

Collection of Diverse Canadian Children's
Books with Focus on Black-Canadian
Authors and Characters

Curated for the Art Gallery of Ontario by Becks
Lefranc

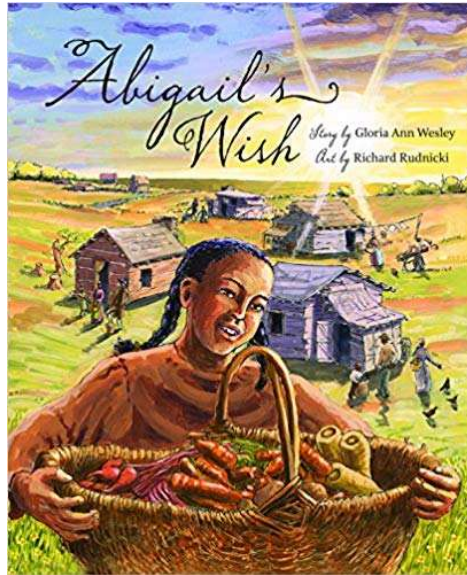
This collection of children's books was requested by the Art Gallery of Ontario's (AGO) Hands-On Centre as part of a mission to diversify and update the centre's book collection. AGO curators requested a focus on Black-Canadian stories written by Black-Canadian authors, and that the books be geared towards early readers, from ages 0-8 years.

I have curated a list of twelve illustrated books, nine of which are by and about Black-Canadians. Topics range from historical narratives, modern notable figures, day-to-day narratives, and cultural festivals. The three additional books are written by Indigenous and South Asian authors.

All books are from the year 2000 onwards with varying artistic styles, although all are, in my opinion, beautiful works. The order the books are listed in is random, and each entry begins with a photo of the book cover, as an example of the artistic style. I have included under each entry the author, illustrator, year of publication, recommended age range, and official book summary taken either from Amazon.ca or 49thshelf.com, a repository of books by Canadian authors.

I hope that this collection can provide what I lacked as a child, which is to say recognition of oneself, and from recognition, self-love.

Any further questions, comments, or concerns can be addressed to myself, Becks Lefranc, at beccalefranc@gmail.com



Abigail's Wish

Author: Gloria Ann Wesley

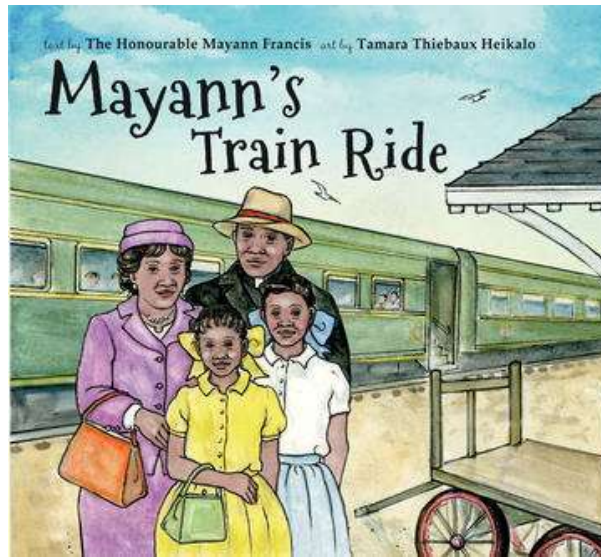
Illustrated: Richard Rudnicki

Publication Year: 2016

Age Range: 4-8

Summary: Ten-year-old Abigail Price is excited about spring in her new home in Birchtown. Spring means lots of things, like flower buds and fresh leaves and her Aunt Dinah's new baby. She's hoping it also means she'll get a new dress to wear for the celebration, but new clothing, like many things, is hard to come by.

The first children's picture book set in historic Birchtown, Nova Scotia, *Abigail's Wish* is a window into the life of a Black Loyalist family in the early years of the historic colony. Through the eyes of young Abigail, this stunning collaboration between poet and novelist Gloria Ann Wesley and award-winning illustrator Richard Rudnicki will teach readers about Black Loyalist life, and the value of friendship and patience.



