

Recommended Books from the [University of Wisconsin Cooperative Children's Book Center](#) Supporting November Veterans Day and Military Family Appreciation Month

I've included a range of books from our recommended book search database, save for the first book which is very new and was recently featured as a Book of the Week. Note, there are many books about specific military events in history, so I tried to focus on contemporary stories and experiences.

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[Ginny Off the Map](#)

by Caroline Hickey

Illustrated by Kelly Murphy

Christy Ottaviano Books / Little, Brown, 2023

304 pages

Ages 8-12

Eleven-year-old Ginny's dad is an army doctor. Ginny (white) and her older sister, Allie, are blindsided when they learn his posting to Afghanistan in the new year has been changed; he leaves shortly after their expected move from North Carolina to Maryland at the end of the school year. Allie, who is gifted athletically and makes friends easily, is out playing with kids in their new neighborhood right away. Ginny, who is gifted academically but struggles socially, isn't. Passionate about maps, she's upset when a geography summer camp at the nearby community center is canceled, and her efforts to engage the neighborhood kids in her interests fail. Ginny's dad, who understands her best, video calls when he can, but not as often as any of them want. With their mom focused on a new job, and Allie and Ginny at odds, tensions in their house are high. As the family faces an additional unexpected challenge around

the deployment, Ginny and Allie's relationship and individual struggles with the move, and missing their dad, turn a corner as everyone in the family learns to be more honest, open, understanding, and supportive of one another. Believable characters ground this engaging book set in 2015 illuminating some of the challenges unique to military families, as well as challenges many families can understand. It features a likely neurodivergent main character in Ginny. Smaller subplots involving the diverse kids in the neighborhood and Ginny's expectations around school all further enrich this inviting, welcome story. ©2023 Cooperative Children's Book Center

Coming Home

by Greg Ruth

Illustrated by Greg Ruth

Publishers: Feiwel and Friends, Macmillan

Publish Year: 2014

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 4-9

An almost wordless picture book captures anticipation, drama, and joy as it follows a boy at the airport waiting for the arrival of an airplane carrying troops coming home. "Waiting" is the only word on the opening spread, in which the red-shirted boy stands at the front of a group of people eagerly watching for the plane. Then the plane lands and he and the others spill onto the tarmac. "Go!" The boy witnesses a series of reunions — a female soldier with her dog, a young couple ("Sheesh!" is his comment on their kiss), a father and daughter. "Where is...?" he wonders as he searches through the crowd. A variety of perspectives, including a wonderful overhead view, allows readers to focus on the boy while visually following other stories. Finally, he spots the person he's come to see. Only the soldier's boots and duffle bag are shown before a turn of the page reveals the boy's joyous face: "Mom!" In an author's note Greg Ruth writes, "No soldier goes to war alone ... I felt getting this right was the most important way to honor those fortunate enough to come home to the loving arms of those whom they have left behind." ©2014 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Personal Effects

by E. M. Kokie

Publisher: Candlewick

Publish Year: 2012

CCBC Age Recommendation: Age 14 and older

The already tense atmosphere in Matt Foster's house only tightened after his older brother, T. J., was killed in Iraq. Matt moves through the world like a clenched fist, ready to explode. His dad often does explode, with words, and sometimes physically. He also refuses to talk about T. J. or let Matt see any of T. J.'s things. Then T. J.'s footlockers arrive, and immediately disappear behind the closed door of T. J.'s old room. Matt secretly begins looking for his brother among the items inside. T. J. had made a real effort to connect with Matt on his last visit, and the brother Matt glimpsed then is echoed in some of what he finds. But there's a surprise, too—a huge one. Correspondence and photos hint at T. J. having been in love with Celia, a fellow soldier, and the two of them having a child together. Celia's letters are postmarked from Madison, Wisconsin, and Matt heads off on an illicit road trip—Pennsylvania to Madison—in hopes of meeting her and discovering more about T. J. What he finds when he arrives is wholly unexpected, and at first unsettling. But T. J. is there after all, in the memories of people who loved him deeply and understand how much Matt, too, loves and misses the older brother he was just starting to know as a man. E. M. Kokie's intense and deeply moving debut novel is set in 2007 and rooted in wonderfully developed characters and the relationships among them. © Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

