

Mac Barnett Reviews Picture Books About Time and Space

By Mac Barnett

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TIME IS A POWER

By Julie Morstad

THE DAY TIME STOPPED

1 Minute — 26 Countries

By Flavia Ruotolo

THE VOLUME

By Luis Camnitzer

ONCE UPON A TIME THEREAS AND WIL BE SO MUCH MORE

By Johanna Schaible

The concept of time can confound even intelligent grown-ups. The thinking adult may wonder, *If I find a concept befuddling, can a child ever hope to understand it?* Well, yes. Children are natural philosophers. Their minds are flexible, their observational powers are keen and their attentions are driven by curiosity about the world around them. It's a humbling truth, but your average kid will outshine your average adult when it comes to contemplating your average mystery of the universe. Time, then, is good grist for a picture book.



“The Volume,” by Luis Camnitzer, begins at the start of time itself. On the opening spread, the Big Bang explodes in a colorful “mess.” From that mess comes a dot, which rotates, drifts, expands and splits. The dots make lines, which become pages, which become a book — the titular volume. Eventually the lines become drawings, and finally, “best of all,” the drawings make “pictures of words.” “This type of drawing came to be known as ‘writing.’ Writing was always showing off the impressive things it could do.”

It’s an odd conclusion, this assertion of the written word’s supremacy, since the picture book is an art form that brooks no hierarchy between text and image. And while lots of Camnitzer’s sentences sparkle, his pictures function more as decoration than narrative illustration. The result is a nicely designed volume, but it’s not really a picture book.