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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.

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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; Roger Sutton, Senior Editor; Zena Sutherland, Associate Editor; Deborah Stevenson, Editorial Assistant. An advisory committee meets weekly to discuss books and reviews. The members are Alba Endicott, Robert Strang, Elizabeth Taylor, Kathryn Pierson, Ruth Ann Smith, and Deborah Stevenson. Reviewers' initials are appended to reviews.

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 1-35 (1947-1981) 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. 7-12.  And now for something completely different! Guyanese writer Agard has compiled an energetic, innovative anthology drawn primarily, but not entirely, from young poets who reflect multi-cultural backgrounds of Caribbean, African, British, American, and other traditions. Although some European and Asian contributors are included, most are black or racially mixed. The tone is offbeat, with rhythms of rap, rock, and ramble; the themes are as often irreverent as deeply caring; the subjects range from pimples to panic. The textual diversity is matched by a format whose every page surprises a reader with varied typefaces, drawings, and decorations that are choreographed well enough not to become jarring. Notes on or by the writers are random but interesting. While the quality of the poems is uneven, the voices are fresh. Teenagers will find the book informal, approachable, even alluring—it's a prime selection for booktalking. BH
C.U. Literature—Poetry


R  Gr. 4-6.  Like the author's *Trapped in Tar: Fossils from the Ice Age* (BCCB 6/87) and *Dinosaur Mountain: Graveyard of the Past* (BCCB 6/89), this is a photodocumentary that reveals as much about paleontology exhibits as about the fossils themselves. The subject here is an Australian exhibit on loan to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, and the color photos show steps of preparation, unloading, and reassembly that lead to the educational display. The text then systematically describes examples, both vertebrate and invertebrate, with pictures of skeletons, footprints, and casts or models (including the giant egg of an Aepyormis). This is an especially practical complement to the many titles that don't include Australia's unique species of marsupials and flightless birds. Arnold is careful to include the Aborigines' myth for which the exhibit is named (*Kadimakara: Fossils of the Australian Dreamtime*) and to cite approximate dates for extinction of a number of animals, the fierce meat-eater Megalania and the ostrich-like Genyornis among them, that coexisted with early Aborigines. A concluding series of maps compares shifting positions of the continents over 500 million years, and includes a brief explanation of plate
tectonics. The style is somewhat catalogic, but the information is inherently interesting and the illustrations awesome. Dinosaur fans will gape over the marsupial lion, with "sharp teeth and claws good for...ripping apart its prey." Short of the three-dimensional experience itself, this offers a next-best opportunity for immediate exposure. BH

C.U. Paleontology


R 5-8 yrs. When he hears the witches chanting "**Lunes y martes y miércoles—Tres!**" over and over, Carlos can't help himself and calls out a response: "**Jueves y viernes y sábado—seis!**" Delighted to hear the rhyme completed, the witches reward Carlos with gold and remove the mole from his nose. Greedy cousin Ricardo wants his turn, of course, but his shout of "**Y DOMINGO, SIETE!**" is met with somewhat different results: no gold and two moles. The chant, the funny story, and the shot of bilingual literacy add up to a read-aloud good for almost any day of the week. Full-color illustrations are a bit rough but have a buoyantly rustic humor. Also available is an all-Spanish edition, (tr. by Alma Flor Ada; ISBN 0-8075-9355-9; same price) which uses a livelier idiom—wart ("verruga") instead of mole, for example—than the English. RS


R 3-6 yrs. Because the text is simple without becoming either boring or cloying, and because the watercolor paintings are deeply involving, this is one of those rare bedtime mood pieces that does indeed cast a spell. The opening spread of falling twilight contrasted with a golden bathroom ("Sleepy children go to bed") is reversed in the concluding quiet dawn faced by a page of children bustling to "start a new day." In between come blue-textured scenes of the natural night world, with bullfrogs, skunks, raccoons, rabbits, possums, and of course their predators, the silent owl, the stalking coyote, and a fox. Even armadillos put in an appearance: "To cross a small stream, they hold their breath and walk across the bottom. To cross a wide stream, they swallow air and paddle across." The skillfully varied pictorial frames, the convincing perspectives, and the fine animal drafting invite a long look, while the words will soothe many a fear of the shadowed world beyond reach of electric lights. BH

D.V. Fear, overcoming


Ad Gr. 5-7. Protesting yet another move because of her single mother's academic career, Diana can only imagine one good thing about staying a year in England: the chance to meet Princess Di. Because of their common name, twelve-year-old Diana convinces herself that the Princess would be certain to understand all her problems and help her get back to Minneapolis. Caught up in her daydreams, Diana agrees to travel the two-hour journey from the little village of Coleby to London with Group Captain Somers, an old man—and fellow dreamer—she met while walking. Too late, Diana realizes that she's put herself in a dangerous situation. Bauer's references to Diana's typical pre-teen
dislike of her mother ("Her mother laughed, a deep throaty laugh Diana had loved once. Now the sound of it ran beneath her skin like an itch") are realistic, unlike the Di-dreaming that would seem naïve even in a younger child. The non-communication between mother and daughter is resolved at the story’s end—in a cleansing talk, mother explains her reasons for moving so much, and tells Diana why her husband left them. The ending is disjointed: Diana helps the unstable Captain Somers through an emotional memory, and after being given a choice, makes her decision about where to spend the year. The psychology is both overstated and unconvincing, but adolescent anglophiles will find the story a diverting trip. KP

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


R 2-4 yrs. Printed on heavy stock and sturdily bound in a laminated cover, this counting book is simpler than most—a significant consideration in a genre that seems to be getting away from its intended audience. "1 one-year-old" sits in the grass, "2 two-year-olds" walk in the rain, "3 three-year-olds" ride their trikes... on up to the twelves, who engage in a tug-of-war. Color photographs for each double-page spread are clear and close (but with a grainy texture); the activities depicted are developmentally authentic and, more important, look like fun. RS

D.V. Everyday life concepts; Growing up


R 4-6 yrs. The young narrator rescues Mama from peril in a private game of make-believe. Sarah saves Mama from lions, a flash flood, rattlesnakes, rolling boulders, a sinking ship, and snoring bears. Each time, Mama thanks Sarah, who replies modestly, "It was nothing," or "My pleasure." When the Gonagetcha Forest proves too scary for both Mama and Sarah, they are relieved to find a hug can make it disappear. Although the text is repetitively patterned, the book has plenty of child appeal, both in the watercolor illustrations of exotic places or intimate domestic scenes and in the rhythmically alliterative text—"there was roiling, boiling water coming down... there were rude and raucous rattlers all around." Unfortunately, the use of repetition becomes heavy-handed when the opening lines are repeated at the book’s end—"Mama says she loves me. Mama says she needs me. When Mama goes adventuring, I’m never far behind." The last illustration of a loving gaze between Sarah and Mama says it better. A comforting readaloud to be shared by parent and child. KP

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


R Gr. K-2. Daniel is small, black, engaging, and suffering just a bit from dethronement. To fill the gap, he’s invented an imaginary dog, and when his friend Norman (Asian-American) feels unhappy, Daniel solicitously provides him with his own imaginary dog’s shaggy friend—also canine, also imaginary. The illustrations are deft paintings, with realistic scenes given just a
bit of contrast by the judicious use of abstract design or a ghostly dog. Low-keyed, the story provides a perceptive mother who helps her child adjust to his sibling and who accepts his imaginary companion with equanimity. ZS


\[R\] Gr. 5-8. In a series that has the wit to mock series ("There's *Wild Reckless Autumn* and *Wild Reckless Winter* and *Wild Reckless Spring*, but my sister says *Wild Reckless Summer* is the best"), Bingo survives a precarious exchange of Christmas gifts with his girlfriend Melissa, who confides in a letter that she always substitutes his name for the hero's in her favorite romance, *Gypsy Lover*. Bingo also survives his parents' enthusiastic anticipation of a new baby ("The very thing that is now blissing you out is here! And has been here for over twelve years. Me!") and his new brother's premature birth, which he waits out with his grandmother and his first cup of coffee ("What he liked was the feeling of companionship that came over two adults when they sat drinking a basically bad-tasting liquid together"). Not only are many of the lines off-guardingly funny, but also several scenes are as well: the one where Bingo suddenly perceives his arms as growing unnaturally long and fast, for instance, or the one in which a girl intensifies her flirtation over the phone, launching a record-breaking silence on Bingo's part. Even quick-studies get a keen profile, as in Bingo's mother's overweight hospital roommate: "She lined the five pieces [of fudge] up on her table like a little train. After a brief deliberation, she ate the caboose." Byars has always had a special gift for blending narrative with internal dialogue in a natural flow. Here she proves once again that originality can buoy up an easy-to-read, companionably shaped, junior-high romance to levels of high-class fiction. BH

