EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH ANNOTATIONS

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

* * *

THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS (ISSN 0008-9036) is published monthly except August by The University of Chicago Press, 5720 S. Woodlawn, Chicago, Illinois, 60637, for The University of Chicago Graduate Library School. Betsy Hearne, Editor; Zena Sutherland and Roger Sutton, Associate Editors. An advisory committee meets weekly to discuss books and reviews, which are written by the editors. The members are Isabel McCaul, Hazel Rochman, Robert Strang, and Elizabeth Taylor.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year, $24.00; $16.00 per year for two or more subscriptions to the same address; $15.00, student rate; in countries other than the United States, add $3.00 per subscription for postage. Japanese subscription agent: Kinokuniya Company Ltd. Single copy rate: from vol. 25, $2.50; vols. 17 through 24, 50¢. Reprinted volumes 1-16 (1947-1963) available from Kraus Reprint Co., Route 100, Millwood, New York 10546. Volumes available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Complete volumes available in microfiche from Johnson Associates, P.O. Box 1017, Greenwich, Conn. 06830. Checks should be made payable to The University of Chicago Press. All notices of change of address should provide both the old and new address. Postmaster: Send address changes to THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS, The University of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE. Address all inquiries about subscriptions to The University of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE. Review copies and all correspondence about reviews should be sent to Betsy Hearne, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois.

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New Titles for Children and Young People


R Gr. 4-6. Eddie hoped his little sister would like the dragon, elegantly crafted of brass and with transparent blue glass wings. Mina didn’t like it at all; she said it was alive and it was watching her—but then Mina was only six. It soon becomes clear to the reader as it does to Eddie, that the dragon does come to life, and that it acts as an instrument of vengeance against those who are unpleasant to Eddie. The fantasy element is nicely incorporated into a story that has perceptive treatment of familial and peer relationships, of Eddie’s growing self-confidence in dealing with a bully and overcoming shyness, and of the delicate balance of classroom life, especially for a child with cerebral palsy. Well done. ZS

D.V. Brothers-sisters; Handicaps, adjustment to; Shyness, overcoming


R 4-6 yrs. The young narrator describes a snowy night when she and Papa observe their custom of feeding the deer. After scattering grain, corn, and apples around the salt lick, they watch two fawns cavort in the drifts. The text is brief and clear, with no pretense to poetic rapture but with a distinctively voiced respect for the natural setting. Baker’s watercolors, like those in her acclaimed picture book *The Third-Story Cat* (BCCB 11/87), are soft-edged, spaciously composed, and filtered with blue and white tints that seem to light up the rural scenery. A book that raises environmental consciousness by emphasizing the aesthetic rather than the didactic. BH

C.U. Nature study
D.V. Animals, kindness to


M Gr. 3-4. Crisp, finely detailed paintings do little to redeem a thin, rather precious story. One day, walking home from school, Addie spies a mysterious box in an alley. The box contains mittens—magic ones, it turns out—that cause snow to fall whenever Addie puts them on. After causing

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pleasant, innocuous snowfalls for a few days, Addie decides to conjure up a blizzard for Christmas . . . and finds she can’t get the mittens off again. Why not? There’s no clue. Anyway, “suddenly” the wind unravels the mittens and the snow stops. The fantasy has the appeal of Christmas magic, but it lacks consistency and direction. RS

M Gr. 6-8. Artistic Louisa knows she can count on certain things: on her own brilliance, on a perfect summer with her grandfather, on “things that never changed. Like the sun and the stars and the farm and Tat.” Of course, readers know immediately that things will change—and should, as far as Louisa’s personality goes. She alternates between cranky and vituperative, but never deviates from selfish obsession with her own importance. Although this may be an accurate portrait, it gets rather wearing, with various symbols—a gravestone, an eclipse, and representative incidents or characters (especially Louisa’s nasty Aunt Ruth)—insistently asserting the theme. By the time the local boy has fallen for Louisa’s sweet sister Meg and the farm has been sold, one is almost relieved to hear Tat’s concluding sermon, where even the symbols are explained: “‘Things change. That’s what life is about.’ Now Tat was saying it, too: change. He was saying that the grave she had seen as a symbol of permanence really represented the fact that things had to change. . . . ‘We’ve got to be brave enough to go on.’” Occasional stylistic lapses include some truly unfortunate misplaced modifiers (“With Lee overalls, a blue work shirt, and a blue-visored cap over his sleek, midnight black hair that stayed on whether he was indoors or out . . .”). There’s a real sense of setting here, as well as a diligently structured concept, but the development is labored and didactic. BH  
D.V. Family relations; Self-evaluation

Ad Gr. 3-6. Unlike Bradman’s and Moseley’s pop-up books reviewed below, this is more a display item than a picture book. Eight double spreads alternate pop-out wooded scenes with close-ups of leaf clusters captioned for identification. A diagrammatic numbered inset will help readers put tree and leaf together, and a panel of text describes the type of environment depicted: deciduous, coniferous, grassland, or pond and marsh. While the four landscapes are arresting and do show the shapes of the trees, there’s no real reason why they should be paper-engineered three dimensionally. The scale, proportions, and perspective could have been projected just as easily—and more durably—on one plane. In addition to playing an integral part in fictional plots, mechanical devices can serve a function in non-fiction, witness science pop-ups that can be dialed to demonstrate seasonal change or manipulated to show how inventions work. This one is shelf art. BH  
C.U. Nature study

Ad Gr. 9-12. "The hard glint of her eyes is not entirely rational, but I'm past caring. She is more than a girl; she is something else, so compelling it chokes me." Well, that's Terri, a blonde on the edge; and Dan, an alienated high school senior, is irresistibly drawn to her. This winner of the publisher's contest for new teen writers is an essentially well-structured novel, with some subtleties of character development, but it badly needs editing. Every event prompts another childhood memory from Dan; some of these are telling, most are extraneous. Dan is second-best on the school swim team, a situation nicely paralleled with Terri's status as a failed dancer, but here again there is too much detail of irrelevant sports action. Despite the problem novel trappings (Terri turns out to be manic-depressive) this is the old story of *la belle dame sans merci* who loves and breaks and leaves her tortured man, who is bereft of all but her memory. A formula, yes, but it's nice to have a smouldering alternative to the mild-mannered teen romance. RS


NR Gr. 4-7. Written in the present tense about the future, this combines known facts about Mars with speculation about its future colonization. An appealing premise, but readers will be hard put to separate fact from future. "Iron is the most abundant metal on this planet." True enough. "If you lived on Mars, your house would be in a five-story underground building." Not true, at least not yet, and why five stories? "Phobos and Deimos are natural satellites. But there are also about twenty artificial satellites in orbit around Mars." To add to the confusion, the last chapter, "The Future of Mars," creates a further hypothetical future following the one already under discussion. The facts within the conceit are occasionally underexplained or contradictory. Berger says that the polar ice caps "almost disappear" in the summer; he does not explain how they grow again, given the lack of precipitation. In one place he states that the Martian year lasts 687 Earth days; in another that "there are actually three Earth months in one Martian day!" RS


