

BACK-TO-SCHOOL:

Beyond the Usual Jitters



By Jessica Levine

While adults debate mask mandates versus no masks, continued social distancing, and vaccinations for kids under 12 years old, many children themselves are increasingly anxious about returning to school this fall. “School anxiety is on the rise in a really big way,” says Sivan Hong, author and illustrator of *Emily D and the Fearful First Day*, which is all about back-to-school jitters.

Experts across the country agree with Hong and are calling for increased focus and awareness on student

mental health and well-being this year. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show mental health-related emergency department visits among children ages 12–17 were up 31 percent in 2020, compared with 2019.

Educators are keenly aware of the need for emotional support for children as they return to in-person schooling. In fact, many teachers feel that social and emotional learning comes first. “SEL is the foundation, the heartbeat of the classroom. It’s about connecting everybody and making them feel safe and secure before you get to the academics,” says second grade teacher Wendy Turner on NEA.org, the website of the National Education Association.

Publishers too are playing their role in helping kids transition back to “normal” life. A plethora

of new titles address not only back-to-school anxiety; they are also taking on broader SEL issues like empathy, setting goals, establishing positive relationships, and responsible decision-making.

Here are some of the books that can help teachers, librarians, and most of all students manage what is sure to be a very different back-to-school experience for all.

National Geographic Kids Books

National Geographic began over 130 years ago as a society of geographers and scientists seeking like-minded people interested in exploring the Earth. Since then, the iconic brand has become known for its magazine, featuring spectacular photography of the natural world. The company’s book publishing arm ▶



From *Shadow Mountain*

is just as impressive, with more than 1,800 titles in publication, including numerous best sellers and award winners for both adults and kids.

National Geographic Kids Books publishes about 50 titles a year, from board books to middle grade titles, and a few teen titles. The division's newest imprint, **Under the Stars**, boasts three middle grade fact-based fiction series. While the plots are fiction, the science, culture, and history are real. In support of the story lines, each series has a related website with additional factual content, and each book ends with a "Truth Behind the Fiction" supplementary section.

"The goal was to reach kids we might miss because they prefer fiction to nonfiction," says Ruth Chamblee, director of marketing for National Geographic Kids Books. "With this imprint, we can create content that is true to who we are as National Geographic—including STEM, animals, history, geography, everything we do so well in our nonfiction—and bring that into the fiction world."

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—Ruth Chamblee, director of marketing, National Geographic Kids Books

The imprint's flagship series, **"Explorer Academy,"** is about a school for kids who aspire to become explorers. "This series is inspired by the long tradition of exploration that's embodied by National Geographic and the incredible work of our world-class explorers, scientists, photographers, and journalists," Chamblee says. "The plotlines in the series are based on the real work of these explorers." Series author Trudi Trueit had access to these experts and their resources

for her research in writing the series.

The first title in this action-packed, sequential seven-book series, **The Nebula Secret**, July 2019, ISBN 9781426331596, introduces young protagonist Cruz Coronado, who lives, studies, and travels aboard a world-roaming classroom-at-sea, the Explorer Academy. Together with his 23 international classmates, Cruz attends cool classes and augmented-reality training expeditions, while dealing with a secret side mission. In the process, he learns about friendship, teamwork, and problem-solving.

In the sixth book in the series, **The Dragon's Blood**, October 2021, ISBN 9781426371660, Cruz is confronted with a familiar face and finds that the final piece of his most important mission may lead to a dead end. Like all the series' titles, **The Dragon's Blood** engages and inspires young readers' curiosity with near-future technology and amazing inventions, plus secret clues and codes to track down within the text. And, in keeping with the fact-based fiction concept, each book showcases award-winning artist Scott Plumbe's vibrant illustrations, superimposed on stunning National Geographic photographs. The seventh and final book in the series is planned for October 2022.

"Parents and educators and librarians can feel really good about giving these books to ▶



From National Geographic Kids Books

WELCOME TO THE COOLEST SCHOOL ON THE PLANET!

