

Books That Emphasize the Importance of Art

Thursday, February 28 2019, 3:57 PM

FAMILY MEDIA/BOOKS

Books That Emphasize the Importance of Art

Stories about kids who grow through art

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER

PUBLISHED ON: FEBRUARY 12, 2019



One of my kids lives for art. The other shudders at the thought of art class. But I encourage them both to explore the arts in as many different formats and ways as possible. That's because [research](#) has found connections between arts education, emotional intelligence and academic success — students who receive [arts education](#) are more likely to go to college. Fiction offers one more avenue for exposing kids to the arts. [Books](#) centered on characters who grow through art help my practical-minded child see what all the fuss is about and give my art monster a chance to see herself reflected in the stories she reads.

Prepared with the help of my local librarians, here are recommended [books](#) that feature art at the heart of the story.

Picture [books](#) for younger children

[Hey, Wall](#)

by Susan Verde and John Parra

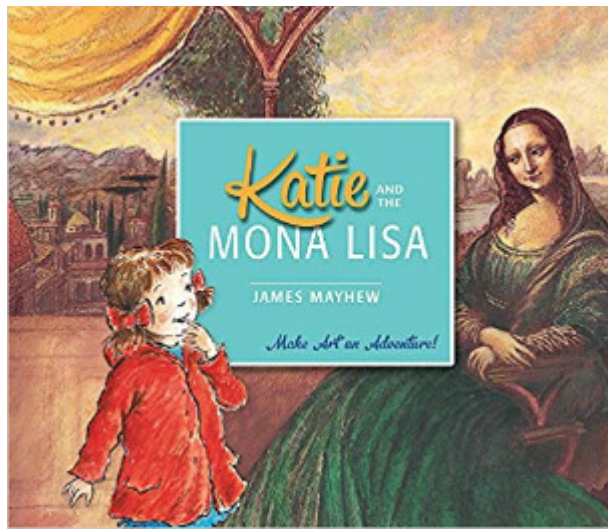
Ángel lives in a multicultural neighborhood set against the backdrop of a bleak, bare wall. In this story told in verse, he brings his neighbors together to create a community art project that transforms the wall into something as vibrant as the lives that surround it.

Katie and the Mona Lisa

by James Mayhew

When her grandmother takes Katie to the art museum, she makes friends with Mona Lisa,

and together they explore the worlds inside famous Renaissance paintings. If your child likes this title, there are more than a dozen [books](#) about Katie and her magical journeys through art history, by the author of the “Ella Bella Ballerina” series.



"Katie and the Mona Lisa" by James Mayhew

Emily's Blue Period

by Cathleen Daly and Lisa Brown

Emily is, like her favorite artist Picasso, going through a blue period. Her parents have separated, and shuttling between two houses makes for some complicated feelings. At first, a school assignment to make a collage of her house only makes things worse. But through the project, Emily learns to combine elements of her two homes into something beautiful.

Grandma in Blue With Red Hat

by Scott Menchin and Harry Bliss

When a little boy learns about the qualities of great art — beauty, rarity, distinctiveness — in a Saturday art class at the museum, he realizes that his beloved grandmother is a work of art. Unfortunately, the curator does not accept grandmothers for display. So, the boy creates his own grandmother-themed exhibit at home, filled with references to famous works and styles of art.

Drawn Together

by Minh Lê and Dan Santat

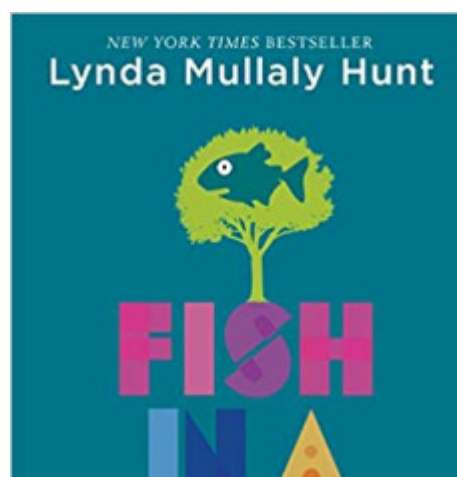
An American boy visits his Thai grandfather in this bilingual book. They struggle to communicate until they discover a shared language in art. With the dialogue printed in each character's respective language, and the illustrations matching their distinctive drawing styles, they connect with one another despite their different languages, ages and cultures.

