This children’s literature review column showcases the winners of the 2018 NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children.

Since 1989, the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction has annually recognized high-quality, engaging, and artful nonfiction for readers in grades PreK–8. The award pays tribute to the first picturebook for children, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, written by Johann Amos Comenius in 1658. Orbis Pictus was also the first nonfiction book for children and the first to capitalize on the potential of words and images to work in concert to convey information. Since the inception of the award, the field of nonfiction for children and young adults has continued to grow, change, and push boundaries, just like *Orbis Pictus* did 360 years ago.

The 2018 Orbis Pictus Award recognizes one winner, five honor books, and eight recommended titles. These books demonstrate accuracy and authenticity, as evidenced by the research conducted by authors and illustrators, as well as engaging writing, inviting illustrations, and appealing overall book design. The books attract a wide range of readers and can play a diverse range of roles across the content areas. At a time when we are looking to increase the informational literacy of elementary and middle school students, these Orbis Pictus-winning titles are important touchstone texts. Generous back matter offers young readers and writers the chance to understand both the academic and the artistic processes that create these versatile teaching tools and works of art.

From the Grand Canyon to the Constitution, from an 18th-century pirate shipwreck to 21st-century street food, from Ballet Folklórico to the pianoforte, the 2018 Orbis Pictus titles offer readers a window to the world.

**Winner**

**Grand Canyon**
*Written and illustrated by Jason Chin*

Jason Chin’s masterful nonfiction picturebook takes the art form to new levels. Every conceivable bit of space in Grand Canyon is used to convey information: the covers, end papers, jacket flaps, and every page in between. Chin takes readers on a journey from the deepest depths of the canyon—and the oldest layers—to the rim, covering the canyon’s five-million-year-old history. Chin artfully uses book design and inquiry to convey conceptual understanding of geological time and processes.

For example, a portion of the canyon, the Grand Canyon Supergroup, has ripple marks embedded in stone. Chin’s text directs readers to examine these illustrated ripple marks. A cutout within the illustration prompts curiosity, and an effectively placed ellipsis encourages prediction at the page turn. The next spread reveals a tidal flat...
from 1.2 billion years ago on that very same spot, the cut rock transformed into sand. Such design patterns repeat through the book. Still other two-page spreads have their margins filled with the wildlife that live in the canyon, deepening readers’ understanding of interrelationships and habitats.

When readers finally arrive at the rim, they are treated to a climactic panoramic gatefold spread. What follows are eight pages of back matter, each more impressive than the last. Moving beyond a mere listing of source materials, Chin uses the back matter to explain geology, plate tectonics, ecology, human history, and more. Almost a full page is devoted to the accuracy of the illustrations, where the science leaves off and imagination kicks in. Chin reminds us that “it’s imagination that makes both science and art possible.” At 277 miles long and 18 miles wide, the Grand Canyon is impressive. So is this book. (MAC)

A son of Korean immigrants, Roy Choi spent hours in the family restaurant where his mother cooked kimchi with sohn-maash (love). He also spent time on the streets of Los Angeles wondering where he fit in. One day, when watching a cooking show, he thought maybe he, too, could cook with sohn-maash. After some cooking school success, Roy struggled with the demands of fancy restaurant kitchens. Perhaps being a chef wasn’t the right recipe. A friend suggested they cook Korean tacos and sell them out of trucks. Turns out, this food fusion and restaurant remix brought Chef Roy Choi back to the streets with purpose, redefining culinary trends and launching the food truck movement. Jacqueline Briggs Martin’s and June Jo Lee’s lyrical and lucid narrative, as well as street artist Man One’s graffiti-inspired artwork, are the perfect ingredients to bring this timely tale of identity to life. (SR)

**Honor Books**

**Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix**
Written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and June Jo Lee
Illustrated by Man One
Readers to Eaters, 2017, unpaged,

