Stephanie Christensen:

Libraries are a treasure trove of stories waiting to be discovered. And our school librarians can help you find the perfect books for the readers in your home. So here at Connect Canyons, we've decided to have a monthly special where our district librarians highlight some of their favorite reads. When the weather is cold, there is nothing better than curling up with a good book. So today we are talking warm winter reads with Canyons District's Librarian Specialist, Gretchen Zaitzeff and Brighton High School's Teacher Librarian, Catherine Bates. Warm winter reads. Gretchen, what do you have for us?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

So I'm very excited to share a picture book by Mac Barnett, illustrated by John Klassen called Extra Yarn. It was a Caldecott Honor Award winner for 2013. So in the picture book, at the beginning of the story, we meet Annabelle. And Annabelle's world is pretty much black and white. It's illustrated in brown ink and its absence of color. But magically, Annabelle finds a box with colored yarn and knitting needles, and she begins to knit herself a sweater.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

But when she finishes her sweater, she still has extra yarn. So she knits her dog a sweater, but she still has extra yarn. And that is how the story goes. And each time Annabelle knits, she brings more and more color to her family, friends and community. John Klassen adds texture, warmth, and color every time that Annabelle knits for someone else. This book is full of magic and speaks to the generosity and powerful ability of children to make life better for the rest of us.

Stephanie Christensen:

What would be the age range for this book?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Picture books are typically books read to children who cannot read by adults or older readers in their life. But I love this picture book so much, I gave it as a gift to adults in my life who knit. So picture books are really for everybody.

Stephanie Christensen:

Oh, that's a great idea. I have a quick question about Caldecott winners, was that the right term?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Yep.

Stephanie Christensen:

Is that a good indicator for picture books? What is their-

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

So every year the American Library Association recognizes the best in picture books. So there's typically a winner for the year, as well as a number of honorees that are recognized for kind of the confluence of story and picture. And it recognizes the best of the best.

Stephanie Christensen:

What's your next suggestion?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

So my next suggestion is by local author Lehua Parker, One Boy, No Water, which is the first book in the Niuhi Shark Saga. So Lehua grew up in Hawaii, attended the Kamehameha Schools. And even though she now lives in Utah, her books are filled with the warm images of modern life in the Hawaiian Islands. This book is written for middle grade readers and is award winning in that it was recognized as a Hawaii State Children's Book honoree.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

When you consider One Boy, No Water, think of it as Percy Jackson in Hawaii. Zader is bullied. He's 13 years old. He's trying to get into private school, but his biggest problem is that he lives in Hawaii and he's allergic to water. How bad could it get? Like in Disney's Lilo and Stitch, Ohana (family), plays a big part in Zader's story as he realizes that he is like the Hawaiian legends and mythical heroes he's heard all his life, but much more special, dangerous, and powerful than he even imagined. This story is infused with Hawaiian and Pidgin words and phrases, but they are easily discernible in context, but for us mainlanders, there's also a glossary in the back.

Stephanie Christensen:

That's awesome. I love learning little cultural nuggets like that through books. And such a great thing for kids to be able to see that, I don't think you know at a young age about the Pidgen language or different things about Hawaii, so.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Right, and the idea that modern Hawaii is much like what a young person's life would be like here only special in its own way. So if you like mythology, monsters and warm tropical locations, this book might be a good fit for you or a reader you know.

Stephanie Christensen:

I would love some warm tropical locations right now. So that would be a perfect winter read. Catherine, what do you have for us today?

Catherine Bates:

So the first book that I want to talk about is called The Holiday Switch by Tif Marcelo. And this book is about a girl named Lila who lives in the very Christmassy town, Holly. And Holly happens to be the place where a famous romcom in that universe is filmed. And she works at the hotel that this romcom takes place at. And so every year around Christmas time, the town fills up with tourists. This Christmas, Lila's boss has her nephew come work for her as well and of course there is a little bit of a romance that develops. I really love this book because it is adorable, first of all. It's essentially a Hallmark movie in a book. So if you didn't get enough over Christmas, you can have a little bit more in the new year.

Stephanie Christensen:

Who can ever get enough of those Hallmark movies?

Catherine Bates:

That's right. But I really also love the family dynamics that are in this book. Her relationship with her parents is really deep and beautiful and complicated much like many people's relationships with their parents. And I really like that aspect of it.

