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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 Gr. 4-6. Handsome color photographs of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune and their rings and satellites illustrate a text that is continuous, clear, and carefully organized. Apfel lectures to children at Chicago's Adler Planetarium, and her experience is evident in her choice of material and vocabulary: no writing down, but also no heavy use of technical details or extraneous facts. The book describes the computer-controlled missions of spacecrafts Voyager I and Voyager II, which employ each planet's gravitational effect to redirect the path so that the vehicle can planet-hop. A very brief index and an equally abbreviated list of books for further reading are supplied, as is a pronunciation guide. ZS

C.U. Astronomy


Ad 5-8 yrs. As in many contemporary alphabet books, the concepts presented here are too sophisticated for an audience at work on their A-B-C's; that said, *D Is for Dolphin* is a handsome collection of paintings yoked to a credible sequence of definitions: A is for Air, B is for Blowhole, C is for Calf... etc. While the twenty-six paintings of dolphins in the water are at first glance repetitive (and occasionally tangential to the definitions), illustrator Biondi varies seashades and tones through a blue-gray-green spectrum. The dolphins themselves are a lively bunch, and here again the illustrator uses an assortment of longshots and close-ups to keep us interested all the way to Zzzzz (a pair peacefully sleeping at the surface). A brief glossary explains each entry. RS

D.V. Animals, respect for


M Gr. 7-10. In this earnest and well-meaning novel about contemporary rural Guatemala, Isabel feels torn between her desire to be a teacher and her respect for the Mayan traditions that mandate a very different life for women. Although her boyfriend loves her—"He stared so deeply into her when he kissed that she felt him loosen the capstone inside her and let free a torrent of

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crystalline waters”—Lucas wants her to be a traditional wife and is jealous of her curiosity about a young American medical student who is visiting their village, and who, perhaps, can help Isabel’s desperately sick mother. The author’s treatment of the Mayan culture and people is so reverent and noble that the characters seem like studies from *National Geographic*: “Though these were the most ordinary of things in Chuú Chopoló, ascending as she was to the house of the mystical Eziquel, Isabel felt a ripple traverse her body because of nature’s activity.” Such purple prose makes the culture and landscape seem exotic even to the characters themselves, and that can’t be right. The overwriting is relentless, witness Isabel on her way to confront Lucas after an argument: “Isabel could not relax enough to keep her right shoulder from spasming just under the skin. Her flesh leaped into frenzied gyrations every few seconds. Her throat felt dry and her stomach gurgled. On uncertain legs she went. On some level she knew that courage is often nothing more than a knot of muscle at the gears of the jaw.” Although the characters (and readers) are overwhelmed by the excesses of the prose, the author does gives us a rare picture of a culture totally unknown to most American teens. RS

D.V. Pride in background and heritage; Sex roles


Ad Gr. 6-8. Mylanyfindra and her brother, Brevan, thought the old man was their grandfather until he died. The townspeople, who claim the siblings as geth (common-property slaves) tell them otherwise. Without the protection of the kind old man, Myl and Brev find they have no rights in an awful world. While they are still geth, they sneak out of their dormitory/prison at night and discover that they can rise above the ground and fly. Using this skill, they escape and are captured three times, each time by equally evil people. Chetwin uses a generic Good-versus-Evil theme as well as over-familiar fantasy elements to create a story tinged with déjà vu. There are devastating fire storms reminiscent of Anne McCaffrey’s Pern, and the narrative is burdened with too many other-worldly words (“I went out of town once, right after the glair, up into the Greater Podlithra to clean for the ’lith crews”). Chetwin stays true to her form with a stretched but very happy ending. KPJ


M Gr. 3-5. Although kids will be intrigued with Cobb’s picture of the Australian outback here, they should also know that it’s a limited and romantic view. “If you lived on the outback of Australia, the only people you would see every day would be your own family.” Well, not necessarily—along with the immense sheep stations described in this book, the outback also has towns, mining developments, military installations, and aboriginal communities. Although cover art features a mumbo-jumbo design of loinclothed, war-painted aborigines, the book could lead one to believe that the aborigines are extinct, referring only to cultural contributions without indicating that Australia’s first inhabitants are still very much around: “the art and legend of the aborigines have made a strong impression on modern Australia.” Along with the kid-appealing aspects of sheep-station life (school via radio), the book
also includes scattershot coverage of Australia animals, geological history, European settlement and the Great Barrier Reef. Paintings depicting Australia's animals are better than the sometimes cutesy pictures of people, but the coloring is whimsical: blue sheep? RS

C.U. Geography


R Gr. 6-10. McKane family life, it seems to Scottie-Anne, revolves around her beautiful older sister Dane, a veteran of the beauty pageant circuit. Scottie feels smart but ordinary-looking ("you have very nice features," says her mother), and her motives for entering the Marshfield Middle School Princess Pageant are so mixed that she doesn't—until her best friend Lillie, in collusion with Dane, forges Scottie's application and signs her up. Cooney's treatment of her subject is nervy and smart: she takes a hard-eyed look at the beauty contest scene while at the same time making us root for Scottie to win the school pageant. And while Scottie only places as third runner-up (coming closer than is probably realistic), there are no easy and sanctimonious lessons about beauty being skin deep. Dane is a complicated, formidable beauty queen, with far more magnetism than her sometimes whiny younger sister. "I love winning," Dane says, and you can see why she usually does. There are a few purple patches, but the writing is generally sharp, and would-be Danes and Scotties will both find themselves a sister. RS

D.V. Sisters


R* Gr.5-. Eleven chilling folktales have been elegantly—and carefully, from cited sources—adapted for the benefit of sophisticated young readers and adult storytellers. The pen-and-ink drawings will insult neither, for they maintain the atmospheric integrity of these marsh tales involving boggarts, will-o'-the-wykes, witches, dead hands, green children, and a marvelous character called Tiddy Mun, who mourns the passing of the swamp to modern drainage systems . . . and demands retribution. Feminists will delight in "The Dauntless Girl," who agrees to rid a farm of unnatural visitors with these words: "I'm not afraid of ghosts. But you ought to take account of that in my wages." Later she says to the haunt, "I've no cause to be afraid of you, for you are dead and I'm alive." Bravo Mary, and Bravo, once again, Kevin Crossley-Holland, whose *British Folk Tales* (BCCB 1/88) was a landmark collection. BH

C.U. Storytelling


R Gr. 2-3. For slightly younger readers than is Bruce McMillan's *The Weather Sky*, reviewed last month, this is another good guide to elementary weather forecasting. Beginning with a clear discussion of cold and
warm fronts, the book also describes various weather instruments (including
thermometers, wind vanes, anemometers, hygrometers, and barometers), and
shows how forecasters use these to find fronts and predict the weather. Croll’s
illustrations are crisply designed and colored, with an appealing balance between
informational graphics and mood-setting spreads of snow and storms. RS
C.U.  Science

Freedman, Russell.  *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane.*
$16.95.  

