Japanese Children's Books 2020

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JBBY Book Selection and Review Team

The JBBY Book Selection and Review Team collaboratively chose the titles listed in this publication. The name in parentheses after each book description is the last name of the team member who wrote the description.

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Akira NOGAMI
At Shogakukan, served as editor of First Grader monthly magazine, head of children’s books, company director, and finally president and CEO of Shogakukan Creative. Taught children’s literature and culture at Shirayuri University and Tokyo Seitoku University. His writings in Japanese include To the Modern Children’s Literature of Japan (Parorusha), Children’s Literature Crossing Borders (Nagasaki Shuppan), and Contemporary History of Children’s Culture (Otsuki Shoten). Coeditor of When I Was a Child, There Was a War (Rironsha) among others. Managing director of Japan PEN Club. JBBY vice president.

Yumiko SAKUMA
Translator, editor, reviewer of children’s books, representative of the Japan-Africa Children’s Books Project (JACBOP), and former professor at Aoyama Gakuin Women’s College. Her writings in Japanese include The Cooking Stoves of Enzaro Village (Fukuinkan Shoten). Her more than 250 translations of books from English to Japanese range from Charlotte’s Web by E.B. White and the picture books of Maurice Sendak to Refugee by Alan Gratz. Her translation of Last Summer with Maizon by Jacqueline Woodson made the IBBY Honour List. JBBY president.

For each selected title in this catalog, we provide the following:
Title in English
(Title in Japanese/Title in Romanized Japanese)
Author/Illustrator | Publisher | Publication Year | Number of Pages | Trim Size | ISBN | Target Age | Keywords
Basic Book Description (Last Name of Reviewer)
About JBBY and This Catalog

The Japanese Board on Books for Young People (JBBY) was founded in 1974 as the Japanese Section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).

JBBY is dedicated to enhancing international understanding, and to providing information on children’s books to people around the world. We promote IBBY’s mission in a broad range of ways. Our international network allows us to take advantage of the prolific information generated by IBBY and to encourage mutual understanding. Our mission is to create a peaceful future for children worldwide through books.

JBBY hosts international book exhibitions in Japan that provide information about global titles to Japanese readers. In addition, we provide information on Japanese children’s books to people around the world. We nominate titles for international recognition, as a means to deepen global understanding towards Japan.

In this catalog, we provide information about recent Japanese books recommended by a JBBY book selection and Review team in several categories: picture books, chapter books and novels, and nonfiction. In addition, we introduce Japanese winners of and nominees for the Hans Christian Andersen Award; books selected for the IBBY Honour List from Japan; and recent translations into Japanese recommended by JBBY.

We list the recent Japanese books by category and in order of target age, including cover images and synopses along with bibliographic information. We hope you will enjoy reading about these books. For further information, please contact us: info@jbby.org

Yumiko SAKUMA, JBBY President
Let’s Search for a Cool Place
(あついあつい／Atsui atsui)
Text/Illus. Taruishi, Mako | Fukuinkan Shoten | 2019 | 24 pp. | 22 x 21 cm | ISBN 9784834084610 | Ages 0+ | Penguins, Seals, Hippopotamus, Elephants

A penguin trots around sweating heavily and complaining, “It’s too hot!” Finally he finds a cool, shady spot, but then realizes it’s in the shadow of the seal’s body. So now the two of them go around looking for somewhere cool, and gain more friends along the way as the hippopotamus and the elephant join them in their search for a somewhere else cool. And eventually they reach the big wide ocean! As you turn the pages, children can guess which animal will appear next, and enjoy the rhythm of the words that are repeated. This is a cheerful picture book with a bright yellow background, and amusing pictures of the animals who are so hot they can’t stand it. (Shiozaki)

The Snail Taxi
(かたつむりタクシー／Katatsumuri takushii)

A young ant’s mother sees him and his father off from their fruit candy tin home as they take to their grandmother’s house. It starts to rain, so they take a snail taxi and enjoy the ride to Rocking Horse Park. Father and son enjoy the landscapes as the taxi climbs a mountain, crosses over on the underside of a bridge, and passes through a pond. Along the way they drink some juice at a juice stand, and eventually arrive safely at Granny’s house. It is interesting to see the world from the perspective of an ant, and fun to see how insects use leaves and mushrooms as umbrellas, and how they devise ways to convert bottles and flowerpots into their homes. (Doi)

Granny Bo-Peep
(いないいないばあさん／Inai inai baa-san)

This picture book is about a boy who goes for walks with his granny, but she keeps suddenly disappearing and reappearing somewhere totally unexpected. His granny pretends to be a mannequin in a show window, hides under a bridge and jumps out at him, poses on top of a statue in the park, hangs upside down behind the stairs, stands on top of a chimney, and suddenly appears out of a snowman. The pictures of the chubby granny as she goes to extraordinary lengths to surprise her grandson are amusing, and it’s fun to see the boy wide-eyed as he is continually being surprised. (Doi)

Little Shadow
(くろいの／Kuroi no)

On her walk home, a little girl encounters the small, completely black Little Shadow, which no one else can see. One day, the girl works up her courage and talks to Little Shadow, and it leads her down a lane and through a wall to a house. An adventure all their own begins, as the two climb from a storeroom into an attic room, where a mysterious play space awaits. This 64-page picture book is illustrated entirely with copperplate etchings. Detail and the black tone stimulate the senses, lending wonder to a pool of sunlight on the porch; a shadow in the storeroom; plants. Even the smell of the old house is evoked. Winner of the Nami Concours Purple Island Prize and Shogakukan Children’s Book Award. (Hiromatsu)

Maple Leaf Letter
(もみじのてがみ／Momiji no tegami)

A thrush brings a mouse a letter from beyond the mountains. Consisting of a single maple leaf, this letter brings tidings of winter. The mouse, gathering the squirrel and brown-eared bulbul, goes in search of maple leaves on the mountain where they live. At first, when they see something red, it turns out to be a mushroom or a camellia. But before long, a pure red scene of maple leaves spreads before them. The expansive, free illustration style brings the animal characters to life. Watercolor paintings with bleed and blur, involving a limited palette, make the reds stand out. A 2019 Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava winner, this book’s covers and endpapers also deserve close attention. (Hiromatsu)
The Mirage Picture Book
(まぼろしえほん/Maboroshi ehon)

Each page of this nonsense picture book begins with the words “Nobody knows but...” and follows up with startling revelations of strange things humans don’t realize, such as the moon really being a light bulb or a bear sleeping in a train. When a road is rolled up and taken away, the reader is left pondering what a road really is, while the image of a dog walking a human makes the reader reconsider the relationship between animals and humans. The allegorical illustrations are drawn with a warm touch and capture the humorous gap between the unique reality imagined here and the reality we know. (Doi)

The Ororon Parade
(おろろん おろろん／Ororon ororon)

This picture book is inspired by a sixteenth-century illustrated scroll called Night Parade of the One Hundred Demons. Here the parade of monsters and spirits is called Ororon. On the night of a red moon, the parent monsters and spirits go out for the Ororon Parade. Left behind at home, the children decide to do their own Ororon Parade. They call together their friends, sing and dance, make strange faces, and practice music. They start out in high spirits, but after a while they lose their way and become discouraged and uneasy. They are beginning to feel really scared when they have a pleasant surprise. It is a slightly scary but delightful book by an author known for painting pictures of monsters. (Sakuma)

Peace and War
(へいわとせんそう／Heiwa to senso)

As a teenager, the author was forced to flee from fire bombs during World War II, at which time he saw countless corpses. In this book, however, he neither shares those painful experiences nor talks about peace in abstract terms. Instead, he takes familiar things and actions that we take for granted and juxtaposes what they look like during a time of peace and a time of war. The book begins with a child’s decision to have a parade. Left behind at home, the parent monsters and spirits is called Ororon. On the night of a red moon, the parent monsters and spirits go out for the Ororon Parade. The children decide to do their own Ororon Parade. They call together their friends, sing and dance, make strange faces, and practice music. They start out in high spirits, but after a while they lose their way and become discouraged and uneasy. They are beginning to feel really scared when they have a pleasant surprise. It is a slightly scary but delightful book by an author known for painting pictures of monsters. (Sakuma)

The Pea-sized Boy Patufet: A Folktale from Catalonia, Spain
(まめつぶこぞうパトゥフェ／Mametsubu kozo Patoufe)
Text: Uno, Kazumi | Illus. Sasameya, Yuki | BL Shuppan | 2018 | 32 pp. | 29 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784776408628 | Ages 3+ | Folktale, Cow, Farm, Errand

Patufet is an active little boy who tries to do everything even though he is pea-sized. When his mother asks him to go and buy some saffron, he successfully fulfills his mission. To make sure no one steps on him, he sings “Patan, patine, paton” the whole way there. When he goes to take lunch to his father, however, it begins to rain. Patufet shelters under a cabbage leaf, but is swallowed by a cow that eats the cabbage. What does he do? The resourceful boy sings loudly inside the cow’s stomach so that his parents can find him and leaps out when the cow farts. The illustrations and text are fun and entertaining. (Sakuma)

Turning on a Flashlight
(かいちゅうでんとう／Kaichu dento)

I’m never scared in my room at night, even when it gets dark. I switch on my flashlight, and start exploring with my older brother. When I shine it on the wall, the light is round. If I go closer to the wall, the circle of light gets smaller. Light and shadows dance, and the room I thought I knew really well always looks completely different. Can you catch light? How far does light go? This picture book is mostly black and white, capturing the contrast between light and dark with a soft touch, making it easy for small children to understand the fascination of light. (Shiozaki)

Undies People
(パンツさん／Pantsu-san)
Text/Illus. Tanaka, Hikaru | Poplar | 2019 | 36 pp. | 31 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784591160497 | Ages 3+ | Underpants, Big, Small, People

Clay figures emerge from the mud wearing colorful undies. A giant hand appears and grasps a clay figure. The picture zooms out and we see that the man to whom the hand belongs is also a man wearing undies. He uses the figure to open a bottle and take a drink. The picture zooms out again, and an even larger man is stringing the man taking a drink on a chain as a pendant and fastening the pendant to his girlfriend’s neck. The picture zooms out again and the man and his girlfriend are being hung by their undies on the clothesline to dry by an even bigger woman dressed in undies. A sudden shower falls, and when it stops, we see that this whole world fits under the hand of a little girl playing in a sandbox. A nonsense book that challenges the reader’s sense of scale as absurd figures wearing undies grow ever larger from one page to the next. (Nogami)
**Gorobe in the Land of Mononoke**
(ゴロべえ もののけのくににひいく/ Gorobe monoke no kuni e iku)
Text/Illus. Otomo, Yasuo | Doshinsha | 2018 | 32 pp. | 21 x 23 cm | ISBN 9784494016297 | Ages 4+ | Mononoke, Samurai, Wit stories, Folklore

Long ago, there lived the strongest samurai in all Japan: Gorobe. He wanted to experience fear, an emotion he had never felt. On the advice of a Buddhist temple’s head priest, he journeyed to the land of *mononoke* (evil spirits). But though he happened upon a *mononoke* banquet, and a giant monster tried everything to scare him, he merely felt amazed or amused. Then, when he returned to the temple, a young monk offered to teach him fear. This folktale-like story of studying fear resembles some of the Grimms’ fairy tales. The ending has a witty twist upon a Buddhist temple’s head priest, he journeyed to the land of *mononoke* (evil spirits). But though he happened upon a *mononoke* banquet, and a giant monster tried everything to scare him, he merely felt amazed or amused. Then, when he returned to the temple, a young monk offered to teach him fear. This folktale-like story of studying fear resembles some of the Grimms’ fairy tales. The ending has a witty twist.

