"Critical literacy is the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. The development of critical literacy skills enables people to interpret messages in the modern world through a critical lens and challenge the power relations within those messages. Teachers who facilitate the development of critical literacy encourage students to interrogate societal issues and institutions like family, poverty, education, equity, and equality in order to critique the structures that serve as norms as well as to demonstrate how these norms are not experienced by all members of society (Coffey).”


**Summary:**

*Thunder Boy Jr.* is about a little boy who doesn’t feel his name, a name he shares with his dad, fits him. He wants a name all his own, one that he feels suits his big personality. He struggles with how to tell his family without hurting anyone’s feelings, especially his dad. Finally, his dad reads “his heart” and gives Thunder Boy a new name…. Lightning. It fits perfectly.

**Text and Illustration:**

The narrative in this story is told from the perspective of Thunder Boy Jr, who, struggling with his identity, no longer feels this name is his. The text is quite simple, as one would expect from a
boy who is six or seven but is no less expressive. Alexie uses large text, often in boldly outlined speech bubbles, to show the importance of those words, especially names. In Indigenous American cultures, names hold great significance and often are changed over time as the individual changes (Waugaman).

The simple, colourful, graphic, joyous illustrations are well matched with Alexie’s story. Morales used an interesting technique to give the illustrations depth and texture. She scanned pieces from an old house – bricks, wood, plaster – and used these images to ‘digitally paint the illustrations’. This gives a warmth to the pages, that reflects the warmth of this family’s connection. Thunder Boy Jr.’s discontent is illustrated clearly on the sixth spread where, in big, bold letters he yells “I HATE MY NAME!”. But even if these words were not on the page we would know this by the three, large brightly coloured (red, fuchsia, and turquoise) circles with simple images of a wolf, a snake, and a bear, all howling with their mouths wide open, while Thunder Boy Jr. peeks angrily up from the bottom of the page. The images that follow, as he tries on different names, are joyous and colourful, filled with playful scenes of this loving family.

Finally, we see Thunder Boy Jr. curled up in a ball, feeling hopeless when big hands reach down, lift him up, and set him upon a green, earth-like ball. His dad gives him a name that suits who he has grown into, a fiery, electric, bright spark of a boy. To illustrate this, we see him sitting atop his father's back, lightning bolts firing off in all directions, and the word ‘LIGHTNING’ written in large, jagged letters across the page.

**Uses and Audience:**

*Thunder Boy Jr.* could be used with primary classes when discussing families, diversity, indigenous cultures and accepting differences. It also explores the idea of matching what one feels like on the inside with how they would like to be identified – name, race, gender included. Students could examine their own name, deciding if it matches their identity. Later, they could think of a new name that better reflects who they are and create a collage to go along with it. Teachers should be cautioned to not make light of indigenous cultures and traditions.

Summary:

*Waiting for the Biblioburro* is inspired by the real-life librarian, Luis Soriano Bohorquez, who brought books to children in rural Colombia on the backs of his burros (donkeys). Ana is one of those children and she loves reading and writing stories but books are scarce since her teacher moved away. One day she awakes to the sound of the Biblioburro and excitedly chooses books to read. She then has to wait impatiently for his return and writes him a story in gratitude.

Text and Illustration:

*Waiting for the Biblioburro* is told in a simple and straightforward manner, with text that is pleasing to read and that children will enjoy. The Spanish words embedded into the story and illustrations throughout draw the reader into the story, making it feel more authentic. Brown’s descriptive language helps the reader feel the angst, excitement and anticipation Ana feels when she thinks she no longer has books to read, then the biblioburro arrives, then leaves, only to return weeks later.

John Parra’s illustrations bring this book alive. His Folk art paintings complement the text; they are joyous, colourful, and vibrant. The detail in the paintings cheerfully portrays life in rural Columbia. The illustrations are filled with the flora and fauna of the farms and jungles and the children in Ana’s village. In Ana’s house, we see scenes of love and family, and the importance of learning and reading to Ana.

Uses and Audience:

This story could be used with primary students when discussing reading, books, and how children around the world do not have the same access to books that they do. It touches on Critical Literacy themes of empathy, poverty, family and equal access to education. This would be a perfect book for a librarian to read to students to help develop a greater reverence for books and their library.

Summary:

*Drum Dream Girl* tells the true story of a young Cuban girl who dreams of becoming a drummer. She loves everything about drums - the look, the feel, the sound – but she knows that only boys are allowed to play. The girl continues to secretly dream about drums and eventually she learns to play, despite the discouragement of her father. Eventually, he concedes and sends her to a drum teacher to judge if she is good or not. The drum teacher “was amazed” and *Drum Dream Girl* went on to change the hearts and minds of her fellow islanders; girls and boys can both be dreamers and drummers.

Text and Illustration:

Engel’s poem tells the true story of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a girl that persevered, despite being told that girls are not drummers, and made her dreams come true by becoming the first female drummer to perform in Cuba. The reader feels the rhythm of the drums in Engel’s words, both in cadence and word choice. Words like “pounding”, “tapping”, and “boom-boom-booming” allow the reader to practically hear the joyful, powerful island drums. The text also has an ethereal quality to it, conveying *Drum Dream Girl’s* journey from dream to reality.

The most remarkable thing about this book is the vibrant, lively dreamlike paintings Lopez used to illustrate this book. They outstandingly capture the energetic and pulsating rhythm of Caribbean music and the vital, bustling island life. The figures throughout the story embody the beat of the music as they lean and bend and move to the music. The girl’s dreams are lush, fanciful scenes with larger than life drums, mermaids, birds, and flowers and the perceived unattainableness of her dream illustrated with a winged drum trapped in a cage. An interesting feature of this book is that most of the spreads are landscape but there are a few the readers needs to turn to portrait to view up and down.

Uses and Audience:

This book would be suited to primary students and the addition of the historical note at the back gives us helpful information about the inspiration for this story. This story could be used when discussing gender roles, equity, equality, and multicultural traditions. Students could listen to Cuban music and learn to play the drums mentioned in the book: bongos, congas, and timbales. Students could share their dreams with each other and create a dream mural in the style of Lopez.

**Summary:**

*In a Cloud of Dust* tells the story about a young Tanzanian girl who is studying during her lunch break and misses the bicycle library truck. Other students take all the bikes before she makes it to the schoolyard. Although she is disappointed she makes the best of the situation by helping her classmates ride their bikes. In return, one allows her to ride his bike home.

**Text and Illustration:**

This engaging narrative of a day in the life of Anna is simple yet tells a story of friendship and compassion. The text is uncomplicated, yet one can almost feel the dust, Anna’s disappointment, and the wind as she finally rides home.

The vivid oil on canvas illustrations goes a long way to giving feeling and life to this story. This is apparent when Anna notices she has missed the truck. Deines paints her standing alone in the orange, dusty driveway, and her body language utterly embodies disappointment as she looks longingly after the truck. Another example is when Fullerton’s text describes Anna’s experience with each of her friends: she runs, “she bumpety-bumps”, “she helps Leyla careen”, and “she twists and turns”. This joyful language describes their experience but the illustration where Muhammed is doubling Anna, Anna holding on tightly, a big cloud of dust rising up behind them, with wide smiles on their faces, gives the reader a real sense of the positive impact these bicycles have had.

Even though Anna doesn’t receive a bicycle of her own in this story, the reader does not feel unsatisfied. The text and illustrations seem to offer us a snapshot in this Tanzanian girl’s life, and what readers do learn (she is hardworking, generous, compassionate, and clever) leave them hopeful that Anna will have whatever she needs in the future.

**Uses and Audience:**

This book could be read to primary students when discussing social responsibility, empathy, compassion, sharing, and similarities and differences of children around the world. The Author’s
Note at the back of the book describing the importance of bicycles in developing nations like Tanzania, and listing organizations that provide bicycles to these nations, is a welcome addition. Teachers could have students research these organizations and find one to connect with. A bicycle drive could be organized directly benefitting students like the fictional Anna.


