

What's new on Jane's bookshelf?

by Jane Leeth



When I'm not teaching, I'm scouring bookstores and websites for interesting new releases in children's and young adult literature. My dogs don't even bark anymore when the UPS man shows up at the front door with a box of books; he's sort of become part of our family.

I've listed here a handful of books that recently piqued my interest—whether I was intrigued by the topic, the aesthetic post-modern appearance, and/or what I can do with the text in the classroom.

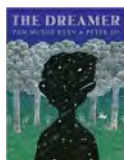
Jane Leeth is a reading workshop coach for the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers. Her favorite source for new book recommendations is the Newbery Medal website, www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.cfm.

For more great resources on the teaching of reading and writing, visit www.indianayoungwriters.org.

below: Teachers investigate a few dozen of Jane's favorite books at an after-school workshop.



The Dreamer Pam Munoz Ryan (YA)



One of my newest favorites! This fictional biography tells the story of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and his early love of poetry. One of my favorite passages takes place early in the book when Neftali (Pablo as a boy) starts his collection of interesting words on scraps of paper that he places in a drawer for safekeeping. One night he imagines he hears the words moving and looks up to see some of his favorite words floating in the air: *chocolate*, *oregano*, *locomotive*, *terrible*, *iguana*. He rubs his eyes in disbelief and goes to the drawer to find the words sound asleep. Peter Sis' illustrations add to the puzzle of Neftali's childhood. They add visual commentary but leave the meaning open to interpretation.

Me...Jane Patrick McDonnell (Picture book)



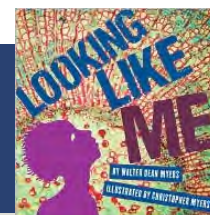
Need I explain why I love this one so much? Besides having my name in the title, this book's repetitive use of the ellipsis makes it a good choice for a punctuation study. Primary sources and ornamental engravings from the 19th and early 20th century give this rather simple text a few challenging twists. The story is based on the childhood of Jane Goodall and her subsequent research and lifetime devotion to chimpanzees.

The Graveyard Book Neil Gaiman (YA)



I can't get enough of Neil Gaiman, whether it is his picture books for intermediate readers (like *The Wolves in the Walls* or *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*) or a chapter book like *The Graveyard Book*. In this reimagining of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Nobody ("Bod" for short) grows up in a graveyard after the rest of his family have perished. Mysterious and so intriguing that you can read it in one sitting! This book is filled with puns and is popular with boy readers (yes, even the reluctant ones).

Identity



Looking Like Me Walter Dean Myers (Picture book)

Momma, Where Are You From? Marie Bradby (Picture book)

These two make a great pair to celebrate identity. *Looking Like Me* has an eclectic mix of text placement with intriguing backgrounds while Bradby's book uses refrains within its text to tell the story. Each celebrates identity from a slightly different perspective (and interesting to note that *Looking Like Me* was illustrated by the author's son, Christopher). I can easily imagine using these to launch a reading workshop, when I'm trying to establish a community and get to know the readers in my classroom.

Let the Celebrations Begin

Margaret Wild (Picture book)

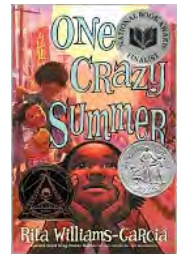
Although this one is a picture book, its audience is middle and upper grade students. A powerful perspective on the liberation from one Nazi concentration camp, the story is a tribute to the women of the camp who used scraps of their own clothing to make toys for the surviving children. The book carries a sophisticated message and makes an interesting cross-curricular study when paired with *Erika's Story* by Ruth Vander Zee and *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti.



One Crazy Summer

Rita Williams-Garcia (YA)

A very entertaining piece of historical fiction, *One Crazy Summer* is told from the perspective of three sisters that are sent to California to be reunited with their mother during the 1960s, in the midst of the growing Black Panther Movement. The strong female characters and sibling rivalry make this an easy book for young readers to connect to—especially if they have sisters! A friendly text for reluctant readers of chapter books, this book might make you laugh out loud.



illustrations

Sometimes pictures reveal another story.

The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery

Graeme Base

This book has been around a while, but I keep a copy by my bed because each time I pick it up, I uncover something new in the illustrations. This is a mystery about an elephant's 11th birthday. The trick is to follow the clues in the illustrations and text to solve the mystery. Incorporating clues, riddles and warnings, the format of Base's book reminds me of *Black and White* by David McCauley. You really have to be on your game to catch all the nuances.

Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave

Laban Carrick Hill

Martin's Big Words

Doreen Rappaport

Freedom River

Dorreen Rappaport

John's Secret Dream: The Life of John Lennon

Dorreen Rappaport

All of these books are illustrated by Bryan Collier, and his notes are as interesting to read as the text. The illustrations are layered with symbolism, and Collier's signature style of collage and watercolor emphasize the text in a variety of ways. I always like to read the text first, then the notes, to see how many drawings that are not part of the main illustrations are incorporated into each page.

