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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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New Titles for Children and Young People


Gr. 5-8. Ruritania lives again, as Alexander's atypical, picaresque heroine Vesper Holly (*The Illyrian Adventure, The El Dorado Adventure*) meets new challenges and once more outwits the nefarious Dr. Helvitus. Again the story is told by seventeen-year-old Vesper's guardian, an incorrigibly pompous Philadelphian (whose complacent parochialism, while still amusing, does get a bit repetitious). He blunders along as Vesper deals with villains, Gypsies, heads of state, etc. with successful impunity when attending the diamond jubilee celebration of Her Most Serene Highness, Maria-Sophia of Drackenberg. Adventures galore, humor as usual, colorful (if not wholly convincing) characters, and the appeal of a series book are combined in a story written with typical Alexandrian gusto and aplomb. ZS


Ad 2-4 yrs. This wordless book has much less substance than most of Anno's previous output, its one value being, perhaps, for children still young enough to be reminded that an object has not disappeared because it's out of sight. Part-pages alternate with full pages, each part-page consisting of two hands that almost obscure the picture beneath: a tiger, a person, a cat, etc. This is Anno's first book for toddlers, and it may be so bland as to disappoint his fans. ZS

D.V. Visual perception


Ad Gr. 5-8. Beginning with an informative, if dry, chapter on various disaster relief organizations (Red Cross, UN and governmental agencies, OXFAM, etc.), Arnold goes on to devote a chapter apiece to each of the major natural disasters, from hurricanes to forest fires. Using headline events like hurricane Agnes and the Guatemalan earthquake of 1976, she describes how the phenomena develop (the snow conditions that precede an avalanche, for example), what kind of help survivors need, and how that help is provided. She concludes with practical advice to readers on how to cope in disasters, and what kind of supplies to keep on hand. While this has a textbook tone and could use more eyewitness documentation by
survivors, the appeal is a ready one, and the book could provide an antidote to the sensationalism too often found in disaster accounts. Illustrated with black-and-white photographs (most too dark), the book also includes a glossary, bibliography, and an index. RS

C.U. Safety education


Gr. 8-. Like its companion, *The Mythology of North America*, this is a sprawling compendium of myths from many diverse groups. After an introduction characterizing certain traits of the lore, Bierhorst organizes the material geographically: Greater Brazil, Guiana, the Brazilian Highlands, Gran Chaco, the Northwest, and the Central Andes. Within these sections, he proceeds thematically according to elements of the material, grouping tales that treat hostility between men and women, for instance, or variants of ubiquitous tale types such as The Tree and Flood or The Twin Myth. While the imagery is powerful, this is more description than storytelling, and thus more dry than dramatic. Although readers may get bogged down in some of the fragmentary explanations of origin, however, anyone using the work for research will find it invaluable, especially where the author provides interpretation, as in the lucid conclusion on Inca lore and commentary on cultural contrasts. With exemplary documentation in the form of source notes and an extensive bibliography of references, this is illustrated with black-and-white photos of art objects and drawings by the people represented, along with maps for each region. BH

C.U. South America (unit)—folklore


Gr. 4-6. Books from Oxford Scientific Films can be counted on to have excellent color photographs, and this is no exception; many of the same pictures are used (but without the captions) in the text adapted by Harrison for younger readers (see review below). The text describes the varieties of kestrels, discussing their habits and habitats and pointing out the reasons that they thrive in urban (as well as rural) settings on several continents. The coverage is good, the writing style direct, the organization of material adequate; a combined index and glossary is appended. ZS

C.U. Nature study


5-7 yrs A fantastical story in an unusual setting, this tells of the Jolly Mon’s adventures with a magic guitar as he sings people to happiness in the Caribbean Islands. When pirates seize his boat, the Orion, and toss the Jolly Mon overboard, a dolphin swims him safely home to Snapper Bay, where eventually his guitar turns up as well—minus the picture of a dolphin that had been painted on it. There’s a touch of lyricism in the text and a song at the end, with music and words. The illustrations, which rely heavily on the brilliant blue of sky and sea,
have a glittering clarity against which the graceful black figure of the Jolly Mon forms a warm contrast. BH


R  Gr. 8-12. Back from his first year at UCLA, Jesse Harmon and his deaf younger brother Bry are walking home from a party one night when a drunk driver swings to the side of the road and kills Bry. Jesse and his close family are devastated, and Jesse’s guilt over not saving his brother is heightened by his attraction to Bry’s girl friend, Chloe. In fact the death begins to seem to the reader a cheap device for a standard romance, but Bunting redeems this aspect of the plot with the more powerful theme of Jesse’s anger. He is determined to find the killer, and after several false leads, he does—Chloe’s mother—a discovery which complicates his feelings rather than relieving them. Bunting is a smooth, practised writer, adept at style, structure, and type-casting. If sometimes her work seems over-calculated, even in treating emotional situations, as it does here, it is nevertheless both competent and readable. BH

D.V. Brothers; Death, adjustment to


Ad  3-6 yrs. Despite the exclamatory series title, this quartet is more about the engaging antics of cute baby animals than it is concerned with developmental processes. The first few pages of each title are devoted to birth, nursing, and first steps, but the real fun begins when the babies learn to “play.” While there is some padding here which, again, seems an excuse for cute (albeit clear and copious) photographs, Burton is careful to emphasize that animal play has a serious side: “Kitten games prepare them for real fights if they are attacked by other animals.” Reproductive behavior is glossed over; at five months, Freckles the rabbit meets a wild rabbit—“then they are off, having a great time chasing each other through the trees.” Next page: “Now Freckles is making her own nest . . . Her babies are nearly ready to be born.” While library bound editions are available, librarians might want to consider purchasing multiple copies of the paperbacks instead: high circulation is guaranteed, and these are more desirable as browsing items than as serious competition for similar books by Joanna Cole and the Fischer-Nagels. RS


R  Gr. 6-9. Although several books about a younger Julia have been published in the interim years, this is the direct sequel to the 1971 title *A Room Made of Windows* (reviewed in the June, 1971 issue), the first book about the girl who was a budding writer and passionately loyal friend to her neighbor. This sequel is one of the best books Cameron has produced, both tightly knit and expanding with Julia’s growing maturity and her involvement in the lives of
others. There are depth and empathy as Julia, now fifteen, finds love and accepts
temporary separation from her love, and adjusts to the fact that imperfection of a
loved one (her uncle Hugh, primarily) does not mean the end of loving. A far cry
from the formula romance, this is a book for thoughtful readers. ZS

D.V. Older-younger generations; Uncle-niece relations

illus. and with photographs. (Issues). $10.90.