**Summary:**

*When I Was Eight* tells the heartbreaking true story of Olemaun, an Inuit girl who dreams of reading. She convinces her father to let her go to school with her sister, but when she gets there it is not what she expected. What she discovers at Residential School is cruel, spiteful nuns, hard work, and very little time for reading. She finds the courage to stand up for herself and is finally allowed to read.

**Text and Illustration:**

The narrative is told from the perspective of Olemaun, a tenacious eight-year-old girl who embodies her namesake, “the stubborn stone that sharpens the half moon ulu knife used by our women”. Like this stone, she is stubborn and hardens herself to protect against the cruelties she faces in Residential school. The story reads somewhat like a fairy tale. The evil queen played by the callous Nun, the cold building is the castle with its basement dungeon, and Olemaun is the spirited princess doing all she can to survive. Unfortunately, the happy ending is not that she escapes the school, but that she escapes the wrath of the Nun only temporarily by defiantly learning to read and escaping into *Alice and Wonderland*.

Grimard’s soft, muted, and velvety illustrations flawlessly portray Olemaun’s picturesque Arctic home and the gloomy, oppressive nature of the school. The body language of the characters is of particular note. On Olemaun’s face, the reader sees hopefulness, determination, defiance, fear, hopelessness, and triumph. The nun’s dark, looming presence is felt throughout the book but on the page where she sends Olemaun (now Margaret) to the basement the reader sees the anger and bitterness in this menacing ‘tyrant’. The final illustration shows only Olemaun’s face. Grimard
perfectly captures how she feels: “brave, clever…unyielding…strong”. She is Olemaun and she is a reader.

Uses and Audience:

*When I Was Eight* is based on the memoir, *Fatty Legs*, by the same authors, and was created to make this story more available to younger readers but the story is no less powerful. This book could be used when discussing the impact of Residential schools on the indigenous peoples of Canada. It could be paired with Orange Shirt Day activities.


**Summary:**

One day Vanessa wakes up to find her sister, Virginia, is in a ‘wolfish’ mood. Vanessa tries all sorts of ways to cheer Virginia up, like painting her pictures, inviting friends over, playing the violin and recruiting her brother to make faces. But nothing works as Virginia is very deep in the ‘doldrums’. Finally, Vanessa paints Virginia a garden of her own, which lifts her from her dark mood.

**Text and Illustration:**

The story is told in the voice of *Virginia Wolf’s* sister, Vanessa. At the beginning of the story, Vanessa is a little girl but Virginia is a shadowy wolf in a dress. One immediately picks up on the connection that these siblings share, despite Virginia's lupine state, and the concern Vanessa has for her ‘wolfish’ sister.

The illustrations and text further cement the feeling of the darkness that has taken hold of Virginia. The colours of each illustration for the first thirteen pages are black, white, grey, and soft grey-blue, with muted red and yellow on some pages. Vanessa’s dress is yellow – clearly, a bright spot in the gloom cast by the darkness Virginia has fallen into. The text further illustrates Virginia’s ‘wolfish’ mood. It is big and jagged, crooked and uneven, as Virginia tries to scare everyone away.
As Virginia refuses to be cheered, the illustrations get darker and more shadowy. The reader begins to feel that Vanessa is losing hope until Virginia tells her about ‘Bloomsberry’ and she is inspired. The first sense of hope for Virginia comes with Vanessa painting a bright red poppy. After this the pages are filled with more and more colour; reds, oranges, and greens, join the blues and yellows as the ‘Bloomsberry’ grows in the sisters’ imagination and across the pages. The illustrations become light again, as one page is completely yellow and the wolf Virginia rises up the page. The text has become more even, only changing size when the sisters marvel at the magnificence they have created. The last spread shows Vanessa and Virginia as two rosy-cheeked girls with bows in their hair on a pure white background. They are both smiling, they both look content, and, as the text indicates, ready to go out and play. But just by the colour of the bows in their hair – Vanessa’s is yellow and Virginia’s is blue – we are left with the feeling that Virginia will be a wolf again one day.

**Uses and Audience:**

This book is based on the life of Virginia Woolf and her struggle with mental illness and depression. The painter, Vanessa Bell, was her sister and one can certainly imagine that she used her art to try and bring light to Virginia’s life. Bloomsberry in the book is certainly in reference to Woolf’s writing collective, the Bloomsbury Group, who gathered in Bloomsbury, London. This connection will be lost on children, but they do understand ‘dark’ and ‘light’ moods. Everyone wakes up feeling a little ‘wolfish’ at times and perhaps some students will have suffered from depression or witnessed it in a close family member. This book could be used with primary students when discussing families and feelings (empathy, sympathy, helplessness, happiness). It would lend itself to an art lesson on darkness and light and the feelings conveyed through different colours.


**Summary:**
One day a teacher asks her class to share what makes their family special. One student is nervous to share as she feels her family is just too different. As she listens to her classmates talk about their families she realizes that every family has something that makes them unique.

Text and illustration:

*A Family is a Family is a Family* is told from the voice of a young student but we hear each of her classmates’ stories in their voices as they share. The text is quite simple, each student only speaking a sentence or two. Most of the narrative is told through Qin Leng’s ink on paper illustrations. Each spread is filled with quirky, playful scenes of cheerful family life, but the family dynamic is not always in the text, leaving the reader to presume the characters’ relationships with some being less obvious than others.

One illustration shows a man and a woman and several children in a bright kitchen; some are spilling out of cupboards, others peering through the window. Together with the text (“Mom and Dad just keep coming home with more”) the reader gathers that this is a foster family. Another shows a boy pushing a woman in a wheelchair quickly towards a flock of birds. The birds are wildly taking off in all directions and although the woman looks concerned, the boy appears like he is having fun. With the text simply reading “My mom says that before I was born I grew in her heart”, the reader can only really assume what narrative is taking place on these pages.

Other illustrations require less guess-work. One spread shows two women singing and playing music on a rooftop, just after sunset. A boy is with them and is covering his ears, but others in the building lean out their window to listen and smile. The narrator’s classmate, says “…both my moms…”, therefore the reader does not need the illustration to help figure out the family dynamic.

Although this story is meant to teach about family diversity it does not come across as didactic. Young readers may need an adult to help interpret some of the family relationships characterized in this book but each student’s narrative is represented sweetly and cheerfully, in a way that is very matter of fact – a family is a family is a family.

Uses and Audience:

This book could be used with primary students when talking about family diversity. They will enjoy having the opportunity to examine the illustrations and discover the details Leng included.
A Family is a Family is a Family could be used to talk about similarities and differences, unique family situations, gender, same-sex relationships, divorce and, overall, acceptance. Students could create and share family trees that show the diversity in their own classrooms.


Summary:
In Last Stop on Market Street, an inquisitive young boy, CJ, and his wise and patient grandmother (Nana) travel by bus to a soup kitchen where they volunteer every Sunday after church. Along the way, they encounter a cast of characters one would only find on an inner-city bus and Nana helps CJ see the beauty in the world around them.

Text and Illustration:
At first glance, both de la Pêna’s narrative and Robinson’s illustrations appear quite simple. But in this apparent simplicity, there is a message of hope, tolerance, compassion, acceptance and love. The entire story takes place as CJ and Nana travel by bus from church to the soup kitchen at which they volunteer each Sunday.

De La Pêna’s words are poetic, with an almost musical quality. The lines “The outside smelled like freedom, / But it also smelled like rain” immediately pull the reader into the narrative, allowing the reader to connect with a feeling everyone has experienced as they burst out of church or school to whatever freedom awaits. The author continues to delight readers and listeners alike with words that describe the sights the pair see and the feeling and movement of the bus: “…the bus creaked…sighed and sagged…” and “Crumbling sidewalks and broken-down doors, graffiti-tagged windows and boarded-up stores” allow one to almost see the scenes without even looking at Robinson’s illustrations.

