**Podcast: Literaticast**

**Episode: 50: The Holiday Gift Guide, 2021 Edition**

**File Name: Melissa\_p\_mixdown.mp3**

**File Length: 00:51:53**

**Transcription by Keffy**

[00:00:00] Literaticast theme music plays.

Jenn: [00:00:06]Hello and welcome to the Literaticast. I'm Jennifer Laughran and I'm a senior agent at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency where I rep children's books, from baby books through YA and everything in between. And I'm here to give you an insider's look at all things children's publishing.

[00:00:23] We're nearing the end of October, fall has crept into the air. And the holiday season will be here in just a few short weeks with Thanksgiving and Hanukkah. I feel like this year has gone by in an absolute blink. I know that I've said it before, and I'm so sorry to have to keep banging this drum. But if you're planning to buy specific books for holiday gifts, your best bet is to order them now. Because shipping and printing delays are going to be problematic the closer we get to Hanukkah and Christmas.

[00:00:51] And if books sell out, they may not be able to be reordered because reprinting has been problematic. So that's why we're doing the annual holiday gift guide a little early this year.

[00:01:02] Before we get into it, a few orders of business. I'm going to give you three different ways that you can support this podcast. Firstly, all the books we're going to talk about today are up in the show notes on my website. That's at JenniferLaughran.com/Literaticast. When you purchase books through those bookshop.org affiliate links, a teensy portion of the cost goes to supporting the podcast. But these books are also all available at your local independent bookstore of choice, or wherever your favorite place to buy books is.

[00:01:34] Additionally, if you'd like to support the podcast directly, there's a Patreon. It's at patreon.com/literaticat. Throw in a buck a month and help keep the podcasts coming.

[00:01:45] I really appreciate everyone's kind words about this podcast, and how you've recommended it to friends. The easiest way to get the word out, if you like it, is to leave a review on Apple Podcasts. More reviews help more folks find the show.

[00:02:00] Now, onto my guest. I'm delighted to welcome indie bookseller Melissa Posten. She's got great taste and I know she's going to provide some terrific book recommendations for us. Let me see if I can get Melissa on the line.

[00:02:17] Hi, Melissa, welcome to the podcast.

Melissa: [00:02:18] Hi, Jenn. Thanks for having me.

Jenn: [00:02:20] Of course. So first of all, can you introduce yourself to the audience and your bookstore?

Melissa: [00:02:25] Yes. So my name is Melissa Posten. And I am the children's buyer at The Novel Neighbor bookstore, which is a full service indie in St. Louis, Missouri.

Jenn: [00:02:36] Great, thank you. I've brought you here, of course, to recommend some awesome books. But before we get into it, I want to hear more about your store. It seems like your store, just from like perusing your website, I've never gotten to visit. But it seems like you're a robust hub for the community. How has that all gone during the pandemic?

Melissa: [00:02:56] So we were very lucky during the pandemic, first of all, because we had a website that allowed people to buy things online. So we were very easily able to move to selling things online and curbside pickup. We were closed for several months, like I think everybody was, but we never really slowed down as far as business went. And a lot of people started ordering from us for shipping. And then we hired a new social media person who made us fairly big, at least for a bookstore on TikTok. And now we are selling books to people all over the country based on various videos that she's made for us. And that's been really great.

[00:03:42] So we've been very lucky. We're doing quite well. And we do like to think of ourselves as a hub for the community. We carry a lot of local authors and artists. We carry a ton of sidelines. We have an event space that you can rent. It's just a really warm and welcoming space and I love working here.

Jenn: [00:04:00] I love that. And I'm obsessed with TikTok, as many listeners will know. So I will I'll put a link to your TikTok as well into our show notes.

Melissa: [00:04:11] Excellent.

Jenn: [00:04:13] I saw that you have a super cool program called the mystery box that people can order on your website. I'm gonna put a link to that too, obviously, but tell us about it.

Melissa: [00:04:21] Yeah, so I love our mystery boxes. You pick a price point. And then you fill out a questionnaire, you give us information about what you or the recipient likes and doesn't like. It can be books and merchandise or just books. You can give us a link to your Goodreads or your StoryGraph and we put together a box of surprises for you and each one is hand-curated for the specific person.

Jenn: [00:04:46] I love that. So I know that people are sick of hearing about supply chain issues. But part of the reason why we're doing this podcast so early with a holiday gift guide, we're doing it in October. Because seriously, there have been a lot of supply chain issues. I'm hoping that doing this early will encourage people to shop early for Christmas and Hanukkah. Hanukkah is also very early this year, it's right after Thanksgiving. But what else do you want to tell people about bookstores and supply chain issues?

Melissa: [00:05:18] I mean, I feel like bookstores have a unique set of problems, because we're kind of at the crux of the paper shortage and the printer backup and the dock backup. And then we're going to be at the center of the shipping backup. Well, when people are trying to ship early so, for us, I think our main selling points to people have been shop as early as you can, and be flexible in the books that you're looking for.

[00:05:46] You know, sometimes people really need a specific book. And if you do try to figure that out early, but if you don't then be open to suggestions from independent booksellers, because that's what we love to do most. We are definitely seeing shortages already. We are seeing books that are not going to be back in stock until February or March. We've stocked up where we can, but mostly we're we've just sort of crossed our fingers and thrown our hands up and ordered what we thought was right. And we don't have a crystal ball, unfortunately, I think a lot of us would pay a lot of money for a crystal ball.