M Gr. 7-10. While packaged in the same attractive format as Evans’ *South
Africa*, reviewed below, also in the Issues series, *Secret Service* suffers from poor
organization and a lack of logical development. Opening (logically) with a discus-
sion of “Why have spies?” this then moves through brief sections on the
Iran/contra affair, western secret services, “Eastern spies,” a definition of
intelligence service, wiretapping, satellites, human agents, etc., with no discernible
effort made to link the topics. The text is too dry, and occasionally given to
sentiments that should be documented or explained: “In Britain, the government
does not want to have freedom of information laws. It believes that people should
accept that what the government does is always right, without wanting to check
the information on which government decisions are based.” A photograph of
Nicholas Daniloff is captioned “The Americans claimed he had been framed and
swiftly arranged his release. Journalists are often used as agents by secret
services.” On the whole, the many pictures and captioned information contain far
more interesting information: there’s a photo of a Soviet nuclear sub, taken by a
satellite 90 miles away; another of a German advertisement warning secretaries
against attractive, inquisitive strangers; and a few spy-in-action shots, including the
dramatic cover photograph. RS

from galleys.

R Gr. 7-10. Ricky, the narrator, has just started high school in his small
town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, and although he’s known as
“that nice Appleton boy,” he feels he can never live up to the performance of older
brother Rodney, a world class egomaniac. There are several plot threads: rivalry
with a girl classmate, friendship with an oddball boy of whom Ricky’s parents
don’t approve, a contest, a minor mystery about a ne’er-do-well old prospector, a
running feud with Rodney, and a persistent dismay at how Rodney has duped their
parents into giving him undeserved kudos. Ah, but it all comes right in the end in
a very impressive story that has polished style, a structure deftly meshing all the
threads, a cast that is distinctly differentiated, and a core of perceptive exploration
of the silent treatment that can be a way of communicating ease or hostility, con-
tempt or shyness, resentment or resolve. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Brothers; Friendship values

Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm*; ad., comp. and illus. by Eric Carle.

R 5-8 yrs. Partially taken from previous collections illustrated by Carle,
these twenty-two tales range from commonly anthologized selections such as the
Grimms’ “Tom Thumb” to less well-known stories such as Andersen’s “The Trav-
eling Companion." The retellings are smooth, though they lack the rhythmic power of other versions; the invocation of "Flounder, flounder, in the sea..." is missing, for instance, from "The Fisherman and his Wife." The drama of Carle's paintings, however, is undeniable, and they are generously distributed, sometimes full-page and sometimes partial, on every spacious double spread. The picture of tiny Tom Thumb curled up in a snail shell that covers two pages thickly textured with greens, blues, and tans is unforgettable. BH


As in his Breaktime and Dance on My Grave, Chambers here uses a variety of devices—diary entries, letters, lists, "intercuts" and illustrations—along with (almost) straightforward narration that readers may have trouble keeping track of. Glamorously aloof and agnostic, seventeen-year-old Nik agrees, grudgingly, to help a youth group make a what-if movie about the second coming of Christ. Chronologically, this is the beginning, but the fragmented narrative actually begins with reports of a crucifixion in a junkyard. That the victim is Nik is not the real mystery; instead readers are asked to think about how—spiritually as well as physically—Nik got there. The bildungsroman of faith is a rare thing in YA fiction, and Nik’s journey, attended by devils and saints, is thought-provoking, articulating questions considered but not asked by many teens. However, the form and style are hampered by a self-conscious cleverness that impedes the subject, and while we hear plenty—too much—of Nik’s religious quandaries and epiphanies, there is barely enough story or characterization to support the theme. RS

C.U. Religious education
D.V. Religious understanding


R* 3-6 yrs. From the cover photograph of an orderly field of Crayolas through the clean design of the pages, this book seems to know exactly what it is that kids love about a box of crayons. Order. Rows. Precise and unpeeled points. And within all this exactness, sensuous spots of pure color. You want to eat them. Even the factory itself (Binney & Smith—in many ways the book resembles a glossy, pint-sized, annual report) is Crayon Heaven, where the machines are brightly covered with crayon dust, performing Willie Wonka-like feats of melting and molding, sorting and sharpening; the device that sorts the different colored crayons together looks like a high-tech gumball machine. The text is clear and minimal, wisely subordinating itself to the close-up, monumentalizing photographs, which, as far as the preschool audience will be concerned, tell the whole titillating story. RS


R Gr. 6-9. Valentine Marsh is fourteen and possessed of magical powers inherited maternally. In this book, a sequel to The Bronze King (reviewed in the January, 1986, issue), she and her grandmother, a beneficent witch, foil the
machinations of a vile necromancer who is stealing souls from the homeless and outcast to resurrect dead warriors battling in a galactic encounter between good and evil. The villainous Mr. Brightner and his wife Ushah are a fearsome couple, providing some climactic encounters in a story with vigorous action, a vivid New York city setting, and a well-blended sub-plot resolving the tensions between Val and her mother, who prefers a "normal" life to acknowledging her supernatural gift. Fans will look forward to the next episode. BH

D.V. Grandparent-child relations; Mother-daughter relations


R Gr. 4-6. Considering that a question-and-answer format is inherently rougher in terms of organization and transition than scientifically structured approaches to information on sex and reproduction, this is more effective than one might expect. After an introduction and list of helpful books for parents and kids, Cole has grouped the questions by subject: growing up, finding out about sex, the different development of girls and boys, masturbation, crushes, intercourse, childbirth, preventing pregnancy, pregnancy, homosexuality, and protection from sexual abuse and disease. The tone of the text is straightforward but reassuring, with an emphasis on the emotional as well as the physical. Cole seems well aware that extensive information may seem too much for kids of this age, and she keeps her answers brief and to the point, a few sentences to a few paragraphs each. Whether the questions actually came from middle-grade readers, the text does not say; if not, their tenor nevertheless rings true. BH

C.U. Sex education


Ad 3-5 yrs. Line and wash drawings (clean composition, colors that are both soft and bright, some humor but little grace) illustrate a brief story about two children who, having been told by their respective parents that they can’t go on a picnic, solve their problem in a novel way. With a quick shift to fantasy, the parents are washed until they shrink to doll size; a pleasant picnic is enjoyed by all, and after it “Jeremy’s father grew tall right away. But Alison’s mother decided to stay small a little while longer.” This quirky ending provides the one bit of humor in a simply written but not very substantial story with a concept that may appeal to children. ZS


R Gr. 6-9. Unlike John Griffiths’ *Cuba* (reviewed in the March issue), which accepted a country’s controversial claims for itself without reservation, this book about South Africa is forthrightly critical, as evidenced from the start in its placement in an “Issues” series rather than a “Countries” series. Beginning with the European colonization of southern Africa (and refuting South African claims that white and black arrived in the region at the same time) and the Boer War, this moves quickly to the victory of the National Party, the institutionalization of apartheid in 1948, and subsequent events through 1986. While unequivocally
denouncing apartheid, the book also concisely discusses the pros and cons of
divestment and sanctions, dissent among black political groups, and the uneasy ties
between South Africa and its neighboring black states. The layout is rather busy
and sensational (a photo of a black and white couple, torn in half, for example),
but it is eye-catching, and all the photos are both dramatic and germane. In
addition, there are plenty of clear charts and maps that vividly support the author's
argument. RS

C.U. Social studies

Field, Rachel. General Store; illus. by Nancy Winslow Parker. Greenwillow, 1988. Li-

$11.88; Trade ed. $11.95. Reviewed from galleys.

