

This week's column is by Ruth Gilbert, Youth Services Librarian at the Kirkland Town Library.

This month at the Kirkland Town Library we're focusing on creativity. Our "We'll Get You Through the Winter" program has lots of ideas for ways to find a creative outlet. Maybe you'd like to try a new hobby, or revisit one you haven't been able to dedicate time to lately. Maybe you sing, play an instrument, dance, or love to draw. Whatever your passion is, give yourself a little time this month to reconnect with it. Here are some great books for kids and families to inspire you to think about creating art, music, and ideas.

"Maisy Goes to a Show" by Lucy Cousins. It's been a while since attending a live performance has been an option, but this picture book for preschoolers will bring you to the theater with colorful illustrations and simple text. It captures the excitement of seeing a live show.

"Mix It Up!" by Herve Tullet. Let your toddler get messy without breaking out the finger paints. This delightful interactive picture book invites readers to "mix it up" by touching blobs of paint printed on the page. You'll blend colors, splash paint, and do other tricks as you follow the book's suggestions.

"Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat" by Javaka Steptoe is so many things: a Caldecott Medal winner, a picture book biography, and a work of art itself. The illustrations were painted on wood found around New York City, where Basquiat lived and worked. This is a wonderful book for anyone who tries to see the art and beauty in the world around them.

"RESPECT: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul" by Carole Boston Weatherford and Frank Morrison. Many of us know Aretha Franklin as a powerful singer, but she was also a songwriter, pianist, and a civil rights activist. This picture book tells the story of a girl who taught herself to play the piano, a teen who recorded an album at age 14, and a woman who sang at two presidential inaugurations.

"Woodpecker Girl" by I-Tsun Chiang, Chingyen Liu, and Heidi Doll is a new picture book that tells the true story of a girl with cerebral palsy who paints with a brush strapped to her head. The text is simple enough for preschoolers but the story is engaging enough for older children. Some of the illustrations in the book are actual paintings by the real young artist, a girl named Yipei Huang.

"Better Nate than Ever" by Tim Federle is a middle-grade novel for all the theater kids out there. Thirteen year old Nate Foster sneaks off, alone, to New York City to audition for a part in "ET: The Musical," a role he knows he was born to play. Nate is a lovable character and you'll cheer for him as he tries to make it on Broadway.

"Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World" by Ashley Herring Blake. Ivy Aberdeen makes sense of her world through her drawings, but when disaster strikes and her home is hit by a tornado her precious sketchbook goes missing. The sketchbook holds a secret about herself and she thinks that someone else has found it. This middle grade novel is about finding the courage to express yourself and to figure out who you are.

“Punching the Air” by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam is a young adult novel inspired by the experience of one of the coauthors, Yusef Salaam, a member of the Exonerated 5. The story, written in verse, is about sixteen year old Amal Shahid, who is imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit. To cope, he turns to his art: his writing.

“Blood Water Paint” by Joy McCullough is the fictionalized story of Artemisia Gentileschi, a real female painter in seventeenth-century Rome. Written in verse, this young adult novel depicts the difficult life of a talented woman artist in a world dominated by men.