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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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ANNOUNCEMENT

Beginning with the September, 1992 issue (volume 46, number 1), The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books will be published by the University of Illinois Press for the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Betsy Hearne will remain editor of The Bulletin, and has also been appointed as associate professor at GSLIS; Roger Sutton will continue as executive editor.

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These addresses are approximately 150 miles apart from each other; please make sure to direct your inquiries to the proper office.

The September Bulletin may take you by surprise—don’t look for the familiar white cover with the griffin. We’ve completely redesigned the cover and interior of the journal and added some other useful features as well. With this exciting new look and an exciting new home, we’re still committed to the same critical standards of evaluation and writing that The Bulletin has always maintained.

Roger Sutton, Executive Editor
New Titles for Children and Young People


Ad Gr. 2-3. Like other entries in Adler’s series of easy-to-read American biographies (see Eleanor Roosevelt, BCCB 4/91), this account of Harriet Tubman’s life is simple and direct, but occasionally choppy in its transitions. After describing Tubman’s hard upbringing on a plantation, for example, Adler recounts her escape, stating that “Harriet ran to the house of a white woman who had once offered to help her.” Who? How did they meet? The text also jumps uncomfortably between the events of Tubman’s life and those of the larger world, moving from her meeting with John Brown in 1858, to the election of Lincoln in 1860, back to Harriet and her work during the Civil War. The illustrations (amateurish in depicting human figures, somewhat better in color and composition) reinforce the abruptness of the text, with disparate images clashing on facing pages. But the text is honest about the facts of slavery (even if one illustration of the young Harriet cowering under a whip is more awkward than tragic) and provides the incredible and inspiring facts of this heroine’s long life. RS

C.U. History—U.S.
D.V. Devotion to a cause


R 3-5 yrs. First published in Great Britain, a story that is realistically illustrated with line and colored pencil drawings evokes the atmosphere of an interracial classroom where the protagonist, Ling Sung, feels the pangs of being a non-achiever. Other children are praised for their newly acquired skills: Terry can tie shoelaces (Ling Sung cannot) and Manjit can write her name (Ling Sung cannot). By chance, our doleful hero discovers that two long-handled paintbrushes can be used as chopsticks—and Ling Sung is adept at using chopsticks. Admiring compliments boost his morale, and soon Ling Sung is teaching everybody in class. This says a great deal, very simply, about children’s need to achieve, to conform, to belong. ZS

D.V. Age-mate relations; Self-confidence


R 4-6 yrs. His irritating presence described in verse, an indefatigable fly buzzes around a long series of objects. The fact that there’s an alphabetical element (“He played on the Keys by the kitchen door. He lit on the List for the grocery store”) is a bonus, and the lap audience will happily join in with the text’s periodic interjections of “Shoo fly! Shoo fly! Shooo.” Capital letters are in bright color—the “K” in “Keys,” for example. Indeed, bright color, in ebullient swishes and spatters and washes, dominates the paintings, which have a happily frenzied quality and some sharp comic details that underline the disaster humor of the text. ZS

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R Gr. 6-9. A pioneer in medical education for women, a dedicated physician who overcame dyslexia, deafness, and sexist exclusion in her medical education, Helen Taussig is best known for her discovery of a surgical innovation that could save the lives of cyanotic children, often referred to as “blue babies.” Baldwin gives an adequate amount of information about the biographee’s personal life but focuses on her career, explaining clearly the therapeutic procedures used and describing with respect—rather than hyperbole—the many honors bestowed by Dr. Taussig’s peers. This is good medical history as well as good biographical writing, with the material carefully organized and a text that will be buttressed by photographs, by an index, and by a bibliography.

ZS


R Gr. 3-6. Some thirty-four Native American groups, broadly scattered from Alaska to Chile, are represented in this collection of riddles. The book, which is illustrated with organically rounded charcoal drawings and formatted in a spacious design, will serve two functions: some of the riddles are witty and translate easily from their original context to current vogue; others offer insight into unfamiliar traditions within the framework of a playful genre. Here’s an example of the former: “The cave has a pig in it... it’s the tongue in your mouth (Mexico: Chatino).” And who doesn’t feel a stab of identity at the title riddle? “What is there inside you like lightning... meanness (Oklahoma: Comanche).” On the other hand, who would guess that what “looks like soft white clouds around the sky” refers to the “fat around a reindeer’s fourth stomach (Alaska: Koyukon)” ? Readers who don’t figure that one out will learn a little something they didn’t know about reindeer anatomy and the importance of it to a far northern tribe. Bierhorst has adapted Native American folklore with consistent integrity, and this is one of his most accessible collections. Descriptions of tribal groups and sources and are listed at the end of the book. In his introduction describing various kinds of riddles—hunters’, dream guessing, gambling, and so on—he explains the concept of *haku* (“very good,” or “almost right”), a Koyukon word spoken by the riddler in response to an answer that makes sense even if it is not the one the riddler had in mind. Our children should have such options! BH

C.U. Folklore


Ad Gr. 7-10. Through the voice of ten-year-old Bartolina, readers learn of the oppressive cruelty of the feudal system that still obtained in rural areas of Bolivia in the early 1930s. A member of a large, extended family of Aymara Indians, Bartolina is devout and naive. Her father’s departure (ordered by the administrator of the estate, Don Luciano) to fight against “land thieves” in
the Bolivian war against Paraguay is the first omen of a period of upheaval. This prompts the warning of the title: Bartolina is told to beware of the rapacious bird that can appear in the form of a man. As more men are sent away and there is less food raised, an irate Grandmother wants to organize a protest—but she is shot. Four years pass before Bartolina finds her father; when the story ends she is fifteen, less ignorant and far less innocent in her understanding of the system and its corruption. As a picture (rarely drawn) of Bolivian life and political change in the years covered by the novel (1932-38), the book makes a substantial contribution. As a literary entity it is less effective, inundating the reader from the start with unexplained words, creeds, practices, and intricacies of the system in which the patron is all powerful. ZS

