PRODUCTION NOTE

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*Gr. 5-7.* Eleven-year-old Lindy is still mourning for her mother, who deserted her and her father, Dan, but she takes her grief out on Dan’s new wife Millie. Millie is hardly more than a simpering child herself, and when she becomes pregnant, the family conflict erupts with such force that Dan arranges to send Lindy to stay with a detested aunt. Lindy instead chooses to live with an aristocratic neighbor, Miss Ellie, whose lonely existence convinces Lindy to learn how to love her new step-sister. This is a big cast and plot for such a brief novel, and some of the elements get shortchanged. The character of Millie, for instance, is exaggerated to the point of stereotype. Why does she have a heavy southern accent when no one else does (the novel is set in the South during the 1930s)? The relationship between Lindy and Miss Ellie’s black servant Maybelle deserves a book all by itself. On the other hand, Lindy’s pain is vividly rendered in a number of well-developed scenes. Her jealousy and the other characters’ flaws are clearly enough focused to fetch sympathy from a reader who feels injustice in her own situation and wants to make sure Lindy’s turns out right. BH

D.V. Baby, adjustment to; Stepparent-child relations


*Gr. 5-7.* Adhering to the customary phonetic guides for unfamiliar words (“...Leonardo da Vinci [da-VEEN-chee, 1452-1519]”) this addition to the “How Did We Find Out Series” has some minor flaws, but is both clear and informative. Asimov describes both the accrual of a body of knowledge about the human brain, citing the contributions of scientists of the past and present, and the structure and function of the brain and nervous system. His facts are accurate, but his coverage is far from comprehensive. There is no mention of brain malfunction in Alzheimer’s disease, although epilepsy is discussed, no reference to what may be learned from PET or MIR tests. “Sleep” is cited in the index, but not “Memory.” Too, the illustrations are not carefully labelled; for example, the diagram labelled “Corpus callosum” shows a drawing of the brain with the corpus callosum identified as on one small area in which the bundle of nerve fibers connect the hemispheres of the brain. ZS

C.U. Biology

Ad Gr. 4-6. Davey, the narrator, is eleven and is not finding it easy to adjust to farm life (his mother's idea) and is especially bothered by two bullying neighbors. What he doesn't need is to have to relinquish his bedroom to an intermittently senile great-uncle and to share his room with a surly older brother. Despite Uncle Will's times of thinking he's a child, there is a growing affection between him and Davey. In the end, Will gets lost and is saved from commitment to a nursing home when the friendly neighborhood school bus driver proposes to him and is accepted. The book has a worthy purpose, some moments of humor, and a weak ending to a plot that's stretched; however, it has sympathetic characters and sturdy writing style in a first novel that shows potential for a better successor. ZS

D.V. Adaptability; Uncle-nephew relations


Ad 4-6 yrs. A pleasant incident narrated by a girl remembering her first snowfall in a part of the country where "it rains a lot" but rarely snows. She and a friend go out in the night to build a snowman but, as the whole neighborhood turns out to help, end up with a gigantic "snow thing." There's no real plot here, though the accrual of helpers reflects the enlargement of the snowball as it rolls along; and like the snow creature, the story melts away at the end. The art work lends momentum, however. Blue-toned watercolors create playful shadows with washes on white ground and white snowflakes against dreamy color. An atmospheric seasonal read-aloud. BH


M Gr. 6-8. While her mother is on a second-marriage honeymoon, thirteen-year-old Laurel goes to a rural cabin to join her father for the summer. Daddy is working on a book dealing with parapsychological phenomena, and Laurel doesn't want him to know that she has the ability to find things through extrasensory perception. She is instantly angry (albeit not logically) because she suspects that Daddy wants her there to do housework so that he'll be free to write; she runs away and is taken in by a sympathetic neighbor whose children also have psychic powers. Unlike the Hoobler book reviewed below, the plethora of psychic characters here is gratuitous. As the summer progresses, Laurel enjoys her new friends, is helped by them to accept her ability as a finder, is pleased when that ability is used to help people in danger, and comes to understand that her father loves her and that he accepts her paranormal powers. The writing style is adequate, the appeal of the parapsychological may attract readers, and the pace of the story is well-handled; the characterization is not strong, however, nor is the plot. ZS

D.V. Father-daughter relations


R 5-8 yrs. It's hard to resist a picture book of 12 solidly noisy poems by the likes of James Reeves ("The Ceremonial Band"), David McCord ("Song of the
Train"), Elizabeth Coatsworth ("Rhyme"), and Jack Prelutsky ("The Yak"). The sound effects alone are tempting enough, from *swush* ("Fishes' Evening Song" by Dahlov Ipcar) to *bash* ("Jazz-Man" by Eleanor Farjeon). Most of the verses have a lively beat and brash imagery. Even the illustrations seem raucous, with loud colors, bold shapes, and wildly varied book design. It's all internally consistent, however, with the ludicrous logic of nonsense. Family or classroom sharing will surely provoke response. Cover your ears. BH

C.U.  Reading aloud


M Gr. 7-9. In a first novel set in a small Ohio town in the 1930s, the protagonist is ninth-grader Harry Lee, and he is instantly smitten when a new girl, Nancy, walks into his classroom. The connections between the two families (Nancy's is rich, Harry's is poor enough to do the hand laundry for Nancy's father) is so deliberate as to seem contrived: Nancy's alcoholic mother has an affair with Harry's older brother and eventually shoots him and herself. Harry sustains damage when he saves Nancy from a sledding accident, and Nancy's father is so grateful that he offers to pay Harry's college tuition. The story is uneven in pace, occasionally obtrusive in writing style "... those offhand, clownish movements that preserve personality when seven children and their parents cram a three bedroom house." The characterization is of variable quality. Not a bad first novel, but it has a concocted quality. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Family relations


