

Massachusetts Book News



Another Great Year for MassBooks

Nearly 400 works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and children's/young adult titles were nominated for this year's Massachusetts Book Awards program. As ever, the power and grace of the writers among us was apparent in the strength of the offerings (all of which we'll incorporate into the annual MassBook Census,

hosted in the book awards section of the Mass Center for the Book website: massbook.org). Our judges read their way through this embarrassment of riches in ours, one of the most literate and literary states in the Union, and they trust that the titles they have distinguished as Must-Read Books will be worthy additions to Massachusetts community, school, and personal libraries.

There's something for everyone here, from the literary novel to the topical nonfiction narrative, from works by emerging poets to lively and informative picture books, middle readers, and young adult titles. Pick up one or more or all, recommend them to your friends, bring them to book groups. Most of all, read & enjoy!

Our Commonwealth
Is Reading.

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"Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties . . . it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates in all future periods of this commonwealth to cherish the interests of literature. . . ."

— from The Massachusetts Constitution, Chapter V, Section II, "The Encouragement of Literature, etc."

Must-Read Books Launch at MLA 2011

The Massachusetts Book Awards returned to the Massachusetts Library Association, premiering the 2011 "Must-Read Books" poster and celebrating the joy of reading the writers among us with two lively events on April 28, 2011. Eight of this year's

Must-Read authors participated in the first-ever "Speed-Dating with the Authors" session with Massachusetts librarians. The session was followed by a reception to unveil this year's entire roster of must-read books and raise a glass to the judges who

read so diligently for months to create the list. Mass Center for the Book announced Summer Book Talk as well, the chance to engage in a conversation about the must-read books that will be hosted and/or spill over from the MCB Facebook page.



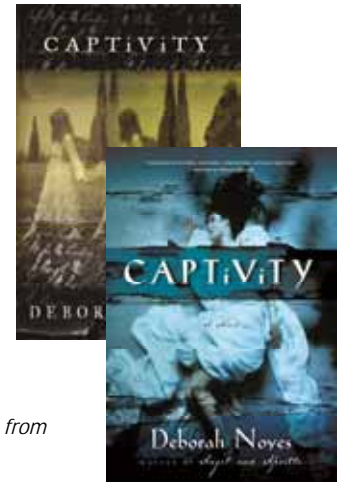
The Massachusetts Book Awards are a program of the Massachusetts Center for the Book, the Commonwealth Affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, on the web at www.massbook.org.

Must-Read Fiction 2011-2012

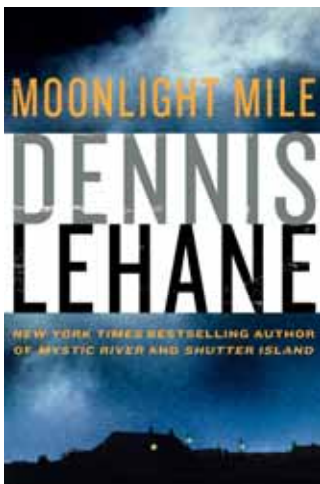
Weird in all the best possible ways, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God* (Random House), by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein is certainly thought-provoking, and possibly even challenging, but it's darn funny, too. This MacArthur-award winning author tears away every rough-edged argument on religion, cuts through the hoopla and posturing, and zeroes in on the basic human struggle: to live and to love. Simply.



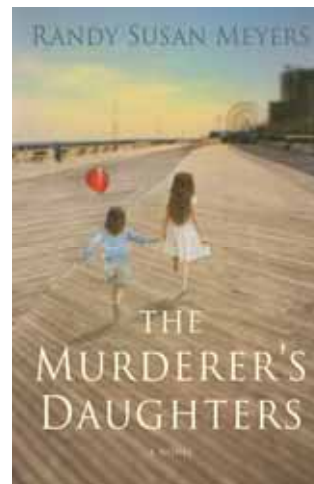
A remarkable novel about the real-life Fox Sisters, 19th century girls who claimed they could communicate with the dead, *Captivity* (Unbridled Books), by Deborah Noyes, so successfully evokes the period and setting that readers will find themselves fully immersed in this elegant work of historical fiction.



Both titles now in trade paperback editions from Vintage and Unbridled respectively.

