

BEST STEM BOOKS 2026

BOOKS PUBLISHED IN 2025

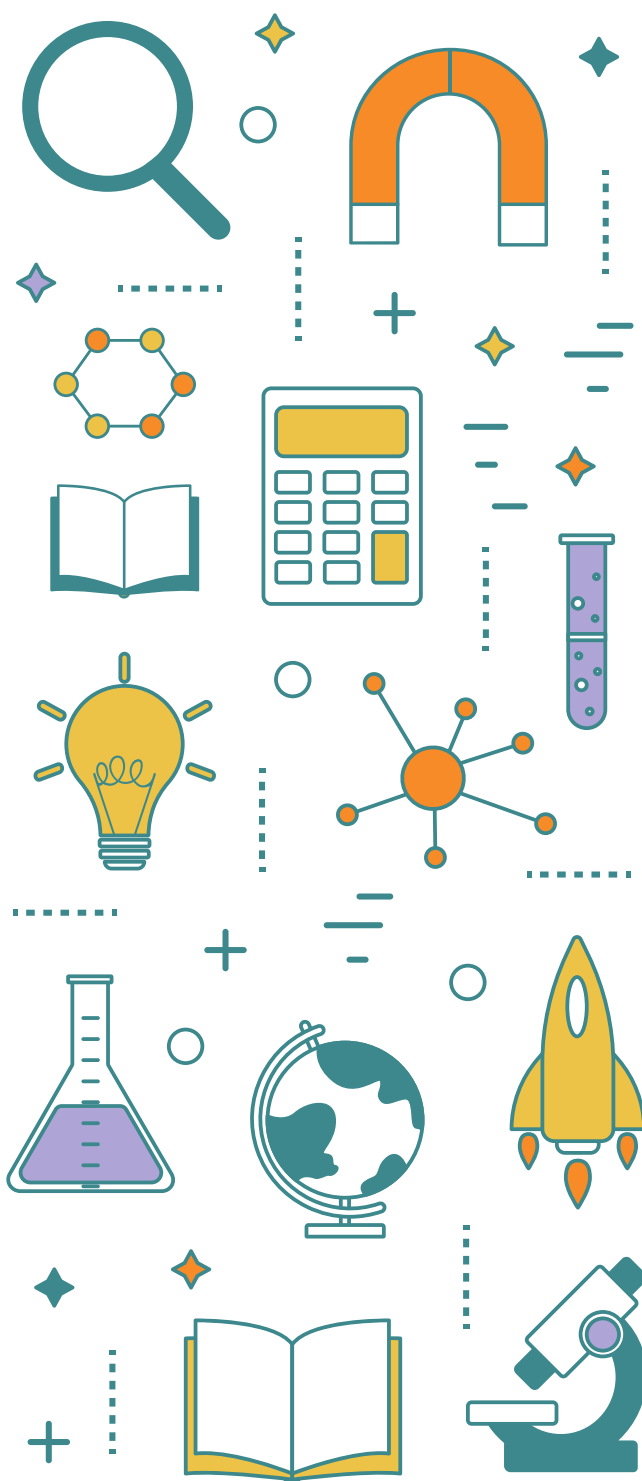
STEM books offer endless opportunities for engaged learning. They invite students to see the world differently and to think in new ways about what they observe.

We have chosen titles that provoke readers to examine the “thinking stance” of characters—not simply to look at actions and results.

Best STEM Books winners explore problems and possible solutions in the scientific world and, where applicable, in the lives of the protagonists. Instead of focusing on specific content, the Best STEM Books emphasize real-world issues that cross disciplinary boundaries.

Teachers can use these books to foster and model “minds-on” work. Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers can involve even the very youngest children in the process of STEM thinking.

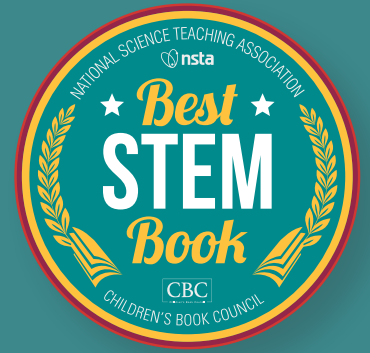
How do we prepare 21st-century kids for challenges and jobs that we at present cannot even describe? The Best STEM Books help by celebrating convergent and divergent thinking, analysis and creativity, persistence, and the sheer joy of figuring things out.