**A Japanese Summer**
(なっちゃんのなつかしい/ Nacchan no natsu)

O-Bon is a Japanese summer ritual of honoring one’s ancestors. On the day of O-Bon, a little girl named Nacchan goes alone to the riverbank, encountering plants and creatures. The kudzu vine tickles her heel so she laughs. The sunflower watches her with its round eye, seeming unwell today. From the shadows, Nacchan watches a grey heron move, sips some salvia nectar, and uses a four o’clock flower to paint her fingernails and nose. The reader shares in her enjoyment of the wind through the grasses, the discomfort of a mosquito bite, the loneliness of seeing a dead cicada fall. Prose poem-like writing and watercolor illustrations stimulate the senses as well as the emotions. This book portrays a full summer day when life and death intertwine.

**Little Frogs Play Hide-and-Seek**
(あまがえるのかえるねぶ/ Amagaeru no kakurenbo)

Three frog children are playing hide-and-seek in the grass, when all of a sudden one of them turns brown. The other two wash and scrub him, but his color remains stubbornly brown. They are wondering why when suddenly a heron swoops down from the sky. The shocked frogs freeze, and the heron moves away without noticing them. Through a fun story, this picture book informs the readers how as frogs grow, their bodies change color to blend in with their surroundings. The illustrator spent a number of years watching tree frogs breed, and her illustrations accurately capture the actions of the frogs. It is also fun discovering the other small creatures. (Sakuma)

**I’ve Started Playing Japanese Chess**
(しょうぎはじめました/ Shogi hajimemasita)
Text: Mabe, Kayo | Illus. Tanaka, Rokudai | Bunken Shuppan | 2019 | 32 pp. | 27 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784580823471 | Ages 5+ | Shogi, Traditional games, Board games, Grandfathers

Shogi, often called Japanese chess, is a traditional board game played by two people. In this book, the main character learns to play shogi at after-school recreation, but he always loses games to older students or his father. When summer comes, he goes to stay with his grandfather, an excellent shogi player, and asks him for lessons. Even readers who have not played shogi will be able to follow their story and absorb shogi rules, beginner practice methods, and winning strategies. While the book conveys the fun of shogi, it also shows with warmth the interactions between generations of a family. The cover and back cover turn into shogi pieces and a board, letting readers play right away! (Hiromatsu)

**The King of Circles**
(まるのおうさま/ Maru no osama)

The plate says, “I’m the roundest thing in the world. I am the king of circles.” No sooner have the words left his mouth than he falls from the shelf and shatters. A pair of cymbals laughs and declares that he’s the true king of circles. But as soon as he says so, he is crushed by a bouncing, rolling wheel. Many others, including a compass, an orange, and a record claim to be king. Finally, the Earth declares that they do not need a king of circles. He points out that there are countless stars in the universe that are even bigger than the sun. The last page encourages readers to draw their own circles, concluding with a graceful brush-drawn circle in black ink. The creative design and bright colors transmit the beauty, mystery and freedom of circles. (Doi)

**Let Me Tell You a Long Story**
(なんげばはじっちゃ しかへがな/ Nange hanashikko shikahegana)

Narrated in the Tsugaru dialect of Aomori in northeastern Japan, the book begins with the phrase “Let me tell you a long story.” The author relates many long tales such as that of a crown that caved each time a chestnut fell from a tree until the very last nut fell after a year and three days, a singing contest between a cicada and a turtledove, a snake who came out of a hole, a carpenter bee who flew out of a storehouse, kappa children who dived one by one into the water, and the loincloth of the thunder god. In the last story, a monk chants “Tagazugu, tagazugu” to make a hag grow until she reaches the clouds. The unusual northern dialect along with the Japanese-style illustrations make this book endless fun. (Doi)
The author takes his cat, Mitsu, for a walk in a spring field. Mitsu is dying, and the fresh brightness of the yellow daffodils is the author’s final gift for his beloved pet. The author holds Mitsu, who is now as light as a ball of fluff, through the dark and rainy night. At dawn, Mitsu closes his eyes as though squinting against the spring sunshine. The lives of all the little animals in the field full of dandelions are portrayed in colorful detail as if in celebration of Mitsu’s life. On the last page, Mitsu smiles. The gentle language and illustrations portray the departure of a little life from this world, profoundly touching the heart. (Nogami)

One day, Mr. Octopus comes over to Sho-chan’s house wanting to play. Sho-chan is hesitant, but Mr. Octopus turns out to be good at video games, soccer, and hide-and-seek. Everyone is impressed and praises him, but he is quite bashful. In the evening, Mr. Octopus goes back to the sea waving one of his eight legs. The exchanges between Mr. Octopus and the children are full of humor. A delightful picture book by an author nominated for the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award, who is an illustrator as well as editor and essayist. (Shiozaki)

A father lion with a mane like fire takes his five children for a walk through the African savanna to “see the wind.” Scattered across the broad panorama of the plain are many kinds of animals. The short manes of the giraffes flicker in the wind. A family of warthogs marches through the tall grass, holding their tails high. A black rhinoceros stands like a black stone in a sea of grass. The magnificent savanna and the animals that live there are depicted in bold brush strokes, and the dynamic images vividly convey the atmosphere of the wild kingdom and the movement of the wind. (Nogami)

A Japanese illustrator and author takes on a once-upon-a-time story from Bulgaria. A king orders such as a flying horse and a fine bridal garment to be brought to his daughter for her wedding. Three princes enter the competition, but the youngest prince proves honest and intelligent. Stumbling at times due to temptations, he nonetheless overcomes obstacles due to magical elements such as an alligator, an albatross, and an anteater, and crisp, rhythmic sentences such as “An alligator ate an apple,” the book entices readers into the world of words. Children can piece together each story as they discover many words and intriguing things in the colorful and detailed illustrations. (Shiozaki)
I Dream of a Journey
(ぼくのたび/Boku no tabi)

The main character in this book manages a hotel in a small town. Every day, he welcomes guests from around the world and listens to their stories. After work, when he climbs into bed, the wish to travel wells up inside him. Never having left town before, he travels to unknown places in his dreams. Then, a letter from a former hotel guest arrives, further stirring his desire to visit guests around the world. The illustrations, by an artist who ardently loves travel, are all lithographs. The softly layered, beautiful colors draw readers into the hero’s imaginary journey. This is the latest work by internationally renowned illustrator Akiko Miyakoshi, recognized at the Bologna Ragazzi Awards and by The New York Times/New York Public Library Best Illustrated Children’s Book Awards. (Hiromatsu)

It’s New Year!
(お正月がやってくる/O-Shogatsu ga yatte kuru)
Text/Illus. Akiyama, Tomoko | Poplar | 2018 | 32 pp. | 24 x 27 cm | ISBN 9784591160657 | Ages 6+ | New Year, New Year’s Eve, Lion dance

This picture book portrays traditional Japanese New Year customs. The protagonist is Naoko, who lives in a modern city where her husband manages a construction firm. As the year draws to a close, they buy a special lucky rake from a shrine, and then some materials for New Year decorations at Asakusa’s Gasa-ichi fair. They use these materials to make traditional decorations, which they sell to local people. When they’ve finished that, their family thoroughly cleans their house from top to bottom, she prepares the special New Year’s food, and on New Year’s Eve they eat buckwheat noodles as they see in the New Year. And once the New Year has started, in order to chase out bad luck, Naoko’s husband and others put on the Lion Mask and dance to the accompaniment of drums and flutes as they go around the neighbourhood wishing everyone a Happy New Year. (Sakuma)

Konton
(こんとん/Konton)

This picture book is never simply funny or sad. Its theme is konton—chaos!—and it grew from the Chinese legend of a mysterious monster. Having no name, the monster is no one. Since the monster is no one, it can be anything. Wait, it has ears but can’t hear? No, it has no ears, eyes, or mouth! But Konton is always looking up at the sky and laughing! This collaboration between a well-known novelist and manga artist exudes chaos in every way—with its text, illustrations, and even binding and printing. If read repeatedly, however, with an openness to the unknown, it gradually imparts joy, sadness, and beauty. (Hiromatsu)

Yamashita Doesn’t Speak
(やましいくんはしゃべらない/Yamashita-kun wa shaberanai)

The narrator of this book has a classmate named Yamashita, whose voice no one has heard. Yamashita makes mischief in class without speaking, and at the choir competition, he only lip-syncs. Shortly before elementary school graduation, on a parent observation day, Yamashita is due to present an essay. He brings a cassette recorder into the classroom and plays a recording of his voice. The author himself did not speak throughout the nine years of preschool and elementary school, and he based this book on an episode in his life. Written from the point-of-view of a girl classmate, the book shows Yamashita’s individuality and growth. The illustrator, also a manga artist, created facial expressions that convey nuanced emotional changes. (Hiromatsu)

The Boy of Yanbaru
(やんばるの少年/Yanbaru no shonen)

The word yanbaru refers to the original forest that covers the northern part of Okinawa island, the westernmost part of Japan. It is a treasure trove of rare animal and bird species threatened with extinction. To the children in this story, the forest is a natural playground where they climb trees, jump into the river, and fish. But the great trees are to be felled to build an American air force base for Ospreys. Local men and women protest by blocking the road to stop the bulldozers. The powerful illustrations convey from a child’s perspective the cruelty of razing this bountiful forest to build a military base. (Nogami)

The Imaginary Museum of Fossils
(空想化石はくぶつかん/Kuso kaseki hakubutsukan)

A young girl finds herself in a museum of mysterious fossils. The bones of a great dinosaur speak: “We have been waiting for you! Imagine us when we were alive, will you?” As the girl imagines, the fossils of an extinct species of coelacanth, the winged dinosaur Anchiornis, and other creatures from millions of years ago come alive, take on skin and color, and move! Inventory from the Oishi Fossils Gallery of Mizuta Memorial Museum, Tokyo, was used as the basis for creating this picture book. Realistic pencil drawings lead one to ponder how life on Earth has miraculously continued for such a long time. The end-matter includes a fossil guide. (Hiromatsu)
Kai and Tim’s Nighttime Adventures

It’s Kai’s sixth birthday. His Mom and Dad give him a soft-toy Tyrannosaurus, while Granny and Grandpa’s present is a picture book about dinosaurs. Kai’s Mom keeps telling him that now he’s six he’s a big boy, so he declares that from now on he will sleep alone. After his Mom has turned out the lights and left his room, he suddenly gets anxious, and sees a small ghost in the dimness.