EXPLORER ACADEMY

This thrilling fact-based fiction series is inspired by the real adventures and work of National Geographic Explorers. Readers will join the explorers in training as they unravel mysterious events, decode ciphers, and complete vital expeditions while traveling around the world aboard *Orion*, their amazing classroom at sea.

Explorer Academy is approved by celebrities, media, moms, teachers, and ... KIDS!

"As an educator I am always looking for books that pull my students into new genres and spark the love of reading, and this book can do just that!"

—Elementary school teacher

"These books are awesome! They have my two favorite things: science and adventure."

—Timothy, age 10

"It's fun and adventure and mystery all rolled into one."

—Mom blogger

"Nonstop action and a mix of full-color photographs and drawings throughout make this appealing to aspiring explorers and reluctant readers alike, and the cliffhanger ending ensures they'll be coming back for more."

—School Library Journal

"Inspires the next generation of curious kids to go out into our world and discover something unexpected."

—James Cameron,
acclaimed filmmaker



EXPLORER ACADEMY CHECKS ALL THE BOXES

You can feel good about sharing this series with the child in your life. It comes with the trust and authenticity of the world's premier scientific, education, and research organization.



- ✔ Engages readers with compelling, action-packed narrative
- ✔ Highlights exciting near-future technology
- ✔ Explores STEM subjects in a fun, interactive way
- ✔ Exposes kids to diverse characters, places, and cultures
- ✔ Prompts critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- ✔ Promotes the values of friendship, trust, and teamwork
- ✔ Features a Truth Behind the Fiction section connecting the real-life work of National Geographic Explorers to the story



Discover more at ExplorerAcademy.com



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

kids for a number of reasons,” Chamblee says. “The students of the Explorer Academy are multiethnic, multiracial, international characters. The series prompts critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Not only are there puzzles and ciphers embedded throughout the series, but the storylines are exciting and packed with fun learning.”

“**Izzy Newton and S.M.A.R.T Squad**” is a fun new middle grade fiction series featuring five girls who decide to form a mystery-solving team, the S.M.A.R.T. Squad. Based on real scientists, this diverse group of brainiacs includes Izzy Newton, a budding physicist; Allie Einstein, a math wiz; Charlie Darwin, a biologist and animal lover; Marie Curie, a chemist who likes to mix things up; and Gina Carver, an inventor and engineer.

“This is a great girl empowerment series. But it’s also for anyone who’s interested in science and figuring out how things work.”

—Ruth Chamblee, director of marketing,
National Geographic Kids Books

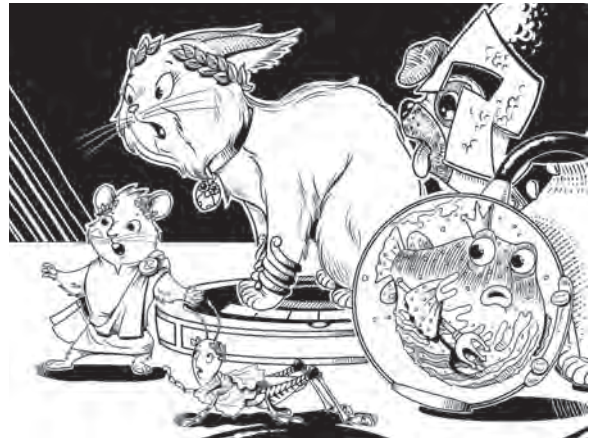
“It’s all about middle school, ‘tween angst, and how they deal with that,” Chamblee says. “But each book also has a mystery that the girls have to use their science smarts and brainpower to figure out.” The first book, *Absolute Hero*, September 2020, ISBN 9781426338694, opens on the girls’ first day of middle

school, with all the usual first-day jitters. To make matters worse, the school’s air-conditioning is on the fritz and the school is freezing cold. The girls take it upon themselves to find out what is wrong and fix it.

