Nebraska Golden Sower Award Nominee Titles 2023-2024

A program of Nebraska Library Association

This nominee list is developed by a group of adult volunteers representing teachers and librarians across Nebraska. Local library or school officials are responsible for selecting books from these lists they feel are appropriate for the needs and interests of their patrons or students. **Voting eligibility requires student readers to have read or heard a minimum of four** of the current nominees from a category in which they will be voting: Little Bluestem, Honeybee, or Meadowlark.

2023-2024 Little Bluestem Nominees – Primarily intended for grades K-2.

Bathe the Cat by Alice B. McGinty, illustrated by David Roberts. Chronicle Books, 2002. ISBN 978-1452142708 [hardcover].

Cats + water: What could go wrong? This riotous romp of a picture book follows a frantic family as they try to get some chores done—with no help from the family cat, who keeps scrambling the list of chores to hilarious effect. Get ready for a rollicking read-aloud with a truly purrfect ending.

Bear is a Bear by Jonathan Stutzman, illustrated by Dan Santat. Balzer + Bray, 2021. ISBN 978-0062880512 [hardcover].

Bear is . . . a new friend, a fellow mischief-maker, a protector, and a dreamer. Through all the many ups and downs of a little girl's childhood, Bear is there to provide love and support. Until it is time to say goodbye . . . and hello again.

Chester Van Chime Who Forgot How to Rhyme by Avery Monsen, illustrated by Abby Hanlon. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2022. ISBN 978-0759554825 [hardcover].

Chester van Chime is usually the BEST at rhyming. He can normally tell you all about cats wearing hats and snails delivering mail, but today, something has changed. Today there's no dog on a log. No duck in a truck. Just a Pomeranian on a sideways tree and a waterfowl in a full-size pickup. What's a kid to do?!

Chez Bob by Bob Shea. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 978-0316483117 [hardcover].

Welcome to Chez Bob, which seems like a real restaurant...until you realize...it's on an alligator's NOSE! Bob's got a hidden plan for his customers: "Birds will come to eat, but I will eat the birds!" As they fly in from all over the world to dine on Bob's face, something starts to happen that takes the lazy, hungry reptile by surprise -- the birds stay. "More yummy birds!" he rejoices -- he'll want for nothing! But when the time is right, will Bob make the right choice?

Knight Owl by Christopher Denise. Christy Ottaviano Books, 2022. ISBN 978-0316310628 [hardcover].

Since the day he hatched, Owl dreamed of becoming a real knight. He may not be the biggest or the strongest, but his sharp nocturnal instincts can help protect the castle, especially since many knights have recently gone missing. While holding guard during Knight Night Watch, Owl is faced with the ultimate trial—a frightening intruder. It’s a daunting duel by any measure. But what Owl lacks in size, he makes up for in good ideas.

Milo Imagines the World by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 978-0399549083 [hardcover].

Two Hoots, 2022. ISBN 978-1529066326 [paperback]. Milo is on a train journey through the city with his older sister, looking at the faces of the other passengers and drawing pictures of their lives. Milo wonders if perhaps the little boy in bright white trainers is living in a castle with a moat and a butler. But when the little boy gets off at the same stop and joins the same queue as him, Milo realizes that you can't judge by appearances and that we are all more alike than we are different: both boys are visiting their mothers in prison.

Norman Didn't Do It!: (Yes, He Did) by Ryan T. Higgins. Disney-Hyperion, 2021. ISBN 978-1368026239 [hardcover].

Norman is a porcupine. Mildred is a tree. Norman and Mildred are best friends. Just the two of them. And only the two of them. But when a surprise pops up, life will never be the same again.

Not Yet by Kelly DiPucchio, illustrated by Claire Keane. Viking Books for Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 978-0593114070 [hardcover].

Monsters are loud. And rude. They like to smash things and they always need to be right. But not Yeti. Yeti bakes banana bread and sings to whales and always has a nice word to say. But sometimes you find yourself alone when you're different. And Yeti doesn't know there's a special surprise in store for him.

Something's Wrong!: A Bear, A Hare, and Some Underwear by Jory John, illustrated by Erin Kraan. Farrar, Straus and Giroux , 2021. ISBN 978-0374313883 [hardcover]. Jeff the bear has definitely forgotten something. He ate his breakfast, he watered his plant, he combed his fur…what could it be? Why does he feel so oddly off? So he asks his friend Anders the rabbit

what could possibly be wrong. It couldn't have anything to do with the fact that he's wearing underwear…over his fur...could it?