R 3-5 yrs. Wherever children enjoy playing store or fantasizing about owning
one, there'll be a ready audience for this simple rhyme illustrated with large-
size, colored pencil drawings. Parker has filled the pages with "jars of peppermint,
tins of tea, pots, and kettles, and crockery. Seeds in packets, scissors bright, kegs
of sugar, brown and white." A bolt of brightly sprigged calico unrolls across one
counter, a brass cash register dwarfs the young girl "taking the money in all my-
self." With endpapers that will serve, like the old-fashioned objects in all the full-
page pictures, as a good point-and-identify game, this moves at an appropriately
active pace for the listeners to whom it will appeal. BH

D.V. Imaginative powers

Fields, Julia. The Green Lion of Zion Street; illus. by Jerry Pinkney. Margaret K.

R Gr. K-3. In her first book for children, poet Julia Fields uses the voice of
a child to reflect the feelings of a group of children towards the majesty and mys-
tery of a sculptured lion. The lines, which use some of the idioms of Black speech,
are impressionistic, vividly expressing the children's pleasure in using their
imaginations as well as in working up a pleasurable fright in a safe situation.
Occasionally, the power and impact of the writing fail to admit a flat word or
phrase, but for the most part this is a bright poetic narrative. Pinkney's paintings
are deft: children huddled against the cold penetration of a foggy morning, the lion
looming blank-eyed and massive in the gray day. ZS

Fisher, Leonard Everett. Monticello; written and illus. by Leonard Everett Fisher and with
galleys.

R Gr. 5-9. Thomas Jefferson's life and times are framed in his passion for
building a house on the "little mountain" crowning his property of Shadwell in
Virginia. The text opens with summary background on the development of
English and American architecture, the specific buildings that influenced Jefferson,
and his early planning. Various stages of construction and modification
demonstrate Jefferson's ingenuity and wide-ranging intelligence as he adapted
classical structures to local landscape. The decay of the property after Jefferson's
death and its eventual renovation give as much sense of history as the building's
conception. The photographs, reproductions, diagrams, and drawings are a
masterly mix of graphic information, including Jefferson's sketches and drawing
tools, interior and exterior pictures of the building in states of disrepair and restoration, a photo of one of Jefferson’s slaves who managed his nailery, and an 1828 land-sale notice. A prerequisite for any young reader’s visit to Monticello, and an armchair tour for students who can’t make the trip. BH

C.U. Architecture; History—U.S.—pictorial presentation


Ad Gr. 4-8. While including such old favorites as “The Dead Live Again” (“Cut down the box to the appropriate shape of a coffin”) and “Jungle Worms” (spaghetti), this also features such new-wave effects as “Radioactive Fallout” (luminous paint and popcorn) and “Acid Rain” (luminous paint and rice). “Total darkness” and “setting the mood” are the most frequently mentioned ingredients for these spooky tricks, which should relieve parents and teachers who balk at luminous paint and stage blood (mix clear corn syrup with red food coloring). Readers are frequently counseled on safety and neatness. Many of the tricks can be found in other magic books, here recast for Halloween: the old bead-on-a-shoelace trick, for example, becomes “Dracula’s eye.” While the authors are perhaps a touch, um, sanguine (and repetitive) about the effects’ effectiveness (“If you do it well, they’ll scream”), there’s enough here to keep the kids occupied in your neighbor’s rumpus room for the entire month of October. RS

C.U. Halloween—programs


NR Gr. 2-4. Told through the eyes of Johanna Krause (whom one must assume is fictional, as this biography has neither notes nor sources), this is a child’s perspective on Jane Addams and Hull House. Johanna meets Addams in a Chicago street, is invited to Hull House for cake, and learns about the reformer’s great plans: “We want to do things here that will make life a little nicer for everyone.” As is true of too many biographies for younger children, this is inaccurately child-centered (“Especially, though, they helped the children”) and tends to trivialize, in the name of simplicity, a complex personality and life. While readers are told four times that the streets were filled with garbage, that’s about it for the social ills of 1890s Halsted Street. To say that Johanna “was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. She was hungry most of the time,” does little to distinguish her or her times for contemporary readers. Following suit, the illustrations, except one spread which includes the aforementioned garbage, are tidy and cheerful, Johanna in a neat pink pinafore. RS


R Gr. 7-12. Hamilton has done a masterly job of melding historical fact with fictional characterization to the enhancement of both. This is the gripping story of
a slave who, after escaping to Boston, is recaptured by his southern master and returned to Virginia by the power of the Fugitive Slave Act. It is also the story of abolitionists' attempts to resist the law, a judge's fateful decision, and a black minister's determined and finally successful efforts to buy Burns' freedom. One of Hamilton's most remarkable capabilities is her revelation of the present through glimpses of the past. Here she alternates between the tense courtroom or crowd scenes and Burns' recollections of his youth. Without too much psychological speculation, this device shows the reader what slavery was like, for Burns, for his family, for his friends. It is ironic but understandable that he escapes the cruelties of current reality through remembrance of suffering survived. The past is familiar and finished; the future, unknown and all the more terrifying. Although Burns' worst fears come true when he is punished in a prison camp for runaways, he is bought back and freed, realizing his dream to be an educated minister before his death at age 28. Hamilton's afterword makes careful distinctions between documented facts and educated guesswork; she also includes selections from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and a valuable bibliography of primary and secondary sources. BH

C.U. History—U.S.
D.V. Pride in background and heritage


Ad Gr. 2-4. One of the many titles in the Where Animals Live series that has been adapted from the Animal Habitats books for middle grades readers produced by Oxford Scientific Films, this has been rewritten to be read by a primary grades reader, with simplified language, shorter sentences, and larger print. Arrows point to illustrative color photographs that, in the original book (see Birkhead review above) have descriptive captions. The tables of contents and the glossaries of the two books are the same, an indication of the fact that the coverage in the adaptation is adequate. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the writing style, which is flat and has some changes that weaken the text. ZS

C.U. Nature study


R* Gr. 7- For a slightly older audience than Meltzer's biography (reviewed in the October, 1986 issue) although there is an overlap, this is one of Haskin's best. It is forthright but calm in tone, admiring rather than adulatory, and smoothly written. It gives excellent background (despite one misuse of the derogatory term "kafir") about South African history and politics without overbalancing the text to the detriment of Winnie Mandela's life story. Haskins wisely has let her character and her achievements speak effectively for themselves. A divided bibliography of sources is provided. ZS