“Who are you?” he asks. “Tim,” comes the answer. Kai thinks his toy tyrannosaurus must have spoken, so he asks it, “Tyra, can you talk?”, but it wasn’t his toy. It was a fairy called Tim, who is 422 years old and looks after children who are afraid of the dark and can’t sleep. Tim tells Kai that when you close your eyes, you can see places you’ve never been to and things you’ve never seen before.

Kai closes his eyes, and when he opens them again on Tim’s signal, he is in the Jurassic world of the dinosaurs. He rides on an iguanadon’s back and is targeted by a pterosaur. Now he can go on the bus, and also she’ll stop at a café on the way home and treat him to an ice cream. After her knees has been examined, Granny goes to the local shopping street to buy lots of things for the family. Tonta squeezes all of her purchases into her large rucksack. He hates walking around town with her carrying the rucksack since he thinks it looks uncool, but that’s all part of the outing and he has to put up with it.

Having been to the café and finished all the shopping, they are on their way to catch the bus home when Granny realizes that she has lost her walking stick somewhere along the way. Tonta runs around the town going to all the shops they visited. He eventually finds the stick in the hospital they’d been to first, and the doctor tells him that if Granny had forgotten all about the stick after leaving the hospital, then her knees must be healed. Tonta is so tired after all the running around that he has a nap on the bus on the way home. The final amusing twist is that Tonta belatedly remembers that he was supposed to meet his friend that day.

This is a fun book for children, as all the animals living in the town are humorously and amusingly depicted, and it conveys the heartwarming bond between Tonta and his Granny. (Nogami)
Garden of Wonder

(あららのはたけ/Arara no hatake)

This story unfolds through the letters exchanged between ten-year-old Eri, who has moved to Yamaguchi, and her friend Emi left behind in Yokohama. Through these letters we learn how Eri’s grandfather has given her a small patch of land where she grows strawberries and herbs. She writes all her thoughts to Emi, like how vigorously all the weeds grow even if you step on them; about a spider that only spins a temporary web when it senses a typhoon is about to hit; how her face swelled up when stung by hairs from caterpillars on the peach tree; and the feeling of being in contact with nature. The reader can appreciate the fresh amazement and wonder that a city-raised child feels upon moving to the countryside.

Emi tells Eri how she has studied about spiders and caterpillars thanks to her upon moving to the countryside. It is interesting to see how in this day and age Eri and Emi deepen their connection not by telephone or email, but by letters, and the story ends on a refreshing note when a frog jumps out of a box of vegetables that Eri sends Kenji, prompting him to step outside and begin to change. This book won the Joji Tsubota Prize. (Sakuma)

Angel’s Baggage

(天使のにもつ/Tenshi no nimotsu)
Ito, Miku | Doshinsha | 2019 | 224 pp. | 20 x 14 cm | ISBN 9784494020553 | Ages 11+ | Work-experience program, Middle school, Nursery school

Futa is in eighth grade and has to choose a workplace to visit for five days as part of his class work-experience program. None of the options offered appeal to him, but he chooses the Angel Nursery School assuming that he will spend his time playing with children. Things he never imagined begin to happen once he starts. The lively children refuse to leave him alone even when he escapes into the washroom, and the teacher keeps giving him more work to do. Although Futa claims he is a sloppy guy who leaves jobs half done and isn’t interested in anything, it gradually becomes clear that he is a kind and sensitive young man.

He cares for an abandoned puppy in his apartment complex even though he knows pets are against the rules. He worries about Shion, a five-year-old boy at the nursery school who seems strangely attached to him, and about his relationship with his mother. As he struggles to overcome various challenges, Futa begins to grow and change. His inner kindness, of which he is unaware, is drawn out by the nursery school teachers, Makun who is three years his senior, and the nursery school children. The way the adults and Makun interact with Futa and affirm his individuality is particularly heartwarming. The children’s acceptance of Futa as one of their own demonstrates how discerning children can be. The good feeling generated by the book lingers long after the reader is finished. (Shiozaki)

Artificial Soul

(つくられた心/Tsukurareta kokoro)

The story is set in the near future. A newly established model school not only offers small classes and high-tech facilities but also has a super security system to prevent cheating, bullying and violence. Each class has a guard-droid that looks and behaves just like one of the students, but is actually an android programmed with the same intelligence as a human and equipped with a built-in mike and camera through which the school can watch over the students. The androids each have their own personality and are indistinguishable from humans.

Mika comes to this new school with great expectations and makes friends with three students sitting near her. The students are forbidden to look for the guard-droid, but Mika’s class secretly tries to find out. Mika starts suspecting everyone. She and her group of friends visit the home of a girl who appears suspicious and closely observe a boy who never gets out of breath even when he runs a marathon.

But perhaps the guard-droid is really one of Mika’s friends. Are their smiles fake? Is one of them being operated by remote control and just pretending to have feelings? Is it all an act?

In the end, the students find out that even the guard-droid doesn’t know who the droid is, and its identity is never revealed. The author vividly conveys the frightening nature of a society in which everyone is watched and where it is impossible to tell the real from the fake. Artificial Soul warns us that the human mind could one day be subdued and controlled. (Sakuma)

Robert, the Cat Pediatrician

(ねこの小児科医 ローベルト/Nekono shonikai Roberuto)
Kiji, Kaeko | Illus. Igarashi, Daisuke | Kaiseisha | 2019 | 72 pp. | 21 x 19 cm | ISBN 9784033137704 | Ages 9+ | Cats, Pediatricians, Families

One night, Yuki’s two-year-old brother Yu suddenly vomits as he sleeps next to her, and he complains of stomach pain. Their parents don’t know what to do and can’t decide whether to call an ambulance.

Then, Yuki finds an entry in the phonebook for “Robert Matsuda, Emergency Night Pediatrician,” which is somehow glowing. Yuki finds this odd but calls the number. Soon, a doctor arrives on a small motorbike, wearing a small helmet and goggles. Dismounting in his white coat, he turns out to be a black and white cat! The cat doctor diagnoses a rotavirus, has Yu drink a rehydration solution, and tells the family what to do in case of further symptoms. Everyone is relieved. But the next morning, Yuki’s parents don’t remember the pediatrician at all! “Dr. Robert Matsuda helped us!” Yuki insists. “It’s Robert you mean, he’s over there,” Yuki’s mother says, pointing at a cat asleep in the living room.

Was the whole thing a dream? Yuki begins to doubt herself, but a week later, she wakes to see Robert talking on a cell phone and changing into his white coat. Robert does not return after that house call, and soon everyone but Yuki forgets him. A fantasy that skillfully explores the mysteries only children can see. (Shiozaki)
August Light
(八月のひかり／Hachigatsu no hikari)
Nakajima, Nobuko | Chobunsha | 2019 | 128 pp. | 20 x 13 cm | ISBN 9784811326061 | Ages 11+ | Families, Summer, Poverty, Food, War

One August day, hot from first thing in the morning, fifth grader Miki hangs laundry on the porch, slices carrots and cabbage, and makes grilled soba noodles to eat with her second-grade brother Yuuki. Yuuki gulps his portion of five bites, and Miki gives him her one bite. The two of them don’t have enough to eat. They go hungry for hours, but they never tell their mother. Their father, who was once kind, quit his job and began playing pachinko constantly. Then he started hitting their mother, and when Yuuki was three, he left. Miki and Yuuki’s mother works as a supermarket cashier, but her body is weak, and she can’t handle long hours. With little income, the family of three barely scrapes by. Miki takes her mother’s place cooking refrigerator leftovers into daily meals, but food runs low. Electricity costs money, so the family runs the air conditioner just an hour a day.

Yuuki tells Miki that at school, he’s been teased: “You’re basically living on school lunch, aren’t you?” “Do you ever take a bath?” Miki’s been told the same. Their mother was born when their grandmother was only 18, unmarried, and grew up in poverty herself. The cycle seems unbreakable. In the midst of this, Miki and Yuuki’s determination and the support of one friend of Yuuki’s and his dad, is what keeps them going. The end of the book includes the note, “In Japan today, one in seven children under 17—about 2.7 million young people—can be found living in poverty.” This novel brings their struggle to life. (Nogami)

Kofuji the Cat: Number 3 Ash Street
(ねこのこふじさん／Neko no Kofujisan)

Kofuji the cat once worked very hard at an advertising company. When her coworkers began to treat her coldly, however, she quit her job. Now she stays at home, never leaving the house. One day, however, her grandmother asks her to take care of her house on Ash Street while she travels around the world. Instead of rent, she asks Kofuji to plan a monthly event, each one befitting the month in which it is held.