The book’s back matter shares short bios of each of the real-life scientists the girls’ characters are based on, as well as information about other female scientists. It also delves into scientific concepts that come up in the story, like absolute zero and the scientific method.

Series writer Valerie Trip is the co-creator of the hugely popular “American Girl” book series. The books are vividly illustrated by Geneva Bowers. Book 2 in this episodic series, *Newton’s Flaw*, ISBN 9781426371530, publishes in November. In the new outing, the S.M.A.R.T. Squad is on the case of a mysterious illness that threatens to shut down their school.

Greek mythology meets adorable, talking animals in the hilarious middle grade series “**Zeus the Mighty.**” Set in the Mt. Olympus Pet Rescue, high on a hill in Athens... Georgia, the series centers on the rescue’s owner, Artie, her love for Greek mythology, and her menagerie of animals named after the gods and goddesses. Among



From National Geographic Kids Books

others, there’s the wise cat, Athena; the proud puffer fish, Poseidon; and—taking center stage—the overconfident hamster, Zeus.

Each afternoon, Artie and the animals listen to a podcast called *Greeking Out*. “And lo and behold, the animals all come to think they actually are Greek gods and goddesses,” Chamblee says. “At night they sneak out and go on mischievous adventures.” Each adventure is a reimagining of a classic tale from Greek mythology.

In the series opener, *The Quest for the Golden Fleas* by Crispin Boyer, illustrated by Andy Elkerton, October 2019, ISBN 9781426335471, the menagerie’s first mission to find the Golden Fleas leads them into the raging whirlpool, Charybdis (really a flushing toilet), and aboard the Argo...in “reality” a robot vacuum! The back matter explains mythology for young readers and includes the story of the myth on which the book is based, Jason and the Golden Fleece.

Book 3 in the series, *The Trials of Hairy-Clees*, August 2021, ISBN 9781426338960, finds our hero, Zeus, being challenged for top god by Hermes the chicken. Once the Oracle has spoken, the mysterious trials of Hairy-Clees begin. It’s another riotous and educational romp through Greek mythology with the menagerie of the Mt. Olympus Pet Rescue. ▶

Stafford House Books

In 2009, Stafford House began filling a specific hole in the children's book market. "There seemed to be a lack of books introducing yoga to kids in a fun, playful, accessible way," says associate publisher Tracy Grigoriades. The company now publishes two to four titles per year for ages 3–8.

The publisher's first title, *The ABCs of Yoga for Kids* by author and kid's yoga expert Teresa Anne Power, illustrated by Kathleen Rietz, September 2009, ISBN 9780982258705, is an introduction to yoga featuring the alphabet, rhyming vignettes, and colorful illustrations. The book pairs each letter of the alphabet with a pose and a how-to rhyme (A is for Airplane Pose and so on). The

book's numerous spin-offs include a coloring book, a guide for parents and educators, and a learning deck.

"The intent behind this series is that just five minutes of yoga a day can offer mental health benefits and physical benefits," Grigoriades says. "Our hope is that if they start practicing yoga early, it will ignite an interest for a lifetime."

Turning her love of yoga into a worldwide celebration, Power founded International Kids' Yoga Day in 2015. Since then, hundreds of thousands of kids, teachers, and parents from over 40 countries have participated, practicing the same yoga routine at the same time on the first Friday of April each year. Her book, *The Night Before Kids' Yoga Day*, illustrated by Anna Abramskaya, February 2021, ISBN 9781734478624, was inspired by the



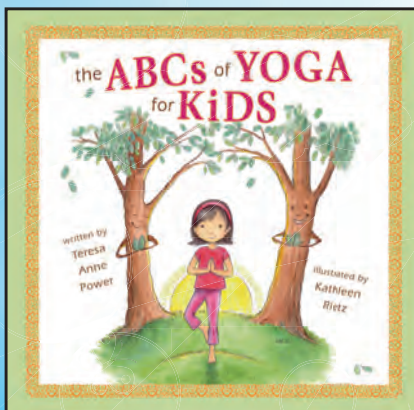
From Stafford House Books

excitement leading up to the big day. Impatient to celebrate, the book's characters start an impromptu nighttime practice session of the Kids' Yoga Day routine. "It's a send-up of 'Twas the Night Before Christmas,'" Grigoriades says. "It's really cute."

