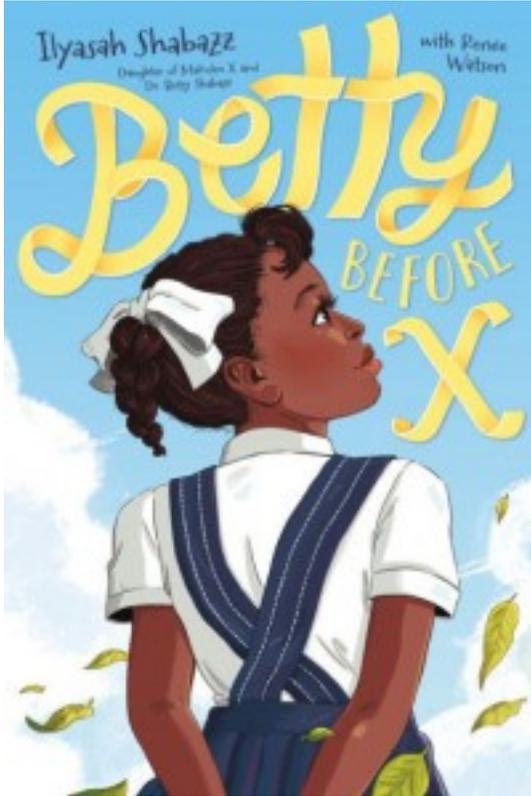


18 2018 Middle Grade Books to Have on Your Radar

DECEMBER 12, 2017 BY [AMANDA MACGREGOR](#)

All descriptions from the publishers.

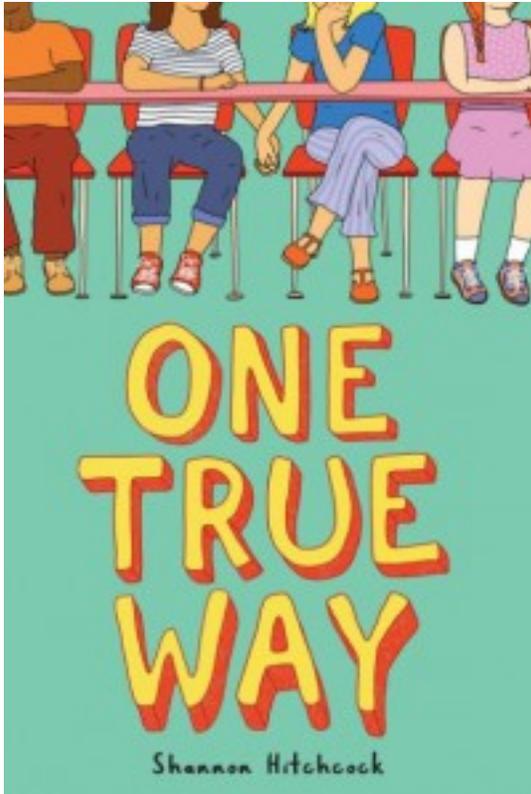


Betty Before X by Ilyasah Shabazz and Renee Watson (ISBN-13: 9780374306106 Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publication date: 01/02/2018)

In Detroit, 1945, eleven-year-old Betty's house doesn't quite feel like home. She believes her mother loves her, but she can't shake the feeling that her mother doesn't *want* her. Church helps those worries fade, if only for a little while. The singing, the preaching, the speeches from guest activists like Paul Robeson and Thurgood Marshall stir African Americans in her community to stand up for their rights. Betty quickly finds confidence and purpose in volunteering for the Housewives League, an organization that supports black-owned businesses. Soon, the American civil rights icon we now know as Dr. Betty Shabazz is born.

Inspired by Betty's real life—but expanded upon and fictionalized through collaboration with novelist Renée Watson—Ilyasah Shabazz illuminates four poignant years in her mother's childhood with this book, painting an inspiring portrait of a girl overcoming the challenges of self-acceptance and belonging that will resonate with young readers today.

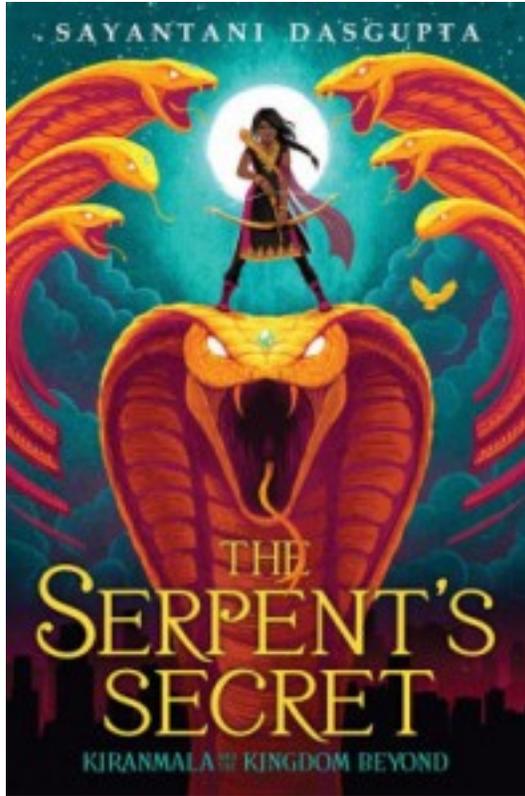
Backmatter included.



