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* 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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It did not take long, after literacy became a buzzword, for sensible educators to expand the concept from reading skills to cultural knowledge. What children read is basically tied up with how and why they read. E. D. Hirsch has been one of the strongest voices for a defined body of knowledge, a canon he sets forth explicitly in *A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know* ("by the time you finish sixth grade"). It is not the title that's objectionable here so much as the subtitle and the commercialization of a national concern: “More than just a reference guide, this book provides the right diet of learning for a child's future success,” says the publisher's hype. In only one small introductory disclaimer does the author refer to the limitations of a catch-word approach: “This dictionary cannot take the place of good parenting and teaching or of *good books* (italics mine), tapes, and videos that convey literate knowledge coherently and vividly.” In fact, an encyclopedia tells more and a trade book tells it better. In addition to the theoretical problems underlying a book like this is the question of what criteria have determined the selection of information here (never articulated in the note to parents and teachers). In making arbitrary decisions of such sweeping scope, is Hirsch responding to culture or creating it?

Of even more immediate concern are the inaccuracies that plague what has been included. Some of these latter are factual errors, some are oversimplifications, and some seem attributable to sloppy editing. Chicago, according to the text, “is nicknamed the Windy City because of the strong winds that blow off the lake” (p.143); actually the epithet derives from an accusation by Charles A. Dana, editor of the New York *Sun*, in response to Chicago "windbags" who clamored to hold the World’s Columbian Exposition in their city. The blues are called “a kind of sad, slow music” (p.53) when in fact blues are often fast and bitterly funny. An alto is incorrectly asserted to be a synonym for a contralto (p.51). Fiction is amorphously defined to include “novels, plays, poetry, or short stories, such as fairy tales” (p.24). The entry for “The Little Engine that Could” takes up twice as much space as the one for the New Testament (pp.30, 74). “Dracula is a vampire in a famous horror story.” (p.23) What story or by whom is not indicated. Gibraltar is described without mention of its being ruled by the British. (p.170) “Infinity refers to a set of numbers that goes on without end, for example: 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on” (p.190)—a bafflingly limited explanation. These are only a few random samples of the kind of problems which, if they appeared proportionately in a trade book such as David
Macaulay's compendium of technological literacy, The Way Things Work, would have elicited a drubbing from critics. Adults can have fun taking The First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy apart in the spirit of anti-trivial pursuit, but kids don't know enough to do that.

The sins of omission are as striking as those of commission: why an entry for Psalms and none for Proverbs in the Bible section? Why cite Maya Angelou and not Langston Hughes? The attempt to impress kids with relative time through the use of blue boxes to demarcate historical periods (1492-1765, 1765-1800, 1800-1865) is more confusing than giving the actual dates. Nowhere in the entry for Abraham Lincoln does it mention when he was born or died; one must deduce from the blue-markered box that he falls somewhere in the third section, 1800-1865. The guides to further reading are dated and often out of print, an important point to consider in light of the fact that these bibliographies hold the key to children's books providing the real experience of cultural literacy. This section is also rife with typos: Denise Murcko Wilms' book Science Books for Children: Selections from Booklist, 1976-1983 is attributed to Denise Mureko Wilma (p.253).

Such nitpicking should not distract from the more pressing issue of what children really learn from this kind of checklist. How much cultural relevance is there in knowing who Odysseus is when the name has been emptied of the story? Remembering is once again reduced to rote, in which case Hirsch is contradicting his own plea to restore content to the curriculum. This is an important work because of the author, the coverage, and the distribution. With its organized basics, maps and diagrams, and quick-glance facts, it will be widely bought and will be useful in many homes and classrooms. However, the book raises as many questions as it answers. Teachers, librarians, and parents deserve support in preferring in-depth sources over easy access.

Betsy Hearne, Editor

New Titles for Children and Young People


R 4-8 yrs. A brief biography of the famous civil rights leader, Adler's account covers the basic events of King's life and also provides some background information on the history of the civil rights movement. King's boyhood encounter with racism is put in the broader context of segregation, as his mother explains to him that "there were still some people who did not treat black people fairly." The simple text is enlivened by quotations, from the famous "I have a dream" speech to King's comment during the Montgomery bus boycott: "There comes a time when people get tired of being kicked about." The chronology contains a factual error: the Kings were married in Marion, Georgia, not Marion, Alabama. The biggest appeal of this biography is its plentiful watercolor illustrations. Some portraits, like that of young Martin singing in the choir, are awkwardly drawn. Others are very dramatic: especially so is the depiction of King's assassination, with his entourage pointing accusing fingers at the murderer. King's boyhood home is exactly reproduced, and,
throughout, Casilla shows a penchant for detail which gives the illustrations a photographic quality. Suitable both for storytelling and beginning readers, this slim volume will meet the information needs of primary graders and spark their desire to know more about King. RAS

C.U. History—U.S.; Social studies


Gr. 3-5. Lisbeth Zwerger’s delicate line and economical composition, her restraint in use of color, and the humor in the animals’ faces make this edition of the fables a pleasure to look at. Zwerger has chosen a dozen fables to illustrate, some as popular as “The Fox and the Grapes,” others (“The Man and the Satyr”) less well known. The retellings and the moral tags may be more fully comprehensible to the reader in the middle grades, but this can also be used for reading aloud to younger children. ZS


Gr. 5-8. “You’re my best friend,” she told Anna firmly, making it sound like an order. Or a prison sentence.” New girl Anna is pleased when Lindy Miller invites her to be the only other girl in the Society of Masks, even when it turns out that Libby uses her status as “the Silver Lady” to push Anna, a lowly “Companion,” around. Like Stephen Bowkett’s *Gameplayers* (BCCB 2/89) and Gillian Cross’ *A Map of Nowhere* (BCCB 6/89), this is a story of secret games gone awry and frightening. The Society of Masks becomes controlled by the Yellow Lord, an older boy whom Libby and Anna have never seen unmasked, and whose purposes seem far more evil than the petty rituals previously practiced by the group. While Anna, set firmly on the angels’ side, is not a complex heroine, her eventual scapegoating and “trial” by the Society is a convincing and satisfying martyrdom. Rough-edged Libby is more complicated, but she makes a last-minute transformation that has not been fully prepared by the author. This, on the whole, seems a hastier work than we are accustomed to from Alcock, with too many loose ends, abrupt leaps of time and perspective, and a thematic diffusion of the interesting into the obvious, particularly in the just-say-no finale. But the appeals are many and mighty, led by the straight-ahead suspense. RS


