

# APALA BEST OF THE BEST BOOKLIST

## 2023



The Best of the Best Booklist celebrates stories from across the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) diaspora. All APALA members were invited to nominate picture book titles about AANHPI communities and experiences that were published in the 2023–2024 calendar years. Members of the APALA Family Literacy Focus Committee evaluated the nominations against the APALA Rubric and curated the final list. Eligible titles that earned a 2023 or 2024 APALA Literature Award or Honoree designation were automatically added to the Best of the Best Booklist. The titles depict diverse representations of heritages and cultures across the AANHPI diaspora.

### A Dupatta Is...

**BY MARZIEH ABBAS, ILLUSTRATED BY ANU CHOUHAN**

ISBN: 9781250820945

A little girl explores how a dupatta, a traditional shawl, can be used for play, while also serving as a symbol of family, identity, and culture.

### Hi'iaka and Pana'ewa : A Hawaiian Graphic Legend

**BY GABRIELLE AHULI'I, ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH DEMONTEVERDE**

ISBN: 9781484672853

This retelling of Hi'iaka, the Hawaiian goddess of hula, and Pana'ewa, a mythical lizard, offers young readers an introduction to the world of graphic novels.

### Quiet Time With My Seeya

**BY DINALIE DABARERA**

ISBN: 9781250824271

A beautifully illustrated and endearing story about the special days a young child spends with her Sinhalese grandfather, her Seeya, despite their language barrier.

### Ning and the Night Spirits

**BY ADRIENA FONG**

ISBN: 9781913123161

Shy Ning befriends a magical creature who introduces him to more magical friends. By discovering that these creatures are not scary, he learns to make friends and connect spirits with humans.

### Last Flight

**BY KRISTEN MAI GIANG, ILLUSTRATED BY DOW PHUMURUK**

ISBN: 9781646140862

Told from a child's perspective, this story follows a family's last days in Saigon as the Vietnam War ends and their journey to the United States.

### Desert Queen

**BY JYOTI RAJAN GOPAL, ILLUSTRATED BY SVABHU KOHLI**

ISBN: 9781646142620

This picture book biography, spun in vibrant verse by Jyoti Gopal, traces the journey of a beloved Rajasthani drag performer who defied tradition and dazzled the world.

### Two New Years

**BY RICHARD HO, ILLUSTRATED BY LYNN SCURFIELD**

ISBN: 9781797212814

This vibrant and welcoming New Year celebration invites readers to learn about Rosh Hashanah and Lunar New Year traditions and to reflect on the rich blends of cultures and traditions in their own lives.

### Finding Papa

**BY ANGELA PHAM KRANS,**

**ILLUSTRATED BY THI BUI**

ISBN: 9780063060968

At the end of the Vietnam War, Mai and her mother make the long journey from Vietnam, to a refugee camp, and eventually to the United States—with the hope that they will reunite with Mai's papa again.

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PICTURE BOOK HONOR**

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### Summer Is For Cousins

**BY RAJANI LARocca, ILLUSTRATED BY ABHI ALWAR**

ISBN: 9781419757334

Ravi can't wait to spend summer vacation at the lake house with his family, especially his cousins. This picture book celebrates the resilient bond between extended family members.

### Lolo's Sari-Sari Store

**BY SOPHIA N. LEE, ILLUSTRATED BY CHRISTINE ALMEDA**

ISBN: 9781534494473

A little girl recalls helping her grandfather at his shop, where she learns the importance of community. When she moves to America, she uses those lessons to make friends and build a sense of belonging in her new home.

### The Truth About Dragons

**BY JULIE LEUNG,  
ILLUSTRATED BY HANNA CHA**

ISBN: 9781250820587

A young boy explores a magical world conjured from his mother's bedtime story. Mythic beings from eastern and western mythologies populate enchanted forests that unravel through lushly illustrated ink drawings. The stunning imagery and captivating storytelling pave an ingenious path toward exploring identity and the boy's own mixed cultural heritage.

### Scroll

**BY HUI LI**

ISBN: 9780316340731

Embarking on an adventure, Lulu discovers that the Chinese characters her grandpa taught her have come to life. Lulu uses her calligraphy skills to fight a fire-breathing dragon.

### Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine

**BY HANNAH MOUSHABECK, ILLUSTRATED BY REEM MADOOH**

ISBN: 9781797202051

During bedtime, a father reminisces about his youth in Palestine, bringing to life the sights, sounds, and smells of Old Jerusalem for his daughters.

### Bhangra Baby

**BY KABIR SEHGAL AND SURISHTHA SEHGAL, ILLUSTRATED BY ANI BUSHRY**

ISBN: 9781665936156

Readers join Bhangra Baby in learning a popular Punjabi folk dance.

### Maribel's Year

**BY MICHELLE STERLING, ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH GONZALES**

ISBN: 9780063114357

Month by month, Maribel waits for her father to arrive from the Philippines to America, illustrating how family bonds can endure, no matter the distance.

### Spicy Spicy Hot

**BY LENNY WEN**

ISBN: 9780316281027

A funny story about one girl determined to embrace the spice of sambal in order to connect with her grandmother and heritage.