The illustrations are colourful, vibrant, stirring, and almost childlike. Robinson’s illustrations enhance de la Pêna’s narrative and allow us to see the city the CJ sees it. The details that Robinson adds, like the reflections in the puddles, the tattooed man, the signs and buildings, and the many different people at the soup kitchen, tell part of the narrative. The reader sees the
juxtaposition between the sweet moments experienced by CJ and Nana (their walk in the rain past the trees, the compliment from the blind man, and the transcendent song the man with the guitar plays) and the rough neighbourhood they are traveling through (broken windows, graffiti, and a man with a shopping cart piled high with things). But Robinson leaves us hopeful and illustrates the beauty Nana encourages CJ to see perfectly on pages 21 - 22 and 23 – 24. Here we first see CJ and Nana walking past old, tattered buildings with a man in a wheelchair and another with his cart ahead of them. A flock of birds are taking off, rising up all around them, moving forward. The next spread shows CJ and Nana and, again, walking hand in hand, in front of the shabby, closed-up storefronts, but a brilliant rainbow has appeared above everything.

Another important message within the pages of Last Stop on Market Street occurs when CJ and Nana get on the bus. She seats them at the front, reminding readers of the civil rights activist, Rosa Parks, and her protest against segregation. This message of equality and acceptance continues as Nana encourages CJ to greet everyone as they take their seats; black, white, tattooed, disabled, young, old, and impoverished are afforded equal esteem in Nana’s eyes.

Uses and Audience:

This book would be suited to primary students when examining issues of race, poverty, families, cities, neighbourhoods and transportation. Discussions on finding meaning within text including figurative language and similes. The illustrations lend themselves to students painting their street in Robinson’s style and writing a story to go with their visual narrative.


Summary:

Rink Bowagon’s family lives up a winding path at the top of Lonesome Mountain. Each member of the family has an ‘exotic talent’ but Rink’s was “the most special”: he grew flowers all over his body at each full moon. Rink was shy at school, keeping to himself, until one day a new girl arrived in class. He immediately feels connected to her and, wanting to impress her, he secretly makes her a pair of shoes so that she can attend the school dance. She falls in love with
the shoes and Rink and after the dance, they share their differences (they each grow flowers) with one another and they live happily ever after, together.

Text and illustration:

This story of friendship, love, and accepting one another’s differences, is told as much through the colourful, vibrant illustrations as it is through the text. We first notice how different Rink is from everyone when we see him sitting at the table with his ‘strange’ family of shape-shifters. He looks like he is in his own world, daydreaming perhaps, despite the busyness around him. The flowers that grow from Rink during the full moon are the kind one would present to their love and the lamp in the illustration where we first see them illuminates and accentuates their beauty. When we meet the ‘plain’ Angelina Quiz, we see her standing in the foreground of the picture, appearing larger than life, with Rink appearing small and hidden behind a book in the background. Her face is open, soft, and serene and one can see the “forthright honesty” and interest in Rink, in the way she is standing and listening to her new classmates talk about how different he is. As Rink races home to carry out his plan of making Angelina new shoes, the expression on his face never really changes. It remains somewhat blank, belying the excitement, trepidation, and anticipation the reader is sure he must be feeling. The reader is finally let in on his excitement and the budding feelings for Angelina are confirmed. When Rink finishes his task, and a stunning pair of chartreuse green shoes are before him, he sprouts a glorious bouquet of fuchsia flowers from his head.

The author’s tale of two individuals, with their own unique challenges, finding commonalities and falling in love despite or because of it is simply heartwarming. The warm, lush, colourful illustrations perfectly portray the love story unfolding on the pages, even if you don’t see a lot of emotion from the characters until Angelina receives her shoes. On the second to last page one sees Rink and Angelina, both on their knees. Rink is sprouting pink flowers that perfectly match Angelina’s pink dress and, with the look of love and adoration on both their faces, one barely needs to read the end of the book to know it ends in ‘happily ever after’.

Uses and Audience:

Upon reading the author notes on the dust jacket it is revealed that Jen Wojtowicz wrote this book because she has a brother on the Autism spectrum. One can then understand why Rink
appeared and behaved the way he did. This book would be excellent when discussing Critical Literacy and similarities and differences amongst students.


**Summary:**

*Ruby’s Wish* is about a girl growing up in a wealthy, traditional family in China in the early 1900’s. Ruby, whose favourite colour is red, isn’t quite like all the other girls in the big extended family. She does not want to learn about cooking and embroidery, she only wants to learn to read and write like the boys do. Ruby is persistent and has to work extra hard to convince her Grandfather to let her continue her studies. Eventually, Ruby’s persistence pays off and her Grandfathers sees the passion and potential Ruby holds. He presents her with her greatest wish: Ruby has been accepted to University.

**Text and illustration:**

The story is told from the perspective of Ruby’s granddaughter; a fact we find out at the end when we also discover this the true story of Shirin Yim Bridges’ grandmother. The connection to Chinese culture and tradition is evident from the brilliant vermilion cover with the gold Chinese motif to illustrations of the capacious, walled houses, patterns on clothing and page borders, and the calligraphy throughout by Jianwei Fong. Red is Ruby’s favourite colour and she boldly, and at times defiantly, wears it every day. Red is an auspicious colour in Chinese culture, signifying good fortune, joy, and celebration. The illustrator, with her use of gouache paint to render vibrant, colourful pictures, uses red to make Ruby stand out in each illustration as different than all the other children in their drab clothes. The reader cannot help but know that there is something special waiting for Ruby at the end of the story.

The colour red again plays an important role near the end of the book when Ruby receives a lucky red envelope from her grandfather. Inside is not the lucky money many girls and boys would have received, but a letter accepting her to university where she would be “one of their very first female students”.
One can imagine what may have happened had Ruby not been so tenacious and had a grandfather willing to go against status quo and advocate for his granddaughter. Would Ruby have made it to university? Would Ruby have married and lived in a house like the one she grew up in, one of many wives? Would Shirin Yim Bridges ever have become a writer like her grandmother? Thankfully readers know the answers to these questions.

**Uses and Audience:**

This book could be used with seven and eight-year-olds to discuss how the role of women has changed over the last 100 years and how many more opportunities there are for little girls with a dream. Teachers could discuss families and the importance of hearing family stories. One suggestion would be for students to interview an older family member, like a grandparent, or have them come in and discuss an interesting event from the past. Students could also make colourful lanterns, like the ones Ruby wished the girls could have but were only given to the boys.
Information Books:

**Summary:**

*Off to Class: Incredible and Unusual Schools Around the World* presents snapshots of schools around the world and the challenges faced by the children who attend them. The environment, societal norms, proximity, and poverty are all outlined as barriers students face in the pursuit of education and how different schools are addressing these issues. Twenty-three schools are featured from developing to developed nations.

**Text and illustrations/Images:**

The information in this book is presented in a variety of ways and the writing is well suited to the intended audience (8+) without over-simplifying the subject matter. Hughes has broken it down into three chapters: “Chapter one: Working with the Environment”, “Chapter Two: No School? No Way!”, and “Chapter Three: One Size Doesn’t Fit All”. Each chapter features a new school on each page spread and includes Hughes’ description of the school, the environment, challenges, and the students. This is often accompanied by a personal account of how a particular student overcame the challenges with which he or she was faced. Maps and fact boxes, with information such as population, materials, and statistics, are also included.

The layout of *Off to Class* is somewhat reminiscent of a travel scrapbook. Each spread is a collage of text and images (photographs and illustrations), making reading a pleasing experience. Colourful photographs of schools and school children adorn each page. Although one feels buoyed by the images of smiling faces and the innovative and/or creative solutions to schooling highlighted in this book, the reader does not get a sense of the real challenges and hardships these individuals face. Only one image shows the reader a glimpse of the real hardships faced by some children in the world today. This is a photograph of a young boy standing in a sea of garbage, collecting recyclables, in Cambodia. *Off to Class* might have more of an impact if it better represented the disparity between the state of education and schools in developing and developed nations.

