



CADL Best Books of 2024

We asked our expert Capital Area District Libraries staff to weigh in on their favorite books published in 2024. Here are the titles that rose to the top. Enjoy this wide-ranging selection of engaging reads for all ages and interests.

Adult Fiction

[Finlay Donovan Rolls the Dice](#) by Elle Cosimano

Perpetually harried mystery writer/single mother Finlay Donovan is back in the latest installment of this fast-paced, witty series of thrillers. Finlay's life is never simple, and even a weekend excursion with her friend becomes a family affair when Finlay's mother, two kids, and ex-husband invite themselves along, meaning that they're all involved when a dead body turns up.

[First Lie Wins](#) by Ashley Elston

Sweet Evie Porter is not what she appears -- instead of the Southern charmer the world sees, Evie (not her real name) is actually a con woman employed by the mysterious Mr. Smith. While on an assignment, Evie begins to fall for her mark, though her burgeoning feelings are nothing compared to the shocking death of a woman who looks a lot like Evie -- and goes by her given name.

[Funny Story](#) by Emily Henry

In her newest romantic comedy, Henry introduces overachiever Daphne and laid-back Miles who are thrown together when their respective exes get engaged. What starts as a fake relationship turns into much more. Written with a witty style and well-developed characters.

[The God of the Woods](#) by Liz Moore

It is the summer of 1975 and a teen has gone missing from Camp Emerson -- a horrifying truth compounded by the eerily similar disappearance of her brother 14 years earlier. Could it be the work of a recently escaped serial killer? An intricate literary thriller that delves into class, family secrets, gender roles, and trauma.

[I Cheerfully Refuse](#) by Leif Enger

Enger's latest is a dystopic Orphean "road trip" novel set on and around Lake Superior as Rainy is chased by rich malignant foes for unknown reasons in a desperate illiterate world.

[James](#) by Percival Everett

Hailed as a modern classic and winner of the 2024 National Book Award, this riveting, unsparing, and harrowing adventure tale tells a completely new story of the character Jim from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in this deeply affecting and unforgettable book.

[Long Live Evil](#) by Sarah Rees Brennan

Dying, Rae seizes on a chance to save her own life and is thrown into the world of her favorite fantasy series. She wakes up in the body of one of the villains, set to be executed the next morning. Gathering up a collection of other villains of the tale, Rae sets out to stave off her own death in whatever way she can finagle. Brennan humorously takes on the best villain tropes and provides a darn good story in the process.

[The Ministry of Time](#) by Kaliane Bradley

A civil servant is invited to a secret ministry project, where she finds the question “can history be changed when it is staying in your living room?” is not merely theoretical. This fabulous time travel thriller romance has a cheeky sense of humor and a thoughtful heart.

[Wandering Stars](#) by Tommy Orange

Tommy Orange returns with a family saga that ranges from the Sand Creek Massacre to the Carlisle School, through the lives of the ancestors of the Red Feather brothers introduced in his award-winning debut *There There*.

[The Women](#) by Kristin Hannah

Hannah continues to write utterly absorbing historical fiction. This time, we follow nurse Frankie McGrath to Vietnam in 1965. A part of the Army Nurse Corps, Frankie must look at what it means to serve and what representation looks like for women in service. Throughout the book, we are introduced to an array of characters and given detailed descriptions of the environment in which Frankie finds herself.

Adult Nonfiction

[Amrikan: 125 Recipes from the Indian American Diaspora](#) by Khushbu Shah

Written by an Okemos High School alum, this cookbook dives into the heart of diaspora cooking – using familiar ingredients like Bisquick, peanut butter, and instant noodles, Shah demystifies Indian cuisine and showcases the melding of two cultures.

[Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees](#) by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Following her bestselling book *World of Wonders*, the acclaimed poet and essayist turns the attention of her lyrical writing to food and all its meanings and associations, including reflections on foods from her Filipino and Malayali heritage.