D.V. Baby, adjustment to; Boy-girl relations


\[R\] Gr. 7-10. Marcus is the narrator, the older child in a Mormon family who had taken in Henry, a Native American, as a foster son when he and Marcus were seven. The boys' fathers had been friends, and Mr. Yazzie had sent his boy to the Jenkins family when Mrs. Yazzie died. Now the boys are adolescents, and Marcus is trying not to be jealous because Henry is spending so much time with a girl. She happens to be the girl Marcus yearns for. She also happens to be the daughter of a well-to-do couple who are not pleased that their lovely Celia is dating a Navajo. Eventually Marcus falls in love with the girl next door, Sutton Rogers. Henry's continuing bouts of cultural conflict culminate in his decision to return to his home and spend more time with his father and grandfather. What happens to Marcus and Henry is not unimportant, but the candor and perception with which Cannon interprets their feelings—about themselves and about each other—looms even larger. ZS

D.V. Friendship values; Interracial understanding

Despite the fact that the teacher promises “a happy third grade,” Maggie, out of pure contrariness, refuses to learn cursive writing. Her passive resistance soon turns to full-blown rebellion. “Maggie began to enjoy cursive time. She experimented with letters leaning over backward and decorated with little circles, the way her mother dotted her i’s. She wrote messy g’s with long straight tails, the way her father made his y’s.” Illustrated with overly sober-sided pencil drawings, the story will seem somewhat purposive and single-minded to fans of Ramona’s adventures. It is, however, an easier read, and not without Cleary’s typically tart narration: “‘Take your paper home and do it over,’ said Mrs. Leeper, ‘and we must close our a. Your name is not Muggie.’ Maggie knew she was done for.” Younger readers will appreciate Maggie’s struggle; older ones can feel satisfyingly superior. All will cheer her intransigence, as well as her eventual capitulation.


In this sequel to *Racso and the Rats of NIMH* (BCCB 6/86), sullen Margaret and her little brother Artie become lost while on a camping trip with their parents. Found and saved by the rats (one of whom Margaret briefly holds hostage) the children go to live for a time in Thorn Valley, making friends, helping with some big projects, but more often getting in the way. The book is fast-moving and easy to read, but the addition of human characters renders the fantasy less convincing. How, for example, did Margaret converse with rat Isabella from the top of a high cliff? Why do the rats happen to have a medicine that cures Artie’s asthma, apparently for good? The last third of the book, when Margaret and Artie return to their family, is overextended and piles on more improbability, including a scene in which the children and two visiting rats operate and enjoy the rides at a closed amusement park. That the NIMH rats would actually befriend our own kind, however, is a wish-fulfilling premise, and readers will enjoy sharing Margaret and Artie’s discoveries. Racso, Isabella, Christopher and the rest remain credibly developed and appealing. RS


No name is given for the narrator, a black child whose widowed grandmother joins the household, arousing some resentment—because of her strictness—on the part of her grandson. An old baseball that is covered with autographs is on Grandma’s dresser; the boy takes it out to “see if it still works.” Grandma comes out on the porch but doesn’t seem to mind, for she shows her grandson how to throw a slider, telling him that she had learned the technique from Grandpa, who had been a baseball player. Seeing her sadly remembering, boy administers a restorative hug, Grandma says “I love you,” and they make a pact: he’ll “lighten up” on slamming the screen door if she’ll do the same about serving oatmeal for breakfast. Line-and-wash drawings indicate the author/artist’s capability with color and composition, and his difficulty with
figure drawing. Not a story that has substance or animation, but an adequate slice-of-life first effort. ZS
D.V. Grandparent-child relations


Ad Gr. K-2. Frank and Ernest, a bear and an elephant, don’t actually play ball; they have been hired to manage a team, the Elmville Mudcats, for the one day the manager can’t be there. As in the first book, *Frank and Ernest* (BCCB 9/88), there’s a separation of species; the staff are animals while the players and fans are people. This isn’t a baseball story as much as a book that investigates—tediously—baseball slang; at times the effort seems stretched, with a slang phrase or two on one page and the definition (in a baseball dictionary) on the next. Watercolor scenes put heart into the contrived format. More terms are included in an end-paper glossary. Too many raisins and not enough rice pudding here, but children often prefer the raisins. ZS


R Gr. K-2. Davy Crockett returns from his cameo appearance in *Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett* (BCCB 6/85) by Caron Lee Cohn, illustrated by Dewey. He looks as ridiculous as ever, wearing on his head an animated version of his coonskin cap—a live raccoon. This is the seventh in Dewey’s series of picture books featuring tall tale heroes and heroines; the brightly colored books do a lot to restore that dusty and faded genre. The boldly splashed special effects include a thunderstorm (Davy rides the lightning), Niagara Falls (Davy rides *up*), and a marriage proposal (“His voice came through the woods like a tornado”). The style jerks around a bit, in the non-stop style of an Indiana Jones movie, as the hero jumps from one adventure to the next. Some of the simple lines are wonderfully descriptive, “A great bear was hugging him like a brother, but with no love in it. The bear licked Davy’s neck to feel where to sink in its teeth.” Lively and gruesome. KP


Ad Gr. 3-5. His imagination inflamed by one of Grandfather’s stories, Miko sets out to rescue Ravna, daughter of the sun and moon, from the perilous hold of King Winter. The sun cannot rise until she is freed, which means Lapland will remain forever in winter darkness—and Miko’s birthday will never come. While his motivations are contrived, Miko’s brave quest is action-packed with appearances of wolves, demons, and the Star Bear, who comes down from his constellation to help. Although it does not have the strength and unity of a folktale, the story employs traditional motifs in an effective way, and the simple language is directly appealing: “‘Take them to the prison!’ yelled King Winter. ‘Lock them in the deepest dungeon of ice!’” Pen-and-ink illustrations don’t match the story’s drama, but they are coolly attractive. RS

Ad  Gr. 2-4. Of all the traditional hero tales, Jason's is perhaps most fraught with treachery, beginning and ending with a family turned against itself. This recounts the Argonauts' disastrous voyage to Colchis, including the loss of Heracles, and then Medea's sorcery, first used to help Jason gain power but later to destroy his new bride, as well as his and Medea's own children. Some of Fisher's dramatic paintings have the same kind of power that typified his picture book version of *Theseus and the Minotaur* (BCCB 10/88), but the monsters here appear to have been given a toy-like quality, perhaps to defuse the story's brutality. The pink-eyed dragon guarding the golden fleece resembles Puff, and the Harpies look mechanized; some of the characters' exaggerated expressions border on caricature. Still, Jason and Medea are well portrayed, and the action scenes and seascapes are ultimately strong enough to impress young readers or listeners with stylized images of a Greek tragedy. BH

D.V. Courage


Ad  Gr. 3-5. Old Sean MacLoegaire, known as the more easily said John McCleary, is the village carpenter whose first love is the fiddle. Young John also loves the fiddle, and comes to love Mr. MacLoegaire, who eventually bequeaths his best fiddle to the boy. MacLoegaire's death from pneumonia is the offstage crisis here, an event hushed up by the adults but nevertheless inferred by John. His resentment at being kept in the dark ("They could've told me. I'm not a baby") is spoken but not addressed, a subtlety that may irritate young readers. Otherwise, this is a tender, low-key tale that is probably somewhat evanescent for its intended audience. Pen-and-wash illustrations are suitably sensitive if a little sweet in the characters' facial expressions. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Older-younger generations