Jenn: [00:06:24] Yeah, I mean, that's what I try to tell people, too. Like, the bookstore is absolutely jammed full of amazing book.

Melissa: [00:06:33] Yes.

Jenn: [00:06:33] And maybe we don't have whatever this exact thing you want is, but we probably have something else totally awesome that you've never even heard of. So being flexible is really cool.

Melissa: [00:06:44] Yes.

Jenn: [00:06:45] And if you absolutely must have something, try and order it ahead of time and also be nice to booksellers.

Melissa: [00:06:50] That’s really, I mean, that's just the rule period, for this holiday season. Just be nice to people.

Jenn: [00:06:57] Yeah, we're all we're all trying, and we're all frustrated, too. So, anyway. Okay, I know you have a lot of book recommendations for us, and I have some too. Now, I'm going to admit that I'm cheating a tiny bit, because some of these are books that I've repped, and some I’ve spoken about before. However, if I've, either whether they are books that I repped, or don't rep, they're all brand new, like in the past month or so, or they're just about to come out. I truly do think they're amazing, obviously. And if you're one of my authors, and I didn't mention one of your books, don't be offended. All of my clients’ books are up on my website with buy links. If you, listener, have read and liked some of my books, you should probably check out all of my books, because obviously you have great taste.

[00:07:45] Anyway, all of that said, let's get into it. We're gonna talk, I'm going to basically say the category. And then we're each going to give a couple of picks for each category. And maybe we'll switch back and forth.

[00:08:03] So first category is baby books, that means board books and also books perfect for toddlers. So I'll go first. My first pick is *Circle Under Berry* by Carter Higgins. So at first glance, this is an incredibly simple book with simple illustrations. Shapes, in bright, bold colors. But that simplicity is really deceptive. Because the text gets more and more wild and deliciously fun to read aloud, and also rewards rereading. It's really engaging. It will draw kids in. There's like new ways to enjoy it every time you read it. If you like books like *Orange Pear Apple Bear*, which is one of my very favorite first gifts to give babies. You're going to love this. And I feel like it's going to be one of those classic must give books. It is a picture book, not a board book. But it's very sturdy. There's no jacket, it's like cardboard, and it definitely is aimed at toddlers.

Melissa: [00:09:00] I was very jealous you picked that book before I could.

Jenn: [00:09:04] What's your first pick?

Melissa: [00:09:05] So my first pick is completely different. It's called *Giganotosaurus Roar, Giganto, Roar*. And it is about four dinosaurs who are having a roaring contest. And they want the biggest dino to join in. And the fun part about this book is the biggest dino is this gigantic, plush dinosaur hand puppet that's actually in the book. So you know there's a lot of those board books where you have like a little finger puppet, you can move around. But this is like a full sized, gigantic dinosaur puppet that you get to manipulate while you're reading the book and I just love it. It's so much fun.

Jenn: [00:09:44] That's great. So my next pick is *My First Pop-Up Mythological Monsters* by Owen Davey. I believe this came out last year in the UK but it's brand new here. Just like the title says it is an introduction to mythological monsters from around the world with a bit of their backstory. Some you've definitely heard of, others may be new to you. It is board book sized, it’s stunning to look and it invites, touching and playing with. Little hands love little books. The pop-ups are fairly sturdy, though it's possible if your kid plays with it very roughly it will tear because it's paper engineering. But it's cool enough that I'm going to give it to all the toddlers in my life. And actually, I would buy it for myself. I did buy it for myself. It's frickin’ cool. There we go.

[00:10:34] Do you have another pick in the baby section?

Melissa: [00:10:35] I do. So a picture book that came out several years ago called *Esargot* just came out in board book, and is also available in plush form from Merrymakers. So it makes a great set to give together. *Escargot* is a little snail, who is French, and he is on a journey to the end of his book, where there is a delicious salad waiting for him that he can't wait to eat. So he invites the reader to join along on this journey to the salad. And along the way he asks the reader to name a favorite animal and he’s sad because nobody ever says the snail which always makes me a little, you know, choked up. But he's using his time as well to try to convince the reader why, he, the snail should be his favorite pet. And it's just charming and delightful. It's got a lovely little ending and I love that it's available in board now. It's just such a sweet story.

Jenn: [00:11:31] Yay, I love *Escargot*. The book. I like the food too, but I won’t tell him, that.

Melissa: [00:11:39] Yes, I’m not [crosstalk] food, but I do love the book.

Jenn: [00:11:42] Alright, let's do picture books, proper picture books, and you can go first.

Melissa: [00:11:47] Alright, so my first pick his *Sweater Weather* by Matt Phelan, which I think is the perfect book for this season and any season really, but especially this season. It's about Papa Bear, who tells his cubs to get their sweaters on. And he's waiting and waiting and waiting. And he's knitting while he's waiting. I love that he knits. And he goes upstairs to find out what's taking the cubs so long and they're having a hard time getting the sweaters on and there's this adorable spread where they're just all mixed up in the sweaters and two of them are in one and one is in a sleeve and I just love it so much. And then they're all sort of arguing back and forth about who gets what color and who gets what sweater and Papa Bear solves the problem in a very sweet and loving way. And it's just lovely. It's done in Matt’s trademark watercolor art, and I love it so so much. It's like a giant sweatery hug in a book.

Jenn: [00:12:53] I love that. So my first pick is *Little Witch Hazel* by Phoebe Wahl.