R 4-7 yrs. Remembering the day when her father got a phone call about the death of his aunt, the young narrator describes the memorial service that she and her family attended. The perspective is childlike, with attention distributed equally between the girl's reluctance to clean up her room and her sad uncertainty about the death. Of course, verisimilitude does not a story make, and this one is slightly strained by the inclusion of a cryptic allusion to even greater loss: "My mother decided she couldn't live with us anymore and moved away. I don't like it when somebody says they are sorry to hear something." On the plus side, adults will welcome the book as a chance to discuss what children feel but cannot analyze or express (this narrator notwithstanding), and there are precious few picture books that portray the stress-ridden occasion of a funeral. Cannon's ingeniously patterned watercolor art will give kids somewhere to look while they're undergoing bibliotherapy; the perspective from the church ceiling says a lot about how dwarfed and distanced children feel on such occasions. BH

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Father-daughter relations


R 5-8 yrs. Nowhere is the tone of this anthology reflected more clearly than in the last poem by John Gardner: "Always be kind to animals,/ Morning, noon, and night;/ For animals have feelings too/ And furthermore, they bite." Cole's sense of humor is well paired with rollicking, spacious illustrations by Munsinger, who draws animals with the easy aplomb of Wallace Tripp. Her skill in drafting and her subtle coloration make the art an example of intelligent cartooning that children will savor while they listen to verses by X. J. Kennedy, John Ciardi, Kenneth Grahame, Aileen Fisher, Ted Hughes, and William Cole himself. If it's a choice between this anthology and the one by the Kennedys, reviewed below, get them both. BH


R Gr. 7-9. Born in 1802 and sent to Boston to live with her wealthy grandmother when she was twelve, Dorothea became a teacher and managed to convince the elderly Mrs. Dix to sanction a school in the Dix Mansion—a harbinger, no doubt, of this pioneer educator and reformer's amazing career as a social activist. She felt concern for the care and treatment of the mentally ill; this cause became her passion, her crusade; she also worked for nurses' training and herself nursed at military hospitals during the Civil War, and she labored for programs to rehabilitate prisoners. The writing is moderate in tone rather than laudatory: Colman lets Dorothea Dix's achievements speak for themselves. Photographs and reproductions of contemporary prints are well-placed in a sensibly organized text. Appended material includes a chronology, a list of historic places to visit, a brief bibliography, and an index. ZS

C.U. Social studies

Ad Gr. 4-6. When given an assignment in her fifth grade English class to write about a pet, homely Jennifer decides to buy one on the way home. By accident—or maybe it’s fate—Jennifer stumbles onto a magic shop and buys a toad. Bufo is no ordinary toad. He is immortal, can speak, turns humans into toads with a kiss, and has the Jewel of Perfect Happiness embedded in his forehead. Bufo attributes all of his exceptional qualities to the fact that he was one of the first toads from the mouth of the fairy tale character who spat out vermin every time she spoke. The fairy tale elements are clever, but the Jewel of Perfect Happiness is a contrived plot device that doesn’t quite fit in. The issue of Jennifer’s homeliness is left realistically unresolved, although she is diverted from her unhappiness when her ordinary life gets more interesting after her discovery of the magic shop. The story is fast-paced and Bufo’s comments are often funny (“I had no idea I possessed such a powerful pucker!”) but the climax fizzles out when the reader has every reason to believe Jennifer will turn an adversarial witch into a toad—while Jennifer seems to forget she has the power. Nevertheless, this is a likable school story with a fairy tale twist. KJ


Ad Gr. 3-5. Since this playful version of the story of Noah and his ark appeared, published in 1940 by Harper and Brothers, it may have been forgotten by many. Part prose (conversations between Cullen and his loquacious cat) and part poetry, the book describes the animals “who didn’t get into Noah’s Ark, even though he sent them all invitations.” There are long nonsense verses about such creatures as the Lapalakes, the Treasurerit, the Squilliligee, and others. A previous edition (BCCB 6/70) was illustrated by Joseph Low with frolicsome pictures that are given a light, humorous quality by their casual line and light washes. Brian Pinkney’s colors are darker, with hatchings and striations that are often more eerie than comic. ZS


Ad Gr. 5-8. Maggie, twelve, has always been interested in the occult and is therefore especially intrigued when a little figure of a cat (purchased at a yard sale) turns out to be a mummy of a kitten that had been the pet of a boy pharaoh. The latter, in ghostly form, advises Maggie on magic that will help her achieve the goal they both want: getting the gilded cat back to the tomb from which it had been stolen. Pursued by a magician uncle who had murdered him and who now seeks to destroy his spirit, the young ghost brings danger and adventure into Maggie’s life. There’s plenty of action here, and the supernatural is certainly attractive to many readers, but this is heavy with contrivance and too often seems labored in its fantastic episodes. ZS

“Don’t be such a fool, Finn,” his father said when Finn protested that they ought to have gone to live on the family island, instead of staying on the farm they had come to when Dad lost his job at a Glasgow school. The island is Hirsay, evacuated sixty years earlier by Finn’s grandfather and others because they couldn’t cope with the harsh environment. Finn is wildly excited, then, at the invitation to visit Hirsay with an agriculture student, Douglas, and his son Chris. Dunlop does a remarkable job of creating atmosphere, subtly developing characters and relationships that change and grow. The island proves to be as rough and inhospitable as Finn was warned, and while he gives up his idealized daydream of Hirsay, Finn gains a deeper understanding of his heritage—and the true legacy of the island.