R Gr. 6-10. Profusely illustrated with well-placed photographs of
the craft and flights of the first airplanes (those of the Wright brothers primarily,
but also those of other early aviation pioneers), this is an account that, for all its
attention to technical details, remains lively and forceful. The photographs,
many by the Wrights themselves, will interest camera buffs as well as flight
fans. Freedman’s research is, as usual, impressive, and his organization of
material excellent; the focus is on the experiments and improvements made by
the inventors, as indicated in the subtitle. An appended note describes the
photographic work of the Wright brothers and is followed by a list of places to
visit, a bibliography, and an index. ZS
D.V. Courage; Industry


Ad Gr. 7-12. It’s her last summer before college, and Gillian is
spending it with her family at their summer cottage. Someone has broken into
the cottage, taking food and bedding—and Gillian’s diary, which contains details
of her growing awareness of her lesbianism and her love affair with best friend
Suzanne. Garden’s *Annie on my Mind* (BCCB 12/82) was a groundbreaker in its
romantic treatment of a gay theme; the present book is notable in that it presents
a gay relationship as just one (and a subordinate one, at that) story element. The
central plot concerns Gillian’s befriending of Lark, a younger girl who with her
little brother has run away from an abusive home. Lark is a tough but
ultimately vulnerable stereotype of the Gilly Hopkins mold; the dialogue
between Gillian and Lark is windy and therapeutic, as Gillian convinces the
bitter girl that the world is not necessarily a terrible place. Despite Suzanne’s
dire (and sensible) warnings not to get too involved, Gillian takes the two
children to their kindly aunt in New Hampshire, leaving the younger girl feeling
much better about herself: “Some of what you said began making sense, and I
began feeling maybe I was okay after all, and maybe there were some good
things around after all . . . I—I think I do want to be alive.” The love story
between Gillian and Suzanne is also talky, but authentically so, and gay and
straight kids both will find them an easy pair to like. RS

Gogol, Nikolai.  *Sorotchintzy Fair;* ad. by Countess Sybil Schönfeldt; tr. from
the German by Daniel Reynolds; illus. by Gennadij Spirin. Godine, 1991.

R Gr. 3-5. Taken from a German adaptation of the original
Russian, this tale of peasant wit, credulity, and romance does occasionally show
signs of awkward translation, but the combination of traditional tale-elements,
action and humor, and—above all—striking illustrations, has a strong appeal. A beautiful girl, coming to the annual fair with her father and stepmother, responds instantly to the love (equally precipitate) of a handsome young man. The path of true love runs no more smoothly here than it’s supposed to, as trickery and superstition cause delays in, but do not prevent, the wedding. Spirin’s paintings are rich and colorful, and they combine meticulous details with a Breughel-like gusto. ZS


R Gr. 9-. Subtle and sophisticated, the sixty-one poems in this thoughtful collection recall the “pulsing of the loud and fallen dusk,” (Delmore Schwartz) and other signs of day and night and time. A majority of the poems are translations, ranging from 10th century Japanese (“The way I must enter/ leads through darkness to darkness” —Izumi Shikibu), to modern Hebrew (“this night/ and these three stars/ lost among trees/ this wind”—Leah Goldberg). While the theme probably does not have the immediate young adult appeal of Gordon’s anthology of love poems, *Under All Silences* (BCCB ), the collection is loosely and sensitively ordered, offering lyrical meditations from a range of quiet, introspective voices. Indexed by title, author, and first lines. RS


Ad Gr. 5-8. Tyler and his best friend Lymie sneak out one night to swim in the forbidden quarry, where they stumble upon a corpse in the water and a car making a quick getaway. Twelve-year-old Tyler is a lonely rich kid; Lymie a gold-hearted lout; and this is a junior-high mystery that seems fairly oblivious to the last quarter-century in young adult literature. The two kids are likable enough and the writing and plot development are professional, but the didacticism is overbearing, as Tyler learns Lessons in Life from the wise and kindly family retainers Mrs. Saunders the housekeeper and Chuckie the groundskeeper: “It seemed funny hearing a tough guy like Chuckie using the word ‘love’. “ This is just one echo from the 50’s; another is the stereotyped school librarian: “It was a small library and she probably knew where every book in the place was by heart, but all she could do was point at the card catalog.” Unenlightened but undemanding, this is a quick pick for kids who want another book about friends who solve a mystery. RS

D.V. Friendship values


R 3-5 yrs. Even listeners too young to know the difference between a gnu and a yak will love the sounds of this cumulative tale, as a parade of animals confronts the mysterious grumpalump, which just lies there—a big multicolored pile of stuff—resisting the animals’ attempts to get it to do something but grump. “The bear stared, the cat sat, the mole rolled, the dove shoved, the bull pulled, the yak whacked and the armadillo used it for a pillow. But the lump still grumped.” The lump and its suitors sprawl across big crayon- and-watercolor double spreads; the animals’ expressions range from meditative
(the bear) to smug (the cat) to determined (the gnu, who blew and blew until "to everyone's surprise, the grumpalump began to rise"). The grumpalump's an air balloon, the gnu its intrepid pilot—"And how the bear stared." Large print and lots of defining white space make this a terrific just-one-more for storytime. RS


Note: Books written by The Bulletin's editors or advisory committee are given a descriptive annotation rather than a review.

Gr. 7-12. "Poetry is a way of seeing," says Betsy Hearne in the foreword to her new collection of forty-seven poems for young adults.


R* Gr. 7-. This biography of Rachel Carson is impressive: it has a balanced treatment, it reflects economic and scientific changes during the subject's lifetime, it focuses on Carson's interest in ecological balance without abandoning other facets of her life, it has a tone of admiration but no hyperbole, and it is written in a style that has vigor and grace. Henricksson writes with sympathy of the scientist who found writing difficult but who wrote so well that she was able to afford giving up a salaried job to devote her time to writing, especially about the sea she loved and the pollution she feared. Chapter notes, a bibliography, a list of dates, and an index are appended. ZS

C.U. Ecology


R Gr. 2-4. Max and his friend, Gordy, try and fail at several get-rich-quick schemes. They wouldn't take their failures so hard if six-year-old Austin Healy wasn't such a success at the very same things—a lemonade stand, a backyard carnival, door-to-door solicitation. Finally, thanks to a tip from Austin, Max and Gordy manage to make a nice profit on their final scheme of the summer. The writing is simple without being patronizing, the sentences are short without being choppy ("Max felt like throwing a wet sponge in Austin's face too"). The desire to make money lies in every eight-year-old's heart, and this realistic story will ring up a sale. Animated pen-and-ink illustrations add to the light-hearted humor of the story. KPJ