ABOUT THE REVIEWS

In addition to standard publishing information, the reviews indicate the following:

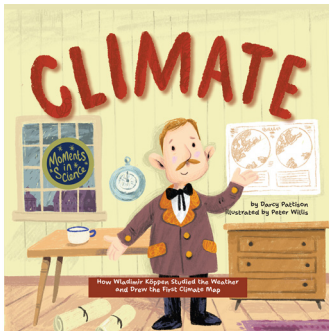
1. International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) are included for trade editions.
2. The prices are current as of January 2026.
3. Reading levels (K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12) are provided by the reviewers. They are intended as guidelines and are not meant to limit the potential use of titles.
4. The reviewer's initials follow each description



CLIMATE: How Wladimir Köppen Studied Weather and Drew the First Climate Map

DARCY PATTISON. Illustrated by Peter Willis. Mims House. ISBN 9781629443058. \$25.99. (3–5)

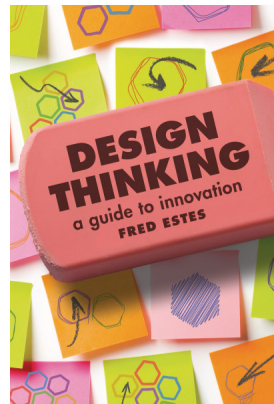
The story models authentic inquiry, critical thinking, and meaningful scientific impact. Young Wladimir notices that different plants grow in different places, sparking a lifelong question about why climates vary across the world. As an adult, he studies weather patterns and creates a network of weather stations to gather data. When he needs oceanic information, he innovatively places stations on ships; to study the atmosphere, he designs kites to collect data from the sky. Köppen's problem-solving shows creativity, persistence, and adaptation—hallmarks of STEM thinking. (RG)



Design Thinking: A Guide to Innovation

FRED ESTES. Lerner Publishing Group / Twenty-First Century Books. ISBN 9798765608005. \$38.65. (9–12)

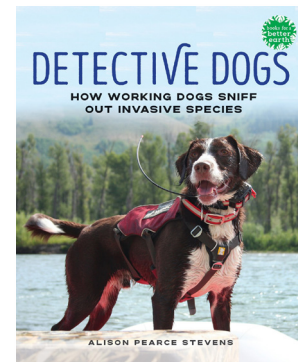
The book opens with an example of students using design thinking to solve a problem, how to help blind people cross a street without veering into oncoming traffic. Their journey through the design process models how real-world problems inspire creative solutions; through trial and error, they develop a smart band that vibrates to prevent walkers from veering into traffic. Each preceding chapter explores one step of the design thinking process, using case studies to show how ideas evolve through empathy, experimentation, and iteration. Readers see how problems are identified, researched, and refined through trial and collaboration. The examples within the chapters provide real-world examples of how curiosity and persistence lead to meaningful impact. (RG)



Detective Dogs: How Working Dogs Sniff Out Invasive Species

ALISON PEARCE STEVENS. Holiday House. ISBN 9780823455645. \$20.99. (3–5, 6–8)

This engaging nonfiction title follows real canine-human science teams as they track and identify invasive species. Readers learn how biology, ecology, and technology combine in data collection and problem-solving. Observation, collaboration, and persistence are highlighted as essential STEM habits that protect ecosystems. Bibliography, Index. (JCL)



BEST STEM BOOKS CRITERIA AND RUBRIC

OVERVIEW

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is an integrated and creative approach to discovering and applying knowledge about our world to solve problems which utilizes one, or more of the content areas. Trade books that deliver background and model the practices of STEM provide context and inspiration to readers. Recognizing the best publications in this field can help guide their use and provide direction to publishers.