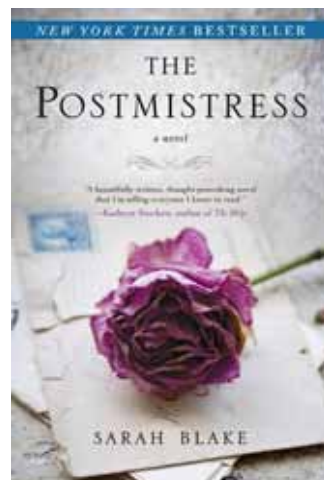


Patrick and Angie are back in *Moonlight Mile* (William Morrow), Dennis Lehane's fast-paced follow-up to *Gone Baby Gone*. The writing is smart, fresh and funny. Without sentimentality but with plenty of heart, Lehane captures the roughness and vulnerability of hard-knock lives.



From the very first page and straight on until the last, the clear and distinctive voice of Randy Susan Meyers's *The Murderer's Daughters* (St. Martin's) will have you enraptured and wanting more--even though self-preservation may curl you into a ball to shield yourself from the painful circumstances of the two sisters. This is a heart-breaking and powerful novel.

Sarah Blake's *The Postmistress* (Amy Einhorn/Putnam) transports the reader to a 1940s Cape Cod village and to a time when handwritten letters held power. The postmistress has a letter which she may (or may not) deliver. Across the ocean, during the London bombings, another letter is carried by a female reporter. How these women are connected and what they experience are beautifully told here.

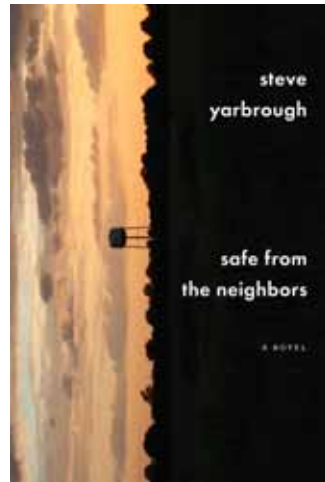


A tale of two women coming to terms with their lives on neighboring farms in the Midwest in the early 1900s, *The Quickening* (Other Press) by Michelle Hoover skillfully explores the complicated relationships between the women and between the women and the land, and helps us understand what is essential.

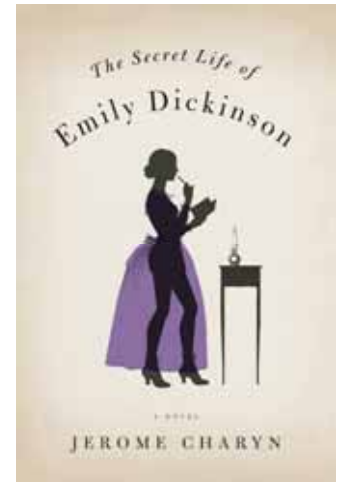


from the Massachusetts Book Awards

In a small town in the Mississippi Delta, a middle aged history teacher wrestles with his marriage, with his children leaving home, and with secrets from his childhood, including a death in his town on the night James Meredith enrolled at Ole Miss in 1962. In *Safe from the Neighbors* (Knopf), Steve Yarbrough evokes the voice of struggles internal and external in an honest and skillful story.



Impeccably researched, but also wonderfully re-imagined, *The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson* (Norton), by Jerome Charyn, takes an entertaining look at what might have been, or could have been, and allows readers to see behind the lace curtain of one of America's most-celebrated authors. Sure, liberties may have been taken, but the result is plausible and satisfying.

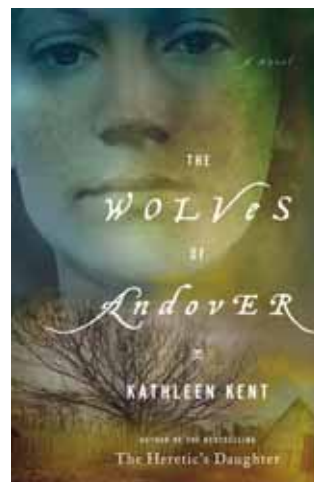


The sudden death of his young wife sends broken-hearted Arthur Rook on a journey to discover the reason a 16-year-old postcard went unmailed and who the people are that it was intended to reach. From Hollywood to a boarding house in rural New York, quirky characters and their relationships are beautifully explored in *This Must Be the Place* (Holt), Kate Racculia's accomplished first novel.