One True Way by Shannon Hitchcock

(ISBN-13: 9781338181722 Publisher: Scholastic, Inc. Publication date: 02/27/2018)

Welcome to Daniel Boone Middle School in the 1970s, where teachers and coaches must hide who they are, and girls who like girls are forced to question their own choices. Presented in the voice of a premier storyteller, *One True Way* sheds exquisite light on what it means to be different, while at the same time being wholly true to oneself. Through the lives and influences of two girls, readers come to see that love is love is love. Set against the backdrop of history and politics that surrounded gay rights in the 1970s South, this novel is a thoughtful, eye-opening look at tolerance, acceptance, and change, and will widen the hearts of all readers.



The Serpent's Secret (Kiranmala and the Kingdom Beyond #1) by Sayantani

DasGupta (ISBN-13: 9781338185706 Publisher: Scholastic, Inc. Publication date: 02/27/2018)

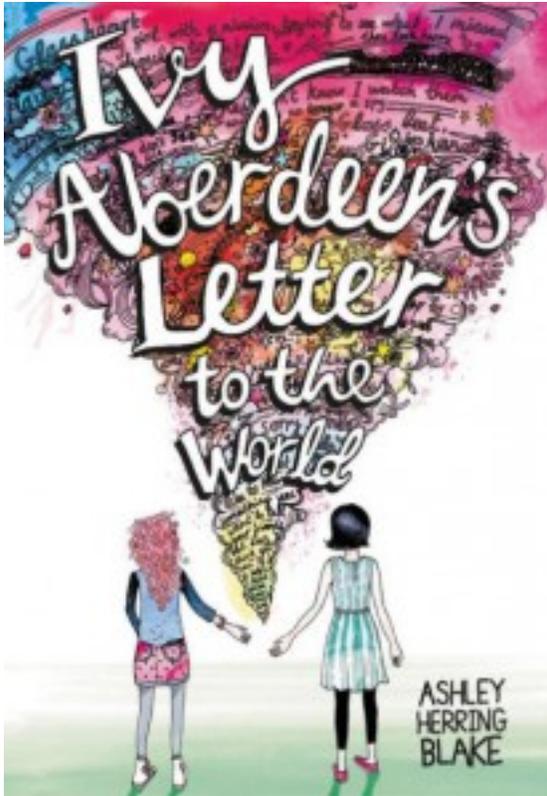
MEET KIRANMALA:

INTERDIMENSIONAL DEMON SLAYER

(Only she doesn't know it yet.)

On the morning of her twelfth birthday, Kiranmala is just a regular sixth grader living in Parsippany, New Jersey . . . until her parents mysteriously vanish and a drooling rakkhosh demon slams through her kitchen, determined to eat her alive. Turns out there might be some truth to her parents' fantastical stories-like how Kiranmala is a real Indian princess and how she comes from a secret place not of this world.

To complicate matters, two crush-worthy princes ring her doorbell, insisting they've come to rescue her. Suddenly, Kiran is swept into another dimension full of magic, winged horses, moving maps, and annoying, talking birds. There she must solve riddles and battle demons all while avoiding the Serpent King of the underworld and the Rakkhoshi Queen in order to find her parents and basically save New Jersey, her entire world, and everything beyond it . . .



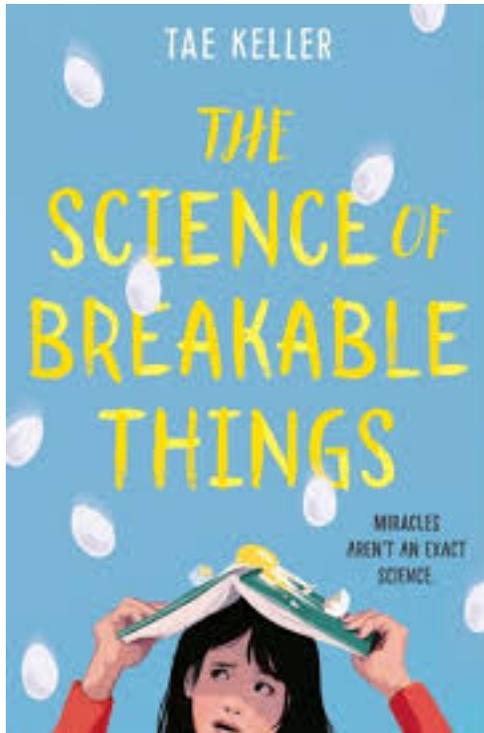
Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World by Ashley Herring Blake (ISBN-13: 9780316515467)

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers Publication date: 03/06/2018)

In the wake of a destructive tornado, one girl develops feelings for another in this stunning, tender novel about emerging identity, perfect for fans of *The Thing About Jellyfish*.

When a tornado rips through town, twelve-year-old Ivy Aberdeen's house is destroyed and her family of five is displaced. Ivy feels invisible and ignored in the aftermath of the storm—and what's worse, her notebook filled with secret drawings of girls holding hands has gone missing. Mysteriously, Ivy's drawings begin to reappear in her locker with notes from someone telling her to open up about her identity. Ivy thinks—and hopes—that this someone might be her classmate, another girl for whom Ivy has begun to develop a crush. Will Ivy find the strength and courage to follow her true feelings?

Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World exquisitely enriches the rare category of female middle-grade characters who like girls—and children's literature at large.



The Science of Breakable Things by Tae Keller (ISBN-13: 9781524715663 Publisher: Random House Children's Books Publication date: 03/06/2018)

An emotionally-charged new classic about the science of hope, love, and miracles! Natalie's uplifting story of using the scientific method to "save" her mother from depression is sure to take root in readers' hearts!

