

# APALA BEST OF THE BEST BOOKLIST

## 2025



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 between September 1, 2024–August 31, 2025. The Family Literacy Focus Committee selected books aligned with the Talk Story mission and used the *APALA Rubric for Evaluating Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Literature* to guide the curation of the list. Eligible titles that earned a 2025–2026 APALA Literature Award or Honoree designation have been included at the end of this list.

### **Bea's Balikbayan Box of Treasures**

**BY CHRISTINE ALEM SHAH, ILLUSTRATED BY DREAM CHEN**

ISBN: 9798885546416

Bea connects with relatives overseas by sending a balikbayan box—a care package filled with presents for aunts, uncles and cousins in the Philippines. As she awaits its arrival, she learns about the balikbayan tradition and watches (via video call) the joy and excitement her presents bring to family overseas.

### **The Big Boil-Up**

**BY ANGIE BELCHER, ILLUSTRATED BY ZAK ĀTEA**

ISBN: 9781775439257

Join Bubba and Mum as they prepare a boil-up that brings the whole whanau together. From hunting and gathering to simmering and sharing, this is a heartwarming story of tradition, family, and aroha.

### **Nainai's Mountain**

**BY LIVIA BLACKBURNE, ILLUSTRATED BY JOEY CHOU**

ISBN: 9780823452187

A Taiwanese American girl, nervous about visiting Taiwan, finds her footing when her Nainai turns a mountain trip into a journey of connection that helps her understand where she comes from.

### **The Pink Pajamas: A Story About Love and Loss**

**BY CHARLENE CHUA**

ISBN: 9781665943161

Ah Yi's niece loves everything that Ah Yi makes, except for the pink pajamas. When Ah Yi becomes ill, her niece waits for Ah Yi to come home and make a new pair. Ah Yi doesn't make it home, but the pink pajamas become a comfort for her niece and inspire her to sew in Ah Yi's memory.

### **Kamal's Key**

**BY RIFK EBEID, ILLUSTRATED BY SOPHIA SOLIMAN**

ISBN: 9798985992687

A multigenerational and empowering story that explores the resilience of the human spirit to persist through life's most difficult challenges.

Scan the code for  
Talk Story Resources for  
caregivers, educators,  
librarians, and community  
members alike.



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asian/pacific american librarians association

### **Koro Wētā**

**BY HEATHER HAYLOCK, ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH TROLLE**

ISBN: 9781990042690

A child loves their gumboots but gets frustrated when a large wētā (an insect endemic to Aotearoa) keeps making the boots their home. With creativity and thoughtful conversations with their parents, the child finds a way to coexist with the koro wētā and his whole whānau. Written in te reo Māori and English.

### **Sarang Saves the School**

**BY KORENA DI ROMA HOWLEY, ILLUSTRATED BY JOOWON OH**

ISBN: 9781536232318

A school in a South Korean village risks closure from low enrollment. A girl listens to her grandmother's childhood dreams of attending school and comes up with a plan to save the school, keep her family together, and make that dream come true.

### **Rose Weaves a Garden**

**BY RASHIN KHEIRIYEH**

ISBN: 9780593705100

With patience, perseverance and guidance from her grandfather, Rose learns to weave a beautiful rug from a drawing she created of their garden. Working side by side with her baba, Rose is shown how to dye yarn, knot and tie it on the loom and learns a love of artistry and tradition between generations.

### **100 Days: A Story of Sisterhood**

**BY KIMBERLY LEE, ILLUSTRATED BY MICHELLE JING CHAN**

ISBN: 9780374389871

A young girl struggles with jealousy after her baby sister's arrival but, with the support of her aunt and meaningful Chinese traditions, slowly discovers that sibling love can grow in its own time.

### **The Beat of the Dragon Boat**

**BY CHRISTINA MATULA, ILLUSTRATED BY NICOLE WONG**

ISBN: 9781534113206

An engaging book that captures the energy and cultural significance of the Dragon Boat Festival through a boy's experience with his grandfather.

### **Fa'afetai Mama:**

#### **A Samoan Children's Story of Gratitude and Love**

**BY GIGI MCMOORE, ILLUSTRATED BY FRANCO CARO R.**

ISBN: 9798218666941

A day in the life of a young Samoan girl as she spends her day alongside her mother, thanking her for all the little things her mother does to make her feel loved, cared for, and confident.