SpC Gr. 4-6. An odd book that is not without its charm, this yields an unexpected amount of information on Monet once it gets to the point. The narrator is a young girl who loves flowers so much that she inspires her neighbor, a retired gardener, to take her for a visit to the garden of Claude Monet, whose art she admires. The text describes their trip, with sidelights about the painter's development and complicated family life. Meanwhile, the illustrator's watercolors sit fairly comfortably alongside reproductions of Monet's work and photographs of him and his family and beloved garden. These are too many elements to incorporate into one short book, but there's a flavor that redeems the shaky structure and an honesty about the subject's eccentric and sometimes autocratic behavior that often does not appear in juvenile biography. Though it's not for a picture book audience, this will be most useful shared by an adult; it will also appeal to the artistically gifted child and find ready use in juvenile art collections. BH

C.U. Art appreciation


R Gr. 6-9. Part of an excellent series that has included books on pen-and-ink and pencil (reviewed in the July/August issue, 1986), this explores art techniques of monoprint, stencil, woodcut, and linoleum-block printing. The text describes the materials used, the processes, and the effects, while black-and-white
illustrations on almost every page give graphic samples of each point (these are not always as clear and vivid as in earlier volumes, but they are sufficient). The authors acknowledge that more complicated methods, including etching, engraving, lithography, and silk-screening, require a hands-on introduction with experienced supervision, but the suggestions here are clear enough to follow independently. A staple for art collections in classroom or library. BH

C.U. Art—study and teaching


Ad 4-6 yrs. Although the retelling of a favorite nursery tale has some passages that are flat, the text is adequate. The illustrations are stunning in the romantic fairytale tradition: framed pictures that are equally notable for their lavish ornamental detail, their use of space and color, and their textual quality. Architectural details, artifacts, and clothing are ornate, but they escape being obtrusive because they are so deftly balanced and fused. ZS


R 2-4 yrs. A companion to Brown's *Hand Rhymes* (reviewed in the December, 1985 issue), this includes a dozen play rhymes illustrated with handsome, full-color, double-page spreads that are inset with miniature diagrams of motions to accompany each line (the latter should have been larger). Several are old favorites: “Teddy Bear,” “Wheels on the Bus,” “I’m a Little Teapot,” and “Do Your Ears Hang Low?” are mostly there for the pictures and to jog a parent’s memory. Others, such as “Animals,” are not so commonly in vogue and will serve as good controlled activity for groups: “Can you hop like a rabbit?/ Can you jump like a frog?/ Can you walk like a duck?/ Can you run like a dog?/ Can you fly like a bird?/ Can you swim like a fish?/ And be still like a good child—/ As still as this?” It’s doubtful, but it’ll be fun to try. BH

C.U. Nursery Schools


R Gr. 3-6. From “Attic” (“Along the wall/ the shadows stand/ like flowers pressed/ against the page”) to “Zoo” (“For comfort and pleasure/ where troubles are few/ there’s nothing to rival/ a room at the zoo”), Cassedy’s poems take us on an alphabetical tour through rooms of all kinds: a greenhouse, jungle gym, parlor, widow’s walk. Most of the poems have many lines (sometimes too many) of just a few words each, and if Cassedy occasionally displays an overfondness for easy alliteration, her best verse combines strong rhythms with metrical (and metaphorical) surprise. In “Imaginary Room,” for example, she asks us to clasp our hands “hollow to hollow/ as though/ you were holding/ a bird—/ and then to “let him go./ Don’t follow his flight;/ it’s the space left behind/ that we want.” Most of the poems are illustrated, not badly, but unnecessarily—Cassedy’s own humor and descriptive powers stand better on their own. RS

C.U. Poetry (unit); Reading aloud

**Ad**  
Gr. 2-4.  
Elaine Chow has just moved to Iowa from San Francisco and is feeling very much a stranger, especially when a girl in the class laughs at her tin lunch container of fried rice. It’s not long, however, before another girl, Mary Lewis, invites her to catch frogs in the creek, and the two become friends when Elaine’s father helps them make a frog-shaped kite for a class project. There’s not much of a story here, since Elaine wins her way so quickly and painlessly, and one never finds out quite why Mary Lewis is so fascinated by frogs. However, the teacher is refreshingly sympathetic and the girls’ friendship will win attention from readers who can manage the brief, easy text without strain. Illustrated with black-and-white drawings. BH  
D.V. Friendship values


**M**  
Gr. 3-5.  
The concept of a kit from which children can build things that become real is enticing. The magic object of a “sizer,” a two-headed hammer that taps things larger or smaller, is ingenious. Unfortunately, the episodes of Scott and Rachel’s adventure are distractingly disparate. In the first, they change a stock car racer (and driver Scott) from a model to life-size to match-box size, an incident that involves a neighbor and the police. In the second, they surprise a burglar and miniaturize him. And in the third, they go with him into a model castle complete with Medieval society. Any one of these would have made an outsize story, but as is, Chew just skims the surface of the action. Children who need practice on books the next step up from easy reader will appreciate the simple sentences and vocabulary, however, and enjoy projecting themselves into the game aspect of these forays. BH