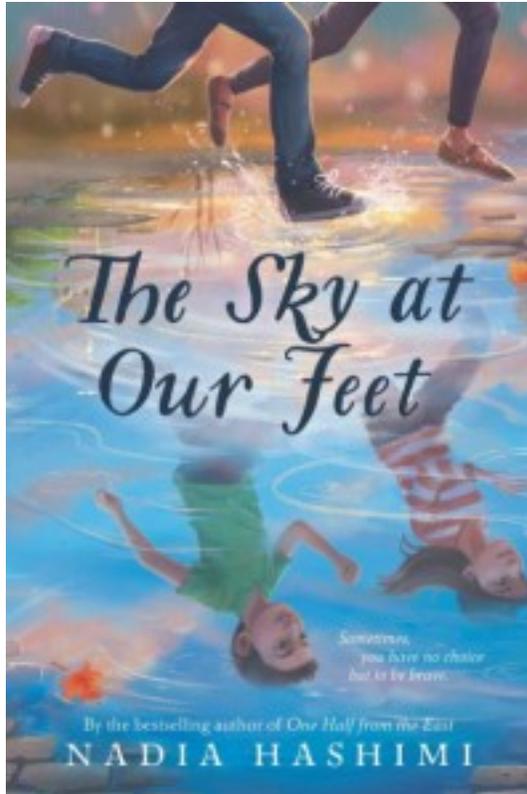
How do you grow a miracle?

For the record, this is not the question Mr. Neely is looking for when he says everyone in class must answer an important question using the scientific method. But Natalie's botanist mother is suffering from depression, so this is The Question that's important to Natalie. When Mr. Neely suggests that she enter an egg drop competition, Natalie has hope.

Eggs are breakable. Hope is not.

Natalie has a secret plan for the prize money. She's going to fly her mother to see the Cobalt Blue Orchids—flowers that survive against impossible odds. The magical flowers are sure to inspire her mother to love life again. Because when parents are breakable, it's up to kids to save them, right?

An extraordinary debut about the coming-of-age moment when kids realize that parents are people, too, and that talking about problems is like taking a plant out of a dark cupboard and giving it light. Think THE FOURTEENTH GOLDFISH meets THE THING ABOUT JELLYFISH.

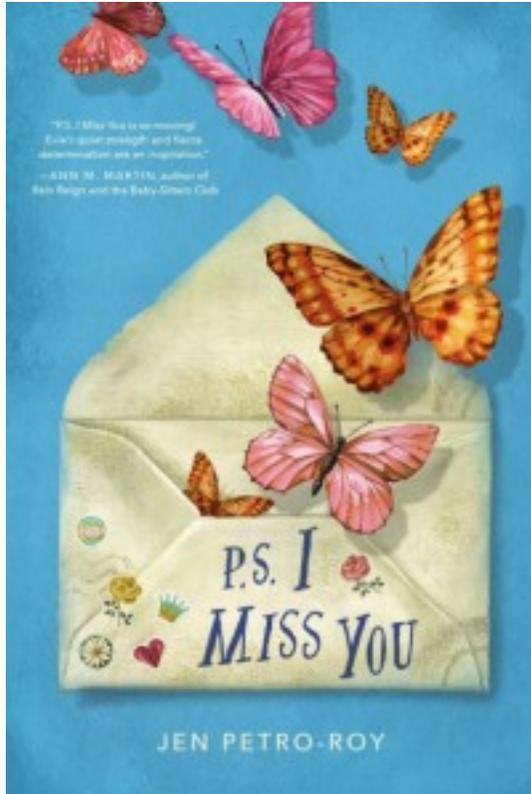


The Sky at Our Feet by Nadia Hashimi (ISBN-13: 9780062421937 Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers Publication date: 03/06/2018)

This #ownvoices novel by bestselling author Nadia Hashimi tells the affecting story of an Afghan-American boy who believes his mother has been deported. For fans of *Inside Out and Back Again* and *Counting by 7s*.

Jason has just learned that his Afghan mother has been living illegally in the United States since his father was killed in Afghanistan. Although Jason was born in the US, it's hard to feel American now when he's terrified that his mother will be discovered—and that they will be separated. When he sees his mother being escorted from her workplace by two officers, Jason feels completely alone. He boards a train with the hope of finding his aunt in New York City, but as soon as he arrives in Penn Station, the bustling city makes him wonder if he's overestimated what he can do.

After an accident lands him in the hospital, Jason finds an unlikely ally in a fellow patient. Max, a whip-smart girl who wants nothing more than to explore the world on her own terms, joins Jason in planning a daring escape out of the hospital and into the skyscraper jungle—even though they both know that no matter how big New York City is, they won't be able to run forever.