Melissa: [00:12:57] I love this so much.

Jenn: [00:12:59] Yay! Okay, full disclosure. This is one of my books. But my own biases aside, *Little Witch Hazel* is a must buy for both picture book lovers and also kids who are ready to listen to longer stories and independent readers alike. It's absolutely gorgeous, somewhat oversized, like hefty book. It's got four stories inside. I call it a treasury of stories. And it follows this little gnomy witch midwife who lives in the forest and helps her animal friends and fairy friends throughout the year.

[00:13:32] Though she is a witch, this is not a Halloween book by any means. Each story represents Hazel enter forest in a different season. So it is a year-round enjoyable book. It's also, it's really hard to find longer picture books that appeal to somewhat older kids like your four, or five, six, seven year olds who have a longer attention span. Who can listen to chapter books and stuff like that, but they still want something really highly illustrated and really special. And *Little Witch Hazel* is that something really special.

Melissa: [00:14:02] I love that book so much.

Jenn: [00:14:06] Your turn.

Melissa: [00:14:07] My second book is *Niki Nakayama A Chef’s Tale in 13 Bites*. And this is picture book nonfiction. And it is about a woman named Niki Nakayama who is a restaurateur in California. She has a very famous restaurant there but this is the story of her life told in 13 vignettes.

[00:14:29] So she grew up in the United States, fascinated with her family's traditional Japanese cooking and just falling in love with food, and having all these experiences working in her family business. And when she graduated, she took a trip to Japan where she felt even more in love with the traditional Japanese ways of cooking. She went to cooking school. Then she decided she wanted to be a sushi chef and there are not a lot of women who do this and she decided she wanted to go to Japan and learn to cook more traditionally. And again, it's a very male dominated industry there, but she was incredibly successful. And now she has this restaurant in California. And it's just this lovely, lovely book about her life and falling in love with food and becoming a chef and I just adored it. It makes a beautiful read aloud. I think it'd be great for a foodie family. Or really, I think it's just a good book for anybody.

Jenn: [00:15:25] Yeah, and I think Debbi Michiko Florence is the author, and—

Melissa: [00:15:29] Yes, she’s a co-author.

Jenn: [00:15:30] Co-author, and she is a friend of the podcast. She has been a guest on here before.

Melissa: [00:15:33] Oh, excellent.

Jenn: [00:15:32] So look out for that one. My next pick is called *It’s OK, Slow Lizard* By Yeorim Yoon and Jian Kim. It's a book about mindfulness and taking it slow. There's a bird who's super stressed out and an elephant who's too frustrated and gets angry. And a rabbit who's sad and bummed out. But lizard, lizard takes life as it comes, teaches all its friends to take it down a notch. There's a lot of books like this, but this theme that sometimes they come across as like lessons, but *It's OK, Slow Lizard* is just really lovely and special. The illustrations are soft and gorgeous. And it's a good book for kids whose emotions are heightened, or for adults who just need to take a deep breath. Basically this is the book equivalent of taking a relaxing bubble bath. Or like drinking a cup of warm cocoa by the fire. It's so cute and cozy. It's irresistible.

[00:16:35] Okay on to early reader and chapter books, I will go first.

Melissa: [00:16:37] Alright.

Jenn: [00:16:37] So my pick, this is again cheating because it's multiple books, and I repped it, but whatever. The entire *History Smashers* series by Kate Messner. So these books are perfect for any kids who like things like graphic nonfiction like *Nathan Hale’s Hazardous Tales*, or who love books like the Who Was series, but are ready for some more information and like cooler presentation. They're really engaging, informative, nonfiction, with illustrations, graphic novel elements that are also really funny.

[00:17:11] And they shed light on pieces of history that are not normally taught in school like the real deal about famous events. The series now includes books on the true history of the Mayflower. The American Revolution, women's right to vote, the Titanic, Pearl Harbor, and the latest installment is plagues and pandemics, which ranges from the Black Plague all the way through to COVID-19. These are funny even for adults, and I learned something in literally all of these books that I will tell my sister like, you will not believe what I just found out. But kids are super into them. They're very kid friendly. The seven to ten year olds that I know are obsessed.

[00:17:51] So that's my first pick, sort of the entire series.

Melissa: [00:17:56] All right, well my first pick is Waffles and Pancake Planetary-Yum by Drew Brockington, who is the author of the *CatStronauts* graphic novel series, which is about cat astronauts. And this one is like a prequel. So it takes the main character of *CatStronauts*, Waffles, and it takes you back to his time as a kitten.

[00:18:19] And the first book, Dad cat takes Waffles and his sister Pancake to the big city to go to the Science Museum. And they are seeing all these exciting things. And then they get separated from dad. So they have to try to find their dad or maybe they're just going to get stuck in the museum and have to eat star tots and tuna melts forever. It is just a hoot. It's a graphic novel. It's a very early graphic novel. It's book one of a series and I'm just in love.

Jenn: [00:18:47] I love that and kids are so into *CatStronauts*, so.

Melissa: [00:18:51] Yes.

Jenn: [00:18:51] So my next one. Again, this is a little bit cheating, because it's not really a chapter book or an early reader. But it's called *365 Words for Clever Kids!* It's by Dr. Meredith L. Rowe. It could be a baby book, a picture book, arguably a middle grade book. It's basically an illustrated kind of mini thesaurus, compendium, of big words. It was compiled in conjunction with a Harvard professor of childhood development. But it's not learn-y or anything, it’s just adorable. And it will inspire a love of special words in kids whether they're already reading or not. It's basically a vocabulary expanding book. And it's also just super cute. So I think it's perfect for that kind of, I'm just learning to read and becoming confident kind of person.