**R**  
Gr. 6-9.  
Since his first novel in 1974, *I Tell a Lie Every So Often*, Clements has always given us a good read, but this is plot plus. Fourteen-year-old Laurel Bybank, named after the riverside shrub where she was abandoned in mid-nineteenth-century England, has found a “place” as servant to orphaned Mistress Alice, whose aunt and uncle would love to dispose of her before she turns eighteen and comes into her fortune. The suspense is taut, the cast irresistible; but it is wit that sets the book apart. Much of the dialogue goes beyond the function of action and characterization to play with parody. Alice constantly refers to her Intended, for instance, when it is Laurel who consistently rescues her. The girls’ friendship is the central relationship of the book, and ultimately, despite their society’s sexism, religious prejudice, and class snobbery, they both value each other above all. Laurel’s being almost smothered during her “rebirth” into a lady’s dress presages her ultimate choice to abandon the wealth and position she has so rightfully earned for further adventure to America—any reader will yearn to follow her after this revel of crafty humor. BH  
D.V. Resourcefulness; Sex roles

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R Gr. K-3. Although the paintings of birds are not always color-true (purple predominates over black in the raven’s feathers) they are correct more often than not, and they are certainly handsome. Climo does a nice job of retelling the traditional story of how the small wren was chosen king of the birds “Long ago, when the oceans were only half filled with water and just a few stars lit the sky...” This is also a *pourquoi* story, explaining how the wren got its color. The small bird used his brain when all the birds were in a race (literally) for title; he piggy-backed on the eagle and flew upward when the eagle tired, so that he was the last to return to the earth, scorched brown and gray by the sun. The story is retold with good pace and flow and with good balance of dialogue and exposition. ZS


M Gr. K-2. Black-and-white drawings, many of which seem crowded with details that vitiate their basic strength as compositions, illustrate a story with a strong message: be proud if you are different, there are others like you. Here the unhappy boy, Sudan, is teased because of his hair, which “giggled when he talked and roared when he walked and often sprouted wings.” (The drawings show hair that looks like spaghetti). He runs into a street circus where all the performers have hair like his, and thereafter he’s happy about it. The text is poetic (wandering in and out of rhyme) but not convincing either as realistic narrative or as borderline fantasy. ZS


R Gr. 7-10. Morgan, the narrator, and Jimmy are seventeen; their families are close and they’ve been friends since they were babies. Best friends. It’s Jimmy who helps Morgan get over her shame at being struck dumb while on stage, just as she has helped him over a failed dance audition. When Jimmy is killed in an automobile accident, Morgan goes through the classic cycles of grief, feeling guilty, angry, stunned, and denying the reality of her loss. For a first novel, this is impressive in style (particularly dialogue) and narrative flow; while the pace is uneven and the focus narrow, the characters are strongly drawn and the protagonist is convincing and sympathetic. ZS

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Friendship values


R 5-8 yrs. Set against a background of impressive but gracefully restrained paintings, these fables have been smoothly abbreviated with morals written in Chinese calligraphy beside the English. The dominant image is a fan-shaped frame arching the double-page spreads, each in a different hue, where delicately stylized animals dramatize the stories. Some will be familiar, as in the tale of the blind
mice who feel different parts of the elephant and so arrive at different conclusions about his total appearance. Others will be less so—the struggle between a crane and a clam that are both captured by a fisherman because neither will let the other go (“In the face of disaster, don’t waste time arguing”). Although the effect of both art and proverb is quiet and has a mature appeal, each selection is brief enough to hold younger children though a read-aloud/discussion session of several stories at one time. Even middle-grade children who are studying fables can be drawn into this picture book if they are challenged to consider the textual variants here and the graphic concepts of Oriental art represented by Demi’s studied work. BH

C.U. Language Arts


Ad 3-6 yrs. There’s a funny pink nose poking out of a bush: “Whose tubby snout?” Turning the page reveals the rest of the aardvark, and so on, as noses and toes and quills and tails reveal themselves as appendages to mostly familiar (excepting the pangolin) African animals. Not new, but young children love this kind of guessing game, and Drescher’s illustrations of a young boy moving from animal to animal (hoisted up a tree by an elephant only to encounter a giraffe) are brightly colored and imaginatively composed. The same boy appears in the companion volume, *Whose Furry Nose,* a similar guide to Australian animals. The animals here—spotted cuscus, numbat, koala and kangaroo—are less likely to be known to children, and some of the clues (“whose bright eyes?”) are too amorphous to allow a reasonable chance of recognition. Both books have facts appended about the animals. RS

D.V. Perceptual acuteness


Ad 4-6 yrs. Black, white, and yellow, the scratchy and lively pictures in this small book have more substance than does the story they tell. This doesn’t quite achieve what a wordless book should, since the pictures tell a story that requires more knowledge (visual signs for wind currents and a conventional depiction of bends in a river) than most young children have. Two monkeys use an umbrella, dropped by a zoo visitor, to sail into the sky, float in the ocean, and finally reach a colony of their species in a tropical forest. ZS


R Gr. 4-6. A companion volume to *I Am Phoenix,* this includes 14 poems for two voices. All of the poems focus on insects, their movements, voices, appearance, and metaphoric significance. One of the best is “Digger Wasp,” narrated by the female as she digs a protective nest for the young she will never see (my young will/ know me well./ When they care/ for their own children”). There’s lots of humor: a book louse begins, “I was born in a / fine old edition of
Schiller.” “Whirligig Beetles” has the same frenetic quality as the bugs’ movements, which are also captured by pencil drawings swirling around the page. Some of the poems make better use of two voices than others; in “Honeybees,” for instance, there is an amusing back-and-forth between a worker and a queen which ends in a simultaneous chant, “Truly, a bee’s is the/ worst (best)/ of all lives.” The poems are of necessity simple on the page, but the sound effects are playful and the dual voice form is a natural for sociable children who want to share the joyful noise of reading aloud. BH