P.S. I Miss You by Jen Petro-Roy (ISBN-13: 9781250123480 Publisher: Feiwel & Friends
Publication date: 03/06/2018)

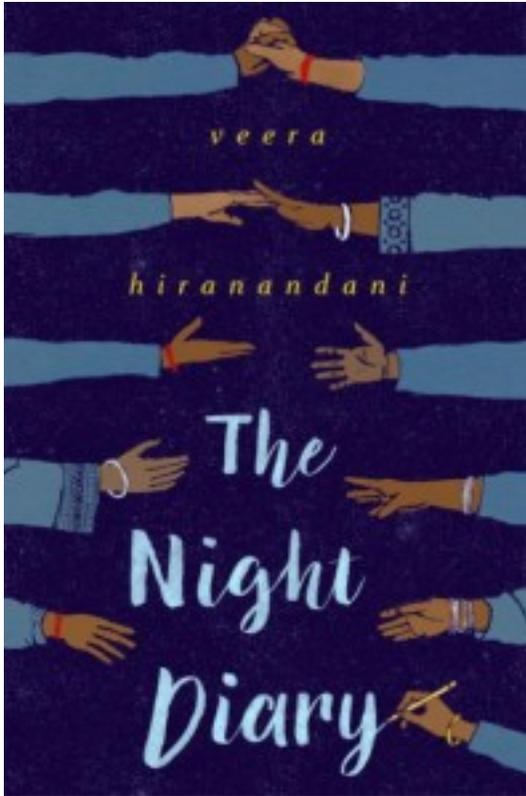
A heartbreaking—yet ultimately uplifting—epistolary novel about family, religion, and having the courage to be yourself.

Evie is heartbroken when her strict Catholic parents send her pregnant sister, Cilla, away to stay with a distant great-aunt. All Evie wants is for her older sister to come back. Forbidden from speaking to Cilla, Evie secretly sends her letters.

Evie writes about her family, torn apart and hurting. She writes about her life, empty without Cilla. And she writes about the new girl in school, June, who becomes her friend, and then maybe more than a friend.

Evie could really use some advice from Cilla. But Cilla isn't writing back, and it's time for Evie to take matters into her own hands.

P.S. I Miss You by Jen Petro-Roy is a heartfelt middle grade novel dealing with faith, identity, and finding your way in difficult times.



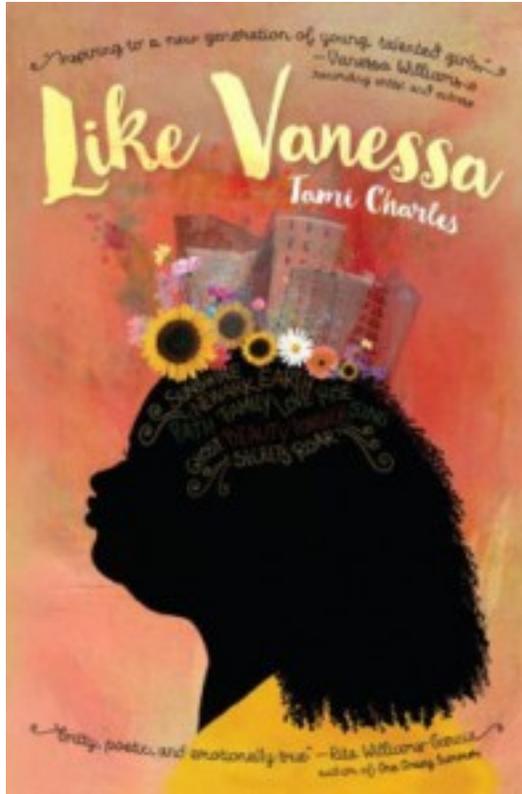
The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani (ISBN-13: 9780735228511 Publisher: Penguin Young Readers Group Publication date: 03/06/2018)

In the vein of *Inside Out and Back Again* and *The War That Saved My Life* comes a poignant, personal, and hopeful tale of India's partition, and of one girl's journey to find a new home in a divided country

It's 1947, and India, newly independent of British rule, has been separated into two countries: Pakistan and India. The divide has created much tension between Hindus and Muslims, and hundreds of thousands are killed crossing borders.

Half-Muslim, half-Hindu twelve-year-old Nisha doesn't know where she belongs, or what her country is anymore. When Papa decides it's too dangerous to stay in what is now Pakistan, Nisha and her family become refugees and embark first by train but later on foot to reach her new home. The journey is long, difficult, and dangerous, and after losing her mother as a baby, Nisha can't imagine losing her homeland, too. But even if her country has been ripped apart, Nisha still believes in the possibility of putting herself back together.

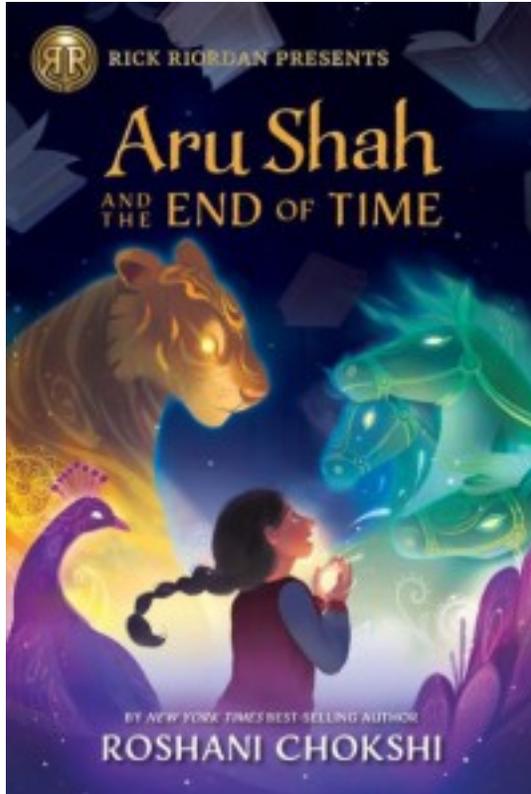
Told through Nisha's letters to her mother, *The Night Diary* is a heartfelt story of one girl's search for home, for her own identity...and for a hopeful future.



