ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED
WITH ANNOTATIONS

* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
R Recommended.
Ad Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
M Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
NR Not recommended.
SpC Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
SpR A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

Except for pre-school years, reading range is given for grade rather than for age of child.
C.U. Curricular Use.
D.V. Developmental Values.

* * *
New Titles for Children and Young People


Like Bess’ novel, *Tracks* (reviewed in this issue), Aaron’s follows the fortunes of youngsters caught in the grip of the Depression, in this case six children who call themselves Lackawanna after the freight trains they ride. When Deirdre’s younger brother Herbie is stolen by a hobo, the rest of the gang leave their snug basement retreat in New York City and head west, searching every shelter and “jungle” until they track down Herbie. Their fierce loyalty through hunger, cold, and fatigue is the strongest theme, for they remain more a unit in the reader’s mind than a group of distinctly developed individuals. Still, the situation will prove an eye-opener for today’s history students. Although *Tracks* is better defined and crafted as a novel, Aaron’s work is of substantial interest for the social conditions it reveals so vividly, and one of the narrators, Deirdre, emerges as a simultaneously strong yet vulnerable voice.

C.U. History—U.S.
D.V. Friendship values; Perseverance


Eleven-year-old Casey is the narrator of a story about marital discord and its effect on children. Casey is usually at odds with her career-oriented mother and gets along easily with the stepfather whom she and her older sister Jen love. When Mother decides to leave the suburbs and move to Manhattan, it’s arranged that Jen go with her and Casey stay with Dad. The hardest thing for Casey to bear is separation from her beloved sister. This isn’t a story with a strong plot, but it’s a substantial development of a situation, and Adler explores the cross-currents of motivations, reactions to change, and ambivalence in familial relationships with insight and depth. The subject is serious, but it’s handled with perspective and humor (especially in dialogue), and it has some sturdy and unexpected characterization, particularly the caustic depiction of a carping and interfering maternal grandmother.

D.V. Parent-child relations; Stepparent-child relations


First published in Great Britain, this is a remarkably effective story, effective in its perceptiveness, its credibility as the voice of a child, and its dramatic suspense. Kate, eleven, is shocked when she accidentally discovers an older sister had been stolen from her pram as a baby. She’s even more shocked when tough, vulgar thirteen-year-old Rosie shows up with a sealed letter that says the sender (Rosie’s “Mum”) confesses to having kidnapped her and announces that she’s going to disappear and Rosie is all theirs,
that she is their long-lost Emma, Kate's older sister. But is it true? Is Rosie-Emma going to oust Kate from her position as does the fledgling cuckoo hatching in another bird's nest? Rosie, by the way, is angry, vituperative, and not at all interested in being part of an upper middle class family. Alcock does a fine job of showing the ambivalence of both girls as their relationship changes, and she builds suspense without making a big fuss about doing so.

D.V. Sisters


A gentleman scholar goes to collect his sixteen-year-old ward, Vesper, and straighten out her estate, but instead finds himself embroiled in an adventure halfway around the world. The time is 1872, and the place a small, autocratic kingdom in the Mediterranean, where Illyrian guerillas are carrying on skirmishes against their traditional enemies, the king (not a bad fellow) and his advisor (a very bad fellow). Vesper has stumbled over a secret in her deceased father's research, which eventually leads to the reconciliation of the warring factions, but not before a harrowing series of escapades—all revealed by the stuffy narrator, whose slowness to catch on adds calculably to the reader's suspense and high estimation of Vesper's cleverness. Alexander's archaological mystery has intricate plotting and witty wording—a romp of a read-aloud for Raiders of the Lost Ark fans. And doesn't the ending hint at more enterprises to come?

D.V. Meeting difficult situations


"'They said 'Jack is hungry,' when it's Jake who cried. They said 'Jake is wet,' but it's Jack they dried.'" Nobody, except their big sister, can tell these identical twins apart.

While the rhyming text bemoans the mix-up, the pictures show the difference: Jack and Jake may look alike, but they enjoy different things. Jack likes trucks, sports, rough-housing (he's the first to crawl); Jake likes flowers, reading, and stuffed animals (he's the first to talk). This is a clever idea, though young children will probably need help understanding it, and Aliki's bright paintings of the pudgy twins (there's one physical difference—Jack's hair is always disheveled) have a nice, casually offbeat humor. However, active/passive stereotyping of the twins' personalities is shallow, undermining Aliki's implicit moral that the real differences between people are inner, rather than superficial.


Like this team's other two historical looks at Thanksgiving and Christmas, this recreates, with a carefully researched story and surprisingly natural black-and-white photographs, the experience of a holiday in earlier times. The setting is Prairietown, Indiana; the characters are a pioneering family on their way west in a wagon to buy land; and the date is 1836, when the Fourth of July was the only national holiday. The story is told from the point of view of young Joshua, tired from traveling and wide-eyed at the town's celebration, which includes a parade, speeches, a play, music and dancing, games, contests, and lots of rare treats to eat, from roast pig to cake. In spite of an occasional lapse into stiffness in either text or illustration, this is a successful presentation of information in documentary fiction format. It gives a real picture of the times, including the children's smudged face (and one girl's perpetual fear of Indians). A
substantial complement to Shachtman's America's Birthday, also reviewed in this issue.
C.U. Frontier and Pioneer life (unit); History—U.S.—Pictorial Presentation


After an accident in which his boat turns over with most of his supplies, Ansell spends two months surviving in the Australian outback, alone except for his two dogs. Surprisingly little happens to him, and much of the book meanders into his macho philosophy of hunting, working, and living. The book does give a sense of the monotony of survival—killing and eating meat, checking routinely for crocodiles, waking at night to tend the fire, etc. Although there are some wildly opinionated passages championing separate fire places for blackfellows and whitefellows, or denigrating the silly sensibilities of anyone who protests shooting animals, the problem is not the content, which at least offers an authentic documentation of wilderness camping. It is the style, threaded with jarringly incomplete sentences in a kind of journal shorthand that makes for very bumpy reading. Originally a film, this was probably more effective in that medium.
D.V. Courage