CRITERIA

The best STEM trade books must invite STEM-like thinking by:

- Modeling real-world innovation
- Embracing real-world design, invention and innovation
- Connecting with authentic experiences
- Showing assimilation of new ideas
- Illustrating teamwork, diverse skills, creativity, and cooperation
- Inviting divergent thinking and doing
- Integrating interdisciplinary and creative approaches
- Exploring multiple solutions to problems
- Addressing connections between STEM disciplines
- Exploring Engineering Habits of Mind
 - Systems thinking
 - Creativity
 - Optimisation
 - Collaboration
 - Communication
 - Ethical considerations
 - Critical thinking

The best STEM trade books might represent the practices of science and engineering by:

- Asking questions, solving problems, designing and redesigning
- Integrating STEM disciplines
- Showing the progressive changes that characterize invention and/or engineering by:
 - Demonstrating designing or redesigning, improving, building, or repairing a product or idea
 - Showing the process of working through trial and error
 - Progressively developing better engineering solutions
 - Analyzing efforts and makes necessary modifications along the way
 - Illustrates at points, failure might happen and that is acceptable
 - Providing reflection and learning occurs

Firefly Song: Lynn Frierson Faust and the Great Smoky Mountain Discovery

COLLEEN PAEFF. Illustrated by Ji-hyuk Kim. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing / Margaret K. McElderry Books. ISBN 9781665931847. \$19.99. (K-2, 3-5)

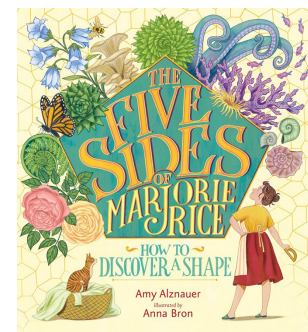
Lynn Faust notices unusual fireflies blinking near her cabin in the Great Smoky Mountains and wonders if they might be synchronous fireflies, a species thought not to exist in North America. Driven by her question, she gathers observations and seeks out a biologist to help confirm her findings. Together, they measure and analyze the fireflies' flashing patterns. Through collaboration, critical thinking, and perseverance, they collect enough evidence to prove the species' presence. *Firefly Song* beautifully illustrates how wonder, data, and persistence transform a simple question into real-world science. (RG)



The Five Sides of Marjorie Rice: How to Discover a Shape

AMY ALZNAUER. Illustrated by Anna Bron. Candlewick Press. ISBN 9781536229479. \$18.99. (3-5)

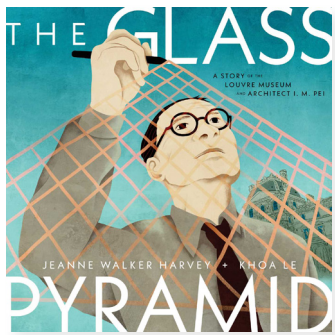
This is the story of an ordinary mother and artist who discovered four new types of pentagonal tessellations in her kitchen. Without formal mathematical training, Rice used visual-spatial reasoning and a unique system of notation and diagramming to solve a problem that had stumped mathematicians for decades. Featuring beautiful geometric illustrations, this picture book biography highlights the power of perseverance and the diverse ways of thinking that contribute to significant discoveries in mathematics. Author's Note, Bibliography. (KK)



Glass Pyramid: A Story of the Louvre Museum and Architect I. M. Pei

JEANNE WALKER HARVEY. Illustrated by Khoa Le. Simon & Schuster's Children's Publishing / Atheneum Books for Young Readers. ISBN 9781665953337. \$19.99. (K-2)

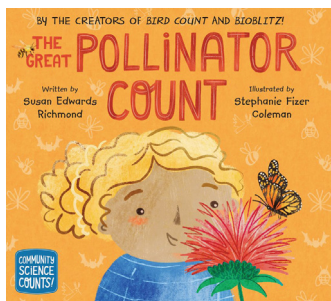
Readers explore the process, challenges, and successes of architect I.M. Pei as he undertook the redesign of the Louvre Museum. This story highlights the intersection of art, architecture, and engineering, showing how Pei's glass-and-steel vision uses geometry, creativity, and problem-solving. Through Pei's challenges and achievements, readers learn the value of perseverance and flexible thinking as essential STEM habits of mind. (JCW)