Ad 5-8 yrs. Ehlert here turns her hand to interpreting the “greatest circus on earth” as a festival of colors and shapes. The abstracted figures are depicted in vibrant and fanciful neon shades—cobalt bears, scarlet elephants, and lime goats cavort across eye-poppingly contrasted (preponderantly black) backgrounds. The text pages are several inches smaller than the covers, so that every page seems bordered by the endpapers’ row of vivid stars. It’s not much more than a series of terrific posters, however, because there’s no story; each “act” gets a double spread with a line or two of text (“For our next act, please welcome the daring darling of our show, Princess Lydia, as she rides bareback on her prancing horse”) that never connects to pages previous or following. The book is mainly about its own pictures, in fact, and the words are largely superfluous except where, as with the flying Zucchinis, they’re necessary for identification of the performers. Still, for kids old enough to deal with the abstraction, the visual impact is undeniable, and if you use the book with a group, you know they’ll be able to see the pictures from the back of the room.

DS


R 5-8 yrs. “On the first day out, much to their surprise, they caught one.” And yup, this gang of cowpokes roped in a one, “1,” that is, big and blue and now corralled. The boys then find a whole bunch of 1s in all colors and sizes, nine ones in all, until one jumps the fence and runs away. “So they rode out to look for the one that got away.” Your appreciation of this overextended joke will probably lag behind that of kids just learning wordplay, but even they may be frustrated at the conclusion of the search: the cowboys spy the 1 atop a butte, but when they get up there themselves, the 1 is gone. Where? This one searched in vain for some clue in the pictures, which are otherwise funny and angular, investing even the cacti with personality, with the 1’s and the cowboys (not to mention the horses) competing for loopier looks. Anyway the boys console themselves with their other eight, which, when they return, have turned into just that: 8. One-der why? RS

R 2-4 yrs. Garland creates, in affable line and wash pictures, the atmosphere of a busy, friendly crowd of parents and children enjoying an indoor pool. This English picture book author and illustrator shows the same clever simplicity here that she has exhibited in her earlier books (*Going Shopping*, *Having a Picnic*, BCCB 9/85, etc.) so that the minimal text is all that is needed to convey, along with the pictures, the action and humor of the story. A mother, her small daughter, and a toddler brother have a great time, the latter overcoming his fear and learning to paddle. In all, a cheerful outing. ZS

C.U. Community life
D.V. Fear, overcoming; Mother-child relations


R Gr. 7-12. Fiction about troubled times and places runs the necessary risk of imposing story onto chaos: without a plot, there is no focus; too much plot lends a betraying neatness to the situation. This novel, set in postwar Vietnam, has a convincing balance. Loi, seventeen, is a con-lai, the scornful name for a child of an American soldier and a Vietnamese mother. Taunted by the other villagers, refused admittance to the local school, Loi has two secrets: a photograph of herself, her mother, and an American soldier; and her forbidden love for Khai, a boy who returns her love but who is not allowed by his family to court her. It's a classic situation, of course, but Garland is careful not to allow romantic cliches to overwhelm the sad, realistic circumstances of Amerasian children. Learning that free passage to the U.S. is available to children of G.I.'s and their families (including husbands), Loi and Khai plot to fake her death, escaping the clutches of a lustful government official who wants to marry Loi, and run away to Ho Chi Minh City, marry, and go to America. None of this works out as planned, and while the ending is a happy one, it is also sobering, as Loi learns the truth about her father and mother. There are some travelogue-ish patches in the scene-setting, and a subplot involving a scrappy orphan boy is a bit sentimental, but on the whole, the novel is both a good love story and an honest portrait of the aftermath of war. RS

D.V. Parent-child relations


R Gr. 5-7. It's seldom easy to be a rising star in the same field as a famous parent, but Brett Hull is, he claims, a "laid back guy." In fact, despite the impressive record of goals scored, he is not a great skater and is inevitably compared to his father Bobby, "the Golden Jet." Traded to the St. Louis Blues in 1988 because of his poor showing on the Calgary team, Brett found his new coach more encouraging. Three years later, he became one of the few ice hockey players ever to score 50 goals in the first 50 games of the season. Goldstein includes an adequate amount of personal information, but most of her text is devoted to the career of "the Golden Brett." Informative but not

Ad Gr. K-2. Rose and her family have just moved into a new house, and children of the neighborhood have told Terrible Tales about the awful man who lives next door, R. Wintergarten. It is reported that he rides a crocodile, that he has a dog like a wolf, and that he eats people. Well, he certainly doesn’t respond when one of the children kicks a soccer ball over the fence and Rose politely tries to get it back. However, after she’s left, he relents and even kicks the ball back over the fence himself. Concluding line: the ex-ogre says “Let’s play again tomorrow.” Concluding line-and-wash drawing: the immense cactus-like growths that make Mr. W’s house gloomy are all being taken away, as is the fence. The book has an unconvincing, slender plot, but the read-aloud audience will no doubt enjoy the child’s triumph and the story’s humor. ZS D.V. Fear, overcoming; Older-younger generations


Ad Gr. 4-7. With varying degrees of success, Graham-Barber gives the etymology of everything having to do with Independence Day, from concepts (representation, unite) to verbs (burst, pledge) to tangible nouns (fireworks, cherry pie). The histories of many of the nouns are interesting—did you know the “dachshund dog” was shortened to ‘hot dog’ when a newspaper cartoonist forgot how to spell ‘dachshund’? Although the etymologies of some terms are dull (“the basis for the word unite is the Latin word unire, ‘to join together,’ from the Latin root unus, meaning ‘one,’ which evolved in Old French as unite”), the author makes up for the lack of interest with historical tangents and occasionally incomprehensible examples (“The day Ben founded the first Annual Holly Triathlon, he put his John Hancock on a marriage license and then, with his new bride and her father, watched Father Christmas lead the holiday parade”). The numerous pen-and-ink illustrations add a humorous sophistication and consistency that is lacking in the text and a thorough index provides access to all the historical terms mentioned. This fourth book in the publisher’s holiday series (see Graham-Barber’s *Mushy!*, BCCB 3/91) may prove useful as a lighthearted supplement to U.S. history classes. KJ