Books for middle-schoolers

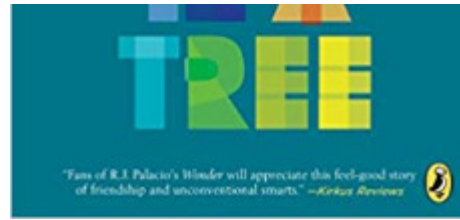
Fish in a Tree

by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

The only class Ally excels in is art, and she takes comfort in



drawing when feeling like the class clown gets her down. A new teacher identifies Ally's dyslexia and uses her skill in art to prove to her that she is smart enough to learn to read. One of this year's Global Reading Challenge choices, "Fish in a Tree" illustrates the many forms that intelligence can take.



"Fish in a Tree" by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

The First Rule of Punk

by **Celia C. Perez**

At her old school, 12-year-old Malú felt like the only Latina. In her new one, she is the only punk rocker. Although her mother wants her to be a proper young señorita, her father says the first rule of punk is to be true to yourself. Malú's efforts to form a punk band for the school talent show help her figure out how to be both Mexican and punk. Another Global Reading Challenge choice, "The First Rule of Punk" may send readers down a Spotify rabbit hole or inspire a burst of zine-making.

Drama

by **Raina Telgemeier**

In this classic graphic novel, middle school misfits and oddballs find a home in the theater. Callie and her friends on the stage crew navigate friendship, romance and identity as the semester progresses. There is drama on-stage and offstage, but there is art

in both places as well. The stage crew kids may work in costumes and carpentry instead of acting, but they grow in professionalism with just as much passion and creativity as the performers who claim the spotlight.

Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World

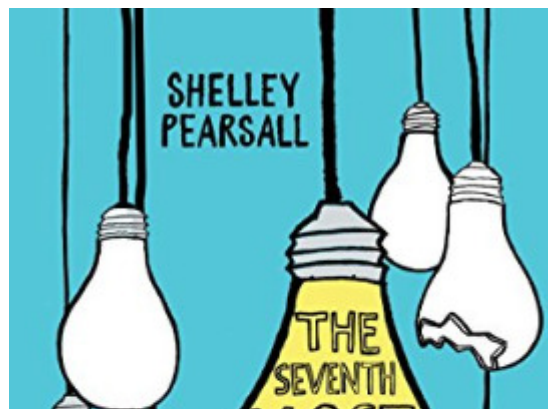
by Ashley Herring Blake

"Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World" is a sensitive story of first crushes, loss and feeling stuck in the middle. After her home is destroyed by a tornado, overlooked middle child Ivy finds it even harder to talk to her family about her feelings for June, a poetry-writing classmate who admires Ivy's drawing talent. She sketches her feelings in her notebook, until it goes missing and the person who has it starts leaving notes in her locker. Just as the notes suggest, Ivy needs to find a confidante.

The Seventh Most Important Thing

by Shelley Pearsall

Angry over his
father's death,
Arthur strikes out
at the
neighborhood



trash picker. He's headed to juvie for his violent act when his victim suggests an alternative — community service as his assistant.



"The Seventh Most Important Thing" by Shelley Persail

The trash picker is folk artist James Hampton, and Arthur must fill a shopping cart with the seven most important things: glass bottles, foil, cardboard, pieces of wood, light bulbs, coffee cans and mirrors. Through helping Hampton create his art, Arthur learns about redemption and other important things that don't fit in a shopping cart.

