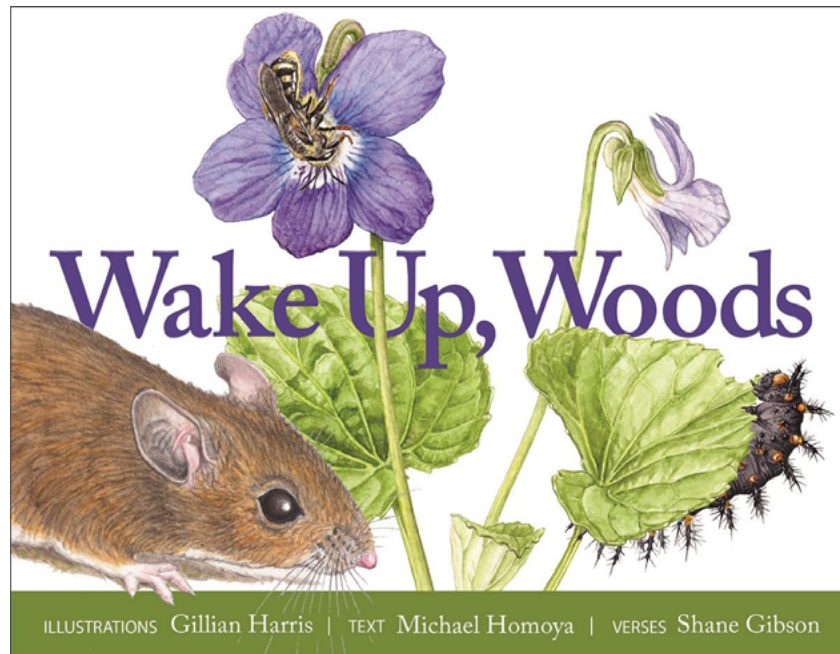


Wake Up, Woods by Michael Homoya & Shane Gibson, Illustrated by Gillian Harris

Reviewed by Jelena Byers @jelgobes (Instagram)



Wake Up, Woods is a beautifully illustrated book with well written information about the various flora one might encounter in our forests and nature preserves. Each new plant is introduced with easy poetic verse that draws you into the world they might be found in. The poetry leaves the reader thirsting for more information which the author delivers with interesting facts regarding insects and animals that live off these plants as well as their visual characteristics and how they pollinate. This book would be good for any young budding botanist or outdoor enthusiast.

Jelena Byers



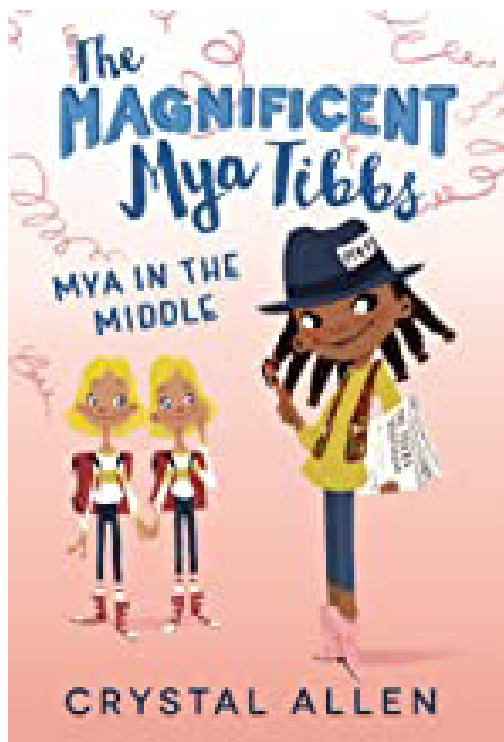
@yaswim07



@jelgobes

The Magnificent Mya Tibbs : Mya in the Middle by Crystal Allen

Reviewed by Denise Dragash



Mya is back for the third book in the series with *Mya in the Middle* by author Crystal Allen. This time Mya finds herself as the middle child after her family welcomes adorable baby sister, Macey. As can happen, the parents are sleep deprived; add in some family business worries and Mya is feeling left out. She tries to solve the problem with the help of some of her friends and big brother, Nugget. Throughout the struggles, Mya learns some valuable lessons about friendship and family. The experiences Mya goes through are relatable to the intended reading audience. Everyone can learn from examples of what to do and not do at school, with friends and family. Positive role models of the teacher and principal serve as a good reminder for readers that these can be safe people in their own lives. The town of Bluebonnet sounds like the perfect place to live which makes parts of the story a little unbelievable, but we can all wish to live in a place as friendly and helpful as Bluebonnet.