Melissa: [00:19:46] It's such a good book. I think it's beautiful.

[00:19:49] My next book is the *Sydney & Taylor* series, actually by Jacqueline Davies. The second book came out very recently and this is in the same vein as the *Mercy Watson* books. It's that level. It's fully illustrated in color. And Sydney and Taylor are a skunk and a hedgehog who are best friends. And in the first one, they realize that they are small animals who never go anywhere. So they decide that they're going to explore the big wide world. And in the second book, which is called *Take a Flying Leap*, the hedgehog decides that they want to become the first flying hedgehog and their best friend does not know how to discourage them without, sort of just pulling the rug right out from under all of their dreams. They are just delightful and beautifully, beautifully illustrated by Deborah Hocking. I just love the series so much. I can't wait for more books.

Jenn: [00:20:47] Awesome. Let's do middle grade books, and you can go first.

Melissa: [00:20:51] Okay, so my first middle grade book is called *Barakah Beats* by Maleeha Siddiqui. And this is about a young girl named Nimra. And it's her first time going to public school and I believe… So, it's middle, she's going to middle school, so she's in sixth grade. And it's very difficult for her. She's confused by the schedule, and she thinks the teachers are mean, and she wears a hijab so she starts getting the cold shoulder from a couple of kids. And that makes it difficult. And then she accepts this unlikely invitation to join this eighth grade boy band called Baraka Beats.

[00:21:33] But the only problem is, is that she was brought up, taught that music isn't allowed in Islam, and she knows that her parents won't like this. So she has to try to figure out how to join the band, how, for her parents not to find out how to save her friendships that are kind of on the fence because of everything that's going on at school. It's just a beautiful story about school and friendship and faith and being true to yourself. And I just loved it.

Jenn: [00:22:00] Oh my gosh, that's amazing. And did you by any chance watch the TV show *We Are Lady Parts*?

Melissa: [00:22:07] No.

Jenn: [00:22:07] Okay, so I don't know if I talked about this in the podcast before, but it's for grownups and teens, not little kids. But it is on Peacock of all things. So I'm afraid that a lot of people won't watch it. But it gives me all the vibes of like a *Bend It Like Beckham*, or something like that.

Melissa: [00:22:27] Oh, yeah.

Jenn: [00:22:27] It’s a pitch perfect TV show. Hilarious. And it's about a hijabi girl who's like in her, maybe like 20 years old. And she's from a very traditional kind of family. But she joins an all girl punk band like an all girl all Muslim punk band. It’s an absolute delight.

Melissa: [00:22:51] And what’s that called, again?

Jenn: [00:22:51] It's called *We are Lady Parts*. So this book that you just said sounds like the kid version of this TV show.

Melissa: [00:22:59] Yes! Okay, I need to watch that.

Jenn: [00:23:00] You completely do. You will love it. Anyway, back to middle grade books, after our little sojourn into the TV world.

[00:23:10] So my first pick is *The Troubled Girls of Dragomir Academy* by Anne Ursu.

Melissa: [00:23:18] That was another one I was sad you picked.

Jenn: [00:23:20] Sorry…

Melissa: [00:23:20] No, you’re fine.

Jenn: [00:23:22] It’s suspenseful. It's gorgeous. It's filled with magic and monsters for kids who like fantasy. This is a magic school book unlike any other you've read. It’s fave of the year. Basically every kid who likes fantasy, this is my go to. This is what I'm handing them. Yeah, that's all.

Melissa: [00:23:41] All right.

Jenn: [00:23:43] Middle grade fantasy of the year.

Melissa: [00:23:44] Yeah, I… Agreed. It is just an absolutely beautiful book.

[00:23:49] I am going to talk about *Dust & Grim* by Chuck Wendig which I am kind of obsessed with. It is about a 13 year old girl named Molly who grew up with her incredibly neglectful father and never knowing her mother. And when her father dies, she is taken by an uncle to this gigantic weird house where the older brother she's never met lives and finds out that the family business, which is run out of the house, is a mortuary for monsters.

Jenn: [00:24:26] What?

Melissa: [00:24:28] And they are charged with kind of easing the path into the next world for creatures who are not of our world. And it is not only an awesome fantasy and a really great family novel, but it is also so funny. It's just awesome. I could not recommend it more highly.

Jenn: [00:24:51] Oh my gosh, I like Chuck's adult books but this is his debut middle grade, I think.

Melissa: [00:24:59] Yes, and his voice translates to the middle grade space really well.

Jenn: [00:25:03] Oh, I will have to look for it. I'm not even seeing it.

[00:25:07] Okay, so my second pick for middle grade is *Stuntboy in the Meantime* by Jason Reynolds and Raul the third. I did rep the illustrator, full disclosure. It doesn't come out until November 30th. But I would highly recommend pre ordering it if you want it in time for the holidays. It's about a kid, Portico Reeves who lives in an apartment building and all the characters who live there. He has anxiety which is dealt with really well and he deals with it by becoming a superhero of sorts. It's funny, it's a great book. But what puts it over the top is the exuberant illustrations. They cover every single page. They add another dimension to the story. It's not a graphic novel, but it will definitely appeal to graphic novel fans. It’s just something really special. I've never seen anything like it. It has to be seen to be believed. And you need it. So you know, November 30th, preorder it please. That's my pick.

