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.
C.U. Curricular Use.
C.V. Developmental Values

* * *

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Ad Gr. 4-6. In the first of these nine stories, Jason wins a gift rainbow from the Wind, gives pieces away to those in need, and feels all the better for it. In the second, Clem pursues the tooth fairy in search of the dream she stole from him, loans it to her, and feels better for it. Not all the stories are so optimistic; one ends with a disagreeable princess suffering an empty life, another with a young painter forever frustrated in his work. The tales all depend on a multiplicity of marvels, and an occasional overload cancels out the effect. The images are vivid but bizarre. Legs run off by themselves, bits of face turn to glass, a heroine must plunge her bleeding hand into a tubful of spiders, a boy has “two butterflies whirring like helicopters inside his mouth,” another’s heart flutters “like a lark inside a biscuit tin,” a tree sends love messages to a girl, a queen is punished with screaming hair that she pulls out by the gobful to solve the kingdom’s problems. The book may have some appeal for the crowd that draws rainbows arching over white unicorns, but it lacks the crisp wit and tight structuring of Aiken’s better work. BH

D.V. Imaginative powers


Ad Gr. 4-6. A chocolate aficionado walks readers through a bit of history, technology, and taste testing, beginning with information on the Aztecs’ use of chocolate and its subsequent spread through the Spanish explorers to the rest of Europe. He then describes the processing and manufacture of candy and concludes with a conglomeration of recipes, places to visit, a food value chart, untrue “myths” about chocolate, jokes, and a list of books for further reading. Black-and-white photographs extend textual descriptions, as in the picture of cocoa bean pods with a ruler showing their size; a map, diagrams, and old-fashioned prints further illustrate the book, which is indexed. A lightweight confection. BH

C.U. Nutrition (unit)


R Gr. 3-6. One of those spare, almost predictably tragic dog stories that nevertheless holds the reader to the inevitable end. Gray Boy is a huge animal, part Labrador, given to Ian by his father, who died shortly afterwards in a car accident.
Much as Ian loves the dog, he and his mother recognize and worry about the streak of uncontrollable wildness in him. Finally, Gray Boy destroys a neighbor's prize rabbits and runs away, surviving entanglements with various wild animals until a fight with a trapped fisher leaves the dog critically injured. In trying to rescue him, Ian himself falls through ice and gets retrieved by the dying dog, an event foreshadowed by an earlier fishing trip in which Gray Boy has retrieved a fish for Ian. This has dramatic action, homey characters, and a wild setting that will ease reluctant readers through the short text or function as an attention-getting read-aloud. BH

D.V. Animals, love for


R Gr. 6-10. In 1986, the U.S. Border patrol apprehended over 1.5 million illegal border crossers from Mexico, according to jacket copy, which continues, "But during the same year, Mexicans crossed the border legally almost 200 million times to work, shop, visit..." Ashabranner's investigative journey is recorded in a text that is sympathetic and lucid, based on many interviews on both sides of the border. He points out how interdependent the neighboring areas are, especially in the establishment of U.S.-owned assembly plants in Mexican border cities, in the sharing of conservation or irrigation schemes, in the back-and-forth flow of tourist, family, or business crossovers. The book is marred occasionally by florid passages, but is informative and detailed, is given variety by cited interviews, and is enhanced by the many well-placed photographs. A bibliography and an index are appended. ZS

C.U. Social studies


R Gr. 4-6. Henry is a baby squirrel adopted by a family waiting out the London Blitz on a country farm during World War II. With her characteristic subtlety of craft, Bawden develops scenes and dialogue that bring the reader to realize what Henry means to the narrator, her two brothers, and her mother as they all await her father's return from naval duty. The youngest, Charlie, is particularly touching in his desperate attachments to any strong male figure—a farm hand, an Italian prisoner of war—and in his vague fears about the father he can't quite remember. His question of whether his dad will like the squirrel clearly translates into one of whether his dad will like Charlie. There are many realities here, death in a neighbor's terminal illness, her son's decision to stay with his father on the farm afterwards. This is a story that speaks of family unity in the face of dislocation and separation. BH

D.V. Family relations


Ad Gr. 2-4. This runs the gamut, as do most riddle books, from funny and very occasionally clever puns to puns that are contrived or that depend on latent
content to be understood. All are in question and answer form, and are grouped under headings that are more or less pertinent. The pencil drawings, in cartoon style, have vigor, and the humor, however stretched, is the kind that children find eminently and interminably quotable. ZS


Ad

Gr. 3-5. After an introduction to the tools and materials needed, 35 projects are organized into four basic constructions: “minute mites” (a few quickies involving balloons and a frisbee cut from a styrofoam plate), “spinners” (several kinds of tops), wind spinners (weathervanes made from plastic cups), and crazy cars (the longest and most varied section). These are ephemeral by nature—the most liberally used material is tape—but they will keep children busy, which is more important than the actual product. A few seem unnecessarily doomed to quick garbage disposal, for instance the “carrot car” that calls for raw vegetable wheels. Patterns are repetitive, but there’s an effort to build on basic principles for inventive effects, as in explaining “two ways to make wheels turn” (spin the axle, spin the wheels). With spaciously formatted instructions and clear, black-and-white diagrams. BH


R

4-7 yrs. Having been through a good many traumas with Arthur already, young listeners won’t be too surprised to find he’s suffering some pangs of sibling rivalry with the arrival of a new baby sister. And they won’t be disappointed in the humor that’s injected into Arthur’s dose of adaptation. The spacious cartoon strips document a classic sequence: peer reactions (“You’ll have to change all those dirty diapers!” says Muffy, holding her nose), Arthur’s understated anxiety (“I think babies are taking over the world!”), Mother showing Arthur a snapshot of himself, aged one and crowned with a bowl of mashed peas—and of course the classic conclusion, in which Arthur solves the baby’s problem when no one else can. Young listeners know what to expect of Arthur; now they know what to expect of a new baby (“Burp!”). BH