Although reluctant at first, Kofuji plans a picnic under the cherry blossoms in April, a seasonal change of clothing in May, plum juice-making in June, a star festival in July, fireworks in August, moon viewing in September, chestnut gathering in October, a festival for children aged three, five and seven in November, wreath making in December, making traditional New Year’s dishes in January, bean throwing in February, and a dolls’ festival in March. The neighbors on Toneriko Street are a diverse group of characters. There is a tapir who moved back from overseas and thinks she has to conform to fit in, a young fox who throws tantrums because she’s upset that her mother has a new fox cub, and an elderly monkey living on his own. Through her interactions with these different neighbors, Kofuji gradually perks up and by the end of the year, she has decided to start weaving traditional textiles.

Each monthly event is described by Nezumori, the postmouse who lives in the cupboard of her house. His own story also unfolds within this book, and the last scene is his wedding, which is attended by all the characters who have appeared, including Kofuji’s grandmother who has returned from her travels. With one story per chapter and plenty of illustrations, the book is easy and entertaining even for children unused to reading. (Sakuma)

Happy Tokoi
(ゆかいな床井くん／Yukai na Tokoi-kun)
Tomori, Shiruko | Kodansha | 2018 | 192 pp. | 20 x 14 cm | ISBN 9784065139059 | Ages 11+ | School, Point of view, Humor

This novel vividly portrays a year in the class of two Japanese sixth-grade students: Koyomi, a girl, and Tokoi, a boy.

One episode unfolds per chapter. In one episode, a boy named Toya blurts out that a student teacher has large breasts. In another, a girl named Omori realizes in the school bathroom that she’s gotten her period and doesn’t know what to do. Another girl, Suzuki, can speak freely at cram school but struggles to speak at school. Katsuta’s father has lost his job and unfortunately takes his stress out on her, so she takes her stress out on her classmates. Many different stories fill the class.

For her part, Koyomi is the tallest student and has been called “Giant” and “Amazon Woman,” but the shortest student in the class, Tokoi, once expressed jealousy of her, saying, “I wish I could be tall.” Now, nobody makes fun of height. Koyomi often feels pressured by classmates but dislikes playing along with them; in contrast, Tokoi voices his thoughts freely and finds the good in everyone. Koyomi gradually comes to admire Tokoi; when something happens, she considers it, observes Tokoi’s reaction, and takes a step toward trying someone else’s point of view.

Humorously narrated and filled with the appeal of Tokoi, this book keeps readers turning pages and offers them the appeal of new viewpoints. Winner of the Noma Children’s Literature Prize. (Sakuma)

Luna and Sango
(月と珊瑚／Runa to Sango)

Sango Oshiro is in the sixth grade at an elementary school in Okinawa. Her name, which means “coral,” was chosen by her grandmother in honor of the coral, as well as the blood and tears, upon which the island of Okinawa was built. But the Chinese characters for “sango” are quite difficult, and Sango, who hates studying, has trouble writing her name. Her classmate Shion Mizuhara teases her about this. To improve her writing ability, Sango decides to keep a diary. Through her entries, we learn what happened in Okinawa during and after World War II and the issues surrounding the American military bases on the island.

Because Sango’s mother, a hair dresser, works in Kyushu, Sango lives with her grandmother who performs traditional Okinawan songs in pubs. But they are so poor that Sango cannot afford a smartphone like her friends and sometimes has to use a meal program for disadvantaged children that charges only one hundred yen (about US$1.00) per meal.

American fighter jets frequently fly over the school with a deafening roar that throws Shion into a panic but sets the boys guessing the type of aircraft from the engine sound. The great-grandmother of Sango’s classmate has been arrested numerous times for demonstrating against the construction of a military base in Henoko. When Sango learns that her own great-grandmother was forced to work in the brothels due to poverty, she is devastated. She is helped, however, by the arrival of Luna Izumi, a student who transfers in from another area. This ambitious work sheds light on the history of war, the vicious cycle of poverty, the background to the military bases in Okinawa, and the current situation. (Nogami)
This story is about a family who moved to Nemuro in Hokkaido following the great earthquake and tsunami that hit their hometown of Kesennuma, Miyagi prefecture, six years earlier in 2011, narrated from the perspective of eleven-year-old Kaito. Kaito’s father is a boat builder, and he shows the local youths the techniques he uses. Kaito and his six-year-old brother Hikaru attend the local elementary school, which has only 13 pupils. At school they have to draw a picture of a mackerel pike, and their drawings will be made into a calendar to sell at the festival. However, Kaito is terrified of the fish’s eyes and can’t bear to look at it. One day, his mother disappears, and Kaito and his father go to his grandmother’s house in Sendai in search of her. When they find her there, she tells them she has been trying so hard to keep her life going that she is worn out. She had come to see Granny out of a need to reconnect with people she holds dear.

Before returning to Nemuro, the three of them go to Kesennuma and his father vows to rebuild his boat-building workshop. However, Kaito feels that Nemuro is home too, and he studies mackerel pike so that he can draw them. He sees thin seagulls swallowing the fish, the catch being brought in as the sun comes up, and visions of boats and Spanner, the dog they lost in the disaster. Finally he is able to draw a picture of a fish.

A Vietnamese trainee whose father used to work in Nemuro comes to see Kaito’s father’s workshop, prompting us to consider what family means. Kaito’s thoughts about life and death are symbolically portrayed through the seagulls that appear throughout the book. The bold illustrations in India ink provide a lively portrayal of people going energetically about their lives. (Doi)

The story follows the relationship of a boy and his grandfather, Tokujiro. Stubborn and cantankerous Tokujiro is a widower who lives alone and is hard of hearing. He has three daughters including the boy’s mother but when they and their families come to visit during the summer, Tokujiro just sits silently in front of the TV.

Yet this same taciturn and difficult old man teaches the boy how to make bamboo-copters, takes him beetle hunting in the woods, and teaches him the wonders of nature. The boy is fascinated by his grandfather’s stories. Born in 1923, the year of the Great Kanto Earthquake, his grandfather was a rebellious boy of whom even his parents despised. Although a poor student, he excelled at sports. He and his friends had dangerous stone-throwing fights and snuck into other people’s fields and orchards to steal tomatoes, loquats and oranges. If they had been caught, they would have met a horrible fate, Tokujiro tells the boy.

The life of this stubborn old man whom the boy loves dearly is vividly and richly portrayed from the boy’s perspective, including the old man’s gradual demise after a heart attack. The man’s boyhood and way of living overlap with the family’s history, linking with the boy’s present life. Tokujiro’s unique approach to living is scrupulously portrayed through his interactions with his grandson, his experiences during the war, and the family’s response to nursing him after his heart attack. Each memory of Tokujiro is a precious gift that enriches the boy’s life. (Nogami)

In the year 1800, a 56-year-old man named Tadataka Ino walked the island of Hokkaido in order to survey and map it for the first time. This documentary-like novel follows a fictional 12-year-old boy named Heiji who travels with Ino on this journey. Heiji’s reason for accompanying Ino is that he received news that his father died in Hokkaido, and he wants to confirm this with his own eyes. Ino’s real son, Shuzo, is on the journey, too, and appears in the story.

Ino runs into trouble crossing the Tsugaru Strait between Japan’s main island, Honshu, and Hokkaido; he also struggles with measurements for the map. For his part, using a piece of wood given him by an indigenous Ainu person, Heiji finds a letter from his father and learns that he fell off a cliff and was picked up in nearby waters by a Russian vessel.

At the end of each section of the book, a column with text and diagrams presents background information on Ino’s life; early studies of the West by Japanese; and the fine reputation of Ino’s Hokkaido map today. In one memorable passage of the book, Ino—who only became a scholar at age 50, yet left a significant legacy—scolds Heiji for filling in blanks in mapping logs with numbers that seem apt. “Filling in numbers you want doesn’t make them right!”

This book can function as a biography of Ino, an introduction to the Edo period, and even an absorbing primer on cartography. In addition, with Heiji as the main character, the book reads as a story of sons and fathers: Shuzo and Ino, Heiji and his missing father. The ghost fish in the subtitle turns out to be the shape of the cliff where Heiji discovers his father’s letter. (Doi)
Daichi, and gets irritated when he is criticized by his team mates for saying cruel things to him. When he comes across the public bathhouse where he used to go with his late grandfather as a little boy, he decides to go in and feels his irritation melt away as he soaks in the hot water. After this he goes to the bathhouse regularly, and it not only becomes a place of healing for him, but he also begins to see things from a new perspective as he chats with the people he meets there. He comes to understand that even Daichi, who he used to resent for being able to do everything well, has a big problem of his own.

Most of the regular customers at the bathhouse are local elderly people, but there are also young people too. A plasterer called Hiro, who grew up in a children’s home, has been blessed with a good boss and does his best at work. Kona is a high school student obsessed with bathhouses, and she posts on Instagram about their attractions.

However, after 77 continuous years of business through two generations of ownership, the bathhouse is finally to close down. The old couple who run the place can no longer cope with burning the wood to heat the water. On closing the place, they assure readers that they will continue to go into the bathhouse along with the regulars. But then there is a power cut . . . Readers are sure to sympathize with the efforts of the regulars to support the business right until the end. (Sakuma)

Kona is a high school student obsessed with bathhouses, and she posts on Instagram about them. These days, and the public bathhouses that are now slowly disappearing.

Shuto and the others to support the business right until the end. (Sakuma)

This interesting story links soccer, which is all the rage among children these days, and the public bathhouses that are now slowly disappearing.

Shuto, a junior high school student who belongs to the soccer club team, is shocked when he is replaced as captain by newcomer Daichi, and gets irritated when he is criticized by his team mates for saying cruel things to him. When he comes across the public bathhouse where he used to go with his late grandfather as a little boy, he decides to go in and feels his irritation melt away as he soaks in the hot water. After this he goes to the bathhouse regularly, and it not only becomes a place of healing for him, but he also begins to see things from a new perspective as he chats with the people he meets there. He comes to understand that even Daichi, who he used to resent for being able to do everything well, has a big problem of his own.

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The summer between semesters of her third year in middle school, Okyo is taken by her mother to a small island where her grandmother lives. Until now, the island has been a place for family vacations, but this time is different. Okyo is staying with her grandmother due to her parents’ divorce. Not fully understanding the adults’ problems, Okyo believes that she has been cast off. Anxiety and anger envelop her, leaving her lost.