R 4-7 yrs. Miss Teaberry’s comedy of disaster begins unprepossessingly when her cat digs up a gold locket. Miss Teaberry, who had planned to weed zinnias, spends the day discovering that none of her clothes are fancy enough for jewelry. That night, she does not sleep well for worrying about robbers, and next morning she asks the milkman to give the locket to some enchanting young girl, “from a secret admirer.” Unfortunately, the girl reciprocates with three squirming puppies, which Miss Teaberry asks the milkman to give to some “winsome young man,” who, of course, reciprocates
with a squawking parrot, which Miss Teaberry duly passes on to the enchanting young girl. As the gifts get larger, the two adults get more weary until finally Miss Teaberry figures a way out of the deadlock. This is simply but cleverly written ("All night it sang. It did not sing well") and simply but cleverly illustrated. Sewall’s heavily outlined, rounded shapes have the rhythmic appeal of Wanda Gag’s, but with the addition of smoothly complemented colors. The compositions focus on a limited number of large figures with plenty of clean white space to set off their humorous poses. It’s too bad that the “Indian folktale” from which the author adapted her story (according to the back jacket copy) isn’t specified, but the folkloric pattern of escalating repetition is authentically engaging. BH


R  Gr. 7-10. Although many pages seem heavily filled with almost-solid paragraphs of print, the vitality and ebullience of the subject and the drama of his career make this an exciting story of one man’s dedication and of the civil rights struggle in which he played so large a part. Thurgood Marshall may be remembered in the future as a brilliant figure in the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* and as the first black man to be appointed to the Supreme Court, but the details of his education and his legal career are also impressive, and Haskins (despite an occasional stylistic lapse) has made a substantial contribution in compiling this informative biography. Sources are cited in a bibliography, and an index will be appended. ZS

D.V. Devotion to a cause


R  Gr. 5-7. Cody has never known any other kids. His parents, two crew members on a spaceship, disobeyed orders by conceiving him, but by the time he was born, the ship was too far into space to send him to Earth. When Cody is twelve, the ship is due for maintenance, and he gets his first chance to leave the ship. The entire crew is given a month’s leave on the isolated planet, Patma. During the long days, Cody’s solitary expeditions along the beach lead to his capture by a race of large, insect-like creatures. To protect themselves, the intelligent creatures are living hidden from the human settlements. When Cody returns to his hotel, he is shocked to learn the truth behind the human colonization of Patma. The official, top secret statement draws strong parallels to reality in human history (“Should the native population in any way impede development, it can, at minimal cost, be confined to remote reservation areas and disposed of by seemingly natural causes”). Hoover’s writing is simple and powerful, and she creates Cody’s ethical dilemma well by forcing him to sort through the rights, wrongs, and emotions of the issue. Cody’s strong reaction conveys the author’s message, but is also believable within his character and as a twelve-year-old’s need for justice. KJ

Taichi and his sister, Yumiko, live in rural Japan; it's just after the war, and their house is in ruins, their father is dead, and their mother is away all day working. A stray cat leads the siblings to an old man, who is hurrying to wrap a damaged cherry tree in order to protect it from the winter's cold. The children help, and, after a bitter winter, the tree finally flowers: "It used to blossom like this before the war," says a bystander, "but I'd given up hope that it would ever bloom again." The story is a trifle saccharine, but it's a welcome reversal of The Giving Tree, and it has a folkloric flavor that will make its rhythm familiar to young readers. Wildsmith's delicate lines combine exuberance and precision, whether in his open-air palette of spring greens and pinks or the night scene of darker tones washed with golden moonlight; even an American child who can't think of a cherry tree without evoking George Washington will appreciate the final triumphant riot of pink blooms. Overall, this is a gentle and visually appealing story of rebirth after hard times. DS


Ad 5-8 yrs. Like Isadora's At the Crossroads (BCCB 5/91), this is set in South Africa and depends heavily on that setting for its substance. Sweeping watercolor sea- and landscapes provide a backdrop for a boy's journey with his mother and baby sister to see his grandmother. The preparations for the trip, their walk there, and the wait for Grandma Zindzi to appear from a visit with some friends is the sum of a story which, were it set in hometown U. S. A., simply wouldn't command attention (Zolani's helping a man with his pig and later chasing an ostrich amount more to brief descriptions than to developed incidents). As a travelogue, this is vivid and inviting; as a portrayal of a black child's life in the Transkei, it may leave something to be desired. What's exciting is Isadora's further exploration of a freer, looser graphic style that risks dazzling color juxtapositions. BH

D.V. Grandmother-child relations


Ad Gr. 7-9. Set on the Harper ranch in West Texas in 1869, this is the story of six sisters (March, April, May, June, Julie, and Lily) who embark on a series of projects meant to be the financial salvation of inept Daddy's investment. Each scheme is desperate, has little possibility of success, is not quite within the law, and is particularly enjoyed and usually masterminded by the youngest, Lily, who is thirteen. The cattle-rustling fails, the still for moonshine blows up, but the holdup of a stage brings the six teenage girls some censure from the authorities (i.e. jail, but a cozy jail) and then a fabulously successful theatrical tour (The Harper Girls in Person, YOUNG AND DANGEROUS!). The book has a plethora of action, and enough humor to amuse readers who can tolerate drawn-out stereotype and slapstick. ZS

D.V. Sisters

R 5-8 yrs. The authors’ seasoned commitment to poetry shows throughout this assortment of classic and contemporary verse for children. From Robert Louis Stevenson to Dennis Lee, with samples of most of the best children’s poets ranging among the 123 selections, there’s a sense of rolling rhyme that carries the reader from one singing page to another. And there are many pages, each designed to surround the poetry or set it into neat, discreet illustrations that project graphic images from verbal ones. Dyer’s art for “Old Man Ocean” by Russell Hoban, for instance, is simply a full-page green watercolor wash with a white rectangle that holds the poem and is bordered by a moonlit strip of white sky at the top and a stylized series of whitecapped waves at the bottom. In selection, scope, and visual format, this is likely to be a volume many times revisited. BH