R Gr. 4-6. Giving background information on how the public defender system evolved in the United States, Hewett focuses on the work of one such lawyer, Janice Fukai, who works as a public defender in the Los Angeles County system. Black-and-white photographs are too dark (and not always informative), but they show Fukai's activities from arraignment through hearings and consultations to the trial. While this is an account of one lawyer, it offers information about all public defenders who participate in our system of justice. The book concludes with a glossary, a bibliography, and an index. ZS

R Gr. 3-5. The author has served as education coordinator for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, so this activity book, first published in Canada, is nicely gauged for a middle-grades audience both because of its appropriate vocabulary level and because of the range of complexity of its suggested investigations. Under such rubrics as "Insects in Winter," or "Insect Impostors" are a series of two-page projects ("Waterscope down," "How to tell a butterfly from a moth," "Biters and stingers") printed in double columns on each page and profusely illustrated. Instructions are clear, and safety warnings ("Carefully tape the sharp edges so you don't cut yourself") are included. An index is appended. ZS

C.U. Nature study


M Gr. 6-9. Five years after her adoptive mother's death, fourteen-year-old Bridget feels that her father is interested only in his biological children. The one member of the family to whom she relates is her younger brother, Morgan, who has never spoken. Bridget's resentment increases when their father indulges his passion for sailing and takes the family to a sparsely populated lake for the summer. As the plot grows denser, it becomes confusing, and the numerous characters are more inconsistent than complex. Is the nanny intentionally, or just stupidly, cruel to Bridget and Morgan? Does Bridget's weight problem stem from her anger at her father? Has Daddy completely forgotten that the lake where they are vacationing is close to the little town where Bridget's birth father once killed a man? And what is the House in the Woods, anyway? Compared to the painful twists and turns of Bridget's adolescence, the neat ending is a disappointment. Holland's competent style holds up the weight of the plot, however, and the pace and natural dialogue keep the story moving. KPJ


R 5-8 yrs. A gentle family story about the relationship between a black father and his son. How many stars are in the sky? Mom would know, but she's out of town. Her son, who can't sleep, decides to count them but keeps running into obstacles: "... there were lots of stars hiding behind the trees. The houses blocked out even more. The street lamp was so bright I couldn't see the stars anywhere near it." Since Dad can't sleep either, the two go on an all-night star-counting drive. More sophisticated readers may question Dad's logic in driving first to town ("This isn't a good place to see stars," I said"), then to the city ("I couldn't see any stars at all"), before finally going to the country, where stars are abundant, but the long trip cures both insomniacs. Oil paintings capture the changing hues of the evening sky, suggesting the mystery of the world at night. The artist is less successful at depicting human figures and facial expressions, which are occasionally stiff and awkward. The
book's premise will appeal to night owls, who will enjoy the thought of going on a trip at three in the morning. RAS

D.V. Father-son relations


R* Gr. 5-8. Beginning with the German surrender on May 7, 1945, Hotze has vividly recreated, from the perspective of a young Polish immigrant, the neighborhood bordering Chicago's Wrigley Field. Christine's mother has a job, Christine's sister has a soldier who sweeps her away to the Aragon Ballroom, and Christine has the Cubs, whom she watches from an overhanging screened porch where she sleeps in summer. Christine's father has not been heard from since he stayed in Kraków to settle their financial affairs and was caught in Hitler's invasion. This is a story of tight times and strong ties, but each character is individualized to avoid period clichés. The protagonist's effort to raise money by selling season tickets to watch the game from her apartment, her evening as a soda jerk with a boy to whom she's attracted, and her race through a graveyard with best friend (and loudmouth) Arlene make unforgettable scenes in a historical novel that is developed with skill, consistency, and imagination. BH

C.U. History—U.S.

D.V. Growing up


R Gr. 6-7. Both poets and mythologists work with compressed image; England's poet laureate Ted Hughes combines the forces of lyrical style and concentrated plot in these ten original creation myths. Add a generous dollop of humor, and you get a God tired of working all the time and not incapable of making mistakes. Take the case of Leftovers the Lion, who, created right before dinner, absorbed a little too much of God's hunger for sausages in the process. "The Making of Parrot" features one of the most entertaining scenes, a singing contest in which a cormorant performs first ("Aaaaaaaahake!") followed by a loon and then a giraffe ("What looked like a bubble travelled slowly up her neck. Giraffe opened her mouth, and after about six seconds burped"). However, there are bitter moments along with the confusing ones, as when Eel wins his point about being the sweetest of fish, only to doom his heirs to lives of eluding hunters. Hughes satirizes suspense itself in the hilarious denouement of "The Invaders" (fleas from outer space). "The Playmate," on the other hand, is a tale of gentle beauty about God's creating a horse to be woman's playmate. There's a sophisticated tension between male and female here that depends on adult experience, and a few of the tales have a tone of self-conscious contrivance. The total impact, though, is one of anarchic genesis, at once funny and fierce. The black-and-white engravings add a biblical dignity with occasional sly flecks of levity. BH

C.U. Literature


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This anthology of mostly male poets and mostly male voices may be seeking to woo poetry-resistant teenage boys. Among the poets are the nationally known (Robert Penn Warren's stunning "Orphanage Boy" and Gwendolyn Brooks' famous "Gang Girls" are included) as well as people more familiar from other contexts, such as Jim Wayne Miller and Ron Koertge. Some formal variation (nearly all the poems are free verse) would have enhanced the collection, but it is nonetheless full of varied and vivid insights. Janeczko has a particularly strong selection of dead-on "boy’s-eye-view" vignettes with added perspective, such as David Allan Evans' "Bus Depot Reunion" and Herbert Scott's "That Summer," which seem likely to lure any audience into reading further. An index and source notes are included. DS


Although he was raised by the gatekeeper Dorf, Rabon's mother is Jenna, a mysterious witch, and his father is rumored to be Solmak, the great Lord and guardian of the Sun Gate, which keeps away the dreaded, King Kong-like, Luan. "The Sun Lord also has to see that the monthly tribute is paid. Without that, Luan becomes restive. Uncontrollable. Then, too, there's the question of... of sacrifice..." This quest-fantasy is complicated, involving two sets of twins trapped in dualistic, Beauty-and-the-Beast roles. Rabon's brother is Lal, an ugly monster who lives in the swamp and whose hideousness conceals a brave and loving heart. After the death of their mother, the two boys set out for the Sun Gate, Rabon to confront his father and Lal to bury his mother. Their journey is dangerous (and well-paced by Kelleher), their arrival the occasion for even greater terror and unexpected reward. Darker-toned than much juvenile fantasy, this is an adept and satisfying blend of action and atmosphere. RS


Duffy, undersized and underfed, isn't at all sure he'll like apprenticing to the old apothecary Master Crowe, but he knows it will be better than the almshouse where he had been living, the only home he'd ever known. Much to Duffy's apprehension—and delight—it turns out that Crowe is an accomplished alchemist as well as herbalist, and he enlists Duffy in his quest for the Philosopher's Stone, the Jewel of Life. Kirwan-Vogel creates an atmospherically detailed setting for this fantasy story, and both Duffy and Crowe are engaging and believable, if familiar, characters. What this first novel lacks is a strong narrative pulse: the quest for the Stone is intermittent, and Duffy's three adventures in a mysterious other-world are too convenient and unconvincing in their impetus. Aside from some occasional prattle ("We are our own stars. The dance and the dancer are the same") the writing is fresh and graceful. RS


Kitchen's paintings are, as always, scrupulously realistic and beautifully detailed, with a strong textural quality. Here the pictures
of a series of animals accompany four-line verses that are unfortunately limp and contrived. An example: "The bluetit in the birdhouse/ Pokes out her little head/ She chirrups to her parents/ It's time that she was fed." Save for the fact that each creature is in or on something (bird in nest, bird in birdhouse, ferret in watering can, field mice in a parsley pot, etc.) this seems a random assemblage.