C.U. Social studies
D.V. Leadership; Social responsibility
R Gr. 5-8. In Robert's small village, there's a rumor that a magnificent City lies to the south. With the prodding of an old Witch Woman, Robert determines to find it and discover what part he is to play in its destiny. In this recasting of the Fisher King story, Robert is the prince who must redeem the dying land, and while he performs courageous deeds and faces terrifying specters, the perspective is less mythic than realistic, the most sinister horrors perpetrated by the king's corrupted son. This is one of the few fantasy novels that needs to be longer—the magical elements are intriguing, but not fully worked out. Yet the vaguely archaic diction and tone are consistent, the horrific details (a mad queen) are intense, and, without betraying her characters or story, the author maintains respect for her mythic sources. RS


R Gr. 6-9. A trenchant novel about two Jewish children who are separated from their parents in the last days of World War II Germany. Rebecca's memory, even of her last name, has been blasted away in a bombing raid, after which she is found crying near the ruins of a house. Although Nazi authorities are suspicious, they assign her to an orphanage, where she suffers cruel taunts from other children who call her "Gypsy Child." Nearby, she discovers Samuel hiding out in a corn field, and his imaginative stories create a fantasy world that allows them brief respite from hunger and the artillery terrors of the advancing front. He also makes her a cornhusk doll, and her attachment to it is the most poignant and well-developed aspect of the book. The fantasy seems almost to intrude on the immediately suspenseful realism, but it plays out the children's capability to cope through powers of imagination. The telescoped ending is half fairytale, half fable: Rebecca's parents "were found in a camp. They adopted Sami and emigrated. They searched for a country where there would be no war, a country with everlasting peace." The most powerful element here is the depiction of fateful quirks in a war-stricken dictatorship: with a stupid prank, one of the orphans betrays the very woman who has protected her. Indeed, the author's portrayal of children's confused responses to war are the heartbeat of the book. BH

D.V. Friendship values


R Gr. K-2. Pencil drawings in quiet colors illustrate a story that should appeal to children because of its familiar activities: eating, playing, fussing about, cleaning the resultant disorder, adjusting to the fact that even a patient, loving grandmother draws the line somewhere. Lassen, the narrator, is one of five small cousins who are staying with Grandma overnight. When Grandma does get grumpy (but not very), she freely admits that the reason she sounds like the children's parents is because she's the one who taught them "everything they know about being grumpy. And I'm older, so I've had more practice." Then she shows how sensible and loving she is all over again. A modest but not unsubstantial
D.V. Grandparent-child relations; Social behavior


R 3-5 yrs. Hogrogian’s wash drawings provide a traditional setting for this Armenian cumulative song-tale about a cat which, in return for a loaf of bread, gives the thorn in its foot to a woman to use as a needle. The cat then swaps the bread for a chicken, the chicken for yarn, the yarn for a coat, the coat for a dog, the dog for a sheep, and the sheep for a shepherd’s mandolin, which will accompany the cat’s singing forevermore. The words and music of the cat’s song conclude the book, which is designed with woodsly endpapers that extend the verdant scenery of the cat’s capers. The fused effects of the backgrounds contrast nicely with the pencilled lines texturing the cat’s fur for a gentle effect to which young listeners will respond by quickly picking up the chant. BH


Ad Gr. 8-12. Greek tragedy without a true hero or heroine, this portrays a villainous Jason tricking a young Medea, who has already been deserted by her mother and betrayed by her father and who seems intent on self-destruction. There is a great deal of historical color here and a lot of butchery—the bodies pile up in heaps. What seems odd is that Medea goes through all this for passion, but there’s not even a hint of sex, even on her wedding night, so her horrendous fate (murdered step-brother, children, etc.) seems gratuitous. The theme of a matriarchal Baltic society, worshippers of the Great Goddess, doomed by the war-mongering, patriarchal Mediterranean cultures makes an interesting backdrop, and the characterization is consistent. The writing is smooth, with the exception of some labored passages (“Oh, Hercules, look what we’ve done with the serpent’s red egg of potential”). Jason is so unappetizingly cruel, however, and Medea so ruthlessly and blindly faithful that their exploits occasionally pall. BH


R* 3-5 yrs. Eighteen simple, cheery rhymes are surrounded with illustrations that will sweep youngsters through the four seasons. Starting in spring, there are several paeans to rainy days and mud play. Summer celebrates picnics in the park and at the beach; autumn, the wind and harvest fruits. The best verses come with winter, one about being sick, another about a bonfire: “Fire is a dragon/ (Better beware)/ Dangerous and beautiful/ (Better take care)/ Puffing out smoke/ As soon as it’s lit/ Licking up leaves/ Crackle and spit!” The children who romp through these non-stop family scenes are rosy, cared-for, active, and enthusiastically messy.
Hughes' drawing is always good, but the composition and coloration here mark some of her most cohesive book design and art work. BH

C.U. Reading aloud


Resonant in style and robust in essence, these five stories have stood the test of twenty years since their first publication for a fresh reappearance with Dirk Zimmer's powerful pen-and-ink drawings. Each story presents a monumentally scaled threat, first by the Iron Giant to the human world, and then, after they're reconciled, to the Iron Giant and the human world by a space-bat-angel-dragon from a star in the constellation of Orion. The fullness and mythical overtones of these stories make many a contemporary picture book pale by contrast. The Iron Giant has a pathos like that of the Golem and other monsters, and the boy Hogarth, who first traps and then befriends him, has the folktale appeal of a typical unlikely small-guy hero. For great sound effects, from rhythmic repetition to onomatopoeia, read this one aloud—you'll have the Gobot and Transformer crowd entranced. BH

C.U. Reading aloud


With a bright tone and winning characters, this plays the old tale of three wishes for an irresistible new angle. Eleven-year-old outfielder Jason Reid has read all those stories about the downfall of greedy wishers, so he's not entirely unprepared when Quicksilver, an Elster of the Third Order, appears on top of a garbage can and offers him three wishes. Jason asks for a baseball glove that will catch anything, a grant of immunity from surprise or questioning about the glove and three more wishes. The rest of the book details Jason and his friend Penny's juggling of wishes to include something more generous than small, personal-type acquisitions, and in the end . . . . Well, it wouldn't be fair to tell the end, but it's ecological, suspenseful, and convincing. The pen-and-ink drawings are competent but lack the natural grace of the writing. A first novel carefully crafted for transitional readers: home run! BH

D.V. Social responsibility


While everyone is sad that Patrick's mother was killed in a bus accident while on a trip to Russia, Patrick himself seems to have gone over the edge—he believes the accident was faked, and his mother still lives, taken prisoner. When incontrovertible evidence of this shows up in the form of a photograph, Patrick maneuvers himself into Russia to take a look for himself. The setting up of the plot is overwritten and overlong (little brother's adjustment to Mom's death, father hospitalized, father's romance with a nurse), but once Patrick begins his search, the story sheds most of its problem-novel trappings and works up some

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genuine cold-war intrigue. As it turns out, Patrick's mother has defected, an unusual twist on the author's part but presented without convincing motivation: unhappy in her marriage and job, Mrs. Kendall goes to Russia, gets involved with Deputy Minister Yuri Davidov, fakes her death and defects? As every good spy knows, never make a plot more complicated than it needs to be. RS

