

The New York Times

For Kids

EDITORS' NOTE:  
THIS SECTION  
SHOULD  
NOT BE  
READ BY  
GROWN-UPS

PARK  
PETITIONS

Go  
BIG!

VOICES  
for  
VETERANS

Change

POSTCARDS  
TO SAVE  
WOLVES

NO-STRAW  
PROMISES

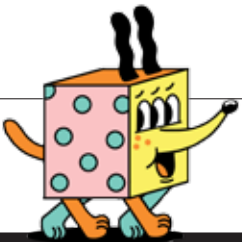
The  
WORLD!

TEDDY BEARS  
FOR EVERYONE

KA-BOOM! 'MYTHBUSTERS' IS BACK, FOR KIDS  
WHY CELLPHONES ARE BANNED IN FRENCH SCHOOLS • THE 13-YEAR-OLD FIGURE SKATER NAILING TRIPLE AXELS  
ONE BOY'S ESCAPE FROM A WILDFIRE • 31 MIND-BENDING MINI CROSSWORD PUZZLES!

ILLUSTRATED BY KATE PRIOR





BOOK REVIEW

THE 5 BEST BOOKS FOR KIDS OF 2018

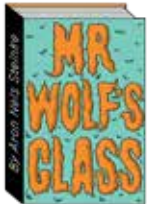
BY MARIA RUSSO

AS THE CHILDREN’S-BOOK editor at The Times, I page through hundreds of books for kids every year. Some are great, and some ... not so much. With the really good ones, I find that I want to read them again — and so do the kids I talk to. Here are the five (O.K., technically six) that stood out in 2018.



**DOG MAN: LORD OF THE FLEAS AND DOG MAN: BRAWL OF THE WILD**  
By Dav Pilkey

When I meet kids between ages 6 and 9 and ask what books they’re into, “Dog Man” is often right up top — and in 2018, not one but two new books in the zany series came out. In “Lord of the Fleas,” Dog Man joins forces with the evil cat Petey. In “Brawl of the Wild,” our hero is sent to the pound for a crime he didn’t commit.



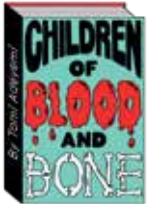
**MR. WOLF’S CLASS**  
By Aron Nels Steinke

This funny graphic novel is the beginning of a new series that kids loved this year. It’s set in a fourth-grade classroom with students who are all different animals: dogs, frogs, ducks, pigs, rabbits. The teacher is — you guessed it — a wolf. But he’s really nice. Maybe even ... too nice?



**MY BEIJING: FOUR STORIES OF EVERYDAY WONDER**  
By Nie Jun

Do you ever wonder what everyday life is like for kids in China? This collection of four graphic-novel-style stories has a fantastic answer. The little girl who is the protagonist has trouble walking, but her friends and her grandpa step in to help by riding her around on bikes, carts and wagons. There are some cool surprises waiting for readers as they explore her busy neighborhood — including time travel.



**CHILDREN OF BLOOD & BONE**  
By Tomi Adeyemi

If you’re a fantasy fan and ready for a book with more than 500 pages, this one will sweep you away. It’s inspired by African mythology and features a heroine who goes into battle to restore magic to her kingdom, which has been overtaken by an oppressive regime based on skin color. You’ll wish there were even more pages — and there will be, because two more books are coming, to make a trilogy.



**INKLING**  
By Kenneth Oppel, Illustrated by Sydney Smith

If you like your stories a little bit mysterious and chill-inducing, this novel is for you. The hero is a kid named Ethan whose dad, a famous artist, hasn’t been able to draw anything in years because of creative block. A shape-shifting ink spot appears to Ethan, promising to help him get his dad drawing again, but things do not turn out as planned. ♦

Arts



EXPLOSIONS, DUCT TAPE AND FIRE-EXTINGUISHER JET PACKS:

‘MYTHBUSTERS JR.’

BY CHELSEA LEU • ILLUSTRATION BY JEREMYVILLE



**H**AVE YOU EVER seen “MythBusters”? The explosion-filled TV show conducted absurd science experiments to confirm or debunk common myths from pop culture. (Can cockroaches survive a nuclear blast? Maybe. Is there really a five-second rule for food on the floor? Busted.) It ended in 2016 after 13 years, but now it’s back, and this time kids are taking over: “MythBusters Jr.” premieres Jan. 2 on the Science Channel. It stars six young makers who aim to answer life’s burning questions. Like: Are farts powerful enough to launch rockets? And can you use a fire extinguisher as a jet pack in space?

