The Orbis Pictus Award Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English honors the best in nonfiction literature published in the previous year for young readers in grades K–8. The Orbis Pictus Award, begun more than 15 years ago, commemorates Johannes Amos Comenius for his work published in 1657 entitled, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus: Hoc Est Omnium Principalium in Mundo Rerum et in Vita Actionum Pictura et Nomenclatura* (The Visible World: Or a Nomenclature and Pictures of All the Chief Things That Are in the World, and of Men’s Employments Therein). The book is considered the first nonfiction book written for children. Each year the committee bestows the award on an author for a nonfiction book “that makes an outstanding contribution to children’s literature.” This column features books designated as the winner, honor, and recommended books of distinction.

This year, as in past years, the committee searched for titles that best meet the criteria for outstanding nonfiction literature—accurate information; clear and logical organization; engaging, eye-catching design; and stimulating style that leaves readers wanting more. The committee has weighed how authors support their information with source materials that appear at the beginning and end of their books, as well as in the text, in the captions, and in the authors’ comments on the information presented. As you read the selected 2006 Orbis Pictus books, you will find that authors have documented multiple sources in developing accounts, authenticated their work, separated fact from theory and conjecture, and provided additional sources for readers.

The committee has searched for books that lend themselves to more study, yet invite immersion in reading. You will see artful design in which photographs, illustrations, and artifacts are integrated into, and enrich, the text. Information presented in charts, tables, sidebars, and maps provides entries into reading. We searched for books that provide perspectives on topics to which young readers could relate; this collection includes books on the ordinary lives of people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the life cycle of the mosquito, health care of family pets, and school experiences of a scientist. The 2006 winner and honor books represent multiple disciplines of science, archeology, politics, and history. They will appeal to younger as well as older readers. Eight recommended books further explore topics in different disciplines. Among them are books that demonstrate how science and history can be integrated in arresting text about such topics as the excavation and study of a submarine from the American Civil War, archeological discoveries from unearthed artifacts of Pompeii, and the study of mummies discovered in places around the world.

**2006 Orbis Pictus Award Winner**

Understanding that historical events are told from different perspectives is a cornerstone in reading historical books. In *Children of the Great Depression*, Russell Freedman presents the perspective of young people of the 1930s, the decade of the deepest economic depression in American history. Precipitated by a convergence of events that ruined American economic life, this period saw millions of people caught in a downward economic spiral, losing their jobs and uprooting their families from homes and farms to find work. Freedman shows readers how the children suffered with their families and shared their tragedy. At the same time, they struggled to make life better and carve out moments for themselves where they could be children going to school and reveling in play. The committee thought that Russell...
Freedman created a context for understanding historical events as he integrated narrative, information, and archival photographs into the chapters that bring to life children’s experiences.

**Children of the Great Depression**

*Written by Russell Freedman*

*Illustrated with photographs*


The multiple first-hand accounts of people from all parts of the United States give readers vivid details into the experiences of children as they unfolded under the heavy weight of economic depression. One person explained how in 1931, when he was twelve years old, he awoke to the shattering changes in circumstances the Depression brought to his family. The family bakery failed, most of the family savings were gone, but “we still had our house, and we were eating, which was more than could be said for some of our friends” (p. 4). He explained that things got worse, but the low point of the Depression for the boy was the moment when he caught his father crying in the coal bin. He said, “I guess the thought that he wouldn’t be able to buy enough coal to get us through the winter was just too much for my father to take” (p. 4). The details of the boy’s experience provide readers a context for the background information in which Freedman describes social and economic conditions that unfolded before the Depression and followed the stock market crash of 1929.