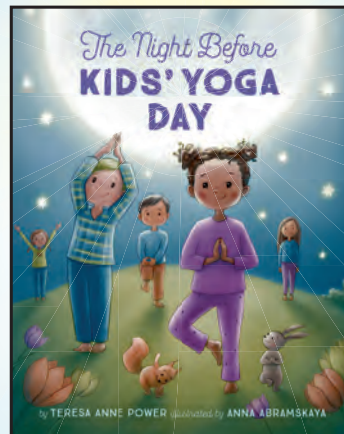
Power's "**Little Mouse Adventures**" series follows the activities of Little Mouse and his ▶

Go back to school with Stafford House Books!

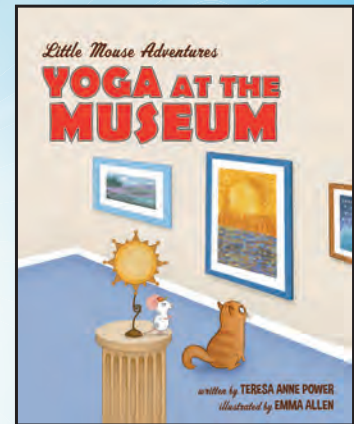
Teach your students to solve problems and manage stress with yoga and mindfulness!



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From bestselling author Teresa Power, for ages 3–8.



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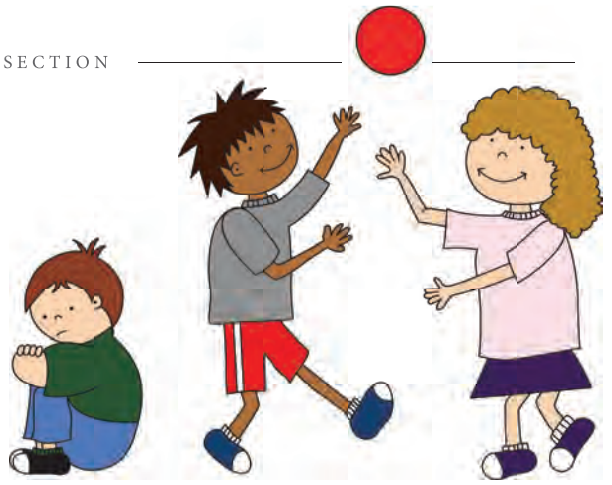
best friend, Mr. Opus the Cat, as they discover how to use yoga to solve problems and manage emotions. In the third and most recent title, *Yoga at the Museum*, illustrated by Emma Allen, May 2021, ISBN 9781734478655, the pair goes on a field trip to a local art museum, where they are introduced to classic artworks and learn related yoga poses. Combining art appreciation and yoga, the book will help young readers learn how to navigate the emotions of new experiences through yoga and mindful breathing.

Sivan Hong

The “**Super Fun Day**” series for children ages 4–7 was author Sivan Hong’s pandemic “sourdough bread.” She had already written and illustrated the three books comprising the series, based on

her own sons’ experiences on the autism spectrum. But during COVID, she got the courage to publish them. She chose to self-publish on Amazon, to get her books into kids’—and parents’—hands quickly.

“Fifteen percent of public school kids have special needs,” Hong says. And yet when her sons were young, she couldn’t find books to help her talk to them about what made their brains different. “There’s a huge need to show these kids that they’re OK,” she says. Seeing themselves reflected positively on the pages of books is one of the best ways to make



From Sivan Hong

neurodivergent children feel valued and accepted.