The Great Pollinator Count

SUSAN EDWARDS RICHMOND. Illustrated by Stephanie Fizer Coleman. Holiday House / Peachtree. ISBN 9781682636084. \$18.99. (K-2)

This engaging picture book blends storytelling with real-life community science as Mellie and Jason explore the world of pollinators. Rich STEM content introduces insect identification, ecology, and data collection, while vibrant illustrations enhance the reader's understanding. A perfect choice for inspiring young students to observe, count, and care for local pollinator habitats. (JCW)



ABOUT CBC

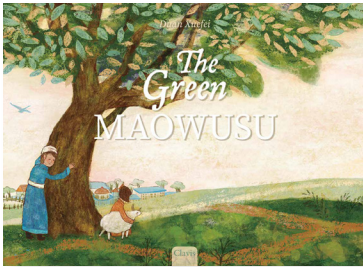
The Children's Book Council (CBC) is the nonprofit trade association for children's book publishers in North America. The CBC creates educational programming, promotes diversity in employment and in book publishing, compiles curated reading lists and resources for teachers, librarians, and booksellers, and fights against the banning of books. Alongside the NSTA on both the Outstanding Science Trade Books and Best STEM Books, the CBC further oversees a portfolio of national book award programs including CBC Favorites, Youth Book Prize for Social Justice, Free Speech Award, and more. The CBC also manages the national programs of **Every Child a Reader**.

The books that appear in these lists were chosen by a review panel made up of educators and other subject-area experts, all appointed by the National Science Teachers Association. NSTA and CBC have joined forces on developing this annual list since 1973, and over the years it has become the go-to resource for school librarians, science teachers, and parents eager to cultivate a love of science in young readers. Initially, the list was primarily targeted at grades K through 8. Beginning in 2002, it expanded to include high school. Through the years, this effort has had but a single mission—to highlight the very best in science trade books for young audiences.

The Green Maowusu

XUEFEI DUAN. Illustrated by Xuefei Duan. Scholastic / Scholastic Focus. 384pp. ISBN 9781338749571 \$17.99. (6-8, 9-12)

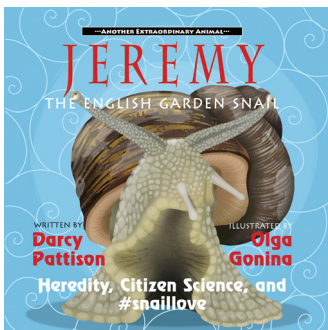
Baori learns that the desert she calls home was once a lush green meadow. Inspired by tales of the past and supported by local villagers, Baori and the people of the Maowusu desert undertake a decades-long effort to bring trees back to the Maowusu desert. Through problem-solving, perseverance, and teamwork, the Maowusu desert has transformed into the Maowusu green space. (MP)



Jeremy, the English Garden Snail: Heredity, Citizen Science, and #snaillove

DARCY PATTISON. Illustrated by Olga Gonina. Mims House. ISBN 9781629442556. \$24.99. (3-5, 6-8)

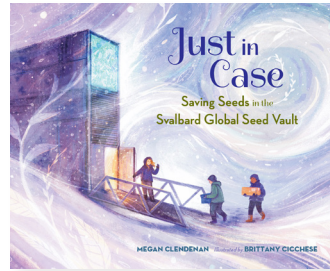
A day of gardening uncovers Jeremy, a left-coiled garden snail. That discovery sparks curiosity which leads to questions and eventually to a global citizen science project. Volunteers around the world participate in the viral #snaillove campaign to find a mate for Jeremy to help scientists learn about snail coil direction heredity. Garden Snail, Citizen Science, Glossary. (MP)



Just in Case: Saving Seeds in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault

MEGAN CLENDENAN. Illustrated by Brittany Cicchese. Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781623544805. \$17.99. (K-2, 3-5)

