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Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa. All these holidays include gift-giving. What's better than books to read and discuss with your favorite young people? Here's a list of current suggestions.

"The Biggest Smallest Christmas Present" by Harriet Muncaster (G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$16, ages 3-5)
 For the wee lass on your list, this is a charmer aided by whimsical illustrations. Clementine is tiny. But how can she let Santa know that all the toys he leaves are far too big? Until finally he leaves the perfect one.

"Come Home, Angus" by Patrick Downes, illustrated by Boris Kulikov (Scholastic, \$17.99, ages 3-5)
 One angry, angry little boy storms out of the house, only to feel frightened and hungry a few blocks away in an unfamiliar neighborhood. And guess who is waiting for him - with a sardine sandwich. The mixed media illustrations beautifully convey Angus' turbulent emotions and the joyful conclusion.

"A Squash and a Squeeze" by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler (Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic, \$16.99, ages 3-5)
 A delightful rhyming rendition of a familiar folk tale. When a woman complains her house is too small, an old man gives her unusual

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advice. Humorous illustrations embellish the story.

"The Great Spruce" by John Duvall, illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon (G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$17.99, ages 5-8)

Environmentalists will applaud this book, which argues for letting Christmas trees live by transplanting rather than sawing their lives away. Duvall's protagonist, the storyline and Gibbon's illustrations are appealing and provide a cautionary Christmas treat for today's world.

"Around America to Win the Vote" by Mara Rockcliff, illustrated by Hadley Hooper. (Candlewick Press, \$16.99, ages 5-8)

In 1916, a yellow car, a kitten and two determined women traveled 10,000 miles across the U.S. campaigning for a woman's right to vote. This upbeat account with its cheerful illustrations belongs in every primary classroom.

"A Piece of Home" by Jeri Watts, illustrated by Hyewon Yum (Candlewick Press, \$16.99, ages 5-9)

Coming to America from South Korea and adjusting to a different culture and language aren't easy for Hee Yun or his grandmother. But as he makes new friends he spots the very same flower that grew in his grandmother's Korean garden. Watercolor illustrations help tell this gentle tale.

"The Secret Keepers" by Trenton Lee Stewart, illustrated by Dianna Sudyka (Megan Tingley Books, Little, Brown and Co., \$18.99, ages 8-12)

This is destined to be-

come a classic. Stewart's novel is captivating. The plot is taut and engrossing; the protagonist, 11-year old Reuben, is appealing; and his struggle against evil is compelling.

When Reuben finds a watch with extraordinary powers, he is at first wildly excited, but then he discovers that the treasure he holds is desperately sought by the evil dictator of his town, New Umbra. There are danger, tension plus new friends and allies, whose family are the secret keepers of the legacy surrounding the watch. All race forward to a conclusion that is completely satisfying.

"Mission Mumbai" by Mahtab Narsimhan (Scholastic Press, \$16.95, ages 9-12)

Dylan, a New Yorker with a passion for photography, welcomes the invitation to vacation with his best friend's Indian family in Mumbai. But he's totally unprepared for both the beauty and the poverty in the steaming, crowded city and its environs.

Narsimhan's descriptions evoke the sounds, smells, sights tastes and even the heat of this foreign land. The boys' adventures, brush with dangers, misunderstandings and the final conclusion are well-constructed and provide the reader with a glimpse of a vibrant culture.

"The War That Saved My Life" by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (Puffin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, \$8.99, ages 9-12)

Ada's cruel mother sends her daughter's defec-

tive foot and so keeps her hidden away, forbidding her to go out in public. When word comes that the London children will be evacuated because of the impending war, Ada decides to join her younger brother and escape.

In this completely compelling story, we see Ada move from a girl disabled physically and emotionally to someone who in the Kentish countryside grows to believe in herself and all she can accomplish (e.g., learning to ride a horse and to read and write.)

The author lets you feel both her pain and her evolving pride in a novel that offers a different aspect of World War II.

"A Long Pitch Home" by Natalie Dias Lorenzi (Charlesbridge, \$16.95, ages 9-12)

This is a well-crafted and heartfelt story. Through circumstances, Bilal and part of his family are abruptly uprooted from Pakistan and suddenly find themselves in a totally new culture in the U.S.

Bilal misses many things, but most of all his father. Now, instead of being a cricket champion, he must learn the all-American game of baseball. But it is this game and his courage that amazingly save his family.

"The Dog Ray" by Linda Coggin (Candlewick Press, \$15.99, ages 9-14)

For any dog lover, this is a must-read. When 12-year old Daisy dies in a car accident, she is reincarnated as a dog. More than anything, she wants to find her human parents again and act as a loyal, loving pet for

them. But it's not to be.

In a well-constructed novel that is impossible to put down, Daisy helps a boy find his father and a new home for both of them. If you ever thought your dog really understands you, then you will relish this poignant confirmation told from the dog's point of view.

"Tales from the Arabian Nights" by Donna Jo Napoli, illustrated by Christina Balit (National Geographic, \$24.99, ages 9-14)

Stunning illustrations decorate this classic Middle Eastern feast of tales. Napoli's beautiful retelling is mesmerizing. Scheherazade saves her own life through the intricate, interwoven stories with which she wins the king's favor.

There are magic and monsters and plenty of chicanery, but underneath it all, Scheherazade wants to teach the king to trust and to love. Historical sidebars contribute to the reader's knowledge. This is a gift for a family to share – a tale a night.

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