D.V. Baby, Adjustment to


R

Gr. 3-5. Capably written in 12 brief chapters and illustrated with a mixture of crosshatch portraits and drawings from Potter’s books, this is a sensible, non-adulatory biography of the first modern picture-book artist. Potter’s domination by her demanding parents, the untimely death of her fiancé, her brother’s alcoholism, and her eventual happiness on a country farm with her husband William Heelis are interwoven with her development of Peter Rabbit, Squirrel Nutkin, The Tailor of Gloucester, and other classic animal characters. U.S. children researching Potter will note with interest her relationship with Anne Carroll Moore of the New York Public Library and subsequent cordiality to visiting Americans. BH

C.U. Illustrators (unit)

**Ad 5-7 yrs.** Arnie is not nearly as enthusiastic about two weeks of overnight camp as his mother is; he's lonely and homesick before he even gets there. Gradually, however, and—to the author’s credit—with no dramatic episode, he begins to enjoy his counselor, bunk-mate, nature walks, campfire stories, and even pranks. Except for a few bee stings, Arnie’s home free with the “Best New Camper” award. Nothing new or different here, and Arnie doesn’t seem quite as lively as Carlson’s *Harriet.* However, with its action-packed animal cartoons, the book is a good one to share with any young child about to trek off to camp, even if the picture book audience seems a bit young for that experience. BH

D.V. Adaptability


**R 5-8 yrs.** The young hero of *Harald and the Giant Knight* (reviewed in the June 1982 issue), who was earlier disillusioned about tournaments and jousting, here challenges the hallowed hunting customs of the Middle Ages. Harald has glimpsed the Great Stag targeted by the baron for sport, and he throws the dogs off track by scattering the Stag’s droppings in “a crazy pattern over the forest floor.” Saved from discovery by an old hunter who also admires the Stag, Harald escapes the severe punishment that would have accompanied his deed but retains an indelible impression of how it feels to be hunted. The watercolor paintings are rich in woods hues, with occasional spreads featuring festive trappings of medieval attire. The dappled lighting and soft textures graphically emphasize the shadows into which the Stag escapes. A thoughtful blend of historical and contemporary themes. BH

C.U. History

D.V. Animals, kindness to


**Ad 3-5 yrs.** Caseley’s interest in design and texture is evident in the ornamental details of paintings that are adequately set off by white space. The people in her paintings, however, are stiff figures, often awkward and sometimes cut off at the hips. The story of a small child’s adjustment to dethronement is fairly standard, but the telling, in its style and humor, is better than standard, as Lindsay begins to appreciate the fact that her newborn sister’s behavior is normal and that she herself had performed the same “silly” way. ZS

D.V. Baby, adjustment to


**M Gr. 2-4.** Adhering to a formula frequently found in primary-grades stories about child detectives, this is slight, contrived, and pedestrian in style, with the narrator and his two peers doing the investigating, while the local police are called
in only to make the arrest. On his way home from a Little League tryout, Fenton sees the fat cat whose collar says "MAC." Readers are given broad hints that the collar belongs to a wealthy woman named Mary Alice Collinbacher, and that the cat is a pregnant female. Fenton and his friends do trace the cat's owner (M. A. C.) in response to a lipstick-scrawled note tucked into the cat's collar. Small marks for Fenton's persistence and the author's provision of a happy ending, but there is little more to recommend the book. Not that that will stop ever-voracious mystery fans. ZS


R  Gr. 6-. While young people who are Cleary fans will certainly enjoy her autobiographical account of childhood and high school years, it is probable that die-hard adult fans will appreciate the book even more as they share memories of the past. The author sees her child self with the same clarity and objectivity as she has seen her fictional characters, and her reminiscences have a resultant integrity and candor. She is honest but not bitter about a mother who was both possessive and domineering, she gives a vivid picture of life during the years of the depression, and she is persuasive rather than dramatic in describing the experiences that are universal to childhood. ZS

C.U. Authors, Children's authors (unit)


R  Gr. 1-2. Lillian Hoban's pictures of the members of Miriam Cohen's first grade class have always been as endearing, as the children's true-to-life antics. Many a recognition reflex has been registered by beginning readers, and the books have also been popular with the read-aloud audience. Here classmates in a multi-ethnic schoolroom learn to appreciate the special quality of George, who is far from the best student in first grade, but who wins deserved media publicity for being quick-witted enough to telephone an emergency number when an elderly friend, on whom he calls every day, collapses. ZS

C.U. Reading aloud; Reading, beginning

D.V. Age-mate relations; Consideration for others


R*  Gr. 6-9. In a beautifully crafted story that has won the Carnegie Award, the matrix for memories of an extended English family is given by Jess, about to go to France for a university year abroad. The family gathering (three generations) introduces characters, and the ensuing separate segments are woven into a cohesive if varied single fabric. This is a testament to family love, it is a piece of social history, and it is a fascinating read that involves the reader in making connections among the roundly depicted characters. Good pace, good style. Good awarding. ZS

D.V. Family relations

Gr. 2-4. Miss Marshwater is stereotypically lady-like until she unwraps two duck-billed platypuses in a package sent her from Australia. A and Bea, as they’re called, transform her into a relaxed and happy woman simply byechoing everything she says and providing the company for which she has been so lonely. Although there’s some redeeming humor, the creatures seem a bit cutesy and the story contrived: A and Bea have babies (Cee and Dee), who echo Miss Marshwater’s words in babtalk. “And,” as the ending abruptly has it, “that’s the story.” Easy to read, with funny illustrations, this may serve as practice for transition readers, who will get a kick out of names like the landlady’s (Mrs. Wolfbottom). BH

D.V. Animals, kindness to


Ad Gr. 4-6. Kate, age ten, knew she should never accept a ride from a stranger, but Mr. Atwood knew her mother (he said) and so did his wife. That’s how the story starts, as Kate is kidnapped. Her sister Sandy, despite the embarrassing fact that Kate has run away twice, is sure that this time is different, that Kate is in danger. That sort of reasoning is one of the weaknesses of the book, as retired policewoman Agatha Bates makes a series of conveniently correct assumptions as she works with the town police to catch “Mr. Atwood,” who has kidnapped Kate because she looks like his own child who had disappeared some years ago. The writing style and pace of the story are unimpressive, but readers will enjoy the suspense as the text moves back and forth between the detective efforts in Kate’s town and the big, silent house where the kidnapper tries to persuade Kate that she will be happy being his child. ZS