Hong’s third title, *Emily D and the Fearful First Day*, August 2021, ISBN 9781736744420, follows a neuro-atypical girl on her first day of school. The story will help kids identify and share their worries, and its bright illustrations are deliberately simple. “Children with ADHD and autism can get distracted very easily and lose focus on the story,” she says. “The illustrations are designed with this audience in mind.”

Shadow Mountain

Salt Lake City-based Shadow Mountain Publishing is best known for its fantasy series “Fablehaven” and “Dragonwatch” and its empathy-building novels. The publisher’s list of about 30 titles a year centers on “clean content” for children and young adults. That means no drugs, sex, foul language, or violence. However, “our characters live in the real world, and they have to deal with the consequences of their actions,” says Ilise Levine, director of sales and marketing.

Although the popular “**Dragonwatch**” series is written for kids ages 8–11, about one-third of its readership is adult. Levine attributes this to the sophistication of the stories. Following Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey, these titles go beyond friends and foes and quests: “There’s always buried, nested, hidden meanings,” she says, pointing out that the real story is ▶

The Super Fun Days Books Series

Conversation starters about neurodiversity

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always the inner journey. “Campbell says, “The cave you fear to enter has the treasure that you seek.”

The fifth and final book in the series, *Return of the Dragon Slayers* by Brandon Mull, October 2021, ISBN 9781629729305, is no exception to the rule of going deeper. Series hero Seth must face his most dangerous quest, while his sister Kendra must reconcile two conflicting desires.

A Child of God, September 2021, ISBN 9781629729176, is a picture book for readers ages 4–7 that explores prejudice and racism amid faith. The young Black characters notice that they don’t see their skin color, their physical features, or their gender in visual representations of their faith. Their father points out that all the depictions were drawn by someone and invites his children to draw their



From Shadow Mountain Publishing

own. “This book shows in a subtle but highly impactful way how pervasive the lack of representation is in our culture and how hurtful it can be to the BIPOC community,” Levine says.

Another standout in Shadow Mountain’s empathy-building catalog is *Missing Okalee* by Laura Ojeda Melchor, September 2021, ISBN 9781629729329. This 256-page middle grade novel is about two sisters, Phoebe and Okalee, and the emotional toll of secrets kept, lies told, shifting family dynamics, and finding the courage to do what’s right after a tragic accident. “The story is a real emotional gut punch about the real-life challenges that kids face,” Levine says.

Mackin Educational Resources

Mackin Educational Resources offers over 3.5 million pre-K–12 fiction and nonfiction titles, plus products and services, to schools and libraries, primarily focusing on content aggregation. The company

works with more than 65,000 schools across the country and around the world. MackinVIA is its free digital content management system for ebooks, audiobooks, databases, videos, and read-alongs.

“When distance learning first started, schools and libraries were able to try out MackinVIA and get free ▶

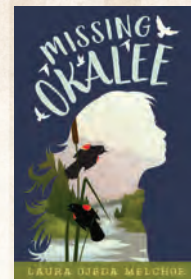
New Titles Fall 2021



Return of the Dragon Slayers/Dragonwatch series
Brandon Mull
9781629729305/\$21.99/HC Ages 8-11 (Oct)

Finale to the *NYT* #1 bestselling *Dragonwatch* series, sequel to *Fablehaven*.

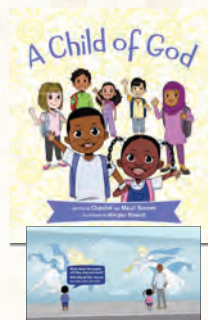
The Dragon King, Celebrant, has united the dragons into a vengeful army, and only a final artifact stands in the way of them unleashing their fury against humankind.



Missing Okalee
Laura Ojeda Melchor
9781629729329/\$16.99/HC Ages 8-11 (Sept)

Two sisters—one their parents’ favorite, the other often feels unheard—embark on an adventure that leads to tragedy and lies told and secrets kept.