R Gr. 7-12. While her references to "teenagers of size," may cause a cringe among fat and slim alike, Landau's summary of social issues surrounding fatness is crisp and persuasive, with an organized synthesis of research findings. This book is less scientific and more political than the Silversteins' book reviewed below, with Landau placing less emphasis on how to lose weight and rather more on the prejudice overweight people, particularly teenagers, face. She cites some of the same research as do the Silversteins, but her explanations are clearer and better documented, usually with footnotes. On the other hand, Landau tends to gloss over research that indicates that being fat is less healthy than being slender. Still, it's a book with an argument—not a bad thing—and the author includes interviews of both the fat-kid horror story variety and the success story type. As one contented fat girl says: "When I die, I want people to be able to say something more than 'There lies Barbara—she sure managed to keep her weight down.'" A directory, notes, index, and reading list are all included. RS

C.U. Health


Ad Gr. 5-8. This winner of the 1989 Belgian Book Prize is a first-person, present-tense novel set in Ireland during Cromwell's invasion. Just before English troops drag him to his death, Father O'Faolain charges his foster son, Rory, to deliver a secret parchment to a friary on the west coast. Rory relates his narrow escapes along the way and, in so doing, reveals a panoply of characters and situations typical of the times. Although the excitement is just a bit too non-stop, this is an aspect that some readers will appreciate rather than consider to be calculating. The large cast offers a mix of individualized and stock characters who, though not always memorable, neatly forward the plot, which includes the protagonist's friendship with an Irish wolfhound, establishment with a new family, and rescue of a girl. Given the appeals of adventure, romance, and an unusual style that is evenly translated, it's too bad the cover is more young-looking than the tone of the book. BH

C.U. History—Ireland

D.V. Perseverance

Three brothers—a stonecutter, a metalsmith, and a sailor—leave the port of Dublin because of Viking raids during the year 804. Taking refuge at the monastery of St. Columba, the older two men work on the book of Kells until each is claimed for his skills by a warring king. It is the youngest who, because he saves a Viking boy from drowning, is able to protect the monastery and finish the Great Book. Although the art is ornate, Lattimore's characteristically elaborate borders here seem more appropriate than usual because of the book's subject. The miniature scenes and designs are also balanced by a more carefully controlled simplicity of central compositions, whose hues are often softened blends of the brighter tones in the illuminated frames. The story itself has a legendary quality that keeps it from seeming too farfetched; in total effect, this an unintimidating introduction to the Book of Kells, which admittedly makes any imitation look garish. BH


Beginning with John Ciardi's reminder to ask *how* rather than *what* "a poem means," Livingston takes a formal approach throughout her guide to the sounds, shapes, and structures of poetry. In clear—occasionally severe—prose she elucidates practice and principles of voice, rhyme, metrics, imagery, and form, including quatrains, ballads, haiku, cinquain, limerick, and free verse. There are plenty of examples from first-class poetry, and Livingston is not afraid to quote from some of her students' lesser efforts in order to show us what *not* to do. She seems particularly annoyed at teachers who regard poetry-writing as a language arts exercise, and just as tough on students who rhyme mindlessly ("When you're alone/ it keeps you capone") or natter ("I realized his idea of poetry was simply to write prose and arrange it in lines"). Her arguments for the benefits of formal structure are cogent and convincing: "Repetition can serve you best as a meaningful way of providing sound and thought patterns where there is no end rhyme. It also lends emphasis to what you wish to say. It can hold a poem together when used well. Used poorly it will make your readers yawn!" Aside from a few general suggestions, would-be poets are left on their own as far as inspiration goes, but Livingston's *hows* are in themselves good prompts for *whats*—and *whys* as well: this is just as much a book for readers as it is for writers. RS


This fictionalized life of the warrior who united Ireland and either overcame or pacified its Viking raiders cuts a neat swath through relationships among clans, families, and personalities that dominated a complicated political landscape. Without idolizing Brian Boru, Llywelyn projects his charisma, along with the ambition that made him determined to free—and rule—a land he loved. Between panoramic battles and household conflicts (Brian married four times, with children by each wife), the scenes here achieve an epic quality without sacrifice of detail or dialogue. Through an
understated style and fluency of information, the author has shown respect for the inherent drama of her subject. Junior high and high school students will find themselves involved and moved by a historical figure equal to the Homeric heroes. BH

C.U. History—Ireland
D.V. Leadership


R Gr. 5-7. Henry Bergh's one-man crusade is an example of how an individual can change the laws and behavior of a nation, and this book is a competent chronicle of his commitment to animal rights and his founding of the ASPCA. The author begins by making clear the economic and transportational importance of animals and the wide employment of certain cruelties, then goes on to describe Bergh's wide concerns, touching on sanitation, cab horses, circus animals, livestock, and, in the famous "Mary Ellen" case, child abuse. While occasionally marred by sweeping or perplexing statements, the book is unusually fair-minded in its discussion of Henry Bergh's inconsistencies (preaching vegetarianism while eating meat, for instance), nor does it glory in or shrink from his occasionally flowery Victorianism ("... the same starlit night that brings you rest shines down also upon the bloodstained stones of your slaughterhouses ... "). The final chapter describes the contemporary work of the SPCAs and ASPCA; a bibliography and index are included. Illuminating period illustrations and cartoons liberally adorn the text. DS

D.V. Animals, kindness to


R Gr. 6-9. One of a series of books published by the New England Aquarium, this is written by the head of that organization's publishing division. The color photographs are beautiful as well as informative; the text is written authoritatively but is not always well-organized within subdivisions. Mallory describes the forms of marine life that inhabit the Red Sea, focusing on rare species that inhabit the varicolored coral reefs. The final page is devoted to a discussion of the efforts of many countries that border the Red Sea to protect its wildlife. A glossary, a brief bibliography, and an index are appended. ZS