R Gr. 5-7. First published in Germany in 1978, and smoothly translated, this novel (based, an afterword reveals, on the author’s childhood experiences) is set in East Berlin in 1950. Frank is seven, his half-brother Burkhard is fourteen, and their twice-widowed mother is the proprietor of a restaurant. Woven through this touching story of fraternal affection are several themes: Mother’s marriage to a man that Burkie despises, the dedication that both Frank and Burkie have to soccer, and Burkie’s foolhardy insistence that Frank keep secret the serious injury Burkie suffered in a game. Above all, it is a candid and realistic account of the problems and pleasure of daily life—and it ends, sadly, with Burkie’s death and Frank’s loving memories. ZS

D.V. Brothers; Death, adjustment to; Stepparent-child relations


R Gr. 5-7. The combination of many black-and-white photographs and a text that grimly records the war years in London creates an immediacy that is often found in film clips of that period. Kronenwetter begins with a description of a metropolis that was rigidly divided into social strata and, in analyzing the reaction of Londoners to the devastation of the blitz, concludes with an evaluation of changes in attitude by the war’s end. Primarily, this is a measured photoessay, a bit heavily written but not dull; in fact, the events (and many of the photographs) are so dramatic as to be both touching and chilling. A list of sources, by chapter, and a bibliography precede the index. ZS

C.U. History—England


R 1-3 yrs. “How does a cow go to sleep—tell me how? . . . A cow lies down in the soft, sweet hay, in a cozy barn, at the end of day.” A father’s rhythmic litany intones the nighttime routine of a cow, duck, horse, pig,
and hen before he gently picks up his sleeping son, who has been playing with small toy animals, and puts him to bed. It's a genuinely sweet book, with glowing art that's detailed in golden sunset tones. Although the farmscapes are literal almost to the point of lacking tension, they are, after all, supposed to be sleepy, and their juxtaposition with the photo-real father and son scenes makes a neat shifting frame for the text-chant. BH

Llewellyn, Clare. *My First Book of Time*; illus. by Julie Carpenter and with photographs by Paul Bricknell. Dorling Kindersley, 1992. ISBN 1-879431-78-5. 32p. $14.95. Ad Gr. K-2. An oversize book has a combination of color photographs and pastel wash details. While it has many interesting and instructive features, it is weakened as a teaching device by the fact that the pages are crowded, and by the fact that there are discrepant levels of maturity addressed. For example, some of the text is written very simply: "Who is the oldest child here? Who is the youngest child?" "Is Billy older or younger than you?" (This is visually based on the numbers of candles on birthday cakes.) On the other hand, "Draw a rectangle about 15 inches by 7 inches on a piece of heavy paper," or "Digital stopwatches have the same kind of timing button as analog stopwatches" may not be comprehensible to the same age group. In addition to material on how to tell time, the author covers such topics as days, seasons, simple fractions, clocks, measuring time, and time zones. There are brief boxed short topics (early clocks, Roman numerals) and the book concludes with a list of words about time and with a sturdy paper foldout clock with movable plastic hands. ZS

Machotka, Hana. *Breathtaking Noses*; written and illus. with photographs by Hana Machotka. Morrow, 1992. Library ed. ISBN 0-688-09527-5; Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-09526-7. Library ed. $14.93; Trade ed. $15.00. R Gr. 1-3. In *What Neat Feet*! Machotka examined the kinds and special uses of feet belonging to a variety of animals; here she turns the same attention to another underestimated part of the anatomy. A leading question or statement regarding a particular kind of nose ("A nose that's also a powerful digging tool belongs to a . . . ") appears opposite a closeup of the proboscis in question, and the following double-spread identifies the animal ("PIG"), describes the particular benefits of its nose ("This hard, flat nose will act like a shovel to root out the tasty morsels from the dirt"), and offers a clear photograph of the entire animal in question (although we don't always get a second look at the nose). The zoology here is simple and understandable, with a straightforward explanation of noses that smell underwater, noses that breathe but don't smell at all (and how that animal does smell), noses that pick up the faintest scent, and noses that pick up large trees. The cover photograph, a full schnozzle-shot of the end of an elephant's trunk, is droll and compelling enough to make a reader open the book, and many of the animals pictured inside display enough nasal allure to rival Jimmy Durante. This is an easy and appealing read that will make the importance of this physical feature as plain as the—well, readily apparent. DS

R  2-4 yrs.  Color photographs show an engaging multiracial cast of infants and toddlers, and of objects (most of which will be familiar to very young children) that reinforce the concept of variety in shapes. First published in England, the book pairs pages to reinforce identification of ovals, squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, or the form of a star, a heart, or a diamond. On the left is a picture of a child (“What shape are Sam’s buttons? They’re diamonds”) and on the right, labeled objects are gathered under the heading “more diamonds.” Basically, the book achieves its objective, although in this case, as is true occasionally on other pages, there is the possibility that a child may misinterpret what’s presented: not all buttons or cake tins are in diamond form; there are, also, some photographs in which a shape (a rectangular box wrapped in paper) has stars, squares, and circles all over it. ZS

D.V.  Perceptual acuteness


R*  5-8 yrs.  At the turn of the century, Prince was the finest horse in his small Maine town, and Martin imagines three simple but characterful stories of what might have happened to him: an unscrupulous horse trader might have attempted to steal him, a local joker might have privately taught him to dance to parade music, or he might have been tended by a farmer’s children when he fell ill. Although the framework of the stories—the horse belonged to the narrator’s great-aunts, the narrator heard about Prince from an old watchmaker, and she’s clearly inventing what might have happened—is rather complex, it enhances the storytelling atmosphere; the creation of one’s past in the absence of any actual information is, after all, a traditional American exercise (and kids will probably just take it as three stories about a horse). The luminous illustrations are fluid yet precise watercolors filled with shimmery shadows, jewel-toned landscapes, and classical compositions with a touch of Americana. Prince himself is a small-town Bucephalus with an air simultaneously grave and fantastical. Although a thoughtful mood pervades, this isn’t a nostalgia book to send young audiences into yawns; the strategic and gentle repetition gives the text a curl-up-and-listen rhythm that’s perfect for a rainy day readaloud. DS