R Gr. 3-6. Organized by phases of the loon's life cycle, Billings' text describes the spring arrival of the birds at their breeding grounds, their nesting, raising chicks, winter migration to the ocean, and loss to environmental threats such as power boats and oil slicks. Color photographs are of uneven quality, some striking and others unclear or even lost in the gutter. On balance, however, the book provides the kind of straightforward information that could supplement more inspiring presentations—films such as *The Loon's Necklace*, for instance—which vividly project the eerie call and characteristics that have given the bird mythological significance among Native Americans. BH

C.U. Nature study

**R**  
Gr. 4-6. The young plant lover of *Linnea in Monet’s Garden* (BCCB 2/88) gives information about every aspect of indoor gardening: choosing, planting, pruning, fertilizing, spraying, adjusting light and water. The writing is light and crisp; somehow Björk manages to be amusing without ever becoming cute. This is informative, accurate, comprehensive, clear and well-organized; the illustrations are helpful and are carefully placed in relation to textual references. What more could the beginning gardener or old green-thumbed hand expect from any horticultural how-to-do-it book? ZS  
C.U. Botany; Hobbies


**Ad**  
5-8 yrs. Tuan is a Vietnamese boy who barely remembers his father, a soldier who died of a fever. On the morning of the story, Tuan begs to stay with his grandmother in the rice fields instead of going to the day care center while his mother works at her rug factory job. After playing with his cousin’s water buffalo, Tuan is bitten by a rabid dog and saved only because the doctor is able to procure more of the rare vaccine needed to cure him. Although somewhat contrived to inject a “typical” situation with a dramatic incident, the story avoids sounding too forced and does sustain a modicum of realistic suspense. The watercolor paintings have a velvety pastel quality; they are strikingly effective in the double spread landscapes but stiffer when the focus is on human figures. The strongly projected setting is an unusual one in picture books, however, and compensates for the book’s flaws. BH  
D.V. Mother-son relations


**R**  
4-7 yrs. Like other good examples of the toy-book genre (see *The Ghosts of Creepy Castle,* reviewed below), this uses a graphic gimmick in service of the text. Here a dopey-looking Little Red Riding Hood is warned about the wolf, which hides behind every flap, by various animals as she makes her way to Grandmother's house. “Look out, he's behind you!” they call, to which LRRH says “Where?” Of course the young viewer can tell her by lifting the flap. There’s a funny twist at the end when Grandma’s parrot echoes, “Look out, Mr. Wolf, he’s behind you,” upon which the woodcutter leaps out to save everybody (this is the chauvinistic version). The humorous cartoon gags and reader participation will lighten up the effects of what still strikes many children as a very scary story. BH


**Ad**  
Gr. 3-5. A brief first-person account (fictional) of life in a coal-mining community in 1916, when the narrator, Carmela, was eight. The writing style is choppy, the story episodic, with Papa’s death in a mine
explosion the one major event. While the writing style is not impressive and
the characterization and plotting are minimal, the book gives a convincing
picture of the company town and of a loving Italian-American family surrounded
by aunts, uncles, cousins, and eventually the grandfather who appears after
Papa's funeral to take the widow and her five children to live with him on his
ranch. ZS

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Family relations

(Stepping Stone Books). Library ed. $5.99; Paper ed. $1.95.

Ad Gr. 3-5. After seeing the "Wanted" posters in the post office, Julian, his best friend Gloria, and his little brother Huey decide to spend the
summer catching criminals . . . well, they do save a dog locked in a hot car, and
they rescue a baby from a fountain, but that funny cook who seems to be
Eugene "the Great Imitator" Johnson, turns out to be the police chief's son. Not
as focused as Julian's Glorious Summer (BCCB 12/87), and more than a trifle
trumped-up (as when the kids sneak into the hospital to find criminals who
might be undergoing plastic surgery), but the humor is effective and the action
non-stop. RS

Cohen, Caron Lee, ad. The Mud Pony; illus. by Shonto Begay. Scholastic,

Ad Gr. K-3. A Skidi Pawnee tale is retold in a style that is at
times choppy, at times flat, but that preserves the folkloric quality of the oral
tradition in its cadence. The same quality is present in the soft-colored pictures
by a Navajo artist, whose first book illustrations are strong in design and in
textual integrity; some of the pages have backgrounds that make the print less
easily legible. Envying the other boys their ponies, "a poor boy in an Indian
camp" made a pony out of mud and clay. The pony came to life and took the
boy to his people, from whom he had been separated; the boy never forgot what
the pony had told him: "Now cover me with a blanket to protect me from the
rain, for I am part of Mother Earth." Years later, when the boy has become a
great warrior and a chief, he again obeys the pony, and takes the blanket away.
The next day, the rain has washed the pony away, but the chief hears its voice.
"I am here, your Mother Earth. You are not alone!" The story is neither as
dramatic nor as minatory as are many Native American tales, but it speaks
strongly to the American Indian belief in the unity of human beings and the
natural world. ZS

Cooper, Kay. Where Did You Get Those Eyes?: A Guide to Discovering Your
ed. $13.95. Reviewed from galleys.

M Gr. 4-7. This beginner's guide to genealogy inauspiciously
leads off with the grammatically startling question "Has anyone ever told you
that your eyes are the same color as one of your parent's eyes?". While padded
with a few projects like making a "time line" of one's own life or "Writing your
own epitaph,” most of the text is straightforward how-to, including information on talking and writing to relatives, using libraries and government records, and finding genealogical clues in photos and cemeteries. Occasional genetic claims for personality traits are dubious, and a suggestion that researchers record eye-color is forgotten halfway through. Some of the record-keeping seems superfluous, keeping the same information in several places, but perhaps that is part of the appeal: genealogical research is as much for kids into obsessive cataloging as it is for those interested in family history. There are a couple of examples of blank charts; a few more of these would have been more helpful than the pointless black and white drawings. RS


R Gr. 5-9. A sometimes tragic but always fascinating subject receives competent summary coverage here with chapters on the role of nurses in the Civil War, the Crimean War, the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam. The text is factual but not dry; the black-and-white photographs, many historical, are revealing. Background information is livened by quotes from letters (no sources cited) and occasionally fictionalized stories about individuals who pioneered the field, from Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale to contemporary women who have crusaded for recognition of nurses' status as veterans. The history of war weapons, of medical developments in dealing with them, and of women's determination to help heal the wounds inflicted on male battlefields all suggest further areas for study and issues for discussion. Unfortunately, there's no bibliography. The index will help students doing reports, while browsers will get caught up in the herstory. BH

C.U. History—Modern; Medicine (unit)


R Gr. 2-5. Beautifully designed and illustrated, this is the moving story of seven-year-old Allugua, who must be left to die, according to the laws of his people, because his blindness would make him a burden to the village. The kindness he has shown to a freezing mouse saves him, however, because Mouse Woman comes with bits of food and water, while the seal oil lamp his mother has left behind miraculously continues to burn till his people return. By that time, Allugua has learned stories and a powerful hunting song from Mouse Woman, and he is accepted back into the village after he kills his first whale. The life-and-death struggle, the meeting of real and mythical realms, and the strong but unintrusive narrative voice make this traditional tale a gripping one. Moreover, the bookmaking, which includes thick white paper, blue-gray print, and starkly forceful black-and-white woodcuts, has been carefully considered to support a strong text. It's too bad there are no source notes, although there is a brief glossary. The respect for nature emphasized here will make the book ideal for reading aloud in conjunction with environmental awareness discussions or study units focusing on native Alaskan groups. BH