At the Mountain's Base

by Traci Sorell

Illustrated by Weshoyot Alvitre

Publishers: Penguin Random House, Kokila

Publish Year: 2019

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 5-9

“At the mountain’s base”... is a hickory tree. Beneath the tree is a cabin. Inside the cabin is a kitchen, with a stove, and simmering pans, and a grandma weaving “and worrying.” Around the grandma is a family “tending and singing” a song in which a battle unfolds. “In that battle soars a plane” piloted by a young woman “protecting and defending” as she prays for peace. The

comforting cadence of this picture book featuring a contemporary Cherokee family concludes with an image of the pilot's arrival home. The grandmother's weaving serves as visual symbolism throughout a book that depicts how the young pilot is tethered to her family through bonds of love even as she soars, and even as they are motivation for why she has chosen her path. A story that depicts a specific, fictional family will surely resonate with many military families. An author's note discusses the role women in American Indian and Alaskan Native nations have played in many conflicts, including Ola Mildred Rexroat, an Oglala Lakota WASP pilot in World War II, and many Native women in service today. ©2020 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Poems in the Attic

by Nikki Grimes

Illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon

Publisher: Lee & Low

Publish Year: 2015

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 5-9

A warm picture book collection alternates between poems in the voice of an African American girl whose mom is away in the military, and poems in the voice of her mother as a child, growing up in a military family that moved many times. The contemporary girl's discovery of her mother's childhood poems has inspired her to write her own, which often reflect on the differences between their childhoods, especially as she is living in one place with her grandmother while her mom is away, rather than moving from place to place. But there are many parallel experiences that play out in the two poems on each page spread, one in each voice. There is a strong sense of connection and continuity—grandmother, mother, grandchild—while in both present and past there is a child missing a parent who is away on duty. The illustrations do a terrific job of distinguishing between present and past on the same page spread. An author's note talks more about the experiences of military children and identifies the actual U.S. air force bases which formed the locales for the places the girl's mother lived as a child. ©2015 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Each Tiny Spark

by Pablo Cartaya

Publishers: Penguin Random House, Kokila

Publish Year: 2019

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 9-12

Smart, creative Emilia Torres, 12, is hyper-focused when engaged, but organization is a challenge. Her app developer mom, on a work trip, stays connected by video chat, while her dad, just home from a tour of duty overseas, is sometimes funny and affectionate and sometimes moody and withdrawn, making it hard for Emilia to reconnect with him. He opens up when teaching Emilia to weld, but she often feels the weight of his silence, along with the weight of expectations from her mom and Abuela. A social studies project researching the history of Latine emigration to the Atlanta area, and ongoing discussions about redrawing school boundaries in her town, which would bring more Black and Latine students to Emilia's school, has Emilia thinking about justice, and fairness. Anti-immigration sentiment puts people she knows at risk, while many are quick with opinions about the proposed school boundaries, but no one is asking what kids and families who would be forced to change schools think. For Emilia, the importance of being seen, heard, and valued extends from her personal life, where she feels loved but not always listened to, to her community. Cuban American Emilia and her family are the believable, compelling center of an ambitious story that naturally integrates Spanish throughout. ©2020 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Pax

by Sara Pennypacker

Publishers: Balzer + Bray, HarperCollins

Publish Year: 2016

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 8-11

CCBC Location: Fiction, Pennypacker

Lonely Peter's only friend is Pax, the fox he found as an orphaned pup and raised. And Pax, who has never really known the wild world, is completely dependent on Peter. The two are separated when Peter's dad, about to join the war, takes him to live with his grandfather miles away. Pax, abandoned on the side of the road, has to survive on his own. Peter runs away from his grandfather's house, determined to find Pax, but an accident lays him up in the home of Vola, a reclusive veteran. Impatient to be on his way, Peter must instead take time to heal. The more time he spends with Vola, the more he sees she is struggling to make peace with all she's seen and done as a soldier. Meanwhile Pax gradually bonds with other foxes, but never gives up hope or intention of finding his boy. Two survival stories, told from Pax's and Peter's alternating points of view, are set against the backdrop of a near-future second U.S. civil war (likely over water rights). The tense and moving novel is an exquisite exploration of connectedness – among humans and nature – as well as a heartrending look at the impact of war on people, animals, and the earth itself. It will grab readers from its opening paragraphs and hold them in a spell until a bittersweet but triumphant ending. Jon Klassen's muted, elegant illustrations add to the physical beauty of the singular book. ©2016 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