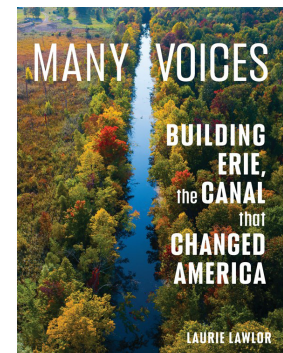
Deep inside a mountain on a remote Arctic island, a secure vault is the home of and protects millions of seeds. These building blocks of our food and future are stored there just in case they are needed. This engaging nonfiction book explores how and why the vault was built, highlighting the global teamwork, icy challenges, and hope behind preserving the world's biodiversity. Author's Note, Back Matter. (CAR)



Many Voices: Building Erie, the Canal that Changed America

LAURIE LAWLOR. Holiday House. ISBN 9780823455638. \$19.99. (6-8, 9-12)

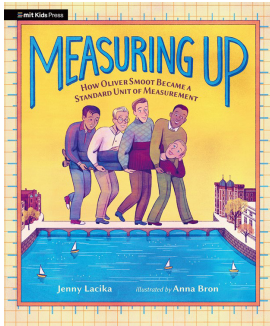
The complex story of the Erie Canal, an engineering marvel that seemed impossible, has transformed American history when it opened in 1825 after eight years of construction. Beyond celebrating this landmark achievement, this book examines the canal's darker legacy, including corporate greed, environmental destruction, exploitative working conditions, and its devastating impact on the Haudenosaunee people. Through compelling storytelling supported by rich back matter—maps, photographs, timelines, and source notes—this narrative connects past and present to explore the canal's enduring influence on America's social, political, and economic landscape. (KC)



Measuring Up: How Oliver Smoot Became a Standard Unit of Measurement

JENNY LACIKA. Illustrated by Anna Bron. Candlewick Press / MIT Kids Press. ISBN 9781536230123. \$18.99. (K-2, 3-5)

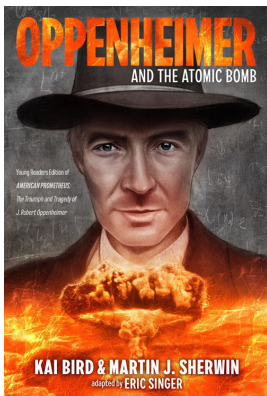
What started as a practical joke turns into math history. A great book that shows creative thinking, problem solving, and using non-standard measurement. Oliver is the shortest of all the friends at MIT who decide to use him as the measurement in an assignment for finding the length of a bridge. This is a fun book looking at a silly side of mathematics. (CC)



Oppenheimer and the Atomic Bomb: Young Readers Edition of AMERICAN PROMETHEUS: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer

KAI BIRD AND MARTIN J. SHERWIN. Adapted by Eric S. Singer. Penguin Young Readers / G.P. Putnam's Sons BFYR. ISBN 9780593856451. \$18.99. (6-8, 9-12)

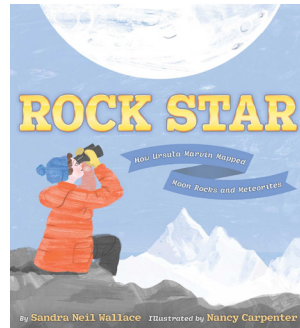
This young reader's adaptation of the biography American Prometheus explores the life of J. Robert Oppenheimer, emphasizing his role as a brilliant theoretical physicist and the technical challenges of the Manhattan Project against the backdrop of McCarthyism. The narrative illustrates how complex physics translated into unprecedented engineering at a pivotal moment in American history. It offers a look at the relationships among top scientists and political leaders and their ethical considerations in harnessing the power of the atom. End notes, Photographs, Diagrams, Index. (KK)



Rock Star: How Ursula Marvin Mapped Moon Rocks and Meteorites

SANDRA NEIL WALLACE. Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing / Paula Wiseman Books. ISBN 9781534493339. \$19.99. (K-2)

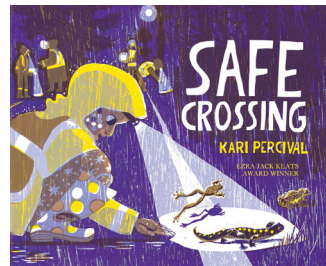
This inspiring biography spotlights geologist Ursula Marvin, whose groundbreaking research connected meteorites to the Moon's surface. Her persistence, curiosity, and analytical thinking model the habits of real scientists and engineers. Readers see how evidence, mapping, and problem-solving lead to discovery. Author's Notes, Select Bibliography. (JCL)



