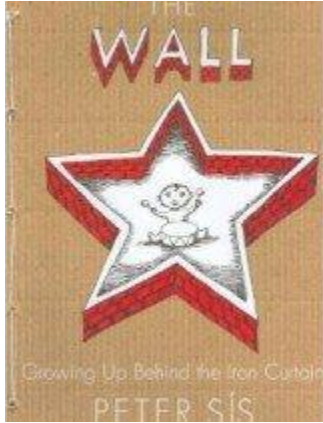


Books to challenge 5th grade readers

These entertaining and interesting reads also qualify as "complex texts," a key reading standard for fifth grade readers.

by: [S. Michele Fry](#)

[Print book list](#)



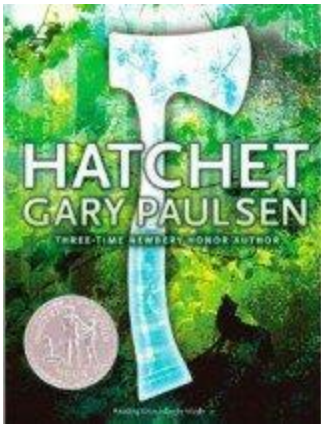
The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain

by: *Peter Sis* - (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2007) *56 pages*.

This award-winner shows a child's view of the Cold War. This serious book deserves time and close attention. There are many big political and philosophical ideas, and mentions of events that may disturb some children, including a plane hijacking, imprisonments and deaths. Families can talk about and compare what was happening in America during that time. Are grandparents available to share their own memories of the Cold War era? Families can also explore the Western cultural touchstones that meant so much to Sis — the Beach Boys, the Beatles. Awards: Caldecott Honor, New York Times Best Illustrated Book Award, Kirkus Reviews Editors' Choice, School Library Journal Best Book, Parents' Choice Award Winner, Horn Book Fanfare.

Perfect for: Kids who like historical fiction.

Find [The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain](#) at your local library.



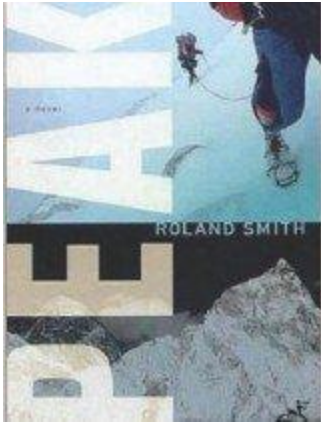
Hatchet

by: *Gary Paulsen* - (Simon & Schuster, 1987) *192 pages*.

The story is about Brian, 13, and how he manages to survive 54 days in the Canadian wilderness after a plane crash. Brian was flying to visit his father when the pilot dies of a heart attack in mid-flight. Brian crash lands the plane into a small lake and swims out of the wreckage. He has his clothing, a tattered windbreaker and a hatchet (a gift from his mother). The novel takes us through Brian's days, how he learns patience through his experiences with failures and small successes: building a fire, fishing and hunting, making his shelter a safe one. He endures a porcupine attack, a tornado and being utterly alone for almost two months. This is a tale of adventure but, more importantly, it is a tale of character growth. This edition includes a new introduction and sidebar commentary by the author.

Perfect for: Kids who like adventure stories.

Find [Hatchet](#) at your local library.



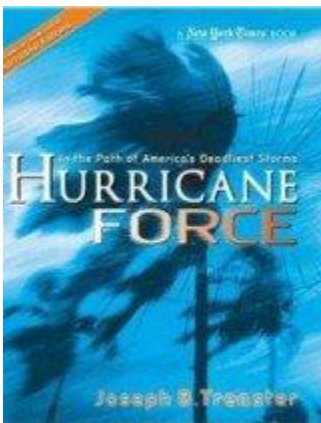
Peak

by: *Roland Smith* - (Harcourt, 2007) 246 pages.

When 14-year-old Peak Marcello is caught scaling a skyscraper to place his signature graffiti tag, he is offered a choice: spend three years in juvenile detention or climb Mt. Everest with his long-absent father. Though the choice might be easy, the journey is not. Peak is physically and emotionally challenged by the grueling climb, the weather, and the politics and drama of climbing culture. And the pressure is on, because if Peak can reach the summit before his 15th birthday, he'll break a world record and gain glory and money. Peak is gripping and surprising, and though it's written for a middle-grade audience, readers young and old will be sucked in by the sharp writing and memorable characters.

