

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANE ADDAMS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARDS ANNOUNCED

JANUARY 19, 2026... Recipients of the 2026 Jane Addams Children's Book Awards are announced today by the Jane Addams Peace Association. Since 1953, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award annually recognizes children's books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people.

The Jane Addams Peace Association Children's Book Awards will be presented to the winning and honored authors and illustrators on June 26th at 5:30pm at the Hull House Museum, preceded by a Hull House Tour at 4:30pm in Chicago. For details about the award event, and securing winner and honor book seals, please contact the Jane Addams Peace Association at info@janeaddamspeace.org.

2026 Winner in the Picture Book Category

The History of We, written and illustrated by Nikkolas Smith, and published by Kokila, an imprint of Penguin. ***The History of We*** is a powerful work that tells of humanity perched in the African cradle. This story takes us on the journey of a lifetime and of a people: interconnected by the truths that make us "we". The book opens with asking what the Beginning looks like and quickly shares that the Beginning has roots. This language helps even the youngest reader connect this history to that of a tree. In a tree, branches are what can be easily seen, while the networking of the roots and the genesis cannot be easily seen. Throughout the story, there is celebration of the first people in civilization as artists, pioneers, musicians, dancers, and weavers. Smith repeats the lines "we were" to unite the descriptions of those who came before us and that helped make us who we are today.

Nikkolas Smith brings his robust gifts of art and illustration to life on every page of the book. The hand-painted acrylic illustrations create both a texture and warmth that jumps off the pages and into the eyes of every reader. The blending of earth tones and lighter colors help to convey the message with each work and phrase. Nestled within the illustrations lies a history of its own. This book centers the celebration of humanity, particularly those of African origin. In his author's note, Smith describes this book as "our family tree." The inclusion of all of us as "we" makes this picture book relevant to every child. This story invites dialogue, reflection, and curiosity for all readers. Smith creates a space where we can see how all people have worked together to ensure justice and understanding to achieve equality. The centering of what is just and right about "us" is the history that we all need. This book is a necessary addition to classrooms and libraries around the world.

2026 Winner in the Chapter Book Category

A Sea of Lemon Trees: The Corrido of Robert Alvarez, written by María Dolores Águila, and published by Roaring Brook Press, an imprint of Macmillan.

Based on the true story of Roberto Alvarez and the Lemon Grove Incident court case, this unforgettable novel in verse, set in 1931, tells a compelling story that parallels current events. Roberto's extended family relocates to San Diego, after being driven out of Oklahoma by deportation raids on Mexican families. When they arrived, they were barred from attending school due to their race and were compelled to attend a segregated school located in a barn. The community rallies, organizes, and fights against the injustices, overturning the law, but not without substantial, heartbreaking losses along the way. This novel comes at a critical time, shining a light on a darkness in our past and sounds the alarm on dark injustices that are recurring today. Águila ends her note by stating, "I wrote this story for young readers to learn about the resistance and resilience of their communities and feel inspired to make a difference."

Two Honor Books were named in the Picture Book category:

A Line Can Go Anywhere: The Brilliant, Resilient Life of Artist Ruth Asawa, written by Caroline McAlister, illustrated by Jamie Green and published by Roaring Brook Press, an imprint of Macmillan; and ***A Place for Us: A Story in Pictures***, written and illustrated by James Ransome, and published by Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin.

A Line Can Go Anywhere: The Brilliant, Resilient Life of Artist Ruth Asawa invites dialogue and reflection on how creative non-violent responses to prejudice and hatred can push back at oppression. Through this biography, young readers can connect with Asawa's humble message "art belongs to everyone," witness her resilience in the face of xenophobia, sexism, and elitism, and appreciate the human capacity to find beauty and dignity in bleak circumstances – a timely message indeed. Jamie Green's illustrations of charcoal and watercolor continue the visual motif of the line as both decorative and symbolic. Curls, grids, twists, and loops foreshadow the shapes of Asawa's wire sculptures, while bold straight lines across double page spreads represent the connection and movement across time and space: sometimes whole and sometimes broken. ***A Line Can Go Anywhere*** elevates Ruth Asawa, an Asian American woman, artist, activist, family and community member, who used her talents to uplift others and will inspire young readers to do the same.