D.V. Animals, kindness to

Ad 5-8 yrs. Delaney's tall tale updates an old-fashioned, who'll-save-the-farm soap opera with slapstick science fiction. Hank's "barn had collapsed. His well had run dry. His mule had arthritis and his chickens had insomnia." Now Mr. Sneezle gives Hank 24 hours to pay back the $1,951.12 he borrowed—or else see the farm turned into a video games factory. The situation looks hopeless until three chickens from the planet Koog arrive with a plan to help out. Even so, it's Hank who finally does the job. Somewhat reminiscent of Daniel Pinkwater's chicken popularia, this is pretty predictable, but it has a farfetched lunacy that is served up with linear verve and lots of mauve coloring in the cartoon art. The whole package will appeal mightily to kids. BH


R 5-7 yrs. Alexander is a boy who's not allowed to have a pet, Felix is a toy dog, and this is a cleverly surrealistic picture book about an adventurous rescue in the city streets. Felix sets out to find Alexander when the boy doesn't return home from his daily walk. As the houses seem to grow taller, Felix feels scarerder and smaller until suddenly he sees Alexander "in the grip of a fearsome monster!" The monster, which is really a house, turns to stone when Felix shines his flashlight on it, and Alexander finds the way home by following the sparkling bits of stuffing that have come out of a tear in Felix's side. The watercolor paintings project a child's perspective on inanimate objects as sentient, whether they be toys or buildings. The colors and compositions are freshly imagined and handsomely framed on pages ranging from gold to blue to rose, depending on the mood of the action. These two characters will project young listeners into a spell of alternate reality. BH

D.V. Imaginative powers


R Gr. 7-12. The summer before his senior year, 17-year-old Joe Faust moves to Seattle because of his father's scientific work. Hoping to enter a public school with a good basketball team, Joe gets into trouble with one of the players and is sent to a private school, where he seems to lose his touch during team tryouts. While practicing on a deserted court one night after a class discussion on Dr. Faustus, Joe thinks he would give anything for a full season of powerful playing. Eerily, he has it. Everything that was going wrong starts to go right—games, grades, friendships. But his troubled relationship with his father seems to be the price, and when Dr. Faust has a heart attack, Joe is haunted by the idea that he has indeed sold his soul to the devil. This is a rare sports novel, with complex plot and characterization as well as gripping game play. Deuker is careful not to use easy outs: the local bully is as unpredictably moral in a game as he is immoral on the street; Joe's father works to change his
workaholic ways but still can't resist pushing Joe toward Stanford instead of a smaller college where he's been offered a basketball scholarship. Their confrontations are realistic but never overdone, and Joe's mother is well played as the mediator who determinedly maintains her identity as an artist. BH


Titled primarily with Arthurian motifs ("Sword," "King," "Enchantress") these nine stories are linked as Merlin's dreams while the great wizard sleeps through his enchantment. The stories are not themselves Arthurian, but are magical tales with medieval settings. It's all here, in rather overwhelming diversion (unicorns, knights, dragons, damsels) and most have great drama, appropriately gruesome detail, and, occasionally, humor. Merlin's transitional soliloquies brush up against some genuine Arthurian material, but are rather vague (excepting the first, a powerful account of his spell-induced sleep) and not particularly necessary. The many accompanying drawings and paintings are over-literal and vulgarize the stories, but they will probably have appeal for the Dungeons and Dragons crowd. RS


Perfect, smiling Dorf "was cool." But what the rest of the class, excepting Richard Bickerstaff, doesn't know is that Dorf is an alien, specifically, a Drane. "Space trash. Mean. Very mean. When the Dranes see a planet they like they move in. Before the natives know it, their minds are mush." Richard knows all this because Aric, a Ganoobian member of the Interspace Brigade ("Our goal: to wipe out cosmic trouble-makers") has popped up one morning in Richard's bowl of Alien Crisp. This appears to have been written by people who spent more Saturday mornings in front of the TV than was really good for them, but the book is a thoroughly off-the-wall delight, crammed with one-liners ("bye-bye, biosphere") and pseudo-sick humor. It features a spectacular demise for Dorf: "'I hate to lose! I hope you flunk math and history! I hope you fail science and art and social studies and English and gym!' Then he blew up." Few transitional readers have such wit to exploit the comic potential of the short sentence; material and delivery both have enormous appeal. Björkman's nutty and plentiful sketches are a definite plus. RS


In a post-apocalyptic New Zealand, 17-year-old Michael is a scribe, copying the books that survived the blast. (Why they need to be copied is not made clear). Excepting his teacher and a few others, the villagers are uneasy around Michael, both for his scholarly bent and for
something secret that has to do with his long-dead parents. Even when Michael and some friends track and kill a man-eating tiger (the descendant of escaped zoo animals) the villagers' fear and distrust deepens. Faville's future primitive society is not as wholly realized as have been others in this genre, and the story jerks along at an unsteady pace. The basic premise of a small group of young outsiders will appeal, and while the plot is predictable (and capped by a convenient volcanic eruption) there is plenty of adventure. RS


R Gr. 2-5. A more symbiotic collaboration than most picture poetry books, this makes it hard to tell where poem leaves off and picture begins. Greenfield gives voice to portraits: “pineapples, pumpkins, chickens, we/carry more than the things you see/ we also carry history.” Through cool planes of green and blue, Ferguson creates a peaceful ocean shore that makes visible Greenfield's “place I know/ where children go to find/ their deepest feelings.” Sometimes contemplative, often funny (“It takes more than a wish/to catch a fish”) the poems glide and bounce with rhythmic effects echoed in the bold paintings, which are naively drawn and iconographic, and formally patterned with two-dimensional perspectives. For “The Brave Ones” (“We hear the bell clanging/ we come in a hurry/ we come with our ladders and hoses/ our hoses”) Ferguson paints a stylized house afire, its straight lines surrounded by bomb-like blobs of smoke and a wreath of flame around the chimney, all capturing the danger and excitement of the poem. “The Sailboat Race” sounds and looks ready to rush off the page. The last poem is a marvelously festive toast from both poet and illustrator: “let’s lift our punch/ to the bunch/ (that’s us) . . . this toast we’ll repeat/ each time we meet/ and now, my friends—/ let’s eat”. Crisply designed, with poem and painting on facing pages, the collection is supposed to be “an affectionate portrait of life in the Bahamas,” but given the breadth of vision contained herein, the book extends far beyond the Caribbean. RS

C.U. Reading aloud


R Gr. 6-9. In a sequel to *Which Way Freedom?* (BCCB 7/86) Hansen focuses on Easter, the girl that Obi (black hero of the first book) left behind him. Like Obi, Easter is determined, after her escape from bondage, to find and keep freedom. A tenacious and resourceful adolescent, she joins those recently emancipated Sea Islands workers who rebel when the government denies them promised land. Always hunting for Obi, Easter at last decides she will leave the South, go North to train as a teacher, and hope that her path and Obi’s will cross. At the close, there is a strong hint, in an epilogue, that that may happen: “No matter how long it took, he would find her.” ZS

C.U. History—U.S.