D.V.  Imaginative powers


R  Gr. 4-6.  Jauntier in style than is Meltzer’s wont, this is an easily accessible and surprisingly interesting text that traces the evolution of myriad varieties of potatoes, from the Peruvian tuber that could be so easily grown, even high in the Andes, to the blight-resistant hybrid developed in the 1880’s. Taken home by Spanish explorers, the potato was hesitantly accepted in
Europe, eventually making its way to North America. Meltzer incorporates dietary benefits, agricultural research, and historical events (particularly the potato famine in Ireland) into his account of the importance of the potato as a source of food. Boxed insertions, containing pertinent but tangential material, at times seem an interruption of the text. Photos, a bibliography, and an index will be included in the bound copy. ZS

C.U. Social studies


R Gr. 6-8. Ned senses that he shares a secret with his sister, Nell, but he’s not certain what it is. He has a mystical infant-memory of being cradled by the sea’s waves, and Nell claims to hear “the ocean’s footsteps.” Their mother knows the children must live by water, and she commutes to a city job so they can live in a seaside house with a turret. The mystery of Ned and Nell is revealed slowly, through half-told stories and Ned’s partially-understood memories. When their mother and new stepfather go off on a honeymoon, the children are confronted with an aunt and hostile grandmother they’ve never known before. At the same time, Ned and Nell meet a fascinating man on the beach, who helps them sort out their past and survive present troubles. The children’s interest in their new friend’s obsession, rescuing sea creatures, is a convincing link between him, them, and a long-dead girl named Ultramarine. A haunting story that wavers from reality to fantasy and quickly back again, the dream-like, secretive quality of the narrative mesmerizes the reader until the children’s mystery is fully revealed. Somehow, it is believable when the sea itself slips gently into the house under cover of night. KJ

D.V. Ecological awareness


Ad 3-5 yrs. Ed Young’s velvety soft pastels accompany a poetic lullaby, without music, relating an Ojibway baby’s experience in some idyllic time that seems more fantastical than traditional. The Native American dreamcatcher is a luminous image, a woven web hung over cradleboards to keep out nightmares and let in happy images. However, as the heart of a picture book plot, it may leave something to be desired for holding the attention of an audience not quite attuned to such conceptual symbols. Whereas adults can revel in the lyrical descriptions (“dreams of charms hung on the cradleboard—/ little white shells tinkling in the breeze/ pheasant feathers ruffling/ sucking maple sugar in a birchbark cone”) and admire the scary, ghostly “bony long leg” that tries to creep into the wigwam, preschoolers will need some supplementary storytelling to figure it all out. Dark, flowered, vertical borders outweigh the misty, otherworld effect of the double spreads. BH

C.U. Bedtime stories

R  Gr. 5-8.  Human overpopulation and commercial expansion have turned the wildlife refuge system into a subject of both urgency and controversy, which Patent has indicated in a dispassionate overview illustrated with impressive color photographs. In surveying the history and variety of these refuges, Patent is characteristically careful with facts and issues. Yet the account remains curiously distant, perhaps because it doesn’t lead readers, through in-depth coverage, to care about a particular refuge or species. Nevertheless, the tight organization, clear writing, handsome format and handy map, list of addresses for more information, and index add up to a book that will be useful for reports and can serve as background for less generalized coverage. BH  

C.U. Conservation  
D.V. Ecology


R  Gr. 5-9.  Seven casually multicultural stories allow brief glimpses into the lives of thirteen-year-old Lindsey Randall-Pena, her family and friends. Lindsey is a bit of a worrier: she worries when her Mom goes off for a week at a women’s camp; she’s uncomfortable watching an old woman eat alone while she and her Dad are out for dinner; she’s stuck with the word “potato” rolling around in her head when Ms. Azumba assigns a free essay. Eric, Lindsey’s older brother, is both nervous and excited when a stupid bet he agrees to puts him into an embarrassing situation in front of a pretty girl. This story is funny and touching, but relies on an unlikely contrivance—an appearance on David Letterman—for its conclusion; the other stories achieve better effects with more subtle means. One of the best, and briefest, is a vignette about Lindsey’s adopted Vietnamese little brother: Tu is confused by the way his family seems to play with his name (his father once said he was “tu skinny”) but emerges the hero on a family camping trip when he sees “tu eyes behind you” gleaming from beyond the campfire. Homelessness is a small theme in a couple of the stories, but Pearson is never preachy or sentimental, allowing her quiet storytelling to speak for itself. RS  

D.V. Family relations

Ad 5-8 yrs.  
R 5-8 yrs.  