Mayann's Train Ride

Author: Mayann Francis

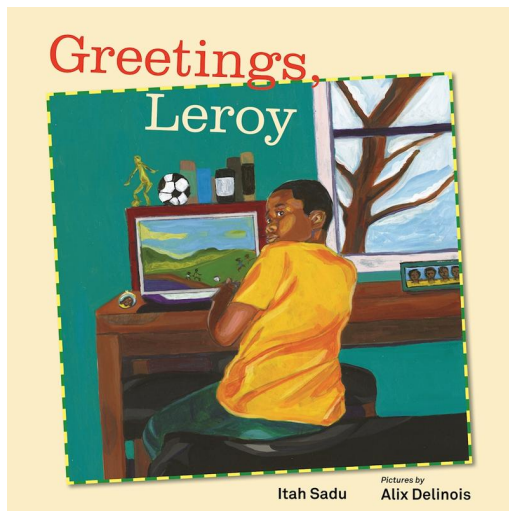
Illustrator: Tamara Thiébaux-Heikalo

Publication Year: 2015

Age Range: 4-10

Summary: Nine-year-old Mayann Francis and her family are travelling from their home in Cape Breton to New York City by train. Everything is exciting to young Mayann, from the beds that fold down to the stop in Montreal to visit friends. Most exciting of all is the chance to show off her brand new purse.

When the Francis family arrives in big, bustling New York City, Mayann visits with relatives, goes to the zoo, and rides the subway. She even receives a beautiful black doll, something she has never seen before. But one subway ride, she loses her beautiful purse. At first she's heartbroken, but she just might learn a lesson that makes the whole trip worthwhile.



Greetings Leroy

Author: Itah Sadu

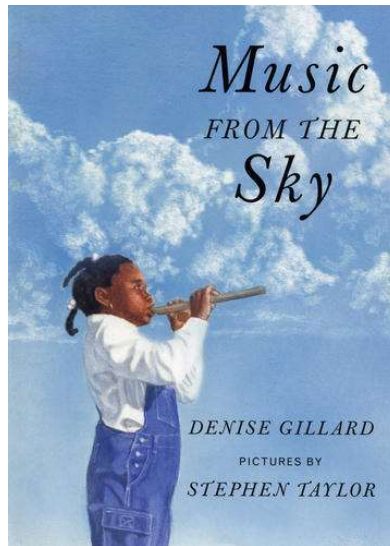
Illustrator: Alix Delinois

Publication Year: 2017

Age Range: 4-7

Summary:

Written as an email-letter to his friend, *Greetings Leroy*, chronicles the first day of school for a young boy named Roy. Recently arrived from Jamaica, and experiencing the surprising coldness of the Canadian sun, Roy receives an important gift, a button featuring Jamaican reggae star Bob Marley, to school with him, allowing him to see loving connections to his favourite things about his homeland as he gets acquainted with the staff and students of his new environment



Music from the Sky

Author: Denise Gillard

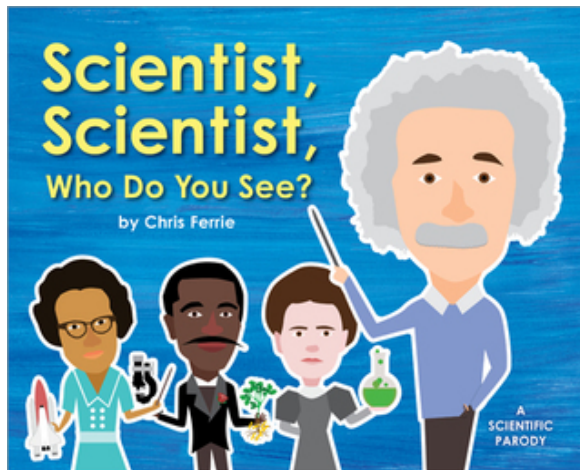
Illustrator: Stephen Taylor

Publication Year: 2001

Age Range: 3-6

Summary: A young girl and her grandfather set out one morning to find the perfect branch for Grampa to carve. Grampa says he's going to make a flute, but the girl is doubtful. She has been to a concert in the city, and knows what a flute looks like. How can her grandfather make one out of a tree branch? But Grampa knows what he is doing and, after finding the right branch, they return home, where he whittles away until the branch is no longer a branch, but a wonderful flute.