Ad  Gr. 5-8. Profusely illustrated (chiefly by watercolor paintings) and including some diagrams, this is Foreman's account of the wartime years of his boyhood in a small village on the Suffolk coast. The text gives information about various aspects of England's experiences during World War II, and some of the incidents are vividly written. Unfortunately, this is not true of most of the book, which is weakened by choppy writing, references that will probably be obscure to American readers, and a tendency to leave snippets of information unexplained or undeveloped. Example: "... Gus the sergeant had fallen asleep on the settee with a cigarette in his hand. All the children sat and watched as the butt burned down to the flesh." End of anecdote. The print is woefully small. The illustrations are impressive technically and aesthetically, and they are informative about details that have historical or military interest. In sum, good material, badly organized and awkwardly told, is not of the standard of the illustrations, which are handsome, informative, and/or amusing. ZS

C.U. History—England

*Gr. 6-12.* Gallant, a noted science writer, has ventured into the realm of social science to tackle this ambitious and timely topic. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, he discusses a little bit of everything: spontaneous generation, evolution, earth’s vanishing resources, world climate, acid rain—much that is interesting but extraneous to the book’s main topic. Gallant’s scientific bias does not always stand him in good stead. His view that myths “provided a kind of counterfeit experience that masqueraded as reality” may explain the awkward job he does in retelling the Enuma Elish and other myths about human origins. He incorrectly states that “Evolution is an established fact” rather than an established theory, and vastly underestimates the number of civilian casualties caused by World War II: “Nearly 17 million [troops] or 20 million including civilians.” More disturbing is Gallant’s oblivious-to-argument suggestion that it is better to let people in drought-afflicted areas starve because feeding them only encourages them to reproduce: “millions may survive to produce an even larger population that will require even more food.” The material covering the rise of cities and spread of humankind to other continents is poorly organized and confusing. Gallant begins a section halfway through chapter 5 with “In Chapter 3 we left Cro-Magnon hunter-gatherers living in southern central Europe at the base of the glaciers of the last ice age.” Further on, he asks, “What happened back on the European continent from the time Julius Caesar’s legions had marched from Rome . . . ?” This globe-trotting, millenium-hopping approach is often confusing and at times ludicrous. While Gallant adequately explains the mathematics of population curves and birth and death rates, he shows a peculiar naïveté in holding China up as an example of family planning. Trying to cover too much material, the book offers, at best, a shallow treatment. RAS

C.U. Social studies


*Gr. 5-7.* After thirty years, a sequel to the still-popular *My Side of the Mountain* (BCCB 6/60) is told convincingly by Sam Gribbley, now an adolescent and still living in contented solitude on his mountain. Now, however, his young sister Alice lives nearby in her own tree-house; she, too, has learned how to be independent in the wilderness, and she shares Sam’s concern for living creatures. There are two themes here: for one, there is the quest, as Sam and a friend follow Alice’s trail when she leaves a message to say she’s going off on her own; second, there is Sam’s desperate effort to retrieve his pet falcon after he learns that the man who has her is not the conservation officer he claimed to be when he took Sam’s bird. There is, therefore, a doubling of suspense, and there is always the threat of danger. However, the story would be intriguing to many readers even without these appeals, since it again demonstrates the vast knowledge of wilderness-living-lore that was in the first book. ZS

D.V. Animals, kindness to; Self-reliance

Ad Gr. 5-7. Joni McCord fumes when her father moves the family for a month to an upstate New York Iroquois reservation, where he will fill in for the regular doctor. Joni’s adjustment to a mall-free existence is not helped by the enmity between her and Sarah Birdsong, a Native American girl whose grandmother owns the house in which the McCords are staying. Despite some confusing terminology and explanations of Native American nations, the picture of reservation life is well-researched and interesting. The rest of the territory is familiar here, as the two girls overcome their initial distrust, accept each other’s differences, and come together in a friendship dance at the end. The characterization is also thin: Joni’s naiveté is more crass than convincing, serving mainly as a cause for well-meaning lectures on Native American life, and Sarah’s grandmother Maw Maw is a tiresomely wise matriarch (“But Maw Maw had that way of looking into your heart, and she knew that Joni McCord was unhappy”). The undemanding reader will enjoy the culture-clash plot as it goes through its familiar paces. DS

D.V. Friendship values; Intercultural understanding


Ad Gr. 1-3. Ryan, the only kid on his block without a pet, is at first delighted when his father brings home a toy poodle. But despite generous overfeedings and repeated attempts to hone his killer instincts, Brutus shows no sign of growing into his macho name. To make things worse, Ryan’s neighbor Cassie calls Brutus a “sweet little itsy-bitsy-witsy-cutie pie,” and Ryan’s mother insists on dressing Brutus up with ribbons and pastel doggie sweaters. But what Brutus lacks in size, he makes up for with canine cleverness. His ability to perform tricks wins him first prize at the neighborhood pet show and restores Brutus to the good graces of his master: “Ryan knew he would never have the biggest dog. But he had a dog that could do tricks. He had a dog that could catch ferrets. Ryan was sure he had the best dog in the whole world.” Such repetitive language is occasionally grating, but the short chapters, situational comedy, and abundant dialogue make this a solid snack for young pet lovers. RAS

D.V. Pets, love for


Ad Gr. 4-6. Elise harbors an egocentric fantasy that she is a “child of the stars” (“At last we have found her! The tawny-haired one who is to save our world from certain doom,”) so it’s disgruntling (as well as scary) when real space people show up and take a special interest in her classmate Nick. The credible characterization of Nick and Elise is subverted by the fantasy element, which seems more improvised than carefully structured. But while adults can appreciate the subtleties of satellites, swamp gas, and other illusions, most kids prefer their UFOs as firmly extraterrestrial as Gormley’s, thus giving this often funny and occasionally suspenseful story a ready audience. RS

Gr. 4-5. With clear reference to that favorite old ghost story, "In a dark, dark room," these five stories will appeal to a younger audience than did Gorog's *Three Dreams and a Nightmare* (BCCB 11/88) or *No Swimming in Dark Pond* (BCCB 7/87). All the protagonists are boys. Zack fears that Mrs. Beelzebub will one day make good her threat, "You're so cute I could eat you up"; Louis imagines that, if he has grown as much as his relatives claim, he will be stranded, unrecognizable, in a strange place; Sam cannot sleep in his messy room because of an odd scrabbling sound; and Todd wins a smelly sneaker championship but loses his feet. The stories are well-paced for suspenseful telling in spite of one or two anticlimactic conclusions (The weakest is "Oh Louis," which lacks plot), and transitional readers will be drawn in by the promise of scary fare spiked with pen-and-ink drawings. BH

C.U. *Halloween*


Ad Gr. K-2. Told in retrospect by Osa, this describes the way she had boasted about her father when she was seven; refusing to believe he was dead, she had invented more and more details about his importance. After alienating her friends by her pride, Osa is taught a gentle lesson by her grandmother. Set in the African village of two earlier books (*The Village of Round and Square Houses*, BCCB 6/86, and *Darkness and the Butterfly*, BCCB 2/88), the story is slow-paced and didactic albeit competently written. Vibrantly colorful crayon pictures fill the pages and serve as background to the print, making it hard to read on some pages. The strengths of the book are the details of village life, the warm relationship depicted between Osa and her grandmother, and the richness of the illustrations. ZS

D.V. Grandparent-child relations; Self-appraisal


Ad Gr. 3-5. Photographs and drawings, both of pedestrian quality, illustrate five anecdotes about the feats of five men who have been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame: Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, and Hank Aaron. It's old material, but always nice to read about again if one is a baseball buff. The writing is marred by two stylistic weaknesses: one is a tendency to gush rather than stick to facts, as in the introduction that describes the stories as "... thrilling, incredible, and absolutely true" before launching into one that is shown to be possibly untrue several pages later; the other is an awkward organization of material, as in the same Babe Ruth story, which moves back and forth in time. ZS