Time for Bed, Old House by Janet Costa Bates, illustrated by A.G. Ford. Candlewick, 2021. ISBN 978-1536209983 [hardcover]. Isaac is excited about having a sleepover at Grandpop's house, but he's a little nervous about being away from home for the first time. Luckily, his knowing Grandpop tells him it's not quite time to go to bed yet—first, he needs Isaac's help in putting the house to bed. Quietly and slowly, they move from room to room, turning out lights and pulling down shades, as Grandpop gently explains the nighttime sounds that Isaac finds unfamiliar. Now it's time to read the house a bedtime story (Isaac is good at reading the pictures). By the time the house is settled in for the night, Isaac and Grandpop are ready for bed, too.

2023-2024 Honeybee Nominees – Primarily intended for grades 3-5.

Across the Desert by Dusti Bowling. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2023. ISBN 978-0316494762 [paperback].

Twelve-year-old Jolene spends every day she can at the library watching her favorite livestream: The Desert Aviator, where twelve-year-old "Addie Earhart" shares her adventures flying an ultralight plane over the desert. While watching this daring girl fly through the sky, Jolene can dream of what it would be like to fly with her, far away from her own troubled home life where her mother struggles with a narcotic addiction. And Addie, who is grieving the loss of her father, finds solace in her online conversations with Jolene, her biggest—and only—fan.

Then, one day, it all goes wrong: Addie's engine abruptly stops, and Jolene watches in helpless horror as the ultralight plummets to the ground and the video goes dark. Jolene knows that Addie won't survive long in the extreme summer desert heat. With no one to turn to for help and armed with only a hand-drawn map and a stolen cell phone, it's up to Jolene to find a way to save the Desert Aviator. Packed with adventure and heart, *Across the Desert* speaks to the resilience, hope, and strength within each of us.

A Duet for Home by Karina Yan Glaser. Clarion Books, 2023. ISBN 978-0063290792 [paperback].

At first, June can't believe it: their new home is a *homeless shelter*?When she's told she can't bring her cherished viola inside, she's convinced the worst luck in the world landed her at Huey House.

But Tyrell has lived at Huey House for three years, and he knows all the good things about it: friendship, hot meals, and the music from next door drifting through the windows. With his help, June begins to see things differently. Just as she's starting to understand how Huey House can be a home, a new government policy threatens all the residents. Can June and Tyrell work together to find a way to save Huey House as they know it?

Imaginary by Lee Bacon, illustrated by Katy Wu. Harry N. Abrams, 2021. ISBN 978-1419746642 [hardcover].

Zach should've outgrown his imaginary friend by now. He knows this. He's 11, long past the days when kids are supposed to go on epic make-believe adventures with their invisible friends.

But after the death of his father five years ago, all Zach wanted was an escape from the real world. So his imaginary friend, Shovel, hasn't faded away like the other kids' have. Their imaginary friendship grew stronger. Still, Zach's now in middle school, and things are getting awkward. His best friend ditched him for a cooler crowd. His classmates tease him in the hallways. He still misses his dad. Reality is the worst. Which is why Zach makes regular visits to a fantasy world with Shovel.

But is Zach's overactive imagination helping him deal with loss or just pushing people away?

One Small Hop by Madelyn Rosenberg. Scholastic Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1338565614 [hardcover].

When Ahab and his friends find a bullfrog in their town -- a real, *live* bullfrog, possibly the last bullfrog in North America -- they have several options:A. Report it to the Environmental Police Force. Too bad everyone knows the agency is a joke.B. Leave it be. They're just a bunch of kids -- what if they hurt it by moving it?C. Find another real, live bullfrog on the black market. Convince their parents to let them bike to Canada. Introduce the two frogs. Save all of frogkind.Ahab convinces the rest of the group that C is their only real option. Because if they don't save this frog, who will? Their quest, which will involve fake ice cream, real frog spawn, and some very close calls, teaches Ahab that hope is always the logical choice and that science is always better with friends.With humor and empathy, acclaimed author Madelyn Rosenberg builds an all-too-imaginable future ravaged by climate change, where one kid can still lean on his friends and dream up a better tomorrow.

A Place to Hang the Moon by Kate Albus. Margaret Ferguson Books, 2022. ISBN 978-0823452460 [paperback].

It is 1940 and William, 12, Edmund, 11, and Anna, 9, aren't terribly upset by the death of the not-so-grandmotherly grandmother who has taken care of them since their parents died.