Jess' stepgrandfather in Big Man and the Burnout recounts his journey into maturity riding the rails with his brother as a hobo during the Depression. From its opening scene, in which Blue almost gets killed hopping a freight, the book is gripping, with characters making brief but well-defined appearances and action mounting through vivid episodes. There is a cumulatively forceful theme of the dynamics of prejudice, evinced at first in offhand remarks and attitudes and climaxing in the brothers' last harrowing escape from some masked klansmen whose torture of a Mexican they have witnessed. This is a complex book, perceptive of characters such as the Italian woman who harbors the boys, of the hoboes they ride with, and of the brothers themselves. It's also sharply realistic, a rhythmic first-person narrative told in rural dialect and resonant with the experience of hardship.
C.U. History—U.S.
D.V. Brothers


Three little mice tiptoe out into the early morning to find presents for their sleeping mother. One finds a ripe strawberry, the second a dandelion fluff ball; the smallest mouse hopes to get some honeysuckle but is prevented by the proximity of a ferocious cat. Waiting in vain, Little Mouse gives up the thought of honeysuckle because he has a wonderful idea: he composes a poem. They scamper home, there is a tender scene of gift-giving, and they all join in saying the poem of Little Mouse together. The strongest part of the story is the sharing among the mice brothers, and the story should be useful for Mother's Day reading-aloud in preschool groups, but it's slight and a bit sugary. The illustrations are verdant and, on most pages, too filled with details; they are also, although technically proficient, faintly redolent of greeting card sentimentality.
D.V. Brothers


Like the first book of stories narrated by Julian (lively, black, articulate) this has
A small girl living on a kibbutz on the Lebanese border of Israel is thrilled because the piano for which she has been waiting ever since her family left their home in Argentina has arrived. It’s unloaded and it excites the attention of neighbors, but nobody can figure out how the piano is going to get into the apartment, since both door and window are too small. Aviva goes despondently to school, there’s an air raid alert, and the class goes to a bomb shelter. Oddly enough, the raid provides the solution, for a hole in the wall of Aviva’s home proves big enough to admit the precious instrument. This is told in a light style, it has good structure, and it gives some information about what life on a kibbutz is like. Adequately illustrated with casual line-and-wash drawings, the book is pleasant, but it has a trace of purposive tone and its protagonist never comes to life.

Eight-year-old Oaf sets out into the world with three gifts from his beloved aunt: a word (“fifty-fifty”), a magic cap, and hints of a treasure. “There is no known road to this treasure and the way is steep but one day you may be led to find it.” He acquires friends along the way—a crow, cat, dog, rat, and fox—as well as an enemy, the wicked master who has enslaved a royal family of dwarfs, drugging and torturing them into dancing for his circus. Oaf himself is utterly innocent, wide-eyed at the thought that such evil exists in the world. He teaches the animals his aunt’s “fifty-fifty” principle, and with this and his magic thinking cap, they manage to conquer the master and find the treasure: their love and friendship for one another. As is often true with Cunningham, sentimentality is cheek by jowl with vivid scenes of horror and explicit brutality. These scenes have energy; much of the rest is flatly written, though paced quickly enough to hold interest.

A warm story of a black South African child’s trip to town with his grandmother is full of the old woman’s patient rhythms and the boy’s natural poking gait as he kicks a can or gazes into shop windows. The relationship between them is a touching one of trust and love, and it is no surprise when Grandmother Malusi invests in a new pair of red sneakers (called “tackies” in the book) to replace Gogo’s tattered ones. Gogo’s simple gratitude leads his grandmother to the concluding joke, that if she had red shoes with white stripes, maybe she could walk as fast as he. The watercolor paintings in mottled patterns of brown, blue, and red offer a rich portraiture of the two main characters: Malusi a heavy old woman immensely strong and kind, Gogo a skinny dreamer with the world a place of wonder to him (though there are pictorial hints of the oppression surrounding him). This is a carefully simple, evocative story that will appeal uni-
versally but is all the more special for its personal reflection of a foreign setting.
D.V. Grandparent-child relations; International understanding


An intriguing mystery combines the appeal of a doll that says more than she's programmed to and the well-sustained suspense of three children's discovery of the doll's special powers. The mother of 10-year-old Rose and her sister Lucy is away to attend to their critically ill grandmother, and their friend James is hoping for a visit from his divorced father; both situations provide a realistic base of family stress for the fantasy elements, and Rose, particularly, develops new understanding in the course of the story. The situation is built credibly, and the involvement of a menacing old man who seems to know about and covet the doll heightens the drama.

D.V. Family relations


Line-and-wash pictures that have vitality but little control of technique illustrate a first-person text in which the narrator is a girl who resents her new stepfather, although she fails to misbehave, as she has threatened, at the ceremony. The weak aspect of the story is that she is soothed, while her mother prepares to go off on a honeymoon, by promises of love and future happiness, whereas what she's been worrying about (having a man see her in her kitty pajamas, or never again being alone with Mom) hasn't changed. If this is less reassuring than the author meant it to be, it still may comfort children who share the narrator's apprehension.

D.V. Stepparents, adjustment to


A story about several generations in a noble English family focuses on the youngest heir's life, from his birth in 1916 to an incident in 1985. The hero is Sir Billy Browne-Browne, and his gentleman teddy bear is Bayard, who was acquired by Sir Billy when he was four. Bayard goes with Billy to boarding school, is present when Billy wins a third-place medal at the 1936 Olympic games, flies with Billy during World War II and becomes internationally famous. The paintings are distinctively Pene Du Bois: clean composition, bright, clear colors that are never brash, fidelity of detail and humor of concept. The story presents one problem: who are the appropriate readers for a tale that is told with vitality and humor, has many sophisticated or latent references, and is about a teddy bear? What it's really about is the English upper class, odd but staunch in the author's affectionate, teasing viewpoint.


No lazy hare this, but a heroic rabbit who, once accepted by the officials as a valid marathoner, starts at the back of the pack, and works his way forward with steady stride to win the race. It's the straightfaced details that make the book funny—the spoof on serious sports contenders such as the Olympic runner who balks at lop-eared competition. Thus the punch line of a moose appearing to apply for next year's race is more distracting than emphatic of the joke on humans. Outside of this break in focus, the story is fun and the illustrations are brightly reflective of the racing scene, including
D.V. Perseverance


With tautly ironic style, Evslin details the story of Jason's adventures: the infant prince's escape from a murderous uncle who killed his father to become king; the young man's emergence from a boyhood on the island of Cythera under protection of Venus; and the hero's voyage of maturation to obtain the Golden Fleece and regain his rightful throne. Ekion, son of Hermes, tells the story, and most of it centers on the quest of the Argo and its crew of champions. Pollux' combat with brutal king Amycus is memorable, as is Jason's marriage to Medea and escape from the giant serpent guarding the Fleece. A vivid voyage for students interested in mythology, classics, or sturdy adventure.