Perfect for: Kids who like adventure stories.

Find [Peak](#) at your local library.



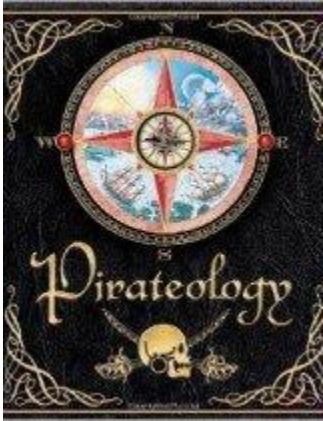
Hurricane Force: In the Path of America's Deadliest Storms

by: *Joseph B. Treaster* - (Kingfisher, 2007) 128 pages.

The author of this book, longtime New York Times reporter Joseph Treaster, was in the New Orleans city hall when Hurricane Katrina hit the city in 2005. He draws on his experiences covering Katrina and its aftermath to provide younger readers with a first-hand look at the deadly storms we call hurricanes. Along with his eyewitness accounts, there is information about what scientists currently know about how and why hurricanes form, how they are tracked, and how they impact coastal areas. Precautions and planning for future storms are also discussed. Dramatic color photos enhance the solid information presented in this book.

Perfect for: Kids who like science and nature.

Find [Hurricane Force](#) at your local library.



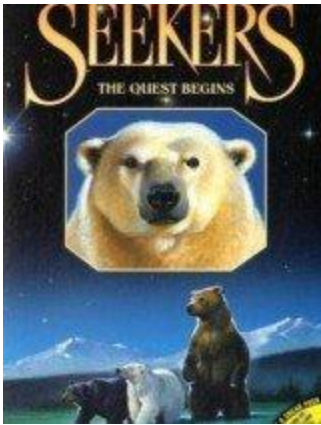
Pirateology

by: *Captain William Lubber, Dugald A. Steer (Editor)*, illustrated by: *Anne Yvonne Gilbert, Ian Andrew and Helen Ward* - (Candlewick Press, 2006) 32 pages.

The richly detailed *Pirateology* (the latest of the popular 'Ology books) is a standout among pirate merchandise, and a treat for both children and adults. This hefty volume centers on the search for treasure left by the "notorious" (i.e., fictional) pirate Arabella Drummond and comes with a host of pirate gear: a compass, maps and scraps of flags, among others. *Pirateology* is loaded with envelopes to be opened, journals and letters to pore over, and codes to be deciphered. Along the way, children learn about navigation, history, zoology and more. Real pirate lore is seamlessly blended with fictional narrative (even the publishing credits are disguised so as not to break the mood), and the old-fashioned illustrations are top notch. Another notable feature is that the pirate pursued here is female, making this book appeal to readers of both genders.

Perfect for: Kids who like adventure stories.

Find [Pirateology](#) at your local library.



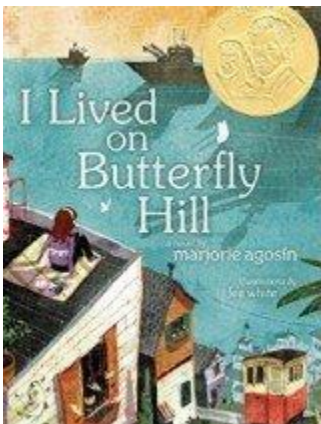
The Quest Begins: Seekers #1

by: *Erin Hunter* - (HarperCollins, 2008) 293 pages.

Erin Hunter, author of the popular *Warriors* series, brings us a new series to love. *The Quest Begins* follows three young bears — a polar bear named Kallik, a black bear named Lusa and a grizzly named Toklo — whose stories begin to connect when they're all separated from their families. This first *Seekers* book is a compelling read. Hunter has definitely started enough threads to weave a richly detailed, adventurous series.

Perfect for: Kids who like adventure stories.

Find [*The Quest Begins: Seekers #1*](#) at your local library.



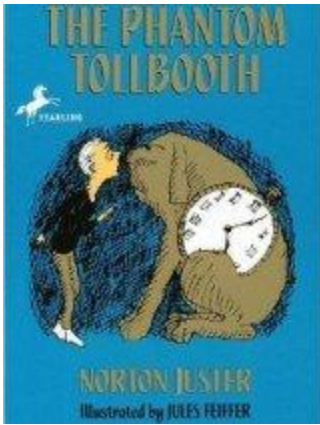
I Lived on Butterfly Hill

by: *Marjorie Agosin*, illustrated by: *Lee White* - (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2015) 464 pages.