Ad Gr. 7-9. Ted, who had been a high school hero as a third baseman, had held out for a major league offer; he comes to the Kansas City Royals ready to take over the position from an aging superstar, Lou Mills. This is formula sports fiction (brash rookie makes good), but it’s capably written, with game sequences that baseball buffs will enjoy, and it gives a realistic picture of major league ball as big business, as the coaches, owners, and manager of the team make their decisions about hiring, trading, and playing or benching men on their roster. ZS


R Gr. 5-. Heavy board pages that will lie flat are cut on one side to form a color-coded index to types of accidents and illnesses. The author, medical director of The Children’s Hospital in Boston, is crisply informative and authoritative, giving illustrated step-by-step procedures for dealing with a wide range of medical crises, frequently suggesting those points at which professional help should be sought. The book should be useful to anyone responsible for child care, in or out of the home, both as instruction in recognition of symptoms and danger signals, and in providing facts about such help as the nonprofessional can give. ZS

R Gr. 4-7. A much more effective approach than most technological overviews of this sort, the Folsoms' presentation is well-organized to answer the questions either burning or lurking in most children's minds about how television, telephones, and other common electrical or electronic mechanisms work. The explanations are selectively simplified and clear, as are the labelled color drawings and diagrams in their uncluttered, two-column format. An extensive table of contents directs students looking for specific material: the section "At Home," for instance, includes electrical system (generator, switch, circuit, fuse and circuit breaker, meter), water system (reservoir, storage tank, water treatment, sewer system), etc. Business, transportation, musical, and medical machines are also covered. Two indexes, one to the illustrations and one to the text, offer further help in accessing information, but browsers just may get caught by their own curiosity to take in the whole book. BH


R Gr. 3-4. Snow White, in this Art Deco spoof of the traditional tale, is a Kewpie-doll blonde, and her newly-acquired stepmother is a slinky brunette Theda Bara. Angry at what she sees in the *Mirror* (the *New York Mirror*) praising Snow White, the villainous stepmother tells a bodyguard to kill Snow White. The rest of the plot is adapted in similar style: S.W. is taken in by 7 jazz musicians when the hit man lets her go; her sleep is caused by a poisoned cherry put into her cocktail, her recovery (cherry dislodged when a coffin-bearer stumbles) leads to marriage when a handsome society reporter smiles at her awakening. This sophisticated picture book may not be appreciated by very young children, but independent readers (who do not need the very large print that's used) should enjoy as much of the joke as they can comprehend. Distributed in 1987 in this country, the book won the 1986 Kate Greenaway Award in Great Britain, and the illustrations are indeed distinctive, with geometric abstractions, handsome use of silhouettes, and intriguing complexities of perspective and color used as backgrounds for the svelte, elongated figures in John Held style. ZS


Ad Gr. 8-10. Misunderstood outsiders in their small town in upstate New York, seven teens, led by charismatic Reed, form a club. When an abandoned gas station the group had used as a club house is to be torn down, Reed decides they should all go to the Adirondacks for a few days, a trip he keeps extending through manipulating a "unanimous" vote of the members. Tragedy strikes when the father of two of the girls comes to look for them and is killed—accidentally?—in a tussle with Reed. It's good melodrama, and the details of wilderness survival will appeal, but thematic concerns tend to overwhelm the narrative, and the characters remain faceless—we're told about the great bond between them, but we don't see it. Reed
is a better developed character; more than a stereotyped megalomaniac, he is a strong leader, competent, encouraging and kind, his obsessive need for control masking insecurities the others come only gradually to see. RS

D.V. Friendship values


Ad Gr. K-2. Beautifully detailed illustrations (watercolors, dyes, and colored pencils) that are meticulous in their depiction of flora and fauna show the actions of a beaver in the quiet dark of night. The text is not as impressive as the pictures because it has little substance and because it leaves so much unexplained; for example, how does the beaver breathe in his lodge, the construction of which is not made clear. ZS

C.U. Nature study


NR Gr. 6-8. The operative question in assessing yet another countries-of-the-world entry is whether or not it provides anything more than an up-to-date encyclopedia article. On the plus side, this *Cuba* includes many informative charts, maps and graphs of health and population statistics, hurricane occurrences, imports and exports, often accompanied by provocative questions. Under a tourism graph, for example, is the question "What reasons are there for the different graphs for socialist and capitalist countries?" On the other hand, this is overly adulatory and uncritical, implying that the biggest problem Cuba faces (aside from Ronald Reagan) is convincing the populace to eat green vegetables. The Bay of Pigs is briefly (and fairly) mentioned, the *Marielitos* not at all, and the Missile Crisis only in the glossary, defining the word *blockade* but not mentioning who wanted the missiles. The author does say about Cuba that "that which is good can be applauded, reservations can be held about what is not," but does not appear to have taken his own advice. RS


R Gr. 7-10. This is Lynn Hall at her serious, perspicacious best. Ariel, seventeen, is the narrator, and both she and Robin, her fourteen-year-old sister, hate their father. There are few people who would understand this, for to the outside world Frank Brecht is a model father. He is not physically abusive, but he controls rigidly all that his children do. Ariel is determined to escape after graduation; Robin is so unhappy that she runs off with a married man just to get away from home. Only as she leaves, anticipating freedom, does Ariel have a glimpse of understanding of her father's love—a love that is destructive but undeniable. This isn't a story with a lively plot, but it is a beautifully developed narrative of family tension that is nicely paced, smoothly written, and acutely perceptive in its depiction of character, especially the characters of one parent who is harshly domineering and the other timidly subservient. ZS