Ad Gr. 6-12. Ocean City, New Jersey spent $5.1 million to create a new beach, only to see the sand wash away in 2 1/2 months. In 1988, a $400,000 house in Chatham, Massachusetts fell into the ocean after winter storms eroded 100 feet of the property in five months. Through many such dramatic examples, Hecht shows that while millions of Americans enjoy living by the shore, few understand its constantly changing nature. Explaining how beaches and other coastal features are formed and shaped by natural forces and, with increasing frequency, by human "development," Hecht suggests that efforts to protect coastal property are often short-sighted: "arming" part of the shoreline with bulkheads or revetments not only destroys its natural beauty, but causes more serious erosion farther down the coast. Building too close to the shore undermines the natural evolution of beaches, leading inevitably to the destruction of both beaches and buildings. Hecht advocates an ecological approach: retreating from the threatened land instead of protecting it. Discussing the longterm results of the greenhouse effect, he paints an apocalyptic scenario: higher temperatures will melt the polar ice caps, raising sea levels and drowning such coastal cities as Miami, located a mere ten feet above sea level. While explanations are generally clear, the black-and-white photographs and diagrams are occasionally blurry or poorly drawn. Hecht effectively draws on his personal experiences; unfortunately he neither footnotes the many recent and historic examples he cites nor provides a bibliography. He may also want to check his atlas: the "Ontario River" which flows into the St. Lawrence is actually the Ottawa River. Despite its flaws, this is a thought-provoking, balanced overview. RAS

C.U. Ecology


R* Gr. 7-. Jinda and her family are suspicious of the university students from Bangkok who have come to "learn" in the drought-stricken northern village of Maekung. Their leader, Ned, is earnest, charismatic, and handsome, winning Jinda's heart and, eventually, the trust of the villagers. Ned convinces them to give just a third, not half, of their precious rice to the landlord. This resistance puts Jinda's father in prison and takes Jinda to Bangkok, where she is caught up in the student protest movement. A foreword explains the political situation in Thailand in the mid-70's, providing a useful context for a story that succeeds dramatically on its own terms. Jinda regards herself as an ordinary village girl, in love with a revolutionary but suspicious of the visitors' slogans. "She couldn't help thinking that Maekung had just been a vacation for them. Now that the vacation was over, it was time for the good little students to go back to school." While Ned's commitment to the cause is paramount, he confesses to Jinda that "sometimes it's easier to talk like a book than a person." Their love story is inevitably fused with the political events of their country, a balance that disallows excesses of romantic melodrama or earnest didacticism. The events are painful, violent, and graphically portrayed, especially in the climactic terror of a rally in which there is a brutal massacre of students by the military. The conclusion, in which both Jinda and Ned find their futures, is sad but honest. RS

C.U. Social studies
D.V. Devotion to a cause

**R Gr. 4-6.** Focusing on the garden at Sixth Street and Avenue B, Huff describes the way in which this, one of Manhattan’s many community gardens, is shared, diligently cultivated, and enjoyed by the neighborhood participants. This is not a how-to gardening book, but a text that gives background on the history of communal gardens in urban areas (including the government-encouraged plots of wartime and the Depression) and describes the growing popularity of such gardens throughout the United States. There are a few reproductions of old black-and-white photographs, but most of the pictures are recent, full color, and of excellent quality. They show the oases of beauty amid dense housing, the brilliance of flowers and of harvested vegetables, and they confirm the textual description of diligent gardening that includes space for children’s plots and quiet, grassy areas. A list of sources of information is provided, along with an index. ZS

C.U. City life


**Ad Gr. 2-4.** In a story about Nick’s first season on a baseball team, the good color photographs are carefully placed in relation to pertinent text. The writing style is not of as high quality as the pictures, being a rather plodding account of the game problems of a newcomer to the Little League. Nick makes mistakes, practices, and improves. The sedate story ends with Nick hitting a line drive and “running faster than he had ever run before!” ZS


**Ad Gr. 7-10.** “Neither Barb nor Madame knew I found The Seagull somber and depressing, and a weird choice . . . .” Particularly weird, it turns out, because the day Stacy gets the role of Nina in a school production of the Chekhov play she also finds out that Madame Karpova, her former acting teacher, has died, leaving Stacy with a legacy and a mystery. All is not well at the Sunnyside Nursing Home, and Stacy is determined to sort out the peculiar circumstances surrounding Madame’s death. The solution is unusual and credibly revealed, and the incorporation of facts about nursing home horrors are usually well integrated into the story, if ultimately beside the point since they don’t cause Madame’s death. There’s a fair amount of inspirational acting advice from Madame that Stacy recalls; such aphorisms as “in putting on the mask of a character we drop our own mask, and find ourselves,” don’t really further the story but will find an appreciative audience among the highminded. RS

D.V. Teacher-student relations


**Ad Gr. 9-**. This sophisticated and varied collection contains twelve new fantasy stories, ranging from Roger Zelazny’s knotty and poetical

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mini-epic "Kalifriki of the Thread" to Robert Westall's rich but only incidentally fantastical evocation of childhood, "Fifty-fafty." Other highlights are "Turntables of the Night," Terry Pratchett's black comedy of a dweeby DJ's date with the devil; Helen Cresswell's "Sky Sea," a girl's chatty account of her beloved great-aunt's belief in a sea above the clouds; and Lisa Tuttle's "The Walled Garden," a Tom's Midnight Garden-like tale of a woman who, as a child, saw her adult self meeting a lover in an Edenic garden. Other stories, however, show signs of labor or contrivance despite containing clever ideas, and some simply lack a sense of atmosphere. The stories by Cresswell and Tuttle may, in isolation, please a general audience, but the reliance of most of these stories on dialect, allusion to mythology, or heavily ornate style restricts their appeal to confirmed devotees of fantasy, who may discover a new author or two. DS


NR Gr. 7-9. Max, the seventeen-year-old narrator, has suffered through his mother's suicide, his father's rejection, a series of foster homes, and two stays in a "juvenile facility." Now he is earning money as a computer hacker, visiting the hospital daily to see Uncle Pete (dying of brain cancer), and feeling miserable because Uncle Pete is the only person who loves him. Max has no home; when not at the hospital or the computer lab, he wanders Venice Beach as other street people do. The male nurse who's friendly when Max visits Uncle Pete introduces his daughter Lindy, black and bright and pretty. They become romantically involved. Max is concerned about a street friend, an older man who is an alcoholic. To get money for those he cares about, Max becomes a computer thief. The alcoholic friend leaves town, Uncle Pete dies, Max returns the stolen money, and everything looks rosier when he's taken in by a graduate student from the lab and transfers to Lindy's school. This heavy-handed melodrama has one mitigating aspect: it deals with issues about which many adolescents are concerned. The style of writing, the structuring of the plot, and the superficiality of the characterization are disappointingly banal. ZS D.V. Ethical values


R Gr. 7-12. Unlike the many tough/vulnerable heroes of contemporary YA books and movies, 17-year-old Nick is just vulnerable. He's self-conscious about his skin: "I spent most of my money on quack cures for acne. Bought a real beauty at the Missouri State Fair: cleans up your face and makes convertible tops look like new." Nick is also worried about his best friend Kevin, who has returned a new man from a summer in California, a bicep-bulging stud who's the image, Nick enviously thinks, of the son his own father always wanted. Then there's the boys' other best friend Frieda, who, for Nick, is turning into something more than a friend. This is a likable trio—even Kevin, whose affectations (and family problems) are overdrawn—and Nick seems like an older brother to some of Richard Peck's affable narrators. While the novel lacks a strong plot, character dynamics are real and funny, particularly among Nick, his mother (a poet), and his father (town police chief: "Everyone just talked naturally to my dad like he'd pulled them over and asked for a driver's license").
Nick and Frieda's romance is cozily bumbling, and their First Time is treated in a way both intimate and easygoing, a reassuring tonal blend that Koertge manages with ease. RS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Friendship values


R* Gr. 7-. Working from the principle that "although human rights are ours by nature, they need to be fought for and protected by law and tradition," Kronenwetter has created an unsensationalized, rational, and compelling book that lives up to its title, not only telling readers why they should take their stand but also arming them for the fight. Basic enough to educate the innocent but comprehensive enough to enlighten the informed, the work includes a history of the idea of human rights, an even-handed discussion of why and where they are abused (including allied countries and enemies, left- and right-wing regimes, and not sparing the U.S. itself), and an overview of past and current fights against human rights abuses. Even more impressive is the full one-third (plus appendices) of the text devoted to explaining what the reader can do. Never patronizing or preaching, the book enumerates small steps and large: how to join or even form a human rights organization; how to write a foreign official or U.S. politician (and how it can be effective even when the writer is not of voting age); how to cope with the necessary expenses and possible failures. Despite its serious topic, the book is highly readable, peppered with anecdotes and showing no sign of the excessive earnestness that can infect this kind of endeavor. Endnotes, appendices (including the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, instructions and format for writing letters to editors and officials, and a directory of leading human rights organizations), and an index are included.