Like Vanessa by Tami Charles, Vanessa Brantley-Newton (Illustrator) (ISBN-13: 9781580897778 Publisher: Charlesbridge Publication date: 03/13/2018)

Middle graders will laugh and cry with thirteen-year-old Vanessa Martin as she tries to be like Vanessa Williams, the first black Miss America, by reluctantly entering her own beauty pageant.

In this semi-autobiographical debut novel set in 1983, Vanessa Martin's real-life reality of living with family in public housing in Newark, New Jersey is a far cry from the glamorous Miss America stage. She struggles with an incarcerated mother she barely remembers, a grandfather dealing with addiction and her own battle with self-confidence. But when a new teacher at school coordinates a beauty pageant and convinces Vanessa to enter, Vanessa's view of her own world begins to change. Vanessa discovers that her own self-worth is more than the scores of her talent performance and her interview answers, and that she doesn't need a crown to be comfortable in her own skin and see her own true beauty.

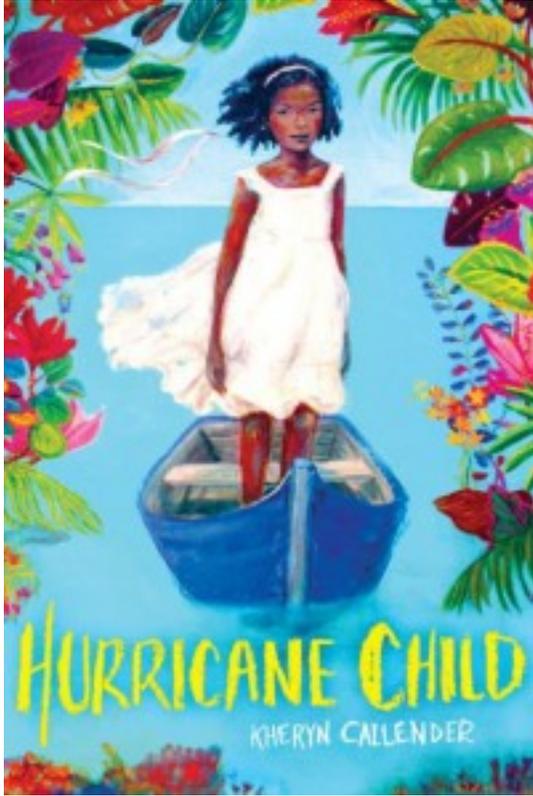


Aru Shah and the End of Time (A Pandava Novel Book 1) by Roshani Chokshi (ISBN-13: 9781368012355 Publisher: Disney Press Publication date: 03/27/2018)

Best-selling author Rick Riordan introduces this adventure by Roshani Chokshi about twelve-year-old Aru Shah, who has a tendency to stretch the truth in order to fit in at school. While her classmates are jetting off to family vacations in exotic locales, she'll be spending her autumn break at home, in the Museum of Ancient Indian Art and Culture, waiting for her mom to return from her latest archeological trip. Is it any wonder that Aru makes up stories about being royalty, traveling to Paris, and having a chauffeur?

One day, three schoolmates show up at Aru's doorstep to catch her in a lie. They don't believe her claim that the museum's Lamp of Bharata is cursed, and they dare Aru to prove it. *Just a quick light*, Aru thinks. Then she can get herself out of this mess and *never ever* fib again. But lighting the lamp has dire consequences. She unwittingly frees the Sleeper, an ancient demon whose duty it is to awaken the God of Destruction. Her classmates and beloved mother are frozen in time, and it's up to Aru to save them.

The only way to stop the demon is to find the reincarnations of the five legendary Pandava brothers, protagonists of the Hindu epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, and journey through the Kingdom of Death. But how is one girl in Spider-Man pajamas supposed to do all *that*?



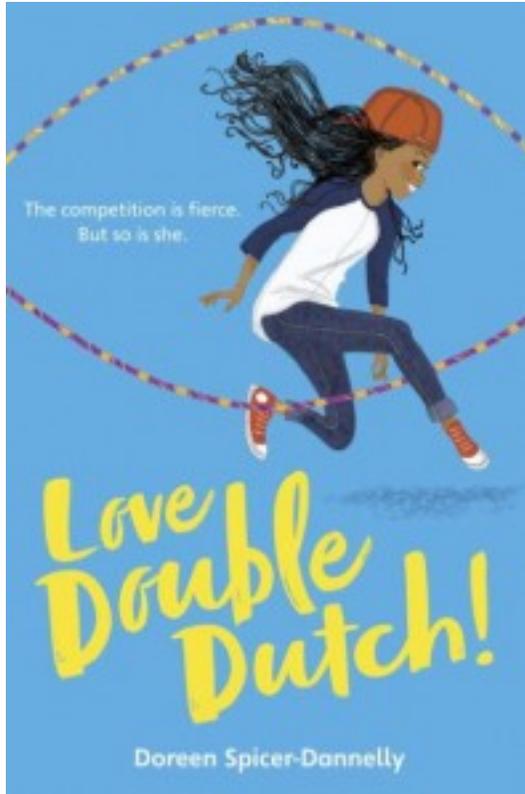
Hurricane Child by Kheryn Callender (ISBN-13: 9781338129304 Publisher: Scholastic, Inc. Publication date: 03/27/2018)

Caroline Murphy is a Hurricane Child.

Being born during a hurricane is unlucky, and twelve-year-old Caroline has had her share of bad luck lately. She's hated and bullied by everyone in her small school on St. Thomas of the US Virgin Islands, a spirit only she can see won't stop following her, and — worst of all — Caroline's mother left home one day and never came back.