4-7 yrs. Charlie can do anything, including dive off the high board and “pick up pennies from the bottom of the pool.” Jessie Mae idolizes him, but young Charlie wisely tells her, “‘I don’t want to be your hero. I’m your friend.’” After Charlie gives Jessie Mae a magic kit for her birthday, Jessie Mae finds she can conjure herself into outrageous situations of her own, like walking on the ceiling or taking a balloon trip around the world. What Jessie Mae has learned about herself is not clear, but the matter-of-fact blend of realism and fantasy provides a satisfying sense of wishes granted. While not as
effectively focused as the author’s *Blackboard Bear* stories (BCCB 9/69), the child’s-eye viewpoint is sympathetic. Pragmatic pencil and watercolor illustrations have a tidy appeal. KP
D.V. Age-mate relations; Self-confidence


Ad 3-6 yrs. Inexorably marching closer, the marching band becomes both bigger and louder: “Big as ants/ Loud as crickets... Big as crickets/ Loud as birds... Big as birds/ Loud as lions/ THUMP, THUMP/ THUMP, THUMP.” The poem is infectiously if unvaryingly rhythmic, with a steady marching beat (“Rat-a-tat-tat/ Rat-a-tat-tat”) that underscores readily remembered variations on a few simple words. Ehlert’s marchers look a bit like schematized gingerbread boys, each a symmetrical array of colored circles, squares, and rectangles. Their march has a similarly jaunty precision, with patterns and perspectives that are attractive but overly calculated. Chanted aloud and marched about, this would make a boisterous story-hour finale. RS


Ad 5-8 yrs. Yoshi loves to build things, but he has run out of ideas. “Then Yoshi saw something floating toward him.” The water brings Yoshi a magic fan which reveals visions of great new projects: a moon-chasing boat, a kite that will fly with the clouds, an enormous bamboo bridge, which, it turns out, saves the people of Yoshi’s town during a tsunami. The story is contrived and inconclusive, with the fan a convenient device, and the boat and kite unnecessary clutter. In any case, the real focus of the book is its illustrations framed within a fan shape across each double-page spread. The recto side of each fan is also a half-page that turns, John Goodall-style, to reveal the fan’s next vision. While the fan-shape tends to circumscribe the pictures, making them less illustrative than decorative, the patterns are carefully controlled, with a dramatic mixture of glowing tones over a black underlay. Handsome and harmless. RS


R* Gr. 2-6. An exemplary series on deafness, physical disabilities, leukemia, blindness, and mental retardation features straightforward but sensitive texts along with frank, spontaneous, black-and-white photographs. Bergman has tailored each volume to its particular subject: the blind children are interviewed rather than described to reflect how they take in the world through
hearing; other books convey information through narrative, always underpinning medical fact with emotional reality. The children here suffer pain, frustration, and fear with courage and patience, though anger and sadness are also clear from some of their reactions. One boy, born without arms or legs but ingenious in the ways he invented to cope, died before the books were finished, a fact the author is honest about acknowledging (“sometimes the weaknesses of a child’s body go beyond what you can see in a picture. . . . Ronny died from an infection that his body could not fight”). On the other hand, the benefits of therapy—revealed by detailed shots of special procedures—are apparent, and prognoses often hopeful. The tone of all the books is humane but dignified, with no cuteness, evasion, or sentimentality. Appended sections give valuable information to help readers generalize from the specific children depicted, answering common questions and suggesting things to do and think about, places to write for further information, and relevant children’s fiction and nonfiction for further reading. Each book also has a glossary and index. This valuable Swedish import, smoothly translated and adapted for American audiences, is something to which all children should have access: for staring at, considering, and discussing. BH

C.U. Social studies
D.V. Handicaps, adjustment to


R 4-7 yrs. Bryan is not only a born storyteller but an experienced one, and his rhythmic, musically patterned rendition of this West Indies tale will have children chiming in whenever the main characters’ names appear. Upsilimana Tumpalerado lives with his grandmother, who insists that he learn and use his full name (“Remember, your name is long, but it’s not the longest”). None of his friends or the animals he meets can remember it, and he’s a little discouraged until Granny challenges him to discover her name, which is finally divulged by Turtle, the namekeeper of the sea. Granny’s name is Mapaseedo Jackalindy Eye Pie Tackarindy! The pictures dance right along with the action in a sunny, swirling rush, though sometimes they seem too busily colored. Liberally laced with onomatopoeia and animal noises and as well as sound-effective names, this will make a happy contribution to story hours. BH

C.U. Storytelling


R Gr. 5-8. Calabro’s account of the grizzly bear research done by Frank and John Craighead is an involving synthesis of bear lore and field narrative. The Craigheads (identical twin brothers of children’s book author Jean Craighead George) came to Yellowstone Park in 1959 and continued their research until 1971. They examined grizzly feeding, mating, and hibernating patterns, tracked their territorial ranges, and observed cub-rearing practices. Much of their research involved the use of radio collars, allowing the brothers to track the bears through the wilderness and to their winter dens. Information about the bears, their habitat, and the research is smoothly incorporated, with several dramas (bear v. man, bear v. wilderness, bear v. bureaucracy) that provide
suspense. Photographs, a map, index, reading list, and an extensive bibliography are included. RS
C.U. Zoology
D.V. Ecological awareness

M
Gr. 7-10. For an older audience than Susan Saunders’ Margaret Mead (BCCB 4/87), this provides a better balance of personal details and professional accomplishments, but suffers from choppy writing and confusing explanations of Mead’s projects and beliefs. While the lack of documentation makes it hard to distinguish between the opinions of the author and those of Mead, some of the anthropological analysis seems callous: “It turned out that the five hundred villagers suffered from hypothyroidism... This hypothyroidism slowed down the pace of living. That did make it easier for the anthropologists to get the information they needed”; or again, “This trancelike way of life was normal for the Balinese.” Transitions are awkward: “It was common to see the bodies of small children floating unwashed and unwanted down the river. There were intense coeducational sports competitions in which the emotions of small children were exploited.” To her credit, Castiglia conveys the charged and controversial nature of her subject, who comes across as challenging if sometimes querulous, admirable rather than likable. Appended are a bibliography (but no notes), index, and chronology; the book defines “difficult” words within quoted material in a way that seems both silly and patronizing: “‘Colleagues [fellow workers] as scholars will correct her errors, the perspective of time [viewpoint in the future] establish her scientific worth.’” RS

R* Gr. 4-. This dynamic combination of health information and SEMs (scanning electron micrographs) has an appeal both scientific and sensational, particularly the photograph, magnified 551 times, of a house mite chewing away on skin cells. “The average double bed may contain two million of them.” A blood clot resembles multiple sunsets, before and after photos illustrate no-more-ring-around-the-collar, a comparison of clothing fibers shows just why polyester feels so plastic. A photo of the many fibers of a single thread passing through the eye of a needle makes the proverbial camel’s attempt seem easy. Cobb’s text wisely defers to the photographs, but it is still a smoothly organized narrative of the ways the body protects itself against threats from within and without, comfortably encompassing both sneezing (“A sneeze exiting a nose has been clocked at slightly more than a hundred miles an hour”) and Velcro, so named because “one side of the tape is constructed the same way velvet is, and the other is similar to crochet.” Explanations of how the photos were taken are included; the format is open and clear. This is bound to be pored and pawed over; refusals to “go wash your hands” should be met with a peek at page fourteen. RS
C.U. Health