Celeste lives in Valparaíso, Chile with her inspiring multigenerational family on Butterfly Hill. Things take a turn when a ruthless dictator overthrows the Chilean president, and Celeste's friends and classmates begin to mysteriously disappear. Her parents, who are doctors, must go into hiding because they are considered subversives for helping the poor. Sent to live with her aunt in the U.S., Celeste struggles to adjust to a new life in exile as her country descends into turmoil. Based on the author's experience growing up in Chile around the time of the Augusto Pinochet coup, the story offers a very personal entrée into a devastating chapter in Chile's history.

Perfect for: Serious readers who enjoy a gripping story with weighty themes.

Find [*I Lived on Butterfly Hill*](#) at your local library.



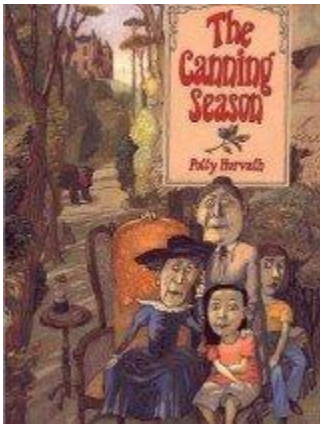
The Phantom Tollbooth

by: *Norton Juster*, illustrated by: *Jules Feiffer* - (Random House, 1961) 255 pages.

Described by many children as “the best book ever,” this is fantasy at its best. Full of irony and insights, Juster created a masterpiece when he wrote *The Phantom Tollbooth*. Give this book to your child and let the wave of words and numbers sweep them into a fantastical world. A clever, almost indescribable book that you may already know about, but is too indispensable to keep from mentioning it here.

Perfect for: Kids who like classic stories.

Find [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) at your local library.



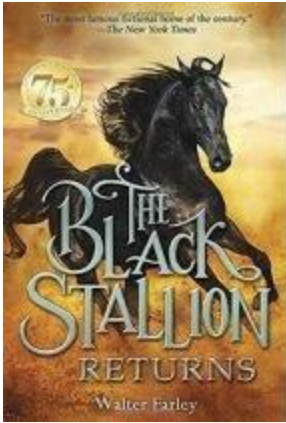
The Canning Season

by: *Polly Horvath* - (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003) 208 pages.

Ratchet loves her selfish mother but receives little in return. Without warning or luggage of any sort, Ratchet’s mother ships her to Maine to spend the summer with two elderly relatives. Tilly and Penpen are un-identical twins who are tremendously eccentric; they are also kind and generous. A laugh-aloud, farcical story evolves from this unlikely premise. Winner of the 2003 National Book Award for Children’s Literature.

Perfect for: Kids who like humor stories.

Find [The Canning Season](#) at your local library.



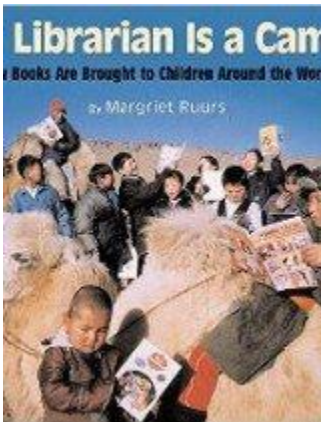
The Black Stallion

by: *Walter Farley* - (Random House, 1991) 187 pages.

When their ship is wrecked in a storm, teenaged Alex Ramsey is stranded on a desert island with a wild, Arabian black stallion. Horse and boy befriend each other in their struggle for survival, and they maintain their emotional bond after they're rescued and transported to New York. Recognizing the amazing speed of "the Black", Henry and a trainer set up a match race between their un-pedigreed mystery and two thoroughbred champions.

Perfect for: Children who love animals — especially horses.

Find [The Black Stallion](#) at your local library.