C.U. Choral speaking


Gr. 6-8. Set in Britain in “very early Christian times,” according to jacket copy, this is a long effective meshing of reality and fantasy, as told by a nine-year-old waif (called Wise Child) who is nine when she begins her story. Deserted by her mother, longing for her seafaring father, Wise Child is taken in by a woman who is an outcast, Juniper. A sorceress and healer, Juniper is tolerated in their Scottish village—until bad times bring accusations of her evildoing. By the time Wise Child is old enough to know and love Juniper, her vicious mother tries to take her daughter away from the one person who has loved and protected her. This is the author’s first novel for children; her readers will surely hope it is not her last. First published in England, the story is impressive both for its style and its structure, and the characterizations and relationships are as capably handled as the period details. The jacket art, by Leo and Diane Dillon, is a gravely beautiful painting in medieval mood. ZS


R 3-5 yrs. It would be hard to go wrong with this one. Can you imagine, the text begins, one whale wearing a veil, two ducks driving trucks, three giraffes taking photographs? The double-page spreads go to 12 and the book concludes with a pictorial recapitulation, handsome and effective. Can you imagine a counting book that has colorful pictures, animal subjects, the appeals of rhyme and nonsense, and the digits (large scale) followed by the word in lower case? ZS


M Gr. 5-7. Like the last book in this series about Abby Jones, (Loretta P. Sweeney, *Where Are You?* reviewed in the November, 1983 issue), this has the junior detective leaping to the wrong conclusions and tripping over the right ones by accident. Here Abby is trying to find a sinister spy she reads about in the newspaper but locates instead the runaway girl her police friend, Garcia, has been tracing. The “spy” turns out to be innocent (Abby finds the missing classified film in his baby’s crib mattress), and the plot turns out to be concocted rather than developed. Abby’s sidekick Pottsy is always stumbling behind with something of the same mystification readers may feel as the story jumps from one incident to another. This has some humorous dialogue that may appeal to mystery fans, but it’s frenetically contrived. BH
Ad

Gr. 2-4.

A more cohesive and believable plot than its prequel, Robin Hill, this recounts Robin’s summer friendship with a new neighbor, Jenny. The two girls exchange books, gifts, and messages in their Basket Express, but Jenny’s troubled home life steadily deteriorates until her parents’ decision to divorce and to farm her out to distant grandparents. This is shown in marked contrast to Robin’s very proper family, which has a 1950s formality of behavior codes. A subplot of Robin’s estrangement from another girl seems obvious and unnecessary, but the didactic tone is offset by a real warmth in the episodes that develop the two main characters’ relationship. Easy transitional reading. BH

D.V. Friendship values


R 5-7 yrs. What child has not “been afraid of the dark? Of being alone in the night when strange things float by that seem to follow you...?” Osa, bright and brave in the sunlight, is terrified at night. One day she gets lost and stumbles onto the house of the Wise Woman. There she falls asleep and dreams that she’s “floating up through the air like the butterfly, flying along with the moon high in the night sky over her village!” From that perspective she sees that the night is not dark at all but filled with the light of stars and moon. With the same graphic grace that distinguished The Village of Round and Square Houses, Grifalconi elaborates an African setting with swirling lines, rounded shapes, and intense hues of gold, blue, and green. The cradling of the child by the loving female figures is, in itself, a reassuring aspect in a book that projects comfort. BH

D.V. Fear, overcoming


R 4-6 yrs. A tale that may be familiar to storytellers as “How Brother Rabbit Fooled the Whale and the Elephant” is played out here with a different set of characters. The trickster is a chameleon, and the bullies are a leopard and a crocodile. The latter torments Chameleon until he challenges them to a tug of war and fools them into pulling against each other instead of him. The vividly hued, strongly patterned paintings offer close perspectives from which the animals seem to leap out at the viewer against their African landscapes. A striking selection for group presentations. BH

C.U. Storytelling


R 3-5 yrs. Two filmic, fast-moving photodocumentaries qualify as introductions to bird life for the younger listener. With a poetic text of a few
words per page, the double-spread color photographs, sometimes inset with smaller contrasting photos, capture sensuous impressions of feathers, flight, or floating. In a few cases, the images interfere with the information: "Birds are eggs, waiting," for instance, may have to be explained or rephrased to avoid confusion. If the books err on the side of aesthetic appeal, however, they still give the audience a better sense of bird life than a volume of prosaic detail. The photographs are vivid and arranged for arresting contrasts, as in the pictures showing Dark-eyed Juncos and Northern Pintail ducks against snowy backgrounds, followed by a Curve-billed Thrasher in a summer desert setting. For each book, an afterword identifies the birds in every picture, including, in the second title, descriptive notes. BH