Polacco has created, in the same season, two picture books of such striking similarity that they beg to be compared. Both books are consciously directed at intercultural relationships: *Chicken Sunday* is the artist’s recollection of a childhood incident involving the African-American family next door to whom she grew up; *Mrs. Katz and Tush* details the relationship that develops between an old Polish-Jewish woman and a neighboring black child. The first
title refers to the meals "Miss Eula" prepared for her grandchildren and the narrator: "fried chicken . . . collard greens with bacon, a big pot of hoppin' john, corn on the cob, and fried spoon bread." When the children try to earn money for her Easter hat, they offend—and then befriend—an old Russian Jewish man who is later touched by their making him Ukrainian Easter eggs. If the concentration camp number tattooed on his arm suggests that he might not be all that touched by Ukrainian Easter eggs, children will not pick up the visual reference. What they'll get is a multi-ethnic bunch of kids doing good for each other and their fellow humans. Mrs. Katz is more subtle in the relationships department because of the sharper focus on two principal characters who interact closely when young Larnel gives the lonely widow a kitten and then helps her take care of it. Of course the cat escapes and has its own kittens, but the parallel development of a new family (Mrs. Katz and Miss Eula both become surrogate grandmother figures) lends some symbolic layering to the process, and the end is deeply touching. It is touching not because of good intentions but because the reader has been engaged with a patiently developed fictional situation despite the interruptions for explanation of Jewish tradition and thematic emphasis ("Larnel, your people and mine are alike, you know. Trouble, we've seen"). The art work for both picture books is warm and exuberant, though the portraits in the second book are, like the story, more expressively individualized. Indeed, in Chicken Sunday, Miss Eula's eye-rolling and easy tears come uncomfortably close to stereotype. On the whole, however, Polacco's artistic development from an earlier reliance on contrasts between color and black and white to a more cohesive portraiture is stylistically sure and supported by an alliance of intense hues and varied patterns. Librarians will probably welcome both these books not only because they represent an idealized racial outreach but also because they do so in context of a story that has child appeal and is not overdependent on elaborate art (see Isadora and Rylant in this issue). BH

D.V. Older-younger generations; Intercultural understanding


Ad Gr. 7-9. As the extensive bibliography indicates, this study of the American Civil War is based on a multitude of sources, some of which is primary source material. Robertson crowds his pages with many facts, some opinions, and a modicum of the sort of personal interpretation that is inevitable in the assessment of historical events. What weakens the text is poor organization of material, since chronological chapters (Chapter 5: "1861: Fighting Begins" and Chapter 7: "1862: The Terrible Hand of War" may be separated by a chapter such as the sixth, "Two Presidents and Their Problems," which gives biographical sketches of Lincoln and Davis that end with their deaths in, respectively, 1865 and 1889. Periodically the text is interrupted by a page or two of a column of print on such subjects as "One War with Many Names" or "Waving Banners" which are not included in the table of contents. Despite a predilection for colorful adjectives, the writing style is adequately smooth and clear. A chronology and a glossary are appended. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.

Ad  Gr. 5-8. Set in Texas in the late 1860s, this is the story of a bright twelve-year-old whose powers of logic, persuasion, and imagination make her instrumental in foiling a gang of criminals, and in saving the young bandit (forced to participate by his evil stepfather) by whom she is smitten. Jo is a likeable, if not quite credibly precocious, heroine; it seems clear, in a fairly patterned western adventure tale, that the stern judge (Uncle Matthew) with whom orphaned Jo and her young brother have been sent to live, will come to appreciate his doughty niece. The novel begins with a hold-up of the stagecoach in which the two children are traveling to Texas, and there isn't much diminution of drama as the story goes on; it escapes being merely sensationalism because the characterization is sturdily consistent and the writing style smooth and resilient. ZS


R 5-8 yrs. From the Zuni, New Guineans, Greeks, Chinese, aborigines, Loma of Liberia, Khasi of India, Ugandans, and Ayoreo Indians of South America, these nine myths explain animal characteristics from the time of creation. Rosen's sources are listed at the book's beginning, but the bibliography of respectable folklore journals gives no hint of how freshly the pourquoi tales are told here in present tense, with wit and neat compression. Leaving the archetypal integrity undisturbed, Rosen nevertheless manages to characterize the animals with funny refrains (“I know, I know, I know,” says Tiger over and over), to preserve chanting rhythms (“See our paddles dive into the water,/ See our paddles fly out of the water,/ See our paddles shoot through the air”), and to keep vivid sound effects (“Foop, foop, foop, go Leopard's paws. Shoo, shoo, shoo go Nyomo's feet”). Short and sweet, these will fit neatly into brief bedtime sessions or story hour niches between longer tales. The angular, collage-effect art leans on designer patterns that leap off the page in technicolor. BH

C.U. Storytelling


Ad  Gr. 2-4. “Solomon Singer lived in a hotel for men near the corner of Columbus Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street in New York City, and he did not like it.” Thus begins a poetic commentary on a lonely wanderer who is touched at last by the warmly smiling Hispanic waiter, Angel, who welcomes him nightly to a café dinner. The protagonist’s reconciliation of an urban existential dilemma is openly nostalgic, even sentimental, as is the supporting art, which evokes idealized visual images from rural Indiana and superimposes them over misty street scenes. This is all very meaningful for adults, but you have to wonder what preschoolers are going to make of that cat staring out of Singer’s dinner plate—oops, sorry, that’s a full moon, not a dinner plate. As a metaphor for what’s wrong with American contemporary society, this could
stimulate discussion among older kids who can make the figurative connections suggested rather breathlessly by text and art. BH


R Gr. 5-7. Their parents were killed in a car crash when Molly was a toddler and her older sister, Beth, was five. Now, eight years later, Beth has come (with her adoptive mother, wealthy Mrs. Lattimore) to visit Molly, who has been adopted by Aunt Karen, their mother's older sister. The story is told by Molly, now eleven, but the focus is Beth, a bitter adolescent trying to cope with feelings of rejection and jealousy. Nuances of love and angst are revealed with a rare combination of perception, compassion, and dramatic conviction, as Molly struggles to understand her sister's behavior and Beth is overwhelmed by memories that bring back the past. Taut and powerful. ZS

D.V. Family relations; Jealousy, overcoming; Sisters


R Gr. 4-6. The closing of the silver mine in a small Idaho town has forced Terry's father to leave home looking for work and has kept the family on such a tight budget that Terry's mother always says no to the boy's plea for a dog—until a lost border collie shows up. This is the story of Terry's adopting the dog, juggling yard jobs with the choir practice that is supposed to gain him a college scholarship, and ultimately making a choice between the dog's happiness and his own. Although the style is occasionally heavy-handed (an old woman's characteristic "heeHEE" is overdone, for instance, as are many references to the dog's "red-brown eyes"), and the plot turns melodramatic when Terry gets suddenly lost in a storm, the Catholic community is well drawn; the scene when the dog ruins Terry's solo by howling makes a genuinely amusing climax. Sherlock doesn't take the easy way out in this first-person narrative: Terry's decisions are hard ones that keep the ending from being tied up too neatly. BH