C.U. Oceanography


R Gr. 2-5. Miss Jones is a careful goose "who never opened the door without knowing who was on the other side." Unfortunately, she doesn't see quite as well as she used to, so when the new neighbor announces that "My husband and I are canaries," Miss Jones does not notice the long furry nose or
sharp white teeth of "Mrs. Caruso." Marshall's up to his old tricks in a new format; this book features seven stories that are longer and more complex than his easy-to-read books but are just as funny, with sophisticated overtones fit for practised readers. Lots of the humor depends on reading: "A Sheepish Tale" skewers a character who claims to be able to read and so leads his friend past a sign saying "Danger Lurks! Beware of Wolves" ("For your information, it says, 'Welcome to the pretty forest'"). Kids can predict the ensuing disaster—if they read the sign. As always, Marshall's art tells half or more of the story, as when the savior of the mouse wedding party turns out to be a bride who's as big as the attacking cat ("Even if she is on the tall side, we'll make a fine couple," hints Cedric Mousejoy in an earlier understatement). Furred or feathered fables of this size are always welcome. BH
C.U. Reading, reluctant

R Gr. 5-8. When the City of Birmingham, needing a water reservoir, plans to flood the Welsh valley where Owen Tudor and his family live, Owen responds in a startling if not unprecedented way: he builds an ark. After moving his family and farm animals onto it, he anchors himself on the pond-soon-to-be-reservoir and defies the Birmingham Water Authority ("It was never like this for Noah," Owen says, "people going to law on him"), with animals multiplying and floods finally moving the Ark to safe, legal, and purchaseable ground. The Welsh water politics that underlie the story won't be known to most American readers, but this is still an attractively gentle and quirky fable, with the flavor of a local folktale. The local atmosphere is pervasive, with Welsh words and names thick throughout, but the story is simply told and easy to read. Readers will enjoy this variant on that favorite story, a little guy triumphing over the odds. DS

NR Gr. 1-3. While there is a great need for biographies at the primary grades level, this entry in a new series is adulatory, oversimplified, not always accurate, and stodgily designed. Anderson had a temper as well as temperament, but in this book she is only "sad" and "not for herself" (twice) when confronting racial prejudice. There is no clue that Anderson was a contralto, nor, in fact, is there any indication that she sang classical music: aside from spirituals, all the book says is that she "sang the high notes, the low notes, and all the notes in between." The year of Anderson's disastrous Town Hall recital was 1924, not 1922; the year of her famous triumph over the DAR and subsequent concert at the Lincoln Memorial was 1939, not 1943. Although the print is large and readable, the format is 50's-primer, and the pen-and-ink drawings look like advertising art from the same era (the several photographs are better). The cover painting gives the singer a halo. A glossary and an index are appended. RS
C.U. Music

Ad Gr. 4-7. Taking a whole-earth approach to understanding weather, this goes beyond weather maps and cloud formations to show how the earth's "system" is governed by natural forces such as gravity and solar energy, and how these forces shape weather and climate. The approach is clear, comprehensive, and enlivened by various projects and experiments, as well as by several extended fictionalized sections that show kids in other cultures using or predicting or braving various weather phenomena. Everything is in good order except for the projects, which are in themselves instructive but aren't always logically placed within the text. The project that kids will probably enjoy the most, a homemade weather station, is broken up throughout the book and is given only the most desultory of mentions in the main narrative. Pencil illustrations are instructive but somewhat amateurish, and "Molly the Molecule" has no place in a contemporary science book. With a good balance of information and anecdote (and an index but, unfortunately, no bibliography), this is a smorgasbord that will provide an enlivening supplement to both weather units at school and rainy days at home. RS

C.U. Nature study; Weather


R Gr. 7-10. Sheryl is a black fourteen-year-old who launches her narrative with an account of her family's trip to North Carolina on Easter of 1963. There she sees Jim Crow laws in action when a store owner yells at her for drinking from a water fountain and a clerk keeps an old black woman waiting through a series of white customers. Back in Brooklyn, she organizes a concert to raise money for the freedom riders, one of whom, her Uncle Pete, is killed by a bomb at the school where he teaches black southerners registering to vote. There are some vivid aspects to this first novel, especially the dynamics of an extended family and of adolescents uniting for friendship, flirtation, and a good cause. The style is sometimes awkwardly expository, as in the narrator's reaction to TV news coverage of "the freedom workers, young and old—hard-pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed"; or in the conclusion, in which Sheryl welcomes "the idea of growing up, knowing art would be part of that future." Some of the motifs, however, are as powerful as the hum that shudders through Sheryl's body when she touches a hot wire fence installed by a hostile white neighbor of her grandmother's—and hears herself called "nigra" for the first time. Scenes such as the one in which Sheryl's mother breaks down over her brother's murder overshadow the book's problems, and its integrity as historical fiction about a charged era is manifest. BH

C.U. History—U.S.
D.V. Courage; Intercultural understanding

Readers who were caught up in Orlev’s World War II ghetto adventure, *The Island on Bird Street* (BCCB 6/84), will not be surprised by the vivid characterization and tight plotting here, but they may not expect the stark realism, which gives this the authenticity of a memoir. The fourteen-year-old narrator, Marek, observes and even participates in the anti-Semitism of Nazi-occupied Poland before discovering that his own father was Jewish. Stunned by this fact, Marek defies his anti-Semitic stepfather, a sewer worker who smuggles food underground into the ghetto for money, and helps a Jew, Jozek, hide in the city. When the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising starts, Jozek insists on going back, and Marek guides him through the sewers only to be caught in the fighting himself. Marek’s mother, stepfather, grandparents, and friend Jozek are as memorably developed as the boy himself, whose gradual understanding of his stepfather tempers an emergent sense of justice. The sewers through which Marek travels are a naturally apt metaphor for his journey through the underworld of self-knowledge, which involves danger from within as well as without. Neither sensationalized nor sanctified, this young adult Holocaust novel has rather been profoundly considered and patiently crafted. Halkin’s translation is so well blended with the author’s style that the text reads as if it were originally written in English rather than Hebrew. BH

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In this sequel to *Hatchet* (BCCB 12/87), Brian returns to the wilderness at the request of the government: “If he could share that with us, show us, take us through it with him—he could save others who are in the same place.” Brian and Derek, a survival psychologist, are flown into the Canadian wilderness with nothing but a knife and a radio transmitter—the latter of which does no good when both it and Derek are knocked out by a lightning bolt. Derek lapses into a coma, and it’s up to Brian to get him out of the woods. Although there is a certain amount of melodramatic paragraphing and emphatic repetition (“Brian would make him comfortable and then wait next to him. Wait for him to come to. He would wait”), the writing is clean and the survival action straightforward. Easier to read than *Hatchet*—and with a corresponding lack of detail—this sequel has a minimal amount of characterization, a clear theme, and a strong wilderness focus, all of which should appeal to reluctant readers as well as confirmed Paulsen fans. RS