R 4-7 yrs. Storytellers will be familiar with this as "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids" from the Grimms or, in another variant, as "The Cock, the Mouse, and the Little Red Hen," which was illustrated in picture-book format by Lorinda B. Cauley. In Conover’s version, Mother Goose’s seven goslings, along with a resident mouse, grumble and groan all morning before she sets out to market. Then a hungry fox weasels his way in by softening his voice with flour ("That sounds like Mother!"), concealing his paws with dough and red shoes ("That looks like mother"), and promising presents if they open the door ("Oh, that’s . . . mother, all right . . . No problem"). Mother Goose then rescues her swallowed brood by sewing stones into the sleeping fox’s game bag, which pulls him into the stream when he tries to take a drink. The art is ornate, with sophisticated double spreads alternating a self-satisfied fox with a self-righteous goose. The endpapers, featuring folktale characters for young viewers to identify, suggest a self-conscious re-creation, which this is, complete with lace doilies decorating the opening pages. The drafting is elegant, if slightly static, and the book design handsome. Elaborately detailed with traditional Dutch graphic motifs, this is a benevolently tamed version of that irrepressible theme, "don’t let strangers in the house." BH

C.U. Storytelling


Ad Gr. 7-10. Jane Johnson is feeling bored and ordinary when she discovers that the missing-child pictured on her milk carton is herself. This is the kind of paranoid premise that junior high melodrams find highly enjoyable, and Cooney doesn’t let them down, filling her story with suspenseful twists. While the plot is appealing and well-paced, the writing is often excessive, abruptly shifting gears between the satiric and the sentimental, and is populated with unlikely imagery: "Energy spilled out of her like oil from a smashed tanker." Although this is no match for the similarly situated *Taking Terri Mueller* by Mazer (BCCB 6/83) or Amy Ehrlich’s *Where It Stops, Nobody Knows* (BCCB 1/89), it’s still an involving story. RS


R Gr. 5-8. An appealing anthology to hand to horse lovers, this balances old standbys from Marguerite Henry, Carl Sandburg, Mary O’Hara, Anna Sewell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne with contemporary stories by Marian Bray, Peter Roop, Nancy Springer, Mary Stanton, Anne Eliot Crompton, and Jennifer Roberson. The story backdrops are broadly varied, from Spanish and Native American to Scythian and prehistoric. Coville himself retells a myth, the taming of Bucephalus, as well as the folktale of Dapplegrim. Tone ranges from humor to romance, but every selection features a solid plot with plenty of excitement to hold interest for reading aloud or alone. The introduction involves an accessible story from Coville’s pony-riding days, and each author is briefly
introduced in italics at the beginning of his or her piece. A few poems are also included, along with Lewin’s vivid watercolor illustrations. BH


Ad Gr. 6-10. If Hila Feil’s Blue Moon, reviewed last month, wedded atmospheric writing to a bland plot, this junior gothic perhaps does the reverse—bland writing to atmospheric plot. Hannah, who is fifteen and fresh out of an institution (where she was sent for depression and anorexia, both conditions brought on by the car-crash death of her mother and the subsequent remarriage of her father to his secretary) has come to recuperate with a wealthy and eccentric great-aunt who lives on Martha’s Vineyard. There she becomes haunted, perhaps possessed, by the ghost of a girl who was unfairly hanged for witchcraft in the 17th century. While there are some clumsy shifts of perspective, this is enthusiastically plotted and paced, with cliff-hanging chapter endings (“She realized, with blinding certainty, she was not alone!”) that keep things going. Although it never really evokes the white nightgown/dark moor chill of the gothic, this has enough of the traditional motifs to satisfy those Lois Duncan readers looking for something just a little different. RS


Ad Gr. 4-6. Incapable, apparently, of writing a book that isn’t funny and lively, Danziger has produced her first story for readers younger than her usual teenage audience. Matthew, planning his eleventh birthday and then having it (that’s the story line) squabbles with his best friend and makes up, argues almost all the time with his older sister, and wages rather nastily prankish war against all the girls in his sixth-grade classroom. It’s almost as good as her other books but not quite—partly because the story line seems stretched, partly because all the many juvenile characters are unpleasant (which is believable but tedious) and partly because the present-tense narration is occasionally awkward. ZS


Ad Gr. 7-12. “Most legacies of war are dreadful to behold . . . But some legacies of war, though born in horror, must be seen as beneficial.” Dolan’s opening statement is typical of his sometimes irritating look-on-the-bright-side approach. Of the five “legacies” examined (which include immigration, the alienation of returning veterans, their psychological scars, the physical side-effects of Agent Orange, and the MIAs) only one, the immigration of Indochinese refugees to the U.S., could really be “seen as beneficial.” While the account reads at times like a textbook, it is carefully footnoted and uses case histories to supplement occasional statistics. The personal accounts, especially in the chapters on Agent Orange and on the Indochinese refugees, are very effective. Unfortunately, Dolan fails to mention that the plight of the “boat people” remains unresolved: thousands face forced repatriation from Hong Kong
back to Vietnam, while others in Thailand and Malaysia remain in political limbo. Focusing instead on those who have made it to America, Dolan describes both the success stories and the problems of racism and discrimination. Here and elsewhere, this provides enough historical background to orient readers unfamiliar with Vietnam but is primarily concerned with problems of the present. Readers looking for more information on the war itself should consult Don Lawson's *The War in Vietnam* (BCCB 12/81) and *An Album of the Vietnam War* (BCCB 7/86). RAS

C.U. Social studies


Ad Gr. 4-6. In a series lugubriously entitled “Gone Forever,” in which each 48-page volume is devoted to one creature that is now extinct, there are photographs and drawings, many of which are uninformative, since they are often of other, currently observable species. Here the color photographs are handsome but only a few represent parrots or parakeets that were indigenous to this continent but no longer exist. The writing style is simple, choppy, and pedestrian albeit accurate in the facts presented. Like other books in the series, this has a combined glossary and index; the page headed “For More Information” gives one resource, the National Audubon Society. See also the Horn review, below, for another book in the series. ZS


R 5-8 yrs. A fascinating pourquoi tale to compare with the Judeo-Christian story of the Garden of Eden, this relates how humans lose their immortal lives of perfect contentment when an old woman disobeys Gitchi Manitou’s prohibition against climbing a magic vine between the earth and stars (a metaphorical parallel to the Tree of Life). The woman is trying to retrieve her grandson, whom spirit beings have whisked up to the sky-kingdom beyond reach of jealous villagers who have persecuted him. After the vine falls under the old woman’s weight, all people begin to experience disease, pain, and eventually death, although the spirits promise them some relief through healing plants in the hands of Mi-di-wi-win, or “Grand Medicine People.” Bordered with stylized illustrations of these plants, the full-color pictures use free-floating perspectives with strong colors sometimes overlaid by shadowy images. A few of the compositions are too crowded, but most pattern central shapes harmoniously. Esbensen cites her source as Ojibway chief Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, who wrote a book in 1850 under the name George Copway, to preserve his people’s legends. BH