Set in rural Nova Scotia in one of Canada's oldest black communities, *Music from the Sky* captures the special relationship between a girl and her grandfather.



Scientist, Scientist, Who Do You See?

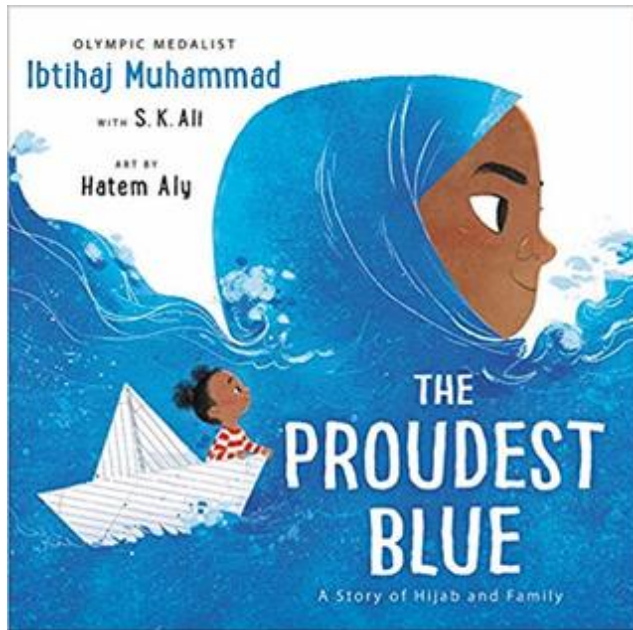
Author and Illustrator: Chris Ferrie

Publication Year: 2018

Age Range: 3-7

Summary:

This book provides young readers an introduction to great scientific and mathematical minds. Featuring diverse scientists in various fields over time, the book has the chemists, mathematicians, engineers and more to introduce each other by asking “Who do you see” in rhyming verse. This book proves to young readers that science is for everyone!



The Proudest Blue

Author: Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali

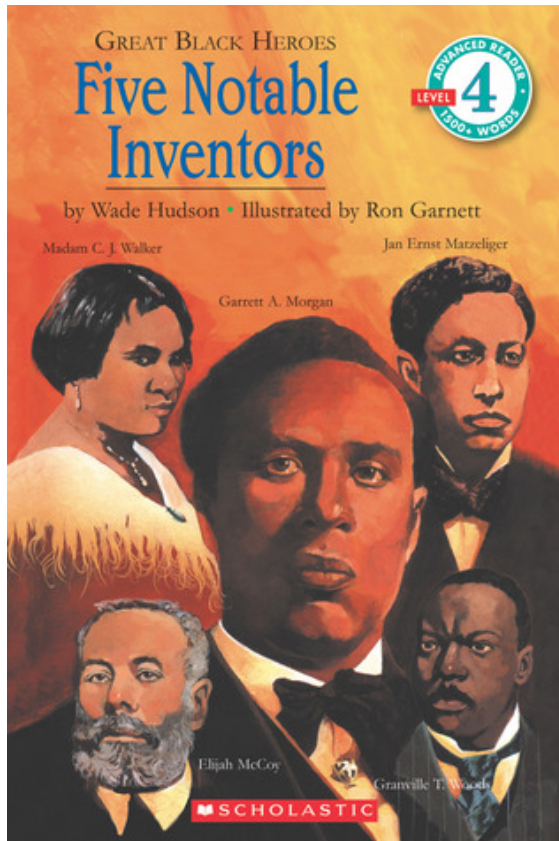
Illustrator: Hatem Aly

Publication Year: 2019

Age Range: All ages

Summary:

Author Ibtihaj Muhammad writes this book for young readers based on her own experiences openly expressing her faith, as a Muslim. Having experienced bullying for wearing a hijab, Muhammad writes to empower Muslim children in expressing their faith. The Proudest Blue follows a young girl named Faizah who is basking in the joy of her older sister Asiya's first day of hijab. Faizah, finds strength by looking forward to her own first day, as well as sharing her joy for her sister by making drawings, checking in on her sister, and finding inspiration in the colour blue.