D.V. Courage

NR Gr. 5-7. Simply written information on gun control is desperately needed, a fact that makes this title all the more disappointing. The text is full of meaningless generalities ("but poverty does not explain the rise of organized crime, like the Mafia"); nonsequiturs ("Switzerland, however, has a very high compulsory gun ownership rate for defense reasons. But laws will not stop determined people from obtaining guns"); inaccuracies ("New York City has very tough gun laws but anyone wanting to buy a gun goes south"); undocumented statistics (in the U.S. "almost 16,000 people between 15 and 34 dies from gunfire every year, compared with 28,500 from road accidents and only 7,400 from cancer"); and just plain grammatical confusion ("In Britain anyone who shoots another person has to prove that they were acting in self-defense and that they used reasonable force in order to be found not guilty"). Three experts are cited out of the blue with no reference to their identity or publications: "But unfortunately the availability of guns can lead to accidents, when a family argument gets out of hand. Professors Wright, Rossi and Daly estimate that there are about 250,000 gun injuries a year." From family arguments? The format is cluttered with photographic insets, too many typefaces, and unnecessary blocks of brightly colored patterns. For target practice only. BH


R Gr. 3-5. Millie, afraid that she won’t receive enough valentines from her classmates, tells them she doesn’t want any, thereby hoping to avoid hurt and embarrassment. "I told everyone not to send me any so I would have an excuse but I didn’t want them to listen to me but they did." Who could not learn from Millie’s lesson, and it’s just one pithy episode in this sequel to *Millie Cooper, 3B* (BCCB 6/85). While period details (the book is set in 1947) are not as smoothly woven in as they are in Miriam Chaikin’s Molly series, Millie’s schemes to get her first bicycle, and her agony/ecstasy over reading her favorite poem to the class give narrative direction and suspense to a warm school-and-family story. RS

D.V. Self-confidence


Ad Gr. 4-6. Meticulously detailed, ornately romantic paintings, impressive in their composition and their use of color, illustrate (on oversize pages that are filled but not crowded) a fantasy that is traditional in concept but pedestrian in writing style. Last of her race, a lovely child in an underground home escapes to the Outside and does battle with the evil monster who has captured her ancestors. Lovely little Reena is helped by many of the fantastic creatures who share her fear of the evil Okira and who help her solve the mystery of the Okira’s power. ZS

R 4-6 yrs. A contemporary urban cumulative tale with as sure a rhythmic pace as the old-fashioned folk variety. "Fletcher was cruising along the sidewalk on his Big Wheel when he met a dog. . . . Fletcher decided to cruise down the other way." Wherever Fletcher goes, the dog follows him. Whenever Fletcher speeds up, the dog speeds up. Their confrontation comes with a rumble of thunder and Fletcher's realization that he is lost. When he stops and faces the big red dog, it licks him on the face and eventually, by refusing to follow Fletcher farther, leads him back the way they came. The story addresses children's fears in the most basic chase plot possible, and the classy cartoon art walks a fine line between supporting the suspense and reassuring young listeners who may share Fletcher's apprehension (the dog is quite a bit bigger than Fletcher—this is a low-down perspective). A perfect step up from the Clifford books, this is a big red dog of more personable distinction. BH

D.V. Fear, overcoming


R Gr. 3-5. Although Hilts relies rather heavily on dialogue as a vehicle for information, the information is given logically, through the device of having a newcomer to whom facts must be explained. The visitor is Dennis O'Dowd, who comes to stay with his kin and whose urban sophistication is resented by his cousin Timmy. The time is 1845, the setting is the banks of the new, bustling Erie Canal, and Timmy (son of a section superintendent) is set on becoming a captain of a passenger packet. In the depiction of travel on the canal and discussions of its upkeep, in moving toward a friendship between the boys, and in the description of a crisis caused by heavy rains, the story has credibility, and—if not depth—suspense, good pace, and carefully-researched historical details. A glossary and a divided bibliography are provided. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.


R 4-6 yrs. Mrs. Brice has twenty-four mice; well, twenty-five, but the last, "one very small mouse," is always intent on distinguishing himself from the rest. Twenty-four mice sleep on the bed with Mrs. Brice (in an arrangement reminiscent of *Madeline*); one very small mouse sleeps on the alarm clock "in case he wanted to know what time it was." His distinction comes in handy when, while on a walk, the mice meet a cat, and while twelve run this way and twelve that way, the one little mouse runs this way and that, wearing out the cat and saving them all. The simple, gracefully repetitive text and bright cartoon drawings will make a preschool hero of the clever little mouse. RS

D.V. Individuality, expressing

Gr. 2-4. As a story about a girl who secretly adopts a stray cat, this is acceptable practice material for transitional readers. As historical fiction, however, it misrepresents both the conflicts and speech patterns of the setting, a nineteenth-century wagon trek to Oregon. The first-person narrator, Kate, seems prescient of modern slang ("I was one big mess") and unaware of the parental authority that governed children of her age, as in the response to her mother's suggestion that she'll make new acquaintances on the wagon train: "'No thanks,' I told her. 'I was perfectly happy with my old friends.'"

Protecting feline Snuggs is the main plot device, but there's an obligatory confrontation with Indians, a river crossing in which Kate and her brother are saved from drowning by a new friend, a crisis with a broken wagon wheel, and of course the acceptance of Snuggs (with her predictable batch of kittens) as a valuable member of the expedition. The tone is one of bright, happily-ever-after promise through which one never senses any real discomfort. Easy-to-read books can be simple in style without sacrifice of authenticity; this one has compromised a basic concept. The problems and pace, however, will probably snag sympathy from struggling readers. BH

C.U. History—U.S.—frontier and pioneer life


Gr. 5-8. A prequel to *Redwall* (BCCB 7/87) recounts the woodland animals' ancestral fight against Queen Tsarmina, an evil wildcat who has murdered her father and become ruler of Kotir Castle. Martin the warrior mouse is the hero here, with stout allies among the otters, squirrels, badgers, hedgehogs, and hares. The enemy includes foxes, weasels, stoats, ferrets, and rats, a villainous crew with few claims to brains. The style has been drycleaned of the excessive verbiage that characterized Jacques' earlier book. The length is rather due to two distinct plot lines: Martin's quest for help from distant Salamandstron and the battles on the forest front. Although these actions eventually converge, they aren't entirely necessary to each other and at times seem distractingly divergent. (There's also the niggling question in any reader's mind: could a mouse really defeat a maddened wildcat?) However, despite moments when the book seems a sendup of high fantasy conventions, the weight of such a completely imagined world, the colorful characters, and the high action will hold their fair share of good readers. BH

D.V. Courage


NR Gr. 7-12. While billed in the introduction as a book of interviews, this is actually a collection of twenty-three monologues by teens about school. The overall picture—of teachers, parents, other students—is pretty grim and, despite the vaguely claimed diversity of interviewees, the voices sound the same. Given the lack of documentation or explanation of
methodology, it is difficult to know how much editorializing has occurred, but these are certainly not raw transcripts, and some of the events recounted appear so aptly paradigmatic that they are not convincing, for example, a Go Ask Alice-like drunk-driving story. The narratives express concerns most teens share, but the problems, which are genuine, deserve better attention than the superficial treatment they get here. RS


R Gr. 9-12. While never quite capturing the personality and motivations of an extremely complicated man, this biography does a good job of explaining Oppenheimer’s contributions and his place in the Cold War context. Larsen balances information about the scientific development of the bomb with the concurrent political atmosphere, clearly showing how a wartime hero could later be denied a security clearance to do further research. Her account of the rivalry between Oppenheimer and Edward Teller is sketchy, but then so are the available facts, a limitation the author acknowledges. Feldbaum and Bee’s *Looking the Tiger in the Eye* (BCCB 9/88) has broader coverage of early atomic research, but Larsen’s book gives a more detailed picture of the Los Alamos community and experiments. There is little on Oppenheimer’s post-war research (excepting a couple of curious references to Oppenheimer’s fight “for peaceful uses of the bomb”) but the book provides an enlightening perspective for those students who date Cold War tensions from the 1950’s. RS

C.U. History—U.S.