C.U. Indians of North America
D.V. Obedience

[135]

Ad Gr. K-2. Animated ink-and-wash drawings show the frenzied activity of the little girl whose monologue is a restrained contrast to the satisfying havoc she creates as shown by the pictures of her hard day's work at Dad's office. Samples of the contrast: "Then I drew some pictures on some other paper and colored those," accompanies a stack of ruined business letters, and "There were lots of things to play with in the closet" shows chaos in the office supply closet. This is the sort of disaster humor young children enjoy, but when it serves for the entire plot it becomes a bit thin; too, there's a trace of an isn't-that-cute-of-the-kiddy tone that may be more amusing to adults than to children. ZS


Ad 2-5 yrs. Familiar settings and objects, a minimal use of words, and a repetition that reinforces the concept of being "in between," aided by very simple and uncluttered (if wooden) paintings, present one aspect of location. Moderately successful, this has some pages that are less than clear. The format uses two pages to orient the audience (one page for front door, for example, and the next for back door) and then a double-page spread to illustrate what's "in between," in this case, "my house." Therefore it may confuse a child to say that the grass is here, the sky is there, and the clouds are in between, when the clouds are *in* rather than *below* the pictured sky. Also not clear: a dog is standing behind a tree with head visible at one side and tail at another, but it is hardly accurate to say "my dog is in between" as though head and tail were not an integral part of the dog. ZS


Ad 3-6 yrs. Dedicated by the illustrator to "tomatoes, potatoes, chickens, and cows," this where-did-it-come-from guide to food is a palatable introduction. Using a question-and-answer format ("What's in my dish?") the origins of kid-appealing foods (jam, juice, hamburgers, tuna fish) are identified: "It's chocolate pudding! Where did it come from? The chocolate in chocolate pudding comes from beans that grow on cocoa trees. Chocolate pudding has milk and sugar in it too." Stylized but recognizable mixed-media illustrations generally but not consistently show both the food and its origins; an illustration of a tomato "growing in the sun" has the fruit floating unattached in mid-air. And in this book, anyway, the egg comes before the chicken, which is pictured both feathered and fried. The pages could use some reshuffling, and while the artistic effects are individually attractive, the whole is an overly diverse melange of tones and styles. Still, an appealing lunchtime reference. RS

D.V. Everyday life concepts

**Ad** Gr. 7-9. Christina's family emigrates to Texas because her father's political views (he was a "free-thinker") endangered him in Germany. Some of the story is told from Tina's point of view; letters to her grandmother in Germany are interpolated and italicized. Although the story has historical interest and the characterization is adequate (stiff but credible) the book is marred by a pedestrian writing style in general and a poor use of bilingual address in particular; the latter is exemplified repeatedly by Tina's use of German words interspersed within her letters (written in German, presumably, and translated by convention into English): "What if you have brought us to this place that God has forsaken for nichts?" ZS


**R** Gr. 9-. With notes on neither the poets nor poems, this is an ascetic collection of approximately two hundred poems on the subjects of peace and war. Unobtrusively grouped by themes, the poems are arranged in a thoughtful progression from peacetime ("And all the summer through the water saunters"—Auden), through preparation for war ("I could not love thee, dear, so much./Loved I not honour more"—Lovelace), its generals and foot soldiers, the families left behind ("and still I don't know/ where my father/ flying home/ took a wrong turning"—Libby Houston) and, finally, peace, the collection closing with Sara Teasdale's "There Will Come Soft Rains." The majority of the poems are English and modern, but there are representations of many times and cultures. While perhaps daunting for individual perusal, this is a powerful complement for classroom use, bringing meditative perspective to battle dates and places, and thoughtful countermand to simplistic rhetoric. RS

C.U. History; Literature; Social studies

D.V. Peace


**R** 5-8 yrs. With straight-faced wit, Henstra's pen-and-wash illustrations elaborate Wilhelm Hauff's story about a Caliph of Baghdad who tricks a trickster. The Caliph's treacherous cousin Kaschnur disguises himself as a peddler and beguiles the Caliph and Grand Vizier into swallowing some powerful magic powder that can turn them into any animal they choose. Then laughter makes them forget the word that reverses the spell, and they are stuck as storks until they meet a princess who has been turned into an owl by the same sorcerer. She helps them resume their true form on condition that the Caliph will transform her by a promise of marriage. Royalty ridicules nature here, but the last laugh is on humans, whom the artist catches in their most pompous

[137]
poses and most foolish expressions—the story is fun to tell and the art large and clear for group sharing. BH


R Gr. 3-5. Dramatic scratchboard illustrations are reminiscent of Leonard Everett Fisher’s work, and are nicely placed in relation to an abbreviated adaptation of a classic tale. Hayes has included most of the familiar incidents and the characters of the longer version, shortening the text by omitting details and embellishments, so that it is useful for slow older readers as well as those in the middle grades. While the pruning has resulted in a staccato style of writing, the story is cleanly adapted and easy to read. ZS


Ad Gr. 6-9. This is primarily a formula girl-gets-boy story, but it’s better than most because the writing style has momentum and vitality and the author has an ear for dialogue that sounds natural. Characterization is adequate and consistent if not deep, and Hermes has done a smooth job of patching a serious problem into the matrix of a high school romance. Allison, a sophomore and the narrator, has a crush on handsome classmate David, and they are both involved in a school project that is set up to combat prejudice. The prejudice is directed against a favorite teacher whose husband has AIDS; he is invited to school for a day so that people can meet and talk to him. The project is successful, teacher and husband are pleased, and—to the probable expectation of most readers—girl does get boy. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations; Teacher-pupil relations


Gr. 3-8. See editorial, this issue. BH


M 5-8 yrs. Sent by his jealous mother, the love goddess Aphrodite, to punish Psyche for her beauty, Eros instead falls in love with the mortal and visits her nightly in a magic palace. Only when Psyche is prompted by her sisters to try and look at her lover does Eros fly away, after which Psyche must endure a series of trials to recover him. Although this is a haunting myth well adapted by an experienced storyteller, it has been sentimentalized here through a visual projection of glamorous characters, dramatic poses, and perennial sunsets. The shading and drafting of Donna Diamond’s clean pointillist graphics in black and white, which distinguished Rumplestiltskin, Swan Lake, and other works, get lost in highly romanticized colors and in stage settings that seem to come from Greece via Hollywood. The most arresting picture is Psyche with a knife in one hand, holding her lamp in the other to look at Eros; the bones of this picture are strong, with gold concentrating the central
figures against a dark purple background. Unfortunately, the bedraggled feathers hanging down from the bottom corners of the picture are more distracting than symbolic of Eros' wings. Other images have a flowery, touched-up-photograph effect, inadvertently reminding us of how important it is not to dilute the power of mythology in making it attractive to children. BH