Freedman illuminates the details of the daily lives of young people—their clothing, their food, their housing, their lives at school, at work, at play, and on the move, traveling to search for work—with remembrances of individual voices. One man recalled, “Looking back I find it amazing what we did without. A partial list would include toothpaste (we used baking powder), toilet paper (we used the catalog), newspapers . . . . We sent no greeting cards except maybe half a dozen at Christmas” (p. 24). Perhaps the most telling scenes are in the chapter on children and school. One person remembered the visible discrepancies between the well-dressed child in a wool overcoat and the child who had no socks to wear. When the weather turned cold, children without sweaters, coats, or socks stopped coming to school. Others came to school hungry. When a teacher, concerned about the fatigue of one young girl, suggested she go home to have food, the child replied, “I can’t. It’s my sister’s turn to eat” (p. 35). As school districts cut back on teachers, those remaining sometimes taught for weeks at a time without pay. Classes doubled in size, yet supplies and books became increasingly scarce. School buses stopped running. To solve the problem, families used their resources and appropriated a last working truck to transport children. In the midst of hardship that weaves through the book, *Children of the Great Depression* gives a glimpse of the pleasures of children in their games of marbles, their listening to favorite programs on the radio, and their enthusiasm for Saturday movie matinees. At the center of the children’s lives are their efforts to make a contribution to the community by earning money for their families and going to school when and where they could.

In his bibliographic essay, Freedman discusses watershed texts that provided the ethnographic information he used extensively to illustrate the topics. Other sources written by artists such as musician Charles Parker and poet Phillip Levine reveal moments when their lives changed. The abundant quotations are cited in source notes.

Each topic in the book is illustrated with beautiful archival black-and-white photographs of the people and places of the period. As much as *Children of the Great Depression* reveals the voices of individuals, the book is a chronicle of a vast collection of photographs, now housed in the Library of Congress. Taken by a cadre of world-class photographers hired by the federal government in the 1930s, they documented the lives of people affected by the Depression, in an attempt to show its reality to a disbelieving populace. Freedman includes a long note at the beginning of the book explaining the photographs as well as a section of photo credits at the end. The large photographs, with captions that include the date and photographer’s name, add rich, often disturbing visual narrative to the text. In its evocative photographs and text, the book provides insight into children’s lives during a watershed period in the modern history of America.
In this captivating book, Suzanne Jurmain tells the story of Prudence Crandall and her battle to provide education for African American girls at a private boarding school in Canterbury, Connecticut, in the early 1830s. At a time when schooling was unavailable for most girls, Crandall, a respected educator, ran one of the finest private girls’ academies in the state. Her pupils were from wealthy, white families. The idea of education for African Americans, male or female, was simply unacceptable, but when the daughter of a local, prosperous, respectable African American farmer asked to attend classes so she could learn to be a teacher, Crandall admitted her.

The ensuing uproar convinced Crandall to close the school, then reopen it for African American girls only. Thus began the harrowing ordeal for Prudence and her students. Tormented and threatened by the townspeople, Prudence sustained her students’ learning even after the school building was set on fire and she was put on trial for operating a school for out-of-state African Americans. Jurmain’s well-written and compelling account of this little-known incident makes the times and people come alive. It is a fascinating exploration of one person’s determination and extraordinary courage in the face of intolerance, malicious behavior of neighbors, and inflammatory attacks.

The book concludes with accounts of what became of the students and other principal figures in the account and provides an update on the struggle for civil rights. It also makes ample use of photographs, many of them archival, and includes a table of contents, appendix, source notes, bibliography, and index.

Albert Einstein’s name is synonymous with genius, a person with superior brainpower. His theories and research, which have had tremendous impact on the academic world, seem out of the reach of common folks. Who is the man behind the abstract talk of space and time? In this book, Delano successfully portrays the warm humanity behind the cool intellect of Albert Einstein. He fought with his younger sister. He hated violin practice during his early years, yet fell in love with violin later in his life. He failed his first college entrance examination and his intellectual quest started with the question, “What would it be like if you could ride on a beam of light?” To Einstein, imagination ignited the creative power of human minds.

Time magazine named Einstein “Person of the Century” in its final issue of 1999. For students who do not care about the field of physics or about scientists who have made great contributions to our world, Delano’s book is an invitation to come in for a brief visit. The young boy who had problems with the rigid teaching of school subjects may strike a common chord with students who lose interest in the rote learning they experience at school. Students may be inspired to let their minds wander and wonder about the puzzles they encounter in the world, inspired by a scientist who created theories about natural phenomena in the universe.