**Uses and Audience:**
This book is intended to be used with children eight years and older but could be shared with younger readers with support. *Off to Class* could be used to support Critical Literacy lessons as it touches on the societal issues surrounding access to education and addresses themes of global awareness, equity, poverty, and equality.


**Summary:**

*If You Lived Here: Houses of the World*, provides snapshots of houses from around the globe and describes the adaptations made to meet the needs of the inhabitants.

**Text and illustrations/Images:**

The text in *Houses of the World* is simple and matter of fact, if at times vague. Each of the 15 types of houses illustrated is paired with a general description of the environment and inhabitants, the house type, materials, location, date, and ‘fascinating fact’. It is important to note that this format makes it easy for the reader to locate the information they are most interested in, but at times it feels like there is much more that could be said. Although the dwellings featured are quite interesting, one cannot help but feel that Europe and North America are over-represented, while Asia, Africa, and South America are under-represented, and Australia is missing completely.

The most remarkable aspect of this book is the illustrations. Each is “intricate bas-relief cut-paper collages involve(ing) many stages of drawing, cutting, painting, and glueing”. The result is exceedingly detailed illustrations with depth and texture. The reader not only sees the structure but a meticulously detailed setting, replete with people, animals, and landscape. Readers will enjoy examining the pages to find the many details in the cities, mountains, woods, farms, and watery locations depicted by Laroche. The map at the very back of the book is also a helpful addition. It is also done in collage, with numbered pictograms of each dwelling, and corresponding to their location around the world.

**Uses and Audience:**
Primary students will especially enjoy the ‘seek-and-find” nature of this book but students of all ages will find interesting information throughout. *Houses of the World* could be used to support Critical Literacy lessons as it touches on themes of global awareness and equity.


**Summary:**

*Because I am a Girl* is a series of stories from around the world that tell how girls are struggling with, overcoming, and fighting against, the many “barriers and dangers” they are faced with daily. Each individual’s story is followed up with an update and information on what is being done to overcome that barrier in different parts of the world.

**Text and illustrations/images:**

The information in *Because I am a Girl* is presented in a clear, logical manner. Each spread contains easy to read text, engaging photographs, and text boxes with extra information where needed. The book follows the *Because I am a Girl Manifesto:*

> Because I am a girl...
> I watch my brothers go to school while I stay home.

> Because I am a girl...
> I eat if there's food left over when everyone is done.

> Because I am a girl...
> I am the poorest of the poor.

**AND YET**

> Because I am a girl...
> I will share what I know.
Because I am a girl...
I am the heart of my community.

Because I am a girl...
I will pull my family out of poverty if you gave me the chance.

Because I am a girl...
I will take what you invest in me and uplift everyone around me.

Because I am a girl...
I can change the world.

Each part of the manifesto is the subject of a chapter and the shared stories are told in a matter of fact manner, in the first person. At times the stories read like they are fictionalized or scripted, but this may be because their voices have been lost in translation. One does not get a sense that information has been omitted for the sake of the audience. Although readers will be both shocked and buoyed by what they read, the overall tone of the book is positive and uplifting.

The images in this book have been thoughtfully selected to illustrate and enhance the stories and messages contained within. Colourful photographs of girls of all ages from around the world adorn each page. The reader gets a glimpse into the lives of these individuals and what is being done to empower and support them globally.

Uses and Audience:

This book is targeted to eight to fourteen-year-olds but, with support, could be shared with younger students. Older students will find value in the stories shared. The message of empowerment is clear throughout the book and teachers should be sure to share it with students of both genders. This book could be used to support Critical Literacy lessons as it touches on themes of feminism, gender roles, societal norms, education, equality, equity, and poverty.

**Summary:**

*Making it Right* discusses restorative justice through a series of fictionalized accounts of young people facing injustices. Each is followed by a discussion of how restorative justice could help solve the problems faced by many around the world, from bullying in schools, to gang violence, human rights abuse, and wars.

**Text and illustrations/Images:**

The information in this book is presented in an engaging, logical manner with text well suited to the intended audience. Each chapter begins with a story of situations that many young people would find relatable even if the overarching theme is not something they have experienced. Each story is supported by historical and/or scientific facts and anecdotes, true stories of individuals who used restorative justice to solve conflicts and hypothetical and/or real situations where restorative justice would have been the best course of action.

The illustrations, like the cover, have a street-art feel. The bold, graphic images by Jef Thompson, add a gritty, rebellious feel to the book. The text on chapter headings, page and sub-headings all appear like they were painted with a big paintbrush. The illustrations themselves, “done on scratchboard before being rendered digitally… (have) an expressionistic feel” (Thompson) that is also reminiscent of street art. The same colours are used repeatedly through the book (sky blue, yellow, red, and black) further giving the book an edgy, street style.

**Uses and Audience:**

This book’s intended audience is grade nine and up but, with support, these stories and ideas could be shared with students as young as grade three. This book could be used when discussing Truth and Reconciliation in Canada and other Critical Literacy themes like conflict, bullying, peace, equality, and equity.

**Summary:**

*Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community*, takes readers through the history of Pride and the significance of these parades and celebrations to the LGBTQ+ community. Robinson presents information on the past and continued struggles and successes in North America and around the world.

**Text and illustrations/Images:**

This information book is presented in a logical, easy to follow format beginning with the first Pride events in the 1970s following the Stonewall Riots, to present day celebrations in North America and other parts of the world. The book is broken up into 4 chapters: “The History of Pride”, “Pride and Identity”, “Celebrating Pride Today”, and “Pride Around the World”. Robinson switches between personal narratives and expository passages throughout the book and includes “Queer Fact” boxes on many pages to give the reader more information. To someone unfamiliar with the Pride movement and/or the LGBTQ+ community these prove invaluable when attempting to fully understand the themes in this book. The author’s inclusion of quotes throughout the book allows readers to further connect to the subject matter as these literally give voice to individuals and how they view and value Pride.

The overall tone of *Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community* is positive and celebratory and nowhere is this more evident than in the many colourful photographs of Pride celebrants around the world that are on every page. The first chapter has a more serious tone, in both text and images, as Robinson provides much of the rich history of Pride. Each spread in the following chapters contains multiple pictures of members of the LGBTQ+ community and their supporters. The reader sees men and women, gender fluid and questioning, young and old, protesting, marching and celebrating, swathed in all colours of the rainbow.

**Uses and Audience:**

*Pride: Celebrating Diversity and Community* is targeted to nine to fourteen-year-olds but people of all ages would find this book accessible and informative. This book could be used when
discussing Critical Literacy themes such as social justice, equality, equity, and families. Teachers could use this book when discussing Pride, family diversity, and Pink Shirt Day.
Novels:

**Summary:**

During a great storm, a cargo ship capsizes and all but five of its robot cargo is lost at sea. These five wash up on a wild island uninhabited by humans. Most of them are smashed to pieces, but some curious otters turn one on and it comes alive. Roz, the robot, adapts to life on the island by learning the language and behaviours of the animals. One day, after crushing its family, she finds an egg. This egg hatches into a gosling who immediately thinks Roz is his mom. This unlikely family befriends the other animals and together face the many challenges of survival. Then one day the RECON robots come for Roz. The island inhabitants need to decide if Roz stays and further endangers her friends and family, or does she go to keep everyone safe and make her whole again but, perhaps, never to return.