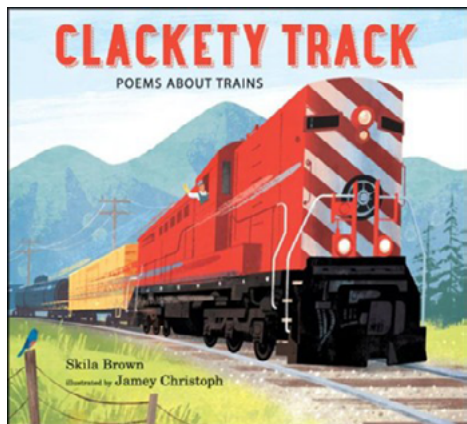
Denise Dragash



@PTEMediaCenter

Clackety Track by Skila Brown, Illustrated by Jamey Christoph

Reviewed by Emma Kelley



Clackety Track is a beautifully written picture book consisting of thirteen independent poems that are “right on track” for young train enthusiasts. Not only does Brown address common types of trains in her poems, such as the Freight Train, Steam Engine, and Bullet Train, she also engages readers in information related to trains - explaining the structure of train tracks and the function of the Shoulder Ballast Cleaner, for example. She cleverly begins the book with *Morning in the Yard* and ends with *The Sleeper Train*. While the book is made up of somewhat unrelated poems, Brown achieves a sense of a beginning and end - morning and night.

Most of these poems could be enjoyed autonomously by its intended audience of young readers, yet there are some instances of challenging vocabulary and figurative language that may require assistance. Fortunately, Skila Brown considered this and included twelve additional train facts, written in prose, at the end of the book. The poem *Electric Train* includes the word “pantograph” with very few context clues. However, the seventh train fact on the final page serves as supporting text, providing an explanation about pantographs. The train facts are organized so that there is one fact per train car, spreading across two pages. While the design is appealing, many of the train facts would be more effectively utilized if they were spread throughout the book and placed on applicable pages. In an educational setting, this book would be an excellent resource for exposing young readers to figurative language, such as metaphor. For instance, in *Freight Train*, the train is referred to as a

“Clackin’ crayon pack on wheels,” as well as a “Rockin’ rainbow made of steel”. Illustrator Jamey Christoph, created thirteen delightful works of art directly aligned with the poems. Each illustration is spread across two pages, taking up the majority of visual space in relation to the words on the page, which benefits the book’s young audience. Poetry can be a challenging genre for emergent readers. However, the vibrant illustrations in *Clackety Track* directly support the information in each poem, which aids in understanding.

An additional design element that supports the reader’s overall comprehension is the organization of the physical words within the poems. In the poem *Tracks*, the letters in “shudder” have been taken out of alignment, causing movement throughout the word, so it appears to be shaking. In many of her poems, Brown increases the space between words, emphasizing a pause. “Listen. Hush. Here comes a train,” intends the reader to stop for a longer period after the word “Listen,” increasing suspense, as if the reader is truly listening for a train.

Clackety Track provides an engaging overview on various trains and other related information. Skila Brown and Jamey Christoph invite readers to join them on the journey into the world of trains. “Come on! Hop on now. All Aboard!”

Emma Kelley



@ejkelley25

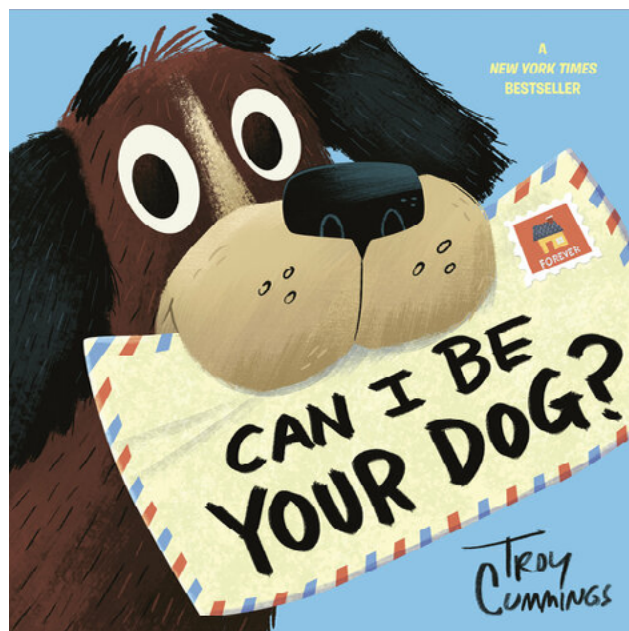


Can I Be Your Dog? by Troy Cummings

Reviewed by Sarrah J. Grubb

Troy Cummings, Indiana native and, according to his Web site “[author/illustrator of more than 40 children’s books](#),” captures this reader’s heart with his charming New York Times bestselling picture book, *Can I Be Your Dog?*