[Tuesday Tucks Me In: The Loyal Bond Between a Soldier and His Service Dog](#)

by Luis Carlos Montalvan, Bret Witter

Illustrated by Dan Dion

Publisher: Roaring Brook

Publish Year: 2014

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 7-10

Luis Carlos Montalván is a disabled veteran who relies on his service dog, Tuesday, for help with daily tasks as well as emotional support. A photo-documentary from Tuesday's perspective describes their relationship and some of their typical (visiting a veterans' hospital) and not-so-typical (a trip to an amusement park) outings. In particular, the narrative does a remarkable job describing Luis's PTSD in straightforward, accessible prose. "He gets nervous when people are around ... or there are sudden movements ... or loud sounds. So each morning, we sit together outside our apartment building, waiting, until his breathing and heartbeat tell me he's calm. Then I walk beside him, always on his right side, so Luis knows that I am there." Wonderful color photographs capture the loving and essential relationship between Luis and Tuesday. ©2014 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Absolutely Truly

by Heather Vogel Frederick

Publisher: Simon & Schuster

Publish Year: 2014

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 9-12

Truly Lovejoy is "smack dab in the middle" of her family of five kids. At 5'11", however, she towers over just about everyone both at home and in the seventh grade at her new school in her dad's hometown of Pumpkin Falls, New Hampshire. The town is as quaint as its name — there's even a winter cotillion for all seventh graders. They've moved because her dad, a military veteran, lost a hand in Afghanistan. While his physical recovery has been progressing, he's having a harder time emotionally. With Truly's Aunt True, he's taking over his parents' bookstore while Truly's grandparents head off to the Peace Corps and her mom goes back to school. When Truly finds a twenty-year-old letter hinting at unresolved romance inside a signed first edition of *Charlotte's Web* in the bookstore, she's soon collaborating with the new friends she's making in the hopes of figuring out who the recipient and sender are and tracking them down. Then the copy of *Charlotte's Web* — valuable enough to get the bookstore out of debt — disappears, too. A true "cozy" for kids, this mystery has a few edges, but just the right

amount of weight and authenticity to the family story and interactions to add emotional depth. Pumpkin Falls is refreshing and believably diverse, with its share of quirky yet credible small-town characters. ©2014 Cooperative Children's Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Sharice's Big Voice: A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman

by Sharice Davids, Nancy K. Mays

Illustrated by Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley

Publishers: Harper, HarperCollins

Publish Year: 2021

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 6-9

“When I was young, I liked to talk. *A lot!* (I still do!)” Sharice Davids, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, describes her journey to becoming a U.S. congresswoman representing Kansas in this picture-book autobiography in which the engaging first-person narrative makes her gift for connecting with others apparent. Davids notes that she learned early on that “the best way to learn about people is to listen to them.” She’s gotten lifelong inspiration from her mom, a single parent serving in the military, whom she describes as “focused and fierce ... confident and kind.” Her mom taught her to be a hard worker whether on a job or pursuing something she loves, like martial arts, at which Davids competed before turning her attention to law school. Appealing digital illustrations by Ojibwe artist Joshua Pawis-Steckley provide a perfect backdrop for this dynamic account. Back matter includes a note from the author and illustrator, and an essay about Ho-Chunk culture and history by a former Ho-Chunk nation president. ©2022 Cooperative Children’s Book Center

CCBC Recommended Book

Shooting the Moon

by Frances O'Roark Dowell

Publisher: Atheneum

Publish Year: 2008

CCBC Age Recommendation: Ages 10-14

Jamie Dexter is “Army through and through.” Her dad is the Colonel, chief of staff at Fort Hood, Texas. Her older brother, TJ, has recently enlisted and is off to Vietnam. Jamie would go herself if she could. At twelve, she settles for working at the rec center on base, assisting Private Hollister, who’s in charge, with odd jobs when she isn’t engaging him in a spirited game of gin rummy. Jamie is fiercely proud of TJ and can’t imagine why the Colonel wanted him to wait until after college to enlist. Now she can’t wait to get his first letter. But when it comes, it’s written to her mom and dad and disappointingly spare. For Jamie, there is only a roll of exposed film with a request for her to develop it. Private Hollister arranges for a vet to teach Jamie how to use the rec center darkroom. Every subsequent letter from TJ has a roll of film for Jamie. She realizes that the pictures are his way of telling her about his life and the war in which he is serving, and that the photo of the moon he always includes bridges the distance between them. Over the course of the summer, Jamie’s skill in the darkroom grows. She is able to bring out greater detail and clarity in the prints, just as the photos themselves begin to reveal more of the tragedy that is war. At the same time, things in the rest of Jamie’s life grow increasingly unclear. Already puzzled by the Colonel’s lack of enthusiasm for TJ’s enlistment, she begins to wonder about the role her father plays in sending soldiers off to war, especially when Private Hollister announces he, too, may be headed for Vietnam. Frances O’Roark Dowell’s nuanced and finely told story features a cast of complex characters, at the center of which is a feisty, funny girl who finds so much of what she once knew to be true gradually shadowed by doubt. ©2008 Cooperative Children’s Book Center