D.V. Father-daughter relations; Self-reliance

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M Gr. 3-5. Zelda, the narrator, is in fourth grade, lives with her mother in a trailer park, and is repeatedly in trouble because of schemes that fail due to her naivete (or maybe it’s her stupidity) and sometimes amuse but more often irritate her long-suffering mother. Like buying a moribund horse for her mother’s birthday, or pursuing a boy on whom she has a crush and announcing she’s his new girlfriend (response: “Bug off, Zelda”) or embarrassing Mom by playing detective and falsely accusing neighbors. The print is large, the structure episodic, and the action plentiful if forced, so that the book, which totally lacks the literary quality of most of Hall’s books for older readers, has some appeal to readers. ZS

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


Ad Gr. 4-6. As is true of most series books about other countries, this follows a well-established format, dealing briefly with facts about economy, geography, religion, and other aspects of the Haitian culture before moving on to a more detailed treatment of the country’s turbulent history. The information is useful, although it offers no new insights or fresh interpretation of events; it concludes with the takeover by a military junta after the flight of “Baby Doc” Duvalier in 1986. The writing style is dry, often to the point of dullness, and is marred by generalizations and—less often—patronizing explanations, but the text is accurate and the tone restrained. The glossary is inadequate, the index adequate. ZS

C.U. Social studies


Ad 3-5 yrs. From England, a picture story book about the middle child in a biracial family confronts the feelings often held by middle children. Nancy isn’t old enough to do some things, or tall enough; she isn’t young enough to enjoy the privileges of a younger sibling. The author treats Nancy’s feelings by use of a repetitive and negative pattern: “So she wasn’t big and she wasn’t small. She was no size at all. . . . So she wasn’t dark and she wasn’t fair. She was no colour at all. . . . So she wasn’t first and she wasn’t last. She was no place at all.” With her fifth birthday, the story ends, Nancy feels that she is old, big, tall, “Nancy-shaped and Nancy-coloured.” The last reference is to one of the strong points of the story, showing siblings whose skin-tones differ. This will find some sympathetic ears, but the combination of negative approach and sudden conversion is not effective. The illustrations are cluttered with details, but the bright pastel hues are cheerful. Better concept than execution here. ZS

D.V. Self-confidence


M Gr. 4-6. Croake Douglas, the black protagonist, finds the behavior of a new classmate offensive; he responds to Ezekiel Silverstein’s silent contempt by
harassing him and then, learning that Zeke is mute, by “eating crow.” The boys become friends, together fighting local bullies, heroically rescuing Zeke’s pet crow, the loquacious Piccolo, and learning to appreciate the therapeutic talents of the eccentric root-and-magic dealer, old Miss Sophie. While it’s nice to have a book about interracial friendship and kindness to animals, the story is both completely predictable (Zeke talks) and heavily over-written, with florid phrases, redundant use of words, and erratic use of dialect. ZS

D.V. Animals, kindness to; Friendship values


Ad Gr. 6-9. Princess Antia of Kamalant is not at all eager to make a state visit to Roshan, “all desert and dirt and flies,” particularly because she believes the purpose of the trip is to marry her off to Jodril, heir to the Roshan throne. Antia secretly loves her tutor Eskoril, so when he urges her to go (“Trust me completely”) and send him reports, she complies, eventually discovering the real reason for her visit and, too late, the duplicity of her tutor. The fantastic element here is kept to a minimum, personified in the Sandwriter, an old woman versed in the ways of the desert who guards the “heart” of Roshan. There’s not much suspense here, and too much quasi-mystic musing instead of action, but feisty and headstrong Antia is a true heroine, and the book could serve as a stepping stone to the books of Robin McKinley and other stories about “girls who do things.” RS


NR Gr. 9-12. While this new edition of a book first published in 1977 has been updated to include information on AIDS and newer statistics on homosexual behaviors, it appears (in the light of ten years perspective) that what most needed revision is Hunt’s patronizing and offensive attitudes toward his subject. He tells us, correctly, that we cannot generalize about homosexuals, but it soon becomes apparent that, to Hunt, there are only two kinds: those of whom he approves (quiet, monogamous, and inconspicuous—he calls them “straight gays”) and those who he finds strange (“A sizable minority look and act like creatures of some other society or even some other planet”), “airy-fairy,” and “queer.” “Let’s agree that we—the author of this book and its readers—aren’t being scornful or contemptuous when we use this term; we’re only being descriptive.” “Queer gays” include transvestites, married men, pedophiles and leathermen, as well as “the macho gay man, the flaming faggot, the diesel dyke and the disco freak.” Hunt claims it is acceptable for him to use these terms because homosexuals use them among themselves, but he misses the ironic way in which gays speak these words, an ignorance and insensitivity that extends to his condescending talk about “camp” and “gay taste.” While Hunt states that “queer gays” and “straight gays” together comprise a statistical minority of homosexuals, he fails to tell us what the rest of them are doing. The new AIDS information is accurate, as far as it goes: while Hunt gives us lengthy looks at drag balls, cruising bars and (approvingly) small dinner parties, his discussion of AIDS is limited to safe sex guidelines and the drop in gay promiscuity, nowhere personalizing this crisis facing the gay community today, nor the courageous responses that are addressing it. The best book on this subject remains Hanckel and Cunningham’s *A Way of Love, A Way of Life*,

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which, while also in need of revision, demonstrates both comprehension and respect. RS


Ad Gr. 2-4. As a world-class conformist and achiever, fourth-grader Cricket confidently expects that she will adjust to the fact that a new girl, Zoe, is just as smart, and it’s equally hard to accept the fact that the fourth-grade teacher plays no favorites. Cricket struggles with jealousy, is angry at herself (and Zoe) when she makes mistakes due to a tension she’s never had before, and eventually recognizes two things that show she has gained maturity and perspective: she can see why she hadn’t been popular in the past, and she can accept Zoe as a friend, realizing that it is less important to be The Best than to do the best one can. Hurwitz’s writing has, despite a few stylistic weaknesses, an easy flow and humor; characterization is believable if not deep, and the plot is realistic if not unfamiliar. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Self-appraisal