[00:26:05] My first young adult pick is *Into the Bloodred* *Woods* by Martha Brockenbrough. Martha Brockenbrough is one of my clients and she's also been on this podcast before, so that listeners, devout listeners will know her. It's everything to love in a YA fantasy. It comes out next week, November 2nd, and you need to get your hands on it. It's this dark, glorious fantasy filled with werebears and monsters and the monsters are both animal kind of monsters and human monsters. It is a fiercely feminist, take no prisoners, bloody fairytale that will suck readers in and keep them gasping. I would give it to any young adult fantasy fan or grown up. What about you?

Melissa: [00:26:54] Alright, so my first pick is also a dark and incredible fantasy. And it comes out, I believe the first Tuesday in November, it is called *All of Us Villains* by Amanda Foody and Christine Lynn Herman. And it's kind of like a magical *Hunger Games*. It is about a city where once in a generation when the blood moon comes, seven families in this remote magical city each name a champion to compete in a tournament to the death. And the winning family gets exclusive control over this sort of secret hoard of high magic. It’s the most magic in the world. And that basically makes them the ruling magical family for a generation.

[00:27:42] So it is about these seven champions, who of course all have different motives and different secrets and what happens to them in this tournament and I just tore through it.

Jenn: [00:27:54] Ooh, that's exciting. One of my colleagues represented one of the authors of that book. I've not had a chance to read it yet, but she's been telling us about it and I'm like what? Magic *Hunger Games*? Okay.

Melissa: [00:28:08] I mean that's pretty much all I had to hear.

Jenn: [00:28:12] Okay, my next pick is still fantasy, but it's a little something lighter. It's *The Other Merlin* by Robyn Schneider. Okay, if you like books, like *My Plain Jane* the series, books that are straight up funny and take stories that you know and turn them upside down, this is a must read. It's King Arthur and Lancelot and Guinevere and Merlin, but gender swapped, queer, and basically both nothing like the original story and weirdly everything like the original stories. They’re just really fun. From start to finish, I was laughing, I was like, cheering. And I cannot wait to see what happens in the next installment.

[00:28:51] I did not represent this book, but I know the author, so I texted her after and I was like, “What the hell? You need to tell me what happens next?” And she was like, “You can find out next year,” and I was like, “D’oh…” So anyway, *The Other Merlin*.

Melissa: [00:29:09] Alright, so my second pick is *If This Gets Out* by Sophie Gonzalez and Cale Dietrich. And this doesn't come out until December 7th, but it is worth the wait. It is about two members of one of the biggest boy bands in America who are in love with each other and keeping it a secret because they think it would destroy the band if it got out that they were gay. And it is about their relationship and the pressure to hide it and what happens when they decide that they can't anymore and it's just fantastic.

Jenn: [00:29:44] Awesome. And good to have a contemp since we leaned pretty heavy on fantasy in that category.

[00:29:54] Okay, graphic novels. You go first.

Melissa: [00:29:55] Yes. Okay, so my first graphic novel pick is middle grade and it is the absolutely charming *Garlic & the Vampire* by Brie Paulsen. So it is about a little garlic who has a lot of anxiety and is convinced that she's always doing the wrong thing and she just wants to stay in her garden and tend it where she knows everything is safe. Even though her friends encourage her to kind of get out in the world, she does not want to do that. But then the village learns that a vampire has moved in nearby and they decide that because garlic is already naturally repulsive to vampires, supposedly, that she is the person that has to confront him. So she has no choice but to go off and try to confront this vampire. And it is so delightful. It is. I want a stuffed garlic. I just want to hug her forever. It is so charming and wonderful.

Jenn: [00:30:49] You had me at a little garlic who has anxiety.

[00:30:58] Okay, my first pick is a YA and again it's a book that I had something to do with but hey. It is *Squad* by Maggie Tokuda Hall and Lisa Sterle.

Melissa: [00:31:08] I’m obsessed.

Jenn: [00:31:09] Yes, thank you. It came out a couple of weeks ago and it has been an indie bestseller since it came out. So I'm very excited about that. And we've got a lot of love from indie bookstores. Maggie's a bookseller for a long time and we love that people are loving this book, but now everybody needs to read it. I pitched it originally as *Heathers* meets *Teen Wolf*.

Melissa: [00:31:32] Yes.

Jenn: [00:31:31] And I'd say that's accurate.

Melissa: [00:31:33] 100% accurate that description. That is [crosstalk] description.

Jenn: [00:31:38] It's a graphic novel about a group of girls at school who on weekends dress up and go to parties and lure predatory dudes into dark corners to kiss and eat them. Because they are werewolves. It is a sheer delight. To be honest, I've never cheered at murderers more. It has a sapphic love storyline, and it will make you say, “Eat the patriarchy.”

Melissa: [00:32:07] Yes. I feel like we need shirts or enamel pins or something for this book.

Jenn: [00:32:13] Yes, for sure. There are stickers, I can send you a sticker.

Melissa: [00:32:16] Oh, yes, please.

Jenn: [00:32:17] Okay.