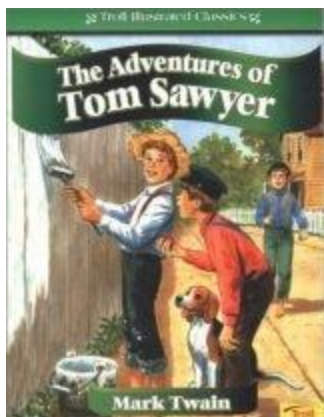
My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World

by: *Margriet Ruurs* - (Boyds Mills Press, 2005) 32 pages.

From camels to elephants to boats and trolleys, this is an inspirational look at the great lengths that some librarians go to to bring books to children around the world.

Perfect for: Kids who like nonfiction.

Find [My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World](#) at your local library.



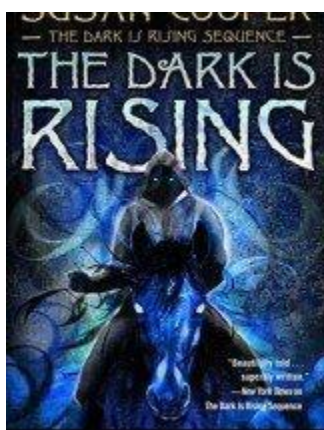
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

by: *Mark Twain* - (MacMillan Collectors Library Books, 2017) 264 pages.

The mischievous escapades of a small-town Missouri boy in the 1840s are described with wry humor, timeless characters, and social critique. The lively, anti-authoritarian plot includes grave robbers, skipping school, tricking the church, kissing girls, running away from home, buried treasure, a haunted house, witnessing a murder, and getting lost in a labyrinthine cave. It's a classic tale of clever, courageous boys seeking freedom in an overly civilized world.

Perfect for: Children who crave thrilling stories and like smart-aleck characters.

Find [The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#) at your local library.



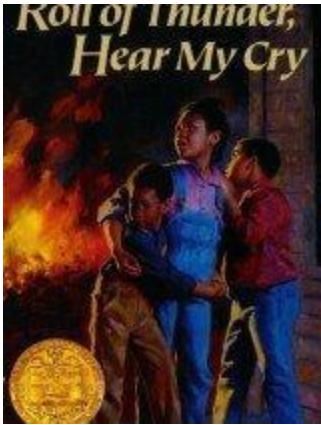
The Dark Is Rising

by: *Susan Cooper* - (Simon and Schuster, 1973) 224 pages.

This is the second book in a five-book series and actually the best one to start with. Cooper convincingly combines fantasy elements with folklore and mythology. Events coincide with significant dates, such as Will's birthday, which is close to Christmas and Twelfth Night, and the use of circles to create a link between the Six Signs and the power of the Light add to this story's mystical aura. Will Stanton meets his destiny on his 11th birthday. He is the Sign-Seeker, last of the immortal Old Ones, who must find and guard the six great Signs of the Light that will overcome the ancient evil that is overpowering the land. This classic fantasy is a bit slow, but enthralling.

Perfect for: Kids who like fantasy stories.

Find [The Dark Is Rising](#) at your local library.



Roll of Thunder-Logan Family

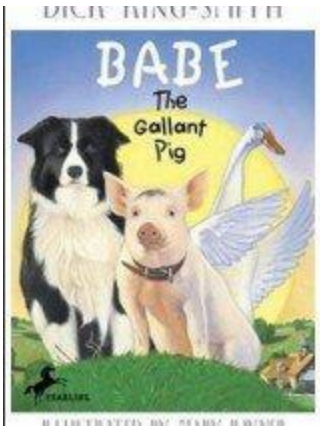
by: *Mildred Taylor* - (Dial Press, 1976)

The hook: This six-part epic follows the Logan family, a landowning African American family living in Depression-era Mississippi. Dealing with racist neighbors, segregated schools, and mob violence, 9-year-old Cassie Logan narrates her world with the clear-eyed pragmatism of a child trying to survive. She sees her family fighting to maintain their pride, and integrity, and begins to understand the importance of owning land to her family. Although the books take on serious topics, the scenes are so intimately depicted as everyday childhood experiences, the stories carry readers along a deeply felt historical experience without lectures or exposition.

The story begins in the middle with *Roll of Thunder* being the first published. Three prequels come along, [*The Land*](#), [*The Well*](#), [*Song of the Trees*](#), that give insight into the family. Additionally, the series includes two short stories with equal emotional depth as the longer books.

Perfect for: Kids curious about kids from other times and places and those interested in history.