R Gr. 4-8. Solid evidence to support Surgeon General Koop’s assertion that children can and should be made to understand the threat of AIDS, this is factual, compassionate, and non-judgmental. While younger children might need help understanding such terms as venereal disease, and older ones more information on safe sex, on the whole this is precisely targeted for upper elementary readers. Hyde and Forsyth are careful to distinguish between what is known about AIDS (that it cannot be spread by casual contact, for example) and what is not known or only tentatively proven — the qualifier “no one really knows” crops up with poignant regularity. Several personal anecdotes (whether fictional or not is not clear) about children and parents with AIDS are woven in, allowing readers a personalizing perspective that humanizes the statistics. Indexed, with a good reading list. RS

C.U. Health and hygiene


Ad Gr. K-2. Colorful paintings that show both what Joey is doing and what he is imagining speak effectively to the theme of a child’s creative instinct. Coming home after seeing a pirate movie, Joey draws pictures on the stoop; rebuked by the landlady and sent to the basement to get a bucket of water for cleaning his chalk drawings, Joey becomes immersed in drawing more pictures in the basement. Papa comes home and helps him clean up; the landlady shows her understanding by giving Joey a drawing pad and crayons so that he can keep the pictures he draws. Thus, this shows approval of Joey’s activity, and it’s pleasant to look at, but it’s a story that’s structurally slight and that lacks the impact of action. ZS

D.V. Creativity

R  **Gr. 5-7.** A decade ago, in *Charmed Life,* Jones introduced a wonderfully fresh fantasy world—or, rather, a series of divergent worlds simultaneous in time—in which two children of the Chant family took it for granted that part of their education was the study and perfection of witchcraft. Christopher Chant is their ancestor, this new story being set many years before *Charmed Life.* Here Christopher is a boy, quickly learning through a series of deftly-structured adventures how great his power is, and slowly adjusting to the fact that he has been chosen as the next Chrestomanci, the arch-magician of a wholly-conceived fantasy world that is firmly rooted in realism and is leavened with wry humor. ZS


Ad  **Gr. K-2.** In an effort to impress her parents with the fact that she is responsible enough to take good care of the dog they have adamantly refused to get for her, May adopts a rollerskate. She walks the rollerskate on a leash, leaves it outside any building that has a “No Dogs Allowed” sign, and gives it all the tender loving care a pet should have. Her parents are impressed with her devotion, but it is several years before May gets her dog. This is a slight—if amusing—concept, not very convincing but very nicely told. The paintings are bright, usually crowded with details, the figures stiff as paper dolls. ZS


R  **Gr. 5-7.** While some of the animals in this series don’t seem to fit its title (*Wonders of Mules, . . . Dairy Cattle,* etc.), the tiger decidedly does. Lavine culls through the considerable folklore that has accrued to this magnificent beast, then moves on to physical characteristics, behavioral patterns, and threat of extinction because of human encroachment on wild habitats. Black-and-white photographs, prints, and diagrams illustrate the rather formal text, which is indexed. BH

C.U.  Zoology


Ad  **Gr. K-2.** Line and wash drawings that are undistinguished but pleasant in a cozy but uncluttered way, are a bit repetitive but will certainly appeal to young animal lovers, as a sick child is visited by Dr. Katz. Dr. Katz is the collective name for the two family cats, sedate Philip and the younger, more lively, Lorenzo. Marianne, who has been whiny about staying in bed with the flu, is delighted by the antics and affection of “Dr. Katz” and falls asleep with two marmalade cats snuggled against her. Slight but soothing. ZS.

Gr. 4-6. A book that will intrigue children as well as benefit them, this describes and illustrates various types of poisonous plants: those poisonous to the skin; others with poisonous berries, leaves, flowers, or roots; some poisonous bushes and trees. The text is an interesting mixture of description, instruction, and commentary. The gummy juice of poison ivy, for instance, “is so strong that the amount on a pinhead can give a rash to five hundred people. And it has a long life: scientists got skin rashes from touching a dry plant sample that was one hundred years old.” The book is handsomely formatted, with each page framed in a green design and illustrated with either black-and-white detail drawings or meticulous full-page paintings of the specimens discussed, which include hemlock, mountain laurel, mistletoe, and many others. BH C.U. Botany


Gr. 6-8. The trouble with Merkka’s grandmother Mary is that she’s an old-fashioned eccentric in a small fishing village dedicated to becoming a tourist attraction. Gramary’s scrap metal is considered an eyesore by the local vendors of progress, and they pressure her throughout the book to sell off, get out, and forget her welding business. Ironically, her artistic scrap-metal creations finally put Ledgeport on the map, but not before she has suffered a stroke and the novel has exposed a whole cast of characters caught in the awkward clutch of change. This is an ambitious novel in both scope and technique, and it occasionally suffers from switching focus. The book starts as a dog story, and several of the most vivid passages entail the rescue of a sheep dog from the sea and later, its herding a flock off an island onto a boat. As soon as the dog is safe, it fades into the background to be replaced by a series of complicated community and family dynamics. The device of alternate voices—Merkka’s in brief, first-person, italicized commentary at the beginning of every third-person chapter of story development—further diffuses narrative attention, especially when she suddenly addresses her new baby sister near the end. On the other hand, the incidents are convincing; when the book does concentrate on one figure, it comes to life with realistic impact. BH

D.V. Grandparent-child relations


Gr. K-2. A third book about the adventurous baby of The Wild Baby and The Wild Baby Goes to Sea has come from Sweden, fantastically conceived by Lindgren, illustrated with bravado and an echoing humor by Eriksson, and adapted by Prelutsky into bouncing, lilting verse. Here Baby Ben is disappointed at getting a toy dog when he’d been expecting a real one for his birthday, but in the magic of the night the puppy, Rags, comes alive—and the two, joined by Ben’s toys, go off on a flight that is varied and joyful. Pure nonsense and great fun. ZS