Safe Crossing

KARI PERCIVAL. Chronicle Books. ISBN 9781797214566. \$18.99. (K-2, 3-5)

Join the Amphibian Migration Team to learn about the annual migration of frogs and salamanders. Beautiful illustrations and engaging text tell the story of how interdisciplinary thinking and citizen science can help overcome the dangers of road crossings for amphibians. Additional resources, Glossary, End Pages Scavenger Hunt. (KM)



Smash, Crash, Topples, Roll!: The Inventive Rube Goldberg—A Life in Comics, Contraptions, and Six Simple Machines

CATHERINE THIMMESH. Illustrated by Shanda McCloskey. Chronicle Books. ISBN 9781452144221. \$19.99. (3-5)

This book shows simple machines, forces and motion, and real-world applications of physics at work along with fun examples and while telling the story of Rube Goldberg. It gives the process for making your own Rube Goldberg machine with tips for success, uses for the various simple machines, a glossary, helpful videos, books, web pages and more. Delightful book with well done, entertaining illustrations. (CC)



Spark: Jim West's Electrifying Adventures in Creating the Microphone

AINISSA RAMIREZ. Illustrated by Setor Fiadzigbey. Candlewick Press / MIT Kids Press. ISBN 9781536225280. \$18.99. (3-5)

In this biography of African American inventor Jim West, you see him using trial and error, problem solving, and tenacity to overcome racism and discouragement from adults. From a little boy who loved to take things apart to the inventor of one of the most used electrical devices, the microphone. Jim got a chance to take things apart again as a college student who got a summer job at Bell Labs where they gave him a challenge to improve sound in headphones that were so much a part of Bell Lab's experiments, this led to eventually his big discovery. Great story of a curious tenacious young boy who was awarded the highest technology medals. (CC)



The Spider Lady: Nan Songer and Her Arachnid World War II Army

PENNY PARKER KLOSTERMANN. Illustrated by Anne Lambelet. Astra Books for Young Readers / Calkins Creek ISBN 9781662680359. \$18.99. (3-5)

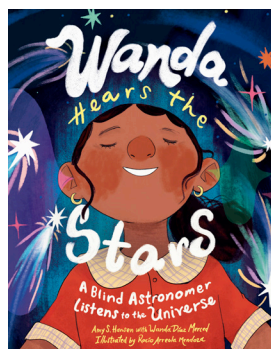
This book tells the fascinating true story of Nan Songer and her innovative STEM solution for collecting spider silk, which played a vital role in military applications during WWII. The narrative and illustrations also detail her problem-solving process and analytical approach. Author's note, Bibliography. (KM)



Wanda Hears the Stars: A Blind Astronomer Listens to the Universe

AMY S. HANSEN AND WANDA DÍAZ MERCED. Illustrated by Rocio Arreola Mendoza. Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781623544874. \$18.99. (3-5)

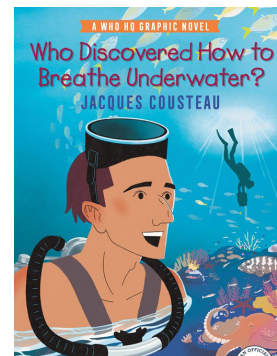
This true story celebrates astrophysicist Wanda Díaz-Merced, who overcame losing her sight by pioneering sonification, a process of converting abstract astronomical data into audible sound. The book showcases exceptional problem-solving and computational thinking as she developed a new way to analyze star activity and make scientific discoveries by listening for patterns. Her work underscores the importance of technological innovation and an inclusive approach to science for accessing and interpreting complex information about the universe. Selected Bibliography, Wanda's Journey as a Scientist, Quotation Sources, Glossary, Explore More, Author's Note. (KK)