But the children do need a guardian, and in the dark days of World War II London, those are in short supply, especially if they hope to stay together. Could the mass wartime evacuation of children from London to the countryside be the answer?

It's a preposterous plan, but off they go-- keeping their predicament a secret, and hoping to be placed in a temporary home that ends up lasting forever. Moving from one billet to another, the children suffer the cruel trickery of foster brothers, the cold realities of outdoor toilets and the hollowness of empty stomachs.

But at least they find comfort in the village lending library-- a cozy shelter from the harshness of everyday life, filled with favorite stories and the quiet company of Nora Müller, the kind librarian. The children wonder if Nora could be the family they've been searching for. . . . But the shadow of the war, and the unknown whereaouts of Nora's German husband complicate matters.

Rez Dogs by Joseph Bruchac. Dial Books, 2022. ISBN 978-0593326220 [paperback].

Malian loves spending time with her grandparents at their home on a Wabanaki reservation—she's there for a visit when, suddenly, all travel shuts down. There's a new virus making people sick, and Malian will have to stay with her grandparents for the duration.

Everyone is worried about the pandemic, but Malian knows how to keep her family safe: She protects her grandparents, and they protect her. She doesn't go out to play with friends, she helps her grandparents use video chat, and she listens to and learns from their stories. And when Malsum, one of the dogs living on the rez, shows up at their door, Malian's family knows that he'll protect them too.

Told in verse inspired by oral storytelling, this novel about the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the ways in which Indigenous nations and communities cared for one another through plagues of the past, and how they keep caring for one another today.

Six Feet Below Zero by Ena Jones. Holiday House, 2023. ISBN 978-0823454693 [paperback].

Rosie and Baker are hiding something. Something big. Their great grandmother made them promise to *pretend she's alive* until they find her missing will and get it in the right hands. The will protects the family house from their grandmother, Grim Hesper, who would sell it and ship Rosie and Baker off to separate boarding schools. They've already lost their parents and Great Grammy--they can't lose each other, too.

The siblings kick it into high gear to locate the will, keep their neighbors from prying, and safeguard the house. Rosie has no time to cope with her grief as disasters pop up around every carefully planned corner. She can't even bring herself to read her last-ever letter from Great Grammy. But the lies get bigger and bigger as Rosie and Baker try to convince everyone that their great grandmother is still around, and they'll need more than a six-month supply of frozen noodle casserole and mountains of toilet paper once their wicked grandmother shows up!

Time Villains by Victor Piñeiro. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 978-1728245744 [paperback].

Javi Santiago is trying his best not to fail sixth grade. So, when the annual "invite any three people to dinner" homework assignment rolls around, Javi enlists his best friend, Wiki, and his sister, Brady, to help him knock it out of the park.

But the dinner party is a lot more than they bargained for. The family's mysterious antique table actually brings the historical guests to the meal…and Blackbeard the Pirate is turning out to be the worst guest of all time.

Before they can say "avast, ye maties," Blackbeard escapes, determined to summon his bloodthirsty pirate crew. And as Javi, Wiki, and Brady try to figure out how to get Blackbeard back into his own time, they might have to invite some even zanier figures to set things right again…

What Comes Next by Rob Buyea. Yearling, 2022. ISBN 978-0525648055 [paperback].

Twelve-year-old Thea and her family are moving to a new town for a fresh start--her parents' bright idea. To Thea, it feels like running away. She lost her best friend, Charlie, in a tragic accident, and in the painful aftermath, she has gone mute. Her two younger sisters, however, are excited about moving, especially after their dad promises that the family will get a rescue puppy. This doesn't change Thea's mind, though, until Jack-Jack bounds into her life and makes it clear that he is no ordinary dog. As she bonds with Jack-Jack, and as the dog's mischievous ways steer her toward someone she can confide in, Thea opens up to the possibility of new friendships and forgiveness, and comes to believe in what cannot be fully explained.

Willodeen by Katherine Applegate. Square Fish, 2024. ISBN 978-1250327970 [paperback].

The earth is old and we are not, and that is all you must remember . . .

Eleven-year-old Willodeen adores creatures of all kinds, but her favorites are the most unlovable beasts in the land: strange beasts known as “screechers.” The villagers of Perchance call them pests, even monsters, but Willodeen believes the animals serve a vital role in the complicated web of nature.

Lately, though, nature has seemed angry indeed. Perchance has been cursed with fires and mudslides, droughts and fevers, and even the annual migration of hummingbears, a source of local pride and income, has dwindled. For as long as anyone can remember, the tiny animals have overwintered in shimmering bubble nests perched atop blue willow trees, drawing tourists from far and wide. This year, however, not a single hummingbear has returned to Perchance, and no one knows why.