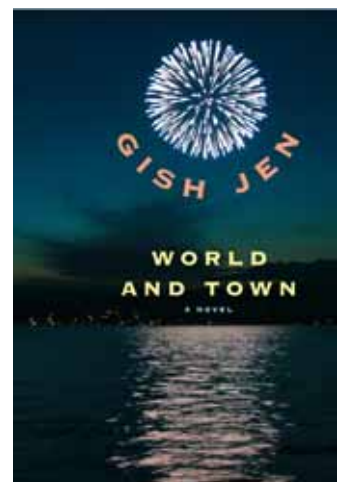


Julia Glass is a master at portraying the deeply moving and complicated relationships between family and friends. In *The Widower's Tale* (Pantheon), she continually confounds expectations and keeps reaching for more. Characters are laid bare without pretense in a voice that commands the page. It is an emotional and intellectual thrill to read *The Widower's Tale*.

For Martha Carrier the Massachusetts landscape brings neither beauty nor comfort, but it provides the perfect backdrop for Kathleen Kent's exquisite novel. *The Wolves of Andover* (Reagan Arthur/Hachette) combines rich historical detail with suspense, romance, and superb storytelling.

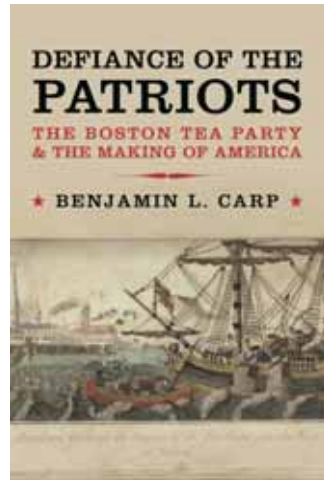


Gish Jen's *World and Town* (Knopf) is an elegant weaving of words, characters, and places that forms a rich and detailed tapestry of strong but broken people in a small contemporary New England town.

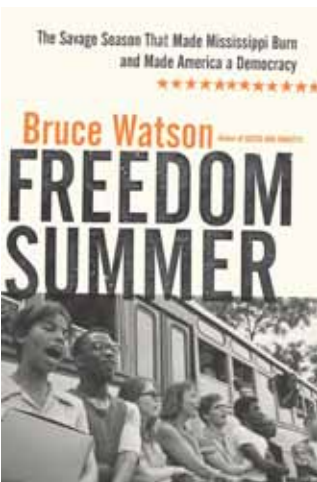
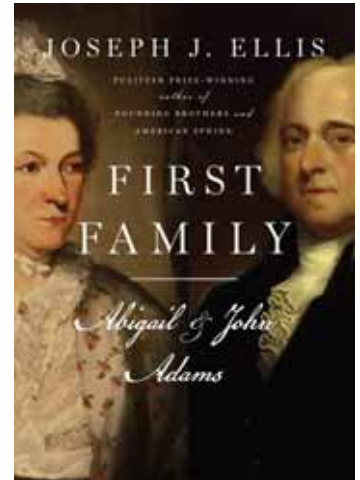


Must-Read Nonfiction 2011-2012

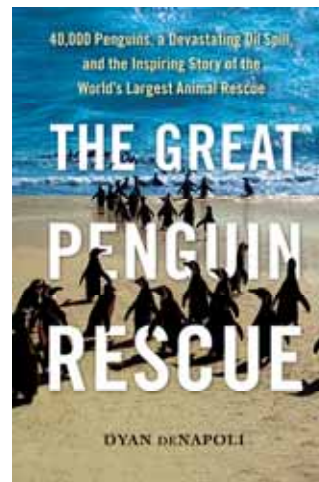
What if America's founding fathers weren't so altruistic but, instead, simply business men wanting to turn a buck? *Defiance of the Patriots* (Yale UP), by Benjamin Carp, poses this question and others as it examines the relevant issues for both the English and the Colonists in the lead-up to the Boston Tea Party and the onset of the Revolutionary War.



In Joseph Ellis's *First Family* (Knopf), an historical and romantic narrative of a marriage and a family, Abigail Adams is not only the mother who raises John Adam's children, but also the wife who longs for her husband and the woman who truly supports from afar this brilliant man who is devoted to the founding of the American nation

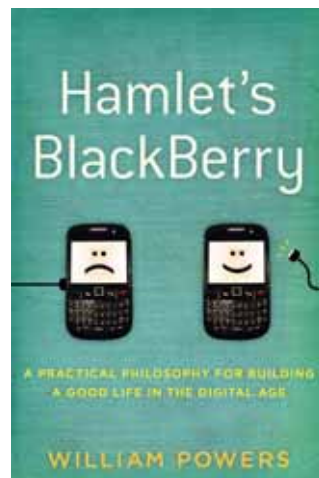


Bruce Watson's *Freedom Summer* (Viking/Penguin) is a fresh and powerful look at the summer of 1964, when civil rights workers flooded the South to help African Americans exercise their right to suffrage. This book gives us a rich and comprehensive story, as told by those volunteers who lived through this most harrowing and critical time in race relations in our country.