In the early 1930s, Hitler Youth, an organization of young Germans dedicated to Adolph Hitler, played
a significant role in his rise to power. In her riveting book, Bartoletti shows readers how Hitler initiated this group, nurtured it through his charismatic rhetoric, and demanded rigid adherence to his demands and conformity with his ideology. On two opening pages, she introduces young Germans and their photographs and weaves their stories in chapters that she thoroughly documents with interviews and correspondence she conducted. Through the experiences of members of the organization, we learn how it commanded the hearts, minds, and actions of young people (often over parental objections), and the intolerance for any other points of view. We also read stories of youth who stood up in protest and worked to subvert Hitler’s causes. An arresting epilogue tells what became of the young people introduced at the beginning. The narratives are powerful in their effect.

Hitler Youth provides a view of World War II from inside Germany, showing how one leader became his nation’s sole decision maker, censored voices, burned books, rewrote textbooks and curriculum, and led his country to unspeakable acts. In this book, readers intimately examine a dark period in history and contemplate lessons for the future. One German American who lived through these years as a youth in Germany said after reading it, “This is an important book. This is how it was. And, this is how it could be again.”

A time line of the Hitler Youth movement, an author’s note page, a bibliography organized by topic, and extensive source notes for the numerous quotations in the text richly document the accounts.

ER Vets: Life in an Animal Emergency Room
Written by Donna M. Jackson
Illustrated with photographs

This book begins with a gripping narrative of a German Shepherd suffering from a deadly condition called gastric dilatation-volvulus, in which the stomach bloats (usually caused from swallowing air), flips over, and twists, thus cutting off the belly’s blood supply. His family rushes him to the emergency room of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Colorado State University, where a series of procedures insures his survival. The narrative introduces the daily life of a veterinary emergency room, the people who work there, the sophisticated equipment they use, and, most important, the variety of animals that come for care. After a brief history of veterinary medicine, the author profiles ER doctors and technicians. She describes three emergencies, illustrating the care and skill of the staff in separate chapters: Shelby, a dog hit by a car; Lucy, a ball python with hypothermia; and Paco, a foal suffering from hypoxia—a lack of oxygen during birth.

The details of these animals and of the people who care for them come alive through Jackson’s writing, excellent photographs, and informative captions. Jackson also explains the emotional side of caring for pets, from both the caregiver’s and the owner’s perspective. One chapter devoted to dealing with the loss of a pet and the feelings of guilt that occur outlines healthy ways to express grief. Sidebars explain how to decide if a problem qualifies as an emergency, toxic substances to avoid, and the items to include in a pet first-aid kit. The book concludes with a bibliography of websites, a glossary, and source notes.

Mosquito Bite
Written by Alexandra Siy and Dennis Kunkel
Illustrated with photographs
Charlesbridge, 2005, 32 pp., ISBN 1-57091-591-1

Alexandra Siy and Dennis Kunkel use words and photography to combine drama and story with science and fact in Mosquito Bite. In the middle of a children’s game of hide and seek, the mosquito, Culex Pipiens, intrudes. Desperate for food, she homes in on one of the participants. She needs blood to nourish the eggs deep inside her body, and the boy hiding by the old tire appears to be an excellent source. This introduction invites us to enter the world of the mosquito. The vivid language turns the mosquito’s life cycle into a suspenseful page-turner, and the text is accompanied by amazing larger-than-life images of the tiny insect’s world juxtaposed with black-and-white photographs of the children’s game. Readers will be drawn to the highly detailed, brightly colored photomicrographs, especially the
one of the mosquito’s proboscis with its knives and cutters used to pierce human skin. Explanations of the photomicrographs, the scanning electron microscope, and the computer techniques generating vibrant colors show *Culex* in high relief.

The end matter provides more information about mosquitoes, including their life cycle; diseases they carry, such as malaria and West Nile virus; effective means of protection, and a life-size photograph of the mosquito comparing it to the photomicrographs. A glossary, index, and list of resources, both print and Internet, are also included. *Mosquito Bite* will align readers’ sympathies with *Culex Pipiens*. They will want the mosquito to find food so she can live—but not quite enough to hesitate before slapping the mosquito on bare arms in summer!