C.U. Literature

D.V. Courage


Originally published in Switzerland, each of these titles is a good introduction to the life cycle of each animal. ... *White Stork* is the simplest of the three, beginning with the spring return of the birds to Germany from Africa, describing nest-building and mating, the incubation and hatching of the babies, and so on, until the young birds are ready for their first migration. A similar progression leads readers through the life cycles of the *Honeybee* and *Ladybug*. *Honeybee* is (necessarily) the most complex of the books, as it cogently describes the intricate social organization of the hive. While the full-color photographs in each book are clear and informative, the ones in *Honeybee* are particularly outstanding, and the authors carefully point out what to look for in each picture. *White Stork* contains a map of migratory range; all three books have a glossary and index.

C.U. Science


This is a big story for small children to absorb, but Fisher has done his best to scale the text down to a primary-level student's grasp of time and place, channeling the real impact through monumentally scaled paintings in shades of black, white, and gray. These are page-filling, boldly textured pictures that do not stint on the drama and hardship that went into the making of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's great wall, built with forced labor to keep out Mongol invaders. The emperor's merciless determination is reflected through the suffering of the masses of workers affected by it, including the "whining son" whom he scorns. A front map shows the location and length of the wall, and a concluding note summarizes the later history of the wall and gives translations of the Chinese characters edging each page spread. Especially effective for children who have had some supplementary background study of China.

C.U. History, ancient
Adolescent Olivia Tate reminisces, in frequent and sometimes unsettling flashbacks, about her two visits to rural New Hampshire. The first is to meet (with trepidation) the father she’d never seen, and the second—a year later—to observe the essence of his just-ended life. To commemorate his beliefs, Olivia goes on a bicycle pilgrimage that repeats his yearly trip, and her memories of the year before are interpolated. These are the core of the book, the taut and often painful stripping of facade until the daughter begins to understand the difficult and complex man who had so abruptly left his wife years ago. The framework is less interesting and is too heavy for the flashbacks. Nevertheless, this is a strong and touching picture of confrontation, revelation, and love, and it is written with polished control.

D.V. Father-daughter relations

Few writers see with such microsurgical precision the complex and interrelated strands of a human relationship; fewer still can incorporate their vision into memorable characters within a story that unfolds with the spare inevitability of a structure as natural as a crystal or a flower. In its depiction of the growing and intricate understanding between a teenage girl and the father she has known so little, this is reminiscent of the Fleischman book reviewed above. Catherine Ames is not the narrator, however, and this is a more balanced book than it would be were she the voice of the story, because it makes it possible for the author to maintain an objectivity that would be false on the part of a girl who feels anguish because of the way she is being manipulated by an alcoholic and irresponsible charmer. Readers who appreciate the bittersweet quality of the father-child relationship in *Blowfish Live in the Sea* will see the same quality in this new approach to the ambivalence of a painful love.

D.V. Father-daughter relations

Kate’s family moves back to the small town of River View that they had lived in until four years earlier, when Kate was twelve. Her best friend, Jon, is still loving and reliable, and Kate begins to wonder if she is moving from loving him to being in love with him. Jon is one of the very few peers who takes no sides in the feud that rages between the towns, especially between “Viewers” and the adolescents of neighboring Hastings Bag. Kate decides she will end the feud and tries to bring the two factions together, her efforts mirroring the dispute between the towns about the location of a proposed nuclear storage site. An apparent accord is reached by the teenagers when Jon is accidentally drowned while a peace talk is going on, the participants being on boats in the river. There is one small non-event that is barely credible (Jon has been scarred by knife with a “T” for traitor because he made a friend in the other group but didn’t inform the authorities) but the plot and the characters are on the whole solid, the writing style is smooth, and the double indictment of hostility is trenchant.

D.V. Age-mate relations; Death, adjustment to; Pacific attitudes

“Instead of thinking of the crowds, the thousands, she thought of the one—the one closest, the one she was helping.” This reverential biography of Mother Teresa traces the nun’s life from her childhood in Macedonia to her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize.
in 1979 and subsequent celebrity. Like others in the series, this is simply written, focusing on the human details behind the achievements and fame. Giff aims for a lyrical style, but this, along with her attempt at simplification, often results in obscurity: attempting to convey that the young Teresa sang well enough to be a church soloist, Giff writes, "She sang alone at Christmas." Definitions of Catholic terms are confusing: "Now Agnes was a postulant—another new word that meant knocking on the door." There are also abrupt, unexplained jumps in the text ("Then suddenly Mother Teresa became famous"), and an irritating number of sentences and paragraphs begin with the word but. Despite these stylistic faults, Giff writes powerfully of the poverty of Calcutta, and the strength and faith of Mother Teresa come through clearly.

C.U. Religious education
D.V. Social responsibility


This is a sports story and it does have some game descriptions, but—despite the title—R—the book is not a series of game sequences precariously held together by thin threads of plot. It's a robust story about a boy who feels that he is average, has ups and downs in his family relationships, and an even more see-saw record of best-friendship. Jeremy is in fourth grade, he's the narrator, and he always feels eclipsed by best friend Lloyd, a superior athlete and vocal about it. When excited, Lloyd is derisive about Jeremy's performance, and Lloyd is usually excited during a game. All this comes to a head when a new gym teacher introduces the class to soccer. The boys learn that girls can be good players and good sports, Lloyd learns to restrain himself, and Jeremy learns to be tolerant in a story that has good pace and balance, and that is convincing as the product of a fourth-grader.