When a handmade birthday gift brings unexpected magic to Willodeen and her new friend, Connor, she's determined to speak up for the animals she loves, and perhaps even uncover the answer to the mystery of the missing hummingbears.

A timely and timeless tale about our fragile earth, and one girl's fierce determination to make a difference.

2023-2024 Meadowlark Nominees – Primarily intended for grades 6-8.

Alone by Megan E. Freeman. Aladdin, 2022. ISBN 978-1534467576 [paperback].

When twelve-year-old Maddie hatches a scheme for a secret sleepover with her two best friends, she ends up waking up to a nightmare. She's alone—left behind in a town that has been mysteriously evacuated and abandoned.

With no one to rely on, no power, and no working phone lines or internet access, Maddie slowly learns to survive on her own. Her only companions are a Rottweiler named George and all the books she can read. After a rough start, Maddie learns to trust her own ingenuity and invents clever ways to survive in a place that has been deserted and forgotten.

As months pass, she escapes natural disasters, looters, and wild animals. But Maddie's most formidable enemy is the crushing loneliness she faces every day. Can Maddie's stubborn will to survive carry her through the most frightening experience of her life?

Amari and the Night Brothers by B. B. Alston. Storytide, 2022. ISBN 978-0062975171 [paperback].

Amari Peters has never stopped believing her missing brother, Quinton, is alive. Not even when the police told her otherwise, or when she got in trouble for standing up to bullies who said he was gone for good.

So when she finds a ticking briefcase in his closet, containing a nomination for a summer tryout at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs, she's certain the secretive organization holds the key to locating Quinton—if only she can wrap her head around the idea of magicians, fairies, aliens, and other supernatural creatures all being real.

Now she must compete for a spot against kids who've known about magic their whole lives. No matter how hard she tries, Amari can't seem to escape their intense doubt and scrutiny—especially once her supernaturally enhanced talent is deemed "illegal." With an evil magician threatening the supernatural world, and her own classmates thinking she's an enemy, Amari has never felt more alone. But if she doesn't stick it out and pass the tryouts, she may never find out what happened to Quinton.

Daughter of the Deep by Rick Riordan. Disney Hyperion, 2023. ISBN 978-1368077934 [paperback] .

Ana Dakkar is a freshman at Harding-Pencroft Academy, a five-year high school that graduates the best marine scientists, naval warriors, navigators, and underwater explorers in the world. Ana's year culminates with the class's weekend trial at sea, the details of which have been kept secret. She only hopes she has what it'll take to succeed. All her worries are blown out of the water when, on the bus ride to the ship, Ana and her schoolmates witness a terrible tragedy that will change the trajectory of their lives.

The professor accompanying them informs Ana that their rival school, Land Institute, and Harding-Pencroft have been fighting a cold war for a hundred and fifty years. Now that cold war has been turned up to a full broil, and the freshman are in danger of becoming fish food. In a race against deadly enemies, Ana will make amazing friends and astounding discoveries about her heritage as she puts her leadership skills to the test for the first time.

Fallout: Spies, Superbombs, and the Ultimate Cold War Showdown by Steve Sheinkin. Roaring Book Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1250149015 [hardcover].

As World War II comes to a close, the United States and the Soviet Union emerge as the two greatest world powers on extreme opposites of the political spectrum. After the United States showed its hand with the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, the Soviets refuse to be left behind. With communism sweeping the globe, the two nations begin a neck-and-neck competition to build even more destructive bombs and conquer the Space Race. In their battle for dominance, spy planes fly above, armed submarines swim deep below, and undercover agents meet in the dead of night.

The Cold War game grows more precarious as weapons are pointed towards each other, with fingers literally on the trigger. The decades-long showdown culminates in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world's close call with the third—and final—world war.

Paradise on Fire by Jewell Parker Rhodes. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2023. ISBN 978-0316493857 [paperback].

Addy is haunted by the tragic fire that killed her parents, leaving her to be raised by her grandmother. Years later, Addy’s grandmother has enrolled her in a summer wilderness program. There, Addy joins five other Black city kids—each with their own troubles—to spend a summer out west.

Deep in the forest the kids learn new (and to them) strange skills: camping, hiking, rock climbing, and how to start and safely put out campfires. Most important, they learn to depend upon each other for companionship and survival.