**Dazzle Ships: World War I and the Art of Confusion**
Written by Chris Barton
Illustrated by Victo Ngai
This brilliantly illustrated book highlights a historical event that is not known to many. Barton and Ngai tell the story of Dazzle camouflage, a military camouflage paint scheme used during both World Wars on ships of the Allied forces. With accuracy and an appropriate and approachable manner for young readers, Barton and Ngai create a strong interest in the book’s content. Through clear language and generous quotes from written sources, readers understand the trial and error involved in the process. Ngai’s colorful illustrations emphasize conceptual understanding, such as when a map of Europe shows an oversized U.S. soldier wading through water, or when Britannia, the personification of Britain, covers starving children with her cloak. This book tells the story behind the military strategy. (SA)
country. Compelling design elements and rich back matter perfectly compliment Rubin’s text, making *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend* just as dazzling as the quilts themselves. (SR)

The World Is Not a Rectangle: A Portrait of Architect Zaha Hadid
Written and illustrated by Jeanette Winter

This beautifully haunting and soulful picturebook biography introduces us to the life of Zaha Hadid, a famous architect who won top architecture awards around the globe. With colorful and iconic Winter illustrations, the book provides a glimpse of the ideas, images, and dreams that shaped Zaha’s life from a young age. The natural world was Zaha’s inspiration. Winter cleverly juxtaposes illustrations of Zaha in the natural landscapes that inspired her with illustrations of the unique structures she created. Hadid persists with her unconventional ideas despite discrimination—she is both a woman and an Arab. In the back matter, each project illustration from the book is labeled with its name and location in the world. Teachers and students will have a hard time resisting the temptation to find out more about Hadid and her projects. This book serves as a fitting and worthy portrait of a woman with huge dreams and the tenacity to make them reality. (JW)

Recommended Books

Danza!: Amalia Hernández and El Ballet Folklórico de México
Written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh

Amalia Hernández had a dream of choreographing and performing ballets based on the folklórico danzas y bailes she learned in villages across México. Illustrated in Tonatiuh’s signature style, which is inspired by the Mesoamerican art of the Mixtecs, this biography follows Ami’s journey toward establishing the world-renowned Ballet Folklórico de México. Tonatiuh presents a visually captivating story that attends to the grace, movement, and agility of dancers from diverse traditions. As with his other books, *Danza!* also includes an extensive author’s note and list of resources. In this case, they support readers’ understanding and appreciation of both the significance of dance in México and the contributions extraordinary women like Amalia Hernández have made to the celebration and preservation of the arts. Published in advance of the 100th anniversary of Hernández’s birth, this book is sure to stir and enchant readers and dancers of all ages, genders, and cultural traditions. (DD)
**Fault Lines in the Constitution: The Framers, Their Fights, and the Flaws That Affect Us Today**  
Written by Cynthia Levinson and Sanford Levinson  

Born of impossible challenges, heated debates, and numerous compromises, the document that the Framers of the Constitution penned in 1787 contained, the authors contend, “limitations, ambiguities, and flatly bad ideas” (p. 6) that have led to crises throughout the centuries. Eighteen succinct and accessible chapters address an equal number of these constitutional “fault lines,” from gerrymandering and the Electoral College to bicameralism and emergency powers. The consequences of these fault lines, and the discussions on solutions and alternative approaches to them (including how other nations have responded to similar questions), provide fascinating reading. Final chapters offer an eye-opening “Constitutional Report Card” and a discussion of the pros and cons of a future Constitutional Convention. A provocative and timely look at an imperfect, yet enduring document. The conversation continues at www.faultlinesintheconstitution.com. (DG)

**If Sharks Disappeared**  
Written and illustrated by Lily Williams  
Roaring Brook, 2017, unpaged,  
ISBN 978-1-62672-413-6

An adaptation of Lily Williams’s (2014) award-winning animated film documentary, FINconceivable*, this accessible picturebook features a smart and insightful child of color who invites readers to consider the devastating implications of a planet without sharks. Here, Williams offers a counternarrative to the notion that sharks are scary and explains that the loss of sharks could trigger a “pattern of cause and effect, called a trophic cascade.” Since all living beings are dependent upon each other for survival, it is essential to sustain shark populations; they serve important predatory roles in preserving a balanced ecosystem for all inhabitants of Earth. Fortunately, Williams reminds readers that sharks still exist and that by working together and remembering every species