### Waiting for Tomorrow

**BY SUSAN YOON, ILLUSTRATED BY JULIE KWON**

ISBN: 9780374390228

Yoon's debut picture book is about two Korean immigrant sisters who prepare a surprise—making hotteuk, a Korean pancake—to celebrate their father's long-awaited arrival home.

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### Awe-Samosas

**BY MARZIEH ABBAS, ILLUSTRATED BY BHAGYA MADANASINGHE**  
ISBN: 9780063257276

Noor doesn't have all the ingredients to make her grandma's samosas for her friends, so she has to problem-solve, get creative, and improvise with other materials to make awesome samosas.

### The Mochi Makers

**BY SHARON FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON**  
ISBN: 9781665931540

In this gentle, heartwarming story, a little girl makes mochi with her grandmother, learns about her family's heirloom recipe, and shares trays of mochi with family, friends, and neighbors.

### Aloha Everything

**BY KAYLIN MELIA GEORGE, ILLUSTRATED BY MAE WAITE**  
ISBN: 9781636551128

Through the medium of hula, a young girl learns the true meaning of aloha. Verses richly interspersed with the Hawaiian language and lush, eye-catching illustrations honor the beauty and vitality of the Hawaiian people, history, ecology, and folklore.

### Memory Garden

**BY ZOHREH GHAHREMANI, ILLUSTRATED BY SUSIE GHAHREMANI**  
ISBN: 9781250843036

A Persian grandmother teaches her granddaughter how to garden, reflecting on her childhood and the new garden they had to start after migrating.

### Noor Needs to Know

**BY FARHANA ISLAM, ILLUSTRATED BY NABILA ADANI**  
ISBN: 9781665957854

Noor is on a mission to learn why the women in her family wear hijabs. Through this journey, she discovers that their personalities and identities extend beyond their hijabs.

### Box of Dreams

**BY FAITH KAZMI, ILLUSTRATED BY CHRISTINE ALMEDA**  
ISBN: 9780063251366

A little girl dreams of meeting the relatives her mom sends balikbayan boxes to in the Philippines, reflecting on how one can maintain family bonds no matter the distance.

### Wat Takes His Shot:

#### The Life & Legacy of Basketball Hero Wataru Misaka

**BY CHERYL KIM, ILLUSTRATED BY NAT IWATA**  
ISBN: 9781643796031

The inspirational biography of Japanese American basketball star Wataru Misaka, the first person of color to play in the NBA.

### Tala Learns to Siva

**BY KEALANI NETANE, ILLUSTRATED BY DUNG HO**  
ISBN: 9781338859317

Tala is resilient as she learns her family's siva, a Samoan dance, supported by her family.

### Simone

**BY VIET THANH NGUYEN, ILLUSTRATED BY MINNIE PHAN**  
ISBN: 9781662651199

When a fire breaks out and her family must evacuate, Simone learns about the power of community. This story celebrates helpers, from neighbors to incarcerated firefighters.

### Seoul Food

**BY ERIN RUSSELL, ILLUSTRATED BY TAMISHA ANTHONY**  
ISBN: 9780593464380

Seoul Food celebrates a mixed family with Korean and Black American heritage. Food and cooking together bring the family closer, across distance and traditions.

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### Piper Chen Sings

BY PHILLIPA SOO AND MARIS PASQUALE DORAN,  
ILLUSTRATED BY QIN LENG

ISBN: 9780593564691

Piper loves to sing and gets stage fright when given a solo, but her grandmother's stories of overcoming butterflies in her own help Piper conquer her own fears.

### The Spice Box

BY MEERA SRIRAM, ILLUSTRATED BY SANDHYA PRABHAT

ISBN: 9780593427132

Rishi reflects on his family's spicy box's history as he learns to cook with his father, discovering that cooking can be mastered through trial and error.

### My Lost Freedom: A Japanese American World War II Story

BY GEORGE TAKEI, ILLUSTRATED BY MICHELLE LEE

ISBN: 9780593566350

Featuring powerful, meticulously researched watercolor paintings, this is a story of a family's courage, a young boy's resilience, and the importance of staying true to yourself in the face of injustice.

### The House Before Falling Into the Sea

BY ANN SUK WANG, ILLUSTRATED BY HANNA CHA

ISBN: 9780593530153

When Kyung's family opens their home to people seeking refuge during the Korean War, she must adjust to the upheaval and learn lessons about empathy, safety, and gratitude.

### The Rock in My Throat

BY KAO KALIA YANG,  
ILLUSTRATED BY JIEMEI LIN

ISBN: 9781728445687

An autobiographical story of selective mutism and a young girl's refusal to speak English after seeing how her immigrant parents are treated in their attempt to speak the language.

### Caged

BY KAO KALIA YANG, ILLUSTRATED BY KHOU VUE

ISBN: 9781984816368

A daughter born in a Hmong refugee camp imagines a world beyond the camp, highlighting present-day refugee issues and their connection to the Asian American community.

### Meena Can't Wait

BY FARIDA ZAMAN

ISBN: 9781459836396

Honoring intergenerational relationships and family traditions, a young girl eagerly awaits a day spent with her Nana learning how to make a special Bengali tea (dodo cha).

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