On the cover, the wishful look in the eyes of the title character, Arfy, encourages us to hope that the optimistic pup will find his “fur-ever” home within the brightly painted pages. As we begin the story, we join the homeless dog as he travels Butternut Street. Arfy writes letters to people in the neighborhood asking for a permanent place to live. Cummings’ strong paint strokes, use of color to reinforce the mood, and inclusion of the letters between residents of Butternut Street and Arfy encourage the reader to root for Arfy, even as his requests are rejected, in kind and not-so-kind ways. (One family explains that their cat is allergic to dogs.) Children, or children at heart, will empathize as it begins to rain and Arfy’s latest letter is stamped “return to sender” unanswered. His dream of a permanent home might not be fulfilled. Will anyone let Arfy be their dog? The resolution of the story is clever and unexpected. As an added bonus, the back



pages include an extra note from Arfy to the reader, explaining how they, too, can “extend a helpful paw” to homeless pets.

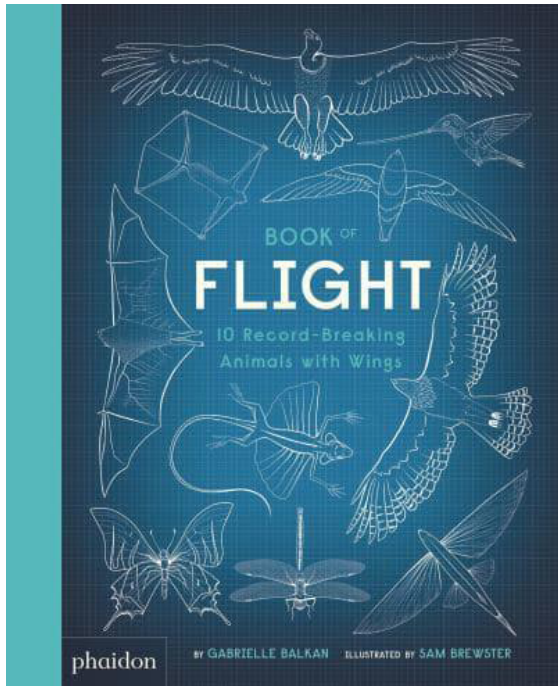
Overall, two paws up for Arfy and to Troy Cummings for bringing the heartwarming tale of hope to life on the pages of *Can I Be Your Dog?*

Sarrah J. Grubb



Book of Flight: 10 Record-Breaking Animals with Wings by Gabrielle Balkan, Illustrated by Sam Brewster

Reviewed by Michele Grossman



A fascination with and admiration of flying things of all types attracted me to Gabrielle Balkan's *Book of Flight: 10 Record-Breaking Animals with Wings*. It did not disappoint. A first skim of the book was a delighted appreciation of Sam Brewster's illustrations. Each "guess who" blueprint of an animal was followed by colorful depictions of the animals in their habitats. Closer inspection revealed that the pages include texture! This was a lovely surprise. A little bit of extra that was delightful to discover.

Balkan's text gives the readers clues, details about the structure and behavior of the animal. She labels Brewster's blueprints with interesting facts that distinguish a particular flyer from all others. While doing so she uses onomatopoeia, alliteration, and exclamation marks that express her contagious sense of wonder and curiosity: *Scoop, tuck, tumble, flip!* In addition, Balkan uses relatable comparisons that help the reader comprehend the facts: *If you ate your weight in food, you'd eat more than 100 bananas before bed!*

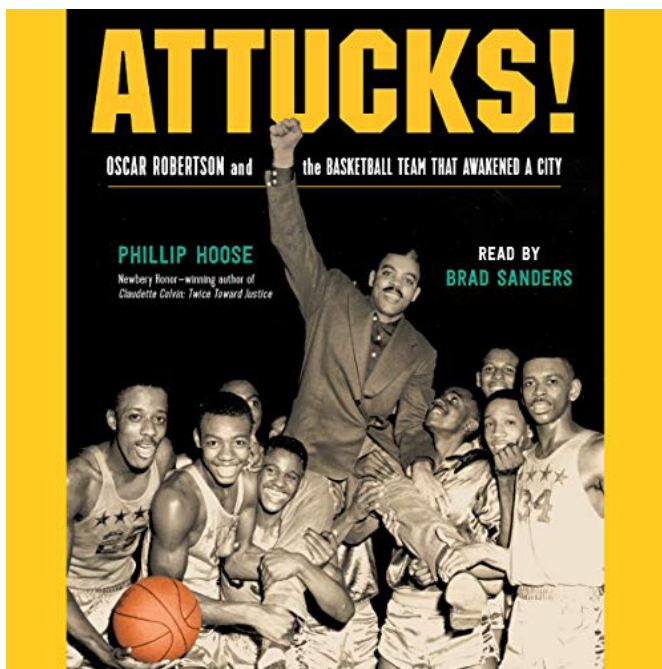
Although the average reader might guess that the described creatures are moths, bats, or birds, the actual animals will be a revelation to most. The