DS

C.U. Social studies

D.V. Devotion to a cause


M Gr. 7-10. Liberty, "sick of being weird, strange, a toothpick, a joke," hopes to start the school year with a new identity. Brother Ian (nicknamed "Moonkid" because he thinks he's from another planet) and Rick, their flower child father, definitely don't enhance her image; Libby disowns them as often as possible. While his sister finds fitting into the crowd as easy as wearing the right clothes, Ian, a gifted smart-aleck, antagonizes his entire class. The story is told from alternating points of view, and neither voice consistently rings true: Libby is too shallow, Ian, too sophisticated for thirteen. When their mother invites them to visit her in California, Libby is ecstatic, believing the trip will enhance her status with her new friends. Ian's response is muted: "Libby has always been overjoyed to receive any of the crumbs that Sharon might want to brush off her emotional table. I find it hard to get excited about crumbs." Returning from their trip to California, both experience a crisis of conscience. In a powerful scene reminiscent of Cormier, Ian makes the humanizing discovery that he can be even more cruel than a bully tormenting him. Libby, faced with the chance to move out to California with her ultra-chic
mother, decides to stay. Her transformation from “material girl” to staunch ally of her father (who has been charged with selling pornography) and her brother is less than convincing: “Suddenly the choice was easy—maybe it had been easy all along. ‘I’m going to stay. . . . There’s been enough running away in our family.’” This pat ending turns the story into a modern morality play: fight materialism, stick up for what you believe, and live up to your name, Liberty.

RAS


Ad Gr. 4-6. Now the most common tick-transmitted disease in the world, Lyme disease (named for a Connecticut town where it was first identified as a distinct disease) has symptoms that may be confusing and is dangerous in its severity if not properly diagnosed and treated. Although there are weaknesses in the writing (“He felt nauseous . . .”), the book should be useful because there is little available for young readers on the topic. Landau describes the tick that causes the disease, its life cycle, and the ways in which it infects and affects human beings and other life forms; she discusses symptoms, progress of Lyme disease, and treatment, and includes current measures of prevention and of diagnosis. A glossary, a half-page bibliography that cites titles of tangential interest (Mice: All About Them, for example) and an index are appended. ZS


M Gr. 3-6. Given the speed with which rain forests are being destroyed around the world and the environmental implications of that destruction, up-to-date books on the subject are important for student research. Landau’s is both easy to read and clearly illustrated with color photographs, but it is also given to problematic generalizations: “People who live in tropical rain forests live in harmony with nature.” What people? Where? How? No such specifics find their way into the section of four brief paragraphs that mention the “over two hundred million people” inhabiting the world’s tropical rain forests. “When a tropical rain forest is burned, carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. There it absorbs much of the sun’s heat. As a result, the planet warms up. Scientists have called this the ‘greenhouse effect.’” Although this statement is partially true, it’s inaccurate in implying a single cause for what is in fact a multi-factored problem. Other overstatements lump “algae, ants, fungi, termites, centipedes, and earthworms” into a chapter on insects. A map makes readers strain to see the pale green marking of rain forest areas. On the plus side is some solid introductory information on rain forest plants and their conditions for growth, along with a glossary, list of children’s books for further reading, and index. BH

C.U. Forests and forestry


Ad Gr. 5-8. This presentation of paleoanthropologists’ uncovering the development of hominids combines scientific explanations, imagined flashbacks to prehistoric scenes, and black-and-white illustrations that project both fact and fiction. The montage effect is not always as neatly clear as a linear
organization would have been but probably conveys more accurately the zigzag route to discoveries. The information is up to date and fairminded in presenting controversial theories, including Don Johanson's bitter debate with Mary Leakey over the categorization of their respective East African finds—Lucy and the Laetoli fossils—as *Australopithecus* or *Homo*. The account also reaches back to Lyell, Darwin, Dart, Dubois, and others who contributed to the development of ideas concerning the evolutionary path. Probably the least helpful aspects of the book are the simulations, such as the description of a young Neanderthal girl's nightmarish fear of predators ("She wishes she were not in this cave. Anywhere else, but not this cave!"). or the futuristic holographic/telepathic lecture by a "Pacific Rift University" professor in the year 2,001,988. Still, the basic coverage is consistently well-researched, and endnotes give sources while a bibliography suggests books for further reference. Careful, copious drawings, diagrams, maps, and a few photographs extend the information and open up the format invitingly. A thorough index eases access for reports. BH

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Ad
Gr. 3-5. Colorful if crowded, these double-spread paintings echo traditional Chinese style and serve as a background for frames that enclose the text. This is an original story based on folkloric patterns and morals of honesty, industry, and courage; it also has historical value, since it reflects some of the events that occurred during the reign of the twelfth-century emperor Hui Tsung. Although the lavish illustrations sometimes threaten to overwhelm the tale, young listeners will identify with the poor orphan girl who is a weaver and who saves Hui Tsung when his rule is threatened by Tartar invaders and the greed of two royal officials. ZS

C.U. Storytelling


R
Gr. 5-9. Almost every schoolchild knows that Columbus "discovered" America. Few know anything about his three later voyages to the New World, that he was sent back to Spain in chains after being found unfit to run the new colony, or that he was marooned on Jamaica for over a year during his final voyage. Levinson's highly readable account provides a sympathetic but balanced view of the explorer: though he was a great navigator, Columbus was a poor governor, and he never abandoned his belief that he had reached the East Indies. Levinson also presents the darker side of history, pointing out that Columbus departed for America on the same day that the last Jews were expelled from Spain and that he was in some ways responsible for the beginning of slavery in the New World. Historical imprints, maps, and occasional excerpts from Columbus' log and letters provide a sense of immediacy: "From sunset to daybreak [we] labored much with the wind and the very high sea and tempest." The book contains an index but no footnotes. Included are a chronology of events and the full text of several historical documents, such as the ship's lists of the *Pinta*, the *Nina*, and the *Santa Maria*. The location of Columbus' first landing in the New World and that of his final resting place are both still
unknown; by discussing these and other controversies, Levinson shows us that history is not just a series of dates and places, but an ongoing investigation.

RAS


R Gr. K-3. "With silver spears/I hold my prey/ Until you bite it/ All away!" These lines are tucked neatly into the tines of a high-tech fork, but in case you didn’t guess the answer, it’s written in white, upside down on the bottom of the page. Twenty-seven sprightly rhymes will lure beginning readers (or picture-book listeners) into a game that’s colorfully designed for playful, varied effects. The snow man is easy to guess, the window shade is hard, the sponge is in between. Sometimes the pictures give too much away (lips, a nose), but they’re funny, cleverly designed, and enticing unto themselves. Livingston is in her element, devising fresh, clean verses that are simple without becoming either flat or forced. This is an imaginative book with lots of bright contrast, visually and verbally. BH

C.U. Language arts
D.V. Imagination concepts


R Gr. 5-8. "His best friend is a girl and he doesn’t care what anybody says about it.” So begins Miranda’s junior-high essay on her best friend Gus, who lives upstairs from Miranda and her mother. Gus and Miranda’s friendship is old and solid but now seems threatened from several directions, including the amorous attentions of Miranda’s friend Catherine towards Gus: “If they started liking each other, who would I be friends with?” While in many ways this is a cozy friends-and-family story, rather plotless but appealingly detailed with eighth-grade authenticity, a darker theme gradually emerges. Soon after a lecture by the housekeeper about being careful of “how you sit and dress, how you act,” Miranda and Gus are nearly mugged by a gang of boys while trick-or-treating. Later, shockingly, she is assaulted on her doorstep by a stranger: “That’s when he grabbed me.” Gagged and tied-up, Miranda is soon saved by Gus and his family. The violence here, as in real life, is intrusive, particularly as it is set against the comfortable background of Thanksgiving and the school Christmas play. The attack leaves Miranda afraid of men, including Gus, but a wrap-up lecture by Mom brings some security (to Miranda if not the reader, who may be newly alarmed at Mom’s discussing the attack as almost-rape). McDonnell is saying that the world can be a dangerous place, and, more pointedly, that men can be threatening to women. If the theme is sometimes effortfully developed, it is nonetheless a brave statement, particularly as occasioned in the junior-high genre. RS

