

# The Washington Post

Jenny Han's new YA novel and other best kids' books for September

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## **WATCH OUT FOR FLYING KIDS!**

### **How Two Circuses, Two Countries, and Nine Kids Confront Conflict and Build Community**

By Cynthia Levinson

Peachtree. \$22.95. Ages 10 to 14

## **LEO**

### **A Ghost Story**

By Mac Barnett. Illustrations by Christian Robinson.

Chronicle. \$16.99. Ages 3 1/2 to 8

## **P.S. I STILL LOVE YOU**

By Jenny Han

Simon & Schuster. \$17.99.

Age 12 and up

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Jenny Han captures the sweet intensity of first love and the complexities of family life in this charming sequel to her popular young-adult novel [“To All the Boys I Loved Before.”](#) Lara Jean Song Covey now has a boyfriend: cute, confident Peter Kavinsky. They joke, kiss and hang out together, but Peter’s worldly ex-girlfriend (and Lara Jean’s frenemy) still seems to have a hold on him. Sound complicated? Add the handsome grandson of an elderly friend, include a neighbor with an eye on Lara Jean’s widowed father and enjoy all the romantic mishaps that ensue. Han, who will be at the National Book Festival, skillfully conveys the zeitgeist of the contemporary American public high school, with teens dating across culture and race. Refreshingly, difference is no easy plot point here; instead, the author weaves in details of Lara Jean’s Korean heritage and

interests (baking, scrapbooking) to create a vivid, endearing protagonist. Han also addresses today's double standard. After an incident of slut-shaming, Lara Jean reflects: "Boys will be boys, but girls are supposed to be careful: of our bodies, of our futures, of all the ways people judge us." The narrative swerves enough to thrillingly roughen the course of love, and the characters are so memorable that readers will yearn for a third book. Perhaps even a middle-grade tale starring Lara Jean's lively younger sister, Kitty.

— **Mary Quattlebaum**

### **WATCH OUT FOR FLYING KIDS!**

How Two Circuses, Two Countries, and Nine Kids Confront Conflict and Build Community

By Cynthia Levinson

Peachtree. \$22.95. Ages 10 to 14

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a circus to send him or her flying through the air and landing safely. Cynthia Levinson's latest work follows two sets of young people, one in St. Louis and the other in Israel, as they develop into confident performers and teammates. Circus Harmony and Circus Galilee are youth social circuses, groups that use acrobatics, juggling and other circus arts to teach cooperation and trust. Circus Galilee, for example, has worked to bring together Arab and Jewish kids since 2005. In this detailed, photo-filled account, the two circuses converge several times through a series of trips to each other's home base. Language barriers seem manageable. As one boy said of their first meeting at an Israeli airport, "We didn't talk yet. We just juggled." But on that trip they also had to deal with poor equipment, a disparity in skill levels, and significant unrest in Israel. Levinson, who will be speaking at the National Book Festival (joined by circus members), shows the conflicts and decisions the kids faced over a five-year period. She also captures their infectious enthusiasm for the hard work and fun of building a circus.

— **Abby Nolan**

## **LEO: A Ghost Story**

By Mac Barnett. Illustrations by Christian Robinson.  
Chronicle. \$16.99. Ages 3 ½ to 8

Mac Barnett's gentle tale of friendship and acceptance is feather-light yet enchanting enough to be read over and over. Little Leo is a ghost who plays happily among the old-fashioned toys of the house in which he grew up. But the new owners are definitely not charmed by Leo, so he heads off to roam in the noisy, busy city. There, no one sees him at all until a young girl unexpectedly invites him into her world of knights and dragons. When a thief climbs into the window of Jane's house, Leo cleverly thwarts him with the help of a time-honored ghost disguise. Leo then admits to Jane, "I am a ghost. I said I was your imaginary friend, but I'm not. I'm your real friend." "Well that's even better," replies Jane. Leo may not be as predictable as an imaginary friend, but he can see Jane for who she is, which, she learns, is just as important. Illustrator Christian Robinson, who will be at the National Book Festival, again demonstrates his artistic versatility and affectionate embrace of the art of the picture book. His angular figures and simple lines in acrylic and construction paper are at once familiar and disarmingly fresh. His palette of blues and ivory is calm and reassuring, with shading and shadows subtly distinguishing between the real and the not real. This innocent yet sophisticated story will appeal to small listeners and their favorite adults.

— **Kathie Meizner**