R  Gr. 5-7. The year is 2349, and twelve-year-old Abby wakes from a drugged sleep to find she has been kidnapped and, along with many other children, taken to a newly-built space habitat where they form a slave labor corps. Bryan, who is Abby's age but far less mature than she, has been her responsibility on Earth (as a guest at the inn run by Abby's uncle) and she feels that she must include him in her escape plans. They do escape and, once home, effect the rescue of the other children by convincing the authorities that those running the habitat are really in contravention of child labor laws. Hoover does a good job of creating a believable future world. While the structure and style are substantial, however, there is little characterization save for the contrast between Abby and Bryan: she is perspicacious, industrious, and deeply concerned about other people while Bryan is selfish, rash and manipulative. Credible but not subtle. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Courage; Resourcefulness


M  Gr. 4-6. In the same series and the same format as the Dunnahoo book reviewed above, this is more flowery and repetitious in its writing style. Horn begins with a two-page fictional scene that has a minatory tone; he then waxes eloquent about manatees and dugongs (Steller's sea cow is an extinct species of dugong) telling the reader, on the first page of description, that the *Sirenia* was a "gentle order of giants," that "... manatees and dugongs are very gentle," and that "They do not have any aggressive tendencies" all on one page. Other books in the series are about the Atlantic gray whale, the dodo, the great auk, the passenger pigeon, the sabertooth cat, and the woolly mammoth. ZS


Ad  Gr. 3-5. Like other books in the "Women of Our Time" series, this is written at a level that is appropriate for its intended audience, being direct and simple (if sometimes awkwardly phrased) but not so simple that older readers who feel nostalgic about Pippi Longstocking can't enjoy it. Hurwitz shows how aspects of Astrid Lindgren's life have been incorporated into her writing, and she shows—without adulatory comments about the author as a person or as a creative artist—why she is so appealing and successful in both capacities. ZS

[ 139 ]
R  Gr. 5-8.  Working in jobs as diverse as newscasting, farming, social work and computer programming, the twelve people profiled here share a convincing dedication to their chosen work. The first-person format is inviting, with a balance of work details (“When we get information on a suspect, we have to get up and move right then. So I could be in a drainage ditch in the next ten minutes, or under a house, or in a vacant warehouse with big rats running all around”) and job satisfactions: “When a suspect that I know is guilty is convicted, it makes me appreciate the method to the madness and it makes me see that my job is really, really worthwhile.” The many black-and-white photographs show the subjects in action: detective Rhonda Hall on a stakeout, Elias Sifuentes cooking in his restaurant, Jeff Franklin at the controls of a KC-10 Air Force cargo plane. While the photos are too gray, this upbeat and personable resource is attractively formatted and easy to read. RS  
C.U. Vocational guidance

NR  Gr. 5-7.  Thirteen-year-old Willow has been making notes, on waking, about her dreams ever since she began dreaming of Kalos, who lived in a past Willow can’t identify. A vivid experience of being Kalos when Willow almost drowns leads her to believe that Kalos is herself in a previous incarnation. There are other facets to the book: the death of a sister (leukemia) and the confrontation with a best friend who, as a devout Christian, is horrified by Willow’s beliefs. Through hypnosis and thought transference, Willow finally realizes that the stranger who saved her from drowning was her sister, long ago in Egypt. When her present-life sister dies, Willow finds that her soul is present—or was present—as another Egyptian sister, new-born. The writing style is pedestrian, the characterization shallow, and the plot unconvincing, in part because the combination of former and present lives is so awkwardly contrived, and partly because it seems improbable that Willow has such difficulty, given the clues (the god Amun-Ra, the “ram-headed sphinxes,” Egyptian clothing) in identifying the land where she, as Kalos, had lived. ZS

Ad  Gr. 6-10.  Like Susan Gates’ *The Burnhope Wheel,* (BCCB 12/89), this is a ghost-time fantasy in which contemporary young people find themselves reliving the sins of the unquiet dead. When Dee and her brothers accompany their mother on one of her historical investigations in an isolated valley in Australia’s Northern Territory, they don’t expect to find secrets, terror, and ghosts. The owner of the property is angry and inquisitive, and his elderly mother is almost too friendly. Kenny, the oldest brother, a retarded seventeen-year-old, becomes possessed by the ghost of Baily, who seeks to reenact a terrible tragedy committed over a century before. At the heart of the history is

[ 140 ]
the cruel treatment of the Aborigines by the white settlers, a theme that is vividly developed but that eventually gives way to more conventional (and rather confusing) ghost story trappings. Too much of the story's suspense is meant to be generated by some secret papers the teenagers find and read in contrivedly piecemeal fashion; more effectively terrifying are the scenes in which gentle Kenny becomes a raging, dangerous memory that still seeks vengeance. RS


R Gr. 4-8. This book has so many points in its favor that it's easy to overlook the cookbook approach and lack of formal hypothesis testing. Kids will enjoy identifying with 13-year-old Alan Kramer, who has been dabbling in chemistry since fourth grade. Most of the twenty-nine "experiments" are actually demonstrations, set up as solutions to the mysteries which Alan has solved in Encyclopedia Brown fashion, using his knowledge of chemistry. In "The Mysterious Chameleon Rice," for example, Alan explains to a distraught Chinese restaurant owner why his rice has turned blue: someone spilled iodine on it. He then invites the reader to reproduce his results: "This is the experiment I did for Mr. Lee. After you do it, you might want to try detecting the presence of starch in other foods." This hands-on approach is hard to resist. All but one of the experiments can be done using common household materials, and the several that we tested worked as promised. The easy-to-follow, clearly illustrated instructions include CAUTION warnings for steps which suggest adult supervision (lighting a match, using a stove). Kramer's low-key enthusiasm makes this ideal for the reluctant scientist. RAS

C.U. Science—experiments


R Gr. 7-10. Although Paul Robeson is known primarily because of his distinction as an actor and singer, he had given evidence of unusual ability even before his theatrical career: All-American football player, Phi Beta Kappa, valedictorian of his class at Rutgers, graduate of Columbia University law school—for a black man born in 1898, an unusual career. Larsen does a good job of integrating facts about Robeson's personal life, his professional career, and his long record as a political activist; she gives good coverage, the biography is balanced and admiring rather than effusive, and it is forthright about Robeson's esteem for the USSR. This is not as well written as the biography by Virginia Hamilton (BCCB 4/75), especially in the use of awkward or stylistically suspect phraseology, but it is full and detailed. Chapter notes, a divided bibliography, and an index are appended, but there is no discography. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.