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The title phrase is taken from a remark by Thomas Jefferson, speaking of slavery: “... we have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” Harriet, the narrator, understands very well: she’s a favored slave who is approaching the age (of twenty-one) when she will be freed by Jefferson, whom she adores and calls “Master.” She believes that she and her brothers are his children. Her mother convinces Harriet that she should agree to make use of her impending freedom and her education by passing...
as a white woman and marrying a white man, a Northerner who has been smitten by Harriet’s charm. Rinaldi presents an issue seldom faced with candor in books for young people, and she deals capably with the facets of the problem through discussions among both black and white characters. There is a trace of contrivance occasionally, but for the most part the novel deals convincingly (if occasionally slowly) with changes in Harriet’s attitudes about leaving Monticello and about passing as white. A provocative story. ZS
D.V. Interracial understanding


R 5-8 yrs. Along with their more practical uses, Robbins tells us that bridges are “monuments to our need to reach beyond the boundaries of nature,” a sentiment at one with this collection of elegantly handtinted photographs of many kinds of bridges, from a fallen log to the Brooklyn Bridge. Each picture is accompanied by a brief paragraph about how the bridge works (“Made of metal and glass, this bridge crosses not a river but a busy street. It lets people walk from one office building to another, saving time and effort while protecting them from weather and the dangers of city traffic”); each double spread of text and picture is simple and fastidiously designed. The low-tech nature of the handtinting process gives most of the photos a nostalgic tone, but since many of the color juxtapositions and intensities are just the other side of likely, the book has a postmodern look as well. Overall, the tinting has the visual effect of blending the bridges into the surrounding land- and seascapes, making both look as if they’ve been around for a long time. RS


R 6-8 yrs. Echoing the tone of a James Agee quote that launches the book, this is a running narrative description of the dogs, people, houses, seasons, and lifestyles of Appalachia. The long, loosely rhythmmed sentences are linked with carefully chosen words that project a stream-of-consciousness flow. The text is punctuated by Moser’s sharp portraits or understated outdoor scenes in which the characters’ backs are often turned to the viewer as they walk into landscapes. Unlike Rylant’s other picture books set in Appalachia—including When I Was Young in the Mountains (BCCB 4/82) and The Relatives Came (BCCB 12/85)—this is more nostalgic mood piece than story or reminiscence, but it is beautiful to read and look at and can feed children’s understanding of regional roots. Given a book so spare and simple, the self-congratulatory back cover blurb seems superfluous. BH
D.V. Pride in background and heritage


R 5-8 yrs. Eleven-year-old Maisie describes the stormy night in which she saved her older sister’s life—and also came to accept the differences she has always recognized between them. Mama is an herb woman who has gone to nurse a neighbor, and Maisie’s sister is a wild child with daring ideas, such as taking down the ax to split a log for a fire. When the ax falls and cuts
her leg, she begs Maisie to cross the dangerous swinging bridge to get help, but Maisie is afraid and instead applies the remedies she’s seen her mother use to stop bleeding and ease pain. There’s real excitement and drama here, as well as a subtle unfolding of opposing characters. This is the kind of story kids beg you to tell, and they’ll sit still for it; though the text is longish for a picture book, the lean writing never dallyies. Except for the opening portrait of Maisie’s sister, which gives her a surreally Asian look, the watercolor and oil paintings manage to place this black family on their isolated mountain some time in the past without becoming too literal. Talifero’s impressionistic graphic imagery suggests delicate landscapes veiled with pouring rain. A strong first book from both writer and artist. BH

D.V. Individuality, expressing; Pride in background and heritage; Sisters


R 4-7 yrs. Jenny’s best friend has moved away, so Jenny writes her a letter that quickly turns into a brave and creative quest in a crayoned sailboat to Maria’s new home. Jenny imagines herself sailing out of New York harbor, into the ocean, and off to adventure: “Remember how lonely I felt when you moved away? I feel lonely now, too, but then a dolphin shoots out of the water. Then another one!” Past an ocean liner, around a mysterious group of islands, through a storm at sea, Jenny finally spots land, palm trees, and Maria. “Hooray!” This is an exuberant rejoinder to missing a friend, with an impetuosity matched by bold and simple paintings that stretch across double-page spreads. Jenny’s sailboat has a friendly, furry figurehead and a pink sail that’s a bright flag against the ocean blues and greens. An imaginative voyage far from the shallows of conventional bibliotherapeutic approaches. RS

D.V. Imaginative powers; Moving, adjustment to


R Gr. 6-9. Written by the author of Ragtime Tumpie (BCCB 10/89), which was a brief, illustrated account of a scene from Baker’s childhood, this newer book is for older readers. Despite an occasional use of florid phrasing, it is a good addition to the publisher’s “Black Americans of Achievement” series, being balanced, sophisticated, and not flagrantly adulatory. Twice married by the time she was fifteen, the flamboyant entertainer became a leading star in Paris before she was recognized in America. A political activist, a member of the French Resistance, mother of twelve adopted children, Baker was controversial, extravagant, naïve, and glamorous. Schroeder does her full justice. A chronology, a bibliography, and an index are appended. ZS


Ad Gr. 2-4. In an easy-to-read series that has included other medical subjects such as vitamins and junk food (BCCB 6/86 and 6/84), Seixas

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describes the history, causes, and treatment of allergic reactions. The text is clear and simple, with a scope carefully, if selectively, defined. It's too bad that the format, which is spaciously designed, can't take advantage of more informative graphics than the two-color cartoons that illustrate the book; they are adequate decoration but don't add much dimension in terms of either fact or fascination. However, kids who need to know what's here—and there are an increasing number of children who suffer pollution-related allergies or are coping with affected friends and family members—will find the material basic and accessible. BH

C.U. Health


Ad Gr. 2-4. Enraptured by the feats of Harry Houdini, young Victor locks himself in Grandmother's trunk (and can't get out), tries to hold his breath for five thousand seconds in the tub ("his mother kept making him get out of the tub and breathe"), and attempts to walk through walls (finally, "he used the door"). But a chance meeting with Houdini, and an invitation to his house, make Victor think he is finally onto the magician's secrets. While the story is resolved through several unlikely contrivances, the writing has a funny, fabular quality that matches the offhanded and slightly skewed crosshatch pencil drawings that go far to evoke a sense of tender mystery. This is very much a grownup's gloss on childhood magic, appealing more to adult nostalgia for secrets past than to children themselves. The ending, in which a now-grown Victor learns Houdini's secret, is a big-boy's delight. RS