**Text and Illustrations:**

*The Wild Robot* is told in third person narrative, with the narrator often speaking directly to the reader. The reader very much feels like a story is being told to them. Brown’s writing is quite simple and that captures how naïve and unemotional robot Roz is when she first ‘comes alive’. The book consists of 80 chapters; some only a paragraph and some a few pages. This does give it an episodic feel but as the story progresses and the tension builds the reader is thankful for the pause. At the beginning of the story the reader feels slightly detached from the events but as Roz becomes more human-like (and wild) and the animals go from rivals to friends and family, the reader starts to believe that she is a sentient individual. Roz loses her ‘robotic’ nature and needs to keep reminding those around her that she is machine not (wo)man. Brown addresses the topics like love and friendship, predator and prey, and life and death with the practicality one may expect from a robot like Roz. She understands she has been turned on and can be turned off and that the lives of the animals are just as delicate. Brown does not shy away from the violence of the animal kingdom or the disruption human (or robot) presence can have.

Brown’s simple, graphic, colourless illustrations are equally endearing, naïve, and chilling. In Chapter 7: The Wilderness, Roz is pictured surrounded by stones and immense trees, her arms hanging from her sides, with her white round eyes shining. She looks solitary, uncomfortable, and incongruous as Brown’s accompanying text describes: “…she stood there, motionless, all
perfect lines and angles set against the irregular shapes of the wilderness (p. 18)”. Another particularly effective illustration occurs in Chapter 50: The Button. Roz and her ‘son’, Brightbill, have decided they need to find out what happens when her on/off button is pushed. Will she come back as herself? Will she remember Brightbill? Or will all of her memories be erased? They decide they need to find out and the text reads: “Click. / Roz’s body relaxed. / Her quiet whirring slowly stopped. / Her eyes faded to black.” The reader turns the page and sees an almost entirely black page spread, with Roz’s body slumped over, lifeless black holes for eyes, and a worried looking goose looking on. As a reader one almost does not want to turn the page, dreading the possibilities, but must find out all is okay.

Uses and Audience:

This is a middle years novel that could easily be read to a class as young as grade two. Brown addresses themes of the circle of life (life, death, predator, prey), love, empathy, friendship and the power of community. One could use this to support Critical Literacy instruction as it examines what it means to be ‘family’ and could ignite discussions on environmental issues like conservation and climate change.


Summary:

This prose-style novel tells the story of Serafina, an eleven-year-old Haitian girl from a very poor family. They live in a hut near Port-au-Prince and everyone in the house must work in order to eke out a living. Serafina and her best friend Julie Marie both dream of becoming doctors like Antoinette Solaine, who tried in vain to save Serafina’s baby brother. But without the money to go to school, they know this is just a dream. Sarafina and her parents agree that if she can earn the money, she can go to school; so she does. Devastatingly, Serafina’s dream is put on hold once again when the earthquake strikes and wreaks havoc on Haiti.

Text and Illustrations:

Serafina’s Promise is a first person narrative free-verse novel. Burg’s writing elegantly flows down the pages and the reader is compelled to keep turning pages until the end. The narrative is told from Serafina’s point of view. She is kind, sympathetic, supportive, and wise beyond her years due to the responsibilities that have been necessarily placed upon her. She pragmatically
faces the hardships and inequities of life in rural Haiti, where poverty and natural disasters are common. She accepts her role in the family, with some of the usual preteen angst, but continues to dream that she will grow up to something better.

The book is broken into three parts. Part one introduces the reader to Serafina, her family, friends and the landscape in which she lives. From her eleven-year-old perspective, the reader learns that she has already faced devastating losses. Her Grandfather (Granpè) was killed by the Tonton Macoutes and her baby brother died shortly after birth due to malnutrition. Serafina, without siblings to help, needs to work especially hard, a fact she accepts but wishes were different. In Part two, Serafina has been granted permission to go to school, but she must work extra hard to earn the money. She takes this in stride as well, despite the fact that she works very hard already. A flash flood sweeps through their area one day, killing neighbours, and destroying houses. This sets Serafina back, but with determination, and the need to survive, her family rebuilds and her dream comes true. In part three Serafina is feeling a little disillusioned with school, but then the earthquake hits. She is separated from her family and is reunited with Julie Marie (who had been sold into servitude), who she was sure was lost forever. When she finds Dr Solaine and her father in the rubble, Serafina’s dream is reignited. The end of the book seems to come too fast. The reader is left with many questions: do they find the rest of her family safe? Is the new baby going to survive with Antoinette Solaine’s medicine? Does Serafina go back to school and realize her dream? Despite all of these questions, the devastating state Haiti was left in after the earthquake of 2010, and the few opportunities for poor young people, Burg leaves us with a feeling of hope and survival. The reader is sure Serafina’s dreams will come true.

Uses and Audience:

*Serafina’s Promise* is a middle years novel for ages nine to thirteen. Although this book is fiction, it is based in reality. Haiti has suffered through violent government regimes and several natural disasters and continues to struggle with the effects. Poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, education and opportunities, especially for girls, are harsh realities that young readers may need help to comprehend. *Serafina’s Promise* could be used to support lessons in Critical Literacy as it addresses issues of poverty, education, equality, equity, community, and family structures.

**Summary:**

One day a magical thing happens; Peter Augustus Duchene, desperate to locate his sister, finds a mysterious fortune-teller in the town square. He seeks her advice and her answer is an elephant. Feeling this could not be possible in the dreary city of Baltese, he is left perplexed. But what happens next is nothing short of magic.

**Text and Illustrations:**

Kate DiCamillo presents an allegorical novel that is filled with pathos and humour. It is dream-like, dark, mysterious and uplifting all at once. The lonely but hopeful Peter Augustus Duchene is in the employ of an ‘old soldier’, Vilna Lutz, who longs for a return to battle. Peter’s loneliness is punctuated by the fact that he lives with someone who is mentally living in the past. Across town, a magician’s failed trick leads to an elephant crashing through the ceiling of the theatre and crushing the legs of a stunned Madam LaVaughn. Both the magician and the elephant are imprisoned. When Peter hears about the elephant he is surer than ever that his sister lives and he seeks out the elephant and answers. DiCamillo’s text is poetic and, at times, almost lyrical. It simply begs to be read aloud. With passages like the following, the reader can almost feel the magician’s despair in his cold cell and see the snow gently falling outside.

“He had been so lonely, so desperately, hopelessly lonely for so long. He might very well spend the rest of his life in prison, alone. And he understood that what he wanted now was something much simpler, much more complicated than the magic he had performed. What he wanted was to turn to somebody and take hold of their hand and look up with them and marvel at the snow falling from the sky. “This,” he wanted to say to someone he loved and who loved him in return. “This.””

Tanaka’s contribution to this book it noteworthy. The greys of her soft charcoal illustrations add to the dreamy, magical feeling of this book, while still emphasizing their dreary, cold surroundings. In chapter 5, the reader sees the elephant for the first time. “The beast was installed in (Madam Quintet’s) ballroom… (and) became, quite literally, the centre of the social season.” Tanaka’s rendering of the elephant leaves the reader aching for the beast, as the dejection and hopelessness it must feel is practically written on its wrinkly skin. Later, in
Chapter 18, after the elephant has been freed from its chains and ballroom prison, the elephant is shown with its head up, proud and ready to be sent home.

Uses and Audience:

This middle years novel could be read to students as young as grade two and read independently by students in grade three and up. This uncomplicated story of love, dreams, and hope, would be suited to a unit on Fables, from the past and present. *The Magician’s Elephant* could be used to support lessons in Critical Literacy as it touches on themes of poverty, equity, equality, and family.


Summary:

*Pandas on the Eastside* tells the story of Journey Song, a ten-year-old girl living on the lower Eastside of Vancouver in the 1970s. Journey finds out about a pair of Pandas caught up in diplomacy and stored in a warehouse in her neighbourhood. She is determined to somehow help them, sure they are miserable and lonely, but she cannot do it alone. She solicits the help of the cast of characters she sees every day: the old Chinese man who owns the corner store; her beloved teacher and her black, draft-dodging boyfriend; her learning disabled best friend who is more brilliant than anyone knew; her alcoholic mother and newly reappeared journalist father; and much more.