But when a new student named Kalinda arrives, Caroline's luck begins to turn around. Kalinda, a solemn girl from Barbados with a special smile for everyone, becomes Caroline's first and only friend — and the person for whom Caroline has begun to develop a crush.

Now, Caroline must find the strength to confront her feelings for Kalinda, brave the spirit stalking her through the islands, and face the reason her mother abandoned her. Together, Caroline and Kalinda must set out in a hurricane to find Caroline's missing mother — before Caroline loses her forever.



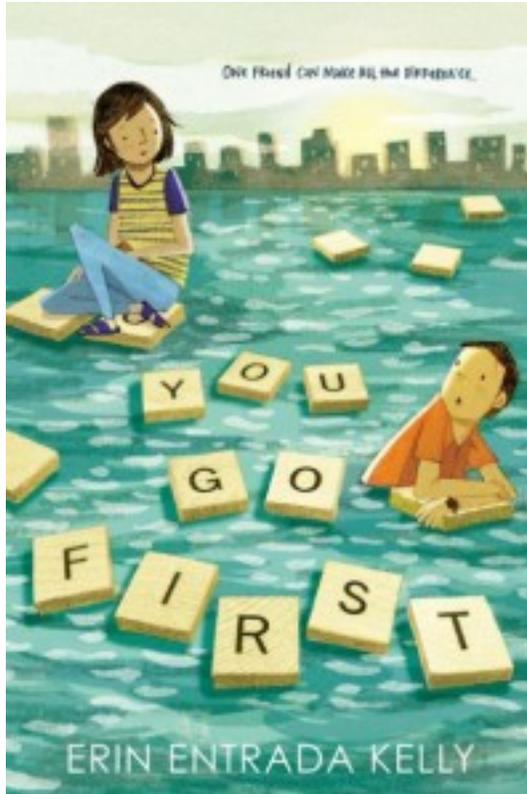
Love Double Dutch! by Doreen Spicer-Dannelly (ISBN-13: 9781524700003 Publisher: Random House Children's Books Publication date: 04/03/2018)

From the creator of the popular Disney Channel original movie, *Jump In!* comes a double Dutch novel perfect for fans of stories about sports, summer, and friendship.

Brooklyn middle-schooler MaKayla can only think about one thing—taking her double Dutch team all the way to the National Jump-off at Madison Square Garden. That is, until her mother breaks the news. Kayla has to spend the summer at her aunt's house in North Carolina while her parents work out their problems . . . or decide to call it quits.

Kayla does not feel at home in the South, and she certainly doesn't get along with her snooty cousin Sally. It looks like her Jump-off dreams are over.

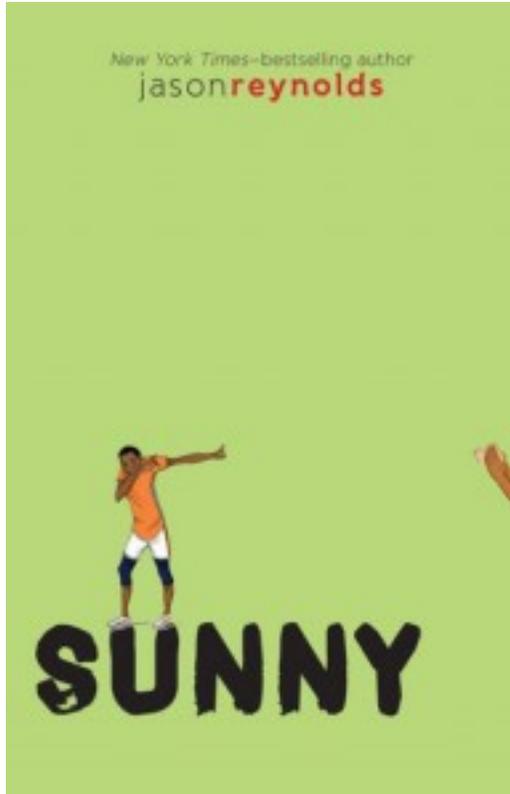
Hold the phone! Turns out, double Dutch is *huge* in the South. She and Sally just need to find two more kids for a team. And a routine. And the confidence to stand up to the double Dutch divas who used to be Sally's BFFs. Time to show those Southern belles some Brooklyn attitude!



You Go First by Erin Entrada Kelly (ISBN-13: 9780062414182 Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers Publication date: 04/10/2018)

Acclaimed and award-winning author Erin Entrada Kelly’s *You Go First* is an engaging exploration of family, bullying, spelling, art, and the ever-complicated world of middle school friendships. Her perfectly pitched tween voice will resonate with fans of Kate DiCamillo’s *Raymie Nightingale*.

Twelve-year-old Charlotte Lockard and eleven-year-old Ben Boxer are separated by more than a thousand miles. On the surface, their lives seem vastly different—Charlotte lives near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while Ben is in the small town of Lanester, Louisiana. Charlotte wants to be a geologist and keeps a rock collection in her room. Ben is obsessed with Harry Potter, presidential history, and recycling. But the two have more in common than they think. They’re both highly gifted. They’re both experiencing family turmoil. And they both sit alone at lunch. Over the course of a week, Charlotte and Ben—online friends connected only by a Scrabble game—will intersect in unexpected ways, as they struggle to navigate the turmoil of middle school. This engaging story about growing up and finding your place in the world by the winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature will appeal to fans of Rebecca Stead and Rita Williams-Garcia.