Ad  Gr. 3-5.  Four zany stories tell how two third graders get hold of a magic phone that grants wishes, how they convince their neighbor that her dog Jonathan is the best in the world (after turning him into a human on a field trip), how they save their friend Charlie from strep throat by reducing themselves to microscopic size and fighting off his germs, and how they help the zoo animals speak their mind about children who feed them against the rules and make them sick. The Czech text is witty, if occasionally self-conscious, and translated with accessibly colloquial Americanisms. The large-scale watercolor illustrations are rollicking and fast-paced, with slapstick appeal in scenes such as the dripping dog-boy Jonathan licking the teacher by way of greeting or retrieving a bare-bottomed bully from the lake. The writing style is a bit breathless for young readers, so this will be read aloud to best advantage. BH

D.V. Friendship values


Ad  Gr. 9-12. With his characteristically involving style, Marrin describes the devastation of the powerful Inca empire by a handful of Spaniards. The atrocities committed by both cultures during the sixteenth-century conquest produced enough blood and gore to fascinate the most reluctant history student (“After an enemy leader had been flayed alive, his skin was stuffed with straw and his stomach made into a drum. The thin, dangling arms were used to pound upon his belly . . . .”). Conscientiously, the author shows that the Spaniards and Incas matched each other, horror for horror, until the Spaniards got the upper hand and enslaved the Inca people. This readable text could be useful to interest a student and/or provide a quick overview on the subject, but it is not solidly documented. A map misspells Colombia; there are virtually no footnotes, with sources for quotes mentioned less than a dozen times in 197 pages. It is impossible to tell where research ends and legend or fiction begins (as Pizarro dies by assassination, he gasps “Jesu,’ tracing a cross on the floor with his own blood.”) Choosing to write with the flair of a novelist rather than with the objectivity of a historian, Marrin has limited the research value of his book, but has probably enhanced its appeal. KP

C.U. History—Central America


R  Gr. 3-5. Jonathan, age nine, had noticed that he and his tutor didn’t have fangs and claws the way Ma and Pa did, but it didn’t bother him. He also accepted the fact that since his parents worked at the blood bank at night, he too should sleep during the day and have his tutoring at night. One day Jonathan can’t sleep, goes outdoors in the afternoon, and meets a girl his age. That’s the beginning of his Age of Enlightenment. There really are telephones and television, which Ma and Pa have said were just make-believe in the books he

Ad Gr. 7-10. Not well organized, but adequately written, this is an overview of Scottish history and of life in Scotland today. It begins with general information (geography, climate, wildlife, natural resources) and moves to history, then examines aspects of Scotland's culture with chapters on such topics as "Progress and the People," "Art and Culture," and "Scotland's Place Today." The bibliography is divided (more or less by chapters) and includes such subheadings as "Discography" and "Filmography," which are not extensive. ZS


Ad Gr. 8-12. When her father, an escaped murderer, turns up at her music camp, fifteen-year-old Andy takes it in stride. She still remembers his midnight visits from two earlier escape attempts. But Jimmy Chavez hasn't seen his daughter for six years and is in for a shock. His "Prettiest Princess" has turned into an adolescent punk. Andy, too, soon becomes disillusioned with her father, who not only criticizes her appearance but also seems lost in the past. As the pair travel through the wilderness, they come to accept each other and are able to share secrets. Andy's account of her abortion ("I missed a couple days of school, that was all") and Jimmy's graphic description of how he smuggled drugs into prison show these two a a matched pair. Though a shifting point of view gives Jimmy and Andy equal time, we learn more about the father through frequent flashbacks. The reader is left caring much more about the fate of the convict than that of his daughter. RAS

D.V. Father-daughter relations


Ad 4-7 yrs. Fifty-six nursery rhymes have been set to traditional 18th and 19th-century melodies in a wide book designed for lap or piano use. Each nursery rhyme is presented in large print on the same page as its musical notation and a full-color chalk drawing. The postmodern-fairyland illustrations are unusually colored, occasionally funny (in "Mary Had a Little Lamb," the red-nosed school teacher threatens Mary and her lamb with a ruler) and sometimes stiffly drawn. While the pictures have a more sophisticated tenor than those in Wendy Watson's edition, they aren't as witty or as clean-lined. Larrick gives some interesting historical tidbits in two pages at the back—"More About Mother Goose," but her notes on "Selected Nursery Rhymes" are mostly filler. Some give a brief history, some advice ("Don't let children worry about the fate of..."

[143]
of the pig” in “Tom, Tom the Piper’s Son”), some give personal reminiscences, and some give instructions on game-playing. This edition is not as appealing or as wide-ranging as Watson’s; it is an adequate song book, providing the melody lines only, with no chord symbols or harmony notated. KP


R 5-8 yrs. Impish children, plump old ladies, and expressive animals are depicted in the watercolor illustrations of this extensive new Mother Goose. Watson has drawn on seven sources for her collection and has filled a 160-page book with familiar (some only represented by their first verses) and not-so-familiar nursery rhymes. Most of the pictures are tiny, but several verses are illustrated by a two-page spread of some bucolic village activity; older children will enjoy searching the picture for the detail described by the rhyme. Other details will keep children looking through the pages repeatedly—who could notice the first time through that Old Mother Hubbard is racing by as Jack and Jill take a tumble, or that she returns with a bone just as they are picking themselves up? Two indices, one of first lines and a useful one of subjects (“Advice,” “Clothing,” “Feeling Good”) complete the book. With its gently pointed humor, Watson’s appealing collection will take its place with the other fine editions listed in her bibliography. KP


NR 4-7 yrs. The title might lead one to think this is an adjustment to divorce or adoption story; instead, Heather is the daughter of a lesbian couple, conceived via artificial insemination. While books on all kinds of non-traditional families are needed, this one badly falters in the sentimentality of its approach. Jane and Kate had everything: a dog, a cat, a little white house, each other. “They were all very happy except for one thing.” So Jane goes to a doctor, who “put some sperm into Jane’s vagina.” No mention is made of the fact that the sperm comes from a man, Heather’s biological father. Later, when an upset Heather asks her daycare provider why she doesn’t have a father, Molly is no more enlightening: “Not everyone has a daddy . . . You have two mommies.” Some listeners might also question how Jane and Kate knew “their” baby was a girl before the birth: “Kate put her hands on Jane’s belly to feel the baby kick. ‘She’s strong,’ Kate said.” The world of children’s books learned long ago not to fudge on the biological details of birth, nor on the explanations of parental absence; this book may concern a “new” subject, but it has an old-fashioned avoidance of the uncomfortable, inexpedient, or ideologically incorrect. On the other hand, this is a positive, if idealized, portrait of a loving lesbian family, and it preaches a respect for all kinds of families: “The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other.” Black-and-white illustrations are saccharine and stiffly drawn. RS