D.V. Friendship values


On her thirteenth birthday, Addie has a fantasy that she will meet her guardian angel, but she doesn't expect it to take the shape of a plump, thirty-year-old pony. Addie's instant love for the pony leads her into a friendship with its aging mistress, who has been rejected by her own daughter just as Addie has been rejected by her mother. Although it is in the air from the start that these two will save each other from loneliness, Hall's sensitive development of the dynamics between them and her delicate unfolding of their life stories are an irresistible invitation to read on. Children answering the call of a horse story will find more here—some understanding of how people whose lives go wrong can put them to rights again with faith, work, and good will.

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


In a sequel to *The Gift-Giver*, its gentle hero, Amir, is still missed by his friend Doris, the narrator, who is black and bright. Doris is in sixth grade, and so is Yellow Bird, who clowns in class and irritates Doris by asking for her help with his lesson preparation. Two plot threads are capably meshed; one is the mounting of a play in which Bird is given the lead thanks to an astute visiting playwright/director, and the other is the fact that Doris realizes that Bird is intelligent but has a learning disability. The author, a teacher, paints a hard picture of her fictional counterpart, who refuses for too long to recognize the fact that Bird is handicapped, even when Doris points it out. However,
her characterization is certainly believable, and the children are depicted with insight and their personalities and changing relationship developed logically and positively.

D.V. Friendship values


Pete's father is dead; Lily's parents are divorced. The two best friends are convinced romance is brewing between their parents (they're right) and are equally convinced that this is a terrible idea. Pete ("Patricia") feels her mother "isn't ready," Lily believes her remarried mother will come back to New York, so the two twelve-year-olds launch "Anti-Romance-Mission." Hest's breezy and natural style will appeal to preteen fans of light realistic fiction. The "best friends" angle, also appealing, is used to good effect: Pete feels shy and awkward around boys, while Lily flirts outrageously with every man she meets. However, this is quite predictable, phrasing is sometimes awkward, and the dialogue pat: Pete asks her mom, "Don't you believe in happy endings anymore?"

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


There are many picture books about shapes, including Hoban's own *Shapes and Things* (silhouettes of familiar objects), but most of those that introduce geometric forms to young children focus on the few that are simplest: square, circle, etc. Here in a wordless book with handsome color photographs that are preceded by a page on which shapes are identified appear both the familiar and less familiar, such as a parallelogram or star or hexagon. This is as useful as it is attractive.


Catriona is a child of a tinker family, one of the close-knit families of Scottish "Travellers" who live by being migrant laborers, tinkers, poachers. Cat loves their life, travelling through the countryside with horses and wagons, learning to live off the land, adhering to the old-fashioned morals and mores of her culture within a modern society. The book has two themes: one is the treatment of such itinerant peoples in Scotland, and how prejudice is giving way to understanding and respect for a different way of life. The other is Cat's coming of age: learning new skills, taking charge of the birth of a brother, falling in love, reconciling her love and her fierce conviction that she will not be a chattel like other travellers' wives, but maintain independence after marriage and always be Cat herself. Hunter does a fine job of telling the story of Cat's rites of passage and her fusing of traditional patterns and news ideas. The characters and their dialogue have depth and vitality, and the narrative flow of the story never sags.

D.V. Family relations; Independence; Sex roles


All books: 44p. $10.95.

Clean writing and clear color photography distinguish these three titles. The two plant books offer close-up, labelled photographs accompanying a well-organized explanation of development from seed to plant maturity; the book on bats outlines the mammal's extraordinarily efficient anatomical characteristics, with diagrams and
photos detailing certain features. The birth of a bat is striking, as are many of the other pictures, and the information is scientifically generous with no overload of terminology.

C.U. Science


Katz gives a full and impassioned account of the ways in which black and red peoples united as warriors, settlers, and family members to produce a history that has been largely ignored in books about the history of the Americas. The material is inherently dramatic, moving, and absorbing, and little of it is easily available elsewhere. The author marshals information and presents it competently; he makes no pretense of impartiality, a choice that is his right. However, his text would be more effective if he supplied verification for some figures and facts, and would be more convincing if he had refrained from rather loose use of strong or emotion-laden terms.

C.U. History—U.S.


Narrator Kathy describes Louise, her best friend next door with whom she shares an imaginary stallion, Golden Silverwind, until Louise leaves one summer for a family vacation. Kathy mopes around, gets letters from Louise about how wonderful the resort is, and finally salvages her summer by making friends with an old man who moves in across the street. Even that compensation dims when his dog, whose puppies have been promised to Louise and Kathy, has a litter of just one. Sharing the puppy brings the girls back together, however, and Kathy's consolation for losing Louise again next summer will be their mutual dog, Golden Silverwind. Kellogg's pictures are not as well defined in color, drawing, or composition as they were in Purdy's *Iva Dunnit* (reviewed in the February, 1986 issue), but his detail will draw young viewers in; the imaginary games, separation problem, and animal theme will also prove an attractive combination for many children.

D.V. Friendship values


The subject here is arguably the best woman tennis player in history, so it is to the author's credit that she keeps the adulatory tone in control, although it pops out on occasion. What does come through consistently is a sense of Navratilova's personality: her periods of moodiness, which have stabilized with work and maturity; her quick sense of humor and banter, which helped her overcome a language barrier and the negative reactions of other players to her own all-too-frequent rudeness; and her commitment to being the best, which finally drove her to overcome a strong lazy streak with disciplined workouts. There is little reliance on game play to pad the text; in fact there is little game play at all, except for occasional references to techniques Navratilova exercised to improve her strokes. Her relationship with her family and Czechoslovakian background are cheerfully over-simplified, but on the whole, this gives a better-than-usual feel for what it took an athlete to get to the top.

C.U. Physical education
D.V. Perseverance

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Five simply written stories for the beginning independent reader are illustrated by full-color drawings, line-and-wash, that have a cheerful vitality and humor. Each story is a modest anecdote about Lionel: a visit to the doctor, a confrontation with the necessity of eating vegetables, a nervous hunt for an older sister’s pet snake...in other words, experiences similar to those most children have. There’s a quiet humor in the writing, so that readers can enjoy the joke while they are empathizing with Lionel’s problems and with his success in overcoming or tolerating them.