Melissa: [00:32:17] So my second pick is also middle grade. And it just came out today, actually. It's called *Marshmallow & Jordan* by Alina Chau. And it is so beautiful. It is about a girl named Jordan who was the star player for her school's basketball team, but she was in an accident. And now she's paralyzed from the waist down. She's still the team captain, but she can't compete. So she's really kind of at sea and not really sure what she's doing.

[00:32:46] And then she meets this mysterious elephant that no one else can seem to see named Marshmallow. And Marshmallow helps her discover water polo. So she tries water polo as her new sport. And what she doesn't know is, is this going to be the way for her to continue the dreams of being an athlete that she had? Or is it going to be the thing that drives the final wedge between her and all of her best friends on the basketball team? And you know, how is she seeing Marshmallow and why can no one else see him?

[00:33:18] The cover is just one of the cutest things I've ever seen. She's with the elephant in her wheelchair and she's holding what appears to be Dole Whip, which just makes me really happy. It's just a beautiful book.

Jenn: [00:33:31] Nice. So my second pick is *Graceling*. It's by Gareth Hinds, adapted from the novel by Kristin Cashore, which many people read. It came out a long time ago, like 10 years ago at this point, or more. You don't have to have read the original book. This graphic adaptation does a great job translating the story for a new audience.

[00:33:52] But if you are a fan of *Graceling* already, you'll also find a lot to love. It comes out on November 16th. You should definitely preorder it. Any YA fantasy fans who love graphic novels will love it. I just got my copies in today, actually. And it is spectacular looking in real life. So I'm very excited about this adaptation.

Melissa: [00:34:10] I can't wait to get my hands on it.

Jenn: [00:34:13] Yes, Gareth does a lot of kinds of adaptations of like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. You've probably seen those graphic novels and he also has done Shakespeare adaptations. This is his first sort of modern novel adaptation. And it's brilliant.

Melissa: [00:34:28] He's one of my very favorite illustrators.

Jenn: [00:34:31] Yay. So now we're on to holiday books. This could be any holiday, any age. I'm just, put a blanket holiday. So you go first.

Melissa: [00:34:41] I picked *Happy Diwali*, which is written by Sanyukta Mathur and Courtney Pippin-Mathur and it's illustrated by Courtney. And this is a joyful family Diwali picture book that follows a little girl from dawn to dusk as she goes through all of the activities of Diwali. The art is beautiful. And then in the back there are activities and questions and information about Diwali, just some really great holiday back matter that I just loved.

Jenn: [00:35:11] Awesome. So my pick for holiday book is *We Give Thanks* by Cynthia Rylant. It’s illustrated by Sergio Ruzzier who I do rep. Now this is not a Thanksgiving book despite the title, it works year round, it does not address the holiday directly. But it can be used as a Thanksgiving book for families that don't really want to talk about some lie about pilgrims, but would rather celebrate thankfulness and gratitude.

[00:35:38] It is entirely cozy and adorable and heartwarming and really sweet. Great to share for Thanksgiving or any time of the year.

[00:35:45] So now we're on to gifty books, or games or whatever gifts, things for the entire family to enjoy. So my first pick is a book of poetry. It's called *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright!* It's out from Nosy Crow books. And it is an animal poem for each day of the year. It's huge, this book, it's lavishly illustrated, really special. And basically, you can share it with the whole family. And every day look at it every day of the year. It's really cool. Like, I love the idea of just having this big book that is, you know, you make a little ritual out of reading and thinking about the poem for that day. It's gorgeous, and really a special gift for the whole family.

Melissa: [00:36:30] I'm really afraid I didn't order enough for the store. It's so pretty.

Jenn: [00:36:34] I know it's stunning, actually.

[00:36:36] Okay, what's your first gifty book.

Melissa: [00:36:38] So mine is a series. So last year, *Highlights* put out *The* *Highlights Book of Things To Do*, which was games and activities and all different kinds of things you could do when you were bored. And it was just terrific. It's this oversized paper overboard really thick, excellent price point. And this year, in just a week or so, they're coming out with *The Highlights Book of Things to Draw* and *The Highlights Book of Things to Write* which are drawing and writing prompts and pages that you can color and write right on. And they're just terrific gifts, I think, for any age.

Jenn: [00:37:14] Nice. So my next gifty book pick is *The Beatryce Prophecy* by Kate DiCamillo and Sophie Blackall. Now fans of this author and illustrator are going to buy this regardless. It definitely does not need a plug from me, it's already a *New York Times* bestseller. But I will say it's not really a novel in the sense that other Kate DiCamillo novels are. It's more of a fable, if you will, about the power of words. And then it is a straight up regular novel. And I think of this as something really, that will benefit from being shared with all ages of folks. And it would make a great family read aloud. Also the production of it is just lovely. There's gilt on it, the paper feels like butter. It’s just really pretty. It would make a great gift.

Melissa: [00:38:07] Agreed. My second pick is *Gender Swapped Fairy Tales* by Karrie Fransman and Jonathan Plackett. And it is a beautifully illustrated collection of traditional fairy tales, where the gender has been swapped in everyone. And it really brings an interesting light to a number of these stories. And I just loved it. I think it works for everyone. It's funny to me how every single story still works. They've only had to tweak little things here and there. But it does make you look at these traditional stories in a whole new light every time.

Jenn: [00:38:41] Amazing and by the way, that was going to be one of my picks. So there you go.

[00:38:47] All right, so now we're on to the wildcard. So for these categories, we're going to tell me who the person is that we're shopping for. And what the wildcard pick is.