C.U. Nature study


Ad Gr. 4-6. In a sequel to *Charlotte Cheatham: Master of Disaster* (reviewed in the January, 1986 issue) Charlotte has decided that she is no longer going to tell lies and get into trouble because of them. Her solution is to use her imagination in a more constructive way, by writing a book. Episodes of this crisis-a-minute thriller are read aloud to her classmates, who are enthralled—but Charlotte becomes unhappily aware that she’s writing junk just to be popular, and that a domineering classmate is trying to take over. Her wooing of others also causes a breach with her best friend, and Charlotte finally decides to quit and throws the manuscript away. And plans to write a play. This has an affectionate humor, it deals with interests and activities that are nicely gauged for a middle-grades audience, and the writing style is light and smooth. Minor characters tend to be stereotypical and Charlotte’s acceptance of their interference is not quite credible, but Charlotte herself is well drawn, and the interpolated episodes of her manuscript are sure to amuse. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations


Ad Gr. 6-9. Fifteen, Allie has known all her life that her psychic powers have made her unwanted at home and unliked at the institution where she has been imprisoned. Now she must adjust to Dr. Chill’s home (where she is one of a small group of children with parapsychological abilities) and to his evident delight in her telekinetic and telepathic prowess. Hoobler creates a believable setting for a story in which the various abilities of the children are used to help each other when danger threatens. As a novel about Psi phenomena, this is successful, with good momentum and style, with interesting characters and an element of suspense; unfortunately, it is weakened by the lurid and improbable plot developments at the end of the story. ZS

D.V. Friendship values


Ad Gr. K-2. From the first dark pages (a cricket’s “tunnel-dark” home) to the vibrant explosion of light and shimmering colors, Ed Young’s paintings dominate
and outshine the text. The pictures are romantic, the story both saccharine and trite, as a small cricket, convinced he is ugly, finally believes a friend who says he is beautiful in his own special way. So the cricket stops wishing he were a butterfly. It may not affect the read-aloud audience, but those who read to them will note that on some pages the background colors make the print difficult to read.


R

Gr. 7-12. This not only describes anorexia and bulimia but also aspires to guide young people who have both diseases. That's a tall order, and the book sometimes assumes an irritating self-promotional note along with its self-help program. However, the information is extensive and invaluable for teenagers, including discussions of self-image, body image, signs of eating disorders, ways to get help, and advice on helping others (victims of eating disorders often become self-centered bullies). The format is broken up by cartoons, quotes from teenagers, questionnaires for the reader, lists of symptomatic behavior, and lots of section


headings for readers who wish to browse. A one-page bibliography suggests books for further reading, plus four medical titles. Appendices list referral sources by state, facts about nutrition (with an analysis of fast foods), and a final author’s note on discussing eating problems with a therapist. BH

C.U. Psychology
D.V. Self-evaluation


R Gr. 5-7. When different authors contribute to a series of uniform excellence, some credit surely belongs to the series editor. Most, of course, to the author, and here Kudlinski has provided a model of brief biography. The tone is appreciative rather than reverential, the balance between Carson’s personal and professional lives is nicely maintained, and the writing is clear, direct, and informative. A pioneer environmentalist, Carson was also an elegant writer, and her biographer informs readers of both those facts as well as of the subject’s integrity. An appended note provides information on Kudlinski’s research methods. ZS


Ad Gr. 1-3. Directing young readers to the zoo for observation, Lauber introduces them to some basic facts about the anatomical structure and hunting patterns of snakes. The selection and organization of material are excellent, and the style is clear except in one case: the statement that “Snakes die if temperatures are below freezing” is not true unless readers deduce that she means outside of the “safe shelters for winter” that are described. The full-color illustrations are attractive but cartoonish: one snake looks like an eel and several hatching from their eggs look like worms happily esconced in cotton balls. The book is nonetheless valuable for the information it provides and for the friendly presentation of a subject that frightens many children. BH

C.U. Zoology


R Gr. 1-3. This is one of those books you want to put in every six-year-old’s hands—personable, easy-to-read historical fiction about a period when books were hard to get and reading was a privilege. The oldest of three children, Clara works alongside her parents. “There were no schools for farm children” (here a date would have been helpful, though it’s provided in the afterword as 1905). On a rare trip to town, she looks longingly at the general store’s “book station” but is forbidden by her father: “Books are for rich people. Farm people like us do not have time to read.” Finally he is persuaded otherwise by a pioneer librarian in the first travelling bookwagon, and Clara gets her chance at learning to read. The story builds naturally in several episodes, and the style is contained without becoming contrived. The full-color illustrations are somewhat doll-like, with the flavor more
of a Pennsylvania Dutch than a Maryland setting, but the rounded shapes and
blended tones are comfortable to look at. A good follow-up to Carol Purdy's Least of All, reviewed in the March 1987 issue. BH

D.V. Education, valuing and seeking


M Gr. 4-6. Since their parents had died, Joshua and Amy (13 and 11) had been living with their punitive, nasty Aunt Vooch. Handcuffed, they escape, hoping to find the grandparents who live in Manhattan and whom they have never met. They join forces with a magician, Mortimer Wintergreen, who has a capricious magic hat that (when in the mood) helps the three evade the relentlessly pursuing Aunt Vooch. Wintergreen (who seems part Micawber, part W.C. Fields) is tediously loquacious and the trio's adventures are frenetic as Aunt V. gives chase. There are some comic moments, but for the most part this is a fantasy so contrived and banal that it's hard to believe it is by the author of books as sensitive as Alan and Naomi and Three Friends. ZS


Ad Gr. K-2. Clean, simply drawn illustrations show a calm and happy child whose mother stays with her except during the x-ray procedure. Much of the time the assistant as well as the dentist is on hand, as Annie is examined, has her teeth cleaned and x-rayed, gets a fluoride treatment, and demonstrates how thoroughly she uses a toothbrush. The format seems artificial in those parts of the story that are broken by sets of questions; for example, "Who is going to brush her teeth? Annie. What will she use? See if you can guess," and the pictures show a hairbrush, a paintbrush, and a toothbrush. It's nice to soothe a prospective patient, but just a hint of the fact that there is such a thing as a cavity would not have been amiss. ZS