D.V. Mother-son relations


R Gr. 7-10. Sounds like a great summer. Midwesterner Billy is going to spend it with his uncle in Tucson, working with a horse trainer, and hopefully pursuing his First Time. But Uncle Wes is gay, the work harder and dirtier than Billy expects, and Cara Mae not exactly friendly. "'Get bent,' she said." Of course, it does turn out to be a great summer, though not without complications, including a coupla mean ol' varmints who want Billy and Cara out of the way. Wes is not one of those stereotyped gay uncles who crop up far too often in YA books, the regular-guy type who "just happens" to be gay. Tall and gorgeous and kind, Wes is also fanatically neat (he has his underwear pressed) and, more seriously, occasionally despairing, watching his friends die of AIDS and worrying about his own chances. He also, another first for the genre, actually has (safe) sex, and instructs Billy about the importance of condoms. The other characters are drawn with an equal specificity that includes both humor and depth: Cara Mae is neither nervous filly nor racetrack floozie, but rather a combination of real and pretended arrogance ("Man, I'd love to sit on a million dollars and tell it to go fast,") and understated vulnerability. More relaxed and even funnier than Koertge's previous novel, *Where the Kissing Never Stops* (reviewed in the February, 1987 issue), this is perfect for growing-up fans of Betsy Byars. RS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Uncle-nephew relations


R 4-8 yrs. With the same gentle tone as the team's *The Foundling Fox* (reviewed in the November, 1984 issue), this effectively handles the concerns of young children through a blend of realism and folktale elements. Small Fur, who resembles a toddler-aged Wild Thing, is mad at everything and everyone because his best friend Brown Fur has moved away. After his exasperated mother tells him "I don't want to hug you anymore," Small Fur goes off into the woods, where, after passing through a mysterious gate, he meets an elf who promises to teach him to fly if Small Fur can retrieve her lost wing—taken by the dreaded Nock who lives underwater. Never truly menacing (the Nock just wants someone to talk to), the story has equal measures of adventure and reassurance (Mother forgives, with lots of hugs) that give an imaginative dimension to a familiar dilemma. Michl's warm red and black drawings are reminiscent of Sendak at his coziest; in fact, the whole is a treat for *Little Bear* fans who are ready for greater length and complexity. Perfect, as well, for a week's worth of short bedtime read-alouds. RS

C.U. Reading aloud

**Ad** 4-6 yrs. A sleep-befogged father wakes up to find a series of notes directing him to breakfast and a Green Sox pennant from Lenny, a cleaned-up kitty litter box and a pair of green socks from Linda, emptied garbage cans and a Green Sox hat from Laurie, a freshly painted cellar door and a Green Sox sweatshirt from Louise, a newly mown lawn and Green Sox key chain from Larry, a weeded terrace from baby Lester, and a washed car and Green Sox tickets from Mom. There's even a surprise pizza for the whole gang to eat during the game. And that's it, folks, a happy time had by all, with full-color cartoons projecting a synchronized, sunny family celebration. Tailored for (and limited to) the occasion. BH

C.U. Holidays
D.V. Father-child relations


**Ad** Gr. 8-10. Conservation of species threatened by extinction is a topic in which many people have an interest, and which for some people is a cause they defend with passion. Lampton, whose plea for the right-to-life of all species is eloquent (if often stylistically flawed), has done a capable job of describing how species evolve and how—now and in the past—they have become extinct or threatened by extinction. His book has two weaknesses: one is the repeated use of terminology that implies anthropomorphic purposiveness, and the other is that after discussing the extinction of various animal species and speaking of the moral issues implicit in protecting endangered species of fauna, he presents his most cogent arguments for plants, not animals, citing medical and other uses of plants in addition to their consumption as food—then moves on to a final plea, again, for saving animal species. The index and a bibliography frame government-issued charts on "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife" and "Endangered and Threatened Plants." ZS

C.U. Science


**M** Gr. K-3. Written by Eloise Greenfield's mother, these nostalgic verses tell of a long-ago time in a small black farming community where children "Tromped to school on hard-frozen roads,/ Warmed themselves by wood-burning stoves,/ Ate supper by light from oil-filled lamps ... ." Sweet and over-idealized, the poems convey a time that never really was, but they may have a naive appeal to children who want to know about "old-fashioned" living. Gilchrist's pastels have more vigor and specificity than the poems: dramatic and dark, the colors reflect the changing colors of sky and earth, and the figure drawing (particularly for "All Dressed Up" and "Papa's Cutting Wood") has some of the stylized strength of 1930's WPA murals. RS

Gr. K-3. In a posthumous publication, an ingenious picture book can be read (and is illustrated) right-side up and upside-down. First, in several pages of small paintings, Lobel introduces his cast of people who are enjoying a summer day. The rest of the story, after the advent of a fierce windstorm, is told through large-scale portraits and descriptive captions. The device that will intrigue children is that the book, when turned upside-down, shows that each portrait functions as well in the new position, showing another face. On some pages the features are somewhat contrived to achieve double interpretation, and the captions are more descriptive than narrative, but if the goal is amusement, it is cleverly achieved. ZS


Gr. K-2. Visually dominated by Rayevsky's drawings of dragon scales and the soft, cool colors given contrast by touches of a rich red, this is an engaging first effort by Martin. Her heroine is a durable, spunky, heart-of-gold Nanny, deemed by the king to be too old to stay on in the royal nursery. Nanny takes on the job of caring for two juvenile dragons. Unable to teach them to breathe fire, she invents a way to simulate that achievement in order to satisfy their mother, the monstrous Dragonia. A surprise ending (but not an illogical one) brings peace and amity to both the dragon family and the royal family. Crisply told and nicely structured. ZS


Gr. 5-6. Some readers will undoubtedly be familiar with the story of a Texan who has become a folk hero, Gregorio Cortez, through the medium of the television film about his unjustified capture and arrest. This story may disappoint such readers more than those unfamiliar with the facts, since it has a thick overlay of fictional heroics that rob the facts of their impact. The story is set in 1913, when Cortez has been pardoned but is using an alias because there are still some vengeful whites. Two boys (one Anglo, one Hispanic) are best friends and neighbors, and they soon discover that the mysterious newcomer "Pablo" is Cortez, doing one dramatic deed after another (shooting a snake about to strike, for example). The characters are flatly drawn, the writing style is mediocre, and the one strength of the book is the inclusion of such factual information as is provided through dialogue about Cortez. ZS


Gr. 3-5. Flip, the narrator, is in fifth grade and has two problems: one is that he resents the six-year-old Korean orphan (Todd) his parents have adopted, and the other is that his parents, particularly Mom, are irritated because Flip has received a fox he'd ordered by mail. (Well, the adoption of Todd had been arranged by mail, hadn't it?) By the time Todd has accepted as inevitable the fact that his fox is a wild creature and should be released in a wildlife reserve, he has also come to realize how much Todd has helped him in caring for the fox and to see the similarities in the adjustment problems of transplanted child and pet. There is little in the story that doesn't develop in predictable fashion, but the writing style
is adequate and both characterizations and relationships are drawn with warmth if not depth. ZS