Stephanie Christensen:

What grade would you recommend that for?

Catherine Bates:

I would say nine to 12.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

And the rest of us who read young adult romances.

Stephanie Christensen:

Which is my favorite, I'm going to admit. It's not a guilty pleasure because I'm reading, but it's a guilty pleasure because I'm all about that romance.

Catherine Bates:

Definitely. And then the second one I would like to talk about is called, [I didn't write down the name of it…]

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

The Impossible Climb.

Catherine Bates:

The Impossible Climb, thank you.

Stephanie Christensen:

So many books, so little time.

Catherine Bates:

And it is about Alex Honnold. And if you are familiar with that name, he is the person who climbed El Capitan free solo, which is one of the hardest climbs to do as a free climb. And no one had ever done it before I believe. So you might have seen the movie produced by National Geographic. The person who wrote this, Mark Synnott, was the director of that movie. And it is all about, it's not only about his ascent of El Capitan, but also just how he got to where he did.

Catherine Bates:

And it starts out from his youth, talks about him climbing a place near his hometown with a clothes line, just him and his buddy. It's just a really cool story, very inspiring. He had some really interesting ideas about living your life to the very fullest. And that's part of the reason why he decided to do what he did, even though it was an immense risk. So if you have a student who likes the outdoors or is a climber themselves, this is a great, great option for them. And another thing I love about this book is there's a full adult nonfiction book that is appropriate for high schoolers, but there's also an adapted readers version that goes for a middle schooler up to a ninth grader, probably.

Stephanie Christensen:

I loved the moment when my child finally found Harry Potter, because that was the gateway drug of books for him. And that got him into finding the books that he wants. How do you help students find the topics that they're going to want to read?

Catherine Bates:

So usually my go-to question is have you ever read a book that you've liked? And if you have, what was it? And sometimes that's not an option, they've literally never read anything that they've enjoyed in their life. And after that, I go to what's important to them? What do they spend their time doing? What do they think about a lot? Because I think that oftentimes will lead to more interest in books, if I can understand better what's important to them.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

One of the questions I always liked to ask when I was in a school library was, what other media do you consume? Do you have a favorite movie? Is there a type of television show or other media that you consume? And then, if you're a sports fanatic, oh, I've got a book. If you're a dance fanatic, I've got a book. And it could be like The Impossible Climb where it's nonfiction. It's about a real person having a lived experience or it might be a fiction title where the characters are involved in the same types of activities.

Stephanie Christensen:

Sometimes as a parent, you just don't know where to start. And I don't know that parents realize that, hey, we have librarian specialists and they can answer a ton of questions and they can give you a little tour guide through. Because it's overwhelming when you go to a bookstore or a library to go, hey, I want to pick a book. Last time I went with my nine year old, I was like, nine is a hard age for me. So how do you gauge…?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Well, first of all, I just want to remind everybody that the school librarians are your friends. That's what we're here for, that's our job is to connect readers to the stories and information that make their hopes and dreams come true and help them make sense of the world around them. And Canyons is very generous. Our collections are vast. One of the tenants of library science is every book it's reader, every reader it's book. And that's what we're here to do is really connect our students with the stories that are powerful and meaningful to them.

Stephanie Christensen:

So would you recommend to parents, hey, maybe start a little book club and we can pick a book at the library? Or how would you really, if you had a child that just you've gone through the route of, I don't have any books I like, I just don't like books, what would you say?

Catherine Bates:

So I think a lot of times, part of the reason kids don't like to read is they're trying to read above their grade level or at their grade level. And if they're a reluctant reader, a lot of times it's better to start a little bit below. So maybe a graphic novel would be a really great thing just to get their foot in the door.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Another gateway drug, graphic novels, Manga, which is Japanese comics, also very popular and very accessible for readers who are trying to find their place.

Stephanie Christensen:

And do we have that in our Canyons libraries?

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Secondary for sure. Graphic novels in all of our libraries. Another thing is to read together. There's nothing more powerful than sharing a story with each other so that you can talk about it. There's good research that children who are being read to regardless of age, they have a stronger vocabulary. There's a lot of mental health things. They're less anxious, they're less depressed, they're more connected to their families. I mean, and it helps strengthen them academically. So, if you have a reluctant reader, but you yourself are a passionate reader, share a story. And even as a family, it's a great bonding experience.