Ad Gr. 7-12. Offering no "tips" or miracles, the Silversteins instead provide a comprehensive survey of the social and scientific issues surrounding weight control and body image. Although the authors seem to have accumulated a lot of research, it is for the most part undocumented, with too many references to unnamed "studies" and "experts." Some of the researchers are named, if unscrutinized: "nutritionist Dick Gregory," for example. Some of the research discussed is contradictory, a fact of which the Silversteins don't always seem to be aware. On page 175, for example, it is stated that "Millions of Americans, especially teenagers and young adults, are risking their lives to be thin." Page 177: "Although no one is certain just how many people suffer from anorexia nervosa, most doctors agree the number is well over one hundred thousand." Page 189 tells us that "millions of American girls and young women" suffer from bulimia. These numbers don't add up in any sensible way, and the overuse of "millions" makes the tone vague. Scientific findings are often contradictory, as the authors themselves state, but the summaries here have not been synthesized into an intelligible whole. The book is better on straightforward biological and nutritional information, explaining why two people who eat the same will gain different amounts of weight, for example; and
there is much sensible advice to both encourage dieters and reassure those who are content with their body image. An index and reading list are appended. RS

C.U. Health

Simon, Seymour. Big Cats. Harper, 1991. Library ed. ISBN 0-06-021647-6; Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-021646-8. 40p. illus. with photographs. Trade ed. $14.95. R Gr. 2-4. Stunning color photographs face every page of Simon's continuous text, which includes an introduction to the big cats and a look at each species: the lion, the tiger, the leopard, the jaguar, the puma, the cheetah and the snow leopard. Basic facts such as the Felidae family's keen night vision are consistently and smoothly presented, with only an occasional lapse in organization, as when a description of the lion's range interrupts the discussion of the characteristics and advantages of living in a pride. The combination of action shots—one tiger is caught mid-spring out of the water—and the author's practised, informal style will win the attention of young readers, with whom Simon charges the future of the big cats. The picture of a lion leaning into the sunset, right next to the discussion of the animals' endangerment, and an endearing photo of a leopard cub on the last page make it hard not to consider the message. BH

Spinka, Penina Keen. White Hare's Horses. Atheneum, 1991. ISBN 0-689-31654-2. 154p. $12.95. Ad Gr. 6-8. Set in a Chumash village in 1522, in what later became Southern California, this is a story of a peaceful people whose lives are disrupted and their safety threatened by the coming of a band of Aztecs. The adolescent protagonist, White Hare, knowing that the Aztec men are preparing for war (and human sacrifices in the rites of war) courageously frees the Aztec's horses by imitating the call of a frightened colt. With their horses gone, the Aztec warriors lose their advantage and are driven from the village. The setting is real, if idealized, the events fictional; the story's strengths are in the convincing pictures of cultural assimilation of the former Aztec slaves and of the sympathetic, (albeit belabored) picture of the Chumash. ZS

C.U. Social studies

Sutton, Elizabeth Henning. A Pony for Keeps; illus. with photographs by Mary Brant Gamma. Thomasson-Grant, 1991. ISBN 0-934738-77-7. [32p]. $9.95. Reviewed from galleys. R 5-8 yrs. Girl meets pony; girl loses pony; girl gets pony. It's an old story, but simply and pleasingly told here, as young Meg gets to take riding lessons but then must bid farewell to her beloved mount when he retires, only to find that her parents have given her a pony of her own. The illustrative photographs are frequently sunk in shadow, which is a shame considering how immensely photogenic the subjects are: Meg's pony for keeps, Lady Jane, is an irresistible fuzzy snowball that resembles a harp seal pup on hooves. The book's accurate depiction of Meg's obsession ("She loved looking ahead through the pony's fuzzy ears, and the smell of his warm, woolly coat") will strike a chord in like-minded readers, who will empathize with her perusing horse books by flashlight and envy her sitting proudly on her tiny steed. The end ("She had a pony to love and care for, a pony to ride any time she wanted, a pony all her own—a pony for keeps!") is all that Meg and her readers could dream. DS

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Gr. 3-5. Mewkiss is a kitten who hates his name. With a sophistication beyond his weeks, he associates his name with mucus—"the yucky, slimy crud people cough up when they have a cold." From a wise old cat, Mewkiss learns in a didactic way that his potential is not limited by his name. Thus inspired, little Mewkiss bravely attacks an evil rat. Many scenes between Mewkiss and his best puppy-friend, Barkus; his "special person," Jessica; and the wise old cat, Allergies, are cloying. They contrast oddly with the fight-to-the-death scenes between cats and rats. Girl readers might flinch from the injustice of Jessica's receiving a new doll and a kitten while her twin brother gets *three* Nintendo games and a puppy for their birthday. On the other hand, the quick pace of the story will please insatiable lovers of animal stories. KPJ


Ad 5-8 yrs. The young narrator has seen "spouts far off and shadows in the mist," but has never seen a whale. Out on the boat again, watching "hard and far," she sees spouts and bubbles, the backs and tails of a mother whale and her baby, and even some huge whale mouths, open to the terns and gulls who feed on the fish therein (an unlikely scenario). And then. . . . Lewin's splashy watercolors have anticipated the whale's triumphant leap from the start, showing us the whales underwater (which may confuse young listeners who may wonder why the girl can't see what they do). The paintings are sea- and sun-filled, the whales' ponderous presences a dramatic focus for composition. While the text isn't so much story as frame, the girl's longing and satisfaction have some of the force of epiphany. RS


Ad Gr. 3-5. Hannah remembers the fall of 1887, when she was nine. The middle child of a farm family, Hannah was blind and knew that her mother felt it would be a waste of time for her to attend school. It was the combination of support from Hannah's father and the pleas of the new teacher, Miss Robbin, that prevailed; Mama was won over, and Hannah was delighted to learn whatever she could and to make new friends at school. This has no serious flaws, but it is weakened by predictability and an overly fortuitous happy ending. ZS


R* 1-3 yrs. It may not be necessary to buy all four board books in this series, but no one who does will be sorry. Each one features the title animal in five double spreads that tell a story in facing images. In one spread, for example, the verso depicts the bear climbing up a chair toward two canisters; the recto shows him standing on top of the chair with a cookie in his mouth and
a cannister of spilled tea on the floor. In the next book, the cat rears up to sniff a boot and then falls into the boot. The dog leaps to catch a ball and then deflates it with one bite. The duck discovers a loaf of bread and then eats a tunnel into it. All the books end with the animal finding a cozy sleeping spot. Some of the stories depend on slapstick, as in the repeated pulling down or knocking over of things beyond reach. Just as often, however, the humor incorporates another level of wit, as when the dog digs to the bottom of a sand pile and finds . . . a shovel. The drawings are appealing without being cute; compositions are clean, objects realistically but imaginatively rendered, and colors true enough for identification, an activity to which these books will lend themselves along with storytelling. A great introduction to cause and effect.