When told by her grandmother to go and harvest a watermelon in the field, she sees a strange boy who calls himself Tsuchinko. He’s shaped like a human, but his head has no hair, and his face is smooth like a mud dumpling. Tsuchinko refers to watermelons as “green whales that swim in summer,” and he teaches Okyo how to find a ripe one. Tsuchinko is only visible to children who feel alone and who struggle; he says that he helps them grow up, then gets forgotten. Besides Okyo, a boy named Kai whose mother died, who refuses to leave his house, can see Tsuchinko; and Okyo’s sensitive cousin Manami can see Tsuchinko. Over the course of the book, these three adolescents weather the storms in their hearts. Okyo learns that her mother, exhausted from life with her father, has huge mental scars of her own. Thought at first able to think only of herself, Okyo gradually grows able to see other people’s perspectives and understand their feelings. A coming-of-age novel that portrays one summer and three vulnerable children. (Shiozaki)
Unofficial Tales of the Moribito

Balsa, now in her late thirties, is a bodyguard second to none. One day she is at the market with her husband Tanda, a herbalist, when she runs into the group Sadan Taram and saves them from a dangerous situation. Sadan Taram is a group of musicians that travels through the plains of Lota carrying out rites for the repose of the souls of the dead with song and dance. Balsa and her late foster father Jiguro had in fact escorted them on their travels twenty years earlier. As a result of this incident, Balsa is again employed as Sadan Taram’s bodyguard, and sets out for Lota.

The group’s young female leader, 19-year-old Eona Le Sari, has a special power of playing the shata, a “river koto,” to open the way to the spirit world. Balsa suspects that Sari might be Jiguro’s daughter and she tries to open up to her band mates. She finds that sharing her past helps her feel more delicate inner lives of the protagonists and their feelings for their friends. Hisui and Takuma are sister and brother in the same year. Their homeroom teacher is passionate about teaching reading and makes her class compete for the number of reading record cards on the books they read.

Takuma sails through even difficult books, but Hisui is so bad at it that she can’t even get through text books. Even so, the teacher seems to think she is a top student who loves reading, and this makes her anxious. Meanwhile Riki hates boys and girls being segregated and is determined that people should be themselves. She refuses to hand in her reading record cards as she feels it infringes upon her privacy, and she openly confronts the homeroom teacher over the issue. Takuma was adopted by Hisui’s family after he lost his own parents, and he is confused when a woman resembling his birth mother appears. Riki happens to get together with Takuma at summer camp, and somehow they get along well and she shares his troubles. Koharu, the class president who tends to overeat and makes out he’s a straight A student, and Rumina, who nobody can along well and she shares his troubles. Koharu, the class president who tends to overeat and makes out he’s a straight A student, and Rumina, who nobody can understand has a chemical allergy, make an odd pair. Each of the five have their own various burdens, and they struggle against old values while being aware of each other’s existence. The words of another student called Koharu, who has moved from another school and has a reading and writing disability that nobody understands, leave a particularly strong impression: “Hey, you all, don’t die! Keep on living, okay?” (Nogami)
Power Lines in the Sky

Power lines supported by tall metal poles are found in the sky all over Japan. This book introduces the job of lineworkers, who inspect power lines as high as 50 meters off the ground. To keep safe, lineworkers use special tools and clothes and call out to one another, working carefully as a group. A foldout page in this book shows the poles’ height; panels in the illustrations evoke the feeling of tension and bring one close to the action. Info-packed endpapers also make the book effective. Illustrations of the mechanical elements are accurate yet warm, inviting the reader to absorb all the details of electrical work. (Hiromatsu)

Radiolarians: Tiny, Wondrous Beings

Radiolarians are single-celled marine organisms just a few millimeters in length. They have lived on Earth for five hundred million years, but their skeletons are complex and beautiful, displaying a breathtaking diversity of shapes. Some structures even look like rockets, spider webs, or eyeglasses! This book shows photos of radiolarians’ skeletons enlarged by electron microscope, displayed as striking white shapes on black background. After drawing readers in with these nature-made designs, the book delivers another surprise: radiolarians are made from the same ingredients as glass! The book’s unique composition effectively emphasizes the visual. The photos captivate readers, causing them to notice nature and want to learn more. The end-matter features detailed information on radiolarian habitat and research. (Hiromatsu)

Sea Cucumber Paradise

They have neither eyes nor ears nor nose, nor heart nor brain. Rub them and they disintegrate, but a few weeks later they’re back. Cut them in half, and two grow! Sea cucumbers challenge our very concept of living creatures. They do not flee, hide, or fight; they may eat nothing but sand, and then excrete the unnecessary bits. As this book describes them from various angles, they come to seem very peaceful, simple creatures. Learning how a being wholly different from oneself lives, leads readers to a reverence that is the hidden message of this work. The writer is a biologist known in Japan for the bestseller Elephant Time, Mouse Time. The artist’s bold, humorous illustrations show her affection and respect for sea cucumbers. The end of the book features music notation for a song, all about sea cucumbers! (Hiromatsu)

Adzuki Beans

When it comes to adzuki beans, the first thing that comes to mind is sweet bean paste. Sweet bean paste has many uses, such as a filling in a bread bun and in sweet red-bean soup. Adzuki beans are also used in the red bean rice made for special occasions. Since ancient times red has been considered a lucky color that protects us from evil, and Japanese people have always eaten a lot of adzuki beans hoping to benefit from their auspicious powers. What sort of plant is this adzuki bean that has underpinned our eating habits in various ways? This is an educational book that provides realistic depictions of the stages of the bean’s growth, and makes you think about the place of this familiar ingredient in Japan’s food culture. (Shiozaki)

The Life of Sardines

The spawning season for sardines is from winter through spring. One female can lay tens of thousands of eggs in a night, but sardines have many natural enemies in the ocean. Only a few of the young can survive. The sardines that overcome danger and reach adulthood form a shoal. Sardines are small and weak, and living in a group is an instinct and knowledge necessary for them to live in harsh nature. The author, who illustrates living creatures and science for reference books, provides a minutely detailed portrayal of the life of sardines in the setting of the solid blue ocean. This is an educational book on how life is born and grows, and on the importance of connecting. (Shiozaki)
A Stick Insect Is Born!
(うまれたよ！ナナフシ／Umareta yo! Nanafushi)
Text/Photos: Yasuda, Mamoru | Iwasaki Shoten | 2019 | 32 pp. | 29 x 25 cm | ISBN 9784265020805 | Ages 5+ | Birth, Insects

This is a picture book about the stick insect, whose body is often mistaken for a twig. We see how the newborn nymph sheds its skin to grow to its adult size, eats leaves, poops, reaches adulthood, lays eggs, and dies, and then how eggs hatch and a nymph is born, through clear close-up photos and simple text that even infants can understand. We can feel the life force of the stick insect in photos of a newly hatched nymph that looks like it could easily be blown away in the breeze as it climbs up a tree. This series also features small cabbage white butterflies, ricefish, crayfish, grass lizards, and hermit crabs, all of which are captured in photos and text from the moment of their birth. (Doi)

Seabird Island
(うみどりの島／Umidori no shima)

Hokkaido’s Teuri Island, located in the northern Sea of Japan, has a circumference of just 12 kilometers and a population of only 300 people, but it annually welcomes some 1 million seabirds who migrate there to raise young. It is known as a seabirds' paradise. This picture book portrays a year on the island in terms of both seabird and human life. The author, who moved to the island as a grade school teacher and then become a nature photographer, has lived there for nearly 40 years. The illustrator, who worked as a zookeeper for 25 years, has also been captivated by the island’s rich natural world and has visited often. His unique perspective and bold composition and color scheme evoke dynamic wild creatures going about seasonal tasks. (Hiromatsu)

Icicles: Water, Cold, and the Power of the Earth
(つらら／Tsurara)

This picture book introduces the icicles we often see in a cold winter through stunning photographs. How are they formed? Why do they grow so long? Their changes in appearance are explained in simple terms using beautiful photographs. Readers are informed that there are places where we can still see icicles in spring, caves where they can be seen all year round, and sometimes ice sprouts up from the ground like bamboo shoots. There are several appendices, including instructions on how to conduct an experiment to grow icicles in the refrigerator using familiar items such as cup noodle containers, and a map showing the various names for icicles in different dialects around Japan. (Sakuma)

Jumping Spiders: The Small Hunter
(ハエトリグモ／Haetorigumo)

Jumping spiders are found almost everywhere, both inside and outside the home. Unlike many other spiders, jumping spiders do not build webs to trap their prey. Instead, they use their eight round eyes to spot and pounce on small insects. When observed at close range, jumping spiders resemble crabs, while in zoom shots, they look like monsters. And when the camera zooms even closer, they resemble owls. Mating for jumping spiders is a life-and-death business. A female may eat a male if she dislikes his mating dance. This book is full of surprises as it introduces a world invisible to the naked eye and uncovers the mysteries of this small life form. The impressive mini-encyclopedia in the appendix introduces fifteen different types of jumping spiders. (Nogami)

What Are Stones Made Of?
(石はなにからできている？／Ishi wa nani kara dekite iru?)
Text: Nishimura, Hisao | Photos: Takeda, Shinichi | Editing/concept : Bokoyama, Kurita | Iwasaki Shoten | 2018 | 32 pp. | 27 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784265043743 | Ages 6+ | Stones, Earth, Plate tectonics (geoscience)

Photos and simple, non-technical text depict how stones are formed. Eight different kinds of stones are featured, each with its own page that includes a closeup photograph and easy descriptions such as “a sparkly white stone.” The book concludes with the words “The Earth has mountains, rivers and seas and many more kinds of stone” and a beautiful portrait of the Earth taken from the moon, suggesting that to know stones is to know the universe. The appendices include the scientific names of stones and their classifications, as well as information about atoms, the smallest components of stone and other materials. (Doi)

The Life of Sparrows
(スズメのくらし／Suzume no kurashi)
Text/Photos: Hirano, Nobuaki | Fukuinkan Shoten | 2019 | 40 pp. | 26 x 20 cm | ISBN 9784834084429 | Ages 8+ | Sparrows, Life, Group living

We can see sparrows everywhere: around our house, in the streets, in the park, in the fields, and on the plains. Even though they are such a familiar creature, few people know much about their habitat or ways of life. Being so small and weak, sparrows have to be cautious and on their guard at all times. In order to protect themselves from their many natural predators, they form flocks. The author has loved animals ever since he was a small child and grew up to become a photographer specializing in wildlife. In this educational book he provides a vibrant account of the lives and actions of sparrows year round through photos and accompanying commentary. (Shiozaki)
**Cutting Tools: Scissors and Utility Knives**
(切る道具／Kirudo)
Ed. WILL Kodomo Chiku Kenkyuujo | Froebel-kan | 2018
32 pp. | 31 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784577047064 | Ages 9+
Scissors, Cutters, Stationery, Design