Gr. 5-7. Twelve-year-old Amanda, the oldest girl in a large, poor Kentucky family during the Depression, has to quit school to take care of the
house and new baby after her mother’s difficult delivery. As a reward, she’s sent to her grandparents’ comfortable home in Memphis for a worry-free vacation. Observing her alcoholic aunt’s unhappy marriage makes her realize how rich her mountain background is, and she returns to it with a ready heart. Although the theme is clear, it is not simplistic. Neither setting is generalized: at home, Mandy recognizes that the boys get preferred treatment and suffers the strains of poverty as her mother manipulates their finances to make ends meet. The grandparents are well delineated as an older couple who must make peace with their past in the shape of children who have not turned out as expected. The book’s strongest point, in fact, is subtleties of human exchange. Not a lot happens externally, but the period flavor is unobtrusively strong and the Cinderella aspects of Mandy’s service and success will appeal to readers. BH

D.V. Family relations


R Gr. 4-6. First of three long stories, “The King’s Men” is told by Joachim, Swiss, age 44, one of a group of dwarfs at a medieval court, and it is both colorful and touching in its depiction of the often-brutal treatment of human beings who are owned and who, as little people, see the plight of another kind of little people, children. All of the tales are beautifully written, but the second is structurally repetitive (two people captured by the fairies return to find those at home have aged) while the third, a contemporary story, is a borderline fantasy, as strong in its own way as the title story. ZS


R 1-3 yrs. A photographic game of identification for the very young, this is simple and spacious in graphic design. The first page asks, “Whose hat?” while the second shows a crisp white chef’s hat against a blue background. Page three portrays the chef wearing his hat as he chops a colorful assortment of vegetables, and page four has two children, also wearing chef’s hats, cooking under the word “Chef.” This format repeats itself through hats for a fire fighter, pirate, construction worker, nurse, police officer, cow hand, magician, and witch. There’s an element of dress-up here that children will enjoy, though the joke of throwing in a witch with realistic working role models may not be clear to them. The book offers plenty of room for response as a toddler group read-aloud, along with lively pictures for browsing. BH


R Gr. 3-5. One of those rare books that combines quality and appeal (for transitional readers yet), this is really a fictional development of the town mouse and the country mouse—with a major thematic difference. Junius Mouse persuades his bucolic friend Adam to visit the city and meet Amanda Mouse on her birthday. Several elements make the trip special for young readers or listeners. One is Moore’s knowledge of children’s interests: the details of preparing a birthday present with a message in riddle form, the delight of Adam’s zooming around in a toy car, the momentary suspense of his sudden disappearance. Then there is
Adam's fresh perspective on what he sees: traffic lights appear as jewels, a bridge seems to be "a great shining web hanging in the air." With natural grace, Adam's poetic thoughts appear in verse form throughout the story, but he only realizes he's a poet during a trip to the children's room of the library. At the end of the book, Adam has ventured and gained. "Not often does one smell roasted peanuts. Not every day does one discover that he is a poet..." Now it is Amanda's turn to overcome her fear of the faraway and find seeds that taste of the sun. A golden read-aloud. BH

D.V. Fear, overcoming; Friendship values; Urban-rural contrasts


Ad *Gr. 5-7.* A sequel to *Skinnybones* finds Alexander Bell Frankovitch starring in a cat commercial after winning a contest with his honest essay about Kitty Fritters cat food. This taste of glory leads him to grab the limelight in an assembly program and try out for the school play. He only gets a bit part but is pivotal in forcing the lead actor past terminal stage fright so the show can go on. Like Park's other books, this is funny and reflective of young readers' insecurities, but it's more frenetic than usual, with Alex's craving and smart-mouth bids for attention a source of irritation in an unrelenting first-person narrative. The ending, in which another junior high student confronts Alex with his obnoxiousness, is a welcome dramatic pause—better late than never. BH

D.V. Group acceptance


Ad *Gr. 2-4.* Like the 14 other books in his biographical series, Quackenbush's *Annie Oakley* hits the high spots of childhood and career, with full-page cartoons illustrating the text. These are bright yellow, with smaller drawings of a poodle (important to Annie's courtship by Frank Butler) telling her puppies further facts about the great sharpshooter. The format here is cutesier than Jan Gleiter and Kathleen Thompson's *Annie Oakley,* the only other biography of Oakley for this age group, but the narrative is more straightforward and better detailed, without fictionalized scenes and conversation. Though neither book is as interesting as the subject, whose life was a series of compelling stories, both titles will be used in a collection where children report on famous American historical figures. BH

D.V. Initiative; Sex roles


Ad *Gr. 4-6.* Eleven-year-old Margo is blond, blue-eyed, adorable, and never, in her view, taken seriously. She sets out to change that by taking up the clarinet and forming a group with three other kids who are willing to practice for her strict "listener," a high school musician. Although the exposition is stiffly handled, the situation will appeal to readers. There's never any real question about Margo's out-playing her arch antagonist, stuck-up Ernestine; each episode simply reinforces
the group's unwavering commitment to work harder until the school year's final recital makes them number one. BH

D.V. Perseverance


M Gr. 4-6. This is more historical fiction than biography and, unfortunately, less successful because of it. Reit's brief introductory source note testifies to background research, but the fictionalization is cliched: in the course of the story, Emma's ears perk up, she breaks into a grin, her friend's eyes twinkle, her cheeks redden ("Romance—fiddlesticks"), etc. The spy episodes themselves are remarkable and would have been exciting in straight narrative form, which also would have eliminated the need for words like "darky" and "niggers" or the dialect attributed to Emma when she disguised herself as a black slave ("Mah name Cuff. Ah'm lost"). Edmonds was an abused child who ran away from home at 16 and lived with audacious defiance of nineteenth-century social conventions. The subject is a natural for study of the role of women in U.S. history. Children will be drawn by the drama here but should have access to a more substantial account, even at this simple level. BH

D.V. Sex roles


R 3-5 yrs. The snowy spaces of the Alaskan settings are vividly evoked in the deftly stylized paintings of the artist (both she and Jean Rogers are Alaskan) with their textured skies and rosy-cheeked people. The story, however, could be set anywhere, since it deals with two themes familiar to most children: the perversity of objects that are repeatedly mislaid, and a love for animals. The story line is not substantial, but it has an easy flow, a mild humor, and an appealing ending as little Pica, who has many times lost his mittens, decides he can do without them when he finds they are under a litter of new-born puppies. ZS