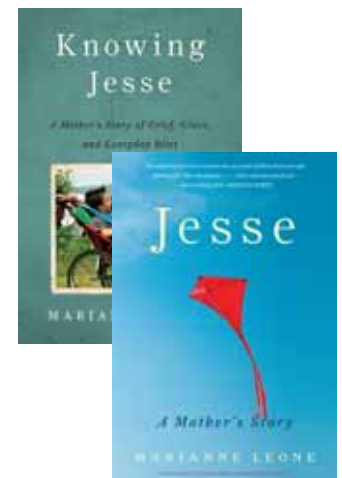


In *The Great Penguin Rescue* (Free Press), author Dyan deNapoli chronicles the amazing story of 75,000 dedicated volunteers who not only rescue 19,000 oiled penguins but who also save 20,000 more from sharing a similar fate after a tragic oil spill off the coast of Africa."

Technology: does it help us or does it "destroy civilization"? This is the question at the center of *Hamlet's BlackBerry* (Harper) by William Powers, an engaging examination of the way that advances from the Gutenberg press to present-day computers have benefited us and created resistances in those who become convinced that life as they know it is over.

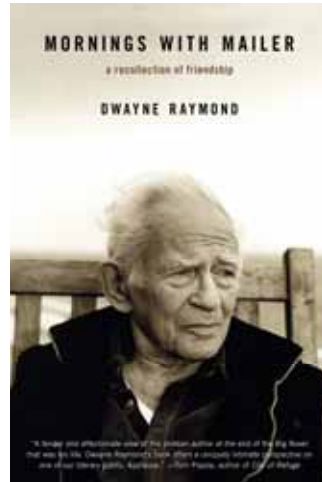


Throughout the joys, trials and, ultimately, the grief of parenthood, this poignant memoir by Marianne Leone, originally published as *Knowing Jesse* and reprinted as *Jesse: A Mother's Story* (Simon and Schuster), describes the challenges faced in a family raising an honor-roll student trapped by Cerebral Palsy in a quadriplegic body.

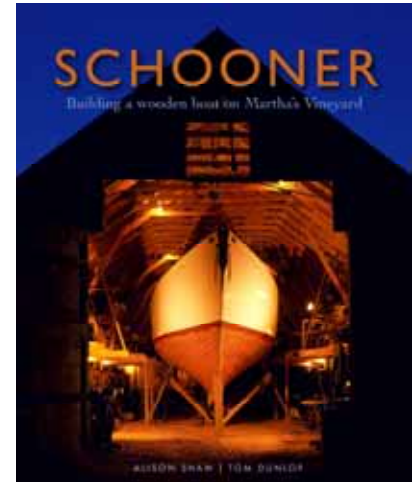


from the Massachusetts Book Awards

In *Mornings with Mailer* (Perennial), Dwayne Raymond communicates a very intimate and loving view of a much-read author, inviting us to share in some tender moments at the end of the life of a man of great genius and intellect who made Provincetown his home, the maddeningly arrogant, obstinate and, too, admirable Norman Mailer.



Follow the creation of the *Rebecca*, a two-masted schooner and the largest boat to be built on Martha's Vineyard in decades. In text by Tom Dunlop and photos by Alison Shaw, *Schooner* (Vineyard Stories) introduces us to a small Massachusetts shipyard which builds boats in the traditional way.

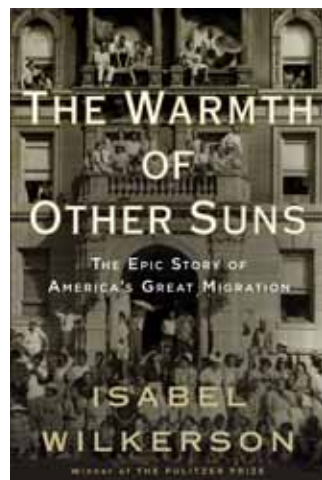


Stuff (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), by Randy Frost and Gail Steketee, is a truthful and fascinating account of the mental illness that affects "hoarders," those unfortunate souls who lose their health, their families, their marriages and their lives to an obsession with collecting and storing things, no matter what the cost to quality of life.