flyers in this book are very specific ones in those larger categories. Recommended for ages 5 to 8, the content will certainly hold up to repeated readings by beginning readers, who will enjoy the illustrations and textures, as well as independent readers, who will learn a good deal about this topic. Even adults who enjoy picture books will learn some factoids that are bound to come in handy at the next trivia night. It is a testament to the enjoyable format that when the final page was a blueprint page that was not followed by an illustrated page, I was disappointed.

Author Gabrielle Balkan's connection to Indiana was as a student at Broad Ripple High School. She currently lives in New York with her family and pets. She has collaborated with illustrator Sam Brewster, a freelance illustrator based in London, on other books for children as well. I will be adding these to my library: *Book of Bones: 10 Record-Breaking Animals* (2017) and *Whose Bones?: An Animal Guessing Game* (2020).

Attucks!: Oscar Robertson and the Basketball team that Awakened a City by Phillip Hoose

Reviewed by Darolyn Jones



2020 Indiana Author Award Winner
2019 ALA Notable Book o
2018 NYPL Best Book for Teens
2018 Booklist Youth Editors' Choice
2018 Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Book
2018 Kirkus Reviews Best YA Nonfiction Book
2019 ALSC Notable Children's Book of 2019
A YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award Nominee

Phillip Hoose, a National Book Award winner and Speedway, Indiana native who now resides on the East Coast, writes primarily historical nonfiction and his works center on sports and social justice issues. His recent multiple award winner, *Attucks!: Oscar Robertson and the Basketball team that Awakened a City*, hits close to home because growing up, Hoose remembers well the racial divide of the city of Indianapolis and the frenzy over Hoosier Hysteria. In 1986 and again long gone from Hoosier soil, Hoose was asked by Sports Illustrated to interview Crispus Attuck's famous and beloved player and leader on the court, Oscar Robertson. The interview lasted three hours, because growing up, Hoose's only contact with African Americans was through the Indiana

High School Basketball Tourney and of course, he had heard the legendary stories of Robertson. He was curious and the more Robertson talked, the more he wanted to know. Robertson said one line to Hoose that inspired this book: "When the Ku Klux Klan started our school [Crispus Attucks], they really didn't understand what they were doing."

Robertson and the historic Crispus Attuck's 1955 basketball team who became the very first all-Black team to win the Indiana High School's Athletic Association's State Basketball Championship and the first team in the city of Indianapolis to ever win that title is not just a story about basketball. That interview with Robertson led to countless hours of research and interviews and was expertly folded into the pages of this character driven piece of critical nonfiction. It's a story that young readers everywhere should read and that teachers and librarians; Hoosier or not; basketball lover or not, should teach, shelve, promote.

I love historical nonfiction. I love Indiana. And I love Hoosier Hysteria. My stepfather lived in a small town next to Milan, and he remembers that famous game where the small school beat the big school, now famously immortalized in one of the most well-known sports movies, *Hoosiers*. Hoose also has written a young book about that aptly titled, *Hoosiers: The Fabulous Basketball Life of Indiana*. And in 2007, I visited the Crispus Attucks Museum and worked on a memoir project with senior citizens with the historic all African American community center, Flanner house. They are the same senior citizens who lived in Frog Island and attended Attucks, where Robertson and his teammates lived and played; the same senior citizens who watched the famous team practice at the Dust Bowl tournaments in Lockerbie; and the same senior citizens who attended the games and cheered with integrated basketball fans, ironic since where those same African Americans lived and attended school remained segregated.

But, I couldn't truly envisage what Attuck's was really all about and why it was such a critical and historic racial moment for the city, the state, and the country until I read this book. This is much more than

a basketball story. It's a character driven story where we learn through the actions and dialogue of each critical person who contributed either to systemically keeping segregation alive or building Crispus Attucks up to be the beacon of hope, harmony, and excellence it became. What happened at Attucks started a movement to break the long held racial divide in the city. The first time many whites in the city or the state ever saw a Black person was when Crispus Attuck's came to their town to play or Hoosiers flocked to Indianapolis to see the games at Butler Fieldhouse. Watching them, supporting them as their Indiana team humanized them to folks that were previously for segregation and racial divide.