Second in a four-volume series about stationery and tools used at school, this volume takes up cutting tools, which must be used correctly to prevent injury. Methods for proper use, tips for fail-free cutting, design of common tools, and different uses for different purposes are covered, along with tools’ invention and history, a “crest-cutting” activity born in the Edo period (1603-1868), and the recent trend of carving rubber erasers to make them into rubber stamps. This series’ other volumes cover tools for writing, fastening, and measuring. (Hiromatsu)

**Journeys to Find Frogs in Japan**
(日本カエル探検記／Nippon kaeru tankenki)
Text/Photos: Seki, Shintaro | Shonen Shashin Shimbunsha | 2019 | 56 pp. | 19 x 26 cm | ISBN 9784879816719 | Ages 9+
Frogs, Environment

This photographic picture book introduces all forty-eight frog species in the Japanese archipelago. It begins with an introduction to the Japanese brown frog (*rana esculenta*), which lays its eggs in February, and continues on in order of egg-laying season to introduce the mating and egg-laying habits of different species. It then reintroduces these frogs based on specific characteristics, such as beautiful appearance, melodious voice, and interesting shape. The author, a nature photographer, traveled the length of Japan to capture photos that spark the imagination and help the reader to envision the life of each kind of frog. He also explains in easy-to-understand language which species are endangered by the destruction of certain environments. (Doi)

**A Family in Hiroshima: Their Vanished Dreams**
(ヒロシマ消えたかぞく／Hiroshima keta kazoku)
Text: Sashida, Kazu | Photos: Suzuki, Rokuro | Poplar | 2019
40 pp. | 23 x 23 cm | ISBN 9784591163139 | Ages 9+
Hiroshima, Atomic bomb

Rokuro Suzuki, a barber who lived in Hiroshima, recorded the life of his family in photos near the end of World War II. Each photo captured their daily life with a loving touch: the smiling face of Suzuki’s wife, the laughter on his children’s faces as they played, and the innocent antics of their pet cats and dogs. On August 6, 1945, the entire family was wiped out by the atom bomb that fell on Hiroshima. When author Kazu Sashida first saw their photos in the Hiroshima Peace Museum, she was intrigued. Based on the photos and interviews with Suzuki’s relatives who saved the photos, Sashida brings the Suzuki family back to life. Suzuki’s photos and Sashida’s text, which is written in both Japanese and English, inspires readers to ponder such themes as life and peace. (Sakuma)

**Hungry Elephant Poo**
(はらぺこゾウのうんち／Hara peko zo no unchi)
Text/Photos: Fujiwara, Koichi | Kaiseisha | 2018 | 40 pp. | 26 x 21 cm | ISBN 9784033327808 | Ages 9+
Jungle, Elephants, Environmental destruction, Scat

The setting of this book is a south Asian rainforest near the equator. Due to drought stemming from global warming, food and water have grown scarce for some wild Asian elephants. They begin to approach areas where humans live, winding up at a garbage dump. The hungry elephants end up eating food in plastic bags and other hazardous items, including broken glass, sharp knives and needles. Near the dump, elephant scat is found that is full of plastic bags, and a young, female elephant is found dead nearby. What she ate seems to have killed her. Environmental destruction caused by climate change and irresponsible development comes to be symbolized by the elephant scat in this galvanizing picture book illustrated with photos. (Nogami)

**A Volcano Awakens**
(火山はめざめる／Kazan wa mezameru)
Volcanoes, Earth science, History

The Namahage ritual carried out on New Year’s Eve on the Oga peninsula, Akita prefecture, is listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Asset. This picture book features photos of Namahage taken over some 35 years. On December 31 at nightfall, a crowd in demon-like masks and straw capes descends a snowy mountain road carrying torches. They circulate among village houses, raising a large knife and asking “Any crying children here?” to galvanize the young. Ample powerful images of this ritual are accompanied by legends and historical information, as well as humorous spot introductions of curious masks. The end-matter includes a guide to similar rituals around Japan, which involve god-visits, masks and costumes. (Nogami)
Wild Plants and Dreams:
The Story of Tomitaro Makino
(草木とみた夢／Kusaki to mita yume)
Text: Tanimoto, Yuji | Illus. Ono, Yayoi | Shuppan Works | 2019 | 32 pp. | 27 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784907108328 | Ages 9+ | Plants, Botanist, Professions, Research

An illustrated biography of Japanese botanist Tomitaro Makino, who is known as the father of botany in Japan. Born in Kochi in 1862 just before Japan opened its borders to the world, he was fascinated with plants from childhood. His longing to know more about them was his starting point and inspired him to become a botanist. Although he never finished elementary school, he continued to study plants on his own for the rest of his life. At the age of seventy-eight, he completed the Makino Japan Plant Encyclopedia, and he continued to study until his death in 1957 at the age of ninety-four. The gently-hued illustrations vividly convey his life as well as his character and his deep love for nature. The end of the book presents well-researched documentation of his life and achievements along with a chronological table. (Shiozaki)

An Illustrated Reference of Wheelchairs:
Understanding Accessibility
(車いすの図鑑／Kurumaisu no zukan)
Ed. Takahashi, Gihè | Kinnohoshisha | 2018 | 80 pp. | 29 x 22 cm | ISBN 9784323056586 | Ages 10+ | Wheelchairs, Accessibility

This book aims to make us think about universal accessibility through wheelchairs. Chapter 1, Guide to Wheelchairs, tells us about what they are, what kind of people use them, their structure and how to use them, and how to assist those using them. Chapter 2, Wheelchairs and Accessibility, is about the types of barriers that exist in cities, ways to make roads, toilets, and public transport accessible, assistive vehicles and UD (universal design) taxis, universal design, wheelchair sports, assistance dogs, and so forth. Chapter 3, Illustrated Wheelchair Reference, introduces various types of wheelchairs from those for daily use to those used for disabled sports. This book is an extremely useful way to introduce issues of accessibility. Index included. (Sakuma)

Come Visit the Mosque
(モスクへおいでよ／Mosuku e oide yo)

Japan’s largest mosque is found in Shibuya ward, Tokyo, and called Tokyo Camii. In this book, Tokyo Camii PR staff member Shigeru Shitayama takes readers on a tour of the mosque. As readers view the spectacular colors inside the worship hall, they learn that about one in four people on Earth is Muslim, and they encounter Islamic history and culture. Arabic numerals, algebra, aspects of science, surgical tools, and much else in human civilization turn out to have roots in the Islamic world—perhaps even cameras and coffee! Mr. Yamashita explains why he became a follower of Islam, affirming the belief that all humans are equal under God. This book begs to be read far and wide to reduce prejudice and discrimination against Islam and Muslims. (Nogami)

Save the Grouse from Extinction
(ライチョウを絶滅から救える／Raicho wo zetsumetsu kara sukue)
Text: Kunimatsu, Toshihide | Komine Shoten | 2018 | 176 pp. | 20 x 14 cm | ISBN 9784338321013 | Ages 11+ | Grouse, Natural environment, Global warming, Ecosystem

The Lagopus mutus Japonicus Clark is a species of grouse native to high mountains such as the Japanese Alps. Due to drastic changes in their ecosystem, global warming and other factors, the species faces extinction. Japanese ornithologist Hiroshi Nakamura identified the Japanese grouse as a key to the mountain ecosystem and has spent years studying and protecting them. In 2013, he launched a project to protect these chicks in cages in the mountains, with positive results. This book represents an important record that teaches us about the natural environment through the Japanese grouse and urges us to rethink our relationship with nature. (Shiozaki)

The Secrets of the Owl: Interesting Creatures
(おしえてフクロウのひみつ／Oshiete fukuro no himitsu)

There are about 240 owl species in the world. Although owls appear in many myths and legends, most people know very little about them. Using photos, illustrations and cartoons, this book reveals the mysteries of the owl in approachable language. Owls have 100 times more light-detecting cells in their eyes than humans. That is why they can hunt at night when there is little competition. People have often depicted owls as gods or forest sages because of their wise appearance, but crows and ravens are actually far smarter than owls. The book brims with fascinating facts about owls, and covers everything from these creatures’ role in folklore as guardian gods and witches’ messengers to the white owl Hedwig which appears in the Harry Potter series. (Nogami)

The Mathematical Ant
(アリになった数学者／Ari ni natta sugakusha)

Mathematics is the field of study that considers what numbers and diagrams are. In fact, numbers do not have a specific form. There is a number called “3,” but a tangible item called 3 doesn’t exist. So what is it? The protagonist is a mathematician who studies the mysterious world of numbers, but somehow one day he suddenly turns into an ant! Now in the ant world, he tries to explain about numbers to the other ants. We take many things for granted in our daily lives, but actually there are lots of things we don’t know about them. This is an educational book that provides an opportunity to find a new perspective through considering the hows and whys of numbers. (Shiozaki)
What Sort of Star is the Sun?
(Taiyou atte donna hoshi?)
Miyahara, Hiroko | Shin Nihon Shuppansha | 2019 | 160 pp. | 22 x 16 cm | ISBN 9784406063678 | Ages 11+ | Sun, Climate, Research

The author studies the relationship between changes in the Sun’s surface, including sunspots, and the Earth’s climate. In this book she explains her method of research and what she learns from it, and the future prospects. No sunspots were recorded when the River Thames froze over in the 17th century during the Little Ice Age. From our efforts to know more about this relationship, by surveying the ice at the South Pole and the year rings in the cedar trees on Yakushima we now know there are changes in the Sun’s activity in units of 1000, 200 and 11 years. Her extremely interesting writing style consists of repeatedly laying out the process of hypothesis, investigation and experimentation, and result, so that little by little the reader learns about the sun, while also getting a feel for the charms of studying science. (Doi)

Learning to Love Bugs from the Experts
(Chiisarii wa nataru ka? / Moshi girai wa naoru ka?)