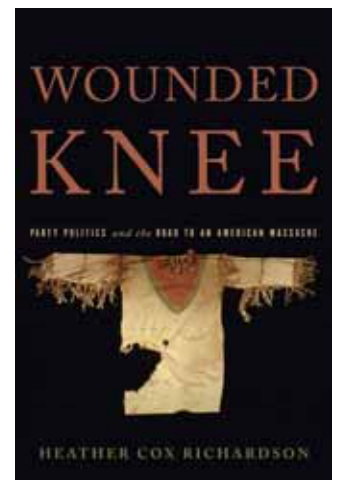


Sebastian Junger's *WAR* (Twelve) is a powerful first-hand account of modern warfare that looks at the nature of war in overview and in particular, detailing the physical conditions of conflict and their effect on the soldiers, and paying special attention to the emotional bonds formed between soldiers and throughout a unit.

An epic narrative of the Great Migration, the journey of African Americans from the Jim Crow South to U.S. cities in the North and West in the early half of the twentieth century, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (Random House), by Isabel Wilkerson, presents three distinct stories interwoven with clear and compelling contextual background.



Wounded Knee (Basic Books), by Heather Cox Richardson, is a unique look at the massacre of nearly 300 Sioux, who were killed while surrendering to the United States Army in 1890, assessing the politics of the event and positing a perfect storm of party politics, public paranoia and election-year posturing with tragic results

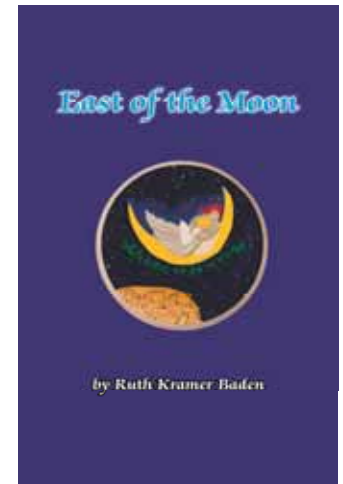


Must-Read Poetry 2011-2012

Daniel Tobin's deft and elegant poems explore and celebrate life as a journey, paying close attention to "the conveyances of getting there" and reveling in the sights and sounds along the way. The poems of *Belated Heavens* (Four Way) invite the reader to traverse both the physical and spiritual realms.



In *East of the Moon* (Ibbetson Street), Ruth Kramer-Baden has written poems that let wonder ripen into wisdom. Her empathy is rooted in the understanding that life is always a desperate improvisation. These poems resonate on a personal, historic, and mythic level.

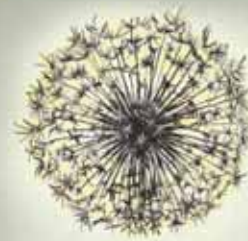


Ghosts and Whispers



Krikor Der Hohannesian

In *Ghosts and Whispers* (Finishing Line), Krikor Der Hohannesian recounts the personal stories of his Armenian relatives, some of whom survived and some of whom were killed in the Armenian massacres of the early 20th century. These are poems that make art out of tragedy.



God, Seed

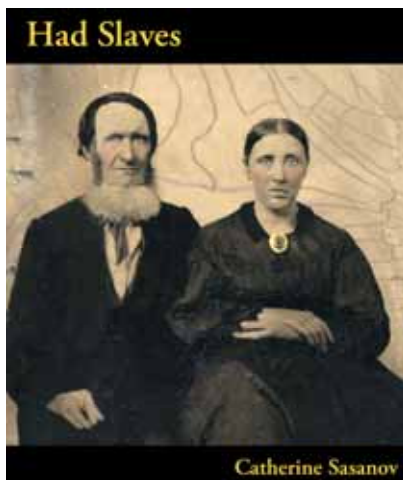
Poetry & Art About the Natural World

Rebecca Foust and Lorna Stevens

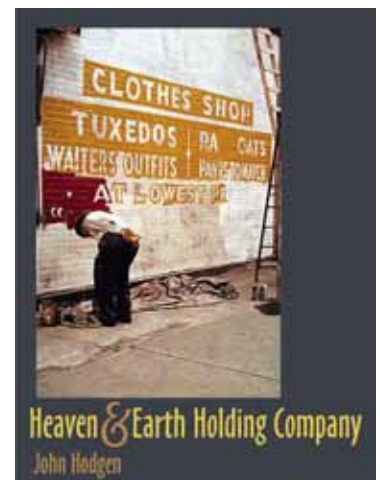
God, Seed (Tebot Bach) is lyrical, intense, and concerned with issues of Earth's survival. It has a fierce yet loving attitude toward the natural world and human nature. Most of Rebecca Foust's poems are matched with paintings by colorful artist Lorna Stevens.