[The Boys of Riverside: A Deaf Football Team and a Quest for Glory](#) by Thomas Fuller

A football story – but so much more. Fuller looks at the 2021 & 2022 Riverside Cubs, from the California School for the Deaf, and how they went on to win the state championship. A sports book for people who don't like sports: he looks at the players' lives and reflects on being deaf in sports and in America.

[Frostbite: How Refrigeration Changed Our Food, Our Planet, and Ourselves](#) by Nicola Twilley

Filled with fascinating facts, this engrossing book by food historian and Gastropod podcast host Nicola Twilley takes the reader on a journey through history and across the globe to tell the story of refrigeration – from its origins to its present implications.

[My Black Country: A Journey Through Country Music's Black Past, Present, and Future](#) by Alice Randall

Black country was having a moment even before the release of *Cowboy Carter*, and best-selling author and songwriter Alice Randall has been an artist in the trenches for decades. This is memoir, history, and a call for recognition and positive change.

[Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts: Stories and Recipes from Five Generations of Black Country Cooks](#) by Crystal Wilkinson

Former Kentucky Poet Laureate and multi award-winning author Crystal Wilkinson blends lyrical memoir with history, photos, and recipes to share the stories of her kitchen ghosts – five generations of Black Affrilachian women ancestors who inspire her cooking, and her life.

[The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer
The Serviceberry is a lovely and powerful essay on reciprocity and the potential of a gift economy in the face of our unsustainable current models— illustrated by the analogous natural systems that create the serviceberry and its ecosystem. It's a timely message—thought-provoking and inspiring.

[Smoke and Ashes: Opium's Hidden Histories](#) by Amitav Ghosh

Springing out of the research for his Ibis Trilogy novels, Ghosh brings the history of the British Empire's opium trade to life in a story of colonial power that travels from Great Britain to India, China, and even America in this eye-opening work of narrative non-fiction.

[There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension](#) by Hanif Abdurraqib

The National Book Award finalist and MacArthur fellow's newest book is structured like a game, in four quarters that center on basketball, his Columbus, Ohio community, his family, and his youth -- but in the hands of this remarkable author, it's about a whole lot more.

[A Walk in the Park: The True Story of a Spectacular Misadventure in the Grand Canyon](#) by Kevin Fedarko

With humor and great passion for his subject, conservation writer Kevin Fedarko tells the incredible story of traversing the Grand Canyon with his best friend, travelling 750 miles on foot to meet their goal of walking the canyon end to end.

Young Adult

[Brownstone](#) by Samuel Teer

Without being heavy handed, Teer tells the story of rehabbing a brownstone building along with rebuilding the broken relationship of Almodena and her father. This graphic novel tells a story that visually represents the breakdown in communication through cultural and language barriers.

[Everything We Never Had](#) by Randy Ribay

Filipino American culture is celebrated in this story describing assimilation, trauma, and generational differences between four men in the Maghabol family. Ribay writes of wounded Filipino American boys and men with humor and intensity. This young adult novel brims with love and forgiveness as fathers and sons learn to accept each other.

[The Great Cool Ranch Dorito in the Sky](#) by Josh Galarza

Sixteen-year-old Brett is losing control over everything in his life – except (including?) his eating. When a page from his food journal is posted online and Brett falls deeper into his eating disorder, it will take a new friendship and all his courage to bring himself back out.

[Indiginerds: Tales from Modern Indigenous Life](#) edited by Alina Pete

Celebrate pop culture in this graphic novel anthology of Indigenous artists displaying their own stories and experiences. Creators use a mixture of art styles to tell eleven stories balancing traditional practices with modern and vibrant living.

[Kill Her Twice](#) by Stacey Lee

When two sisters find the body of a rising Chinese American film actor, their 1930s Chinatown neighborhood is scandalized by the negative attention. Stacy Lee writes a captivating teen murder mystery filled with excellent historical detail while touching on themes of grief and discrimination.

[The Lamplighter](#) by Crystal J. Bell

This young adult novel is set in a 19th century seaside whaling village brimming with persistent fog and gloom. Eighteen-year-old Tempe Byrne has taken over her father's old job as Lamplighter after his untimely death to provide for her family. When a few lamps go out unexpectedly and women start to disappear, Tempe must get to the bottom of these curious mysteries or risk her employment. A Gothic tale not soon forgotten.