The author hates bugs, even butterflies and cicadas. In this book, she records her encounters with seven bug experts she visits in an attempt to overcome her aversion. She meets an expert in the field of education who is studying the relationship between children and bugs, the director of a bug museum, an expert on wildlife observation and outdoor play, an artist who makes clay bug objects, a scientist researching harmful insects, a cognitive scientist studying the psychology of fear, and a bug keeper at the Tama Zoo. With a humorous touch, the author describes how the experts’ enthusiasm sometimes has the opposite effect, turning her off bugs even further. Her persistent efforts to like bugs are endearing, and the illustrations make this a fun read. (Sakuma)

The Emperor System of Japan:
Let’s Think about the Emperor System from the Perspective of Democracy
(Tennoseitte nan darou? / Tennoseitte nan darou?)
Utsunomiya, Kenji | Heibonsha | 2019 | 224 pp. | 19 x 13 cm | ISBN 9784582837933 | Ages 13+ | Emperor system, Democracy, Constitution of Japan

How did Japan’s current Emperor system come about? This book explains the emperor’s position under the present Constitution and the one in force before World War II, and compares the current state of Japanese politics under the Emperor system, with other countries. Simple and appropriate questions such as “Japan’s emperor system has continued from really ancient times, hasn’t it?” “Is there a relationship between wartime responsibility and the emperor system?” are answered. Also, the author makes the significant point that “Furthuring your thoughts about the issue of the emperor system means going back to its origins while also considering our human rights, democracy, and freedom.” (Doi)

Mensore! Chemistry:
Classes with Local Grandmas
(メンソーレ！化学／Mensore! kagaku)

During the war, many children in Japan were unable to finish school, but some later studied at night school as mature students. The author taught local Okinawan women in their sixties elementary chemistry at night school, using familiar things from daily life to illustrate his lessons. In one class, for example, he explained the difference between material change and chemical change by cooking meat and potatoes. In another, he conducted a distillation experiment using wine and millet brandy. As he got to know his students, they began sharing with him what they had experienced during the war. The author learned that there was much that he thought he knew but really did not. This record of the author’s lessons and experiences stimulates readers to think about what science really is and what it means to learn. (Doi)

Peace Baton: Memories of August 6 Depicted by Hiroshima High School Students
(Heiwa no baton／Heiwa no baton)
Yugari, Masazumi | Kumon Shuppan | 2019 | 160 pp. | 20 x 14 cm | ISBN 9784774327778 | Ages 13+ | Hiroshima, Atomic Bomb, Pictures, Memories

Kazunuki Hashimoto taught a creative expression course at Hiroshima Motomachi High School. In 2007, the Hiroshima Peace Museum asked him to undertake a project for high school students in which they would illustrate the stories of atom bomb survivors. To date, 111 students have participated, depicting the experiences of forty survivors. This book presents the resultant illustrations along with the narratives of atom bomb survivors, the students’ experiences, and the teacher’s thoughts and observations. A unique way of conveying the survivors’ experiences to succeeding generations, this work provides readers with insight and understanding through the eyes of the high school students. (Doi)
The Hans Christian Andersen Award

Winners

**Uehashi, Nahoko** 1962-2014 Author Award

Born in Tokyo, Nahoko Uehashi researched indigenous people in Australia for her PhD in cultural authoropology. Her literary debut came in 1989, when her first book won an award that brought her into the spotlight. In 1996, she began to write her historical fantasy series *Morigibito* (Guardian), which became a huge hit and received several literature awards in and outside of Japan, including the IBBY Honour List and the Batchelder Award in the USA. Her series *The Beast Player* is now out in the USA and the UK.

**Mado, Michio** 1909-2014 1994 Author Award

Michio Mado was born in Tokuyama. When he was a small child, his family left for Taiwan, leaving him behind with his grandfather. He began to write poetry at the age of 19. In 1934, two of his poems were recognized by Hakushu Kitahara, the most respected poet of the time. This marked the beginning of Mado’s career as a creator of nursery rhymes, songs and poems for children. *The Animals*, co-published in the USA and Japan as a bilingual book, was translated by then Empress Michiko of Japan.

**Kadono, Eiko** 1935-2018 Author Award

Born in Tokyo, Eiko Kadono moved to Brazil for two years when she was 25, and based on her experiences there she wrote her first book. Since then she has written many books for children of several generations. Her chapter book *Majo no takkyubin* (Kiki’s Delivery Service), written in 1984, won a number of prizes and was included on the IBBY Honour List. This story was adapted into a wildly popular animated film by Hayao Miyazaki. Kadono has been decorated by the Emperor of Japan for her significant contributions to children’s literature.

**Anno, Mitsumasa** 1926-1984 Illustrator Award

Born in Tsuwano, a village located in a valley surrounded by mountains, Mitsumasa Anno developed a strong desire to experience places beyond those mountains while growing up. This is reflected in his books. He taught art in elementary school for ten years; his first two picture books reflect his love of playing with visual perception, and his drawings, often compared to Escher, not only abound with visual trickery and illusions but also display a playful sense of humour.

**Akaba, Suekichi** 1910-1990 1980 Illustrator Award

Born in Tokyo, Suekichi Akaba emigrated to Manchuria at the age of 21. He worked in industry and began to paint while still there. He was awarded special recognition three times at the Manchurian National Art Exhibition. After returning to Japan at the age of 36, Akaba mastered painting techniques on his own; he published his first picture book in 1961. His influences include traditional Japanese painting and Felix Hoffmann.
These authors and illustrators, among the finest creators of Japanese children’s literature, were all nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. Five were named winners.

Nominees since 2000

- **Tashima, Seizo** 1940-2018, 2020 Illustrator
- **Tomiyasu, Yoko** 1959-2020 Author
- **Katayama, Ken** 1940-2014, 2016 Illustrator
- **Kako, Satoshi** 1926-2018 2012 Illustrator
- **Nasu, Masamoto** 1942-2012 Author
- **Hayashi, Akiko** 1945-2008, 2010 Illustrator
- **Tanikawa, Shuntaro** 1931-2008, 2010 Author
- **Kanzawa, Toshiko** 1924-2000, 2006 Author
- **Ohta, Daihachi** 1918-2016 1970, 2002-2006 Illustrator
- **Sato, Satoru** 1928-2017 2004 Author
- **Ishii, Momoko** 1907-2008 2002 Author
- **Cho, Shinta** 1927-2005 1998, 2000 Illustrator
Japanese Books Selected for the IBBY Honour List

JBBY has selected books for three categories (writing/illustration/translation) of the IBBY Honour List every two years since 1992. Since 2008, JBBY has given these books the JBBY Award.

**WRITING**

**Writing 2020**
Nashiya, Arie  
Sensing Your Presence  
Kimi no sonzai o ishiki suru  
Poplar

**Writing 2018**
Furuuchi, Kazue  
Hula Boys  
Furadan  
Komine Shoten

**Writing 2016**
Iwase, Joko  
Since the New One Came  
Atarashii ko ga kite  
Iwasaki Shoten

**Writing 2014**
Mahara, Mito  
Where the Steel Sparks Fly  
Tetsu no shibuki ga haneru  
Kodansha

**Writing 2012**
Inoue, Yosuke  
Hats  
Boshi  
East Press

**Writing 2010**
Hamano, Kyoko  
Fusion  
Fujoen  
Kodansha

**Writing 2008**
Takadono, Hoko  
Let’s Be Frrrrriends  
Otomodasa ni narimasho  
Froe-bel kan

**Writing 2006**
Ogiwara, Noriko  
The Tale of the Flute Player  
Fujinsho  
Tokuma Shoten

**Writing 2004**
Uehashi, Nahoko  
Guardian of the God  
Kami no moribito  
Kaiseisha

**Writing 2002**
Tomiyasu, Yoko  
Mokko in Mount Yamamba  
Yamamba yama no Mokko tachi  
Fukuinkan Shoten

**Writing 2000**
Ito, Yu  
A Bridge to the Other World  
Oni no hashi  
Fukuinkan Shoten

**Writing 1998**
Okada, Jun  
The Stories of the Kosoado Woods  
Kosoado no mori no monogatari  
Rironsha

**Writing 1996**
Iwase, Nobuyuki  
Tanikawa Said It’s Not a Lie  
Uso janaiyo to Tanikawa kun wa itta  
PHP Institute

**Writing 1994**
Iwase, Joko  
Tanikawa Said It’s Not a Lie  
Uso janaiyo to Tanikawa kun wa itta  
PHP Institute

**Writing 1992**
Mitamura, Nobuyuki  
When I was a Dinosaur  
Boku ga kyoryu datta koro  
Holp Shuppan

**Writing 1990**
Ito, Hiroshi  
Hurrah, I’m a Monkey  
Osaru ni naru hi  
Kodansha

**Writing 1988**
Mitamura, Nobuyuki  
When I was a Dinosaur  
Boku ga kyoryu datta koro  
Holp Shuppan

**ILLUSTRATION**

**Illustration 2020**
Tamura, Shigeru  
Night Sounds  
Yoru no oto  
Kaiseisha

**Illustration 2018**
Suzuki, Koji  
Dome Story  
Domu gatari  
Text: Binard, Arthur  
Tamagawa University Press

**Illustration 2016**
Yoshida, Hisanori  
The Ranch of Hope in Fukushima  
Kibo no bokujo  
Text: Mori, Eto  
Iwasaki Shoten

**Illustration 2014**
Abe, Hiroshi  
To the New World  
Shin sekai e  
Kaiseisha

**Illustration 2012**
Inoue, Yosuke  
Hats  
Boshi  
East Press

**Illustration 2010**
Ushio  
Ushio  
Billiken Shuppan
Total book sales have halved since their peak, but children’s books show growth

Sales of books in Japan peaked at 2.6 trillion yen in 1996, and have been on a steady decline ever since. Sales in 2018 were down to 1.3 trillion yen, a half of what they were at their highest. The decline is most dramatic among magazines. Figures in this field have fallen from 1.5 trillion yen to about 600 billion yen, only 40 percent of top figures. Books have declined from 1.1 trillion yen to 700 billion yen, still maintaining about 60 percent of their peak sales.

Total sales for children’s books are 87.5 billion yen, accounting for only seven percent of all books, but this figure has actually increased by close to 20 billion yen, from 70 billion yen at the end of the 1990s. It should be noted, however, that sales of children’s literature soared to 100 billion yen in 2002, 2004, and 2006, when books in the Harry Potter series came out, and the present situation, while good, is not as strong as it was at those times.