Foust's *All that Gorgeous Pitiless Song* (Many Mountains Moving, 2010) is also recommended by the judges.

"Had Slaves": Catherine Sasanov stumbles across these words in the family papers of her Missouri ancestors, and in this volume reconstructs fragments of what might have been the lives of the eleven men, women, and children held in bondage by her great-great-great-grandfather and his family. *Had Slaves* (Firewheel) is a powerful view of American slavery and its ongoing legacy.



In the long, spacious lines of *Heaven & Earth Holding Company* (Pittsburgh), John Hodgen entertains the reader with his witty storytelling. His free-wheeling exuberant cadences disarm and charm the reader, and then deliver their meaning with subtle force.

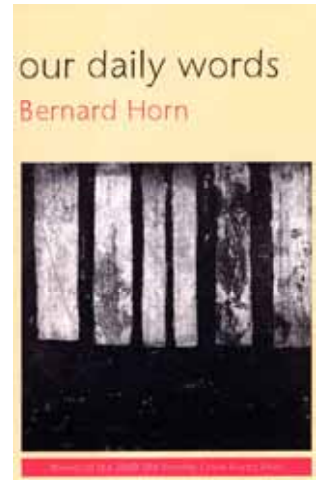


from the Massachusetts Book Awards

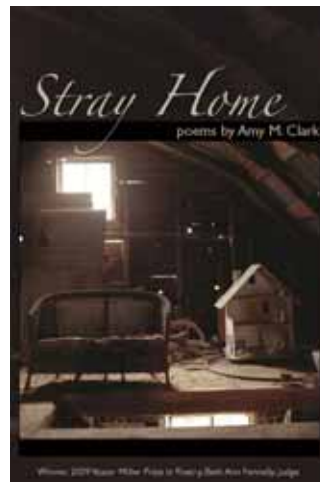
A poet who can make magic out of the hall closet is worth listening to. Geraldine Zetzel's mature work in *Mapping the Sands* (Mayapple) offers an expansion of the spirit, a patent playful imagination that reaches through strictures of propriety and convention to the bedrock of connection. The book allows life to emerge "as if lit from within."



Bernard Horn's poetry in *Our Daily Words* (Old Seventy Creek) holds the beating heart of everyday's apparently random trivialities. In beautiful language he juxtaposes surprising things that don't go together — except in real life. His poems are organically musical and lift daily experience to spiritual and intellectual intensity.



Melissa Shook's *the Real Story* (Finishing Line) shines a Kleig light into the dusty corners of real life in this accessible, un-sentimental collection that will strike chords of recognition for readers.

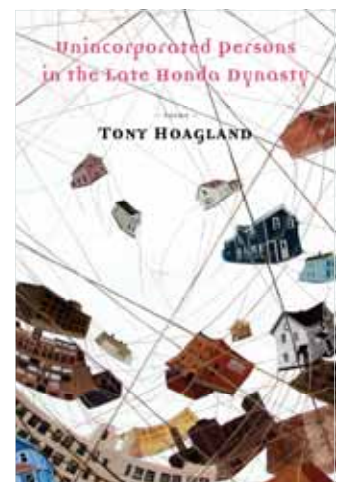


With tremendous economy and control, Amy Clark delivers a bracing and honest collection about family, love, self-awareness, and vulnerability that at times "quivers with bed-rock faith": *Stray Home* (UNT Press).

In *Triage* (Cervena Barva), Tam Lin Neville casts her clear, compassionate eye upon the city and its often down-and-out inhabitants in need of triage from hopelessness, idleness, and fear. Precise, vivid poems reveal a willingness to be a part of rather than apart.



In *Unincorporated Persons from the Late Honda Dynasty* (Graywolf), Tony Hoagland's keen eye, sense of play, and piercing intellect animate every poem. This is a collection that defies, challenges, and invigorates. With his quirky "muchness," Hoagland wrestles with his times in tragicomic fashion.