Five Notable Inventors

Author: Wade Hudson

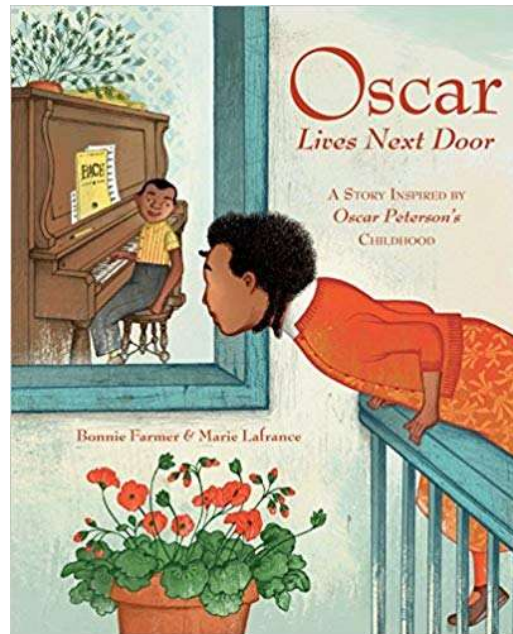
Illustrator: Ron Garnett

Publication Year: 1995

Age Range: Reading level 4

Summary:

This book chronicles the lives and achievements of five notable Black inventors, working in the late 1800s to the early 1900s, largely in the United States. Written for a level-4 reader (grades 2 to 4), the book features both artistic illustrations and historical photographs pertaining to each inventor. The biographies detail their lives growing up, the inspirations for the inventions as well as the hardships the inventors faced due to racism. All the inventors shared in common a pride in their inventions, a drive to solve a problem, and a commitment to their work. Though some of the inventors died in poverty or obscurity, the book highlights the importance of acknowledging their work and how modern-day society has been impacted by their ever-important inventions, and their contributions to society.



Oscar Lives Next Door: A Story Inspired by Oscar Peterson's Childhood

Author: Bonnie Farmer

Illustrator: Marie Lafrance

Publication Year: 2015

Age Range: 4-8

Summary: Long before Oscar Peterson became a virtuoso jazz pianist, he was a boy who loved to play the trumpet. When childhood tuberculosis weakened his lungs, Oscar could no longer play his beloved instrument. He took up piano and the rest is history: Oscar went on to become an international jazz piano sensation.

Oscar Lives Next Door is a fictional story inspired by these facts. The book imagines a next-door neighbor for Oscar named Millie, who gets into mischief with him but also appreciates his talents: Oscar hears music in everything, and Millie calls him a magician for the way he can coax melodies from his trumpet. Millie writes to Oscar during his long stay in the hospital for tuberculosis, and she encourages his earliest notes on the piano.

Set in Oscar's true childhood neighborhood of St-Henri — now known as Little Burgundy — the book provides a wonderful sense of this 1930s neighborhood where most of Montreal's Black working class population lived. Detailed digital illustrations make the community's culture and music almost tangible. The book concludes with a page of informational text about the author's own connection to Little Burgundy and a short biography of the jazz legend.