### **Veena and the Red Roti:**

#### **A Story of Hope During Partition**

**BY NAMITA MOOLANI MEHRA, ILLUSTRATED BEENA MISTRY**

ISBN: 9781525307355

Displaced by the partition of India and suddenly living in a refugee camp, Veena finds joy, hope, and a connection to home through making roti.

### **Meena's Saturday**

**BY KUSUM MEPANI, ILLUSTRATED BY YASMEEN ISMAIL**

ISBN: 9780593110317

Meena loves weekly gatherings with her large Indian family, but she begins to question traditional attitudes around all the domestic labor that the women in her family are expected to do while hosting.

### **Mama's Roti**

**BY RAAKHEE MIRCHANDANI, ILLUSTRATED BY SHREYA GUPTA**

ISBN: 9780316339469

Told through alternating perspectives of a family in America and a family in India, this powerful cross-continental, intergenerational story proves that something as small as a grain of wheat can create a powerful sense of community.

### **A Map for Falasteen:**

#### **A Palestinian Child's Search for Home**

**BY MAYSA ODEH, ILLUSTRATED BY ALIAA BETAWI**

ISBN: 9781250896704

A Palestinian girl seeks answers from her family after her teacher tells her Palestine doesn't exist, leading her to discover her heritage, history, and identity through her relatives' stories.

### What Lolo Wants

**BY CRISTINA OXTRA, ILLUSTRATED BY JAMIE BAUZA**  
ISBN: 9781525308369

Maria and her Lolo draw together every day. Lolo can draw anything, but he begins losing his memories and forgets the words for things. Inspired by their time together, Maria finds a way to communicate with him through drawings.

### Another Word for Neighbor

**BY ANGELA PHAM KRANS, ILLUSTRATED BY THAI MY PHUONG**  
ISBN: 9780063334915

A grumpy older man's quiet life is transformed when two lively young neighbors befriend him with curiosity and kindness, slowly opening his heart to community and connection after the loss of his wife and their shared Vietnamese traditions.

### Hilwa's Gifts

**BY SAFAH SULEIMAN, ILLUSTRATED BY ANAIT SEMIRDZHAN**  
ISBN: 9781536229424

A young boy returns to Palestine and sees the growth of an olive tree he planted with his grandfather during the olive harvest season. From picking olives to preparing them for press and eventually joining with neighbors who use olive oil during a picnic, the boy learns how a harvest celebration is a gift of connection and tradition.

### Home, Home

**BY SIBU T. P.**  
ISBN: 9780593403730

This tale follows a boy visiting his ancestral home for the first time. Everything about the place is unfamiliar, but with a little help from his parents, he learns to appreciate his new surroundings.

### Bunso Meets a Duwende

**BY REV VALDEZ**  
ISBN: 9781223188393

Bunso goes after the Duwende that stole his family's ube halaya. Their Thanksgiving dinner won't be complete without it! This fun story shares Filipino folklore, language, and culture.

### Made for More

**BY CHLOE ITO WARD, ILLUSTRATED BY GAEL ABARY**  
ISBN: 9780063334144

A girl embraces her Japanese roots and Hawaiian upbringing, honoring tradition while redefining beauty.

### Little Bird Laila

**BY KELLY YANG, ILLUSTRATED BY XINDI YAN**  
ISBN: 9780593407110

As the only child in a Chinese American family, young Laila is often a translator for her parents. When she decides to teach them English, the whole family changes as they learn together.

## 2026 ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AWARD FOR LITERATURE

### Pasifika Picture Book Winner

**Kaho'olawe:**

**The True an Island and Her People**

BY KAMALANI HURLEY, ILLUSTRATED BY HARINANI ORME  
ISBN: 9798765605011

### Pasifika Picture Book Honor

**Filo's Butterflies**

BY LITEA FUATA, ILLUSTRATED BY MYO YIM  
ISBN: 9781761212697

**White Sunday**

BY LITEA FUATA, ILLUSTRATED BY MYO YIM  
ISBN: 9781760509873

### Asian American Picture Book Winner

**Many Things at Once**

BY VEERA HIRANANDANI, ILLUSTRATED BY NADIA ALAM  
ISBN: 9780593643907

### Asian American Picture Book Honor

**Every Peach Is a Story**

BY DAVID MAS MASUMOTO AND NIKIKO MASUMOTO,  
ILLUSTRATED BY LAUREN TAMAKI  
ISBN: 9781949480290

**A Vaisakhi to Remember**

BY SIMRAN JEET SINGH, ILLUSTRATED BY JAPNEET KAUR  
ISBN: 9780593859087