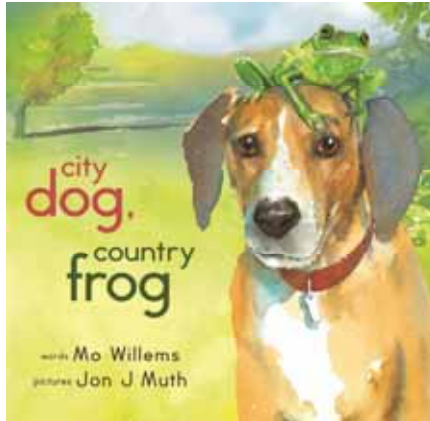


Must-Read Children's/Young Adult Literature 2011-2012

Young Audiences



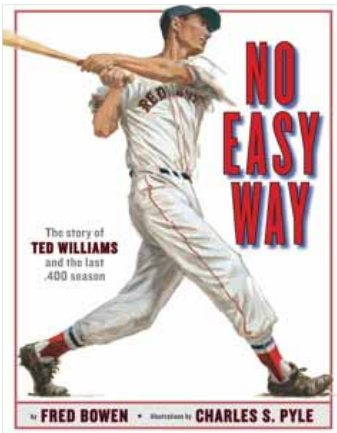
Big Night for Salamanders (Boyd's Mills), by Sarah Marwil Lamstein (Carol Bernoff, *illustrator*), beautifully illuminates the first night a child's neighborhood salamanders return to their native pool, chronicling the actions a family takes during that night to protect the animals on their perilous jour-



Follow City Dog and Country Frog through the seasons as they form a friendship based on curiosity and sharing. *City Dog, Country Frog* (Hyperion) by Mo Willems (Jon J. Muth, *illustrator*) is a poignant story, beautiful and whimsical, about change and moving forward.

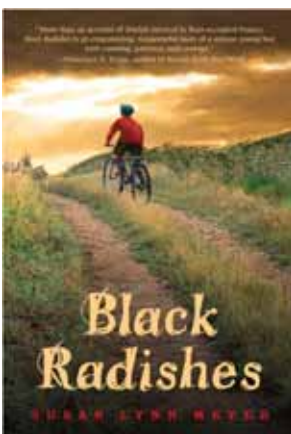


Join twins Ling and Ting on their daily adventures in this light-hearted storybook. Charming illustrations and lively action clearly depict the twins' exuberant and sweet relationship in *Ling and Ting: Not Exactly the Same!* by Grace Lin (Little Brown).



Here is an inspiring biography that will keep readers, especially emerging Red Sox fans, on the edge of their seats. In *No Easy Way: The Story of Ted Williams Last .400 Season* (Dutton Children's) by Fred Bowen (Charles S. Pyle, *illustrator*) compelling text and stimulating illustrations enhance wonderfully this true story's timeless appeal.

Middle Readers



When the Nazis take over Paris in March 1940, eleven-year-old Gustave and his parents move to a safer place and prepare to emigrate to America. As life becomes more repressive and dangerous for Jews, Gustave becomes his father's accomplice in their plot to escape. Their drama is palpable as time runs out. *Black Radishes* (Delacorte), by Susan Lynn Meyer, is a taut historical novel that makes for riveting reading.



Her mother and baby brother die in the winter of 1849, and twelve-year-old Addie is left alone in the shipbuilding town of Essex, Massachusetts. Fearful that she will be taken in as a servant, this resourceful and spunky, pre-adolescent escapes into the snowy woods where she meets an elderly Wampanoag woman and discovers some astonishing truths about her family. *Daughter of Winter* (Candlewick), by Pat Lowery Collins, is sure to please.