Play Mas'! A Carnival ABC

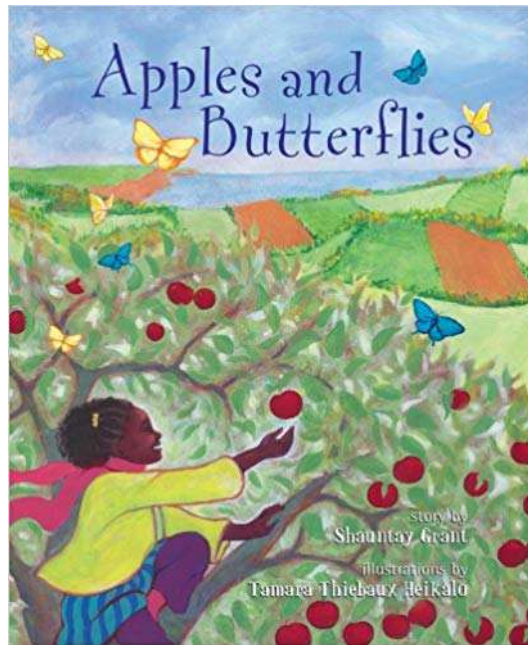
Author: Dirk Mclean

Illustrator: Ras Stone

Publication Year: 2000

Age Range: 0-6

Summary: Join us to jump up on J'ouvert morning! You are invited to Play Mas' and enjoy a Caribbean Carnival. Whether you are taking part in Trinidad or Toronto, Barbados or Brooklyn, Carnival is a joyous chance to sing, dance, and celebrate life. Carnival is rooted in the French tradition of the Masquerade (Mas'), transformed by African, East Indian, and Spanish culture. Originally, Carnival took place just before the season of Lent. Now, Carnivals are held in places around the world at different times of the year. In this book, each vibrant painting presents a different aspect of Carnival. Detailed information about the celebrations makes it a useful resource as well as an opportunity to share in the fun. There is even a hidden letter to find in each painting.



Apples and Butterflies: A Poem for Prince Edward Island

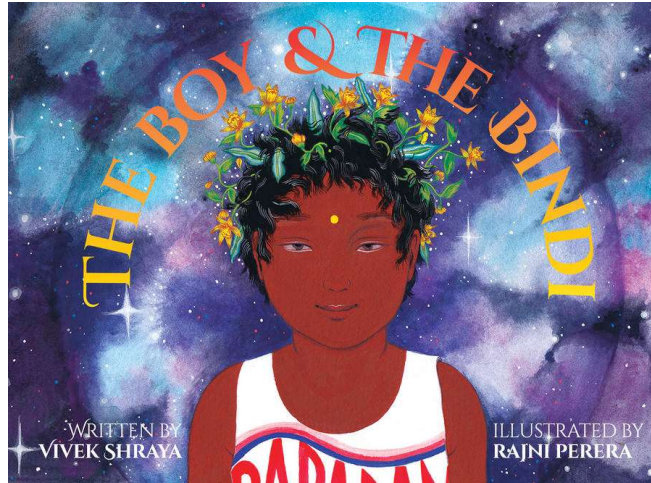
Author: Shauntay Grant

Illustrator: Tamara Thiébaux-Heikalo

Publication Year: 2012

Age Range: 4-8

Summary: From patchwork-quilt farmland to the winding red roads, from sandy beaches to the endless stars at night, Apples and Butterflies shows Prince Edward Island shining in the bright blue and gold light of fall.



The Boy & the Bindi

Author: Vivek Shraya

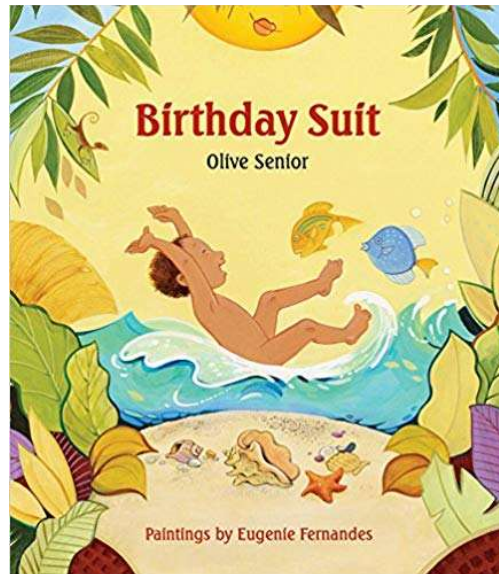
Illustrator: Rajni Perera

Publication Year: 2016

Age Range: 4-8

Summary: In this beautiful children's picture book by Vivek Shraya, author of the acclaimed *God Loves Hair*, a five-year-old boy becomes fascinated with his mother's bindi, the red dot commonly worn by South Asian women to indicate the point at which creation begins, and wishes to have one of his own. Rather than chastise her son, she agrees to it, and teaches him about its cultural significance, allowing the boy to discover the magic of the bindi, which in turn gives him permission to be more fully himself.