D.V. Animals, kindness to; Brothers


*R*  Gr. 5-9.  One of the first chroniclers of the Holocaust for young readers (*Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust*, reviewed in the September, 1976 issue) here takes up the more hopeful side of history—those who helped save Jews from the Nazi’s final solution. Relative to those Gentiles who accepted or participated in the persecution of the Jews, the numbers who resisted were small, but their stories are heroic and hair-raising, from isolated individuals like Oskar Schindler to entire villages such as Le Chambon and countries such as Sweden and Belgium. Some rescuers are well known and saved thousands—Raoul Wallenberg, for example; others, unheralded, risked their own families to save one child. Each case, however, implies a question of what the reader would have done in the same circumstances. There is introductory background on anti-Semitism and a concluding discussion of characteristics or beliefs common to the “Righteous Gentiles” honored in archives such as Yad Vashem, but the emphasis is on the accounts themselves, which are often related by witnesses; unfortunately, these lack source citations. An important complement to current books on the Holocaust by Miriam Chaikin (reviewed in the January 1988 issue) and Barbara Rogasky (reviewed below). BH

C.U. History—World War II—1939-1945

D.V. Courage


*R*  Gr. 7-.  A meticulous consolidation of biographical information about John Kennedy is focused thematically on his relationship with his father and older brother, against whom Jack measured himself even after Joe Jr.’s death on a bombing mission during World War II. Jack’s lack of academic concentration, chronic ill health, use of the family’s wealth and influence, and womanizing are all addressed but shown to have come under control with his maturation as a politician and father. Although some of the detail in the early campaigns seems given equal weight with later, more important developments, the book shouldn’t be faulted for its thoroughness. In fact, one would like to learn even more about sisters Jean, Pat, and Eunice (the rebellious Kick died young and Rosemary was mentally disabled), who seem consigned here to unindividualized campaigning in service of the men’s ambitions. Ted doesn’t get much attention either, but those who most affected Jack’s career—Joe Sr. and Jr., Rose, Bobby, and Jackie, along with select aides who were privy to the Hyannis compound early on—are clearly delineated. This is by far the most definitive portrait of Kennedy written for young people and certainly the first biography to have such thorough documentation, including footnotes for factual background as well as quotations. A solid bibliography of books and videos will further assist students researching the complex life and times reflected here. BH

C.U. History—U.S.

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R 4-6 yrs. Funny, full-color, pen-and-wash drawings illustrate the tale of a childless couple who acquire three large eggs that hatch into dinosaurs. With parental TLC, the three grow so large that the family is forced to heighten the house and then leave the neighborhood for a remote abode by the sea, where they live happily ever after. What particularizes a rather common plot is the odd pictorial detail—a dinosaur trying to skate on two cars or the transport of the three on flatbed rail cars—as a logical extension of earlier mundane bottle, bath, and bedtime routines. Both the macro and micro aspects of the story will delight young listeners in various monster/dinosaur stages. BH


R Gr. 2-4. Full-color illustrations characterized by a filmy photo-realism evoke the setting for this story of the last dinosaur, a female Triceratops whose remaining herd of two males is killed in a fight with a Tyrannosaurus Rex and whose eggs are eaten by small mammals when she abandons the nest to escape a forest fire. The scenario certainly renders the end of the Age of Dinosaurs more immediate than many non-fiction accounts, though the author seems to apologize for this in an afterword (“It’s sad to think about the death of the Dinosaurs. But we shouldn’t be too sad about their end”). A preface mentions the factors of disease, temperature change, and a comet explosion that may have contributed the dinosaurs’ disappearance. None of these appears as a factor in the story; in fact, the opening, in which a Triceratops charges an enormous tree to free its head of grapevines, may make readers wonder how creatures so dense survived as long as they did. Nonetheless, this will be appreciated by a picture-book audience as well as by students reading independently. BH

C.U. History—prehistoric


Ad Gr. 2-4. Nineteen poems about birds and animals are set against watercolor spreads with splatter-brush effects. The verse is uneven, occasionally patronizing and often strained to rhyme (“And now look: squatting on a stump/ A phoebe looking like a frump”). When the poetry leaves the surface, it echoes more resonantly: “A Parlement of Swallows” flies away “... to winter in Brazil,/ And to myself at summer’s end/ To winter in my thoughts until/ The long New England winter ends.” Rand’s illustrations vary from several dramatically composed pages of birds in flight to slightly sentimentalized animal pictures. Not the most original celebration of creatures, this will nevertheless appeal to some nature enthusiasts. BH


R Gr. 6-9. The Iditarod is the annual Alaskan dog sled race (1,197 miles from Anchorage to Nome) across two mountain ranges and the Yukon River. It is
clear that O'Dell has done careful research to achieve such verisimilar details, and just as clear that those details are given dramatic immediacy by being presented in the voice of Bright Dawn, who enters the race to replace her injured father. Through the grueling course of the Iditarod, the Eskimo girl shows tenacity and courage that will involve and engage readers. No, she doesn’t win—but she’s excitingly close. ZS

D.V. Courage; Perseverance; Self-reliance


Ad

Gr. 5-8. In Sweetwater Valley, “where boys can be as all-out mean and ornery as they are big,” 12-year-old Isadora is having particular trouble with hell-raiser Haskell Moore, who likes nothing better than to twit her about the time he saw her dressed in a curtain, dancing like a “gauzy whirlwind,” just like the famous Isadora whose picture is pasted in Mama’s album. Isadora’s hatred for Haskell is passionate, and she is puzzled by the gentle and forgiving responses of her best friend Maybelle, another of Haskell’s victims, who joyfully awaits the day she is to be “saved.” Set in an indeterminate time and place (although the film favorites are Bette Davis and Lash La Rue), this features down-home dialect (that may make difficulties for some readers: “winder,” “askeered”) and some stock characters in Maybelle, who meets a harsh end without complaint, and in Haskell, who experiences an unconvincing transformation into an upright citizen. But Isadora’s own appealing voice and resilience in the face of a tired and disappointed mother raise this above simple stereotyping, as do the grim details of Maybelle’s stern fundamentalist family. RS

D.V. Mother-daughter relations; Religious values


R

Gr. 3-6 yrs. This and Webb’s *Sound,* reviewed below, are the best in two new concept series for young children. Using familiar objects (fingers, stairs, shoes) and involving no number larger than twenty, each page asks a very simple question: “How many chairs are there here?” “How many shoes can you see here?” with the answers found in the accompanying photographs. The photos are the real reason to buy the book: they are clear, colorful, and filled with details that attract observation and extend the concepts. Some are elegantly simple, like one of twenty green and gold and blue marbles reflecting against a textured white background; others delight with their acuity—ten lollipops, each one a different color. “If you ate three of them, how many would be left?” The anticipated debate over which three should be eaten first is all part of the fun. RS

C.U. Counting (unit)