Testing those myths, some of which are drawn

from movies and TV shows, involves elaborate feats of construction. During the season, the kids build a “hovercraft” powered by a leafblower; a 14-foot-tall domino; and a parachute made entirely from duct tape. It also often involves explosions — which are even crazier in person than on TV. “You can feel it in your very bones,” says Allie Weber, 13, one of the MythBusters. “It’s the most exhilarating thing.” Besides Allie, who lives in South Dakota and has invented temperature-sensing gloves that prevent frostbite, the show’s cast includes Elijah Horland, 13, a New Yorker who has built a computer the size of an Altoids tin that can play more than 47,000 games; Rachel Pizzolato, 14, a builder, designer and science-fair champ from Louisiana; Jesse Lawless, a 15-year-old from Louisiana who has been constructing vehicles since he was small; Valerie Castillo, 15, a

robotics-competition winner from California; and Cannan Huey-You, a 13-year-old studying astrophysics and engineering at Texas Christian University. All the kids and their families moved to California for 10 weeks in June and July to film the show. “We became a little maker family,” Allie says. The adult in the room is Adam Savage, the maker, designer and movie-prop builder who was one of the original show’s hosts and producers. “One of the very first things I said to the kids was, ‘We’re colleagues now,’” Savage says. “‘You are the MythBusters.’” Practically every day, the young TV stars learned how to do something they’d never done before: use power tools, hold explosives, ride in helicopters. Savage even taught Cannan how to drive a car for an experiment. “We were all just having constant fun on the set — and somehow, it was all safe,” Elijah says. “Probably.” ♦



K-POP IS ON TOP

BY ELISE CRAIG



BTS performing their song “Idol” on “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon” in September.

IF YOU HAVEN’T HEARD

Awards and staging a sold-out world tour that started in Seoul, South Korea, in August. Tickets in the United States were so hot that if you wanted to buy a last-minute floor seat in Fort Worth, you would have had to drop at least \$1,000. Yikes! So what is K-pop, and how has BTS become such a global powerhouse? K-pop generally refers to South Korean pop-music acts that have a teen-idol vibe and combine all kinds of genres, including traditional Korean music, hip-hop and electronic music. Often, they’re put together by management companies, and members are recruited when they are as young as 11. Though the genre started in the ’90s, it took off in the 2000s, when YouTube and other social-media platforms made it possible for bands to connect more directly with their audiences. There are two reasons for BTS’s rise to superstardom above other K-pop bands, according to Suk-Young Kim, the director

of the Center for Performance Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. First: Since the breakup of the British group One Direction, there has been a bit of a boy-band vacuum. For another, they’re masters of social media. “They pretty much broadcast their daily lives,” Kim says. “By showing much of their backstage and offstage lives, struggles and friendships, BTS made their fans feel like they knew the boys personally.” They’re so good at it that Time magazine actually listed them among the 25 most influential people on the internet. (And last month, BTS released in American theaters a documentary about its global Love Yourself Tour.) For the 10-year-old BTS fan Elliott Olsen, though, it’s not about the social media so much as the music and choreography. He was introduced to the band by his 13-year-old sister and discovered he really enjoyed the mix of melody and rap lyrics in their songs, particularly “DNA,” because it makes him feel “pumped up.” He and his sister, who live in Salinas, Calif., enjoy dancing along to the band’s videos and have become huge K-pop fans, branching out to listen to other bands, like NCT and Got7. “We don’t really listen to American music that much anymore, now that I know about K-pop,” Elliot says. ♦

AN APPRECIATION OF ‘SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS’

BY JAMES PONIEMOZIK

PEOPLE ALWAYS WANT to know where master storytellers get their ideas. Stephen Hillenburg, the man who created “SpongeBob SquarePants,” found his under the sea. Hillenburg, who died in November at age 57, didn’t take a typical path to a TV career. He studied marine resources in college and taught marine biology after he graduated. Later, he went to art school and got a degree in animation, and when he was ready to create his own show, he decided to put his specialized sea-life knowledge to work. Not that “SpongeBob SquarePants” is scientifically accurate, of course. (You try lighting a campfire underwater.) But what’s so special about it is the lovable, believable characters who make its nautical nonsense happen. The show’s squeaky-voiced star, SpongeBob, is an optimist. He believes every day can be the best day ever. He has faith in the most knuckleheaded ideas of his starfish friend, Patrick. He’s confident that next time, he’ll pass his driving test. “SpongeBob SquarePants,” which has had more than 240 episodes and just started its 12th season, began in 1999. Some of its original kid fans have grown up; other kids are just discovering it. In the underwater metropolis Bikini Bottom, Stephen Hillenburg and SpongeBob proved that when you put science and art together, sometimes you make magic.

**BELOVED ‘SPONGEBOB’ MOMENTS** “My favorite quote is, ‘What’s better than serving up smiles?’ It really shows how optimistic SpongeBob is, which is why I love him.” Rosdely Ciprian, 14, New York

“One of my favorite episodes is ‘Squid Noir,’ where Squidward loses his clarinet. He becomes a detective and asks Mr. Krabs if he knows where his clarinet is. Mr. Krabs says he doesn’t know, but says if Squidward finds it again to bring it to him SO HE CAN SMASH IT! That is so funny.” Ethan Perry, 8, Maplewood, N.J.

“I like watching ‘SpongeBob’ because it’s silly, and everything else in life is serious. But if you think about it, there are lessons: Plankton always pretends to be someone else to get the Krabby Patty recipe, but he always loses.” Max Freeman, 11, Bethesda, Md.