Beautifully illustrated with hand paintings by Rajni Perera, *The Boy & the Bindi* is a joyful celebration of gender and cultural difference.



Birthday Suit

Author: Olive Senior

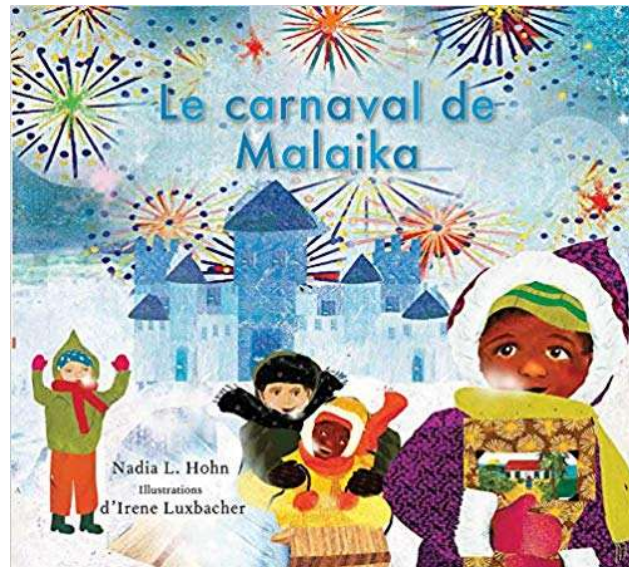
Illustrator: Eugenie Fernandes

Publication Year: 2012

Age Range: 3-6

Summary: Johnny loves nothing better than splashing in the ocean waves—naked. But Mom says now that he's four he's too old to run around without clothes on. She even buys him a pair of overalls with genuine 100 percent child-proof snap fasteners! But they're no match for Johnny as he wriggles out of them.

Johnny's father explains that big boys wear clothes. Doesn't he want to be big like Dad? As Johnny gazes up, he decides that wearing clothes may be a small price to pay to reach such heights. Everyone is happy as Johnny practices putting on his clothes. And now when he runs into the ocean, he makes sure to take his red swimsuit—but that doesn't necessarily mean he'll always wear it!



Le Carnaval de Malaika (French language version)

Author: Nadia L Hohn

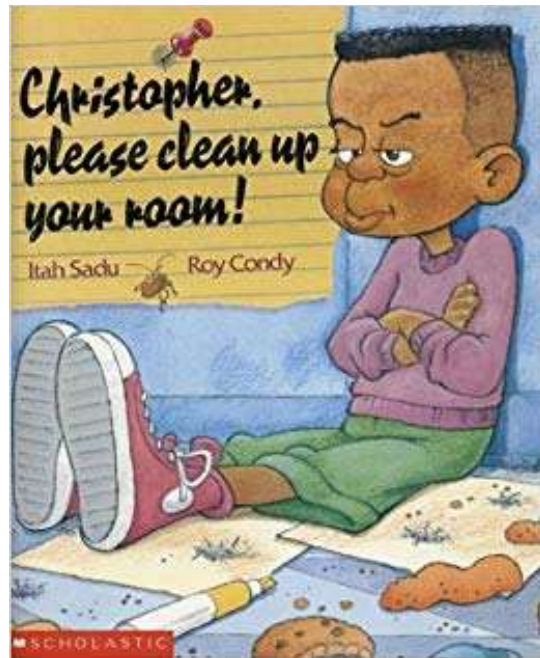
Illustrator: Irene Luxbacher

Publication Year: 2018

Age Range: 3-7

Summary: Malaika is happy to be reunited with her mother, but it means moving to Canada, where everything is different. It's cold in Québec City, no one understands when she talks and Carnival is nothing like the celebration Malaika knows from her home in the Caribbean! Will she be able to adjust to her new family and environment?