Young adult titles

[Everywhere You Want to Be](#)

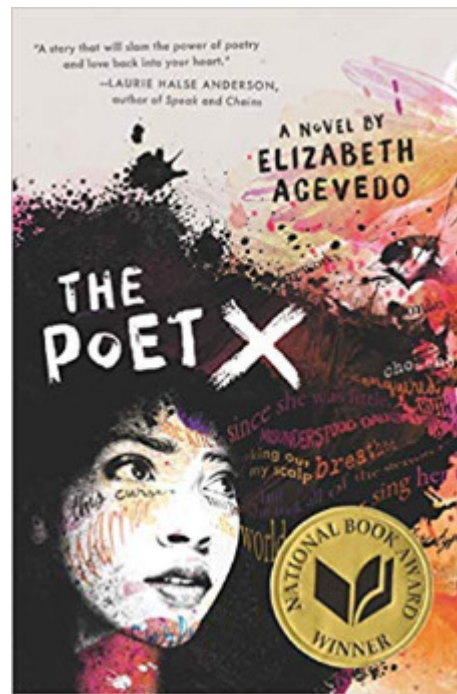
by **Christina June**

Talented teen Tilly Castillo must choose between college and a career in modern dance. She's been accepted to Georgetown University, and her mother expects her to enroll in the fall. But she's also been accepted to a summer dance program in New York that could lead to a job in a professional dance company. Will Tilly make her mother happy by taking the safe path? Or will she risk everything to pursue her true passion?

The Poet X

by Elizabeth Acevedo

Dominican-American teen Xiomara Batista gets all the wrong kind of attention. Strangers notice her curvy body, but no one wants to hear how she feels, least of all her conservative, religious family. So, Xiomara pours out all of her angst in her poetry notebook. Joining her school's slam poetry club is as forbidden as the boy in her bio class, but the heroine of this novel in verse is too strong to stay silent.



"The Poet X" by Elizabeth Acevedo

The Prince and the Dressmaker

by Jen Wang

The dresses in this graphic novel are as beautiful as its story of two young people helping each other find themselves. Dealing equally with class divisions, social expectation and fashion as both art and self-expression, "The Prince and the Dressmaker" is a fairy tale for a new generation. Prince Sebastian wants to live as his fabulous alter ego, Lady Crystallia. Frances wants to create brilliant and shocking new gowns instead of working in someone else's dress shop. As long as they keep each other's secret, they can do what they wish. But keeping secrets keeps them both from being true to

themselves.

Blood Water Paint

by Joy McCullough

Told in a mix of free verse and prose, this historical novel is based on the life of artist Artemisia Gentileschi. Living in Rome in the early 1600s, Gentileschi's father took credit for her paintings; her teacher raped her, and when she publicly accused him, the trial was more brutal for her than for him. Artemisia persisted and today her work, much of which portrays strong women from "The Bible," is considered a milestone of art history.

Bonus: Seattle Art Museum's exhibition "Masterpieces From the Capodimonte Museum," opening October 17, will include some of Gentileschi's paintings.

Draw the Line

by Laurent Linn

In this illustrated novel, Adrian Piper is a talented artist, a sci-fi geek and gay — all traits it's safer to hide



at his Texas high school. So, he lives vicariously through his own Renaissance-art-inspired superhero, Graphite, until a real-life hate crime requires Adrian to decide between heroism and hiding.



"You're Welcome, Universe" by Whitney Gardner

You're Welcome, Universe

by **Whitney Gardner**

When Julia paints on the school's wall to cover up an insult written about her friend, she is kicked out of the Kingston School for the Deaf. Her mothers send her to a mainstream school in the suburbs. Failing to fit in with her hearing classmates, Julia escapes into graffiti art, only to find a rival defacing her finest creations. Illustrated with American Sign Language and Julia's drawings, this novel shows a young girl navigating multiple minority identities to find her place in graffiti culture.

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ABOUT AUTHOR



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1

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