D.V. Parent-child relations

R 4-6 yrs. With the eyecatching appeal of an upscale housewares catalog, this pair of concept books is as much an introduction to crisp design as it is to the technologies of joining and cutting. Simpler than Horvatic’s *Simple Machines* (BCCB 5/89), these books encourage children to find everyday examples of the concepts; in this respect *Join It!*, with its pictures of tape, shoelaces and paper clips, stays closer to the ground than *Cut It!* which features lots of don’t-touch examples: knives, drills, chainsaws. As is usually true with this author and illustrator, the concepts are logically introduced and developed, and the color photos are big, clear, and handsomely arranged. RS

D.V. Everyday life concepts


Ad Gr. 2-4. Scratchy-lined drawings washed with shades of brown and gray face each page of text; at the bottom of the latter are cartoons. All of the cartoons show two boys playing; in each case one asks “Did you know . . .?” and the other answers with a quip. Example: “Did you know that Thomas Jefferson started the first American political party?” “Did he serve cake and ice cream?” Since the text is serious and direct, at times reminiscent of an encyclopedia article, the effect is jarring. The facts given in the text are accurate, but they are densely packed into long paragraphs, the pages unbroken by headings or other separating devices. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.


Ad Gr. 5-7. Black-and-white photographs, including some action shots, illustrate a moderately adulatory sports biography. As do most such books, this starts with a game sequence, in this case the come-from-behind victory of the 49ers (led by Montana) in the 1989 Super Bowl. The text then goes back to Joe’s boyhood and on through his career in high school, college, and professional football. The coverage is adequate; the writing is marred by such awkward phrases as “He also was selected to the Pro Bowl . . .” and “Although Joe sat out from the first ‘replacement’ game . . .” and is choppy. This will probably not daunt Montana’s admirers. ZS


Ad Gr. 4-9. These present-tense libretto-like retellings of fifteen popular operas are a bit on the dry side, with a lack of natural story-spinning that might recommend the collection for its own sake. However, the adaptations are faithful and straightforward, with smoothly incorporated references to major arias: “But when she sings of the lilies and roses she creates, Mimi reveals
herself to be more than a seamstress: she, too, is a poet.” The criteria for inclusion seem to be a combination of supposed child appeal (Amahl and the Night Visitors, L’Enfant et les Sortileges, Hansel and Gretel) and production frequency (Aida, Carmen, Pagliacci); the most obvious omission is Where the Wild Things Are, the most peculiar inclusion is Die Meistersinger. Full-page watercolor illustrations, one or two per opera, depict familiar tableaux that are stiffly peopled but appealingly detailed. RS

C.U. Music


R Gr. 6-9. Based on interviews with adopted children and adults, Rosenberg’s text gives background and, when necessary, explanatory exposition, but most of the fourteen accounts consist of remarks by the adoptees, whose ages range from eight to forty-eight. Some are unhappy about the fact that they learned late in life, or from sources other than their adoptive parents, that they had been adopted; there are differences of opinion about the desirability of trying to find birth parents, although all the speakers are curious about their birth heritage. The diversity of individual situations makes it all the more impressive that there is almost unanimity about the happy relationships with adoptive parents. The diversity also makes the book interesting as well as informative. Appended are a relative index, a divided bibliography, a list of sources of help, and an afterword about current adoption practice and philosophy by the editor of *Adopted Child*, a newsletter. ZS


R 5-8 yrs. Twenty-one short silly poems, ranging from jump-rope rhymes through Edward Lear to Oliver Wendell Holmes, lend themselves beautifully to the pop-up treatment. As in many pop-up books the mechanics are occasionally an end rather than a means, but the absurdity of a poem frequently finds its logical three-dimensional expression, as with the poor distracted centipede who can be made to dance frenziedly under the eye of her smug tormentor, the frog. Some effects are simple: a bite-shaped chunk removed from the page-edge accompanied by the couplet “Oh, this page of whitey-white—/It looked so good, I took a bite.” Ross’ vivid cast of nonsense characters, bursting with quirky expression and high-speed life, seem ready to leap up from the page of their own accord. David Carter, author of sterling pop-up *What’s in My Pocket?* (BCCB 10/89), gets a major design credit. Readers who relished Alvin Schwartz’s *I Saw You in the Bathtub* (BCCB 4/89) will find this an enjoyable step up. DS


R Gr. 6-9. Fourteen-year-old Patti’s best friend is her pretty (and silly) mother; only thirty-one, Vi is often taken for Patti’s sister. It is only when Dad, who is much older, has a heart attack and Vi continues to act helpless
and foolish, that Patti realizes how superficial and self-indulgent her mother is. Grandmother helps, but it takes a while for Patti to become mature enough to cope with the situation and to understand and forgive Vi. There isn’t a forceful plot here, but Sachs—as she has in other books—explores a situation, a problem, and a complex of relationships with insight and nuance. ZS

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


Ad Gr. 4-6. This series, which includes the Dalmatian, Doberman pinscher, Old English sheepdog, greyhound, American pit bull terrier, and Samoyed as well as the spaniel and the Shih Tzu, has a standardized format of sections on each breed’s history, physical characteristics, training, showing, and other information helpful to dog owners. Where the writing is straightforward, the facts are clearly presented and interesting, but the fictionalized conversations that open every book and sometimes intrude later are distracting and even patronizing. However, the color photographs are appealing, the texts maintain a low reading level, and there’s a glossary/index included in each volume, making these useful for young readers who want a short introduction to a specific breed. BH

C.U. Pets, care of


R Gr. 3-5. In an honest and unaffected narrative, Kenyon Conner tells how he practices and performs for the famous Jesse White Tumblers, most of whom come from the Cabrini-Green housing projects and who substitute hard work for the trouble they might otherwise get into. “You can’t drink, smoke, swear, take drugs, or have anything to do with gangs. . . . On some weekends we do 7 shows in a day. I’m really tired after 7 shows; I feel like I don’t have legs anymore, and I can barely walk. I just want to go to sleep. . . . Last year we did 570 shows and went to twenty different states.” Unlike many glamorous photodocumentaries, this does not gloss over the discipline of performing on the hot streets during a street fair or a freezing field during the intermission of a football game. Kenyon’s life is not pampered, but his grandmother and relatives are supportive despite some family trouble (“I guess my mother didn’t want me to stay with her”) and he’s been been honored as a representative of his team as far away as Japan. Schmidt has edited the text for a smooth but natural tone; the organization is unobtrusively self-structured; the color photographs are spontaneous and action-packed. Kenyon will win readers from the pages of this book as surely as he wins fans when he “flies” over his teammates on the mat. BH

