The Lion and the Bird*, received Canada's 2014 Governor General's Literary Award for illustration. The U.S. publisher, Enchanted Lion, was the North America winner for the Bologna Prize, Best Children's Publisher of the Year, at the 2015 Bologna Book Fair, awarded on March 30, 2015.
 - *Lindbergh: The Tale of a Flying Mouse*, by Torben Kuhlmann (Germany), and *Rules of Summer* (Australia), by Shaun Tan (German edition) have been nominated for the Deutscher Jugendliteratur Preis 2015 (German Youth Literature Prize), in the Picture Book category. The winner will be announced on October 16, 2015.
 - Laura Carlin (illustrator of *The Promise*, by Nicola Davies), William Grill (author/illustrator of *Shackleton's Journey*) and Shaun Tan (author/illustrator of *Rules of Summer*)—at the time of the preparation of this article—were shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal for illustration in the UK. The winner will be announced on June 22, 2015.

- Some of the authors and illustrators of books on the 2015 OIB list are significant because of past awards. Annie M. G. Schmidt (*A Pond Full of Ink*) received the IBBY Hans Christian Anderson Award for Writing in 1988. Shaun Tan (*Summer Rules*) received the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2011. Laura Carlin, illustrator of *The Promise*, has twice received the Quentin Blake Award. Jan Pieńkowski (illustrator of *The Glass Mountain: Tales from Poland*) was awarded the Kate Greenaway Medal in 1971 and 1979. In 2009, author/illustrator Stian Hole (*Anna's Heaven*) received the Nordic Children's Book Prize.

Tools for using USBBY outstanding international books

To facilitate the use of all of the OIB lists from 2006 to the current list, members of USBBY have created convenient and valuable resources. These resources are available for viewing or downloading from the USBBY website (<http://www.usbby.org/HomePage.asp>), specifically on the OIB page at http://www.usbby.org/list_oibl.html. The resources include:

- **Bookmarks:** The books selected for each year's list are presented on a bookmark. Bibliographic information for the books and countries of origin are included.
- **Journal articles:** The highly respected *School Library Journal* annually publishes an article (typically in the February issue) with an introduction to the list, and with complete bibliographic information and annotations for the books. Links to the articles are found on the USBBY OIB site.
- **PowerPoint Presentations:** Beginning with the 2009 list, a PowerPoint presentation for each year is available, with images of book covers and bibliographic information. Background information, such as selection criteria, is also included.
- **Maps:** Beginning with the 2012 list, a map of the world for each list, with book titles and pins placing the books in their countries of origin, is accessible.

Worldwide windows with OIB books

Books are windows on the world, and it just depends which window you choose as to how you see the world. We advocate you choose many windows for young people, in order to give them as many views as possible. USBBY Outstanding International Books are one way to do that.

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- Smith, D. J. (2014). *If . . . : A mind-bending new way of looking at big ideas and numbers*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

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2015 USBBY Outstanding International Books List

Books are categorized by U.S. grade level recommendations. Bibliographic information is for U.S. editions, with the country of origin in parentheses.

Grades PreKindergarten - 2

Arnaldo, M. (2014). *Arto's big move*. Toronto: Owlkids. (Canada)

Camcam, P. (2014). *Fox's garden*. Brooklyn, NY: Enchanted Lion. (France)

Davies, N. (2014). *The promise*. (L. Carlin, Illus.). Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK)

Dubuc, M. (2014). *The lion and the bird*. (C. Z. Bedrick, Trans.). Brooklyn, NY: Enchanted Lion. (Canada)

Haughton, C. (2014). *Shh! We have a plan*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK)

Kalluk, C. (2014). *Sweetest Kulu*. (A. Neonakis, Illus.). Toronto: Inhabit Media. (Canada)

Lagercrantz, R. (2014). *My heart is laughing*. (E. Eriksson, Illus.). (J. Marshall, Trans.). Wellington, New Zealand: Gecko Press. (Sweden)

Luxbacher, I. (2014). *Mr. Frank*. Toronto: Groundwood. (Canada)

Uegaki, C. (2014). *Hana Hashimoto, sixth violin*. (Q. Leng, Illus.). Toronto: Kids Can Press. (Canada)