Text:

The narrative is told from Journey’s point of view, and Prendergast has introduced readers to a character who is clever, perceptive, and compassionate. Journey faces life’s challenges pragmatically. She understands she is surrounded by poverty and dysfunction but she approaches everything thoughtfully and all people equally. Journey’s friends are young and old and include people struggling with alcoholism, mental illness, income insecurity, and homelessness. She sees the good in everyone and in return, when she needs them the most, they come together to help the pandas. The relationship Journey has with her best friend, Nancy, is particularly endearing.
Nancy “…has something wrong with her eyes that make the letters look upside down and backwards, and the words get all mixed up (p. 7)” In the past, Journey had been punished for trying to explain this to teachers, who didn’t listen, or try to help Nancy. Nancy is simply one of Journey’s people, and she helps her people all she can. Later in the book Nancy ‘flabbergasts’ everyone when she interprets the Chinese characters from a newspaper. She was seen by Journey as “brilliant (p. 165)” and Journey is proud and happy when others see her friend the way she does.

Prendergast chose Journey’s name purposefully as she experiences more than one journey in this book. The first is her mission to help the pandas. She traverses the Lower Eastside to learn about pandas at the library, find bamboo for them at Miss Bickerstaff’s house and the beach, and to finally help get them fresh food at the docks. The second journey is one of self-discovery. Throughout the book, she is continually learning things about herself, from her mysterious name to her absentee father who suddenly appears one day, and to the reasons he has not been a part of her life. She finds the courage to ask questions and stand up for her friends and her convictions.

Uses and Audience:

_Pandas on the Eastside_ is a middle years novel targeted to nine to thirteen-year-olds but could be read aloud to a younger group. Teacher in British Columbia, with students that may be aware of the lower Eastside of Vancouver, may use this story to help students see the people there much like Journey sees them: unique individuals that should be treated with respect and understanding and not fear. This novel could be used to support Critical Literacy lessons as it deals with family structures, community, friendship, and societal issues such as poverty, equality, and access to education.


**Summary:**

Max, a boy in grade three, has to adjust to his new living situation. His parents have recently divorced and he now has to go back and forth between ‘home’ and ‘the apartment’ where his dad
now lives. Together, with patience, compassion, and understanding, father and son explore the new neighbourhood, meet the neighbours, and find new things to do.

Text and Illustrations:

Weekends with Max and His Dad is a light, uncomplicated story about the complexities of divorce. Urban’s text is simple and easy for a younger reader to comprehend but with subtle asides that only adults will really pick up on. The book is broken into three parts that occur over the first three weekends Max spends at his dad’s new apartment. Weekend one, as the first section is called, consists of the pair settling in, Max not sure about his new room, a spy adventure through the neighbourhood, and a visit to their new favourite breakfast spot. Young readers will simply read the adventure and a bit about Max’s trepidations surrounding the new place. Adult readers will see the clever ways Urban has her characters adapting to this new life, and conscious efforts the father is making for this transition to be as painless as possible.

Weekend two sees Max and his dad meeting the neighbours and exploring the neighbourhood. Young readers will experience the adventure with the two and adults will see the struggle of both father and son, to adjust to a one-parent house. Weekend three, Max has his best friend over for a sleepover and has a school project due. Unfortunately, his dad has a bad cold and is forced to rest. Max and his friend solve their problem by asking a neighbour for help. Young readers will sympathize with the need to get homework done, and adult readers will appreciate how difficult this can be with one parent and that it often takes a village to raise a child. Young readers may need help from adults to fully grasp the narrative Urban intended in this book and they may also be left wanting something big to happen as the book is missing a penultimate event that would make it a little more exciting.

Katie Kath’s illustrations in Weekends with Max and His Dad are humorous and cartoon-like. They help portray the characters as cheery, playful, and positive. Kath’s illustrations help tell the story, especially from the father’s point of view, as the narrative largely follows Max. The reader often gets a sense of the dad’s love, pride, apprehension, exasperation, patience and eventual contentment, through the looks on his face, rather than the text. This almost hidden narrative helps give needed depth to Urban’s story. Young readers will also enjoy seeing the various characters that Max meets on his adventures. Illustrations of old Mrs Tibbet from apartment 302 in her loose, flowy outfits, and her floppy-eared basset hounds; Ace, the bald, rotund owner of
their local breakfast restaurant; and Stevicus and the Baron, action figures, and constant imaginary companions to Max will all delight young readers.

Uses and Audience:

This early years novel would be suited to grade three to five to be read independently, or younger as a read aloud. Urban presents a gentle story that addresses a sometimes stormy topic. This book would be good for both home and classroom, but best if some context was also provided, or shared with a student currently going through this. *Weekends with Max and His Dad* could be used to support Critical Literacy instruction as it deals with the theme of family structures and divorce, as well as multi-generational relationships.
Films/Television:


*Synopsis:*

An ambitious rabbit, Judy Hopps, dreams of moving to the big city and becoming the first bunny police officer. Through determination and the “Mammal Inclusion Program”, she gets her chance and moves to the city of Zootopia to join the ZPD (Zootopia Police Department). Doubting her suitability for policing, they assign her to the traffic division but Judy is determined to prove herself and dives headfirst into her assignment. One day she gets a chance to prove herself with the help of Nick Wild, a fox, predator and usual enemy of bunnies. They discover that someone in the city is turning predators ‘savage’ and the two work together to solve the mystery.

*Writing and Visuals:*

First of all, the noteworthy complexities and details contained within this movie are far too many to possibly remark upon within this annotation, but I will attempt to highlight the main points. What on the surface appears to be an anthropomorphized crime caper is, in fact, a parable that tells one that hard work will make your dreams come true, while addressing themes of feminism, racism, drug use, personal bias, and prejudice. Children will enjoy the detailed, expressive characters and the humour, danger, suspense, and happy ending. Adults will appreciate the poke at the current social and political zeitgeist and pop culture references like “Woolter and Jesse” (Walter and Jesse from Breaking Bad) and their underground ‘night
howlers’ grow-op (cooking methamphetamines) in the subway car (RV) or Mr. Big, a mole with a voice and visage reminiscent of the Godfather.

The digital animation in Zootopia is vibrant, detailed, exhilarating, and bustling. One can see the individual hairs on creatures, and their resemblance and mannerisms to their human voices is uncanny – look up Stu Hopps, Judy’s dad, and Don Lake who voices him. Action sequences are well choreographed and although, at times, unlikely (like being flushed down the toilet and swirling through the pipes to escape the laboratory), they do not seem completely impossible. When Judy chases the weasel thief through “Little Rodentia”, the mouse neighbourhood, one almost wants to pause the movie to see all of the little shops, cars, and other minutiae of the daily life of mice. A notable scene that exemplifies the quality of the animation occurs when Judy and Nick visit the DMV to acquire information from Nick’s friend “Flash”, the sloth. Flash is painfully slow-moving, his every move is long and drawn out, as he sluggishly but deliberately, types on his computer, one long sloth talon clicking one key at a time. Judy, desperate to solve her case quickly, agonizes over every drawn-out, laborious move the sloth makes. Her entire countenance conveys the exasperation and impatience she feels but cannot express as she knows that will not help speed things up. The whole time Nick stands jauntily beside her, reveling in her discomfort, an entertained and somewhat satisfied, look on his face. The animators did a commendable job at conveying the feelings of each of these characters mostly through what we see and not what they say.