BH
C.U. Perceptual acuteness
D.V. Language arts

Wilkes, Angela. My First Party Book. Knopf, 1991. Library ed. ISBN 0-679-90909-5; Trade ed. ISBN 0-679-80909-0. 48p. illus. with photographs. Library ed. $12.99; Trade ed. $11.95. M Gr. 2-4. This oversized guide for young would-be hosts and hostesses, first published in Britain, attempts to instruct readers in making party invitations, decorations, masks, hats, and all kinds of edible goodies in the shapes of faces or animals. Despite its bright and alluring photographs, however, the book has many problems. Repeated claims that materials are shown “life size” are 1) selectively interpreted—equipment is shown in arbitrarily sized drawings with no consistent ratio, making a needle appear as long a a ruler, 2) irrelevant—a bowl merely labeled “cream cheese” or a pitcher labeled “milk,” for which measurements do not appear, are not enlightening, and 3) occasionally false (some mighty tiny fruits and vegetables turn up, as do some humongous glasses). Nor do the directions themselves help, failing to explain the pictured steps clearly and sometimes requiring materials difficult to obtain in your average American neighborhood. The book gives repeated reminders to get adult help every time a craft involves sharp instruments or a hot oven, but a child who can’t cut out colored paper strips unaided is unlikely to be able to “copy the crocodile and dinosaur on pages 8 and 9.” The reader old enough to puzzle out the directions won’t need parental help and probably won’t want peanut dip shaped like a pig, while those young enough to long for a Tuna Clown may find only frustration. DS

Williams-Garcia, Rita. Fast Talk on a Slow Track. Lodestar, 1991. ISBN 0-525-67334-2. 182p. $14.95. R Gr. 7-12. Denzel (christened “Dinizulu” by his sixties-era father) Watson figured he had Princeton licked, even when he was required to undergo a special pre-freshman summer program for minority students. “Remedial? How could you even open your mouth to say Denzel Watson, class valedictorian, Kid Whiz, and remedial all in the same sentence?” But Denzel’s slick talk, nonexistent study habits, and general arrogance get him nowhere but humiliated, and he convinces himself that college is not the answer. Convincing his parents, however, is going to be another matter, and Denzel spends the rest of the summer selling candy and not telling his folks that he’s decided not to go back to Princeton in the fall. Given the didactic tenor of the story, the fact that
Denzel does go back is a foregone conclusion; it is a credit to the author’s gift that the character survives her well-intentioned role-modeling of his fate. Denzel is smart but smug, not allowing anything as petty as self-doubt to get in his way. Competing with smooth-talking Mello, (whom Denzel privately calls a “big, illiterate dummy”) to con the most customers into the most candy, Denzel can’t see how pitiful his sales triumphs are; and, while he puts down his fellow workers as “social misfits unable to get work elsewhere,” he’s afraid to do anything else. If readers can get past the despite-himself finger-wagging of Denzel’s narration, they’ll find a good story of a difficult summer, and a picture of urban middle-class black life that’s rarely shown in YA literature. RS

D.V. Integrity


R Gr. 4-7. A first novel is based on childhood experiences of the author’s father; like him, Willis’ protagonist, thirteen-year-old Henry, also is sent to live on a farm. It is 1943, and orphaned Henry finds it hard to understand why Sarah Morrison wants to keep him with her when she seems so clearly to dislike him. Expectably, a bond forms between the two, and Henry begins to wonder if Sarah could be his birth mother, since he has learned that she had once had an illegitimate child and given him up for adoption. The primary plot is served well by sub-plots, which feed into it rather than competing with it. Unlike many first novels, this is not overcrowded with characters; here, too, as in the structure, the minor roles set off those of the major characters. ZS


R 5-8 yrs. The heroine of this famous Russian fairy tale collected by Afanasev is closely related to Cinderella, but the villain is unique in the pantheon of witches. Who can forget Baba Yaga’s flying mortar, house with chicken legs, and apocalyptic horsemen of the sun, day, and night? It is Vasilissa’s doll—a gift from her dying mother and a comfort after her father’s marriage to a cruel stepmother—that guides her out of the clutches of Baba Yaga, but it is Vasilissa’s own fine sewing that makes her a Tsar’s wife. The stages of a child’s passage into adulthood through grief, tests, and tempering are deeply imbedded in a story accompanied by dramatic paintings rich in fiery hues and elaborately costumed characters. Koshkin maintains the life-or-death tone of the tale with sweeping shapes and stately figures, the latter arranged in traditional, somewhat stiff iconographic poses. This is a long story, alternating double spreads of text and of art in the manner of Nancy Burkert’s Snow White, but the older picture book audience will hold still for it nonetheless. BH

C.U. Storytelling
D.V. Courage


Ad Gr. 4-6. Although this biography is written in a style that has little vitality, it is written clearly and does an adequate job of describing Drew’s life and the importance of his contribution to medical history and to the training
of black doctors. Refused admittance to the medical school at Howard University, Drew entered McGill, where his record of academic prowess was followed by the achievement of distinction as an educator, a medical researcher, and (as a specialist in research on blood) one of the organizers of the American blood bank system. The book closes with a glossary, a bibliography, and an index. ZS


Ad Gr. K-2. The idea of a shop where magical wings of all kinds are sold gives the illustrator ample opportunity for a pastel kaleidoscope of feathery wings, color-filled skies, and rosy buildings. They are the background for Matthew's abortive attempts to fly ("Rental wings by the hour") back to the old neighborhood he misses. The theme of nostalgia-followed-by-adjustment after a move is a familiar one, and it is introduced here in an adequate blend of realism and fantasy; it is, however, overstretched from a situation to a story, and is dependent on the illustrations for the movement it lacks. ZS

D.V. Moving, adjustment to


R* 5-8 yrs. In his plainest portrait yet of life on the African plains (see Young Lions, reviewed in the 3/89 issue and Elephant Crossing, 1/90), Yoshida tells a story of a mother and baby rhinoceros: "The mother rhinoceros has been wounded; her side is bleeding." Black-and-white double spreads illustrate what could have happened; in each case, the author explains why it didn't: "Perhaps they met a male rhinoceros. His horn would wound her. But it isn't likely a male rhinoceros would charge a female rhinoceros." Returning to color once again, the narrative goes back to show what did happen, when the pair met a baby elephant who had wandered away from his herd in the nearby forest. The two babies are only curious about each other, but their mothers engage in defensive combat, a confrontation graphically depicted in a wordless—one needed—spread centered on the spurt of blood from the rhinoceros' hide. This is a fierce tale that will engage readers' sympathies more deeply than tamer offerings, an effect all the more remarkable for its resistance to anthropomorphism. There is natural suspense in the long night following the fight, and the author is matter-of-fact: "If the wound gets infected, she will probably die. Baby rhinoceros can do nothing for her." She does live, with the help of the tickbirds that clean the wound. Strong composition sets the solid animal figures against the long green and yellow horizontals of the plains; while entirely naturalistic, the pictures have a cleanly formalized dignity that gives the events some alleviative distance. RS

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