Nadia L. Hohn's prose, written in a blend of standard English and Caribbean patois, tells a warm story about the importance of family, especially when adjusting to a new home.



Christopher, Please Clean Up Your Room!

Author: Itah Sadu

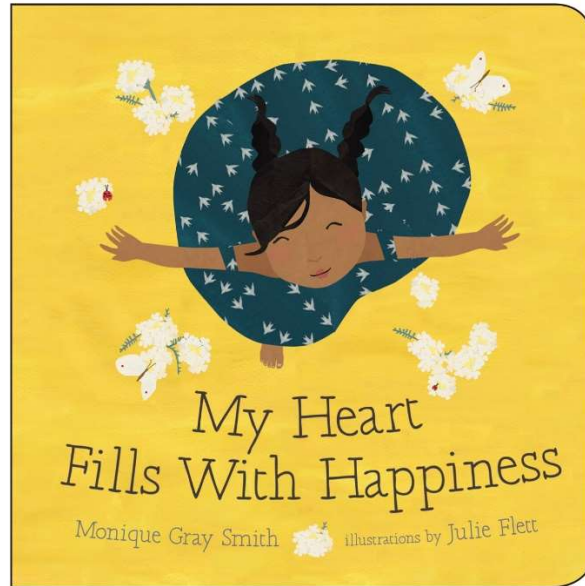
Illustrator: Roy Condy

Publication Year: 2013

Age Range: 5-8

Summary: Christopher is a good kid with one bad habit: he refuses to clean his room. He likes it that way, cheesy socks and all. Even the bugs don't want to stick around. Finally, the critters unite. The fish convince the cockroaches to send a message to Christopher: clean your room!

Itah Sadu's irresistible storytelling voice and Roy Condy's charming illustrations shine in this hilarious book that will appeal to anyone who has ever had a messy room - or lived with someone who has! This Canadian favourite is now available in a fresh new levelled format for growing readers.



My Heart Fills with Happiness

Author: Monique Gray Smith

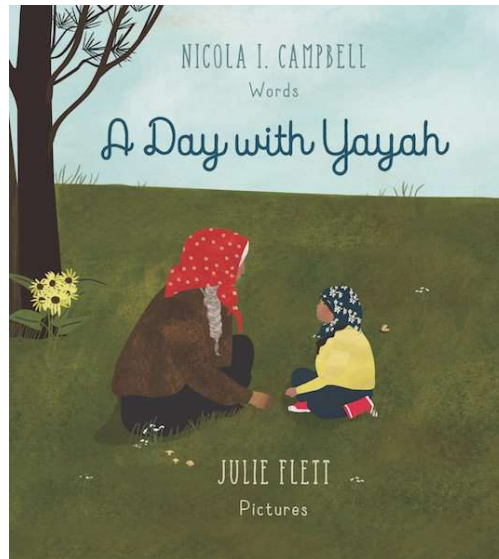
Illustrator: Julie Flett

Publication Year: 2016

Age Range: 0-2

Summary: The sun on your face. The smell of warm bannock baking in the oven. Holding the hand of someone you love. What fills your heart with happiness? This beautiful board book, with illustrations from celebrated artist Julie Flett, serves as a reminder for little ones and adults alike to reflect on and cherish the moments in life that bring us joy.

International speaker and award-winning author Monique Gray Smith wrote *My Heart Fills with Happiness* to support the wellness of Indigenous children and families, and to encourage young children to reflect on what makes them happy.



A Day with Yayah

Author: Nicola Campbell

Illustrator: Julie Flett

Publication Year: 2017

Age Range: 4-7

Summary: Set in the Okanagan, BC, a First Nations family goes on an outing to forage for herbs and mushrooms. Grandmother passes down her knowledge of plant life to her young grandchildren.