

2025-26 Book Blitz Jr. 4th-5th Grade Titles Synopses

***The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Raul**

There used to be an empty chair at the back of Mrs. Khan's classroom, but on the third Tuesday of the school year, a new kid fills it: nine-year-old Ahmet, a Syrian refugee. The whole class is curious about this new boy—he doesn't seem to smile, and he doesn't talk much. But after learning that Ahmet fled a "Very Real War" and was separated from his family along the way, a determined group of his classmates band together to concoct the Greatest Idea in the World—a magnificent plan to reunite Ahmet with his loved ones.

***City Spies* by James Ponti**

Sara Martinez is a hacker. She recently broke into the New York City foster care system to expose her foster parents as cheats and lawbreakers. However, instead of being hailed as a hero, Sara finds herself facing years in a juvenile detention facility and banned from using computers for the same stretch of time. Enter Mother, a British spy who not only gets Sara released from jail but also offers her a chance to make a home for herself within a secret MI6 agency.

Operating out of a base in Scotland, the City Spies are five kids from various parts of the world. When they're not attending the local boarding school, they're honing their unique skills, such as sleight of hand, breaking and entering, observation, and explosives. All of these allow them to go places in the world of espionage where adults can't.

Before she knows what she's doing, Sara is heading to Paris for an international youth summit, hacking into a rival school's computer to prevent them from winning a million euros, dangling thirty feet off the side of a building, and trying to stop a villain...all while navigating the complex dynamics of her new team.

***Lions & Liars* by Kate Beasley and Dan Santat**

Frederick Frederickson has a food-chain theory about life. There are lions, like the school bully. Gazelles, like the bullied kids. There are meerkats, and the fleas that live on the butts of meerkats. Frederick's a flea.

Fifth grade is off to a terrible start when Frederick is sent to a disciplinary camp for troublesome boys. His fellow troop mates—Nosebleed, Specs, The Professor, and little-yet-lethal Ant Bite—are terrifying. But in between trust-building exercises and midnight escape attempts, a tenuous friendship grows between them. Which is lucky, because a Category 5 hurricane is coming and everyone will have to work together—lions and fleas alike—to survive!

***Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina**

Merci Suárez knew that sixth grade would be different, but she had no idea just *how* different. For starters, as strong and thoughtful as Merci is, she has never been completely like the other kids at her private school in Florida, because she and her older brother, Roli, are scholarship students. They don't have a big house or a fancy boat, and they have to do extra community service to make up for their

free tuition. So when bossy Edna Santos sets her sights on the new boy who happens to be Merci's school-assigned Sunshine Buddy, Merci becomes the target of Edna's jealousy. Things aren't going well at home, either: Merci's grandfather and most trusted ally, Lolo, has been acting strangely lately — forgetting important things, falling from his bike, and getting angry over nothing. And Merci is left to her own worries, because no one in her family will tell her what's going on.

Moo by Sharon Creech

Following one family's momentous move from the city to rural Maine, an unexpected bond develops between twelve-year-old Reena and one very ornery cow.

When Reena, her little brother, Luke, and their parents first move to Maine, Reena doesn't know what to expect. She's ready for beaches, blueberries, and all the lobster she can eat. Instead, her parents "volunteer" Reena and Luke to work for an eccentric neighbor named Mrs. Falala, who has a pig named Paulie, a cat named China, a snake named Edna—and that stubborn cow, Zora.

Nightmares! By Jason Segel and Kirtsen Miller

Charlie Laird has several problems.

1. His dad married a woman he is sure moonlights as a witch.
2. He had to move into her purple mansion—the creepiest place in Cypress Creek.
3. He can't remember the last time sleeping wasn't a nightmarish prospect. Like even a nap.

What Charlie doesn't know is that his problems are about to get a whole lot more real. Nightmares can ruin a good night's sleep, but when they start slipping out of your dreams and into the waking world . . . well, that's something only Charlie can face. And he's going to need all the help he can get, or it might just be lights-out for Charlie Laird.

For good.

Pax by Sara Pennypacker

Pax and Peter have been inseparable ever since Peter rescued him as a kit. But one day, the unimaginable happens: Peter's dad enlists in the military and makes him return the fox to the wild.