D.V. Fear, overcoming


R Gr. 4-6. Jenny’s beloved grandmother has a surprise, but it isn’t a nice one, at least not so far as Jenny is concerned: the long-widowed Nana is getting married and is moving away from Bright’s Island to New York.
Maybe, thinks Jenny, the rabbit’s foot she has found can keep Nana at home. Both Nana (who won’t let even a hurricane keep her from her honeymoon) and the story itself have more spunk than most of the recent spate of grandma books—there’s even a gentle suggestion that Nana and “Uncle Charlie” have dallied before benefit of clergy. Jenny’s attempts at subversion are forthrightly annoying (throwing the travel brochures into the ocean, for example), and the stormy climax is a satisfying blend of retribution and redemption leading to the inevitably predictable but goodhearted reconciliation. RS

D.V. Grandmother-child relations


Ad Gr. 7-9. Every chapter in this first-person narrative begins with some lines of rap by Mouse, who is fourteen, a bit perturbed because his father (Mouse’s parents are separated) seems to want to return—and Mouse has been quite content living alone with Mom. He is in the first throes of a serious interest in girls, and he and some pals are hot on the trail of money (loot from a long-ago bank heist) said to be hidden in an abandoned Harlem building. While it’s a cheerful, lively story, this is busier than most of Myers’ books and has so much going on that it’s almost cluttered. It’s also so determinedly bouncy that there’s little contrast in the writing: amusing but as relentless as a rock video. ZS


Ad Gr. 1-3. Molly “has more guts than anybody in the second grade,” so Beth is flattered when Molly invites her for a country weekend. Flattered, and apprehensive: “What if I get homesick? What if they eat stuff I don’t like?” But Beth enjoys the berry-picking and the wildflower-gathering, and it is she who is brave and resourceful when the two girls become lost in a big cornfield. Told in a style that is smooth and colloquial, this easy-reader offers no plot surprises, instead providing the cozy comfort of predictability. Cartoon illustrations are equally pleasant and offer a once-over-lightly crayon distinction to indicate that this is an interracial friendship. RS

C.U. Reading, beginning
D.V. Friendship values


M Gr. 9-12. When her father’s job transfers him, sixteen-year-old Ellen refuses to move with her parents in the middle of the school year. Her parents think she is safely boarded with the family of her friend, Christine. Of course, they’re wrong. Armed with a savings account of accumulated birthday money from her grandmother and the desire for solitude, Ellen rents a flat. Renting their upper floor to an almost-broke teenager, allowing her to paint a mural on a wall in the flat, and assuming a bearded young man who moves in is Ellen’s brother, Ellen’s landlords seem peculiarly naive. The teenage characters in this British novel all act with unusual maturity and speak with unlikely
poesy—in describing a cat leaving her flat, Ellen says “Still tanked up on a billycan of tomato soup, he had a problem coordinating his leg movements, but he covered a couple of yards, raised his head painfully to the skylight, winced at the birdsong, then lurched to the door.” Even though the book’s plot is a teenage fantasy (will Ellen have sex with either of the two boys hanging around the flat?), the pretentious style makes for unappealing and atypical conversation. When Felix spends all Ellen’s money on a lifetime supply of tampons, it is the last straw, if not for Ellen, then at least for the reader. KP


R Gr. 3-5 See review under Vogel, Carole G. *The Great Yellowstone Fire*, below.


Ad Gr. 5-7. Gregory Patent was five when the United States began bombing Shanghai, held at that time by the Japanese. His reminiscences are, expectably, personal and family-focused, reflecting the concerns of a young child. There is enough material of historical interest to give a broader picture, however, and the black-and-white illustrations (one per chapter) also extend the scope of the story. Because he was born in Hong Kong, Patent was a British citizen, although his parents (both Jewish) were, respectively, Russian and Iraqi. Competently written, the text is marred by obtrusively awkward phrases that halt the narrative flow: “While other stomachs were often empty, I was a fussy eater . . .” or “The rats had been hiding in a corner under the bathtub that was hard to reach.” The book ends with an account of the nervous days of waiting for exit visas, and the excitement of the journey to San Francisco in 1950. ZS


R Gr. 4-6. Nervous but excited by the dangers of bombing raids, ten-year-old Norah is glad that she’s not being sent away as so many English children are in 1940. To her dismay, she learns that she is being sent to Canada and is responsible for her brother Gavin, who’s five. Pearson does a fine job of describing the voyage, the confusion of temporary allocation, and the more serious problems of adjusting to a Canadian classroom where she is unpopular, to a home in which one of the two adults (a mother and a daughter) seems to dislike her, and to the fact that little Gavin is instantly loved and cosseted. Norah does adjust—eventually—and comes to realize that her neglect of Gavin has been due to jealousy, that she really loves him dearly. One of the strengths of the story is that Pearson sees her characters with perspective and depicts them with nuance: nobody is all bad or all good, or all wise or all foolish. The pace is well-maintained, and the changes that occur as Norah gains insight are natural. ZS

D.V. Adaptability; Brothers-sisters

Ad Gr. 7-10. The concept—a simultaneously published anthology of stories by Soviet and American writers—is promising; the dedication—"For a brighter peace in every child's heart"—is worthy; the announcement that some profits will go to UNICEF is commendable. The stories themselves, however, are less than the sum of their parts. Six of the nine American stories are actually excerpts from novels most libraries will already have. The excerpting of *The Chocolate War* distorts the theme of the novel; the cutting from O'Dell's *Carlota* is confusing without its proper context. The selections from Rylant's *A Blue-Eyed Daisy* and Fritz's *Homesick* are more judiciously chosen and edited. The title story from Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* is a worthy inclusion; short stories by Jane Yolen and Walter Dean Myers show these writers at less than their best. Some of the Soviet stories also read like excerpts from longer works, and the translations, perhaps, have smoothed from them the stylistic distinction apparent in the best American selections. Yuri Yakovlev's "Wild Rosemary" is a subtle and sad story about a boy who walks dogs deserted by their owners; most of the others will seem naively didactic to an American audience. Of course, one wonders what the Russian readers will make of Cormier's *Brother Leon*...

C.U. Social studies
D.V. Intercultural understanding


Ad Gr. 4-6. Readers may sympathize with the protagonist, Jon, who had been blinded, at the age of two, in the car accident that had taken his father's life. Jon is now ten and feeling some trepidation as he and his mother move to a small town and he first enters public school. Wanting to carve birds as his father had, Jon is taken on—grudgingly—by a man who has been nicknamed "Carver." Jon's mother, although she encourages him to be independent, is not told that Jon is secretly taking lessons from Carver. The story ends with Jon's secret revealed and accepted by his mother, who sees the fine work her boy has done. Structurally thin, this seems more an overextended short story than a full narrative. The jacket points out that "Carver was inspired by the accomplished Curtis Merritt, one of whose many skills was carving. Blinded at age three by cancer and killed by it at twenty-five..." This is not a sentimentalized story, but it is a purposive one, and that purpose weakens the book as narrative although not as an author's tribute; ZS

D.V. Handicaps, overcoming (blindness); Older-younger relations


R Gr. 2-4. Soft pencil drawings extend a quiet text that describes what life was like for one child and her mother in the last two years of World War II. Daddy was somewhere in the Pacific theater, Mama had a job as a welder, everybody coped with food shortages, lack of gasoline, occasional...
blackouts, and—worst of all—the loneliness and fear when a family member was in the armed forces. This is more a log of wartime than a story, but it is a very effective account, simply written and focused on those facets of everyday life that would concern children of the same age as the child narrator. ZS