A Place for Us: A Story in Pictures is an amazing, wordless picturebook that invites readers to spend a one day journey with an unhoused mother and son. This story shows the boundless love of a family who find home in their hearts and in the shared spaces.

The book opens with a powerful note from Ransome sharing the reality for more than half a million people who go unhoused in the United States each day. This sobering note helps to situate the reader within the truth that to achieve true equality for every American, we must grapple with uncomfortable questions around why some people have an abundance of resources while others do not have access to the most basic necessities. Ransome's watercolor and pencil illustrations are as equally masterful as his author's note. He blends both color and detail to create inescapable feelings. The connection of both light and dark colors help the reader to understand the duality of the family's reality. The smiles on the faces of both the mother and son paired with the detail in

each setting helps each reader to envision what it would be like to walk alongside this family for the day. The bold lines and connected shapes help the reader to see how each place is truly part of the love this mother and son have for each and for the moments they are able to share.

With its powerful illustrations, *A Place for Us* creates a space for itself as one of James Ransome's greatest works yet Ransome invites us all to interrogate how our neighbors are known, seen, and valued, and how we can all work together to ensure communities benefit from resource equity.

Two Honor Books were also named in the Chapter Book category:

How The Word Is Passed: Remembering Slavery and How It Shaped America, original work by Clint Smith, now adapted for young readers by Sonja Cherry-Paul, published by Little Brown Books for Young Readers; and *The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze*, written by Derrick Barnes, and published by Viking Books, an imprint of Penguin.

How the Word Is Passed explores how the United States both remembers and avoids the history of slavery, racism, and resistance. In visits to plantations, memorials, prisons, and schools, Cherry-Paul reveals that history is shaped by power, silence, and choice. In doing so, the book powerfully reflects the Jane Addams Children's Book Award's mission that true peace is not simply the absence of war, but the presence of justice, dignity, and opportunity for all people.

The book invites readers to practice compassion and empathy by listening deeply to stories of those who have long been marginalized. Cherry-Paul emphasizes that confronting painful truths about the past is essential to creating a more just present. By modeling careful listening and moral courage, the text demonstrates how people of all racial identities, gender identities, religions, abilities, classes, and cultures can live and work together equitably through honesty, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.

Finally, the book affirms the inherent worth of all individuals and communities, including the women whose labor, resistance, and leadership have often been minimized in historical narratives. By restoring complexity and humanity to the stories we tell, *How the Word Is Passed* builds respect for difference. Ultimately, it calls young readers to participate in the ongoing work of justice, equality, and peace, reminding us that how we tell our history shapes the future we are able to imagine and create.

The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze by Derrick Barnes is a powerful and compelling middle-grade novel that insists peace and justice begin with seeing one another fully and honoring each person's dignity and humanity. Inspired by the author's conversations with children about gender identity, self-expression, and acceptance, the story unfolds in the richly imagined Mississippi town of Great Mountain, where Southern folklore and magical realism deepen young readers' engagement with justice, tradition, and community memory. Barnes centers joy, imagination, and humanity in Henson's journey, emphasizing that being "incredibly human" means being deserving of love, dignity, and belonging just as you are.

With its rich narrative, lyrical blending of tall tales, and humane portrayal of children navigating systemic oppression without erasing wonder or hope, *The Incredibly Human Henson Blayze* exemplifies the literary excellence and ethical insight celebrated by the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. It offers young readers an invitation to question generational biases and imagine a more just, compassionate community.

A national Selection Committee chooses the winner and honor books in the Picture Book and Chapter Book categories. Members of the 2026 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Selection Committee are: Anthony Whaley (Chair, VA), Susie Rios (Co-Chair, NY), Heather Matthews (Publisher Liaison, MD), Jackie Marshall Arnold (OH), Mariah Boone (TX), Amina Chaudhri (IL), Lettycia Terrones (CA), Rabia Khokar (ON), Aura Perez (CA), Robyn Seglem (CO), and Morika Tsujmura (NY).

To read more about this year's finalists and about the Jane Addams Children's Book Awards, please visit:

janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org/book-award/finalists-award-announcement-calendar

For a complete list of books honored since 1953, please visit:

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