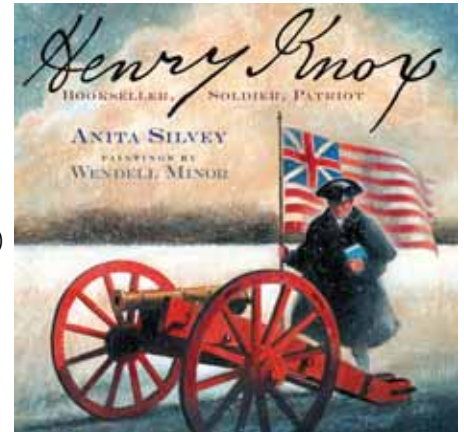
from the Massachusetts Book Awards

More Middle Readers

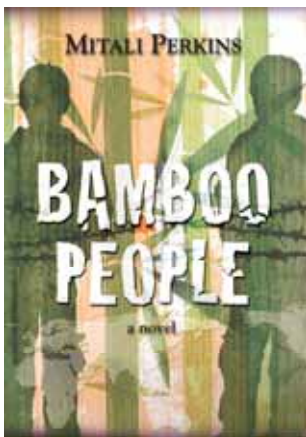
When he and his family move in with his grandfather, life becomes more complicated for Owen Jester and downright hilarious for the reader. As with her earlier *The Small Adventure of Popeye and Elvis*, Barbara O'Connor has given us in *The Fantastic Secret of Owen Jester* (Farrar Straus Giroux) pure comfort food for the literary soul.



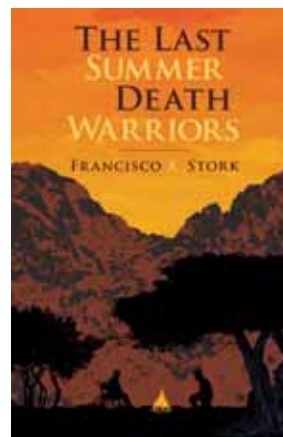
In sixteen one-page chapters, Anita Silvey manages to present a comprehensive biography of an entertaining, intelligent, Massachusetts historical figure. Embellished by the lush paintings of Wendell Minor, *Henry Knox: Book-seller, Soldier, Patriot* (Clarion) will appeal to teachers as well as students. Research-report ready: source notes and a Henry Knox chronology are included.



Young Adults



Mitali Perkins has done it again, returning to the Must-Read list with *Bamboo People* (Charlesbridge), which introduces readers to two boys, caught by circumstances beyond their control, who end up on opposite sides of the brutal civil war in Burma. This is a thoughtful exploration of the life of young soldiers and a powerful indictment of the current reality for those engulfed in the world's longest war.



Pancho is an all-American teen stuck with a really rotten deal – both his parents are dead and even though it was ruled an accident he KNOWS someone killed his sister. He finds a new friend, but the friend has cancer and is about to die, too. Surrounded by all this death, Pancho has to figure out what it means to really LIVE. Heartfelt and totally engaging, *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors* (Scholastic), by Francisco X Stork, a returning Must-Read author, hits no false notes.

The Other Side of Dark (Simon and Schuster), by Sarah Smith, set in Boston, is an engrossing tale that follows two teens coming to terms with the legacies of race and power which built the literal foundations of our modern society. Part ghost story, part romance, part historical mystery, this expertly crafted book both absorbs and challenges us to look at familiar surroundings from a new perspective.



In a parallel universe very similar to our own, Cassel is the outsider in a family of curse workers – people who can control others just by touching them. In this world curse work is illegal and usually associated with organized crime. *White Cat* (Simon and Schuster), by Holly Black, will keep you guessing. This fast-paced book is a captivating blend of magic, crime, romance, and coming-of-age that is sure to grab you.



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A Hearty Thanks to Our Judges

Children's/Young Adult Literature: Clayton Cheever, Boston Public Library; Stephanie Legg, Kingston Public Library; Marina Salenikas, Stevens Memorial Library, North Andover

Fiction: Carter Hasegawa, Porter Square Books; Teresa Parise, Boston Public Library; Owen Smith Shuman, Groton Public Library

Nonfiction: Charlotte Canelli, Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood; Nina Hunt, Bellingham Public Library; Jason Wargo, Worcester Public Library

Poetry: Anne Berard, Milford Public Library; Frank Miller, Brocton Poetry Series, Brocton Public Library; Beth Roll Smith, West Bridgewater Public Library

Partner and Supporting Organizations



Summer Book Talk

Talk back to us and to one another about the wonderful must-read books announced in this newsletter. Beginning in May you can access an online discussion of the books from the Massachusetts Center for the Book Facebook page. Here's a google-shortened version of the page URL:

<http://goo.gl/nnRLS>

Be sure to "like" the page so you can stay tuned as we shall announce the award-winner in each category there at summer's end.

Become Involved!

The Massachusetts Book Awards need you! We are always looking for reviewers to read in the categories and to create reading/discussion guides for the books. Do you like program-planning? The Awards can use you, too, to help create the annual awards event at the State House, held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Center for the Book. Register your interest by completing the volunteer form available here:

<http://goo.gl/RGmDj>