**2006 Orbis Pictus Recommended Books**

In addition to the Orbis Pictus Award winner and honor books, the committee selected eight recommended books. The books focus on social, historical, and scientific topics. One book traces the pioneering efforts of legislators and others to ensure that women enjoy the same opportunities in sports and careers that men do, and one chronicles the life of a 19th-century urban woman whose determination helped her build a long career in teaching. Other books explore archaeological investigations and examine the lives of animals. Teachers and students will enjoy the authors’ style and the artful design that make the books so engaging.

**Let Me Play: The Story of Title IX: The Law That Changed the Future of Girls in America**

*Written by Karen Blumenthal*  
*Illustrated with photographs*  
*Atheneum, 2005, 152 pp., ISBN 0-689-85957-0*

In the United States, women and girls participate in a wide variety of sports and career fields, from soccer to wrestling and from education to medicine. Although many share the joy and the triumph of their accomplishments, very few have knowledge of the law that broke through the barriers inhibiting women’s participation. Blumenthal presents the background, the context, and the implications of Title IX in an informative way, augmented by political cartoons, photographs, and personal profiles.

Edith Green, the Congresswoman who worked hard to pass Title IX, believes that recent history teaches valuable lessons to our young people. As they enjoy the fruits of the efforts of previous generations, this book shows how people need to continue to break down barriers so that the next generation will grow up in a better world. The narratives in this book will engage students in discussing the significance of active participation in a democratic society.

**Maritcha: A Remarkable Nineteenth-Century American Girl**

*Written by Tonya Bolden*  
*Illustrated with photographs and artifacts*  

Born free in New York in a slavery-divided nation, Maritcha Remond Lyons was determined to rise above the restrictions of a biased society. Tonya Bolden vividly portrays details of Maritcha’s buoyant, glorious early life in lower Manhattan where she attended Colored School #3 and enjoyed life with her family who were part of the Underground Railroad support system. The New York Draft Riots of 1863 forced Maritcha’s family to flee their city home for Providence, Rhode Island. Once situated, Maritcha petitioned the state legislature and became the first black student to attend the city’s white high school. Through her determination and high personal standards, Maritcha embarked on a teaching career that spanned 50 years.

Based on Maritcha’s 1928 memoir, this pictorial biography unfolds as an album of colored/textured pages containing detailed text interspersed with documented memoir quotes. Authentic photographs, handwritten and typed documents, personal keepsakes, and drawings and paintings capture the historical backdrop of the mid 1800s in New York. Endpaper maps, an insightful author’s note, and a selected bibliography bring authenticity to this historically accurate biography.
Chameleon, Chameleon
Written by Joy Cowley
Illustrated with photographs by Nic Bishop

This book introduces children to panther chameleons from the island of Madagascar. Through vivid color photography by Nic Bishop, readers watch at close range the progress of a male chameleon who leaves his tree home to look for food. Cowley’s text punctuates danger and intrigue as the chameleon encounters a gecko, a frog, a scorpion, and finally, a juicy caterpillar that he captures with a well-aimed zap of his long, sticky tongue in a new tree home. The male chameleon meets a female chameleon who displays dark, angry colors. He greets her with bright colors and she responds by welcoming him with pale colors. In a section called “Did You Know?” Cowley explains that panther chameleons change color based on their mood and that they usually avoid one another.

An informative photographer’s note explains the painstaking photographic process that took many months and required careful attention to the needs of the wary chameleons.

Bodies from the Ash
Written by James M. Deem
Illustrated with photographs

Under the looming shadow of Mt. Vesuvius, the residents of Pompeii became unexpected victims of an eruption that buried their city under twelve feet of volcanic ash on August 24–25, AD 79. With factual details gained from trips to the archaeological site, James Deem recaptures the annihilation of a prominent Italian city and chillingly reveals ongoing archeological discoveries through meticulous excavations of the past 250 years.