D.V. Animals, kindness to


R Gr. 4-6. A first-class, funny science fantasy that will hook middle-grade readers right from the first scene, when Tsynq Yr evades a Zarnk enemy cruiser, crashes to earth, and has to inject his mind into the body of a skunk for lack of a better host. He's found by a lonely girl, Karen, who renames him Stinker and, with the help of her neighbor Jonathan, returns him safely to the Sylon Confederacy in outer space. What gives this traditional plot its punch is the author's consistent detailing of Stinker's transformation: in trying to convince a dog not to attack, he appeals, "We can play together, chase the ball, find loathsome things to eat." Although enamored of peanut butter, Stinker absentmindedly pops the occasional grub into his mouth. The children, too, are realistic in their initial
antipathy: "I can't go up there and talk with him . . . He's a boy!" . . . "She's a
girl! Tell her I'm sick or something." Space shuttle officials get their fair share of
ridicule when Stinker pirates a craft ("Uh, good morning, Madam, may I use your
telephone?" asks an astronaut of Karen's mother after landing in front of her
house). The situation is gratifyingly absurd, the development satisfyingly natural.

D.V. Friendship values

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$13.95.

R Gr. 6-9. An only child, Troy is a stable, intelligent fourteen-year-old
whose parents approve of his talent as a cartoonist (he does work for the local
paper) but—without interfering—are unhappy about his other passion, karate.
Smith, in a story that has both depth and popular appeal, smoothly knits the
several aspects of Troy's life: his relationship with his parents, his
disappointment that his own lack of discipline has delayed acquisition of a black
belt, and (as per title) his amazed discovery that he enjoys and is good at ballet
when a girl on whom he has a crush begs him to partner her for a performance of
*Coppelia*. Conflict and drama are added by several sub-plots, and everything that
happens is germane to everything else. ZS

D.V. Parent-child relations; Self-discipline

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Stevenson, James. *The Worst Person in the World at Crab Beach*; written and illus.
ed. ISBN 0-688-07298-4. Library ed. $11.88; Trade ed. $11.95. Reviewed from
galleys.

R Gr. K-3. In a sequel to *The Worst Person in the World* (reviewed in the
October, 1978 issue) the elderly grouch-of-all-time goes to a seaside resort that has
everything he likes: awful food, lots of mosquitoes and jellyfish, and cold fog.
Perfect! Well, almost perfect; there are a mother and son who play wheezing
accordion duets, and the worst, who is always referred to thus, grudgingly misses
the hostility when the pair depart. There is a happy if quirky ending. Like the
first book, this should amuse Stevenson's fans, since the entertaining cartoon
drawings are augmented by some very nice forms-in-fog paintings, the irascible
protagonist is a comic non-hero, and the relatively happy ending, after the return
from Crab Beach, preserves the cantankerous attitude of the worst. ZS

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Sullivan, George. *Center*; with photographs by George Sullivan and Aime LaMontagne;
galleys.

Ad Gr. 4-7. Profusely illustrated with line drawings and photographs, most
of which are uninformative, this is a book that is highly specialized, focusing on
the shots, the passes, the strategy, and the techniques that will help the reader do a
good job as center on a basketball team. The material is logically arranged, and the
information is, despite an occasional stylistic error, given in a clear, direct writing
style. ZS

C.U. Recreation

R* Gr. 1-3. Richly textured double-page spreads, which look like colored pencil and pastel drawings on watercolor paper, satisfy the eye of the beholder who considers these fifteen folkloric riddles in poetic form. They are not all easy to guess in spite of broad pictorial hints, and there’s a challenging mix of easy and hard ones. The author has drawn lyrically on a range of cultures from Mayan to Lithuanian, Italian, and African, each reflected in the artist’s dramatic landscapes. A riddle from the Ten’a of Alaska, for instance, reads “Far off in the distance, something white is chasing a flash of red fire,” and the viewer is treated to a sweeping snow scene across which a red fox tracks with bushy tail streaming behind. The Visayan (Philippine) riddle “I run, I run. When I arrive I bend down and let fall all my white hairs” incorporates the suggestion of a figure in a curling wave of surf against a curving shoreline. For an Aztec riddle, the graceful hands of women slapping tortillas seem to echo the movements of butterflies overhead in dry heat. An eyeful, an earful, a cause to pause .... . BH


R Gr. 7-9. Big blue whales and playful porpoises are agreeable candidates for animal rights campaigns, but Taylor, like Colin Thiele (reviewed below), champions the cause of a less popular animal, the killer whale. 14-year-old Jamie’s family barely gets by on their fishing north of Vancouver, and when a glitzy new marine park in California offers $100,000 for a big killer whale, it seems like the answer to their dreams. Catching the whale is surprisingly easy (Jamie and his father trap it in a cove); the problems begin when the trapping becomes a media event, prompting activists to demand the whale’s release. Among them is impetuous Angie, whom Jamie loves, and who undertakes a dangerous attempt to free the whale herself. The moral tension might have been greater had Taylor not made chief nemesis Zachary Cooke (the marine park promoter) such a money-hungry stereotype, and it is curious that Taylor’s plea for the whale’s freedom seems based on its “almost human” characteristics. But the fishing details are strong, and Jamie’s family a realistic confusion of dreams and responsibilities. RS

D.V. Animals, kindness to


R Gr. 5-8. Like the Theodore Taylor book reviewed above, this is the story of a hunt for a dangerous sea predator, in this case, for an immense white pointer shark nicknamed Scarface, who threatens the waters near Cockle Bay in South Australia. To their delight, 12-year-olds Meg and Joe are invited to accompany the great shark hunter George Lane, helping and witnessing the greatest attempt of his career. The hunt itself is exciting, but never romanticized: by turns tedious, dangerous and exhausting, the two attempts fail, the last leaving Meg and Joe stranded with Meg’s severely injured father on a lonely island—little food, no signs of rescue. Any combination of shark hunting and survival story has tremendous
appeal, of course, and both parts of the novel are filled with you-are-there detail and immediacy. Although lacking the thematic depth of Taylor's book, this has story, drama, and heroism, and is especially recommended for reluctant readers. RS