At his grandfather's house, three hundred miles away from home, Peter knows he isn't where he should be—with Pax. He strikes out on his own despite the encroaching war, spurred by love, loyalty, and grief, to be reunited with his fox.

Meanwhile, Pax, steadfastly waiting for his boy, embarks on adventures and discoveries of his own. . . .

Rescue by Jennifer A. Nielsen

Six hundred and fifty-seven days ago, Meg Kenyon's father left their home in France to fight for the Allies in World War II, and that was the last time Meg saw him. Recently, she heard he was being held

prisoner by the Nazis, a terrible sentence from which Meg fears he'll never return. All she has left of him are the codes he placed in a jar for her to decipher, an affectionate game the two of them shared. But the codes are running low, and soon there'll be nothing left of Papa for Meg to hold on to at all.

Suddenly, an impossible chance to save her father falls into Meg's lap. After following a trail of blood in the snow, Meggie finds an injured British spy hiding in her grandmother's barn. Captain Stewart tells her that a family of German refugees must be guided across Nazi-occupied France to neutral Spain, where one of them has promised to free Meg's father. Captain Stewart was meant to take that family on their journey, but too injured to complete the task himself, he offers it to Meg, along with a final code from Papa to help complete the mission -- perhaps the most important and most difficult riddle she's received yet.

As the Nazis flood Meg's village in fierce pursuit, she accepts the duty and begins the trek across France. Leading strangers through treacherous territory, Meg faces danger and uncertainty at every turn, all the while struggling to crack her father's code. The message, as she unravels it, reveals secrets costly enough to risk the mission and even her own life. Can Meg solve the puzzle, rescue the family, and save her father?

Simon B. Rhymin' by Dwayne Reed

Eleven-year-old Simon Barnes dreams of becoming a world-famous rapper that everyone calls Notorious D.O.G. But for now, he's just a Chicago fifth grader who's small for his age and afraid to use his voice.

Simon prefers to lay low at school and home, even though he's constantly spitting rhymes in his head. But when his new teacher assigns the class an oral presentation on something that affects their community, Simon must face his fears.

With some help from an unexpected ally and his neighborhood crew, will Simon gain the confidence to rap his way to an A and prove that one kid can make a difference in his 'hood?

Sisters of the Neversea by Cynthia Leitich Smith

Lily and Wendy have been best friends since they became stepsisters. But with their feuding parents planning to spend the summer apart, what will become of their family—and their friendship?

Little do they know that a mysterious boy has been watching them from the oak tree outside their window. A boy who intends to take them away from home for good, to an island of wild animals, Merfolk, Fairies, and kidnapped children, to a sea of merfolk, pirates, and a giant crocodile.

A boy who calls himself Peter Pan.

Swim Team by Johnnie Christmas

Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, Enith Brigitha, home to the Mighty Manatees—until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of

her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help.

With Etta's training and a lot of hard work, Bree suddenly finds her swim-crazed community counting on her to turn the school's failing team around. But that's easier said than done, especially when their rival, the prestigious Holyoke Prep, has everything they need to leave the Mighty Manatees in their wake.

Can Bree defy the odds and guide her team to a state championship, or have the Manatees swum their last lap—for good?

But as the team gets better and better, her new coach pushes the players harder and harder, until soccer starts to feel more like punishment than fun. And then there comes a point where enough is enough, and Alex and her teammates must take a stand to find a better way to make their soccer dreams come true.

***Virtually Me* by Chad Morris and Shelly Brown**

Going to school is going to be a very different experience for Bradley, Hunter, Jasper, and Keiko—five unlikely friends who are all looking for second chances.

A mysterious box arrives at each of their houses containing an invitation to attend a virtual school. More than just being an online school, they'll be able to create an avatar of themselves and interact with their friends and other classmates in real time using VR headsets.

For each of them, that presents an opportunity to become someone they're not, or someone they haven't been. For Bradley, it's a chance to come out of a self-imposed shell. Edelle hopes everyone will see her for who she is, not just for how she looks. Hunter is looking forward to pretending he's still the person he was last year. Jasper wants to get over past assumptions. And for Keiko, it'll allow her to disappear into the crowd.

For all of them, it's a chance to see just how much they've assumed about each other in the past and maybe an opportunity to become friends.

More information about the books on the 2025-26 Book Blitz
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