In this accessible, well-written nonfiction chapter book, with images and primary documentation, you will learn how the Klan and the community tried to keep Black residents poor and in a segregated, too small school. You will learn about more than the historic Indiana Avenue, but also about

the shameful living conditions of Blacks in Frog Island. You will learn that Attuck's employed some of the top university-trained Black Scholars as teachers because those individuals couldn't get positions at universities or in science or corporations because they were Black.

The book is full of clarifying historic side table insets that explain Jim Crow laws, the Great Migration, even the origin of the word "Hoosier". You will hear from and about the key historical figures who were there and lived during that time. I loved the use of real images from the local newspapers and photographs which helps the reader visualize and understand the political and social commentaries happening in that real time. The book includes a comprehensive Notes and Bibliography section that explains where every source is from. It also includes a "The Times that Followed" section where you can learn what happened to the famous Attuck's players, most of whom are still living.

Darolyn Jones



Girls on the Verge by Sharon Briggs Waller

Reviewed by Lynn Werckenthien

“This is my right. I deserve to be heard.”

17-year-old Camille is preparing to attend Willow, an elite theater camp, when she finds out she’s pregnant. She has big dreams for her life, and she knows she wants an abortion. Too scared to tell her parents, she sets out on a road trip across Texas with two girl friends: Bea, her reluctant and religiously conservative best friend, and Annabelle, a girl she just met but a champion for Camille’s cause and women’s rights. On the way, they encounter innumerable setbacks, including a pro-life clinic masquerading as an abortion clinic, angry protesters, a search for illegal medication in Mexico, and an unsupportive judge. The novel weaves in flashbacks in which we learn more about Camille’s past and the events that brought Camille to this cross-country trip. Altogether, it tells the tale of a girl who, with the support of her best friends, fights for the right to make the choices that will determine her life’s path.

Compelling, honest, and, ultimately, hopeful, *Girls on the Verge* by Sharon Biggs Waller is an important and timely book for students in high school and above about a woman’s right to choose and a girl’s journey to finding her voice.



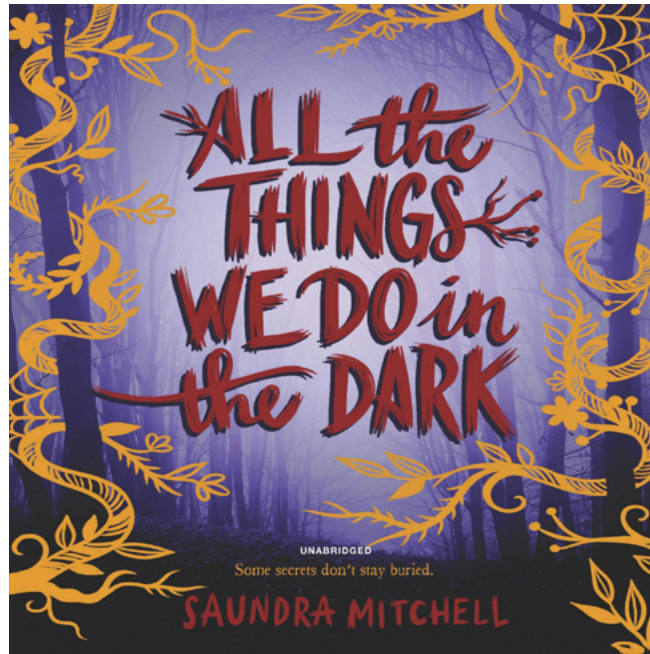
Lynn Werckenthien



@mrs_werck

All the Things We Do in the Dark by Sandra Mitchell

Reviewed by Corrine Henke



Setting is present day in a high school. The weather is cold with snow. The main character is in high school and experiencing growing pains with her parents. She rebels against her parents and gets a tattoo and on the way home finds a dead body in the woods. She does not report it to the proper officials because she notices someone else in the woods. The book is very dark. This is a well written book, but is not for any grade lower than 8th grade. As I was reading this book poolside a friend remarked, "Wow with a title like that I am surprised that it is a kid's book!" I said not to worry, I love to preview books prior to placing them in my library for my 5th graders. This book will be passed on to my friend who teaches 8th grade. The subject content is for mature audiences. The topic is very relevant to more of a high school reading group.

Corrine Henke



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