[Looking for Smoke](#) by K. A. Cobell

After a young woman is found strangled at a Native American festival, four teens from a Blackfoot Montana community are suspects in this thriller that explores the plight of missing and murdered women within Indigenous communities. A realistic portrayal of modern-day Native Americans experiencing violence and poverty make this young adult novel a riveting read.

[Lunar New Year Love Story](#) by Gene Luen Yang & LeUyen Pham

A Vietnamese American high school student is shocked to learn her mother is not dead and that her family is romantically cursed. A touching rom-com graphic novel featuring beautiful scenes of lion dancing while celebrating Lunar New Year.

[Shift Happens: The History of Labor in the United States](#) by J. Albert Mann

A witty overview of the labor movement, highlighting little-known leaders who worked tirelessly to eradicate inequality, is presented for young adults interested in economics and history.

[Twenty-Four Seconds from Now...: A Love Story](#) by Jason Reynolds

A love story in reverse, this relatively short novel covers all the bases (pun intended) - a series of conversations about healthy relationships and healthy teen sexuality, written with the authenticity that Reynolds brings to all his works.

Middle Grade

[The Bletchley Riddle](#) by Ruta Sepetys and Steve Sheinkin

Siblings Jakob and Lizzie Novis have just lost their mother (or have they?) at the outbreak of WWII in Europe. Jakob is working in Bletchley Park as a “government communications operative” and Lizzie is investigating their mother’s disappearance (NOT death). As the war continues, and the stakes for both siblings rise, will they be able to put aside their differences and work together to solve their problems?

[Comet Chaser: The True Cinderella Story of Caroline Herschel, the First Professional Woman Astronomer](#) by Pamela S. Turner

This inspiring biography tells the story of Caroline Herschel (1750-1848), the “world’s first professional woman astronomer.” The evocative painted illustrations integrate beautifully with the text to portray the dark times, hard work, and brilliance of a remarkable scientist.

[Cruzita and the Mariacheros](#) by Ashley Jean Granillo

This novel puts the spotlight on 12-year-old Cruzita, an aspiring pop singer who dreamily creates scenarios of winning a singing contest. But when the family Mexican bakery is in danger of shutting down, Cruzita’s abuela puts her on tortilla rolling duty and cleverly enrolls her in mariachi lessons. The story rejoices in family heritage, pan dulce and an excellent mariachi playlist.

[Force of Nature: A Novel of Rachel Carson](#) by Ann E. Burg

This novel in verse invites readers to learn about the life of *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson through beautiful passages that illustrate her personal story as well as the challenges she faced as a woman scientist fighting for a safer and healthier planet.

[The Hotel Balzaar](#) by Kate DiCamillo

Second in her Norendy Tales series, Kate DiCamillo shares the lives of Marta and her mother. Marta’s mother works at the Hotel Balzaar and one day Marta meets a countess. This countess has a parrot and a story she will tell in multiple parts. The story seems eerily familiar and may help solve the mystery of Marta’s missing father!

[Little Shrew](#) by Akiko Miyakoshi

In this beginning chapter book lovable Little Shrew lives a simple yet full life in his tiny apartment, his workplace, and with friends. Offered in three vignette chapters this quirky yet endearing illustrated book is perfect for any first or second grader.

[London: A History](#) by Laura Carlin

Artist Carlin’s engaging history of London from pre-history to present uses excerpts of sources like poems, songs, letters and journal entries, along with mood-evoking illustrations for a glimpse into a wide variety of experiences and events. It’s organized in chronological order, but perhaps even more enjoyable to dip in and enjoy the double-paged spreads at random.

[Out of My Dreams](#) by Sharon M. Draper

In this third entry in the *Out of My Mind* series our heroine, Melody, is a middle schooler with cerebral palsy. In this adventure she helps an elderly neighbor and travels to London, England. This

book explores accessibility, wheelchair ballet, as well as the technology used to assist non-speaking people communicate. Draper masterfully brings readers into Melody's mind.