Ad Gr. 5-8 yrs. Adapted from the title story of Augusta Baker's collection The Talking Tree (BCCB 5/56), this Italian folktale presents a king who searches for a magical tree and finds a witch-imprisoned princess instead. Rayevsky's adaptation is generally sensible, although she neglects to have the king cut down the tree, a necessity mentioned by the princess therein just pages before. In another instance, the illustrator has slipped, having the king grasp the hand of the freed princess only to discover a page later that she is made of wood, a characteristic apparent "to the touch." But the illustrations are all fine-lined, neo-medieval elegance, lit with intense colors in an orange glow. The witch is a gaudily humorous hag, and the long-limbed king more of a foppish Quixote than a heroic Prince Charming. With enough opulence to satisfy the bookstore eye, the pictures draw their real power from a quirky and individual sensibility. RS


Ad Gr. 3-6. Attractive color photographs and an accessible magazine format invite readers to participate in a variety of outdoor crafts, activities, and challenges. Seven crafts and six activities are suggested, most with adequate instructions, although readers may find the sections on star-gazing and juggling a bit sketchy. In general, the crafts are more innovative than the activities, which include egg-and-spoon races and washing the dog. The craft projects emphasize recycling materials, making sandals out of newspapers or a portable cooler out of a milk carton. A few of the activities (making a Chinese dragon, ice sculpting, and Inuit games) will be new to most readers, while others (making giant soap bubbles or a kite out of garbage bags) give a new twist to an old idea. Informative blurbs ("One average size tree makes a stack of newspapers as tall as one average-sized eight year old kid") encourage browsing. There's not a lot here, but the book has child appeal and an ecologically sound approach: "Take a look around your neighborhood. What things could you do to help the environment?" RAS


R Gr. 4-6. "Daddy had died, Mama was in the hospital where she might not get well for a very long time, and her brothers were the only family Rosie had." Faced with the possibility of being sent to separate foster homes, the three children decide they'll get from Illinois to Missouri—somehow—to find the grandmother they've never seen. It is a bit coincidental that they are able to stow away on a horse trailer that takes them close to their destination, but that's the only weak spot in a book that has drama and suspense, both nicely controlled and paced. What the children find is a dilapidated house, a cool
reception by their grandmother and her brother-in-law, and an intriguing mystery:
someone is hiding, or being hidden, in a closed-off part of the house. The
answer to the mystery evolves logically, as does a satisfying ending to a story
with good flow and structure. ZS
D.V. Brothers-sisters

143p. $14.95.

Ad Gr. 7-9. In a story set in England in 1958, Nelson Vincent’s
family arrive as one of the first Jamaican immigrant groups in England.
Although Jonas, father of Nelson and his two brothers (baby Winston and
Wellington, the oldest child) has been invited by the government to work in
Britain, the Vincents find that few people welcome them, that prejudice against
blacks is widespread, and that they have little choice of living accommodations.
Wellington and Nelson adapt in different patterns, the older boy forming a rock
band and the younger sustained by a friendship with an elderly white woman,
Mrs. Waterman. Involvement in a “Keep Britain White” race riot leads to
readjustment for both boys, clarifying their attitudes and their goals. The book
is based in part on the racial conflict that occurred in North Kensington in the
summer of 1958, so that it has historical interest and sociological validity. As
fiction, it is marred by purposiveness, with an aura of case history rather than a
narrative flow. ZS
D.V. Interracial understanding


R Gr. K-3. Oversize pages offer space that is used with restraint
by the author/artist in a book on the water cycle. First published in Switzerland,
this gives a direct, simple, and sequential description of how melting snow
moves through increasingly larger bodies of water to reach the ocean, evaporate
in the sunshine, and start the cycle of precipitation again. Schmid uses soft
colors in gentle and effective pictures, giving variety by the contrast of rural and
urban scenes. Her paintings convey effectively the change of seasons and
settings. There have been many books on this subject, but another that is both
accurate and attractive is always welcome. ZS

Semel, Nava. *Becoming Gershona*; tr. from the Hebrew by Seymour Simckes.

Ad Gr. 6-8. Gershona is a *sabra*, born in Israel, and the only child
of a marriage between a woman who survived Auschwitz and a man whose father
abandoned his wife and infant son 35 years ago in Europe to immigrate to the
U.S. Now, in 1958, Grandpa has come to Tel Aviv to rejoin the family just at
a time when Gershona is facing adolescent questions of identity with regard to
both friends and family. In the course of the novel, she finds answers in bits and
pieces that add up to self-acceptance and to some very intense scenes with an
agonistic neighboring peer group as well as between her alienated father and
grandfather. The first love she feels for a boy newly immigrated from Poland
and for her new-found grandfather shore up her fragile confidence, while the
confusion she feels on witnessing her parents’ lovemaking is eased with her
happiness at their announcing her mother’s pregnancy at the end of the book.
Except for a brief afterword, the historical background is assumed rather than explained, and the plot itself sometimes proceeds piecemeal, with more thematic cumulation than plot. The first-person narrative will have special appeal for young readers familiar with the Jewish Diaspora, but Gershona's sources of embarrassment—an odd name, an overprotective parent, etc.—are vividly characterized and typical of preteens everywhere. BH

C.U. History—Israel
D.V. Family relations; Grandfather-child relations


Ad Gr. 4-5. Four lines of rhyming text at the foot of each page leave plenty of room for Sorel's big, sophisticated, and busy art-deco watercolors in which the scratchy line and elegantly cartoonish dash will be familiar to those who know his political cartoons. Therein lies the weakness of this book: it is more likely to appeal to adults than to children because of references (Coco Chanel, the lindy) that few of them will understand. The zillionaire, Max Maximillion has one small daughter, Claire, who accompanies him on a cruise aboard his ship, the S.S. Gigantic. The plot: Max is horrified when a psychic tells him Claire will marry a saxophone player, but delighted when the saxophone player proves to be Claire's shipmate Charlie, a boy destined to be a worthy husband because he holds a ducal title. Whether children will read this as a tongue-in-cheek farce or be impressed by the story's surface of snobbery and the joys of immense wealth is moot. ZS


R Gr. 6-12. Profusely illustrated with black-and-white photographs, The White House is a readable account of the history of that famous mansion. St. George qualifies her selection of anecdotal history with a statement in the introduction—"This book is not intended to be a definitive history of the White House or the nation but rather it is a personal selection of those times that have most dramatically influenced the building . . . ." Most interesting are the descriptions of the construction, re-building, and re-modeling of the White House, which is presented in a lively combination of narrative and quotes. The statements of architects, servants, presidents, and their wives create a feeling of immediacy. Dolley Madison, when advised to abandon the White House to the attacking British, stayed to finish a letter to her sister—"Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll, has come to hasten my departure, and is in a very bad humor with me because I insist on waiting until the large picture of George Washington is secured . . . ." Whenever St. George loses track of her topic and attempts to describe presidential administrations, the text and jumps from decade to decade; in two pages discussing the effect of the media on the presidency, for instance, nine presidents are mentioned, seemingly at random. However, the author always manages to return to her topic, and her tangents usually add rather than distract. Where else could one learn that Madame Chiang Kai-shek "demanded that her silk sheets and pillowcases be washed and ironed every time she used them" during her White House visit? KP

C.U. History—U.S.