“Captures the pressures of being an older sister and the unique challenges of losing a sibling. Likely to be popular with reluctant readers. Serious middle grade novel with heart.”—*Booklist*



A Child of God by Mauli Junior and Chantel Bonner
Illustrated by Morgan Bissant
9781629729176/\$16.99/Picture Book (Sept)

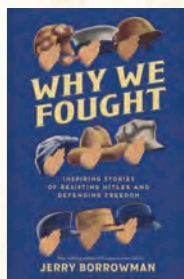
Conveys a comforting message from Black parents to their children who see visual representations of their Christian faith, but question what it means when they don’t see their skin color or gender. A compelling story of how pervasive lack of representation is in our culture and the impact on the BIPOC community.



The Die of Destiny/Champion's Quest series
Frank L. Cole
Author of the *Potion Masters* series
9781629728506/\$17.99/HC Fantasy Ages 8-11 (Aug)

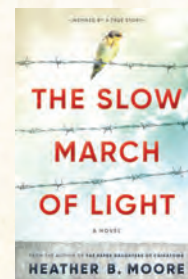
A weird curiosity shoppe leads to a portal into a wild role-playing game, like *Dungeons and Dragons*, where each person overcomes their vulnerabilities in real life to see the world through their game character.

“I was hooked on page one. Adventure, humor, friendship, and courage, readers will love this fantasy!”
—Jennifer Nielsen, *NYT* bestselling author



Why We Fought
Inspiring Stories of Resisting Hitler and Defending Freedom
Jerry Borrowman author of *Compassionate Soldier*
9781629729343/\$19.99/HC History (Oct)

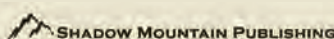
Gripping, largely untold stories illustrate that WWII was fought on front lines far beyond conventional battlefields. This history is, in itself, a civics lesson in citizens defending democratic values.



The Slow March of Light
Heather B. Moore
Author of *The Paper Daughters of Chinatown*
9781629729282/\$26.99/HC Historical Fiction (Sept)

A Cold War drama based on a true story as citizens of a divided Germany risk their lives for a chance at freedom in the West.

“Conveys extensive historical knowledge without sacrificing the emotional impact of the stories of two protagonists...who make a difference in the face of epic adversity.”—*Booklist*



Order from your usual bookseller. eBook Review copies on Edelweiss and NetGalley

content to educate students,” says Troy Mikell, director of marketing and communications. “Our publisher partners realized that kids were sent home from school without the materials to continue their education. Many generously provided free digital content—14,000 titles for new and existing MackinVIA accounts through the summer.” New signups for MackinVIA surged, Mikell says, and the service has continued to lead in the digital content management space for education.

Librarians, teachers, and school administrators have another opportunity to get in on a content bonanza, by taking advantage of Mackin’s mammoth back-to-school sale. Of Mackin’s 3.5 million-plus digital titles, more than 400,000 pre-K–12 fiction and nonfiction ebooks and audiobooks will be available at 20 percent off from August

1 to September 30. Educators just need a free MackinVIA account to take advantage of the deal.

“If you already have MackinVIA in your school, this enables you to buy more content and enhance your library for less,” Mikell says. “For those that don’t have MackinVIA in their school, this is a great opportunity for them to test it out at a lower entry price.”

The winner of multiple national awards, MackinVIA is accessible from any type of device. The platform offers students and administrators numerous intuitive and functional features. Within MackinVIA, students can take notes, bookmark, highlight, underline, adjust color and fonts (including a dyslexic font), use text-to-speech, read off-line, transfer titles between devices, use Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and access EasyBib MLA citations.



From Mackin Educational Resources

Administrators—librarians and teachers—can sort available content by Lexile level, category (like SEL or history), and/or format, such as ebook, audiobook, or read-along. They can then create groups and assignments within MackinVIA. “A teacher can create a lesson and put aside content, including ebooks, videos, or links from YouTube and around the web. It’s a one-stop place for them to find content for a particular lesson,” Mikell says. ■

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