C.U. Reading, beginning


Wilbur the Easter Bunny gets tired of his appointed tasks and applies for a job as assistant to Morgan’s Magic Show. Four bunny friends sabotage all the tricks, contriving to get Wilbur fired and back on the chocolate circuit before the sun rises on Easter morning. Although children will no doubt howl at the slapstick of Morgan struggling to hide his underwear after the bunnies have hooked him up by the pants, the story is contrived. Stevens’ bright drawings do add a lot of energy, but they are more crowded than usual. A seasonal supplement.

C.U. Easter


The twenty-six stories here (one for each letter) are intended to introduce children to unfamiliar words (bifurcate, nostrum, zealot) through puns. When the ice-skating elephant glitters and gleams on the ice, Mr. Sawdust says “Boy, can that Cora skate!” Coruscate. Get it? This is one of the easier tales (which average two and one-half pages each); most wind wordily and tortuously to a sometimes funny, more often abrubtly artificial, punning last line. “Once I was called a speedy ant; but now I’m happy to be called an ex-speedy ant.” While children love even the most contrived puns, many of the ones here obscure the meaning of the words they supposedly define. From “Polite swearing is one thing, Jerry Jaguar; but you, in fact, are all raw cuss,” children will infer that “raucous” means loud swearing. And it seems a shame to substitute “Quick-saw Dick” for Cervantes’ illustrious dreamer. The bright animal caricatures are funny —the cover shows two frolicsome panda bears; perhaps one very shaggy dog would have been more appropriate.

C.U. Language arts


When Adam was transferred from a class for special students to Lisa’s science class, she felt sorry for him, since other people made it clear that they thought he was weird. They don’t even know what Lisa finds out when she makes overtures of friendships: Adam insists that he has come from another planet, even showing Lisa a buried “space capsule.” This touching and unusual story is told by Lisa, who falls in love with Adam, gets to know his mother and sister when she takes pictures of their ramshackle home for a photojournalism contest, and is upset both by her mother’s dislike of Adam and by some of his behavior, which seems borderline psychotic. Knowing that he has been a victim of severe abuse (from a long-gone father) Lisa is torn between anger at some anti-
social behavior, exasperation at Adam's insistence that he is not of Earth, not his
mother's child, and her strong love and sympathy. Lisa finally forces Adam to admit
the truth. The story ends on a realistically hopeful note; it has the same poignant quality
as the author's *Alan and Naomi*. Lisa's voice is convincing in this perceptive and touch-
ing story that has depth of characterization and competent writing style.

D.V. Friendship values

$11.75.

Set in south-eastern Africa among the Xhosa herders, this recounts the coming of age
of Anta, a chief's son destined to inherit and control great wealth in cattle. There is a
plot involving a jealous brother's scheming against Anta, but the real focus of the book
is Anta's shouldering the responsibility of training his father's gift of a fine ox. There
are some problems with abrupt transitions and changes in point of view, but the rituals
and activities of a passing way of life are vividly detailed, especially the people's deep
sense of kinship and interdependence with their cattle. What the book lacks in cohesion
it makes up for in cultural adventure.

D.V. Responsibility

$11.95.

Lionni has always been an effective creator of collage illustrations, and his use of
color and composition is distinctively recognizable, with cool hues, contrasting
shapes, and mottled or marble effects. His story is less impressive, being adequately told
but laden less with originality than with didactic message. Three frogs argue about
ownership of everything until a natural catastrophe brings them together and changes
their competitive claims of "It's mine!" to a placid, communal, "It's ours!"

D.V. Sharing

Reviewed from galleys.

Introduced by a verbose preface which explains that a sense of place is the binding
thread in nine new fantasy tales, this is an anthology ranging from one tale that's trite
and another that's tedious to some that are good and several that are outstanding. One
of these is the editor's "The Stone Fey," a poignant tale of divided allegiance in a
strong rural setting; among the others are Robert Westall's very funny "The Big Rock
Candy Mountain," which sets a crude American in the British Isles and has a deft
blend of the real and the fanciful, and "Evian Steel" by Jane Yolen, which has a fresh
approach to some of the facets of Arthurian legend.

McMillan, Bruce. *Counting Wildflowers*; written and illus. by photographs by Bruce McMillan.
Library ed. $11.88; Trade ed. $11.75.

This is a counting book of many uses: (a) it's beautiful to look at (b) there is no mistak-
ing the number of objects in each strikingly composed picture (c) the color-coded
circles running between the clear black numerals and the written numbers add color
identification possibilities (d) the close-up color photographs are clear and scientifically
labelled to serve as a guide to garden/sidewalk variety flowers. Add to this a humorous
surprise on the final photo spread, with three chicory flowers captioned "How many?"
facing a mass of maiden pinks captioned "Too many to count" (a dare if ever there was one). Afterward comes a listing of the wildflowers' scientific names, their blooming periods, and places to look for them. A bargain for creative learning experiences.

C.U. Counting (unit)


Far and away the most attractive of the spate of books celebrating the centennial of the Statue of Liberty, this unfolds the story in a simple, read-aloud text set into panoramic watercolor spreads that are striking enough for use with classes or groups of children. The opening aerial view of Liberty Island encircled with sea and ships makes a breathtaking introduction, and the monumental scale of the statue is clearly conveyed in oversize drawings as the building history progresses, climaxing in a night scene in which the lady is lit up with fireworks. Several concluding pages give additional information: a table of dates, dimensions of the statue, important people in its construction, and notes on repairs. From one flag-centered endpaper to another, this is a well-designed book.

C.U. History—U.S.—Pictorial presentation


As she did so well in *The Boy Who Was Followed Home*, Mahy builds an absurd situation out of the most ordinary details. After Mrs. Castle gets a job as an atomic scientist, her husband proves super-effective at keeping house, so much so that in his spare time he takes to making jam from the plums off their tree. His enthusiasm gets a little out of hand as jam overflows every jar in the house, appears in every conceivable form, meal and snack, makes the whole family fat, and begins to haunt everyone's dreams and fantasies. Although "Mr. Castle's jam proved very useful, for as well as being delicious, it stopped leaks," the family is relieved to see it gone at long last... just before the first plum of the new season falls ripe to the ground. The spoof on housekeeping, the sex-role reversal, and the sweet theme itself combine for a gay romp that's roundly reflected in the bustling, pen-and-wash pictures. The characters' antics are well cartooned and the colors judiciously dominated by sticky red.