[00:38:58] So my first one is for vehicle-obsessed kiddos. They like trucks, they like cars, they like planes, they like things that go*. Vamos! Let's Cross the Bridge* by Raul the Third with colors by Elaine Bay. This is the third installment of the *Vamos!* Series, you've heard me talk about them. Think Richard Scarry, but more modern and cool and bilingual and set in a border town. It's, as usual with this series they're absolutely packed with details, interesting things to look at and pour over. The whole series is award winning. It's beautiful. You've heard me babble about it.

[00:39:36] But I need to shout out the fact that this one*, Let's Cross the Bridge* both celebrates communities coming together. And more importantly for this wildcard slot, is absolutely jammed full of all different kinds of vehicles. So if you have a kid who loves cars and trucks and things of the go, you need *Vamos! Let's cross the bridge*.

Melissa: [00:39:59] I love it. I love everything he does, but I think this one's really amazing.

Jenn: [00:40:01] I know. I mean, I keep thinking oh, this one's my favorite. This is the best of the series. But I said it about this one so [crosstalk].

Melissa: [00:40:10] So, my first pick is *Battle Dragons Book 1: City of Thieves* by Alex London, which is for your kid who loves *Star Wars* and *Wings of Fire*, which I probably should have said first. But this book is about a city named Dracopolis where dragons were domesticated generations ago and now dragons basically work like horses. They haul cargo and they taxi people. And they have advertisements hung off their sides. And criminal gangs use them to battle for dominance in the skies at night in these sort of illegal bouts.

[00:40:52] And the main character loves dragons but bombed his dragon riding exam and feels like okay, he's just never going to get to ride one. But then his sister has stolen a dragon and pulled him into her secret and their brother is in law enforcement. So they're kind of on the run trying to hide this dragon from their brother and they get caught up in these criminal gang dragon fights. And it's just fierce and awesome, like super fast paced. I feel like Alex really had his thumb on the pulse of what kids want to read about. And bonus. The end papers are dragon scale, it is just so cool looking.

Jenn: [00:41:37] Nice. So my next wildcard is for bookstore lovers. All you fans of independent bookstores. It is *Yours in Books* by Julie Falatko. It is a picture book, and it's great for kids. But also anyone who loves their independent bookstore should indulge in the celebration of bookselling. It is about a little curmudgeon owl who special orders all kinds of books from his local independent book squirrel. But she gives him not just the books that he wants, but also the books that he needs.

[00:42:11] When I pitched it, I pitched it as *84 Charing Cross Road* in the *Hundred Acre Woods*. So if you're familiar with that tale of book loving, it's that kind of book, but in picture book form. It's a delight.

Melissa: [00:42:28] So my next three picks are all for grownups.

Jenn: [00:42:32] Great.

Melissa: [00:42:31] So my first one is for readers who want spooky season to extend all the way through the winter. And it's called *The Haunting Season* and it has eight short stories by different authors like Bridget Collins and Natasha Pully. And it is ghosts. It's billed as ghostly tales for long winter nights. And it really is like a Christmas holiday wintery storybook for adults who also like to be a little creeped out. It has a beautiful cover. I think for your relatives who just love a beautiful mystery, or who love winter or things that are a little creepy. This is the perfect gift for them.

Jenn: [00:43:13] Nice. My next ones are also adult. So my next one is for popular science fans with a funny bone.

Melissa: [00:43:21]Nice.

Jenn: [00:43:23] It's *Fuzz* by Mary Roach.

Melissa: [00:43:24] Oh, yes.

Jenn: [00:43:25] This is a laugh out loud collection of stories about when animals break the law. It is a grown up book. But it's great for anyone who loves popular science nonfiction. Mary Roach just has a special skill with humorous turns of phrase and telling a story you're not going to forget. They're hilarious and you can kind of also dip in and out of it. So you don't need to feel like oh, I've got this whole long book to read. It's more like, oh, I get to hear a funny hilarious story and then dip out and come back to it. So I think it's great for these times.

Melissa: [00:43:56] That sounds so good.

Jenn: [00:43:57] It's very fun.

Melissa: [00:43:59] My next pick is for your relative who adds up the bodies while watching *Midsomer Murders*, and also loves to read cozy British mysteries. It is *Your Guide to Not Getting Murdered in a Quaint English Village* by Maureen Johnson and Jay Cooper. And it is basically a guidebook to all of the people and places that you will find in a quaint English village and your chance of getting murdered there or murdered by the person. Who to avoid. Where to avoid. It is absolutely just, there's a chuckle on every page. It is so delightful. It is a great gift for grandma. It is a great gift for mom or dad. Anybody who loves you know, Broadchurch or anything like that. I think we'd get a real kick out of this book.

Jenn: [00:44:49] Yeah, I'm giving this to a number of people on my list this year. I'm super happy about that one.

[00:44:55] So my next pick is also for grownups as I said, and this one's for foodies and travel lovers. If you've ever planned a trip around what restaurants you want to go to, you need *Gastro Obscura*. It's from the *Atlas Obscura* folks. It is a big, immersive, beautifully colored tour of the world through your taste buds.

[00:45:19] Though it is intended for grownups, I can fully see that if I was a kid, I would pour over this book if it was in my house, and all the weird foods and places that it describes. It's just a delight.

Melissa: [00:45:29] I would make a list of all the places I wanted to go when I was a grown up.