[Video file]. Retrieved from https://lilywilliamsart.com/finconceivable/
Isaac the Alchemist: Secrets of Isaac Newton, Revealed
Written by Mary Losure

This is an intriguing narrative biography about the father of physics. With the help of Newton’s own notebook, Mary Losure invites readers into a lesser-known part of Isaac’s life: his childhood. She sheds light on this child, awkward and bookish, whom many readers will find familiar and relatable as he grows into an adult. Intriguing primary source documents, photos of artifacts, illustrations, and glimpses at Newton’s diaries bring Isaac’s world to life. Back matter includes more information about Newton’s notebook, notes about alchemy, source notes, a bibliography, and image credits. The book’s focus on alchemy (the Medieval magical process of turning lead into gold), rather than on Newton’s famous physics, leaves room for surprising experiments and experiences that help illustrate a time when the line between magic and science was not what it is today. (JW)

Life on Surtsey: Iceland’s Upstart Island
Written by Loree Griffin Burns

In this Scientists in the Field book, Burns explores the ecosystem of a newly generated island, Surtsey. The island came into being in 1963 and is now home to a myriad of flora and fauna. Burns joins entomologist Erling Ólafsson, who has a deep personal and professional connection to Surtsey, in his yearly expedition. Burns’s short trip to the almost pristine world of Surtsey is documented in an accessible manner. Strong sentence variation, clear clarification of concepts and processes, vivid verbs, and literary devices such as alliteration and imagery demonstrate Burns’s command of language. The snippets from interviews speak to the significance of the topic of life’s inception on this brand new Icelandic island. The photographs and the accompanying text reinforce each other. This excellent book educates readers of all ages. The glossary and additional information at the end of the book highlight the accuracy and work put into writing it. (SA)
conversations connect the past and present and help us reconsider—and perhaps reconstruct—how we honor and heal ourselves and our natural world. Chapter titles, font colors, and background bleeds reflect the natural materials used for each of Lin’s projects, while larger-than-life quotes provide readers with insights about Lin’s passion, purpose, and process. The detailed back matter helps ensure that Lin’s legacy of humanitarian art is widely recognized and understood. (JMG)

**The Music of Life: Bartolomeo Cristofori and the Invention of the Piano**

Written by Elizabeth Rusch
Illustrated by Marjorie Priceman

Interested in STEAM education? Want to bring a design perspective into your classroom? The *Music of Life* is a perfect starting point. Rusch’s engaging sensory-filled text and Priceman’s playful and vibrant gouache-and-ink illustrations immerse the reader in 17th-century Padua and Florence as Cristofori, frustrated with the...
limitations of contemporary keyboards, strives to create an instrument that can play both piano (softly) and forte (loudly). Throughout the book, Italian musical concepts (e.g., crescendo, decrescendo, morendo) are skillfully placed amidst the illustrations to frame and deepen the narrative. Onomatopoeia also punctuates the text; the sounds of artisanal Florence are the backdrop to Cristofori’s trial and error. Closing pages connect Cristofori’s design improvements with the unleashing of musical imagination, from Haydn to Joplin. (MAC)

The Whydah: A Pirate Ship Feared, Wrecked, and Found
Written by Martin W. Sandler

Martin W. Sandler’s fantastic blend of factual adventures and fictional legends lures readers into the world of the Whydah, a slave ship-turned-pirate ship that sank off the coast of Cape Cod in the 1700s. Since the 1984 discovery of the Whydah, marine archaeologists have identified over 2,000 ship artifacts from 12 different countries, all of which have helped create a more informed and nuanced portrait of pirates and their lifestyles. Traditional treasures such as gold, jewelry, and coins accompany historical evidence of the pirates’ democratic processes, advanced medical knowledge, sophisticated dining and fashion, and sentimental character traits. This fast-paced, detailed narrative with primary sources and extensive documentation attests to the importance of excavating shipwrecks in the “world’s greatest museum”: the ocean (p. 158). (JMG)

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