R Gr. 4-7. Two boys want to square things with a bully; an old man wonders who will give him a birthday party; shy lovers long to speak; and an Indian swami hears a call... from the Great Dimpole Oak, "hundreds of feet tall, tens of feet thick, with roots as big as fire hoses coiled around its base." The tree is the answer to many wishes in this gently satiric contemporary fable, bringing together hopes and rewards in the unlikeliest of ways, all the while instilling a faith in community. The townspeople, for example, rally around the tree to protect it from the farmer upon whose land it grows; that lonely man believes the demonstration is his birthday party, and so it becomes. While the novel could use a bit of tightening (the swami is really from another story), it generally manages to blend high and low comedy to a resonating end. RS

D.V. Community life; Friendship values

Ad  
*Gr. 6-9.* Bryony (called Brian) is 16, and she detests Brooklyn, to which her family has just moved. It's dirty, it's dangerous, and it lacks the green expanses she'd loved in their old home in the country. By slight contrivance (father away, mother called to join him, sitter quitting), the three children are left alone and decide to keep the fact a secret and to cope. By the time their parents return, Brian and her two siblings have learned to keep house, have even renovated a room as a Christmas present for Mom and Dad, and have learned that there are some nice facets to their new neighborhood. Brian, especially, has had a change of heart, and it's in large part due to learning to know and love the Puerto Rican boy next door. This is adequately written, but it is formulaic in structure, a message-bearing variant on the familiar themes of adaptability and learning to live without supervision. ZS

D.V. Adaptability; Self-reliance

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Ad  
*Gr. 6-8.* First published in England, this and the Sproule book reviewed below follow a series format, with oversize pages printed in three columns (two wide, one narrow and with smaller print) and broken by irregular and unattractive use of color photographs—many of which are attractive or informative in themselves. The rigidity of the arrangement is evident in the assignment of exactly two pages for every topic. There is an index and there is a map, albeit of poor quality; the text is only adequately written, giving facts but colored by an advertising brochure approach. ZS

C.U. Social studies

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R  
*Gr. 1-2.* In a modest way, this is an exemplary story for the beginning independent reader: vocabulary controlled (but not rigidly), story line sturdy, plot not taxing, subject appealing, print large, and pages uncluttered. It also gives some information about getting and caring for a pet, it advocates consideration for animals, and it tells the story of a child who gets just what he's wanted for his birthday, a kitten. Line and wash drawings are a bit repetitive, but they have vitality and humor, and they're nicely integrated with the text on almost every page. ZS

C.U. Reading, beginning  
D.V. Pets, care of

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Ad  
*Gr. 6-8.* "On an ordinary Monday... I suddenly found myself (1) in love, (2) in the detective business, and (3) confused about both these things." Eddie's pursuit of his beloved, whose family won't sanction dating, is intermittent and is not really integrated into the forward movement of the plot, which has to do with the investigations of Eddie and his buddy Jack into an old mystery. The clue
is uncovered (literally) when drought lowers the lake level and exposes a human skeleton. Clues (some misleading) point to friends and family members. Eventually all is made more or less clear, but the suspicions, red herrings, and repeated musings about who did what to whom, and why, make the whole, although adequately written, less than convincing. ZS


*R*  Gr. 5-7. First published in England and winner of the Guardian Award for children's fiction, this is a lively and well-structured suspense story. His father had left them, and Henry was living alone with his mother in a large, rambling house, in which Henry's room was a junk museum. A new item in his collection is the leg of a fashion mannequin, which it soon becomes clear is desperately wanted by some local thugs, who eventually steal it. Henry's sure it is related to a jewelry store robbery, but it takes the help of an adult cousin and the right combination of persistence and luck for the mystery to be solved, not without danger to Henry. This has good pace, strong characters and dialogue, and a believably happy ending. ZS


The following review is rerun from last month's issue because two lines were deleted in typesetting.

*R*  Gr. 1-3. A small segment of Revolutionary War history (cited, in an author's note, is an excerpt from a letter written by Abigail Adams) is used as the basis for a simply written piece of fiction for beginning independent readers. A greedy Boston merchant, hoarding coffee so he can raise the price, is set upon by a group of angry women who force him to surrender his keys and then help themselves to coffee beans. The author begins by focusing on two small sisters who report the merchant's behavior and set off the spark for the women's action. This is just right for the intended audience, since it's easy to read, has action, punishes avarice, and doesn't give more historical background than a young child can absorb. ZS

C.U. Reading, beginning


*Ad*  Gr. 4-6. In this third book about Veronica Schmidt, the protagonist, who knows she has a reputation as a show-off, decides to give up a chance to have the lead in a school musical and to coach pretty, popular Kimberly. Unfortunately, Kimberly sings in a monotone. Also unfortunately, Veronica doesn't have the piano needed for the secret coaching lessons she's promised. Second plot: in response to a letter from her father (divorced), Veronica, with unconvincing stupidity, decides that he has invited her and a friend for Christmas. She does visit him, breaks up a relationship that he has with a calculating woman, makes a new friend, and comes home to a pleasant reunion with friends. This is pleasantly light, often amusing, nicely written but weak in plot and characterization. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Father-daughter relations