R* Gr. 5-9. Relying mainly on primary sources such as the letters and documents collected by nineteenth-century Boone scholar Lyman Draper, Lawlor has written a riveting account of an American folk hero. This is a case in which the real story is more interesting than the cultural myth, and the author has taken advantage of the adventure in Boone’s life to detail a vivid characterization. Lawlor is so enthusiastic about her subject that she often extends an account with footnotes, which are thoughtfully included at the bottom of each page for impatient young readers and which often include intriguing historical vignettes (the tale behind the term “Quaker,” for instance) as well as explanations of terms and sources. The cruelty of the war between settlers and Indians is unflinchingly exposed. Boone’s first son was tortured to death by Shawnee, as witnessed by a slave who escaped the attack; another son was killed in battle, a daughter kidnapped, and Boone himself often captured or nearly killed. The author takes care to remind readers of concurrent atrocities committed by whites against Indians. In fact, the text begins by openly addressing the problem: “Daniel Boone would not wish to be remembered as a rip-roaring Indian fighter. Upon reading a particularly bloody account of his life, he once complained, ‘This book represents me as a wonderful man who killed a lot of Indians. I don’t believe the one has much to do with the other.’” Financially plagued with bad luck, self-destructively restless, affectionate but often neglectful...
of his long-suffering wife (she bore one child to Boone’s brother, who took care of her during one of Boone’s twenty-month absences), Boone nevertheless emerges, on balance, as a man whose physical and moral stature, augmented by an irrepresible sense of humor, made him memorable in the eyes of Indians as well as whites. With a chronology, bibliography, index, and gallery of historical pictures along with black-and-white drawings throughout the book, this is as solidly researched and dynamic as children’s biography should be. BH


Ad Gr. 7-10. First published in Great Britain under the title of Tinker’s Career, this is the sobering narrative of a fifteen-year-old’s quest into family history. Why, Tina has wondered, will nobody tell her anything about her mother, who died when Tina was two? Tina makes her way, after finding some family documents and photographs, to the home of an aunt she can’t remember. Since she arrives with a sore throat and a fever (Aunt Louise and her lover, Diana, are both nurses), Tina stays with them and in the course of time learns that she—like Louise—may have inherited the disease that killed her mother, Huntington’s Chorea. What Tina goes through is harrowing, and Leonard depicts it with sad believability. Less believable are the vagaries of the plot that lead to the knowledge that there is a fifty-fifty chance (therefore the title) that the disease will manifest itself. The way in which Tina finds Louise, the illness that makes it convenient to have her stay instead of going home, the labored turmoil of the adjustment period, all weaken the story, which is told partly in third person, partly in first (by Louise). The format, too, presents a problem of tiny type. Still, the elements of suspense and the interest, for some readers, in a medical problem give the book appeal. ZS

D.V. Handicaps, adjustment to


Ad Gr. 7-9. Kelly Ross is the adolescent narrator, a shy girl whose mother (once a police officer) is head of security for a Manhattan sports complex. Kelly comes to the rescue of a teenage boy being attacked in an alley outside The Dome, and later learns that he’s one of the two ice-skating stars, Andre and Ken. When a series of accidents seems to threaten the two young men, Ken and Kelly try to solve the mystery. Who is the attacker who has endangered the skaters’ lives? Although there is plenty of action, and some suspense, the identity of the attacker seems fairly obvious. The plot is adequately structured, and the writing style is competent, but the characterization is weak, with a couple of minor characters (a nasty, wealthy woman and a Swedish-born coach who’s given to quaint use of language) who are less than believable. ZS

Shirley, starting fourth grade, is apprehensive about what her performance will be; she has dyslexia and is given to clowning to cover her feelings of inadequacy. The teacher, Mr. Bradley, assures her that they will work together, and Shirley does show improvement until Jackie catches up. Jackie, Shirley's newly adopted sister, is eight, a Vietnamese child who thrives on Shirley's love and help. Shirley, too, thrives and gains confidence from being needed and being so successful as a big sister—and also from her new status as the unanimously-elected class artist. There's a rift with Jackie, due to Shirley's jealousy, and a rapprochement; there are several amusing incidents and a rather sugary ending. Not much nuance here, but its a story that pleasantly combines light humor, a sympathetic treatment of a learning disability, and warm family relationships. ZS

D.V. Handicaps, adjustment to


Once again, as she did in *Beauty,* McKinley takes a fresh look at a classic, changing some of the events or deviating from standard characterization to gain new dimensions. Her afterword explains her artistic compromise with myth and history, her wish to write a version that is "historically unembarrassing." With a few exceptions, she has done that admirably, creating a story that has pace and substance and style, and that is given nuance and depth by the characterization. The exceptions are in the use of dialogue—occasionally—that sounds too modern: "Her father bought it..." (in the sense of believing a lie), or too sophisticated for an unschooled outlaw of the period. Historians may find the concept of Richard the Lionheart offering Marian the post of sheriff of Nottingham odd, but most readers will enjoy the novelty of a Robin whose Sherwood Forest enclave is conceived by others, whose prowess at archery is inferior to that of Marian's, and who reluctantly accepts the sobriquet "Robin of the Hood." ZS


One of the surest new storytelling voices in picture books has followed up *Flossie and the Fox* with another winner, also drawn from memories of Patricia McKissack's family. Here, Mirandy is sure that she'll win the cake walk if she can catch Brother Wind for her partner, but he eludes all the tricks her friends advise. When she finally does catch him with her own quick wits, she ends up wishing instead for her boyfriend Ezel to overcome his clumsiness. Sure enough, the two children finish first in high style. "When Grandmama Beasley had seen Mirandy and Ezel turning and spinning, moving like shadows in the flickering candlelight, she'd thrown back her head, laughed, and said, 'Them chullin' is dancing with the Wind!'" This narrative gets a high score, too, for plot, pace, and characterization. Mirandy sparkles with energy and determination, while the action dances with its own rhythm. Pinkney's watercolors are splashed with multi-hued, overlapping shapes that fill the pages with patterned ferment, occasionally threatening to overwhelm the story but
never quite doing so. The translucent blue, larger-than-life figure of Brother Wind is clothed in the same historical costume as the rest of the southern black cast. Occasionally the portraits seem studied, but the rural settings are lush with laurel and wisteria, aflutter with chickens, and evocative of country communities at their best. A treat to pass on to new generations. BH

D.V. Community life


*R* Gr. 6-. Even from so distinguished a social historian as Milton Meltzer, one would not have expected so familiar a subject of biographies as Franklin to enthral anew. It does; this is certainly one of the author's best biographies, and certainly the best about Franklin written for young people since Thomas Fleming's in 1973 (BCCB 12/73). Meltzer has used source material (cited in great detail at the close of the text) in a smooth incorporation into exposition and dialogue, themselves nicely balanced. The biography gives adequate attention to background information without obscuring the personality of the biographee or the respectful record of his many interests and achievements. Indexed. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.