Who Discovered How to Breathe Underwater?: Jacques Cousteau

NED WOLFE. Illustrated by Caroline Hu. Penguin Young Readers / Penguin Workshop. ISBN 9780593385647. \$7.99. (3-5)

This graphic novel celebrates innovation and persistence, using dynamic visuals to trace Cousteau's iterative journey in creating the Aqua-Lung, the first modern scuba diving device that led to longer and safer diving. His process reveals how curiosity, experimentation, and problem-solving work together to drive real-world scientific and engineering breakthroughs. (JCW)



MEMBERS OF THE BOOK SELECTION PANEL

Kristin Cook (KC)

Professor of Science Education
Bellarmine University

Connie Crittenden (CC)

Retired classroom teacher

Rhoda Goldberg (RG)

Director of Science K-1
Spring Branch ISD

Katie Koerten (KK)

Education Director
Hitchcock Center for the Environment

J. Carrie Launius (JCL)

Science Educator
Synergy Education Innovators

Katie Morrison (KM)

Dean, Graduate School of Education
UCDS

Melissa Parks (MP)

Associate Professor of Education
Stetson University

Christine Royce (CAR)

Professor
Shippensburg University

Jennifer Williams (JCW)

Lower School Science Department Chair
Isidore Newman School

CALL FOR 2027 BEST STEM BOOKS FOR STUDENTS K-12

Deadline for submissions: April 30, 2026

ELIGIBILITY

- Books must be published in 2026. Books published in Oct.-Dec. 2025 may be eligible if they have not been previously submitted.
- Books must be intended for grades K-12.
- Textbooks, workbooks, kits, experiment-only books, and activity books are not eligible.
- Original paperbacks are eligible; paperback reprints are not. If a book is published simultaneously in hardcover and paperback, either edition may be submitted. If both editions are submitted, they constitute separate entries.
- Revised editions of books originally published in North America before 2026 are eligible only if they have been newly illustrated or if at least 25% of the text is changed or added.
- Spanish-language editions published in North America simultaneously with English-language editions in 2026 are eligible.
- Fiction titles are eligible if the book has substantial Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics content.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Books should have value for both classroom studies and library collections. The selection panel looks for books that contain substantial STEM content; that are clear, accurate, and up to date

Full submission guidelines will be available throughout the months of March and April 2026 at <https://cbcbooks.org/awards-and-book-lists/best-stem/>.

FEES

- CBC Regular Members: No fee
- CBC Associate Members: \$75 per title
- Non-Member Publishers: \$300 per title

An invoice with payment instructions will be emailed after titles have been submitted and received by the CBC.

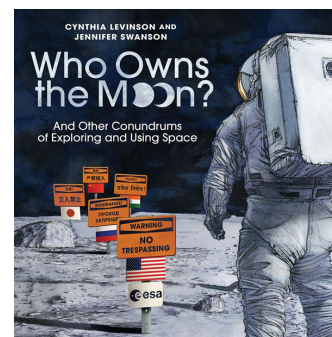
Who Owns the Moon?: And Other Conundrums of Exploring and Using Space

CYNTHIA LEVINSON AND JENNIFER SWANSON.

Holiday House / Peachtree.

ISBN 9781682635377. \$22.99. (6-8, 9-12)

For teen space enthusiasts, this is an engaging exploration of both the scientific and social dimensions of space travel—from cutting-edge satellite technology to the legal frameworks and behavioral norms governing activity beyond Earth. Readers will discover fascinating details about contemporary challenges including debris management, space tourism, and ambitious projects like the Artemis missions and Gateway space station. The book encourages readers to think critically about the decisions that will shape humanity's peaceful and sustainable presence in the cosmos. (KC)



Zero! The Number That Almost Wasn't

SARAH ALBEE. Illustrated by Chris Hsu.

Charlesbridge. ISBN 9781623544324.

\$17.99. (3-5)

Did you know that the number Zero was almost banished? Trace the fascinating history of the number zero from ancient Babylonia to the resistance it faced in Europe and its eventual worldwide acceptance. Playful storytelling and detailed illustrations combine as the story reveals how "nothing" became one of our most important mathematical discoveries. Back Matter. (CAR)