**Ad**  
Gr. 5-7. A sequel to *Fair-Weather Friends* (reviewed in the May 1987 issue) focuses on Pink, the boy jilted by one of the main characters in the first book. Readers will need to be familiar with that episode to really appreciate the intensity of Pink's reactions against what he perceives as summer vacationers' snobbery toward Plymouth Islanders. At stake is his friendship with wealthy Mackie Cunningham and his attendance of a private school to which Mr. Cunningham awards scholarships. The blow-up between the boys' fathers, who had been friends before a similar conflict alienated them, underscores the theme of social-class barriers. The plot is somewhat mechanical and the style occasionally stiff, but the situation seems genuine, as do the protagonist's efforts to recognize his motives more honestly. BH

D.V. Economic differences, understanding; Friendship values


**R**  
Gr. 5-9. An oversize volume that's liberally illustrated without becoming cluttered, this is organized into 28 chapters. Each is about four pages long, from a discussion of early nomadic tribes to an assessment of contemporary international Jewry. Examples of other topics include the Babylonian exile, Jewish life in early Christian Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, Messianism during the Middle Ages, the rise of Zionism, the Holocaust, the Sinai Campaign and Yom Kippur War, and problems of Jews in the Eastern Bloc. Necessarily generalized, these quick-surveys will nevertheless serve to introduce students to important people, incidents, movements, and issues of religious and political change, with clarifying maps, diagrams, time line charts, and good reproductions of historic art works and photographs. The advantage of this volume over a standard Jewish encyclopedia in a school or public library is its chronological sequence and readability as a browsing item; the book can function either for reference or for home/classroom study. BH

C.U. History


**Ad**  
Gr. K-2. In the first picture book he has written as well as illustrated, Sis shows that his artistic proficiency is not matched by his literary prowess. The bare, thin plot is that a rhino's three friends (a red, a blue, and a yellow bird) leave him when each is attracted by something of their color (a blue lake, bunches of yellow bananas, a field of "red" poppies that are bright pink) and then rejoin the rhino when threatened by a predator of matching color. Interesting compositions have a strong sense of color and design, but they are used to impose the story rather than illustrate or even complement it. ZS


**M**  
Gr. 7-9. Orphaned and living with his grandmother, adolescent Jim Taylor (the narrator) is trapped into danger and flight after he has by chance picked up a
computer disk that's the property of a criminal band in an English town. Meeting the boy who lost the disk, a waif named Casey, Jim realizes they are both being followed by vindictive gang members. What ensues is a chase-and-escape story that is often exciting but not always convincing. It has good pace, adequate style, a weak plot, lots of violence and some rough language, and some consideration of the ethical concepts Jim feels but Casey does not. This isn't an impressive first novel, but it does show potential. ZS


Ad  Gr. 3-5. The third in a series about Adam Joshua (*The Kid Next Door and Other Headaches: Stories About Adam Joshua* was reviewed in the June, 1984 issue), this relates five episodes centered on school. In the first, Adam Joshua moves all around the room before he finally settles on the seat in which he started out; in the second, he resolves his jealousy of his baby sister getting his dog's attention while he's at school; in the third, he steals and returns a library book he loves; the fourth is a Halloween scenario, and the fifth is the title show-and-tell struggle between him and his enemy, a show-off named Elliot. The stories depend heavily on running jokes about various members of the class. These can get a little wearing and, like all classes, occasionally frenetic. But Smith has an ear for children's dialogue and obsessions, and readers will find here a laughable microcosm of school room reactions. BH


Ad  Gr. 4-6. Claudia, youngest of four siblings, is the first to meet the vixen that has the power of human speech, and it is at the vixen's behest that she brings the other three to a deserted house to hear the animal's urgent plea. It is the mirrors of the house that provide entry into another world; it is the vixen's mistress, the sorceress Morgana, who is being held captive in that world and who must be rescued if her evil captor is not to pursue a plan that will endanger humankind. As is true of so many first novels of fantasy, this is heavy with magical devices and with dangerous confrontations. It has adequate pace and writing style, some fairly consistent and substantial characterization, but an overwrought plot and an unconvincing duping of oblivious parents. ZS


Ad  Gr. 6-8. Reprinted from a series published in London, this has a cluttered format (see Moore review above) and a space control (two pages per topic) that militates against giving more attention to major topics that deserve fuller treatment. As in other books in the series, the text gives some attention to historical and geographical information, but focuses on daily life in city and suburbs. Since each of the two-page assignments is half taken by photographs, the coverage is, if accurate, superficial. The index is adequate, the map is not. ZS

**R** Gr. K-3. Effective paintings in dark, vivid colors show a small black boy and his grandfather who go out on the porch during a storm-caused blackout. Thomas discovers that smells and sounds seem more clear in the dark, he comforts his frightened cat, and he has a discussion with Grandfather that leads to an anecdote about another night, another storm, another frightened pet. Gently, in a story told (deftly, smoothly, subtly) primarily in dialogue, Grandfather makes it possible for Thomas to admit his own fear, previously denied, because Grandfather had once been a child frightened by a storm. This doesn’t have a lot of action, but it abounds in nuance and should have a lot of impact. ZS

D.V. Fears, overcoming; Grandparent-child relations


**Ad** Gr. 5-7. Christy Swan, the narrator, is adjusting to her first year in middle school, her first crush (Jeff), her acrimonious older sister Sarah, and her first experience as a star in a children’s musical—she’s Peter in *Peter Pan.* The story flows cheerily along, with Christy acquiring a science project, establishing a nice relationship with Jeff, fracturing a wrist but keeping her lead role in the play, and helping to solve the dilemma of a classmate whose temporarily upset home life has affected his performance at school. The writing style is fairly smooth, the characterization is adequate but lacks depth, and the whole is diminished by a lack of focus or impact. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Friendship values