Catherine Bates:

Or just turn on an audiobook in the car. We have a ton of audiobooks available through Sora, which is our ebook and audiobook platform. And I think that's another really great way to just get some interest generated without maybe going full-bore on it.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

I have another book to share. Middle grade author, Tiffany Rosenhan, who is also a Utah local has written a book called Girl from Nowhere. And if you or the reader in your life is a fan of Ally Carter's Gallagher Girl series or Anthony Horowitz’s Alex Rider series, which is currently I think on Netflix, then Girl from Nowhere might be their next great read. High school junior Sophia Hepworth has lived in 94 countries and 31 schools.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

And the story opens on our first day at a new school in Waterford, Montana, where she is going to try to be just like everyone else. A typical American high school student with very few cares in the world. The problem is that Sophia has spent the whole of her life as the daughter of diplomats living in one war zone after another. And while she constantly is reassured that she's safe in Waterford, on her first day she's attacked by a grizzly and saved by a mysterious high school student named Alex. She begins to think that there are other threats in Waterford besides the wildlife and she's right. What ensues is a James Bond-like adventure that includes a PG romance and some high octane action.

Stephanie Christensen:

Sign me up. I'm all for it.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Right, it is hard to put down. My final book kind of goes along with the book Catherine picked. It's called Zion Unmatched and it's a 2021 picture book. It's brand new. It's written by Zion Clark and with James S. Hirsch and Zion is a real person. He was born with no legs and he was given up for adoption at birth. For the first 16 years of his life, he was in one foster care home after another, but that's not what the story's about. Zion's story is a celebration of grit, perseverance, and the indomitable human spirit.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

In spite of having no legs, Zion learns to wrestle. In high school, he loses every match until his senior year in which he almost makes the state championship. Even though he lost, he's given a standing ovation because he's such an inspiration to his teammates and just anyone who knew him. The picture book is full of photographs showing Zion proving others wrong by doing the things they say he cannot.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

There's a quote from Zion's high school track coach that reads, "After coaching Zion, I no longer have any excuses in my life." And I was thinking with the new year and goals and resolutions that we could all follow Zion's example and accept no excuses.

Stephanie Christensen:

I love that.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

So there's an 11 minute documentary about Zion and his wrestling experience in high school that can be found on YouTube and Netflix. I recommend that parents review it first before showing it to their family. Though I consider it family friendly, every parent is responsible of course for the media in their own family's life. But it is really inspirational to see Zion and hear the people in his life in the way that they've been impacted by his courage and bravery in spite of all things.

Stephanie Christensen:

What a great family evening to just sit, watch the short film, go through the picture book and then have a discussion with your kids about overcoming challenges, which hopefully could get them opening up about things that are going in their lives. Did you have any other books for us too?

Catherine Bates:

Nope, that's all I got.

Stephanie Christensen:

So, I'm just curious how many books you guys read per week?

Catherine Bates:

So I am at 62 for the year.

Stephanie Christensen:

Okay.

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Yeah, she's out strapping me by miles. This has not been my best year, but I've been really choosy. So I am new to Canyons. And the move from back east out west has occupied a lot of my time. Though we have listened to some audio books, but I have really reverted back to my comfort books, because it's almost like comfort food for me in that I just need something that's super familiar and easily digestible.

Stephanie Christensen:

That's why it's so important for our kids to find books. Because I too have books that I go back to when things are stressful. It's just like, I need my old friends between the pages. Thank you guys so much for coming in and talking to us. You truly provide great services for our kids. And I hope that parents will take advantage of what's out there. And I hope that kids will take advantage. Go talk to your librarians!

Catherine Bates:

There's nothing that makes me happier than a kid saying, “I'm not a reader, help me find a book.” That is fun. That is a good time to me.

Stephanie Christensen:

Challenge accepted!

Gretchen Zaitzeff:

Yeah. And I think it's fun too. When a reader shows up and says, “hey, I want to read this book,” and I can do that for them. I can find that book or purchase that book and put that book in the hand of that student. I mean that makes everything else worthwhile.

Stephanie Christensen:

Thank you for listening to Connect Canyons. If you have story ideas, drop us a line. Once again, we'll be back next month with more great reads.