D.V. Patriotism


Ad 5-8 yrs. Just before the old umbrella maker dies, he tells his lazy, selfish nephew that his worldly goods are to be shared with Patou, the umbrella maker's young assistant. But the nephew throws Patou out, giving him only a battered umbrella which, as it turns out, is magic and can fly. The jacket copy states that the story is based on a French folktale but no source note is provided. The story ends satisfactorily with Patou, after a few turns of fate, being crowned king of a hitherto umbrella-less country. Zemach's bright and fluid watercolors add interest to a slight tale; particularly well done are the pratfalls and graceful flying escapes occasioned by the benevolent umbrella. A few pages of vague (and undocumented) history of the umbrella follow the story. RS


M Gr. 5-7. Most followers of sports events, and particularly the much publicized contests of the 1988 Olympiad, will find the information in this book interesting. Unfortunately, it is so repetitive and so bland in writing style, and so filled with meaningless pictures (not all, but many) and unattributed remarks as to almost vitiate that interest. No information is provided about the author; in a plodding text she discusses the various kinds of drugs and steroids used by athletes (both those in competition and those who wish to increase prowess or change appearance for personal reasons) and describes the harm done by these substances. On many pages a red-framed remark is included, some being as puerile as "The judges looked at his eyes. That was the
giveaway.” No explanation of why it was “the giveaway” is provided. The book closes with a plea for clean, honest competition; an index, a glossary, a chart of drug profiles, and a list of sources of help are appended. ZS

C.U. Health and hygiene; Physical education


Ad Gr. 6-8. Rory, thirteen, has been sent to stay with his aunt and uncle in the English countryside; his father, a British career army officer stationed in Florida, has decided that Rory’s latest escapade as part of a gang (thrill-driving, with Rory a passenger in a car that hit a post) means he needs punishment. The Yorkshire winter seems bleak and cold; so do Aunt Miriam and Uncle Arthur. Rory makes some friends, becomes fond of a girl, wins a modicum of approbation. When his parents are posted to a nearby village, Rory is happy at the reunion and happy because he’ll still be able to see his new friend Samantha. This is a story that seems unfocused and transitory; it should appeal to readers, nevertheless, because the characterization is firm (the protagonist changes his attitude believably) and the setting well-established; the style—in both exposition and dialogue—is strong. Only the structure is weak. ZS

D.V. Adaptability


R Gr. 2-4. There won’t be any question as to the popularity of these two horror-comedy pop-up books, but they do offer an interesting contrast in terms of evaluating the genre. The paper engineering in Ghosts is part of the plot, as each of five tourists is gagged, gobbled, or grabbed from behind during a walk through Creepy Castle. Even the innocent-looking guide turns out (literally) to have a sinister persona. Things is just a catalogue of Mouldy Manor’s grosser features; rather than any sustained line of action, there’s a series of separate little scenarios; we watch, for instance, as chef Hugo, who “uses only the finest ingredients to prepare his delicious meals,” drops a dead rat into the cauldron. Both books are clever and generous in their art—each page sports several devices to pull, push, or open, with moving effects. These will wear out fast but attract lots of attention. BH

C.U. Halloween


Ad Gr. 5-7. Walter Dean Myers is great at offhand dialogue, and that’s what this book is: an easy-going, first-person narrative that describes two adopted brothers’ little league triumph and their best friend’s adoption by the female coach. There are some really funny lines, as in the description of a ferocious cat (“There was as much of him missing as there was there”); some rough transitions, such as an abrupt switch from the protagonist’s apprehension about getting beaten up to a description of his grandmother’s church; and lots of
game play, which bogs down the middle of the book but builds a lot of suspense at the end. Even the secondary characters are solidly developed here—a likeable crew who make the plot well worth meandering through. BH

D.V. Friendship values


R Gr. 7-10. Mourning the death of her friend Barry, Marti is convinced that the verdict (suicide, the latest of a number of suicides of high school students) is wrong. Several clues do tend to support the idea that Barry took his own life, but Marti is sure she knew him well enough to know it was unlikely; too, the gun had been in Barry’s right hand—but he was left-handed. The only adult authority who takes Marti seriously is a young police officer, Karen. Nixon is an old and polished hand at creating suspense and building logical clues into the structure of her stories. The solution is, therefore, achieved credibly while maintaining dramatic impact including Marti’s dangerous confrontation with Barry’s murderer. Nixon also incorporates information about adolescent suicide without disturbing the story’s narrative flow. ZS


M Gr. 6-9. To the baseball fan, almost any book about stellar personalities of the past or present is interesting. Here, in profiles of the dozen managers he deems great, Nuwer writes in prose that is dense, often cute or slangy, and periodically prone to hyperbole, generalization, or syntactical peculiarities. This does give facts about managerial stars from Cap Anson to Whitey Herzog, but it does so in the worst tradition, stylistically, of sports journalism. Notes and bibliographic information on sources are included, as is an index. ZS


R Gr. 4-6. Mary Elizabeth Lawson, age eleven, is the narrator of a series of short stories about her family, particularly her precocious (believably precocious) younger brother, her perennially-flustered mother, and her perennially-baffled father, who knows that all his wife’s relatives are peculiar and expects the worst. And the worst occurs, in amusing tales that are told in high style; the bland matter-of-fact comments by the narrator are a fine contrast to the more sophisticated dialogue and to the excesses of Mother’s clan. Well, there’s also Father’s sister. . . . It’s a romp, it’s a great family story, it’s a good choice for reading aloud as well as alone. ZS

C.U. Reading aloud
D.V. Family relations


[ 106 ]
Seven brief stories of small adventures and discoveries are delivered with low-key humor and confidingly direct prose. "Ned is seven. His sister Nina is four and a half. And their little brother Joshy is just two." The three of them pretend to be pirates, build a dam on the stream, go to a Halloween party, make a snowman, etc. While occasionally precious, the stories have the appeal of everyday life, and little Joshy is a good foil for the cute-toddler humor that older kids like, as when Joshy plays "hiding squeak" by covering his eyes and believing himself invisible. "And since everyone enjoyed playing along with it, and leaped with shock or cried, 'There he is!' when he opened his eyes again, it was hardly surprising that he continued to believe it." Cozy pencil sketches are scattered throughout the spacious pages.