Find **our favorites** at your local library: [*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*](#); [*Let the Circle Be Unbroken*](#); [*The Road to Memphis*](#).



Babe the Gallant Pig

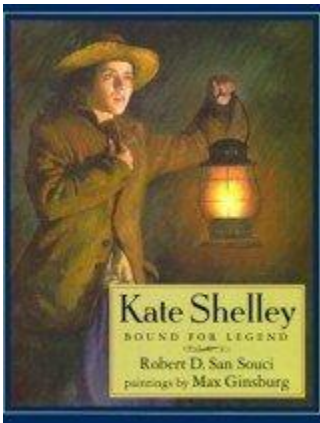
by: *Dick King-Smith*, illustrated by: *Mary Rayner* - (Yearling, 1995)

When Fly the sheepdog adopts the piglet Babe and raises him with her puppies, the polite, gentle pig naturally assumes he's a sheepdog, too. Farmer Hoggett intends to fatten Babe up and eat him for dinner, but his plans change when Babe saves the flock from sheep rustlers and wild dogs. Babe's sweet and genuine spirit is infectious and the quaint details of country life are compelling, especially for city kids.

Want to see the movie? The 1995 adaptation, *Babe*, has something to offer all ages.

Perfect for: Kids who like *Charlotte's Web*.

Find [Babe the Gallant Pig](#) at your local library.



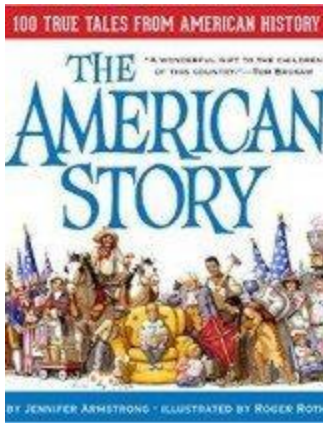
Kate Shelley: Bound for Legend

by: *Robert D. San Souci*, illustrated by: *Max Ginsburg* - (Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995) 32 pages.

In 1881, a ferocious storm destroyed the Honey Creek railroad bridge in Iowa. Kate Shelley, 15 years old, risked her life to warn the Chicago midnight express train. Her crawl across a narrow, windy, dark, splintered, 700-foot trestle is especially terrifying. Realist oil illustrations skillfully depict the raging elements — and one teen's heroism.

Perfect for: Kids who like historical fiction.

Find [Kate Shelley: Bound for Legend](#) at your local library.



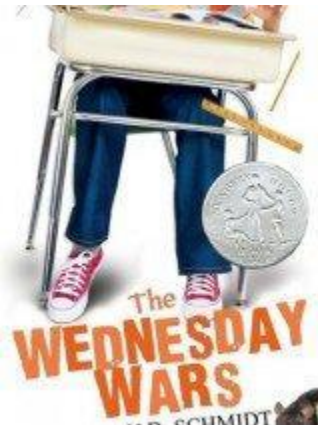
The American Story: 100 True Tales from American History

by: *Jennifer Armstrong*, illustrated by: *Roger Roth* - (Random House, 2006) 368 pages.

This big, 360-page book tells stories drawn from the archives of American historical events, large and small. Its 100 short tales — each typically one to five pages — recount in cogent and chronological order stories of courage, struggle, discovery and freedom that shaped the American experience, from the 1565 founding of America's first city to the confounding 2000 presidential election. ... Smart and written in a lively fashion featuring clever watercolor illustrations, this book makes history digestible in appetizing bite-size pieces.

Perfect for: Kids who like history.

Find [*The American Story: 100 True Tales from American History*](#) at your local library.



The Wednesday Wars

by: *Gary Schmidt* - (Clarion Books, 2007) 264 pages.

On Wednesday afternoons half of Holling's class leaves school early for Catechism class. The other half leaves early for Hebrew School. That leaves Presbyterian Holling alone every Wednesday afternoon with his teacher, Mrs. Baker. Neither of them is happy at the prospect, and Holling is sure Mrs. Baker hates him as a result. At first, Mrs. Baker just has Holling clean erasers, but then decides to make better use of the time by introducing him to Shakespeare. And as events in the larger world during the 1967-68 school year unfold in the background, Holling begins to learn about himself, his family, friends and the mysterious adult world.

Perfect for: Kids who like realism.

Find [*The Wednesday Wars*](#) at your local library.