But then comes a devastating forest fire…

Addy is face-to-face with her destiny and haunting past. Developing her courage and resiliency against the raging fire, it's up to Addy to lead her friends to safety. Not all are saved. But remembering her origins and grandmother's teachings, she's able to use street smarts, wilderness skills, and her spiritual intuition to survive.

The Shape of Thunder by Jasmine Warga. Storytide, 2022. ISBN 978-0062956682 [paperback].
Cora hasn't spoken to her best friend, Quinn, in a year.

Despite living next door to each other, they exist in separate worlds of grief. Cora is still grappling with the death of her beloved sister in a school shooting, and Quinn is carrying the guilt of what her brother did.

On the day of Cora's twelfth birthday, Quinn leaves a box on
her doorstep with a note. She has decided that the only way to fix things is to
go back in time to the moment before her brother changed all their lives forever—and
stop him.

In spite of herself, Cora wants to believe. And so the two former friends begin working together to open a wormhole in the fabric of the universe. But as they attempt to unravel the mysteries of time travel to save their siblings, they learn that the magic of their friendship may actually be the key to saving themselves.

Starfish by Lisa Fipps. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2023. ISBN 978-1984814524 [paperback].
Ever since Ellie wore a whale swimsuit and made a big splash at her fifth birthday party, she's been bullied about her weight. To cope, she tries to live by the Fat Girl Rules—like "no making waves," "avoid eating in public," and "don't move so fast that your body jiggles." And she's found her safe space—her swimming pool—where she feels weightless in a fat-obsessed world. In the water, she can stretch herself out like a starfish and take up all the room she wants. It's also where she can get away from her pushy mom, who thinks criticizing Ellie's weight will motivate her to diet. Fortunately, Ellie has allies in her dad, her therapist, and her new neighbor, Catalina, who loves Ellie for who she is. With this support buoying her, Ellie might finally be able to cast aside the Fat Girl Rules and starfish in real life--by unapologetically being her own fabulous self.

Ten Thousand Tries by Amy Makechnie. Atheneum Books, 2022. ISBN 978-1534482302 [paperback].
Twelve-year-old Golden Maroni is determined to channel his hero, soccer superstar Lionel Messi, and become captain of his soccer team and master of his eighth grade universe…especially since his home universe is spiraling out of orbit. Off the field, Golden's dad, once a pro soccer player himself, is now battling ALS, a disease that attacks his muscles, leaving him less and less physically able to control his body every day. And while Mom says there's no cure, Golden is convinced that his dad can beat this, just like any opponent, they just have to try.

Golden knows that if you want to perfect a skill you have to put ten thousand tries in, so he's convinced if he can put that much effort in, on and off the field, he can stop everything from changing. But when his dad continues to decline and his constant pushing starts to alienate his friends and team, Golden is forced to confront the idea that being master of your universe might not mean being in control of everything. What if it means letting go of the things you can't control so you can do the most good for the things you can?

Too Bright to See by Kyle Lukoff. Dial Books, 2022. ISBN 978-0593111178 [paperback].

It's the summer before middle school and eleven-year-old Bug's best friend Moira has decided the two of them need to use the next few months to prepare.

For Moira, this means figuring out the right clothes to wear, learning how to put on makeup, and deciding which boys are cuter in their yearbook photos than in real life. But none of this is all that appealing to Bug, who doesn't particularly want to spend more time trying to understand how to be a girl.

Besides, there's something more important to worry about: A ghost is haunting Bug's eerie old house in rural Vermont...and maybe haunting Bug in particular. As Bug begins to untangle the mystery of who this ghost is and what they're trying to say, an altogether different truth comes to light--Bug is transgender.

Year of the Reaper by Makiia Lucier. Clarion Books, 2021. ISBN 978-0358272090 [hardcover].

The past never forgets . . .

Before an ambush by enemy soldiers, Lord Cassia was an engineer's apprentice on a mission entrusted by the king. But when plague sweeps over the land, leaving countless dead and devastating the kingdom, even Cas' title cannot save him from a rotting prison cell and a merciless sickness.

Three years later, Cas wants only to return to his home in the mountains and forget past horrors. But home is not what here members. His castle has become a refuge for the royal court. And they have brought their enemies with them.

When an assassin targets those closest to the queen, Cas is drawn into a search for a killer...one that leads him to form an unexpected bond with a brilliant young historian named Lena. Cas and Lena soon realize that who is behind the attacks is far less important than why. They must look to the past, following the trail of a terrible secret--one that could threaten the kingdom's newfound peace and plunge it back into war.