Early attempts to reveal the mysteries of Pompeii focused on unearthing treasures and human skeletons. However, the process of forming plaster mummies, inspired by Giuseppe Fiorelli in 1863, captured the last living moment of those who died by suffocation. Through these plaster artifacts, Deem pieces together stories of individuals, families, households, and the lifestyle of this city of the Roman Empire. Outstanding archival photographs of human plaster casts and preserved homes and gardens accompany the reader on a visual and textual journey through Pompeii. An index, bibliography, informational inserts, and captions further document the power of the sleeping giant that still threatens one million residents today.

Built to Last: Building America’s Amazing Bridges, Dams, Tunnels, and Skyscrapers
Written by George Sullivan
Illustrated with photographs and archival prints

Writing a survey of American history from the perspective of the construction of large and momentous structures, Sullivan describes their design and engineering as he depicts the human drama behind their construction. He has organized the projects by period and describes the inventions that surmounted the challenges of constructing such well-known structures as the Erie Canal, the nation’s capitol, the transcontinental railroad, the flatiron building in New York City, and the Golden Gate and Brooklyn Bridges. Intriguing information in the sidebars gives perspective to the scale of construction. The book’s large black-and-white and color photographs are supplemented by a number of outstanding double-paged calendar-formatted photographs that add gravity, drama, and detail. The book will be an eye-opener for young readers, enriching their knowledge of America and providing a fresh perspective on history and engineering. Included are a number of websites and books for further reading.
Surrounded by spiky tufts of fur, intense yellow-orange eyes stare at us from the cover of Wild Dogs and evoke an immediate reaction: Pick up this book and look inside! These wild dogs are not familiar family pets, but they all come from a common ancestor and have long fascinated humans. In this book, readers travel to every continent in the world, except Antarctica, to discover various species of wild dogs, learn why some survive and others fail to thrive, and explore the critical role they play in preserving the balance of nature.

The author explores the range of people’s attitudes through history, from symbols of worship to images of raging monsters, while readers learn to discern fact from fiction about wild dogs. This book successfully combines information from both science and social studies. Maps, charts, a table of contents, bibliography (including Web sources), an index, and ample use of striking color photographs enhance the well-written text.

In her clear and engaging text, Tanaka shows readers how archaeologists question artifacts as she explains discoveries, raises questions, and ponders possibilities. Outstanding color photographs on every page elaborate on the text and add to the book’s appeal. While the time line, glossary, recommended reading list, and index are valuable resources, one of the book’s major strengths is Tanaka’s honest and sensitive tone that honors the dead.

Mummies: The Newest, Coolest & Creepiest from Around the World
Written by Shelley Tanaka
Illustrated with photographs

The intriguing topic of mummies presented in this well-designed book will have wide appeal. Tanaka writes that preserved human forms have been found on every continent and span thousands of years—from the South American peoples of 7000 years ago to the preservation of political figures such as Lenin and Mao Zedong in modern times. We learn of remains preserved naturally in glaciers or bogs. Especially interesting is how modern forensics reveals the preservation processes and gives insight into the lives and times of ancient peoples.

Sally Walker has integrated history, science, and forensic investigation seamlessly in her book. The opening chapters, detailing the historical origins of the H. L. Hunley and its disappearance in 1864, are printed on cream-colored paper, giving them an antique appearance. The design contrasts with the white paper later in the book, where chapters recount the scientific tale that started in 1995 when the submarine was located.

Thoroughly researched, the book uncovers and reveals the buried past of the H. L. Hunley through the precise investigation of the scientific laboratory of the present. Modern forensic techniques, explained in detail, unravel the clues to determine the identities of the crewmen and the cause of their death. The diagrams, maps, primary sources, and photographs illustrate the ten-year effort to excavate the submarine and uncover its secrets. Detailed source notes, a bibliography, websites, and a glossary are found following the author’s note.

Sandip Wilson is assistant professor of literacy and children’s literature at Husson College in Bangor, Maine. Carol Avery is a retired elementary teacher and educational consultant in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Kim Ford is librarian and middle school English teacher in Memphis, Tennessee. Marjorie Hancock is professor of language arts at Kansas State University in Manhattan. Belinda Y. Louie is assistant professor of education at the University of Washington in Tacoma. Sylvia Read is assistant professor at Utah State University in Logan. Elaine C. Stephens is a retired teacher educator in literacy, now living in South Haven, Michigan.