Sunny (Defenders Track Team Series #3) by Jason Reynolds (ISBN-13: 9781481450218

Publisher: Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books Publication date: 04/10/2018)

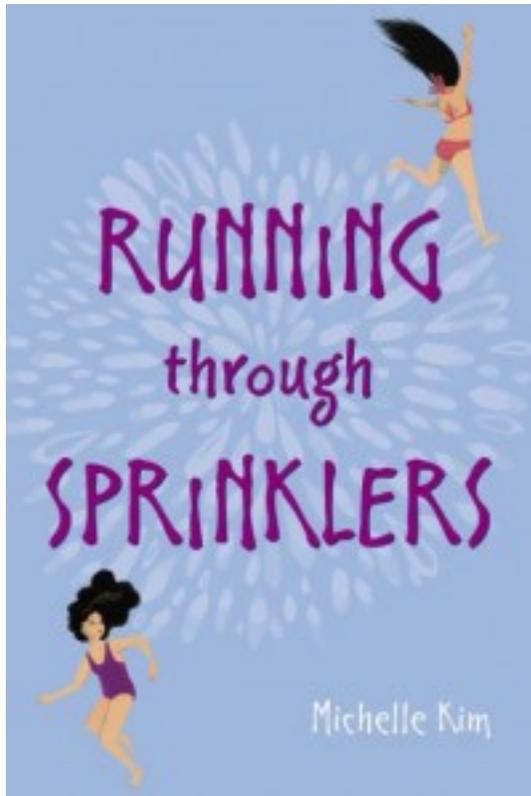
Sunny tries to shine despite his troubled past in this third novel in the critically acclaimed Track series from National Book Award finalist Jason Reynolds.

Ghost. Patina. Sunny. Lu. Four kids from wildly different backgrounds, with personalities that are explosive when they clash. But they are also four kids chosen for an elite middle school track team—a team that could qualify them for the Junior Olympics. They all have a lot of lose, but they all have a lot to prove, not only to each other, but to themselves. Sunny is the main character in this novel, the third of four books in Jason Reynold’s electrifying middle grade series.

Sunny is just that—sunny. Always ready with a goofy smile and something nice to say, Sunny is the chilliest dude on the Defenders team. But Sunny’s life hasn’t always been sun beamy-bright. You see, Sunny is a murderer. Or at least he thinks of himself that way. His mother died giving birth to him, and based on how Sunny’s dad treats him—ignoring him, making Sunny call him Darryl, never “Dad”—it’s no wonder Sunny thinks he’s to blame. It seems the only thing Sunny can do right in his dad’s eyes is win first place ribbons running the mile, just like his mom did. But Sunny doesn’t like running, never has. So he stops. Right in the middle of a race.

With his relationship with his dad now worse than ever, the last thing Sunny wants to do is leave the other newbies—his only friends—behind. But you can’t be on a track team and *not run*. So Coach asks Sunny what he wants to do. Sunny’s answer? Dance. Yes, dance. But you also can’t be on a track team and *dance*. Then, in a stroke of genius only Jason Reynolds can conceive, Sunny discovers a track event that encompasses the hard hits of hip-hop, the precision of ballet, and the showmanship of dance as a whole: the discus throw. As Sunny practices the discus,

learning when to let go at just the right time, he'll let go of everything that's been eating him up inside, perhaps just in time.



Running through Sprinklers by Michelle Kim (ISBN-13: 9781481495288 Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers Publication date: 04/17/2018)

Two life-long best friends grow up and begin to grow apart in this honest, deeply felt middle grade debut.

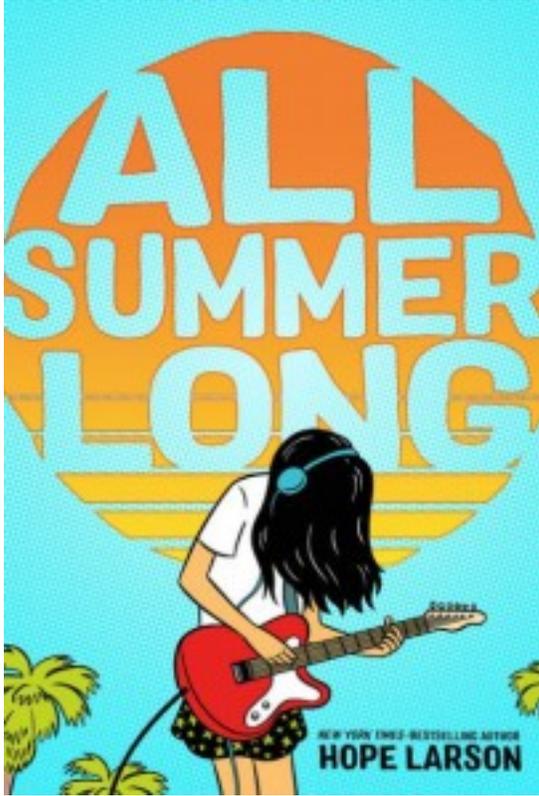
Sara and Nadine.

Nadine and Sara.

It's only ever been the two of them. Two halves of the same person. Best friends forever—until they aren't.