[The Secret Library](#) by Kekla Magoon

Magoon writes an engaging fantasy about Dally, an 11-year-old grieving the loss of her grandfather while negotiating a tense relationship with her mother. After finding a mystery map left by her grandfather, Dally heads to a library offering time travel adventures with curious secrets.

[Shark Teeth](#) by Sherri Winston

In this middle grade novel Sharkita is driven to keep herself and her siblings out of the foster care system, even though she knows her mama is neglecting the family with the choices she makes. Winston powerfully gives voice to a vulnerable tween aching to have a normal childhood and provides Sharkita with the agency to hope for a better future.

Picture Book

[All the Rocks We Love](#) by Lisa Varchol Perron

This is a simple and well-done celebration of all sorts of rocks, from dazzling agate to humble sidewalk chalk. Introductory geological information is paired with friendly, diverse illustrations and depictions of the different ways that children interact with rocks.

[Buffalo Fluffalo](#) by Bess Kalb

Seussian wordplay is used to great effect in this tale of a grumpy buffalo who has really had “enufalo”. Turns out that his gruff (and fluffy) exterior hides a wee bashful creature who simply needs some encouragement from his fellow desert animals.

[Cactus Queen: Minerva Hoyt Establishes Joshua Tree National Park](#) by Lori Alexander

Minerva Hoyt was an early conservationist whose dedication to the California desert is highlighted here. The illustrations, like the landscapes that Hoyt fought so hard to protect, burst with texture and color. This is a lovely introduction to a little-known historical figure whose work still reverberates.

[Luigi, the Spider who Wanted to be a Kitten](#) by Michelle Knudsen

In his quest for a cozy place to call home, a big fuzzy spider gets more than he bargained for. Soon he's playing with balls of yarn and meowing! This comical story of mistaken identity carries a sweet message about acceptance and found family.

[No Cats in the Library](#) by Lauren Emmons

Stray cat Clarisse can't read the words in books, but she certainly enjoys the illustrations. Imagine her astonishment when she discovers a “magical building” where people enter empty-handed and leave with stacks of books! Clarisse's reading journey mirrors that of young readers: first appreciating the pictures, then learning to decipher all those squiggly lines.

[Noodles on a Bicycle](#) by Kyo Maclear and Gracey Zhang

Told through poetic language and vivid, bustling illustrations, this historical picture book pays tribute to the demae (delivery drivers on bicycles) who kept residents of Tokyo well-fed by

transporting towering boxes of noodles throughout the city. It's an edifying and delicious look at a bygone era.

[Not Perfect](#) by Maya Myers

Dot is good at a lot of things, but -- unlike her family members, including the cat -- she's not perfect at anything. Mounting frustrations lead to a moment of anger but eventually give way to acceptance. A lovely, gentle story about learning to regulate one's emotions and forgiving those little imperfections.

[Sour Apple](#) by Linda Liu

An apple is seized with self-doubt when it does not get picked during apple season. A long dark night of the soul follows, but it turns out that the apple had a larger purpose than it ever could have imagined.

[Thank You: Saying Thanks To...Everything!](#) by Jarvis

The narrator of this charming collage-style book thanks everything from "my boots for knowing the way" to "the toothbrush for my smile." It is gratitude through a child's lens and is both warm and witty.

[We Are Definitely Human](#) by X. Fang

"We are definitely human," announce the three decidedly alien-looking creatures who crash outside of the Li family's home one night. With their blue skin and wide eyes, these visitors claiming to be from Europe give the townspeople plenty of reasons to be suspicious, but they are treated with kindness and respect in this hilarious book that contains a timeless lesson.

About CADL Reader's Recommendations

With deep knowledge of literature, trends, and reader preferences, CADL's librarians have a passion for connecting readers with the perfect stories and are uniquely equipped to curate a diverse and engaging collection of books for all ages and interests. Visit cadl.org/recommendations for more trusted guidance on your next great read.