The main protagonist is Judy Hopps (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin), a rabbit from a small town, who dreams of becoming the first bunny police officer. The main message of this character is ‘through hard work and perseverance any dream can come true’. But the road to fulfilling her dream is fraught with bias, double-standards, and prejudice. The underlying message is that because she is female and a prey animal that is inherently weaker, she will be ill-suited to the job. The writers have made a distinct connection between predators and prey in the animal kingdom to racial divides in the human race. Prey, in this case, is the majority and predators are the minorities the majority often fear due to lack of understanding. In Zootopia racism has been systemic, especially prevalent in the police force, until Judy comes along and breaks these gender and racial stereotypes. Judy was offered this opportunity through the “mammal inclusion program” which is also a bone of contention with her superiors. Inclusion programs are not without controversy as many see them as an unfair leg-up but Judy rises above and
succeeds. Throughout Zootopia, Judy’s character continues to address racial and gender stereotypes and double-standards. For example, this exchange with the leopard desk sergeant, Clawhauser:

“Clawhauser: O. M. Goodness, they really did hire a bunny. Ho-whop! I gotta tell you, you're even cuter than I thought you'd be.

Judy Hopps: Ooh, ah, you probably didn't know, but a bunny can call another bunny 'cute', but when other animals do it, that's a little...

Clawhauser: Hoo, I'm so sorry! Me, Benjamin Clawhauser, the guy everyone thinks is just a flabby donut-loving cop stereotyping you.”

This addresses language used within a group, but not deemed appropriate for those outside the group to use. When Judy is relegated to parking duty she says “I am not just some token bunny” referencing being the token minority given a lesser role as they have been deemed not able or worthy of a greater position as they didn’t work for it, but given it through, say, an inclusion program. At the end of the movie Judy is driving with Nick as a passenger and he makes a crack about “bad bunny drivers” to which Judy retorts by expertly speeding off in pursuit of a felon.

Unfortunately, the film's creators did not completely heed the lessons they were trying to convey. Judy, a female bunny, was over-sexualized in her appearance. They gave her a skinny waist, curvy hips that were accentuated when she walked, and a form-fitting uniform that included a bullet-proof vest that was inexplicably short and resembled a sports bra.

Throughout Zootopia several transformations occur because Judy Hopps persevered and broke through the glass ceiling. For one, corruption was revealed and the police department transforms into a more inclusive workplace where predator and prey work together harmoniously. Secondly, Judy herself transforms. She works side by side with a predator (Nick) who she didn’t trust at the beginning because he was a fox, and a fox bullied her when she was young. She goes from defending a sheep from a fox at the beginning to defending a fox from a sheep at the end. She learns that you cannot judge a book by its cover.

Uses and Audience:
Zootopia would be suitable for young people of all ages but has been rated PG as it includes some mature humour, hints at nudity, and violence. It would be suitable to support lessons in Critical Literacy as it includes themes of equality, equity, gender stereotypes, racism and cultural bias.


Synopsis:

The Secret Path tells the story of twelve-year-old Chanie “Charlie” Wenjak, who, one winter day, escapes the Residential School he’s been forced to attend and attempts to walk the 600 kilometres home.

Writing and Visuals:

The Secret Path is the animated version of Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire’s graphic novel of the same name. A number of years ago, after learning about Chanie, poet, songwriter and musician, Gord Downie, wrote a series of poems that he felt told Chanie’s forgotten story, and the forgotten story of thousands of other indigenous children forced into Residential Schools. Downie created 10 songs from these poems and solicited the help of Lemire to bring it to life.

The film contains no dialogue, it is set solely to Gord Downie’s songs, and these songs divide it like chapters. Downie’s voice, after years of performing in a rock band, and a recent terminal cancer diagnoses, is uneven and shaky, but is filled with feeling. With each song comes a new part of Chanie’s journey, which begins when he starts on the path home. The path is the train
tracks that he is sure leads from the Cecilia Jeffery Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, to his home in Ogoki Post.

The animation comes directly from Lemire’s graphic novel. It is as if they have simply taken these images and animated them. The backgrounds are often similar and stay fixed, with movement coming mostly from Chanie as he trudges along the train tracks. The landscape and people are drawn in a sharp, comic style, full of lines and creases. The worry, stress, and sadness are etched across Chanie’s face. The shades of blue Lemire chose illustrate the cold, lonely landscape and the depressed, beaten-down boy finding his way through it. The trees are leafless, lifeless, and the same mile after mile. Charlie never encounters anything that gives him hope that he is getting closer to home. The drive that keeps him going is visions of his family. These visions are always seen in warm, earthy colours. For example, he has a vision of his father, beside their house and a fire, with a warm smile and outstretched arms, everything bathed in reds, yellows, oranges and warm browns, which are a stark contrast to the cold blue world he is in. Chanie has other visions that are not so warm. He remembers cold showers, strict lessons, lonely beds and priests dressed in black. The sinister nature of these individuals is emphasized by the fear etched on Chanie’s face, but we do not see their faces.

The first song, “The Stranger”, talks about Chanie’s escape and the fear and exhilaration he is feeling.

“And what's in my chest
I'm not gonna stop
I'm just catching my breath
They're not gonna stop
Please just let me catch my breath”

The music, soft guitars, pianos, and percussion, is somewhat plaintive; Downie’s voice as unsure as Chanie must have been.

“Swing Set” is somewhat more upbeat as Chanie gains confidence that he will not be caught, that perhaps he has a chance to make it but the next song is called “Seven Matches”, which is all he
has to light fires with, and by the end of the song he uses the last one. This is only the third song. During this song, we also notice a raven that has been following him.

Through “I Will Not Be Stuck” and “Son” Chanie savours the last of his fire. He has more memories and visions of the horrors he escaped and of the warm home that he is struggling to return to. Soon though, when we hear “The Secret Path”, the fire dies and freezing rain has begun. Downie’s once again plaintive voice sings “it’s a windbreaker, it’s not my jean jacket”, either hardly protection against Northern Ontario winter.

During “Don’t Let This Touch You”, Chanie is starting to lose his resolve and he has some of the most emotionally stirring flashbacks. We see a black figure against the light of the open door and this figure approaches the boys sleeping in their dormitory. We see the hard hand of this black-clad figure reaching for Chanie as Downie’s lyrics lament “Don’t let this touch you…”. We can see Chanie struggling with these visions and the freezing rain and we just ache for this boy, but more visions of the warmth and love of his home keep him moving.

With “Haunt Them, Haunt Them, Haunt Them” we again become aware of the raven. The song itself has a sinister feeling, with a harder, sharp quality to it. Chanie sees the raven grow in front of him; this dark, looming presence that certainly foreshadows Chanie’s eventual death. Downie sings “I think I’m in despair, the wind is in the trees, basically just waiting for something to come along and eat me.”

During “The Only Place to Be” we see Chanie curl up beside the tracks, unable to take another step. The cold, hunger and exhaustion have overwhelmed him. Chanie’s eyes are big, but his body becomes still. “Here, Here, Here” starts with slow piano and atmospheric noises. Chanie looks back on himself, curled and blue, next to the tracks that were supposed to take him home. The raven flies away, the snow falls and Downie’s voice sings: “I hurt here, here and here … I died here, here and here.”

**Uses and Audience:**

Chanie Wenjak’s sister feels the Creator chose Gord Downie to tell this story. I cannot say I disagree; it is just disappointing it has taken 50 years to tell it. She also hopes that telling this story will result in greater access to education for Canada’s Indigenous youth, especially
ensuring there is a high school on every reserve. I feel that *The Secret Path* book, album, and film should be in every library in the country as it is one more way we can move towards reconciliation. Although there are some very strong images and emotional scenes, I think that students in elementary school could view the film provided they were prepared ahead of time. This film could be used to support Critical Literacy Lessons in the classroom as it explores themes of racism, sexual abuse, family, equity, and equality.

**Websites:**


**Synopsis:**

*Project Noah* is a global social network where users document and upload pictures of organisms in their region – these are called spottings. This website is a tool for “crowdsourcing ecological data” in an effort to aid in preservation and conservation of wildlife and their habitats.