C.U. Vocational guidance

D.V. Teamwork

Gr. 5-7. This entertaining first novel shows a sure touch with kids and their school environment. Amanda Simon is the fifth-grade narrator, and her (mostly) goodhearted efforts at reporting on the class farm project and at winning several contests (picking the most beautiful apple, decorating holiday windows, and drawing for requests at a rock concert) sometimes land her in trouble. The plot develops in well-shaped scenes without becoming episodic, and the tone is funny without being flip. The relationships that emerge between Mandy and her best friend Lisa, troubled by her parents’ recent divorce, and between Mandy and obnoxious-rival-soon-to-become-boyfriend Jonathan, ring true. With a headstrong, likable protagonist who will cry over a fetal chick spilled from a broken egg or brave a Doberman’s attack to save a half-grown rooster, who knows where a sequel might go? Perhaps to Japan, where both Amanda and Lisa seem headed for summer vacation at the end of the book. Whether or not we meet them again, it’s comforting to have read about the solid Simon family, the inspired elementary-school teacher named Mr. Potter, and a bunch of highly imperfect but basically level-headed ten-year-olds. Amanda may feed her oatmeal to the cat and sneak Oreos for breakfast, but she reads, as well, and titles crop up naturally throughout the book, from *Anne of Green Gables* to *The Pinballs*. BH

D.V. Friendship values


Gr. 3-5 yrs. Crudely drawn line and wash pictures illustrate a first sex education book in anecdotal form and with animal characters. Conversations between Mother Elephant and Little Elephant clarify some of the answers to questions often asked by young children, or address their conceptions and misconceptions about sex and reproduction (with a small dash of antidethronement preventive therapy). Patient Mother Elephant copes with her child’s questions, false concepts, anger, fear, and limited ability to assimilate and/or remember facts. This is adequate, if a bit sugary, but it doesn’t do as well as Joanna Cole’s *How You Were Born* (BCCB 2/85), for the same age group. The latter, of course, does not use animal characters, which Silverman and Ziefert feel helps “children maintain the emotional distance that is necessary for gaining understanding.” They offer an appended section headed “Questions Children Ask and Answers Parents Might Give.” ZS


Ad Gr. 5-7. Janessa, twelve, is in traction in the hospital; traumatized by the terror of her experience (snatched by a criminal and then thrown from a moving car) and immobilized because of a broken back, she rejects most contacts, clinging primarily to her parents and her psychiatrist.

[ 148 ]
Through the device of an unfolding origami boat, Janessa is repeatedly transported to the world of Norse legendry, where her encounters with the gods and others lead her toward a resolution of her fears and toward acceptance of her experiences. Good characters here, and a good narrative style; the psychological problems and solutions are credible and are vividly drawn. The fantasy elements, also, have pace and color—but they don’t quite mesh, so that the visits to Asgard, interesting in themselves, seem to have little relevance to the physically and emotionally injured child in a hospital. ZS

D.V. Doctor-patient relations


R 4-6 yrs. One of the members of a kindergarten class narrates this photodocumentary-style story, concluding with the graduation ceremony on the last day of school; there are brief references to summer and then, in September, the children start first grade with the usual combination of anticipation and trepidation. The rest (and major part) of the book shows what goes on in first grade. There are many books about starting nursery school or kindergarten but very few about that enormous leap from kindergarten to first grade. This is not unduly rhapsodic, but it is a cheerful, positive introduction to group learning, and the first person voice adds credibility. The color photographs of an interracial class seem posed at times, but are nevertheless attractive. ZS


Ad Gr. 9-12. “I know I’m expected to make something of myself,” says senior Herb Hertzman to his school guidance counselor, “but I don’t know exactly what that is.” His eccentric counselor sends Herb to Castles in the Air, a mysterious place where each spin of a huge wheel allows him to ride the Upwardlimobile into fantastical career adventures (“It’s really on the cutting edge of space-slash-time vocational technology,” explains the woman who operates the service). Herb explores three possible careers: Crime (Organized or not), Public Service, and Health Care, each comprising a self-contained story with its own internal logic and absurdities; each also offers progressively more promising contact with various incarnations of his ideal woman until finally (in his Health Care tour, appropriately enough) he explores the mysteries of sex and love. Although the style is buoyant and exuberant, it is marred by self-consciously colloquial language and extensive pop-culture allusions; characterization is thin, but readers with a taste for offbeat action will enjoy the book nonetheless. DS

C.U. Vocational guidance
D.V. Boy-girl relations


R* Gr. 2-4. Birdy’s father is a ferryman, sometimes crossing the river, sometimes ferrying people across dangerous open water to an offshore
island. Does Birdy really have second sight, as an old woman had told her? Perhaps she does, for she sees the three "ghosties" on an island trip, and they are sitting in a seat that had, at first sight, looked empty. And, as often happens in the best of fairy tales, it's Birdy's tact and kindness that bring fortune to her family. This is a wholly satisfying short fantasy in the same way that Sarah, Plain and Tall is a wholly satisfying short realistic story. The style is graceful despite its simplicity, the plot is a firm meshing of the fanciful element and the matrix of its realistic frame; the pace and momentum of the story seem to evolve rather than to have been imposed. Add good characterization and dialogue to a colorful setting, and one has—or rather, Jill Paton Walsh has produced—a story that is a pleasure to read alone or aloud. The story partly depends upon the British usage of the word "strand"; American children will need it explained to them. Wash drawings, some in color, have an Ardizzone-like economy of line and composition. ZS

D.V. Kindness


Ad 3-6 yrs. Every younger sibling knows what it's like to have someone who does everything better and stays up later and has the biggest scabs, the most interesting secrets, and—always—the biggest piece of cake. Widerberg's simple text, a phrase a page, is accompanied by a series of comic, exaggerated line drawings. This may be one running gag with a punch line, but the punch line will be as appealing to big sisters who read it aloud as it is to the younger sister, for the litany of envy concludes, "... and always tallest, and always strongest, and who could cry, cry, cry because she wasn't the youngest in the family." Unfortunately the authorial voice (the younger sister) is not established early enough in the story to make the situation clear from the beginning. ZS

D.V. Everyday life concepts


Ad Gr. 4-6. Apprehensive about her upcoming piano recital, Rosie convinces herself that her having only nine fingers is the reason she can't play the closing run of "Dance of the Dinosaurs." Maybe, however, it's because her Dad has moved to Milwaukee for his job, or perhaps it has to do with the mysterious intruder who ransacked Rosie's bedroom. The tonal shifts are confusing: Mom's depression over the prospect of moving to Milwaukee is affectingly rendered but is set uncomfortably close to slapstick scenes involving the obnoxious little brother of one of Rosie's fellow piano students. There's no doubt that this plot is overstuffed, and it's a credit to Wright's practiced storytelling skills that she manages to keep everything more or less on track. RS

D.V. Fear, overcoming; Handicaps, adjustment to

[ 150 ]
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