R

Gr. K-2. A fanciful story is set in Old Russia, where Babushka, who paints Easter eggs in intricate patterns in the Ukrainian tradition, has planned to enter the annual contest in Moscow. Rechenka, a wounded goose that Babushka has been nursing, accidentally breaks the eggs, but she then lays eggs that are
already decorated and are even more beautiful than the first batch. Babushka wins the prize and returns home to find Rechenka gone, a most beautiful egg left behind, and the joy of having the egg hatch. This not very convincing story is a vehicle for strong, effective paintings. Polacco achieves optimal dramatic contrast by using bold shapes against uncluttered white space and by contrasting rich colors and design details with faces in black and white. ZS


Ad

Gr. 4-6. A tongue-in-cheek robot story in which a Type One Super Housemaster robot nicknamed “Manders” spices up the summer for young Humbert, who has been parked with his uncle while his mother is out of town. It’s a sit-com setup, but the characters are so idiosyncratic that their mishaps raise the level just above formula. Episodes include making and flying a kite so big that it soars away with Manders, who eventually crash-lands through the glass ceiling of a greenhouse. Later on, Manders confuses the baking staples and uses salt instead of sugar for cakes and gravy powder for coffee, foiling the fund-raising effort of an obnoxious neighbor trying to tidy up a lovely wild park. This has some British phrases (the park, for instance, is called a common) but nothing to stop a reader from enjoying the slapstick. BH


R*

Gr. 7-12. A carefully researched history of the Holocaust details the Nazi operations calculated to solve “the Jewish problem” with slave labor and death camps. With Meltzer’s *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust* and Chaikin’s *A Nightmare in History: The Holocaust 1933-1945*, this makes a kind of trilogy. Meltzer’s book is strongest on quoting primary sources, Chaikin’s for chronological clarity, and Rogasky’s for intensely focused factual information. *Smoke and Ashes* gives, for instance, the average caloric content for Jewish food rations in the ghetto. It lists the major figures tried for war crimes and their sentences, which were often light or reduced. It systematically catalogues those individuals and governments who resisted the Nazis with help for the Jews. It includes a section (which seems misplaced between chapters on rescuers and survivors) on other “holocausts,” including the destruction of various Native American peoples by whites in this country, Armenians by Turks, and Cambodians by the Khmer Rouge. Its descriptions of the Nazi camps are probably the most specific, realistic, and thus horrifying of any in children’s literature. In these, Rogasky’s reporting is most effective. In the political analyses, her moral outrage is occasionally redundant; in the case of U.S. and British reactions, for instance, the facts speak loudest and clearest when unaccompanied by editorial commentary or rhetorical questions. On balance, however, this is a wrenching and thoroughly supported picture of the Holocaust, with historical photographs that document the horror more graphically than words. A partial list of sources is divided into eyewitness accounts and references. BH

C.U. History—World War II, 1939-1945

R  *Gr. 3-5.* Handsomely formatted color photographs and a continuous text present the work of four furniture crafters, three men and a woman with distinctively different styles. Although their designs, approaches, and backgrounds are different, all are devoted to form as well as function, and their commitment to durable aesthetics is the dominant theme here. There are one or two rough transitions, as when a full-page spread of wood grains appears unexpectedly after a discussion of general properties and problems of wood’s reaction to temperature changes. Overall, however, this articulates the ideals and personalizes the practical aspects of woodworking artistry, a book as well-formed as it is functional. BH

C.U.  Industrial Arts


M  *Gr. 5-6.* The time is 1914, the place a small mining town in Missouri, and the narrator is fourteen-year-old Lizzie, whose three brothers seem to share all the parental views about woman’s role in life that Lizzie feels are sexist. After a great deal of repetitive incidental narration, a lurid bit of plot emerges when Lizzie (in a forbidden spot) witnesses a murder, later is taken by and escapes from the murderer (he pushes her into a “churning” river), and eventually testifies at the trial at which the murderer is convicted. Alas, this is a cloyingly cute collage, in which the author relies on stretched figures of speech to achieve color, exaggeration to achieve character, and Lizzie’s perversive or tomboyish behavior to achieve comic effects. The story does have action, it has some good period details, and it has some carefully sustained references to the issue of feminine equality. ZS

D.V.  Sex roles


R  *Gr. 5-8.* As usual, Scott and Sweet have produced a book in which the text and photographs have equal strength, even to the unusual care with which the pictures are placed to make captions unnecessary in almost every instance. The subject lends itself to action pictures of grace and beauty, and to still shots, also beautiful, that extend the text. The continuous text is smooth, seldom formal, never cute or repetitive. Scott gives facts about anatomical structure and flight, about characteristics of species, about habitats and migrations, and about all the patterns of courting, mating, nesting, and rearing cygnets in a book that is pleasant to read and dependably accurate in the information it provides. The index includes italicized entries for illustrations. ZS

C.U.  Nature study


R  *Gr. 5-8.* A solidly instructive text introduces various kinds of castles as they developed historically, with chapters on castle life and warfare. Terms are defined in the text as well as the glossary, while black-and-white photographs and labelled drawings clarify descriptions. Although this is not as inspiring as David
Macaulay's *Castle*, its text is broader in coverage and also more detailed. The word "wardrobe," for instance, is traced to the "garderobe" or castle toilet, where clothes were hung because the smell kept the moths away. The geographical emphasis is on England and Wales, but other examples are incorporated as well. A concluding section on legends and ghost stories will whet the reader's appetite for more. Indexed. BH

C.U. Middle Ages (unit)


Ad Gr. 5-8. Meredith does not want to move to San Antonio. She was not consulted in this decision, she does not want to start seventh grade in a new city, and, most of all, she believes that leaving Chicago will take her even farther from her recently dead grandmother. As part of adjusting to the death and to her own new situation, Meredith writes Grandma letters: about her new friends, including a special boy; about missing her older sister, who's gone away to a school for the deaf (Tina has not been comfortable with mainstreaming—neither, it seems, is the author); and the general ups and downs of life. There's a lot packed into this short novel, but Meredith's dilemmas will be familiar to readers, and her voice is appealing. A rather quirky moral is drawn in the end: Mom has discovered and read Meredith's letters (the issue of privacy is not really addressed) which, although they've been lovely, brief, and occasional, are now shown to be evidence of some kind of unhealthy obsession on Meredith's part—the happy ending is that she stops writing them. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Handicaps, adjustment to; Moving, adjustment to


Ad Gr. 3-6. Emulating the early twentieth-century explorer Robert Scott, Robert Swan and company recently walked—without radio, dogs, or rescue beacons—from McMurdo on the Antarctic coast to the South Pole. While the subject and many photographs hold inherent interest, this record of the journey is less than compelling, interspersing an "and-I-alone-survived" tone with facts about the Antarctic, but containing little verbal or observational acuity. Part of the problem may be that too much of the book is devoted to preparations for the journey, and relatively less to the trek itself. Swan does say, however, that along with hunger, cold, and wind, the biggest problem was boredom. RS