Vallat, C. (2014). *Celia*. (S. Augusseau, Illus.). White Plains, NY: Peter Pauper Press. (Belgium)

van Hout, M. (2014). *Surprise*. New York: Lemniscaat USA. (The Netherlands)

Grades 3 - 5

Adderson, C. (2014). *Norman, speak!* (Q. Leng, Illus.). Toronto: Groundwood. (Canada)

Cole, T. C. (2014). *Wall*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK)

Grill, W. (2014). *Shackleton's journey*. London: Nobrow. (UK)

Hole, S. (2014). *Anna's heaven*. (D. Bartlett, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (Norway)

- Jordan-Fenton, C. & Pokiak-Fenton, M. (2014). *Not my girl*. (G. Grimard, Illus.). Toronto: Annick. (Canada)
- Kuhlmann, T. (2014). *Lindbergh: The tale of a flying mouse*. (S. Levesque, Trans.). New York: NorthSouth. (Germany)
- Landmann, B. (2014). *In search of the little prince: The story of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (Italy)
- Millard, G. (2014). *Once a shepherd*. (P. Lesnie, Illus.). Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (Australia)
- Schmidt, A. M. G. (2014). *A pond full of ink*. (S. Posthuma, Illus.). (D. Colmer, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (The Netherlands)
- Smith, D. J. (2014). *If . . . : A mind-bending new way of looking at big ideas and numbers*. (S. Adams, Illus.). Toronto: Kids Can Press. (Canada)
- Tan, S. (2014). *Rules of summer*. New York: Scholastic. (Australia)
- van Leeuwen, J. (2014). *The day my father became a bush*. (B. Nagelkerke, Trans.). Wellington, New Zealand: Gecko Press. (The Netherlands)
- Walser, D. (2014). *The glass mountain: Tales from Poland*. (J. Pieńkowski, Illus.). Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK)
- Walters, E. (2014). *Hope springs*. (E. Fernandes, Illus.). Toronto: Tundra Books. (Canada)
- Grades 6-8**
- Abirached, Z. (2014). *I remember Beirut*. (E. Gauvin, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: Lerner. (France)
- Bassofoff, L. & DeLuca, L. (2014). *Lost girl found*. Toronto: Groundwood. (Canada)
- Boyne, J. (2014). *Stay where you are & then leave*. (O. Jeffers, Illus.). New York: Henry Holt. (UK)
- Das, A. (2014). *Hope is a girl selling fruit*. (G. Wolf & S. Varadarajan, Trans.). Chennai, India: Tara Books. (India)
- Dillon, P. (2014). *The story of buildings: From the pyramids to the Sydney Opera House*. (S. Biesty, Illus.). Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK)
- French, S. (2014). *My cousin's keeper*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (Australia)
- Mateo, J. M. (2014). *Migrant: The journey of a Mexican worker*. (J. M. Pedro, Illus.). (E. R. Smith, Trans.). New York: Abrams. (Mexico)

McKay, S. E. (2014). *The end of the line*. Toronto: Annick. (Canada)

Prins, M. & Steenhuis, P. H. (2014). *Hidden like Anne Frank: Fourteen true stories of survival*. (L. Watkinson, Trans.). New York: Scholastic. (The Netherlands)

Ramstein, A-M. & Arégui, M. (2014). *Before after*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (UK, originally published in France)

Shyam, B., Wolf, G., & Rao, S. (2014). *The London jungle book*. (B. Shyam, Illus.). Chennai, India: Tara Books. (India)

Grades 9-12

Bass, K. (2014). *Graffiti knight*. Ontario: Pajama Press. (Canada)

Charleyboy, L. & Leatherdale, M. B. (Eds.). (2014). *Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American voices*. Toronto: Annick Press. (Canada)

Maier, C. (2014). *Marx*. (A. Simon, Illus.). London: Nobrow. (UK)

Sarn, A. (2014). *I love I hate I miss my sister*. (Y. Maudet, Trans.). New York: Delacorte. (France)

Shraya, V. (2014). *God loves hair*. (J. Neufeld, Illus.). Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press. (Canada)

Zail, S. (2014). *Playing for the commandant*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. (Australia)

Biographical notes

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