In this companion volume to My Friend Leslie: The Story of a Handicapped Child (BCCB 4/83), photographs of good quality show the children of three families in which one child (in one case, two) in the family suffers from a chronic illness or an orthopedic handicap. With a calm tone, in a clear and direct style, and with the authority of professional experience, Rosenberg writes about what it is like to be the brother or sister of a child who has a special physical problem; covered here are diabetes, asthma, and spina bifida. What is most valuable in her writing is the objectivity with which she approaches the fact that the sibling who is not disabled also has problems of acceptance and adjustment; a second strength is the recurrent emphasis on the positive, both in the coverage of sibling relationships and in the demonstration of the fact that, disabled or not, children have similar needs and interests.


Tessa's mother is glamorous, dynamic and always busy: "I think the very first sentence I ever spoke was 'Bye-bye Momma.'" But when Tessa decides to go after handsome Rodney (and get rid off annoying Alan) she takes her cue from Mom, power-brokering her way into directing the school talent show in which both Rodney and Alan badly want to participate. Rodney turns out to be a (vividly rendered) vacuous jerk, Alan, a sensitive songwriter, and Tessa discovers that power corrupts. None of these revelations will come as a surprise to the reader. The story is far too neatly tied up in the last two chapters. Mom lightens up, Dad, after a convenient absence from the rest of the book, comes home, Laura (Tessa's sister, also a latecomer) decides not to go to Baja with her boyfriend and gets engaged instead. Alan is the star of the show. Too much.

[ 107 ]

R Gr. 3-5. "Cold, quiet, and draped with snow, the forest in winter appears still and lifeless. But is it?" Directly above the question appears a captivating close-up of a bear cub curled against its mother's nose; in *Meadow*, a mouse peeks out from a hole in a stump; and in *Pond*, a frog thrusts its head up into the rain. All three books showcase outstanding color photographs that depict seasonal changes in their respective habitats, with textual commentary describing the flora and fauna common to the area. Unfortunately, the area is never specified, though climatic and environmental conditions suggest a cold zone of North America. While there's no formal organization, the pictures and text form a smooth, continuous blend in leading a reader from one observation to another—from seeds to plants to trees to the birds that nest in them to the insects upon which the birds feed, etc. The closeups are remarkable for their color reproduction, composition, and clarity, whether the subject is an owl in flight or a microscopic amoeba. The effect is one of walking, invisibly cloaked, through the environment for a look at the shyest and smallest of creatures, an exercise well worth the sacrifice of more systematically categorized information.

BH C.U. Nature study


M Gr. 7-12. While somewhat unorganized and written in a choppy style, this contains many intriguing stories and anecdotes of post-war spying, from Kim Philby and Gary Powers to contemporary CIA scandals involving the Walker family and the "falcon and the snowman." Silverstein slights information about the FBI, a significant player in the domestic spy scene, and, while sources are given for quotes, there is little documentation for her many controversial statements. For example, she lists countries in which the CIA "is believed" to have illegally interfered, and asserts that "Today, under the direction of Viktor Chebrikov, the KGB is employing strong-arm tactics that have not been seen since Stalin's days." Some of her information is simply incorrect, as when she states that the intelligence services of Albania and Yugoslavia are managed by the KGB. However, there is little on the subject written for young adults, and the overview is comprehensive. One of Silverstein's admirable objectives seems to be the de-romanticization of the spy trade; if she doesn't quite succeed, the fault probably lies not with the author but with the basic and alluring appeal of dangerous secrets.

RS


R Gr. 3-6. From the land of Dennis Lee comes another fresh, funny poetic voice. This collection includes lots of nonsense themes that seem to weave in and out of the narrative and lyrical verses for a total effect that's not
so nonsensical after all. The Auntie poems (#1-11) pop up periodically with variations on the following: “Auntie’s knitting a baby bonnet/ That looks like an airport wind sock;/ If Auntie’s baby fits that hat/ She’s in for a terrible shock.” The baby about which the narrator is so concerned turns out to be humanly proportioned after all, but many of the poems spotlight the kind of worried vulnerability that adults learn to mask with humor. In “Haunted,” for instance, a young insomniac regrets his accidental slaying of a snake, whose “thin little ghost comes each night to my bed./ He comes every night and he gives me no rest./ He curls on my pillow, he lies on my chest;/ He wails in his little snake voice, so pathetic./ His little snake sobbings so soft and poetic . . .” In another poem, a child denies, with poignant protests, that his dog is getting old. Many of the selections, however, are simply rhyming high jinks along the lines of “Vampire Poem”: “If you think/ Mosquito bites pain ya,/ Be glad you don’t live/ In Transylvania.” The spare, pen-and-ink sketches are not as confident as the poems; some are cleverly cartooned and others amateurishly drafted, especially in facial expression. The book as a whole, though, is a jolly good investment. BH

Steig, William. *Spinky Sulks*; written and illus. by William Steig. Farrar, 1988. ISBN 0-374-38321-9. 32p. $13.95.  R*  5-8 yrs. With an offhand, humorous flair characteristic of his best stories, Steig presents us with an all-too-human protagonist. Spinky has been offended by his family’s outrageous behavior. Though his sister begs forgiveness for calling him Stinky, though his brother concedes that Philadelphia *is* the capital of Belgium, though his mother brings him a lunch tray, though his friends whisper goofy things in his ear and swing the hammock to which he’s retreated, though his father assures him that he is one of the most popular of the three children, though his grandmother brings him his favorite candy, though a clown is hired to pull a triple-dip ice-cream cone out of his pocket, though the whole family covers him with a tarpaulin and beach umbrella when it starts raining . . . still Spinky sulks. Actually he begins to reconsider, but he has to figure out how to give in and still keep his self-respect. That’s exactly what this book will do for sulky children—give them a chance to laugh at themselves and reconsider their behavior at the same time. Steig cartoons a green suburban setting with straight walks, straight fences, straight trees in straight lawns . . . all with a straight face. Hank’s family itself is a bit square, though they do learn to be “much more careful about his feelings. Too bad they couldn’t keep it up forever.” Fortunately for us, Steig seems to be able to. BH

D.V. Family relations; Self-expression

Stevenson, James. *The Supreme Souvenir Factory*; written and illus. by James Stevenson. Greenwillow, 1988. ISBN 0-688-07782-X. 56p. $11.95.  R  Gr. K-3. Stevenson’s pictures, lively despite the sober brown of the line and wash, echo the text’s bland acceptance of the ridiculous as they picture the adventures of Chester. Chester is a small dog, but he’s the quintessence of the little guy, modest and affable, who achieves heroic proportions. He is aided in restoring workers’ jobs by a friend (Wendy, a bat) and overcomes the evil machinations of the factory manager (a weasel) who tries
to use crabots (robots with many pincer-like arms) to take over all jobs. Lightweight fun, but like so many of Stevenson’s picture books, this has some veiled comments on human behavior. ZS


R Gr. 7-10. Underneath the tough-talking exterior of this funny novel beats the heart of a formula teen romance, but it’s a pretty good one. Diana Pushkin, Honor Society student (much to her embarrassment) considers herself “Definitely Not Sexy,” as opposed to, say, fellow student Paula Proomer, Definitely Sexy, whose “breasts may not be the largest in the ninth grade, but they’re definitely the pointiest.” Diana decides to work on a sexy image, going after the school’s new bad boy, Jimmy. “Right away I flashed to this hoody movie I had seen, called *Young and Angry*. He and I were the passionate, rebellious, teenage-lover stars. I was Rhonda. He was Chet.” Unfortunately, Jimmy’s not as bad as he seems, but after one semi-steamy petting session, he and Diana become just-friends, and she gets a sense of perspective and prospects of a respectable boyfriend. The teen patois gets a little wearing, but it is realistic, as is the author’s refreshingly relaxed just-say-no-thank you attitude toward adolescent sex and pot smoking. Diana, speaking of her first joint: “I agreed to try it because I wanted to see what it was like, I wanted to think of myself as a person who had tried it, and I wanted other people to think of me as a person who had tried it.” She adds, “But between you and me, I didn’t like it at all.” RS