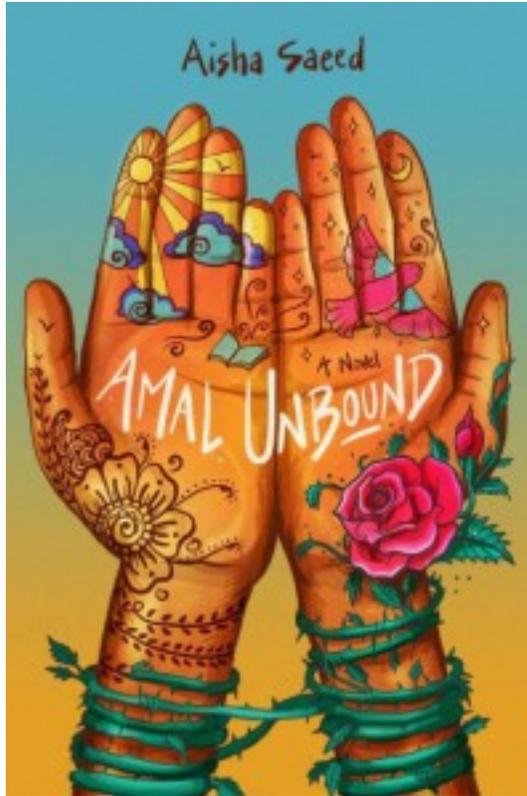
Everything has changed this year. Nadine has suddenly skipped a grade and gone to high school without Sara. No matter how hard she fights to save their friendship, Sara can feel it slipping away.

But change can happen from the inside, too. The forever-friend days of running through sprinklers and slurping up ice cream cones may be over. Yet in their place, Sara just might discover something new and wonderful: herself.



All Summer Long by Hope Larson (ISBN-13: 9780374310714 Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publication date: 05/01/2018)

Thirteen-year-old Bina has a long summer ahead of her. She and her best friend, Austin, usually do everything together, but he's off to soccer camp for a month, and he's been acting kind of weird lately anyway. So it's up to Bina to see how much fun she can have on her own. At first it's a lot of guitar playing, boredom, and bad TV, but things look up when she finds an unlikely companion in Austin's older sister, who enjoys music just as much as Bina. But then Austin comes home from camp, and he's acting even weirder than when he left. How Bina and Austin rise above their growing pains and reestablish their friendship and respect for their differences makes for a touching and funny coming-of-age story.

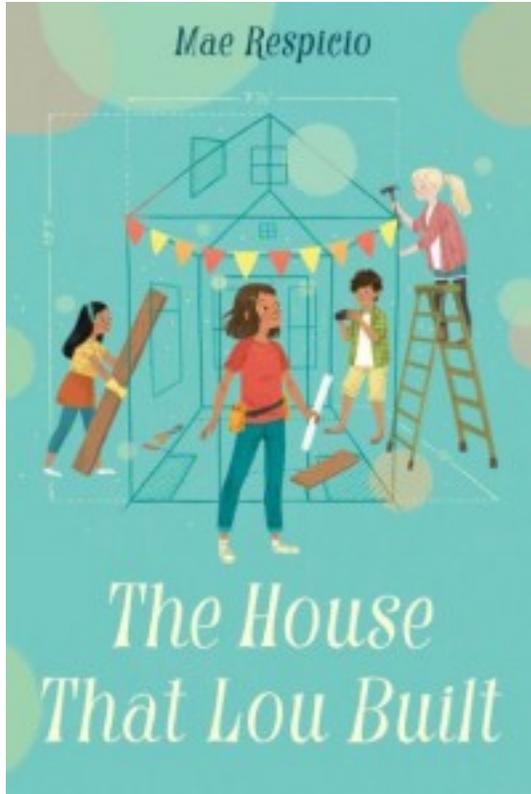


Amal Unbound by Aisha Saeed (ISBN-13: 9780399544682 Publisher: Penguin Young Readers Group Publication date: 05/08/2018)

Aisha Saeed's middle-grade debut tells the compelling story of a girl's fight to regain her life and dreams after being forced into indentured servitude.

Life is quiet and ordinary in Amal's Pakistani village, but she had no complaints, and besides, she's busy pursuing her dream of becoming a teacher one day. Her dreams are temporarily dashed when—as the eldest daughter—she must stay home from school to take care of her siblings. Amal is upset, but she doesn't lose hope and finds ways to continue learning. Then the unimaginable happens—after an accidental run-in with the son of her village's corrupt landlord, Amal must work as his family's servant to pay off her own family's debt.

Life at the opulent Khan estate is full of heartbreak and struggle for Amal—especially when she inadvertently makes an enemy of a girl named Nabila. Most troubling, though, is Amal's growing awareness of the Khans' nefarious dealings. When it becomes clear just how far they will go to protect their interests, Amal realizes she will have to find a way to work with others if they are ever to exact change in a cruel status quo, and if Amal is ever to achieve her dreams.



The House That Lou Built by Mae Respicio (ISBN-13: 9781524717957 Publisher: Random House Children's Books Publication date: 06/12/2018)

A coming-of-age story that explores culture and family, forgiveness and friendship, and what makes a true home. Perfect for fans of Wendy Mass and Joan Bauer.

Lou Bulosan-Nelson has the ultimate summer DIY project. She's going to build her own "tiny house," 100 square feet all her own. She shares a room with her mom in her grandmother's house, and longs for a place where she can escape her crazy but lovable extended Filipino family. Lou enjoys her woodshop class and creating projects, and she plans to build the house on land she inherited from her dad, who died before she was born. But then she finds out that the land may not be hers for much longer.

Lou discovers it's not easy to save her land, or to build a house. But she won't give up; with the help of friends and relatives, her dream begins to take shape, and she learns the deeper meaning of home and family.

<http://www.teenlibrariantoolbox.com/2017/12/18-2018-middle-grade-books-to-have-on-your-radar/>