The population of children aged 14 and under has declined 1.6 million, from 17 million ten years ago to 15.4 million today. Despite this, sales of children’s books have continued to grow slightly almost every year since 2014. The general book market puts out more books than before, but the strategy is to make quick sales before books are removed from shelves after a very short period of time. Even hits come and go at a rapid rate. In contrast, the children’s market has many longsellers, reprints of which play an important role in its support. The selection available is based on books children have loved over the years. Popularity transcends generations, and publishers have done their best to recognize these books for the successes they are, keeping them on store shelves. Several children’s book publishers were making 60 to 70 percent of sales in reprints, a situation that continued to 2018. As sales of publications in general continue to decline, some general publishers have attempted to enter the children’s market, copying the efforts of children’s publishers. So far, however, there have been very few successes.

The picture book market and problems with popularity concentrated on particular works

Research Institute for Publications provides statistics on the Japanese publishing industry. Let’s look at the details. In 2018, 4721 new children’s books were published, up 8.5 percent from the previous year. The estimated net sales were, as previously mentioned, 87.5 billion yen, up 1.3 percent over the previous year. Of all children’s books, picture books saw the most growth. There were 2003 new picture books, up 10.2 percent from the previous year. New reading and chapter books, etc. numbered 2718, up by 7.3 percent. Net sales of picture books was 31.4 billion yen, a small 0.3 percent increase over the previous year, but an increase of 1.5 billion yen over 2014 (net sales 29.0 billion yen). Particular successes include Kagakui Hiroshi’s Daruma-san ga (Dharma series; Bronze Publishing). More than 300,000 copies a year are reprinted, for a total of 2.545 million so far. Inai inai baa (Peek-a-boo, written by Matsutani Miyoko, illustrated by Segawa Yasuo; Doshinsha) is a longseller, with about 200,000 copies reprinted each year for a total of 6.636 million so far.

Among new books, super bestsellers of more than 100,000 copies include books by Yoshitake Shinsuke: Oshikko choppiri moretaro (A Little Pee Leaked; PHP), Mieru to ka mienai to ka (It’s Not About Whether You Can See It or Not; Alice-kan) and Sore shikanai wake
Fewer books in translation from overseas

Up until recently, the Japanese children’s book market had a large share of works in translation available, much larger than in most countries. Iwanami Shonen Bunko, a juvenile literature imprint established in 1950, was a frontrunner in publishing children’s books from overseas. It was followed in 1953 by Sogensha which published the fifty volumes of Sekai Shonen Shojo Bungaku Zenshu (World Literature Series for Boys and Girls). In 1958, Kodansha published a similar 50-volume series. These resulted in a boom for children’s classics in translation. At its peak, these series accounted for a half of all sales in children’s books. The trend continued even into the 21st century with a fantasy genre boom triggered by the popularity of the Harry Potter books. There was a sudden increase in translated children’s books, sales of which accounted for almost 40 percent of all juvenile literature. Recently, however, translated versions of both picture books and other children’s works have been on the decline. Even in terms of numbers of books, books from overseas are estimated to be down to about 15 percent of all children’s books. We wonder if this is a reflection of the times, as Japanese society as a whole seems to be more inward than outward looking. Because of this, JBBY began in 2019, as mentioned earlier, to put out Osusume! Sekai no kodomo no hon (Translated Children’s Books), an annual publication introducing new books from other countries that have been translated into Japanese. We also publish a catalog of recommended books entitled Japanese Children’s Books. We also put together a list of books in translation available for Japanese readers. We distribute both publications at overseas book fairs, to JBBY members, and to other interested parties.

The trend of sales concentrated on a few popular books became even more pronounced in spring of 2019. Word got out from the publishing industry that reprints of Inai inai baa and other longsellers had begun to slow down. It turned out that parents and teachers who buy children’s books were focusing more and more on what the mass media had to say. Even longsellers that had been read and loved over the generations were beginning to lose ground to media recommendations. We fear that part of the problem is the lack of importance the current administration places on culture as well as its manipulation of media. On top of that, sales tax was raised from 8 to 10 percent in October 2019, and this has somewhat slowed sales of children’s books, which had been doing well up to that point.

nai deshou (That Can’t Be All There Is To It; Hakusensha). When these new books were launched, other books already published by the same author had surges in sales. Much of this was because the author was featured on special TV programs and had an overwhelming amount of media exposure. In recent years, this kind of exposure tends to link directly to book sales.

The same thing can be said for chapter books. The Oshiri tantei series (Detective Oshiri series, written and illustrated by Troll; Poplar) occupies the top seven ranks in sales. A small number of books are getting most of the sales, with readers failing to notice the rest. JBBY has taken measures to offset this trend by uncovering excellent books hiding behind the bestsellers. Each year we publish a catalog of recommended books entitled Japanese Children’s Books. We also put together a list of books in translation available for Japanese readers. We distribute both publications at overseas book fairs, to JBBY members, and to other interested parties.

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From left: Daruma san ga (by Kagakui Hiroshi; Bronze), Inai inai baa (by Matsutani Miyoko and Segawa Yasuo; Doshinsha), Oshikko choppiri moretaro (by Yoshitake Shinsuke; PHP), Oshiri tantei (by Troll; Poplar), Sekai shonen bungaku zenshu (Sogensha), Osusume! Sekai no kodomo no hon (JBBY)
Recent Translations into Japanese Recommended by JBBY

JBBY selected books in three categories (picture books/chapter books and novels/nonfiction) for its recent publication *Translated Children’s Books*. JBBY publishes this catalog every year for Japanese readers.

### Picture Books

**Archie Snufflekins Oliver Valentine Cupcake Tiberius Cat** by Katie Harnett (UK) | Tottemo namae no o ni neko, trans. Mayumi Matsukawa; Hyoronsha

**Baby Goes To Market** by Atinuke and Angele Brooksbank (UK) | Chito kun to nigiyakana ichiba, trans. Yumiko Sakuma; Tokuma Shoten

**Baby on Board** by Allan Ahlberg and Emma Chichester Clark (UK) | Akachan ga donburoko!, trans. Chihiro Nakagawa; Tokuma Shoten

**Because of an Acorn** by Lola M. & Adam Schaefer and Frann Preston-Gannon (US) | Tatta hitotsu no donguri ga, trans. Aiko Sena; Hyoronsha

**Bonshommes des Bois** by Elisabeth Ivanovsky (FR) | Mori no tanjobi pati, trans. Misao Fushimi; Iwanami Shoten

**The Boy From The Mars** by Simon James (UK) | Sutanri to chisana kasejin, trans. Shigeki Chiba; Asunaro Shobo

**Camino a Casa** by Jiro Buitrago and Rafael Yockteng (MX) | Issho ni kaero, trans. Kazumi Uno; Iwasaki Shoten

**A Cat Named Swan** by Holly Hobbie (US) | Koneko no Suwan, trans. Izumi Mihara; BL Shuppan

**Children of the Northlights** by Ingri and Edgar Parin d’Aulaire (US) | Orora no kuni no kodomo tachi, trans. Yumiko Kamijo; Fukuinkan Shoten

**The Dam** by David Almond and Levi Pinfold (UK) | Damu, trans. Taischi Hisayama; Hyoronsha

**In Our Mothers’ House** by Patricia Polacco (US) | Futari mama no ie de, trans. Akiko Nakayama; Thousands Books

**The Journey** by Francesca Sanna (UK) | Jani, trans. Machiko Aoyama; Kijitora Shuppan

**Katinka’s Tail** by Judith Kerr (UK) | Fushigina shippo no neko Katinka, trans. Tomoko Kodama; Tokuma Shoten

**L’oiseau du sommeil** by Isabelle Simler (FR) | Nemuri dori, trans. Mariko Kono; Froebel-kan

**Looking for Yesterday** by Alison Jay (UK) | Kino o mitsuketai, trans. Mimi Hachikai; Tokuma Shoten

### Chapter Books and Novels

**Maurits Muise** by Ingrid & Dieter Schubert (NL) | Nezumi no Maurittus, trans. Etsuko Nozaka; Bunka Shuppankyoku

**Potatoes, potatoes** by Anita Lobel (US) | Kachan no jagaimo batake, trans. Mayumi Matsukawa; Hyoronsha

**Schellen-Ursli** by Selina Chöns and Alois Carigiet (CH) | Urusuri no suzu, trans. Yuzo Otsuka; Iwanami Shoten

**The Secret Project** by Jeanette Winter and Jonah Winter (US) | Kono keikaku wa himitsu desu, trans. Yuiko Ninomiya; Mitsumura Kyoiku Tosho

**Sophie’s Squash** by Pat Zietlow Miller and Anne Wilsdorf (US) | Sofi to chisana otonodachi, trans. Yukiko Ninomiya; Mitsumura Kyoiku Tosho

**When We were Alone** by David A. Robertson and Julie Flett (CA) | Watashi tachi dake no toki wa, trans. Kazue Yokoyama; Iwanami Shoten

**Whose Cat Is That?** by Virjinia Kahl (US) | Kono neko, uchi no neko!, trans. Tomoko Kodama; Tokuma Shoten

**The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse** by Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen (UK) | Okami no onaka no nakade, trans. Chihiro Nakagawa; Tokuma Shoten

### Nonfiction

**Katakatakata obachan no takaramono** by 林小杯 (TW) | Katakatakata obachan no takaramono, trans. Noriko Hosako; Holp Shuppan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Translator</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Egg Tree</td>
<td>Katherine Milhous (US)</td>
<td>Tokuma Shoten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folo, il Centauro</td>
<td>Roberto Piumini (IT)</td>
<td>Toru Nagano</td>
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<td>Gracefully Grayson</td>
<td>Ami Polonsky (US)</td>
<td>Shigeki Chiba</td>
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<td>The Hate U Give</td>
<td>Angie Thomas (US)</td>
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<td>Mr. Piper's Bus</td>
<td>Eleanor Clymer and Kurt Wiese (US)</td>
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<td>Ms. Bixby's Last Day</td>
<td>John David Andersen (US)</td>
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<td>The One Memory of Flora Banks</td>
<td>Emily Barr (UK)</td>
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<td>The Other Boy</td>
<td>M. G. Hennessey (US)</td>
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<td>Out of Left Field</td>
<td>Ellen Klages (US)</td>
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<td>A Piglet Called Truffle</td>
<td>Helen Peters (US)</td>
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<td>Pippi Långstrump</td>
<td>Astrid Lindgren (SE)</td>
<td>Eriko fitness</td>
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