**Text and Images:**

*Project Noah* users sign in using their Facebook or Google+ accounts to verify their identity. Once logged in users see a newsfeed style interface, where recent uploads are featured. Along the top are clearly labelled buttons to access the blog, Organisms, Missions, and Education. A column down the left of the page includes the user’s image, settings, “Upload a New Spotting” button, the user’s statistics, and followers. Adding a spotting - a picture of an organism in their habitat that one has spotted and captured with their camera, cell phone, or tablet – is relatively easy. Users click the “Upload a New Spotting” and are presented with a clear, concise form, with prompts in boxes. One simply follows the prompts and clicks save. The image and description will be added to the site and show up in followers newsfeed.

The *Project Noah* website has a clear, uncluttered interface, with the images of animals and insects uploaded by users as the feature. Most of the pictures are taken by young people and
amateur photographers, but despite this, most are of reasonable quality. The vibrant colours of birds and insects, the unusual animals and their varied habitats, keep users interested and scrolling through posts. The addition of content that users could more actively engage with, like games, puzzles, or trivia, would be a welcome addition.

Uses and Audience:

*Project Noah* would be suitable for students of all ages, but due to the way one must log-in (through Facebook or Google+) users would need to be 13 years or older. A workaround for younger students would be their teacher creating a class profile where the group could post and view spottings. This website could be used to support lessons in Critical Literacy as it touches on themes of education and the care and preservation of our environment.


Synopsis:

*The Wonderment* is a social network that connects young people around the world. They “explore, creatively collaborate and solve problems on a global level” with the goal of “making the world a better place for everyone”.

Text and Images:

*The Wonderment* is a safe, secure, moderated social network for young people of all ages. The platform is familiar and easy to navigate, and the text is bold and not overly complicated. After the user is signed in, the navigation screen includes tabs to be taken to one’s profile, creations, notifications, and settings. Also on this page is the current project and the newest ‘paths’. The projects are decided upon by *The Wonderment* users and are programs or initiatives that help a community or group in need. For example, the current project is a “Refugee Community Maker Bus”, to bring together and support the refugee community in Salt Lake City. A previous project was a library bus in Guatemala. The projects receive funding when a goal is met; to do this, users
follow ‘paths’ and contribute content in the form of pictures, video, or writing. The paths are on all sorts of topics, also suggested by the users. For example, the path ‘Soccer Love’ is introduced with a video of young people playing an informal game of football in the Andes. Users then add to the path with comments, videos or images of their own, questions, or facts. Each time a user contributes to a path they earn points which they can use to add to their ‘bot’, or avatar. At the same time, it makes the project meter rise, bringing it closer to fruition.

The images and illustrations on *The Wonderment* website are colourful, imaginative, and engaging. The video content is well-produced and captivating, with subjects and individuals that represent the diversity of the global community. The illustrations and general look of the website are graphic, colourful, vibrant, and appealing. Users of all ages will appreciate the interface as it is not especially juvenile while still keeping the feel of a website for young people. Users will especially like the ability to add to and upgrade their bot. As they contribute content and comment and give stickers to others, they earn points. These points can be used to turn their bots into wild, colourful creatures. The more complicated a mask or outfit is the more points are needed to buy it. For example, one can choose to simply be a cartoonish girl, or perhaps a tiger with a suit of armour.

**Uses and Audience:**

*The Wonderment* is targeted to young people of all ages, but children in grades three and up could use it independently. Educators are encouraged to also sign up and can add the students to their profile. The students can then access the site independently. This website could be used to support Critical Literacy instruction as it explores participating in a global community and could include themes of environmentalism, equity, equality, and education.
Instructional Books:


Synopsis:

*Children Reading Picturebooks* is a comprehensive, research-based text that examines how children 4 – 11 view and respond to visual texts. It discusses how children are able to find a deeper meaning than just the literal interpretation of the images on the page. This second edition includes the original research with updated information based on subsequent research, as well as the addition of chapters about digital books, and culturally diversity, special needs students, and other social issues.

Text and Images:

*Children Reading Picturebooks: Interpreting Visual Texts – Second Edition*, provides a comprehensive look at how children view and respond to illustrations in children’s literature. It is broken into two parts: “Part 1: The original empirical research on children responding to picturebooks” and “Part 2: Theoretical perspectives and new research on children responding to picturebooks”. Revisiting one’s previous work with a newly critical eye, with time to consider old and new research, and the addition of new technologies and changes in the social climate is brave and somehow adds weight to the value of this text. The strength of this book is the logical progression as it moves from motivation to the original research, to new additions and findings. Arizpe and Styles present their information in an accessible manner; one does not get lost in jargon and can easily navigate this book. Within the original research, they worked with children four to eleven, with three different books. As part of the interviews with the children, they were asked to draw pictures and the inclusion of them in this book reveals a great deal about what these students we seeing and feelings. For example, Charlie’s drawing on page 30, shows he connected with and understood the fear Nicky was feeling in the book with the dog’s mouth drawn as a wiggly line, and the looming blackness over the house. The accompanying
explanation of the conversation confirms these feelings and provides the reader with examples of the language used by Charlie. Another strength in this book is the inclusion of spreads from the books used in Arizpe and Styles. Too often texts are analyzed, discussed, and written about but the reader has no real sense as to what they are referring to. By including these illustrations, accompanied by the conversations with the subjects, readers are better able to grasp the concepts presented.

Uses and Audience:

*Children Reading Picturebooks: Interpreting Visual Texts – Second Edition*, would be a valuable tool for new teachers just forming their personal philosophies and experienced educators re-examining their practice. As it examines the way students interpret visual texts it will inform educators when choosing literature to share with students. This book will support lessons in Critical Literacy as, when choosing materials that teach empathy and have social justice themes, educators will be able to look at literature in a way a child might and provide books that perhaps will be more powerful.


Summary:

This instructional book details ways teachers can use drama in their classroom to enhance and bring meaning to literature instruction. Through their practical, scaffolded, research-based approach Barrs, Barton, and Booth provide lessons and strategies, accompanied by examples, in including role-playing, storytelling, rituals and drama games in the classroom for students to “…interact with the themes, characters, and events in a text (p. 7)”.

Text and images:
This book is not about drama… it's about new ways to inspire students is broken up into two parts and accompanying introduction, 3 appendices, and a glossary. The introduction serves to give a comprehensive overview of the book with supporting pedagogy. “Part A: Becoming the Story” details the ways readers read and interact with text, how to role-play can enhance this by putting oneself into another’s shoes, and how this can “enhance students’ emotional understanding of characters and situations (p. 9)”, “Part B: Demonstrations, Strategies, and Texts for Role Playing” does exactly this; provides lessons with accompanying texts for students to practice and perform. The addition of text boxes and asides that give hints to help with things like classroom management is a welcome addition.

The authors emphasize that their methods are participatory, engaging students in social and active learning. They want students to not just passive listen or read literature, but rather explore it from the various viewpoint, dissect it, and become part of the narrative through role-playing and other such methods.

“By becoming the story and by standing in the other people’s shoes, students can gain access to a wider range of feelings, thoughts and ideas, and knowledge. This imaginative engagement deepens their appreciation of texts, making them more imaginative and empathetic (p.33).”

The writing throughout is clear and concise, and one would not need to be either an expert in drama or literature to understand the terms used, although, having a background in Education would be an asset as one would find this format similar to many other instructional teaching books. The addition of the glossary at the back, titled “Overview of Drama Conventions”, is helpful as it defines any specialist language one may need if they did not have a theatre background. This reader does feel that this book is missing images of students in action, or some sort of images or illustration to add interest and break up the text. There are only a few graphs and an image used to springboard a lesson, all useful, but not enough.

Uses and Audience:

This book is not about drama… it's about new ways to inspire students is aptly named as. educators are always looking for new ways to engage their students and this offers that in
practical ways that would be easy to implement with students of all ages. Although many of the activities would be better suited to students in Grade 4 and up, the techniques and games could be used with younger students. This book could be used to support lessons in Critical Literacy as students develop empathy as they work with various texts, which also could have themes “…that frame our students personal and social lives – race, social-cultural backgrounds, gender and identity, experiences, age, interests and abilities (p.35)”.