D.V. Sex roles


Amy is a worrier, and her new stepfather, Richard, had said, "You don't meet trouble half-way, you go and knock on the door..." When Mum was called away to help in a family crisis, Amy was left with Richard, with whom she felt uncomfortable; when he insisted that she come with him (he was a van driver and had to go to another part of England), Amy was angry as well as worried. The author adroitly creates a well-paced story out of a familiar situation and a modest journey, and the change and growth in Amy and in her reluctant respect and affection for Richard are both interesting and credible. The structure of the story is stripped, the style and characterization substantial and smooth.

D.V. Adaptability; Stepparent, adjustment to


As dramatic as fiction but well-grounded in fact, this account of the clash between
Aztecs under Montezuma and conquistadors under Cortes gives vivid cultural background on each group, fine portraits of the leaders involved, and a well-organized tour through the action-packed events. Marrin includes telling quotes from observers and writers of the sixteenth century; his own style is readable, even in detailed battle descriptions, and his balanced perspective and respect for each side are clearly an asset. The unfamiliar names have pronunciation guides in parentheses after each one is introduced. A list of books for further reading is appended. An excellent resource for any study of Central American history or in conjunction with research into parallel developments in the U.S.

C.U. History—Central America


Based on folkloric patterns with the reverse twist of a heroine proving her mettle and winning a husband, this unfolds the tale of Isabel, who seeks her fortune and finds it with the help of a magic box and the hindrance of her mother’s inadvertently baking her a bad luck cake. This last is a bit contrived, but on the whole, the story is well conceived, sustained, and styled. Tomes’ illustrations show more artistic growth than any of her other recent work, however fine that has been. Here she has broadened her range to include some stunning landscape compositions, skillful graphic characterizations, deepened colors, and distinctive line work. If the hawk does on occasion look like a cross between a pigeon and a parrot, it nevertheless has a lot of expression, as do the other creatures in the animal-helper roles and the three funny little men who reluctantly leave their napping in the magic box to build or move castles at a moment’s notice. Sturdy storytelling in art and text.

C.U. Reading aloud

D.V. Bravery; Sex roles


"A short book, to be read by young and old alike" surveys the faces of the poor: women, children, old people, minorities, the unemployed and the unemployable. Meltzer’s bias is clearly toward systematic government relief, and he makes a fair case for it with some historical background on the U.S. economic system’s favoring of the wealthy few. With many statistics and a few case studies, he attacks the myth that poverty is the fault of the poor. A thoughtful bibliographic note and listing of books and articles conclude the book, which is to be illustrated with black-and-white photographs.

C.U. History—U.S.


B.J. is a "Fresh Air kid," bound from his Harmel home to Claremont, N.H. He’s never been anywhere except Coney Island, "Once time with Mama and my daddy before they break up, and the other time after he move out and Mama and my aunt Vernay that live upstairs from us take me and my little cousins, Tiffany and Tanisha." B.J.’s Fresh Air family (Norm and Jackie, little Linda and Jimmy, who’s eleven like B.J.) take him in for two weeks of an idyllic summer vacation: learning to swim, hiking and camping, making raspberry jam, feeding the animals, getting a new pair of shoes. B.J. seems awfully innocent for a Harlem child, and the expectable racial tensions are few: Linda says when B.J. is washing, "I just wanted to see if any color comes off," an older woman masks her bigotry with condescension. Miles does a nice job of evoking
the fun of summer in the country, but that she is well-meaning is too apparent, resulting in a sentimental story that sounds as if it were written twenty years ago.

D.V. Intercultural understanding


His parents work, his two tall, burly older brothers are on the football team, and Sidney, small and wistfully compliant, stays home and does all the chores. Sidney yearns to play football too, but his brothers just laugh at the idea. Along comes a wee fairy godfather (with wings and mustache) who bumbles a bit but finally gets the spell right and produces a uniform for Sidney, who gets into the game, makes many touchdowns, reverts to form at dinnertime, and is not accorded his full due until the team’s coach comes around to see who can wear the left-behind glass sneaker. Giggles for all, but perhaps a special pleasure for boys who may have felt left out of this classic tale of a dear wish granted. The style is blithe, the cartoon-type drawings comic.


Leo Baecck was so essentially heroic and the context of his times so basic a conflict of good and evil that involvement in his biography comes easily. There are some drawbacks to this one, however, especially in the effort to incorporate information into conversation, inevitably fictionalized. At his deathbed, Baecck’s daughter says, “You have been our Seelsorger, one who cares for our souls,” an explanation directed to the reader rather than a rabbi. There is also recapping of Jewish history or theology in dialogue and some questionable writing for effect (“Fighting in the German army, perhaps inches away from Leo at times, was an Austrian named Adolf Hitler”). What were Baecck’s self-doubts? What were his theological doubts? Although his leadership of a tormented German Jewry and his survival of concentration camp did depend on a powerful vision, this book simply whets the appetite for a look at the human as well as the saint.

C.U. History—World War II—1939–1945
D.V. Courage; Faith; International understanding


O’Dell returns here to his most effective voice, a simple first-person narration of historical journey. The story begins with Sacagawea’s capture, along with her Shoshone cousin, by Minnetaree warriors. Her adjustment to life with that tribe, escape from a hostile neighboring chief, and marriage to a French trader after her owner’s gambling loss all test the courage and strength she will need to survive the hardships of the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific—which she makes with a baby strapped to her back. This is action-packed drama, believably revealed by a stoic heroine who maintains her self-worth despite vagaries of fortune in which she’s a pawn of men and natural forces. Although the return eastward telescopes into almost a catalogue of tribes and perils overcome, the book retains its grip on the reader to a fine-honed finished, when Sacagawea abandons her romantic feelings for Clark and returns to her people. An informative and involving choice for American history students and pioneer-adventure readers.

C.U. History—U.S.—Discovery and exploration
D.V. Courage

As fresh and funny as any in the series, this follows the valiant attempts of an unlikely Sensitive, high school freshman Blossom Culp, to settle an Egyptian princess, mumified but very restless in spirit, back in the midst of her rightful splendor. Much against his will, Alexander Armsworth finds himself involved again, assigned to an ancient Egypt project by the formidable new suffragette history teacher, who tackles the Daughters of the American Revolution head-on. The Princess seems convincingly capable of carrying out her curses, and Blossom's wayward Mama is always a treat, as is the pre-World War I cast of small town characters. The plot elements are perfectly spliced, the pace carefully metered, the style tongue-in-cheek. A well-crafted, extrasensory mystery with mischievous scenes of high appeal.