**Ad** 1-3 yrs. Small, square board books have minimal text and bright, clear pictures set off by plenty of clean space. Each presents a concept: *My Friends* shows baby animals like a colt, chicks, a puppy, a fawn; *In a Red House* introduces colors, using objects as familiar as a ball and a chair and blocks; *Where We Sleep* begins, “Bunnies have burrows/ fawns have thickets/ puppies have beds . . .” The book is sturdy and attractive, but some of the terms (thickets, for example) seem inappropriate for the very young child, and the material is hardly innovative in concept or execution. ZS


**Ad** Gr. 4-6. A sequel to *Moth-Kin Magic* (reviewed in the January 1984 issue) details the return of Ripple, her mother Fern, Uncle Kane, Pan, Crick, and Lissa to the clan’s beloved river. There’s a new character, Old Ivy, introduced here, but the emphasis is on narrow escapes from the “giants” that once captured the tiny folk in a bottle. Simply getting across a playground and over a wall involves a
series of life-threatening situations, and these become repetitious in pace though they’re varied in incident. The writing here is not as sensitive and skilled as in Tapp’s realistic novel, *Smoke from the Chimney*, but young fantasy buffs will enjoy the adventurous dimension, the diminutive perspective on a human world, and the magic Ripple feels with her first wings. BH


R Gr. 9-12. In another mature and sensitive novel, Ure begins with the older of two adolescents, Richard, who has just had a violent quarrel with his father and has been told to get out of the house. Aimlessly drifting about the English countryside, he gives a lift to another teenager, Bonny. Richard’s a university student, Bonny a shrewd drifter, uneducated and amoral, whose tough lover, Jake, has left her. This is not a romance; in fact, it becomes increasingly clear as the story goes on that Richard is gay. Bonny does not know until, at the end of the book, he tells her. She’s disappointed, but she likes Richard and is aware that he has encouraged her to get an education and have a more satisfying life than that of a grocery clerk. And Bonny has been good for Richard: in the time they have spent together, he has absorbed some of her resiliency and courage. This is a mature and candid story, told with both momentum and nuance; minor as well as major characters have depth, and they are skillfully developed through dialogue as well as exposition. ZS

D.V. Friendship values; Self-confidence


Ad Gr. K-2. The melodic line—sometimes broken and used as a separate caption for the pictures—is provided for each of the “story songs” in this collection. The pictures are drawn in jaunty cartoon style, the colors are light, not-too-bright pastels, with most of the illustrations in frames or strips on unfortunately crowded, busy pages. ZS

C.U. Recreation


R Gr. 3-5. The authors describe twenty tricks involving cards, string, paper, glue and other easily acquired or prepared materials. A brief introduction lays out the principles of illusion: sleight of hand, misdirection, patter, gimmicks, timing, and, most of all, practice. Although none of the tricks are too difficult, a few may require adult guidance, depending on the reading capabilities or dexterity of the child. Several involve numbers and left/right-handed maneuvers (without mentioning reversals for left-handed children) and some are merely jokes (“the vanishing cracker” is a pretty crumby trick). The text itself has the bantering tone of a magic show, and the cartoon drawings, though they limit the audience to younger children, include helpful diagrams. BH

Ad  Gr. 5-8. Meg learns, after having just landed her first lead role in a play, that she’ll miss the chance because her divorced mother’s shipping her off for a summer visit to her father. Adding to her misery are warning dreams (which have proved prophetic in the past) and, once she’s with her father, the realization that he’s on the verge of a new marriage with his landlady. This woman’s husband was killed in a car accident after being accused of theft, and his son is haunted by the unsolved crime. It’s Meg’s dreams that lead to the recovery of valuables from the bank embezzlement. The plot is formulaic mystery, but the protagonist’s fears and insecurities lend some depth, as does the conclusion, in which both adolescents have to recognize their parents’ flaws and their own separate identities. BH

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Divorce, adjustment to; Stepparent-child relations


M  Gr. 3-5. Format and game-appeal embellishments weaken the reference function of an oversize book that has adequate organization, good maps, and a full index of names that includes map coordinates. The format is tarted up, alas, with puzzles, quizzes, activity suggestions, and games, on pages that are either in two or three columns, with photographs, drawings and boxed inserts. Perhaps the most serious weakness of the book is in the arbitrary treatment; for example, color pictures of flags for India, the U.K. and the U.S. but not for China, Japan, or France. Boxed material ranges from Spanish coins, a mnemonic for the Great Lakes (under “Canada”), a stamp showing the earth from the moon (under “Eastern USA”) and labels from Italian food exports. Some browsing interest here, and some facts supplied, but this doesn’t substitute for a good atlas. ZS

C.U. Geography


R  Gr. 6-9. Third in a science fantasy trilogy (*Dragon’s Blood* was reviewed in the July, 1982 issue, *Heart’s Blood* in the June, 1984 issue) is the story of the runaways, Jakkin and Akki, who are in hiding with their telepathic dragons. The setting is a mythical planet geared to the breeding of fighting dragons, and Yolen does a very good job (again) of making the bonds between human and dragon credible. Jakkin and Akki are trapped in the underground refuge of a throwback community, so the story has danger and suspense in addition to the intriguing and well-realized conception of a vigorous if violent future society. ZS
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