D.V. Perseverance


R Gr. 5-7. Rob is miserable. He's jealous of his infant stepsister, angry because he is forced to give up his bedroom to her, lonely because his only two friends have gone away, and apprehensive because his father has missed two of their precious Saturdays. The imaginative daydreaming Rob has done about being a heroic castaway on a desert island begins to take over, so that what has been a pleasant escape now becomes an imposed other life in which all of his angers and fears are played out. Townsend, always a compelling writer, uses a device that is borderline-believable: a girl Rob's age sees that only a visit to the small island in a local park (a place that had given rise to the complex fantasy-life) will help solve the problem, after Rob, on a visit with her and with his stepfather, has narrowly escaped a panic-induced near-drowning. She talks him through a last visit, a purging of anxieties, and an acceptance of the new alignments in family life (stepfather whose friendship has been rejected, father whose marriage plans had engendered rage) to gain new perspective and stability. Save for the heroic role of the girl and the sometimes protracted fantasizing, this is a story that has great strength: vigor, pace, and psychological insight. ZS

D.V. Father-son relations; Friendship values


R 5-8 yrs. Rayevsky, the witty illustrator of *Mister Cat-and-a-half* (reviewed in the December 1986 issue), teams up with another Russian-born illustrator to dramatize a clever Catalan tale that will appeal to an older picture-book audience. A king is delighted when a charcoal maker explains a riddle: ten cents a day is plenty to live on, and to pay back a debt (take care of his mother), save for his old age (take care of his son), “and still have something left over to throw out the window” (give his daughter a dowry). The charcoal burner promises not to tell anyone else until he's looked upon the king's face one hundred times—which he does when a schemer pays him a hundred coins for the answer. The art work here is strongly stylized, with portraiture that is slyly expressive and scenic panels that suggest stage backdrops. The flat perspectives benefit from backgrounds that are texturally varied; compositions are carefully considered and clean. A good read-aloud to small groups of second and third graders hooked on their own contemporary riddles. BH


Ad Gr. 3-5. Copious black-and-white cartoon drawings that are lively if not precise accompany a brief historical introduction to clothing, from Mesopotamian and Egyptian styles, through Greek and Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, and modern. Fashion and function are loosely connected in sweepingly general commentary: “People were tired of dignity, and once again wanted to look sporty
and ready for action. Maybe that was because people were beginning to move around the earth in ways they never had before.” While many of the assumptions are speculative (“Men were still busy making money and could not be bothered with clothes that got in their way”) or even judgmental (“In their bustles, women did not look very pretty...”), the descriptions are readably organized and detailed. An opening statement defines the scope as being primarily European and American. An acceptable supplement to other sources for students doing reports on the subject. BH

C.U. History


Ad Gr. 7-9. Jake Callaghan, high school senior, is the narrator of a humorous story about himself and the six other students who are attending school in town because there is no high school in their small community, Bear Flats. The Board of Education of Pine Valley is putting up the seven, therefore, at the Scenic-Vu Motel. At first suspicious, the motel owner proves to be a loving surrogate mother. Jake is the leader, laying down laws for behavior that ensure moral conduct and good grades. The rules don’t prevent fun or romance, so readers should enjoy the story despite the fact that its development is predictable, its characters verge on the stereotypical, and its humor depends in part on repetition. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Education, valuing and seeking


R Gr. 2-4. Of the 72 poems included here, only 17 are previously published, and the 55 new ones show Zolotow’s gift for evocative description. Diction and device are always kept simple and clear, but perceptions are often more complex, witness “In the Museum”: “The horse from 200 B.C./ is made of stone,/ but the way he holds his head/ shows/ someone long ago/ loved a horse like him/ though now/ both horse and sculptor/ are dead.” Many verses focus vividly on the child’s feelings: “I remember that night,/ with the snow/ white, white, white,/ and my mother’s arms around me/warm and tight.” As a collection, the poetry is marked by verbal contrast, internal and end rhyme in free verse forms, and observation of ordinary detail to focus a young reader’s attention on nature and human nature. Empathetic. BH

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With this issue we welcome Roger Sutton as an associate editor of the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. Roger has been on the BCCB committee as a contributing reviewer for several years. His journalistic skills and professional insights are well-known from the popular *School Library Journal* column on young adult literature that he wrote from 1983 to 1987. As a full-time staff member, he will strengthen the *Bulletin*’s selection and critical perspective with an unusual combination of literary background, distinctive writing style, editing prowess, practical experience with young people in libraries, and—elemental to all of the above—his sense of humor.

Zena Sutherland will maintain her invaluable contributions to the *Bulletin*, as will the committee that meets weekly to advise the editors. Isabel McCaul, Hazel Rochman, and Bob Strang will continue their long-term service on the committee. Carla Hayden has left, after completing her doctoral work, to teach at the University of Pittsburgh. Replacing her is Betty Taylor, Youth Materials Selection Specialist for the Chicago Public Library.

Subscribers will probably have noticed by now that *Bulletin* reviews are often done from galleys and are thus much more current. Automating the journal with computer typesetting has passed on further time savings, so that the journal arrives at the beginning of the month rather than at the end. We appreciate your patience during this process, which has involved the occasional but noticeable glitch: one program ate beginning and/or ending sentences, compounding the normal percentage of human error by several factors. Nonetheless, the most important element—critical depth—has remained stable. A September, 1986, editorial claimed this publication to be “the only one of its kind based in a research center and devoted solely to reviewing children's books.” We will continue to draw on our juvenile collection—one of the largest in the U.S.—for perspective in evaluating the thousands of new books published each year and to capitalize on a time-tested staff of professional reviewers. What changes are planned will focus on currency, clarification of selection policy, and economy through reformatting for a standard trim size of 6" by 9" (starting with the September issue). We welcome suggestions and response from subscribers and thank you for your continued support.

*Betsy Hearne, Editor*