Jenn: [00:45:34] Oh, yeah. 100%. I love it.

[00:45:37] Did you have another wild card pick? Or?

Melissa: [00:45:38] I do. My last one is for the reader who wants more books like *House in the Cerulean Sea* but with a bonus donut shop and bonus aliens. So it's called *Light From Uncommon Stars* by Ryka Aoki. It is a sci fi novel that they bill as *Good Omens* meets *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*. And I think that is an excellent description. The main character made a deal with the devil. In order to escape going to hell, she has to entice seven violin prodigies to trade their souls for success. And she has already delivered six, she only has one more to go and she's safe. And she meets this young transgender runaway named Katrina, who catches her ear because she's so incredibly talented. And she decides this is it. This is the last candidate. And then of course, something happens to make her think, I don't think I can hand this young girl over. So it's found family and it's funny, and it's a great romp of a space adventure. And I just can't recommend it any more highly.

Jenn: [00:46:47] Yay. All right, well, you know what, I'm actually gonna slip one in. I did not write anything down about this or plan to talk about it. But here we are. Because you talke about a romp. I have a romp suggestion, too.

[00:47:00] Gwenda Bond, who has written a lot of YA books.

Melissa: [00:47:04] Yes!

Jenn: [00:47:04] And some middle grade books, has a brand new adult, her first adult romcom. It is completely delightful. It's called *Not Your Average Hot Guy*. It came out a couple weeks ago and it's basically about a girl who, well, she’s in her early 20s. And she kind of gets kidnapped by a cult and they summon the devil. And he's not what she expects. I mean, what would you expect? I don't know. Not… None of this would you expect. But anyway, it is absolutely top to bottom funny and swoony and romantic if you like shows like *Lucifer* with lots of banter and a little devilish hero. Literally.

Melissa: [00:47:50] Yes.

Jenn: [00:47:50] Then you will like *Not Your Average Hot Guy* by Gwenda Bond. Okay.

Melissa: [00:47:54] It’s so good.

Jenn: [00:47:54] Yay. Thank you for loving it. And thank you for all the great recommendations.

Melissa: [00:48:02] Yeah, thank you for having me on. It's been so much fun.

Jenn: [00:48:06] Okay, but we're not done yet.

Melissa: [00:48:07] All right.

Jenn: [00:48:07] Because this is our favorite part of the podcast that everybody knows, is what are you obsessed with right now? It does not have to be bookish, but it can be.

Melissa: [00:48:18] It’s, yeah. [crosstalk].

Jenn: [00:48:20] I’m going to go first so you can like gather your thoughts. So my pick is *Only Murderers in the Building*, a TV show on Hulu. It stars Steve Martin, Martin Short, Selena Gomez. It's very short 10 Episode mystery series. Although I will say I wanted it to last so badly that I delayed watching the last couple episodes and it was well worth it. It nailed it. It's about three true crime podcast buffs who get embroiled in a real murder mystery in their Manhattan apartment building and decide to make a podcast of their own about it.

[00:48:55] Truly laugh out loud funny, no surprise, given the cast. And lots of humor that will especially tickle podcast fans. Like it has Tina Fey is the celebrity podcast producer, but it’s also remarkably well acted and suspenseful. Selena Gomez in particular, is such a standout and I need to know what happens next. It's really great fun. That is what I'm obsessed with right now.

[00:49:22] Melissa, what are you obsessed with?

Melissa: [00:49:25] So I am obsessed, like I feel half the world is, with *Ted Lasso*.

Jenn: [00:49:30] Oh, yeah.

Melissa: [00:49:30] Which is on Apple TV Plus, and I have watched it multiple times. If you don't know what *Ted Lasso* is, it is about a college football coach who is hired to be the coach of a sort of second tier professional soccer team in England. And he doesn't have the full story behind that hiring but you get it trickled out for you. And it is, I am not a sports fan. I watch no sports, but I do love a really good sports story. And *Ted Lasso* is so delightful.

[00:50:08] Season one made me feel so good about people in a way that I really needed to. And season two definitely delves into more emotional stuff than season one, but it's still so wonderful and charming. And we've watched the whole series, I don't know, three or four times at this point.

Jenn: [00:50:26] Yeah, I love it too. And that's another one actually, I put it in the same kind of category, where I just really didn't want it to end.

Melissa: [00:50:36] Yes.

Jenn: [00:50:36] So I prolonged it. I like saved it. But I'm so glad to know those characters. And I think that sports stories like, I too, I'm not a sports fan. But it's about the ensemble, right. It's about a bunch of different characters thrust into a situation, kind of high stress situation together.

Melissa: [00:50:53] Yes.

Jenn: [00:50:53] And that's why sports stories, I think, are so appealing. But anyway, another delight. Anyway.

[00:50:56] Literaticast theme music plays.

Jenn: [00:50:59] Thank you so much for joining me, Melissa.

Melissa: [00:51:01] Thank you for having me, Jenn. It was so much fun.

Jenn: [00:51:04] And I'll see you on the internet.

Melissa: [00:51:04] All right, that sounds great.

Jenn: [00:51:09] Thanks so much to my guest, Melissa Posten, and to you for listening and supporting the *Literaticast*. For links to everything we chatted about, including all the wonderful books, visit Jennifer laughran.com/literaticast. There you will also find links to the Patreon as well as to Melissa's bookstore, The Novel Neighbor, and so much more. Thanks again for listening and see you next time.