

Giving the gift of words

By Jane Whiting

The holiday season is one of the best times to curl up with a good book. Not only do books make perfect gifts for the whole family, but you can add to the joy of reading with beautiful stationary, journals and supplies to encourage a love of writing as well.

To help you find the right books for young readers, from picture books and up, the Canadian Toy Testing Council also tests and produces a top ten list of “Great Canadian Books for Children.” Through the CTTC’s Literacy Program, which promotes and supports a love of reading, kids read and evaluate a wide array of children’s books, all created by Canadian authors, illustrators and publishers.

All of the books in the CTTC program are subjected to a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation process by the children and their parents. The selection includes first books for babies to novels and non-fiction for kids up to around age 11. A diverse list of eight English and two French titles on topics such as hockey, animals and religion, is created to appeal to a variety of reading interests.

For more children’s book ideas, check out your local Ottawa library branch or go online for recommendations. Many children also enjoy the online book club, where they can read book reviews by kids themselves and write their own reviews. This develops critical reading skills as well as increasing writing abilities.

Another popular library event that promotes both reading and writing is the recently held Kids’ Lit Gala. It not only provides a great opportunity for kids to meet local authors, but also give them a personal connection to the book, explains Jane Venus, OPL Manager of Children and Teen Services. “Part of learning to read is realizing that there is a whole skill to writing books as well as reading them. Linking the writing process to reading helps kids understand that there is a person who actually put together all the words.”

Encouraging kids to write in addition to reading, is something that parents can do at home and it can take many different forms, adds Venus. “It can include journaling, writing out recipes, emailing or writing to friends. It’s an important skill that children need to be comfortable with.”

Aspiring young writers aged nine to seventeen will want to take note that the deadline for submitting short stories and poetry to the Awesome Authors contest, in January. More information is available online at www.biblioottawalibrary.com, together with details on upcoming writing workshops for children.

So don't forget – when you look for a book for a young reader, think about buying a special journal and fun writing supplies to complete the gift of words.

CTTC'S top ten Great Canadian Books for Children:

***Dance Baby Dance.* Written by Andrea Spalding. Orca Book Publishers. Ages Birth+.** This enchanting first book for babies combines fanciful poetry with rich colour photographs of children snuggling, playing and learning about the world through their friends, families, pets and dance.

***Saffy.* Written and illustrated by Paola Opal. Simply Read Books. Ages Birth-3.** A charming story of a baby giraffe so short that she cannot reach the lowest branches of the acacia tree. Stubborn Saffy is determined to get her own leaves without her mother's help and finds clever ways to solve the problem. Bold graphics, bright colours and a simple, engaging use of words capture babies' attention.

***Chicken, Pig, Cow.* Written and illustrated by Ruth Ohi. Annick Press. Ages 2-5.** This engaging book for toddlers tells the story of three toy animals who love everything about their barnyard home made of Popsicle sticks—except for Dog. When the trio go exploring, they learn about friendship and facing their fears. Simple text and colourful illustrations make this book a bedtime favourite.

***Bradley McGogg, The Very Fine Frog.* Written by Tim Beiser and illustrated by Rachel Berman. Tundra Books. Ages 2-5.** A fun story told in rhyme about Bradley McGogg, who lives in a bog, where there are plenty of bugs for a frog to eat. When Bradley runs low on food, he visits his neighbours and soon discovers that rabbits, cows and bears eat some “pretty strange things.” A lively book with clever rhymes and engaging full-colour illustrations.

***Tulipe : Mon pyjama à moi.* Written by Lucie Papineau and illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch. Dominique et compagnie/ Les éditions Héritage, inc. Ages 3+.** An enjoyable story about a little mouse named Tulipe, who loves to wear her comfy pyjamas day and night. When Tulipe wears her pyjamas to school, they become a total mess by the end of the day. Tulipe learns a valuable lesson about

wearing the right clothing for the right occasion. It features beautifully detailed full-colour illustrations.

***A Royal Little Pest.* Written by Anita Reynolds MacArthur and illustrated by Karen Roy. Pollywog Bog Books. Ages 3-6.** Prince Hayden MacCheeky is a royal prince who likes to tease and mimic his brothers and sisters. When they refuse to play with him, Prince Hayden must adjust his behaviour so that he becomes fun to be around. The distinctive, full-colour illustrations add to the book's humour and plot.

***The Little Toy Shop.* Written and illustrated by Frances Wolfe. Tundra Books. Ages 3-6.** At Kringle's Toy Shop, the owner helps every customer find just the right toy. When a box arrives at the shop with a stuffed bunny inside, Mr. Kringle determines to find him a home. Bunny soon makes fast friends with Teddy, a toy bear. A lovingly illustrated, sweet story about friendship and a little girl whose heart is big enough to cherish both toys.

***Savais-tu? Les serpents.* Written by Alain M. Bergeron, Michel Quintin and Sampar and illustrated by Sampar. Éditions Michel Quintin. Ages 7+.** Did you know that snakes are reptiles, with 2,700 species in the world today? In this true trivia book all about snakes, this is just one of many fun facts, and it is accompanied by a full-colour cartoon of an anxious mouse running and yelling for help. The comic-style format makes learning fun.

***Inside Hockey! The Legends, Facts and Feats That Made The Game.* Written by Keltie Thomas. Maple Tree Press. Ages 8+.** This nifty fact book spotlights great stories of hockey and its most legendary characters. Hockey trivia explores topics such as why goalies are different, legends on the ice, hockey hi-jinks, crazy moves made to score goals, players' superstitions, and more. Illustrated with action-packed photos and amusing art.

***Good-Bye Marianne.* Written by Irene N. Watts and illustrated by Kathryn E. Shoemaker. Tundra Books. Ages 8-11.** This 124-page graphic novel tells the quiet but moving tale of 11-year-old Marianne, a Jewish girl living in Germany in 1938. She finds herself barred from school because of her religion, and the story follows her necessary flight from Berlin to England. Black-and-white pencil drawings capture both the desperate times and the spark of hope.

This article originally appeared in the December 2009 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper