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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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New Titles for Children and Young People


R  4-6 yrs. Using the motif of the trickster who is tricked, Abolafia incorporates references to some of the Aesopian fox-fables (sour grapes, stone-filled bag) to prepare the audience for the decision of Crow, Donkey, Rabbit, and Bear that they must catch Fox by *their* cleverness this time. Fox has invited this group revenge by tricking Bear into trading his jar of honey for Fox’s beautiful tail (“I’ll keep it for you,” says Fox). The others prevail and trap Fox in a way that makes him look so silly that he never comes to that part of the forest again. The jovial watercolor pictures are a bit repetitive but are nicely placed in relation to pertinent text; the style is simple and direct, even clipped. ZS


Ad  Gr. 2-3. Sedate watercolor illustrations incorporate the settings and clothing of the almost eighty-year span of Eleanor Roosevelt’s life with a faithfulness made possible by photographs. They are not, however, always reflective of the text, as in the case of Eleanor’s portrait with her horse illustrating a page describing her nanny’s cruelty, or in the picture of a plain woman described as Eleanor’s beautiful mother. This is a biography in which some of the much-publicized aspects of the Roosevelts’ lives have been omitted. The continuous text is quietly admiring, focusing on major events in the biographee’s life and on the philosophy and social involvement that led to Harry Truman’s description of Eleanor Roosevelt as “First Lady of the World.” A list of important dates is provided. ZS

C.U. Social studies

D.V. Consideration for others


Ad  6-9 yrs. Tiberius, a Florentine painter reminiscing about his childhood, tells his granddaughter of an adventure when the portraits of old masters came to life in an art gallery, and Rembrandt painted Tiberius’ portrait.
The illustrations (paintings, of course) are vivid and richly textured; the story is sometimes a bit stretched, as when the masters jest together in a dialogue that strains credulity. The theme is imaginatively played, however, in this picture-within-a-picture-book fantasy. ZS


Ad Gr. 5-7. Twelve-year-old Benjy Stark and his older sister have been shipped off to visit their paternal grandmother while their mother takes a vacation with her new boyfriend. Resentful of the father who deserted them, fearful of further rejection after what he's already suffered at school, and defenseless against his sister's hostility, Benjy makes friends with Hugh, the ghost of a young southern cadet who was shot during a Civil War battle that took place near his grandmother's house. To help Hugh rest in peace, Benjy must find a gold watch, the valued family heirloom that Hugh hid from Yankee scavengers just before he died. The plot is solid—if a bit contrived—and the characters are consistent, but the themes of friendship and honor are belabored. With plenty of action and dialogue attesting to Benjy's newly developing determination, the reader does not need to have it explained repeatedly as well. However, there is little children's historical fiction from such a fiercely southern, proudly military point of view, and Virginians especially may find this of regional interest. BH

C.U. History—U.S.—Civil War
D.V. Friendship values; Loyalty


R Gr. 5-10. Ashabranner here sets himself what should be an unnecessary task: to demonstrate that Arab-Americans are basically like the rest of us. Only one of the interviewees could be categorized as famous (deejay Casey Kasem); most lead ordinary lives grounded, in varying degrees, in an awareness of Arabic heritage and history. Some are descendents of 19th-century immigrants from the Lebanon who often worked as peddlers to farms and small towns; others came in recent decades to go to school or to escape upheaval or both. Their accounts of discrimination in this country are quiet but firm: "I've had people say to me, 'You don't seem like an Arab.' I'm sure they thought they were saying something nice to me." Ashabranner includes a brief historical overview of Arabic history and early immigration, as well as his own reminiscences of the Syrian-American community in his childhood Oklahoma town. The text is a fluent blend of information, anecdote, and interview; the photos of the many interviewees give the book the atmosphere of an extended-family album. A bibliography and index are included. RS

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

Ad 2-4 yrs. A ball gets away from children playing at the water’s edge, it floats away, and it moves through wind and storm to be picked up—after it has been carried back to shore—by a happy child. While this is adequate in structure for very young children, the visual interpretation may be confusing; the paintings are handsome, but the succession of pictures that show the ball in different sizes and locations may require more visual sophistication than most preschool children possess, and occasionally the text (never more than a few words per picture) is elliptical, shifting from description ("Coming ashore") to commentary ("Watch out!" or "Too late now"). Primary graders, on the other hand, may enjoy the game of finding that yellow ball. ZS

D.V. Environmental concepts; Spatial concepts


M Gr. 5-7. Fourteen-year-old Hambone is an orphan who shares the home of a circuit-riding preacher, Old Blue, who is forty-five, a devout and compassionate man. Together they ride Old Blue’s rounds in the Ozarks, a journey that ends with a revival meeting at which several marriages take place, a long enmity is dissolved, and Hambone decides he will leave Old Blue and claim his inheritance, usurped by greedy kin. Branscum uses the circuit as a way to introduce sets of characters, with the revival as a stage for the last, all-ends-neatly-tied act. Some of the characters have substance, but most seem stereotyped, using (not always consistently) quaint speech patterns heavily in what seems to be an attempt to provide local color. ZS


R Gr. 5-7. Stories of running away from problems at home coincide with many children’s fantasies, and twelve-year-old Andy Dubin’s hideout—a penthouse hotel suite to which he’s found the key—will add to the appeal of this suspense novel. Andy is successful at avoiding the maid who cleans the seldom-used suite, but there’s a more ominous employee on his trail, one who makes sinister use of Andy’s own idea for a ransom note that would extort money from his mother in order to visit his father in England. Andy’s first-person narrative reveals not only his own moral ambiguities, but also acute glimpses into the personalities of his mother, of the stepfather he resents so bitterly, and of the father who has essentially abandoned him and a new family in England as well. Bunting’s plot development is practised and her style polished; this will be a natural choice to booktalk as a thriller companion to Dean Hughes’ realistic *Family Pose* (BCCB 3/89). BH

D.V. Mother-son relations; Stepparents, adjustment to


Ad Gr. 2-4. Jackson and his friend Goat spend seven chapters looking for secret treasures that they hide from each other—in fact, making maps and clues is most of the fun. Their game involves escapades that kids will enjoy; in one, Jackson sneaks out of piano practice, runs to Goat’s house for a
chocolate popsicle, and slips back in time for a successful piano lesson. In another episode, both boys sort through a huge pile of garbage for something Goat's sister has actually hidden in the freezer. The plot seems more repetitive than spontaneous, but this may prove an advantage for struggling readers, who appreciate light fare with a familiar flavor. BH

D.V.  Friendship values


R  Gr. 4-6.  "Your father died a week ago, Alex. I learned about it this morning. . . what's left of him is in the den." Alex's dad left the family a long time ago. Mom had all but replaced him with Big Al; marriage appeared to be in the offing. Now Dad has returned home—as ashes in a cardboard box. The reality of his death takes a while to sink in, but keeping the box on the living room table forces everyone to deal with it. Far from being a tearjerker, this offbeat family story combines occasional pathos with a puckish sense of humor, verging at times on the bizarre. The twins, Joel and Lily, unabashedly charge their friends admission to see the cremated remains: Mom is not amused. Irrepressible Lily lightens things up with her weird theological questions: "If God did pick his nose, how large do you think the booger would be?" Alex finds solace by reading a book, *Contrary Imaginations*, a philosophical novel whose main character comes to life, at least to Alex. These interpolations are poorly integrated and weaken an otherwise solid and entertaining family story, whose surprise ending will leave readers guessing. RAS

D.V.  Death, adjustment to


R  3-5 yrs.  Line and wash pictures, a bit awkward but cheerful, are pleasantly set off by plenty of space and show Harry, born without a left hand, with and without his prosthesis. Caseley does a nice job of being matter-of-fact about Harry: he's been a happy baby, and when he gets to school he's not disconcerted by the curiosity of the other children. Harry's parents' positive attitude has helped him feel that he's like everybody else. Well, maybe a better ballplayer than most. It is Harry who senses how much his friend Oscar dislikes being called "Carrothead," and who gets Willy to use the redhead's real name. Told with direct simplicity, this story of a three-way friendship includes a disability but doesn't treat it as a problem. ZS

D.V.  Friendship values; Handicaps, adjustment to; Kindness


R  Gr. 4-6.  A homespun rendition of four tales that combine original and traditional motifs, this is framed by two encounters between a maverick goldminer and a coyote that saves him from going around the bend. The treasure to which Old Man Coyote leads the hungry Old Coot, after several weeks of wandering, is storytelling. Old Coot learns to make his living off it and here shares stories about a rustler, a gambler, and a tall tale contest. Illustrated with aptly offhand, black-and-white drawings, Christian's yarns will
enliven read-aloud sessions during a frontier unit or offer independent readers an American West alternative to the European fairy tale mode. BH
C.U. Reading aloud
D.V. Imaginative concepts

Gr. 5-8. Solomon Butcher, 1856-1927, was a Nebraska pioneer in more ways than one. Restless under the constraints of any steady job, he neglected his homesteading work to travel around Custer County photographing families from whom he collected frontier stories. Conrad’s informal narrative recounts the vicissitudes of Butcher’s progress toward the photographic history that was finally published despite an 1899 fire that destroyed everything except his glass-plate negatives. While the subject and historical photographs are inherently intriguing, the organization, captions, and style here are somewhat problematic. The frontier stories are neither gathered into one section nor interwoven with historical context, but are clumped into two sections divided by a section of history. The captions are more conjectural than informational (“I can tell how spunky prairie kids were by looking at these two”) and sometimes suffer from the same inexplicable grammar (“Dunlap must have dreamed of waves and wind and luffing sails as he carved pieces of this boat upon his horse”) as the text. Misplaced modifiers seem to be the main offense, but there are other points of confusion as well: “Early homesteaders loved a tale that would put a common man up against an outlaw and show him winning.” The common man or the outlaw? Although the book is handsomely designed, sometimes it is hard to tell what photo the text is referring to; there is no drum, for instance, in the photograph facing the sentence “Where did that boy get his drum?” The drum appears in a photo on the next page. Another caption—“I imagine this father down that abandoned well, and his family wondering where he’s gone”—leaves a reader wondering if this is the family featured in the story accompanying the photo (there’s no well in sight). Whether these are editorial/layout problems or not, they distract from but don’t quench the irrepressible energy of the eccentric individual to whom Conrad introduces young readers. What saves the book is the excitement of taking one of those byways that makes primary-source history tempting to read. BH
C.U. History—U.S.—Frontier and pioneer life

Gr. 7-10. Popular and pretty, happy to be half (with Jaz) of the senior class’s perfect couple, Hallie wants high school to last forever. She has no desire to go to college, and she’s not happy when the end of summer brings the departure of Jaz and all her circle of friends. Using a first-person narrative, Cooney makes Hallie’s voice believable and touching, as she gropes her unhappy way toward finding work she enjoys and accepts the fact that she and her former friends have less and less in common; most of all, she misses Jaz. There’s no all-ends-tied conclusion here: this is a believable story about an
adolescent who feels she's a misfit and learns that there are still pursuits and people she can enjoy. ZS
D.V. Age-mate relations; Occupational orientation; Self-confidence


R Gr. 4-7. "Veronica pretty much ran the sixth-grade girls," but that's small comfort when it comes to her feud with former best friend Robin. And while picking on fat girl Gretchen has long been an activity that made Veronica feel good about herself (*Queen of the Sixth Grade*, reviewed in the 11/88 issue) it's no longer helping. Veronica is terrified about her father's impending re-marriage, and, worse luck, Gretchen is the only one who knows how upset she is. The girl-you-love-to-hate is a standard appeal in school series, but making her the main character is a real challenge, one that this author meets with great success. A traditional ploy is to make the mean girl "misunderstood," but Cooper has chosen a more difficult path: Veronica really is, as Robin calls her, "a creep." Even Veronica's mother, when told of this insult, responds with something less than empathy: "we both know Robin's not the kind of girl who just goes around calling names." Creep that she may be, however, Veronica captures our interest and sympathy, and in the end of the book (after a juicy comeuppance) leaves us with some hope that she is capable of change. We'll see. RS
D.V. Divorce, adjustment to; Friendship values


R Gr. 4-7. A high standard of information, organization, and color photography has distinguished this series, and the subject here has extra allure because of the appealing harp seal pups. Cossi explains the animals' reproduction and migration cycles while vivid closeups depict seals at every stage of development, including yellowcoats, whitecoats, ragged-jackets, beaters, bedlamers, and saddlebacks. The continuous text includes abundant facts that are accessible through the index, and a glossary defines terms. The species' complex adaptation to extremes of an arctic habitat emerge clearly; by contrast, the fact that commercial hunting could endanger the animal's survival makes this book a logical springboard for discussion of environmental checks and balances. BH
C.U. Zoology
D.V. Ecological awareness


R* Gr. 9-. This southern picaresque first novel benefits from an unforgettable narrator/hero who escapes from a state school for retarded boys. His rescuer is an alcoholic actor who wants Lizard (nicknamed by his fellow inmates) to play Caliban because Lizard's deformities—and abilities—make him a natural for the part. The actor and his girlfriend take Lizard to Birmingham, a journey that includes, in an Eden-like pine forest, an encounter with a black girl who is abused by her guardian. Lizard forms a deep attachment to both the girl and her younger brother, determining to free them and find out about his own
parents. This is ambitious fiction that has been credibly tempered for a young adult audience; it has classic rite-of-passage narrative patterns, stylistically controlled realism, and a structure that shapes negative forces into a positive ending. Covington has looked at society through one of its outcasts, whose observations are surprisingly self-assured and reassuring. BH


R* Gr. 5-9. "Joan." The miracle began simply, with Joan hearing her name spoken aloud in the garden with no person in evidence. The earliest instructions were easy—"Be good. Go to church"—but Joan had earlier had a dream in which she was told to "help the Dauphin." Only gradually did Joan allow herself to believe that she was the Maid prophesied long ago by Merlin: "France will be ruined by a woman and saved by a maiden from the oak forest of Lorraine." Barbara Dana's recreation of Joan of Arc's early life, before she commanded an army, is entirely involving and convincing. Making no concession to the twentieth century, Dana portrays a Joan true to her own time, neither a feminist nor an hysteric, but a mystic, a child for whom God always came first. While appreciating the company of her pets and her friends, and the companionship of working alongside her mother, Joan's most joyful occupation was prayer. "To me this was all there was. But there was more to know. The voice was a call. It was my call to come awake, to open my mind to all the knowing in my heart." In prose that often recalls the quiet cadences of prayer, Joan relates (from beyond death, it appears) her childhood and early adolescence, giving the same close attention to the memories of sheep-shearing and gossiping as to her voices and visions. The visitations, particularly, are ecstatically rendered: "The voice, the fragrance of a thousand flowers, the blazing light, and then Saint Michael was before me. All flooded purple before my eyes, great blazes of purple light, deep purple, blazing first here, then there, by the sheep, near the bush, by my feet, and brighter than all, amidst all the purple, in blinding white, Saint Michael, the Captain of the Armies of Light." There hasn't really yet been a Song of Bernadette for the present generation; Dana's portrait of Joan will have more than a few young readers hopefully searching the sky, or their souls. RS

D.V. Religious understanding


Ad Gr. 2-4. Soft color-pencil drawings don't disguise the drama of plant and animal survival in the desert. As presented here, the cycle begins at sunset, when a pair of coyotes, "lean, powerful, and tireless," begin their hunt for food. So do bats, birds, snakes, and rats, each feeding (often on each other) under the cool and protective cover of darkness. Dewey is clear and straightforward about the harshness of desert life ("the mouse is caught in needle-sharp teeth, its skull pierced"), but the continuous text is not always well-organized. One paragraph, for example, is confusing in its discussion of rodents and seeds: "Pocket mice, pocket gophers, and kangaroo rats use fur-lined cheek pouches for carrying seeds to caches underground. Desert rodents disperse seeds by stashing, storing, and spreading them. Mice harvest seeds in summer. Their
caches are insurance against lean times.” Storing, harvesting, dispersing—the
distinctions are vague. Elsewhere, there are abrupt shifts in topics whose
connections don’t become apparent for a few paragraphs. But the observation is
sharp and the details are fascinating: “The beetle larvae, like parent beetles, feed
on bats that have toppled from above and cannot launch themselves into flight
again.” Page design is generous, with the life-and-death struggles of the animals
dramatically poised on double-page spreads. RS
C.U. Nature study

Downing, Julie. *Mozart Tonight*; written and illus. by Julie Downing.
R Gr. 1-3. While Mozart and his wife Constanze are on their
way to the premier of *Don Giovanni*, the composer reminisces about his
childhood as a musical prodigy, his unhappy time in the service of the
Archbishop of Salzburg, and his years as a popular—but almost penniless—
composer. Although there are some confusing shifts in point of view, and it’s
unlikely that Mozart would tell his wife that “I’m Joannes Chrysostomus
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,” the tone is light and bright, capturing the
composer’s anticipation of the evening—and the last-minute preparations:
“You, dear wife, stayed up long after the last guest had gone home. You kept
me awake with your best fairy stories. By five o’clock this morning the
overture was finished.” Downing’s watercolors are picturesque and richly
detailed, but with an attention to homely reality that keeps them fresh: a baby-
laden Constanze dropping coins into creditors’ hands, for example. And, while
this Mozart is no *Amadeus*, the occasional smug look on his face is entirely in
keeping with the man’s oblivious egocentricity. An appended author’s note is
exemplary, documenting sources, explaining what is fictionalized and what is
not, and describing the research for the illustrations. The best—so far—of the
recent Mozart books published for the composer’s bicentenary (see also
Catherine Brighton’s *Mozart*, reviewed in the 12/90 issue and Lisl Weil’s
*Wolferl*, reviewed below). RS
C.U. Music

$13.95. Reviewed from galleys.
R* Gr. 9-12. “What do cards and love have in common?” Her
mother recently dead from cancer, Laura, seventeen, is spending the summer
alone in the family’s vacation house near Atlantic City. Her friends there seem
always busy with summer jobs, while Laura’s own preoccupation is
overwhelming: “death was always in her thoughts now, undermining
everything.” Laura finds ritualistic escape in the casinos, getting herself in with
the I.D. she steals from her older sister. She goes in secret every day, calling
herself Heather, wearing lots of makeup, and compulsively playing hand after
hand of blackjack. The third-person narration is deliberate and objective, its
distance echoing Laura’s desperate isolation and fear that her mother’s death has
made the whole world a dangerous long shot: “... the dark card, it was called.
In that card was the outcome of the game.” Laura gets involved with a slick
gambler named Ari; the sexual danger he presents seems less threatening than the
real love offered by Billy, the older brother of her best friend. Most young adult
novels that thematically center on the death of a parent offer some sentimental
pleasure in their grieving; this one is instead almost unbearably bleak, with Laura's eventual escape from Atlantic City a relief rather than a victory. Laura's story is sad, but, more significant, it's scary. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to


R 4-7 yrs. After forty-eight years of envying his neighbor's lush garden, Mr. Grubbs decides to besiege it with a couple of rabbits. The plan works so well that Miss Penny, despite all her protective efforts, loses every single vegetable . . . and wins yet another blue ribbon—for rabbits. The warm-hued, earth-toned illustrations are satisfyingly organic, both humans and animals having a rounded, faintly vegetable-like quality. Compositions are clean and freshened by several surprising perspectives. Although the main characters are adult, the behavior patterns of jealous obsession will feel familiar to children, while the theme of a trickster tricked will appeal to their sense of fair play. A fertile plot for story hours. BH

D.V. Neighborliness


Ad Gr. 7-10. In a story first published in England in 1986, sixteen-year-old Mel is the narrator. At her mother's instigation, she has successfully tried out for a part in a theatrical project: an all-adolescent production of Three Sisters. The background of a local theater company and the details of production and rehearsal will appeal to many readers, and the characterization is both differentiated and, for each person, consistent. The plot is weaker than setting, style, or characterization, however; it is basically a triangular love affair, with a nice female (rejected) and a not-nice female (chosen and triumphant) and a male director. Mel, a biased and involved narrator, learns that the show must go on. ZS

D.V. Friendship values


R 5-7 yrs. The old sheepdog Herman insists on a walk despite sleet and icy puddles, and Ishtar the cat must be fed tuna and poached eggs. "Sometimes I wish they'd take care of themselves," says a girl to her brother, "like when they lived in the wild." This launches Grandpa into a tale of the time when dogs and cats ruled the world, becoming so greedy and lazy that one explorer (Herman's ancestor) during the Age of the Terrible Mess found and brought back some new creatures (Herman's beings, now called humans) which the animals trained to stand upright and do chores. This clever spoof on myths will entertain children and at the same time introduce them gently to satire. The illustrations are warmed by burnt-orange tones of the firelight by which the tale is told; both sheepdogs are heroically furred, and the lolling animal masters are as funny as the humans learning to dress themselves. A fantastique that's lighter in tone but just as freshly envisioned as Gerstein's Mountains of Tibet (BCCB 1/88). BH

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R  Gr. K-3. Tidy and bright, Gibbons' line and wash pictures show a range of views of an off-shore island on the North Atlantic coast, and focus on the major industry of the island. The pictures echo the two emphases of the text, the patterns of daily life in the circle of the year, and the variety of boats and their uses. The writing is static, but has the direct simplicity that makes it easy for young listeners or primary grades readers to assimilate information, and the book gives a sense of the special quality of an island community. ZS

D.V. Community life


Ad Gr. 4-6. Sometimes a joke can backfire. Hobie's pop-up snake was meant to surprise Nick. The hole the wire snake drilled into his friend's nose was certainly a surprise, but Nick isn't laughing. His methods of retaliation, wrecking Hobie's art project and pushing him down an escalator, are underhanded; all-out war looms. Gilson combines elements of a standard school story with an unusual setting (the school is in a shopping mall) and throws in some unusual characters (a skeleton and a disgruntled Santa Claus) to good effect. Her descriptions are often funny ("Nick's little brother, Tony, who is going through the terrible fours . . . also went through the terrible ones, twos, and threes"), and bang-on. Take lunchtime in the school cafeteria: "everybody else finished eating in two seconds, practically inhaling whole bologna sandwiches and sword-swallowing their carrot sticks." The book starts to go downhill after class mediators are called in to help settle the boys' dispute, and the injured parties draw up a contract. All disputes are shown to be solvable by mediation and listening to the other's point-of-view, not just the boys' but that of a Santa aggrieved with the younger generation ("children just aren't what they used to be") as well as two arguing preschoolers. Most readers won't object to the purposive didacticism, as the humorous tone never flags, but potential conflict mediators may find the message overly simplistic. RAS


R  Gr. 5-8. Packed off to English relatives while his younger brother Luke lies dying of cancer in Australia, twelve-year-old Colin determines to get the Queen's intervention. "I'm going to need some help on this one, thought Colin, someone important who knows the phone number of the world's best doctor." His aunt and uncle's idea of help is to ignore the situation and refuse to talk about Luke, taking Colin on a sightseeing trip to London's biggest hardware store. He is undaunted, and un-put-offable: "Do you mind if we go now? I'm actually finding it a bit hard to concentrate on hardware while Luke's got cancer." While his naive actions often make him seem young for twelve, Colin's rescue attempts—climbing the fence at Buckingham Palace, trying to phone the Queen—are funny and courageous, with Colin's matter-of-fact effrontery disallowing any sentimentality. "Look. I know you're probably
not meant to open the gate and you probably get people lying through their teeth all the time, but I promise you I’m telling the truth and if you open the gate I’ll explain everything to the Queen and you won’t lose your job or get sent to Northern Ireland.” Colin doesn’t manage to talk to the Queen, but he does make a friend, Ted, whose lover Griff is dying of AIDS in the hospital where Colin has gone to seek advice on cancer. Here again, the author’s style is too brisk for wallowing, and while Griff’s death is hard, the experience gives Colin the courage to go back home and be with his brother. Not before, however, one last classic bit of backtalk at the airport. After hearing a stranger derisively call Ted a “queen,” Colin turns and looks the man straight in the eye. “He’s not, but he should be.” Brave words from a brave boy. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to


R Gr. 3-6. Incorporating the suspense of a natural disaster into the pace of this brief historical novel, Gross recounts a fictional family’s experience of the 1889 Johnstown flood, said to have killed between 2,500 and 7,000 residents of a western Pennsylvania valley. Although Tina’s mother manages to save both herself and a newborn baby that she snatches from the roaring waters, Tina’s uncle and his fiancée are both drowned. This fact, along with the bitterness Tina’s brother feels against the rich men who built a flimsy dam to enhance their sports club, lends credible realism to the event. In a few places, the dialogue and narrative seem calculated to project the historical setting, but several scenes transcend their purpose to become truly moving, especially the naming of the baby Hope. And offsetting occasional stylistic awkwardness is a neat turn of language, as when Mama, her strength almost spent, clings to a tree: “something within her braided her thoughts into a small rope of strength.” Although the author’s note doesn’t tell whether this incident is based on a true one or not, it does give background information on other aspects of the event. An involving and appropriately unsettling look at U. S. history. BH

C.U. History—U. S.

D.V. Courage; Death, adjustment to


Ad Gr. 4-6. Although this is translated from the German, the action appears to take place in the U. S., a fact less evident from details of setting than from several low-key references in the book. It is exactly such missing details that render the situation more generic than individualized. The dynamics between the two main characters and among their classmates seem unrooted in any social milieu, which may be an attempt to broaden the book’s appeal. Love between a ten-year-old boy and girl is not often enough developed in children’s fiction, and Ben and Anna do show authentic reactions to each other and to the inevitable teasing that ensues from their affection. Anna’s outsider status as a Polish immigrant adds a sub-theme with which some readers will also empathize. However, both the new-wave black-and-white illustrations and the translation suffer from occasional awkwardness (“He liked when she was
confident”), and Hartling does not seem as comfortable fictionally as he was in Old John (BCCB 7/90). BH
D.V. Boy-girl relations


R Gr. 6-9. After her mother dies, fifteen-year-old Lara goes to live with her father, his new wife, and their children on a homestead in the rain forest of northern New South Wales. Although her parents divorced when Lara was a toddler, she easily feels loved by her father. Her stepmother, Gladwyn, is another story: "Just go away!" she yelled full into Lara’s face. "Go on. Go away!" And while Lara gradually wins the hearts of the three younger children, twelve-year-old Pearl mimics her mother’s resentment. The hostility, at school as well as home, is as thick as the humidity, and with Lara’s father gone so much, her only solace is a mysterious dog she meets and names Thunderwith after a favorite poem. This picture of a lonely, grieving girl in a stormy environment is thoroughly realized, with an especially expert weaving of story and setting. Lara’s eventual alliance with Pearl, in face of a bullying older boy, is credibly developed, as is her winning over of her angry and defensive stepmother. This family that seemed so strange and cold in the beginning satisfyingly shows itself to be a comforting place in the end. RS

D.V. Stepparents, adjustment to


R Gr. 6-9. Homeless and friendless, the small boy had no real name but was called Saru, or "monkey." He is the narrator, and his story is both a remarkably vivid picture of power and corruption in feudal Japan, and a moving story of a child’s adaptability and, as he grows, his resourcefulness and courage. It is Saru who thinks of and executes a plan to save himself, his priest-mentor, the Samurai who has become his friend, and the Samurai’s wife, the hostage of a warlord. Historical details are smoothly incorporated, characters are well-defined, and the book’s pace and style have vitality and polish. With Katherine Paterson and Lensey Namioka, Erik Haugaard has made a significant contribution to the body of fiction about an era and its way of life in Japan. ZS

D.V. Friendship values


R Gr. 4-7. Ghosts and family problems are suspensefully entwined in a first novel reminiscent of Mary Downing Hahn. Jessica’s younger cousin Corky has been fiercely overprotected by his mother ever since his father died in an accident; when he says he sees a ghost out the window, everyone thinks it’s just his grieving imagination. But Jessica and her best friend Tiffaney have to admit that something strange is going on up in the hills behind Jessica’s house in rural Oregon. The menace is convincing, as are the relationships among the characters; especially well-drawn is a sad girl at Jessica’s school who becomes involved in the mystery. Cover art is a little young—Heisel does a much more atmospheric job of evoking both the ghostly and autumnal chills so important to this kind of story. RS

Ad 5-8 yrs. In a fairy tale-like story, Suchen, who helps her father make maps, finally goes off on an adventure by following the paths she had once painted. In this version of a tale in which ordinary objects thrown to the ground become magical aids to the hero, too much time elapses between Suchen's unwitting tossing away of the magic objects and the moment when the objects, now animated, help in her escape. She overcomes an evil witch with apparently no effort and escapes in the space of one paragraph. The richly-colored illustrations are framed with medieval borders in the style of Trina Schart Hyman, although the figures and landscapes are not so seductively drawn. Characters are hard to identify except by their elaborate clothing, and on one early page the combination of text and painting makes it easy to confuse the witch and Suchen. The feminist twist at the end is refreshing, but for a similar story with more action and suspense, try good old Baba Yaga. KPJ


R Gr. 3-5. Her older brother, Michael, and some of his sixth grade classmates had a baseball team, but they certainly didn't want Emma to play with them. Emma knew she was a good player, and she was pleased when Mikey said she could play if she had a Bombers T-shirt. When their father tells them he's taking his children to a pro game, both are thrilled. Emma is less thrilled when she discovers that Joe (the most belligerent member of Mikey's team) is tagging along; in fact, Dad gives up his ticket and lets Joe go into the stadium with Mikey and Emma. It will probably surprise few readers that the story ends with Emma getting a solid hit sometime later in a Bombers' game, but it may surprise them that she gets it because of Joe's whispered coaching. Sports-minded girls should particularly enjoy Emma's triumph, but this pleasantly written baseball story has enough play sequences and enough depth in interpersonal relationships to appeal to any middle-grades reader. ZS

D.V. Brothers-sisters; Sex roles


R* 2-5 yrs. An outstanding photographer, Hoban uses no text with this new series of color photographs, but borders each picture with the same list of words that pinpoint location. "Above, on, behind, under, out, against . . ." the list begins, and leaves it up to the viewer to decide where these terms are applicable. Unlike most concept books (including Hoban's) that pair words and pictures, this can encourage children to interpret visually the alternates to the obvious. For example a bateau-mouche is moving under a Seine bridge: it's "under" or "below"; the bridge is "above" or "over"; people crossing the bridge are going "across," the boat is "between" the sides of an arch, etc. Solid concepts with a light touch. ZS

D.V. Perceptual acuteness; Spatial concepts
Nine-year-old Lizzie narrates the story of her summer with her Grama Ax, a painter, in the New England countryside. The plot is slight; the book is really Lizzie's account of the passage of time, the wonders of the country, and the shallowness of people who seek to suburbanize the land ("Old world is the way people used to be when their land was the most important thing there was," says Grama Ax wistfully). The short chapters make the format inviting, and strong-willed Lizzie is an interesting (and occasionally authentically unpleasant) child. Despite its slow pace the book maintains a readable style, and the story may appeal not only to nostalgic adults but to young readers who enjoy tales of independent country life and feisty grandmothers. DS


The subject and scope of these two books are so similar that their different nuances of design, narrative, and focus make an intriguing study in contrast. Both books could easily be absorbed into a collection, and probably should be, given the dearth of photodocumentaries about contemporary Native American children. Hoyt-Goldsmith's book is about a girl named April (Kutsiyat'si in the Keres language), and Keegan's is about a boy named Timmy (Agoyo-Paa in the Tewa language). Both children are ten years old and come from artisan families living in pueblos outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Both books give background information on the culture as well as on the everyday activities of the community. The voices, however, are different. Hoyt-Goldsmith's text is in the first person, which makes it less distant than the Keegan's narrative but also slightly more artificial, since ten-year-olds don't, realistically, rattle off cohesive information about their lifestyles. Although the writing in Keegan's book is better, students working on reports will appreciate the appended legend and index in Hoyt-Goldsmith's. The book design in *Pueblo Boy* is cleaner, with larger, more dramatic photographs coordinated with the text to eliminate captions. There are, of course, a few gender differences, and this may well be the deciding factor, for this age group, in determining which book children will choose. BH


A dab hand at drawing, proficient as a colorist, and dependable for her high standards of composition and controlled humor, Hughes
has made the multiethnic world of Trotter Street everybody’s neighborhood. Here two young boys, envying the more sophisticated bicycles of older children, both hope for new bicycles for their birthdays. One’s wish is gratified; the other is disappointed to the extent that the friendship cools—but when he gets a go-cart together the two ride it to win Trotter Street’s Non-Bicycle Race, beating roller skates, scooters, a box-on-wheels, and other vehicles. The competition is cheerful, the winners are happy, and the twin appeals of group play and the wonders-of-wheels should appeal to the read-aloud audience. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Jealousy, overcoming; Social behavior


Ad Gr. 2-4. In a new addition to the Class Clown books, Lucas Cott celebrates the summer between his third and fourth grade years. The biggest event is the arrival of a French au pair girl Genevieve. At first, mischievous Lucas plays harmless tricks on her, but he soon learns to appreciate all the free time she gives him by taking care of his three-year-old twin brothers. On the whole, Lucas’ summer experiences have an innocence that will appeal most to a young read-aloud audience (“What fun to get paint on you and not have anyone scold, Lucas thought”). Lucas’ most rollicking adventure occurs when one of the twins disappears during a movie, and as Lucas crawls under seats on the floor of the theater, he gets mistaken for a mouse. Some unnecessary didacticism is forced in when Lucas makes a leap in maturity to learn from his mistakes (“He’d have to keep trying not to scare his mother again. He also would have to do a better job of setting a good example for the twins”), but the story carries much of the mood of a quiet summer with a loving family, and Lucas has the promise of camp for the next summer (book). KPJ


R Gr. 4-6. A spaceship travels toward the planet Errat; its passengers are in hibernetic capsules save for Dody, awake due to a computer error. When his parents and his siblings Bobby and Elaine wake, they are stunned to see that while they have not aged, Dody has been awake for fifty years and become an elderly man. Jacobs uses elements that will be familiar to science fantasy buffs: the cloning of children, the hostility of the planet, danger and escape, a return to Earth. This is not as effective as Jacobs’ first book, Born into Light (BCCB 4/88) in characterization and plot development, but it is equally well-written. ZS


R Gr. 3-5. Author-photographer Johnson takes full advantage of the inherent color and drama of his topic, since today’s hot air balloons are dazzling in their splendid variety and create made-to-order compositions against the sky. The text is informative, giving facts about why and how the balloons fly, how they are put into the air and taken down, how the ground crew follows the flight path so that they can be there when pilot and passengers alight. The
text also informs readers of some of the problems and the joys of ballooning. ZS

C.U. Hobbies


Regina’s story begins in 1755, just as the French and Indian Wars are beginning; when their home in western Pennsylvania is attacked by Indians, Regina is kidnapped. She knows her father has been scalped, but her mother had been away at the miller’s and may have escaped. Afraid and angry, Regina learns to respond to her new name of Tskinnak, to trust some of her captors and—in time—to love some of them and to feel so much a part of the Indian community that she joins in their hatred of the enemy, the English. She is, as she was in the historical case on which Keehn bases this novel, reunited with the mother she’s longed to see. Characterization is adequate, and details of period and place are convincing; the writing has good pace, with a present-tense, first-person narrative that is at times compelling. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.—Colonial era

D.V. Interracial understanding


Ad

Hoping to get the lead in a school play, Kit is unhappy at not even getting a minor role; she comes home and has an argument with her alcoholic stepfather. That leads to Kit’s flouncing off to a shopping mall and being caught when she shoplifts. Assigned to do twenty hours of volunteer work for the Humane Society, Kit becomes involved and dedicated. The themes of animal protection and of ethical behavior are adequately handled, but they don’t quite merge into a story that also includes improving a peer relationship, making Kit’s mother and stepfather face his drinking problem, and confessing her thievery to her classmates. ZS

D.V. Animals, kindness to; Family relations


R

Graham is thirteen and starting to feel his oats. He sees his old friend Leslie in a sexy new light, and he’s beginning to argue with his dad about everything. These are classic boyhood rites of passage, and Koertge personifies them in a likable, believable protagonist. Leslie has her own problems: “Do you think I’m flat?” Both Graham’s and Leslie’s fathers are racehorse trainers, and the competition between father and son becomes professional as well as personal when Graham goes to work for Leslie’s father, grooming a horse whose owner has transferred from one trainer to the other. Though the conflict is presented realistically enough, the tone is so breezy that we know there isn’t a chance things won’t work themselves out, which they do, quite nicely. Mom helps: “Your father’s not Godzilla. He’s not going to come through the wall and eat your bed. He’s just mad.” Koertge has a gift for
writing boys' books short on macho posturing and long on offhand amiability—
maybe a little too amiable in the present instance, which glows with good
feeling but lacks the substance of some of his previous winners. RS
D.V. Father-son relations

Lindgren, Astrid. Lotta's Easter Surprise; tr. by Barbara Lucas; illus. by Ilon
R 3-5 yrs. In an import that travels well, Andersen medalist
Lindgren has created an Easter story that has humor, sweetness, and an
understanding treatment of a child's belief in legendary figures. Capably
translated from the Swedish, the story is written with a light, sure touch and
illustrated with watercolor paintings that have charm without whimsy. The
local candy store has closed, and since the Easter bunny has always bought his
eggs there (so Mom and Dad say), there can't be an egg hunt. But Lotta knows,
as do the readers, that Lotta has arranged a very special candy hunt. At one
point, Lotta's older siblings explain that "Dad is the Easter bunny. He is also
Santa, if you want to know." Lotta definitely does not want to know this, and
she accepts it on one level but keeps right on thinking "What a terrible Easter it
would be without the real Easter bunny," thus admitting reality but keeping her
faith in the symbol. This is longer than most read-aloud books, but the
combination of a light style, the appeals of the holiday, and the protagonist's
ingenious should hold the audience. ZS
D.V. Family relations; Self-reliance

Lobel, Anita. The Dwarf Giant; written and illus. by Anita Lobel. Holiday
R Gr. K-3. Lobel's strong sense of design is evident in the
intricacy of swirling costumes pictured in the Japanese-style paintings for a tale
in the folk-like tradition. Pleasant at first, the dwarf who came to the palace of
prince Mainichi and Princess Ichinichi soon showed his evil nature, enticing the
Prince with magic and turmoil, so that he forsook his Princess. Eventually the
Prince realized that he was in danger, since the dwarf giant was more and more
violent and domineering. It was the beautiful princess who rescued the prince by
killing the dwarf. The clear message is that happiness lies (here unrecognized)
"back in your own back yard." The illustrations are attractive, and the story is
competently structured and told, but it will probably be the magic, the danger,
and triumph of good over evil that will appeal most to young children. ZS

Maestro, Betsy and Giulio. The Discovery of the Americas; written and illus.
Reviewed from galleys.
R Gr. 2-4. Beginning quite properly with the Stone Age
migration across the land bridge from Asia, the Maestros remind us of possible
Japanese, Chinese, and Phoenician expeditions, along with St. Brendan and Leif
Ericsson before getting around to the voyages of Columbus. It's a welcome
context, as are the parallel descriptions of highly advanced cultures that were
flourishing in America all the while Europeans were busy "discovering" it. "The
Europeans brought diseases that killed many of the natives, and a strange new
way of life they did not understand or accept. Many lost their lives, and most
lost their freedom, their customs, and their pride.” The continuous text is forthright and well organized. Pencil-and-watercolor illustrations in this large-format book are more variously successful: the land- and sea-scapes are dramatic, the maps are clear and well-placed, the portraits and human figures are crude and sometimes garishly colored. Appended “additional information” includes a chronology, an annotated list of early American inhabitants, more information on the “age of discovery” and “other interesting voyages.” A useful review for Columbus Day. RS
C.U. Columbus Day; History


Ad Gr. 4-6. After her sojourn on *Murphy’s Island* (BCCB 10/90), Collette is back at Sacred Heart Elementary for the second half of sixth grade. When the other girls discover that the handsome new teacher Mr. Kurtlander is an old friend of Collette’s father, she finds herself unexpectedly popular—with some eighth-graders, no less. The situations and conflicts are many and entertaining, but a heavier hand is at work here than in most of the previous Collette stories. Some of the plot turns are forced, and a subplot about an overly mature eighth-grader is didactic. Nevertheless, this has just about everything readers expect from a school-and-family series, including pleasantly vague stirrings of romance. RS
D.V. Age-mate relations


R Gr. 3-5. After a general discussion of air masses and fronts, McMillan devotes most of his book to clouds: the different kinds, the difference that altitude makes, different clouds in different seasons. The material is well-organized, both chronologically (proceeding from winter through spring) and visually, with each page devoted to a color photo of a cloud; a drawing of what the cloud looks like from the side, top to bottom; a diagram of the kind of front that would create such a cloud; and a clear, brief paragraph explaining and amplifying on the illustrations. This is a good guide to weather prediction through skywatching, although kids will wonder about the lack of information on thunderstorms, tornadoes, and hurricanes. On the other hand, what McMillan does include encourages readers to find the exciting in the everyday. A glossary and an index are appended. RS
C.U. Weather


R Gr. 4-6. Fifth-grader Hannah Keddie is firmly anti-precocity: she cherishes and plays with her dolls, eschews trendy hairstyles in favor of a long braid, and is alarmed by the advancing adolescence of her peers: “I’m not ready for Seventeen magazine. I want Ten magazine, Nine even. I’m not ready for makeup or party dresses with no straps on them or kissing boys.” She’s lost and unhappy in her new school, humiliated in gym and lonely at lunch, finding solace only in the library and in art class. When the regular art teacher is
replaced with a substitute who has a fascination for projects involving Clorox bottles, glitzy Caitie Crystal somehow manages to implicate truly artistic Hannah in brief rebellion and thereby sows the seeds of friendship. Hannah must then reconcile her pleasure in her new friend with her frequent alarm at Caitie’s behavior, while deciding just how much growing up she wants to do. This is a warm story from the point of the view of the quiet one whom people wrongly take to be just the sidekick, and it believably portrays Hannah’s intelligence, stubbornness, and appeal for Caitie. While Caitie’s family is too stereotypically self-absorbed as the cause for her occasional amorality, her character as the girl who has both the glamour to be popular and the independence to choose her own friends has depth and credibility. This book will be enjoyed not only by readers who themselves feel outshone by their classmates but also by Caities who are Hannahs at heart. DS

D.V. Friendship values; Growing up


R* 5-8 yrs. To the old man who “loved the stars as if they were his children” there appears, one evening, an orphan child named Kileken. In return for friendship and shelter, the boy does all the old man’s chores, keeping the cattle fat throughout a terrible drought. Although Kileken warns the old man not to probe the secret of his powers, curiosity proves stronger than trust. This is a moving story that resonates with the poignancy of punishment for a prohibition broken. Morin’s paintings intensify the sense of mystery with nighttime blues and the contrasting arid golds of a parched daytime landscape. His use of vertical shapes, diagonal shadows, and pebbly textures creates rich, muted contrasts. Soft or blinding, the light from which Kileken draws his strength is like a third character in the story. BH

C.U. Storytelling

D.V. Older-younger generations


R Gr. 5-7. Determined that her first year in junior high will establish her popularity with everybody, Alice is discouraged by the hostility of one girl. She can’t understand why Denise picks on her, and she is depressed when she realizes that Denise is going to force her to sing on “Seventh Grade Sing Day,” when any upper class student can demand a public performance, even of people who (like Alice) can’t carry a tune. The anguish over this prospect seems a bit out of proportion, but so does the volatility of adolescent emotions. The events at school are balanced by sub-plots about Alice’s brother’s problems with women, by Alice’s father’s problems with women, and by Alice’s injudicious intervention in both situations. Fans of the previous books about Alice will find this one just as entertainingly styled. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations


R Gr. 6-9. Erika begins her story with “These things happened when I was fourteen years old,” and goes on to describe the reasons she and Sif,
who is seventeen, were unhappy living with a married sister in Sydney since their father, a Scandinavian seaman, died. Their mother was still on the home island, Rongo. Separately, each of the sisters makes her way back to their beloved Rongo; then Erika is fearful that the American scientist who has come to Rongo and fallen in love with Sif will learn their secret. Are they really descendants of a sea people? Does their mother really live in a submarine city and talk to sea creatures? Themes of pollution and conservation are smoothly incorporated into a story that very deftly blends realism and fantasy so that each reflects the other and neither dominates. As she did in Playing Beatie Bow (BCCB 4/82), which was voted the Australian Children’s Book of the Year, Park has put together a strong plot, solid characterization, and a colorful setting to create a narrative with depth and lucid style. ZS

D.V. Sisters


R* Gr. 4-6. With the same present-tense immediacy that distinguished her narrative in Ruthann and Her Pig (BCCB 1/90), Porte storytells the fate of Fanny and Bertha during the year Bertha's father returns from a two-year disappearance and Fanny starts coping with her parents' two-year-old divorce. Now in fifth grade, the girls have been friends since kindergarten, and their relationship shows a comfortable familiarity that young readers will either identify with or yearn for. Bertha's triplet brothers provide humorous antics, especially when Fanny tries to teach them the tap-dancing routines through which she's developed such grace—and confidence enough to shed the weight she gained trying to keep her parents' divorce a secret. Fanny's parents act childlike themselves, while her nanny Hildegarde has to be the most original caregiver since Ole Golly tended Harriet the Spy. In fact, Hildegarde spins several of the traditional tales woven into the main story. These likably eccentric characters both shape and deserve their happy endings. BH

D.V. Divorce, adjustment to; Friendship values; Self-confidence


R Gr. 5-7. Based on sources cited at the end of the book, the author tells, in five brief episodes, dramatic stories of escapes from slavery, some as familiar as Eliza crossing the ice or Ellen Craft (passing as white and dressed as a man) posing as the owner of the man who was actually her husband. The writing style is a bit flat, but the inherent drama of events makes the accounts interesting. Rappaport discusses, in an afterword, some of the leaders and conductors of the underground railroad, and she follows the notes on sources with a bibliography of adult and juvenile titles. ZS

C.U. Black History Month; Social studies

D.V. Courage

[ 202 ]
R Gr. 4-12. This oversize book offers a panoply of delights designed to please various breeds of horse lover: there are pictures enough to make the uninitiated happy just gazing, descriptions of horse care and training to allow the more advanced to focus their dreaming, and charts of show jumping courses to enable horseless readers to gallop to gold medals in their living rooms. Rodenas arranges this book in well-defined sections which combine to make an overview of virtually everything connected with *Equus caballus*, ranging from the evolution of the horse to riding for the handicapped. The book’s breadth is particularly impressive in its description of many, many horsey activities, including the familiar, such as horse racing and show jumping; the lesser-known, such as driving competitions and vaulting (although it really should have a section on competitive trail riding); and youth-oriented organizations, such as Pony Club and 4H. And even the most knowledgeable equestrians will appreciate the brief narratives by professionals (some quite famous) about their work: a groom, a veterinarian, a trick rider, several Olympic champions, and many others get their personal say. Complete neophytes may have some problems with the text: certain basic terms (“gelding,” “crossrail,” “equitation,” etc.) are undefined, the writing is not always clear (the “Colors” section has several misleading statements), and some outright errors slip through (a reference is made to an animal’s being 14.4 hands high—an impossible measurement, and a cantering horse is described as leading with his inside kind leg). Overall, however, the book is an equiphile’s delight; bibliography, several lists of organizations, and an index are included. DS

R Gr. 7-10. With its plethora of dates and newspaper quotes, mountain-climbing lore and history, this book about Louise DeMaistre, “one of the three or four best climbers in France these days [1957],” reads like a biography. It’s fiction, though, somewhat formulaically structured, but with plenty of interest generated by the mountain-climbing details and by the strong central figure of Louise. The book begins with Louise’s childhood and early love of the French Alps; her progress from intrepid amateur to noted guide and Himalayan climber is carefully etched, with lots of attention given over to technical information about climbing. This documentary aspect is well-balanced by suspenseful accounting of Louise’s adventures, both triumphant and scary: “Louise had only a second to tighten her grip on the rope. She managed to shout a single word—‘Avalanche!’—before the whole mountain seemed to come loose under her feet.” RS
D.V. Courage

R Gr. 7-12. Sixteen-year-old Patty aspires to be an actress just like her beautiful Aunt Ruth, who is visiting New York from the west coast for
treatment of a severe diabetic circulatory problem. The tension between Patty's staid parents, a surgeon and a stockbroker who both disapprove of Ruth's lifestyle, transfers to Patty as she centers her school life around roles in several school plays. Patty's first-person narrative is embarrassingly self-absorbed ("Should I quit the play and devote myself to writing? Should I ignore Helen from now on? What should I do about acting as a career?"), but authentically so. Many teenagers will identify with her complaint that "I could scarcely concentrate on the drama onstage; my own personal one seemed so much more important and more real." Readers will be drawn to exactly the soap-opera quality of Patty's tone and Ruth's life as both women deal with Ruth's illness—after several unsuccessful surgeries, both of her legs are amputated below the knees. What's more, the substructure of family dynamics, which are as realistic and consistent as they were in the author's first novel Miriam (BCCB 9/88), lends credence to the situation. Except for occasional repetition, Rosofsky's style is competent and involving. BH


R Gr. 2-4. "Hazardous waste is awful and dangerous. In fact, we four guys are the only good things that ever came out of it!" Leonardo and his fellow Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (made so by "toxic mutagen slime") here take kids through an A to Z of environmental awareness. While many similarly themed books don't get much further than advice to recycle and pick up trash, this one is more "radical" in its suggestions. Fast Food: "Don't give your business to fast-food places that serve their stuff in Styrofoam." Meat: "How about not eating so much meat in the first place? And ask your folks to buy meat from organically raised cattle." With each letter accompanied by a bright cartoon of the Turtles in ecological action, topics include Cruelty-free products, Ivory, Ozone layer, and Tropical rainforests. Q is a get-involved standout: "Always ask questions! How was this product made? Do I really need it? Was it tested on animals? When I'm done with it, how do I get rid of it without hurting the earth? Can it be recycled or used again?" Cowabunga, dudes. RS


R 5-7 yrs. This litany of a cowboy's sunup to sundown chores doesn't amount to much, textwise, but the artist's tall-tale humor of line and expression will go a long way toward roping young listener's attention. The red-eyed bronco, the startled cattle, and the deadpan cowpokes make fun of the western myth as surely as they project it. Rounds has exaggerated his usual heavy outlines, angling vertical shapes against long horizontals and adding splatterbrush texture. The very minimalism of words and images leaves a lot of space for imaginative play. Rustlers are conspicuously absent; the only villain in the piece is a rattlesnake, whose "skin will make the cowboy a fancy belt and hatband." BH

C.U. The West

R 5-8 yrs. A bear cub wakes to find his mother gone. Searching for her launches a maturation journey that he survives by successfully eluding his enemies and by learning how to fish for salmon in a stream he tumbles into by chance. Lending urgency to this simple nature narrative are the life-and-death tone and the artist's sweeping watercolor paintings of an animal in constant motion. The Alaskan wilderness makes a naturally dramatic landscape subject, and Schoenherr amplifies his double spreads with open space, large-scale shapes from varied perspectives, strong earth tones, and organic textures. BH

C.U. Nature study


Ad Gr. 7-10. "They called her, 'Gentle Annie,' 'Michigan Annie,' and 'that brave little sergeant in petticoats'" says the explanatory afterword to this biographical novel about Anna Blair Etheridge, Civil War nurse. Here she accompanies her regiment to Blackburn's Ford, First Bull Run, and other battles, tends them on the retreat to Washington, and works in hospitals and on a hospital ship (occasionally brushing shoulders with other historical figures en route). The hard slog and grime of war and nursing are well-conveyed here, but the style never lifts the story above the formulaic despite its factual background. Anachronisms in speech are jarringly common (doctors are described as being "really into beef tea," and another character is going "gaga"), and one character changes her name from Clara to Claire and back again for no apparent reason. Still, Annie is a courageous heroine who lived through some important history, and Shura has shaped her life into an easily readable story. DS

C.U. History—U.S.—Civil War

D.V. Courage; Devotion to a cause


R Gr. 3-5. In the same format as earlier volumes Simon has done for his series of astronomy books, the color photographs are startling in their beauty and their vivid details. The square pages are spacious, the print large, the integration of pictures and text judicious. The text itself is an admirable example of good informational writing: clear, direct, and logical, with good organization of material. Background information about the planet Neptune serves as a basis for noting the new facts disclosed by the 1989 flyby of Voyager 2 as it passed Neptune on the way to the edge of the solar system. ZS

C.U. Science


Ad Gr. 5-7. Stephen Hawking, the British physicist, is clearly a remarkable man, and this biography of him (based on interviews with the subject's friends as well as printed sources) traces his life from his reassuringly
unbrilliant childhood through his major discoveries about black holes to his current work in cosmology. It also describes his long battle with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which has severely limited him physically. Dr. Hawking's personal life is treated respectfully, with the occasional anecdote hinting at the sharp and funny character conveyed by quotes from Hawking himself, making one wish for more of them. The author's writing tends to be cliché ("the mighty mind inside the weakened body"), and some of his observations are dubious ("His disability has allowed him to push his mental abilities to their natural limits"). While the science involved is explained in a simplified form, it may still be too complicated for lay readers. Nonetheless, the book is valuable as a diligent chronicle of the life-to-date of an important scientist and interesting man. A bibliography and index are included. DS


R Gr. 7-9. Chester, who is the narrator and who has turned thirteen while visiting his father in Santa Fe, resents the fact that a court decision made years before when his parents were divorced means he must choose (at thirteen) where he will live. Quiet and sensitive, Chester is torn. Will it hurt his mother, a manipulative alcoholic, if he chooses to live with his father? The latter and his wife, Florence, are people of warmth and integrity; Chester knows he will be happier with them and makes his choice. His mother's subsequent suicide attempt is an emotional burden Chester has to learn to live with and understand. Talbert achieves, in this compassionate story, a non-judgmental attitude that makes it clear that his mother loves Chester, but that the quality of her love is selfish, limited by her own emotional needs; as he learns more, his guilt is assuaged and his love for her becomes easier to express. Chester's friendship with two neighboring brothers, José and Arturo, provides a needed light touch in a story that is serious but not depressing. ZS


R 5-8 yrs. Like Catherine Brighton's Mozart (BCCB 12/90), Weil's picture book concentrates on the early life of the composer, a focus that does not allow full scope for the composer's achievements but that young children will enjoy, particularly in the Guinness-like accomplishments of the prodigy. And the miracle was already apparent with the young Mozart's compositions sounding like "the voices of angels," according to the Archbishop of Salzburg. While Weil's drawing is sometimes crude, her ink-and-watercolor pictures have an effervescence missing from Brighton's book, if they are a little giddy in their exuberance (Mama Mozart waving a sign that says "baby boy" on the occasion of Mozart's birth, for example). The text is generally more restrained, save for the occasional outburst: "And then something quite unexpected happened! Very, very unexpected!" A glossary of musical terms is appended. RS

C.U. Science
D.V. Handicaps, adjustment to

D.V. Divorce, adjustment to; Mother-son relations

C.U. Music

[ 206 ]

R Gr. 6-9. "Promise that if I ever get lost, you'll come and find me?" Bob, fourteen, has a terrible crush on Valerie, so of course he promises, little knowing where his word will take him. Valerie is beautiful but frail, spending as much time sick at home as she does at school—a bit of a relief for Bob, afraid of taunts from the other boys. It's the early days of World War II, and all the boys become caught up in the exhilaration of air raids and plane-spotting: "I won't say I never thought about Valerie; but the War Effort had to come first." This story of first love and war has an almost autobiographical feeling, so it's all the more unsettling when Valerie dies and begins to haunt Bob, insisting that he keep his promise. Thematic comparison with Keats' *La Belle Dame* would not come amiss here, and Valerie's transformation from nice girl to demanding ghost is quite credibly done, proceeding seamlessly from the realistic story. Bob's narration is reminiscential but not nostalgic, his recollections confiding and direct. The pink-and-purple jacket art depicting a 1990s Bob and a bodice-ripper Valerie is romantically effective if somewhat misleading. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to


R* 1-4 yrs. With a winning narrative pattern and graphic aplomb equal to that of the Woods' *Napping House*, this capitalizes on toddlers' fascination with their fingers. Young listeners will hasten to hold up their thumbs in response to the first double spread picturing larger-than-life child hands with gleeful pigs perched on each thumb—"I've got two fat little piggies,"—followed by "two smart little piggies" (index fingers), etc. Meanwhile, the pigs are cavorting, and the pages are changing from hot yellow to cold blue to sudsy pink to mud brown, depending on the condition of both fingers and pigs. The games end with bedtime kisses as the fingertips touch and the light fades. This is what the Woods do best—boldly designed images stylized to heighten the rhythms of a cumulative read-aloud. It's a jackpot for both story hours and family sharing. BH

C.U. Storytelling

D.V. Imaginative powers


M 4-7 yrs. Using art work from New York's Museum of Modern Art as examples, Yenawine (director of education at the Museum) attempts to demonstrate concepts of line, shape, and color, as well as to develop children's visual sophistication and appreciation of modern art. The books work best when they stay simple: "Sometimes the shapes are exact (Composition by Mondrian). Sometimes they aren't" (Arrangement According to the Laws of chance by Arp). "Creative thinking" questions are sometimes provocative—"What can you tell
about this family?—for a Henry Moore sculpture, and sometimes vapid: facing prints of a Roy Lichtenstein beach bunny and Wyeth's *Christina's World* accompany the suggestion to "Make up a story about what they are doing. How do you think they feel?" Characterizing the colors of Monet's *Water Lilies* as "pretty and cheerful" seems not only clichéd but inaccurate, and the contrast between a picture in which colors "Make things look very real" and one in which they make "things seem strange" is subverted when the "very real" colors are in a photograph, as opposed to the "strange" example of an expressionistic painting. The reproductions are good, as is the selection of subjects. Parents and teachers, and kids themselves, may come up with better-suited questions and captions than the ones presented here. Each book includes notes on each piece of art featured.

RS

D.V. Perceptual acuteness


R 5-8 yrs. Gentle yet direct, this small story of a girl's experience of a father gone to war has the sense of children's reality that was missing from George Ella Lyon's similarly themed *Cecil's Story*, reviewed last month. Four-year-old Janie (the dedication seems to indicate an autobiographical source for the story) is excited when her father ships out: he gives her a hundred kisses, she gets to wave a flag, she and her cousin are treated by Grandma to ice cream. But the next day, when Janie and Michael are playing at the beach, she becomes frightened when he runs off into the distance to show her how things look smaller when they're far away. "'Come back, come back,' I cried, suddenly afraid he'd disappear forever like the ships gone from the horizon, dropped over the edge of the world where no policeman could ever find him." The metaphor is unforced and apt, especially so when a two-years-older Janie recalls it upon her father's return: "When you are far away, everything is smaller. But now you are here, so I am big." Yolen's text is comfortably poetic, if occasionally self-conscious, and finds a quiet match in Baker's watercolors, which capture the World War Two setting in cool blue-green tones. While both words and pictures have the perspective of memory, they are not nostalgic, and may well evoke an empathic response from children scanning an uncertain horizon today. RS

D.V. Parent-child relations
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