D.V. Boy-girl relations


Ad 3-5 yrs. Drawings in soft, bright colors are uncrowded but have a casual, slightly scruffy look that actually fits the modest scope of the story well. The artist uses framed, smaller pictures to separate the real from the imaginary, as a small child who is in the throes of separation anxiety copes by projecting her own role as that of the “mother” who always comes back to nursery school to pick up her “child,” a toy bear. Suki’s mother handles the whole situation with sympathy and patience; Suki is eventually convinced that her mother will return and she joins in the playroom activities. This isn’t as effective as the publisher’s *You Go Away*, by Dorothy Corey (BCCB 9/76) but it’s an adequately told if less effectively structured homily on the dependability of a loving parental presence. ZS

D.V. Fear, overcoming; Mother-child relations


Ad Gr. K-3. Van Allsburg’s precise drawings, in soft dulled colors and geometric details, are unusual in their perspective, using the word in both a literal and in a figurative sense. His story of the two ants who, having climbed tortuously into a “sea of crystals” (bowl of sugar) decide to stay on when their
fellow-ants trudge off, is interesting as an exercise in the viewpoint of ants. As a story it is less interesting, being an extension of one gag: the description of surroundings as they appear to the ants, like the sea of crystals or the "mountain" (wall) they climb to reach it or the "giant silver scoop" (spoon) that drops ants and crystals into a "boiling brown lake" (coffee). Some of the vocabulary ("she deemed it ") seems difficult for the young listener but the book seems too young, in the appeal of the format, for older children. However, the striking deco design and the suspense of small creatures at the mercy of large forces will appeal to both groups. ZS


R* Gr. 4-.

A bounteous collection combines the appeal of familiar motifs with the surprise of unusual settings and language patterns. "The Courage of Karazan," for instance, will be recognizable as "The Brave Little Tailor," but it features a twist of ironic humor in that Karazan is really lazy and it is his laziness that leads him to victory. The storytelling devices are traditionally graceful, from beginning ("Once there was and once there wasn't, when the flea was a porter and the camel a barber") to end ("In time, Kazan married the sultan's beautiful daughter, in a wedding that lasted forty days and forty nights, and all their wishes were fulfilled. May we have a bit of their good fortune"). There are riddles interspersed among the stories: "I looked in the evening and there were many; I got up in the morning and there were not any. (Stars)" The 34 stories are organized into sections on animals, fables, Keloglan tales, Nasreddin Hoca tales, witch/giant/jinn/dragon tales, trickster tales, tales of fate, and stories of wish fulfillment. The tonal range offers great variety for storytelling, reading aloud, or just plain entertainment among children fond of folktales, though the format is formidable for young readers. The guide to Turkish pronunciation that opens the book is helpful, as is the concluding glossary, and folklorists will appreciate the introductory note on how the tales were collected by the curator of the archive of Turkish Oral Narrative at Texas Tech University. BH

C.U. Storytelling


R Gr. 7-10.

Heidi Rosenbloom, the sixteen-year-old narrator, has little self-esteem and little hope of changing this. Her divorced mother wants Heidi to wear pretty clothes. Heidi prefers shopping in second-hand clothing stores. She's a miserable loner—until she meets a homeless street performer, Jeffrey; he's dancing, hoping to be "discovered" and to break into show business. Heidi falls deeply, generously in love; unfortunately, although Jeffrey returns her affection, he is gay. She accepts this, still loving him. By the time Jeffrey moves on, however, he has given Heidi some appreciation of her own worth as a human being. This is a nicely structured story, and there is depth in the characterization and compassion that never becomes sticky and is, indeed, occasionally lightened by touches of humor in the badinage between the
protagonists. There are some minor weaknesses in plot details (would Heidi’s mother really fail to realize that when she went off for weekends Jeffrey moved in, for an unspecified period?) but they detract little from the bittersweet quality of the story. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Mother-daughter relations


NR Gr. 3-6. Ho-ho-ho. When the regular postman usually assigned to the chore retires, it’s up to Fred (of the Post Office Department for Wonky Letters) to deliver all those thank-you notes to Father Christmas in Lapland, via helicopter. He takes along his poetaster daughter Beth and their dog Battersea, hooks up with an English-mangling female helicopter pilot, and gets the letters to Lapland only to discover that Father Christmas has disappeared. While the book has a lot of action this is a contrivance-ridden and very silly story, written with an archness that’s in the worst tradition of English children’s fiction. Beth’s poetry: “We’re all going to Lapland, / Going across the sea / Taking letters to Father Christmas, / Battersea, father and me.” “She wanted to make up some more, but she found it very hard to think of a word to rhyme with helicopter.” RS


R* Gr. 6-10. When kids leave the special ed. program in Room 19 to become mainstreamed in the regular classrooms, the commencement is called “Going Up.” “Where is Up?” asks 16-year-old Nick, left behind when pretty Shana leaves the class. He asks her to the prom anyway, saves his money, learns to dance, gets Shana a corsage to match the dress she plans to wear—and then she stands him up. Because the narration is so closely tied to Nick’s perceptions, we never quite understand what’s wrong with him, except that he has trouble reading and writing, and works out his thoughts literally, slowly, and sometimes over-logically, as when he assumes (as do readers) that Shana stood him up because she didn’t want to be associated with the “droolers” anymore. Not at all, instead, Shana has distracting new problems of her own: “I’ve figured out where Up is. It’s where you flunk tests all the time, and everybody wants you to be so smart all the time, it’s so much faster . . .” This is less a narrative than a character study, but few characters have been more intensively realized in recent YA fiction than Nick. The unsentimental narration follows his thoughts rather than his speech or actions, vividly conveying Nick’s pride in his talents, his stubborn love and need for a long-dead older sister, and his frustrations in communicating with others. “What do you mean, Nick? Inside his brain was a terrible asking voice, almost yelling at him: what do you mean?” RS


R Gr. 4-8. Betty Ren Wright can always be depended upon for an appealing ghost story, and here, as usual, she fills out the frights with believable
human relations and complications. Twelve-year-old Charlie has moved to a small Wisconsin town to live with his grandparents, cousin, and father, who has just recently been freed after five years in prison. Charlie is embarrassed by his father, hot-tempered, impulsive, childlike; but he becomes disappointed in his grandparents as well when they refuse to believe Charlie's story about the strange woman who lives in an old, decaying house. The woman is a ghost, set upon revenge for a long-past event that involves both Charlie's grandmother and his cousin Rachel. Suspenseful and fast-moving, this offers an ending that is both hair-raising and heartwarming, as Charlie discovers something new and valuable about his dad. RS

D.V. Father-son relations


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