D.V. Perseverance


R Gr. K-3. Useful maps, evocative paintings of vast, snowy distances and the slow majesty of glacial flow extend and enhance a text written by a scientist who worked for many years for the U.S. Geological Survey. He has simplified his
material appropriately and—as is usually true in this excellent series—excluded nothing of importance; his descriptions of how glaciers form, where they start, how they move, and how they leave evidence of their passing are clear and comprehensible. A revision of a 1965 title. ZS

C.U. Physical geography


Ad Gr. 2-4. Without hectoring or eat-what’s-put-in-front-of-you admonitions, this simply and clearly explains what hunger is ("real hunger is about being very poor") who is hungry and why, and (briefly—this is not a hopeful book) what can be done. With large print, not always relevant photographs (one shows a Greenlander, with neither text nor caption referring to a hunger problem in that country), and diagrams, this is organized by questions that progress logically. "Aren’t there more hungry people in some areas?" "Why don’t people grow their own food?" "Why can’t the food get around to everyone?" While discussing drought and other natural impediments to food production, Versfield maintains that money is the root of the problem. "The main reason why all the world’s food can’t get around to everyone is always the same. Food is only sold to those who can pay for it." A glossary, index, and addresses of hunger organizations are appended. RS

D.V. International understanding


R 4-7 yrs. After one hundred and sixty-six perilous walks along the barn peak, Morgan is strictly told to keep off, so she resorts to the high beams within the barn and cartwheels across the field. More than anything, Morgan wants to be a high-wire artist in the circus like her idol, the Amazing Anastasia. Morgan gets her wish when the circus comes to town, sneaking into Anastasia’s tent for a costume, and then into the Big Top. While some of his figure drawing is awkward, Wallace skillfully uses a variety of perspectives to convey Morgan’s intrepid stunts: from her walk across a barn beam viewed, dizzyingly, from below to a scary moment when Morgan, at the circus, starts to slip from the wire skewed diagonally across a double-spread. Amazing Anastasia comes to the rescue, and dubs Morgan with the honorific Magnificent. Both the pastoral scenes and the glitter of the circus are filled with flamboyant—even surreal—color, giving a not-quite-real, wish-fulfillment tenor to the book. RS


Ad Gr. 8-12. With twelve chapters on major religious groups, and one more touching on another two dozen, this has the handiness of a fact-packed reference book but also suffers from over-compression, under-explanation, and an uneasy balance between informational and anecdotal material. Two-thirds of the book is devoted to Christianity, but Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are also included. Each chapter has been vetted by clergy and/or scholars of the appropriate faith, and, overall, there is more of an emphasis on ritual, sacraments (far too
much about baptism techniques), and what happens in a service than on dogma, beliefs, or contemporary controversy. Statistics of church membership are not included. Each chapter follows essentially the same format: origin, a brief biography of founder or otherwise important leader, baptism, “things to know” (holidays, symbols), and an anecdote about a young person of the faith, which also includes details of service procedures. RS

C.U. Religious education
D.V. Interpersonal understanding


R 3-6 yrs. As imaginatively photographed as Pluckrose’s Counting, reviewed above, this contains simple experiments with appropriately simple explanations. The concept of sound waves is conveyed analogically through experimentation: “Throw a stone in a pool of water;” “How well can you hear on a windy day?” (accompanied by a photograph of an excitingly stormy beach); “Wind can blow sound waves away.” The photos are always pertinent, containing information or ideas not explicit in the text. “How can you use a tube to help you hear from further away?” is illustrated by a photo of two boys, a cardboard tube, and a wristwatch. Graphically a match for Tana Hoban, both Sound and Counting are perfect for children ready to move from observation to participation. RS

C.U. Scientific recreations


Ad Gr. 3-5. An English import has pages crowded with cartoon-style frames, colors that are subdued (fortunately, given the crowding), and a story (more or less in rhyme) that is told partly in captions and partly in balloons within the frames. This may be confusing to readers until they figure out that balloons in black and white fit, metrically, into the captions while conversational balloons with colored background do not. The story, slow-starting, tells of a small boy who visits an adult friend in the hospital. (No explanation of why the patient’s big toes are both bandaged when only one was bitten by a water-rat.) Lost, little Stanley lies down on a bed in an empty room and just, but JUST, escapes eye surgery (double eyeball transplant) as the operating room team assumes he is the blind patient they expect. Rather funny in style, and with the action readers enjoy, this nonsensical tale may not be intended to malign hospital procedures, but it could sow seeds of unwarranted doubt. ZS


M Gr. 3-5. In addition to accurate geographical information, an atlas for children should provide map-reading instruction and, ideally, a sense of the pleasures of fingertip travel. This atlas tries to do all that; its special feature is the use of colorfully detailed drawings to illustrate various industries, agricultural projects and tourist attractions on the maps, each of which is devoted to a single country or region. A key is provided for some of the symbols, and children should
enjoy guessing the others. There is, however, little consistency in their use. The symbol for tobacco growing in Kentucky is different from the one pictured in the key; rice is grown in North Korea but not in China or Japan. Some of these omissions are rectified in the accompanying text, others, including most of the tourist attractions (a football player in Minnesota) and local color (happy drummers in Jamaica) are unexplained. The writing can be odd (“In some places farmers grow vines and use the grapes to make wines”; “Some Austrians work in hotels but most people work in factories”), and British publication is occasionally evident: “You can often find Irish butter and cheese in the supermarket.” The book includes flags of the nations and many color photographs. RS


Ad Gr. 5-7. Black-and-white photographs illustrate this account of a Maine craftsman, Ralph Stanley, who follows the old trade of building wooden sailboats. After some descriptive scene-setting, the story focuses on the building of a nineteen-foot sloop, from commission through design and construction to launching. There are a few abrupt transitions, as when the reader is suddenly shifted from the scene of a race to a boatyard. The photographs are clear and well composed, though not always coordinated with the text. For instance, the sentence “When the molds are complete, they are placed on the keel in their proper location and so define the shape of the hull” appears over a picture showing the molds stacked against the wall, with the keel as yet undefined in text or photo. However, there is a glossary in the back of the book for landlubbers, and anyone can appreciate the clean lines of the vessel that takes shape in Stanley’s seasoned hands. BH


Ad Gr. 4-6. Part baseball story, part mystery, part family story, and convincingly knit together. Sixth grader Josh, who tells the story, is a dedicated baseball fan but so inept a player that his classmates call him “Roots” because he seems to freeze in his outfield position. Teased, Josh decides to accept his father’s invitation to spend a year with him, his new wife, and her daughter Barbara. The mysterious next-door neighbor, Josh realizes when he gets to the lake house, is his hero Slug Smith of the Giants. The story has elements of coincidence and contrivance, but readers will probably savor the happy ending (Slug, who’s been in hiding, rejoins the team when his confidence-building program for Josh gives him confidence also; Josh makes friends with the stepsister with whom he’s had a hostile relationship) and will relish the improvement Josh shows when he is back home and plays with his school team. Style is adequate, characterization believable but shallow. ZS

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