In a third tale about Alanna, who had masqueraded as a boy to learn the skills of knighthood, the doughty young knight and magician goes through several trials to prove herself worthy of becoming shaman of a desert tribe. She is adopted by the gruff old courtier who had been her teacher, she ends her love affair with Prince Jonathan, she becomes mistress of the leader of the city's thieves, and she goes off on another adventure. This is good fantasy in its pace and richness, although the characters, particularly Alanna, amass experiences rather than gain depth. The combination of the chivalric role of the protagonist and the intricate magic powers possessed by her and others should have a strong appeal to fantasy buffs.


Although some of the humor in Mozart's abandoning his opera, "The Magic Prune," to help Inspector Charles LeChat track down a muffin thief named Don Pastrami (alias Apollo Grosso-Fortissimo) depends on more culture than most children have, they will laugh anyway. Between the goofy dialogue, the silly computer graphics, and the wild premise of an extraterrestrial being who has taken all the muffins in Vienna to use for rocket fuel to get back home, young readers will get the drift. Not Mr. Pinkwater's most sustained effort, but an amiable farce readable by an age group hungry for humor.


This doesn't have a strong story line, since there is neither conflict nor suspense, but it is permeated with a feeling of fraternal affection, it is written with direct simplicity, and it has a modest final twist to give the ending a cheerful fillip. The narrator describes the physical changes and growing prowess of a baby brother who seems slow to walk. The framed paintings are bright, busy, happily humorous; they have cozy details that should appeal to the read-aloud audience, as does the text, by making its members feel how far they've come in their accomplishments.

D.V. Brothers


A simply written description of four children whose families have come to the United States (two to settle permanently, two to stay for the duration of a job) is profusely illustrated by photographs of good quality. While there are some statements that show a
preference for an original cultural pattern, and many that show a deference to tradition, most of the material implies that life is preferable in the United States. This is not, therefore, without bias, but the bias is mild, and the adaptability and assimilation of the attractive subjects lend a positive note.

D.V. Adaptability


"There is something mysterious and ghost-like about a plant that is not green, has no leaves or roots, and springs up suddenly after rainstorms." Thus Selsam once again conveys the wonder of science without losing a jot of accuracy in explaining it. In this case the superstitions, myths, and history surrounding the plant are so intriguing that she opens the book with a full chapter devoted to them. There follows an equally interesting description of the mushroom’s special features and growth cycle, with suggestions for young researchers to make a spore print at the stage where the cap has opened and the gills are visible. The unusual and fairly complicated methods of mushroom farming and a discussion of the amazing variety of wild mushrooms (including warnings about the poisonous kinds) complete the presentation. As usual, Wexler’s clear black-and-white photos, along with a few prints and diagrams, extend the information visually. Well conceived, designed, and executed.

C.U. Science—study and experiments


A color album of various fourth of July celebrations along the coast of Maine and New Hampshire, this will have great regional appeal. Its value as historical background is limited by a rambling text, and the current festivities it spotlights are distinctly New England-flavored. At the same time, the parades, boat races, barbeques, and fireworks tucked amid Revolutionary-era dress-up reenactments will spark some discussion among groups of children planning their own holiday activities around other parts of the country.

C.U. History—U.S.


This is just ridiculous enough to be truly inventive... and very funny. Alaric Chicken is so cautious that he checks to see if the floor is still there before he gets out of bed in the morning. To be prepared for all kinds of weather, he wears rubber boots, shorts, and a fur jacket. To buy his mother a Mother’s Day present involves a litany of catastrophes that might accompany any choice of bedroom slippers, candy, perfume, etc. Finally, Alaric buys and presents to his mother, who is barricaded behind padlocks and chains, a huge alligator to join the one already guarding the moat behind her house (“A chicken can’t be too careful”). Wallner’s solid shapes and primary colors anchor each wild scene in a yellow frame or again, render Alaric’s dire fantasies in big, vivid cartoon bubbles. A winning group readaloud for the holiday.

C.U. Mother’s Day


Soft pencil drawings illustrate the discussion, through three anecdotes, in a text that
R deals with death in differing circumstances and that is framed by comments (in italics) that explain death as a sad but natural fact of life. A concluding note to adults makes it clear that the book was written in part to combat erroneous concepts young children may have received from television, where they see actors who "die" but may reappear the following week. The three anecdotes deal sensitively with the deaths of a young uncle with a terminal illness, of a classmate killed in an accident, and of a grandparent.

D.V. Death, adjustment to


The protagonist of *Tarantulas on the Brain* is the narrator of another funny but not wholly convincing story. It combines two themes: one is Lizzie's passionate interest in Robin Hood and her fantasizing about being one of his band. The other is her attempt to enter the music school where her best friend has just won admittance. Lizzie's conviction, when she meets an actor playing Robin Hood at a medieval festival, that he needs her help, is not credible, nor is her belief that she can learn, in six weeks, to play the harp well enough to get accepted by a very selective music school. However, the story has brisk pace, humor, and a lively style and should therefore be appealing to readers.

D.V. Imaginative powers


Unlike most of the sister stories that have appeared in recent months in which a younger sister is jealous (and often yearns for her sibling's boyfriend) this is about Sharon's problems with a prettier, more popular, and more talented younger sister. Sharon is the narrator, and although she is jealous of Penny, she loves her sister. She does, however, feel the need to get away to gain perspective and evaluate herself. This is the rather obtrusive device Smith uses to put Sharon into a situation that forms the plot of the book: a job away from home, acting as live-in sitter for a couple with one child. It is the puzzle of the odd emotional tangle in the Hanover home that provides Sharon with a chance to prove her worth, to meet a man who doesn't fall for her little sister, and to lend a hand and an ear that help Mrs. Hanover get over her emotional block. This isn't badly written, and the story line is believable, but the book is weakened by elements of contrivance and by stretching.