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Ad  Gr. 3-5. Two new Canadian “chapter books” star Maggie, the “Greenapple Street Genius,” in adventures chronicled by Cyril, who would like to be her partner but more often ends up as her loyal Dr. Watson. Each book contains five episodes: *Maggie and Me* ranges from a science project to a duel with a bully; *Greenapple Street Blues* centers on the impending move of Maggie’s family to parts unknown. Maggie's exploits with Cyril are unlikely but readable. Maggie herself is a bright and bossy character, and the two kids are an appealing pair in this mildly entertaining series. DS

D.V. Friendship values


R  Gr. 2-4. Literal but overcolored paintings illustrate a text that might well lend some reinforcement to an often rote ritual. The Pledge was created in 1892 by Francis Bellamy of *The Youth’s Companion* as part of a 400th anniversary observance of Columbus’ arrival. Refinements were made through the years (“my flag” to “the flag of the United States of America,” for example) and in 1942 the Pledge was given legal sanction. Swanson provides brief historical references for background and clearly defines the words of the pledge: “Indivisible means that something cannot be divided or pulled apart.” She is also clear about the controversy that periodically marks the history of the pledge: “In 1943, the most important court in the United States, the Supreme Court, made a decision. No one—child or adult—could be forced to say *The Pledge of Allegiance*.” The beginning-reader format of the book is attractive and consistently reflected in the easy reading level. RS

C.U. Flag Day
D.V. Patriotism


Ad  Gr. 4-6. In a sequel to *The Secret of Gumbo Grove* (BCCB 6/87) the narrator is nine-year old Mary Elouise, who is black but far from proud of it. In fact, Mary Elouise is embarrassed when her teacher (white, saccharine, tactless) talks glowingly of Dr. King; she is upset when she’s chosen class narrator for the Black History segment of Presidents Month. She spends a great deal of time and emotional energy trying to curry favor with a white classmate. Tate doesn’t make racial generalizations; one of the strong points of her story is that there is bias in both races, just as there is understanding in both. What weakens her story, less cohesive than that of the first book, is that it is repetitive and slow-paced, as Mary Elouise learns (from her friends, from her mother, and from a black charismatic storyteller) to appreciate her black heritage. The change is convincing, but the style is labored, weakened by such phrases as “He hunched his head . . .” or by such contradictory statements as “She was dark-skinned, too. That made me feel good,” and “I don’t like real dark skin, not even mine.” A good deal of information about black history is introduced via conversation, a device that becomes obtrusive. ZS

[ 254 ]

Ad  Gr. 7-10. Cassie Logan, now seventeen, and her older brother Stacy are now living in Jackson, which offers job and educational opportunities not available in their small farming community in Mississippi. While visiting their parents, the two young people and their friends encounter racist hostility from Statler Aames and his family, and even, it seems, from Jeremy, the Aames’ cousin and childhood friend of the Logans. In a side-plot that never quite meshes, Cassie’s friend Sissy becomes pregnant and coyly refuses to name the father. Comprising scenes that individually resonate with taut power, the first third of this new novel about the Logan family nevertheless seems unsure of its narrative direction. The conflicts are tellingly shown but diffusely structured, until the breaking moment when friend Moe, tired of his humiliating abuse at the hands of the Aames boys (“Nigger, I said pick up that hat!”) attacks them with a tire iron and is forced to run, involving the Logans as well as Jeremy in his suspenseful escape. That Taylor can be a skilled storyteller becomes evident once the narrative begins to incorporate dramatic as well as moral urgency. The road to Memphis is hard, as when Cassie uncovers the hatred that lies just beneath the smiling surface of a white service station owner, and complicated, as when she experiences a powerful romantic attraction for a brilliant Memphis lawyer. Readers new to the Logan saga should probably begin with *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (BCCB 11/76); faithful (and persistent) fans will appreciate seeing Cassie’s entry into the wider world. RS


R  Gr. 6-9. Set in Seattle in the 1940s, this is an account by fifteen-year-old Rachel of her family’s despair when the youngest child is kidnapped, and of Rachel’s leadership in searching for—and finding—her baby half-brother, Rider. This is not a conventional household. Grandpa Chance had already taken in Rachel’s cousin Jonah; and after Rachel’s mother was widowed, she came to the Chance farm with Rachel and later gave birth to Rider. After the kidnapping, Rachel suspects some evangelists who have passed through town and is determined to follow them and find her beloved Rider. Grandpa helps; so does his eccentric friend, Druid Annie; so does the hired boy who, at first disliked by Rachel, becomes her more-than-friend. This has good characters, both heroes and villains being well-drawn, and it certainly has suspense. If there is a bit of coincidence at the end (Rachel finds Rider’s father, who has not known he had a son) most readers will pardon the lapse into a pat ending. ZS

D.V. Family relations


R  Gr. 5-7. After a brief introduction recounting Richard Wetherill’s late nineteenth-century “discovery” of various pueblo ruins near Mesa Verde, the author describes a fictional village through a year’s cycle of events. The narrative is straightforward, with no attempt to overdramatize the imaginary cast of characters and their lives. Readers will get a sense of the lifestyle and rituals of matrilineal Native Americans who depended primarily on corn and whose art of pottery still yields sherds reflective of the highly developed Anasazi
culture. An afterword details some current survey work by a modern Acoma Pueblo archaeologist, and several endnotes add information: an author’s note, a list of ruins to visit, a bibliography of adult and children’s books, and a glossary. The index will help students seeking information for reports, but the book really needs to be absorbed beginning to end, and this will take a good reader. The print is small, and the format, despite abundant, accurate black-and-white drawings, is repetitious in page design and more appropriate for younger viewers than is the text. However, the inherent interest of the material and the conscientious handling of it offer solid compensations. BH

C.U. History—U.S.; Indians of North America


R Gr. 3-5. Profusely illustrated with color photographs of good quality, Vogel and Goldner’s account (imprint information can be found under Vogel, below) begins with a description of Yellowstone National Park, focuses on the fire of 1988, and discusses the ways in which the plants and animals of the changed wilderness have recovered. The text is clear and succinct, primarily devoted to the drama of the fire and the efforts made to contain it. Patent’s book covering essentially the same material is more sedate, both in text and photographs, but her approach calmly emphasizes the cyclical inevitability of the fire, and details specifically what the Vogel and Goldner book paints more broadly. Patent, for example, discusses the two kinds of lodgepole pinecones and their role in reseeding a burned forest; Vogel and Goldner mention this only in passing. On the whole, though, this is a complementary pair. Patent’s book is indexed. RS

C.U. Forests and forestry
D.V. Ecological awareness


R Gr. 4-7. Weiss explains clearly the physical principles and history of submarines, using a well-organized text and a combination of photographs and humorous black-and-white cartoons. The writing style is lucid as well as light-hearted. Weiss does not lose his reader’s attention by taking his subject too seriously (“The idea was to come up under an enemy warship and drill holes in the bottom. Then, with luck, the submarines would be able to duck away from under the sinking boat!”). Reminiscent of Macaulay’s work, the cartoon illustrations are in keeping with the levity of the text. One drawing of “art and artifacts . . . found on the sea bottom” depicts what is meant to be a bust but looks more like a decapitated head—probably for the amusement of the detail-searching reader. Some material about scuba diving, submersibles, underwater treasure, and undersea commercial operations, although interesting, seems tacked on to extend the book. However, the concise information about submarines, accessible by an index, will be invaluable to young researchers and sub devotees. KP

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R Gr. 7-10. Anne has been hired by the Larimers as a summer "keeper" for their ten-year-old grandson. Matt’s mother is dead, and the Larimers want Anne to keep the boy’s father away from him. This moody mystery is retrospectively narrated by Anne, who is sometimes hard put to explain how she could have been so incredibly dense about the real motives of Matt’s (exceptionally attractive) father. Despite some overexplanation and overt psychologizing, the story is suspensefully spun to an unsettling conclusion. Anne is like one of Phyllis Whitney’s sharper heroines: smart, somewhat detached, and (eventually) self-aware, she relates the story in a grown-up tone that will flatter readers already hooked by the alluring cover illustration. RS


R Gr. 3-5. When the tide takes skinnydipping Simon’s clothes away, he’s determined to get home in a hurry, and won’t call for help because phone booths are all made of glass. “Somehow,” Simon told himself, “I’m going to have to get myself home naked.” Since the mere utterance of the word *naked* is enough to make most third graders hysterical, this fast-moving (“He wasn’t much more than a pink streak”) paperback could send the read-aloud crowd around the bend. “They were definitely chasing him. Now he wasn’t running to hide. He was running to escape.” After disastrous dodges with dogs, kids, a golf cart, and an outdoor barbecue, Simon makes it home, barely one step ahead of the police. Nakedness and catastrophe—they’ll love it. Cute cartoons keep things on the droll (rather than silly) side. A revision of a book first published in 1981. RS

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