D.V. Jealousy, overcoming; Self-confidence; Sisters


Twelve-year-old Lacey returns with her mother, Campbell, and her mother's boyfriend, David, to the small Appalachian town Campbell had fled years before when Lacey was a baby. Now the old family tensions surface again, between defiant Campbell and her tyrannical mother. David acts as peacemaker until his sudden, accidental death, when Lacey finds herself shoring up her mother and fending off her grandmother. Although David seems too good to be true, the other characters show a believable blend of quirky foibles. The mountain setting and wildflowers that Lacey loves form a natural relief to the human dynamics. Lacey's dedication to helping build their house (there's a horse thrown in), David's to his blacksmithing, and Campbell's to her leatherwork cast the drama into a counterculture framework, but the conflicts are as old as the hills.

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Mother-daughter relations

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“Solomon was an ordinary rabbit, except for one thing: anytime he wanted to, he could turn into a rusty nail.” So begins Steig’s latest animal fable, told in his inimitably effortless prose. How does Solomon work the transformation? He “scratches his nose and wiggles his toes at exactly the same time.” And to change back, he says to himself “I’m no nail, I’m a rabbit!” His trick becomes his downfall when Ambrose the cat sees the switch, and, frustrated at waiting for his dinner to reappear, drives the nail into the side of his house. A fortuitous fire rescues the rabbit, who returns to his grieving family. The phrasing is casually felicitous (“His first idea was to show his family what a prize pazooze of a rabbit he was. But then he decided to keep his secret secret”) and the pictures are typically Steig, gently rumpled with softly glowing pastel colors. Although the story employs many familiar Steig motifs (particularly from *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*), there is a greater proportion of pictures (often two to a page) to text than is usual for him, and younger per-schoolers will be able to “read” right along.


In a long fantasy novel, involved but coherent, an orphaned teenage girl, Alexina, is staying with a farm family when she meets some people from another, parallel world. Because she proves to have strong psychic powers, she is enlisted by Marhalt (the leader of four people who include young Taryn, who becomes Alexina’s friend) to help in their struggle against the evil Bron, who has stolen the stone. This is the “Worldstone” of the title, the sentient stone that is at the heart of the culture of the aliens’ world, which is technologically undeveloped (deliberately) so that the focus is on mind-power rather than on tool-power (our world). The concept is presented convincingly, and there is a logical twist at the ending, but the pace is slow in this tale of quest and confrontation, and the traditional pitting of good versus evil perhaps over-emblleshed.


Carmelita had known her next-door neighbors for all of her eight years, and although they weren’t really her aunt and uncle, she called them Tia Rosa and Tio Juan. Now Tia Rosa is home after a hospital stay, and Carmelita is anxious to show her the scarf she has been knitting, as Tia Rosa had taught her. The author provides hints that all is not well, and indeed the elderly neighbor dies. Carmelita grieves, and she is later pleased that she can think of something to do in memory of Tia Rosa: she can finish knitting a pink blanket for the new grandchild that Tia Rosa had hoped to see. As a story about death, this is adequate; it is, however, stiffly written and static in mood.

D.V. Adjustment to; Older-younger generations


There is an enormous amount of dramatic material here, most of it unfamiliar to student researchers and most of it clearly organized and simplified in spite of the confusing cast of characters who tried (seven times) to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. Unfortunately, the exclamation mark in the title is duplicated too liberally throughout the text; the writing is sometimes overwrought and occasionally gung-ho (“Well, it was all a big flop!”) or clumsy (“The terrorist pulled a revolver and wounded two policemen before, with great restraint, he was subdued alive”). There is also some unacknowledged humor in so much elaborate and often inefficient conspiratorial effort on the part of the terrorists, although they finally did hit their mark. History buffs will
be intrigued, and the non-stop action might hook readers who would not ordinarily be interested in the subject area.

C.U.  History—World


In essence, this paperback novel is about a black girl in a loving, cultured family who discovers she had been adopted, runs off for several days to brood about it, and comes home having realized that the place where she has been loved and nurtured all her life is home. This plot is padded by irrelevancies, gushy passages, stretched figures of speech, and interruptions (usually in flashback form) that slow the story at exactly the points at which action is crucial.


Tilly has perhaps created a new genre here, the neighborhood novel. Almost-adolescent Penny Askew is the protagonist, but her relationships with several friends on the block—Tracey, Margaret, and Henry—and the changing family dynamics of each character form the basis for an episodic story. Ultimately, Penny emerges from self-consciousness about her working-class background into an awareness of its strengths. The "perfect" mother of one privileged friend turns out to be tyrannical, another deserts her family. By contrast, Penny's mother is goodhearted, if inelegant, and some diagnostic surgery shocks Penny into valuing her. The theme is strong, but the narrative focus is weakened by an unmanageable number of characters and scenes, some of which are vivid and others tangential. There are also inconsistencies in the writing; at one point Penny's mother is described as "well known for her even disposition," later as "having a foul temper." The large cast does serve to support an authentic small-town southern coastal setting, however, and the throes of transition into high school are convincing. The over-accumulation of detail may show a lack of control, but it also indicates a promising capacity for developing situations realistically.


In *What If They Saw Me Now?* a British adolescent, to help an acquaintance, had filled in as a ballet partner and discovered that—to his surprise—he enjoyed dancing even more than the sports at which he was proficient. In this sequel, Jamie transfers to ballet school; much of the story is about his practice and his prowess, but that theme is nicely and realistically balanced by his first awkward efforts at being a suave Lothario, his surprise when he learns that his flat-mate is gay, his happy discovery that the first girl he's ever loved also loves him, and his gradual achievement of self-confidence and independence. All this happens in a book with a brisk pace, empathetic insight, and a light, witty style that is a good foil for the seriousness of many of the issues and problems of the mid-teen years.

D.V.  Boy-girl relations; Independence
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Koontz, Carol Lovett, ed. Connections: Using Contemporary Children’s Literature (K-9) in the Classroom. National Council for Teachers of English, 72p. $7.50; $6.50 for members of NCTE.


Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading. International Reading Association, 1985. (IRA book no. 437). 972p. $35.00; $25.00 for IRA members.


Weintraub, Sam and others. Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading July 1, 1983 to June 30, 1984. International Reading Association, 1985. 348p. Paper ed. $23.00; $15.00 for members of IRA.