R Gr. 4-6. This has the Silversteins' usual painstakingly detailed coverage of many aspects of their chosen subject, and the material is logically arranged, so that—with the addition of index and bibliography—it can both answer questions and stimulate further interest. Among the areas covered are the structure and function of the human nose and the brain-parts and nerves associated with the sense of smell, the various systems devised to classify smells, some of the experiments that have added to our knowledge of how we smell (the influence of molecular shape, for example), and smell disorders. There are also discussions of smell "signatures" and of communicating by smell (and—of more immediate appeal—a chapter on "those embarrassing body odors"). ZS

C.U. Biology

R  3-5 yrs.  Demonstrating that Viewpoint Is All, Simont describes, in a simple but sly text, the pleasure a rabbit family derives from a newly-planted garden. The gentle color of the paintings echoes the ingenuous reaction of Gladys and Jerome and their progeny—but the pictures also show the increasing frustration of the gardeners as the cottontails ravage the crops, innocently assuming it’s all been cultivated for their benefit. This is not too subtle for a lap audience, which means that children will have the added pleasure of understanding more than the story’s characters do. ZS


R  Gr. 8-10.  In a prequel to *White Hare’s Horses* (BCCB 6/91), Spinka has once again based her tale on the ancient mythology and legends of the southwest Native American Chumash. The story is replete with Chumash traditions and beliefs, including a mystical and drug-induced adolescent initiation rite. This is the story of a girl who grows up to be a powerful young woman, a wot (leader) of three villages. New Woman, whose name changes symbolically twice in the story, is a true heroine—charming, intelligent, and brave. Her charismatic diplomacy is equalled only by her fearless protection of others (she dives into an icy river to save a drowning child; she champions a group of disabled people against a hostile village). The tale moves quickly and believably as New Woman sets off on a journey to find her spirit guide. During her travels, she hears that her people are suffering from famine and she realizes that the irrigated corn she has learned about in the east will save them. In only one instance does New Woman seem too amazing to be true, when she wins an argument with the father who disowned her at her birth because she was a girl. A richly-layered combination of traditions, bravery, and legends. KJ


R*  Gr. 7-10.  If Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn had lived through a nuclear holocaust, they would have joined the River Rats, the self-declared family of six orphans in this story. Their home is an ancient steamboat that they run like seasoned pros. They travel up and down “the river” (the Mississippi), providing mail service and battery-supplied rock-and-roll concerts in exchange for food and supplies. Their predictable life alters drastically on the day they rescue a bedraggled “old guy” from a ferociously determined family that is pursuing him. The River Rats later realize the desperate situation they’re in when their boat comes under attack from the old guy’s enemies. The River Rats are larger-than-life heroes; kids who not only can consistently beat grown men in a fight, but also are willing to sacrifice themselves individually for the good of the group. The story flows unencumbered on the natural prose, carrying both the bitterness of old age (“Sure is different from the old days”) as well as the sarcasm of adolescence (“I’ll bet you complained in the old days too”). This is an exciting, heroic tale of unspoken bonds and loyalties in the dark setting of a dangerous, apocalyptic world. KJ

D.V. Loyalty

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Ad Gr. 6-9. The time is 1904, and narrator Amanda (almost sixteen) is not happy about giving up her summer plans to travel instead with her mother to Texas on an animal rescue mission: to save a herd of buffalo, an endangered species. The writing style has an easy flow, occasionally broken by awkward phrasing. It is clear from Amanda's first hostile encounter with David (handsome, blue-eyed, part Comanche) that love will conquer all, and indeed it does, after a series of adventures in which each saves the other from physical danger or faces perils associated with the wilderness: attacking buffalo, a striking rattlesnake, a punishing hailstorm. The mission is accomplished and David indicates that after he graduates from Harvard Law School and they are married, he will help his people. ZS


R 4-7 yrs. Chan Lo is a sculptor who lets the stone tell him what to carve. When the emperor sends him a perfect piece of green-and-white jade, with orders to create a dragon, Chan Lo hears instead soft splashing noises and bubbles that suggest a statue of three fish. In deciding how to punish him for disobedience, the emperor dreams the same sounds and eventually recognizes the sculptor with great honors. The three sounds ("Pah-tah, pah-tah"; "Bubb-bubb-bubble"; and "S-s-s-ah"), the rhymed request Chan Lo makes of the stone three times, the emperor's three advisers and his three dreams all contribute to neatly sequenced suspense for storytelling. A note touches on the history of the tale, and artist Chen describes his ink and watercolor paintings on rice paper as an evocation of traditional wood-block prints. Like the story, these are appealingly patterned, with soft clay tones and rounded shapes that have a sculpted effect of their own. BH
C.U. Art; Storytelling
D.V. Creativity


R 5-8 yrs. Like the stories about Chinese immigrants in Yee's *Tales from Gold Mountain* (BCCB 3/90), this crosses realism with tradition for a folkloric effect. Young Maylin is a heroine whose victimization by her father and two brothers backfires when an Imperial governor from the old country discovers she's the superlative cook who has created a dish called "Roses Sing on New Snow." No longer can the men in her family take credit for the restaurant's superior food; nor, as it turns out, will the Emperor of China ever taste it, for Maylin's talent is uniquely her own and uniquely of the New World. Chan's watercolors cast the Canadian frontier setting in ruddy tones. Most telling is his varied use of perspective, including a closeup of the furious governor's eyes and nose and later a picture of the diminutive Maylin flanked by towering guards. Vivid art and clean writing are graced by a neatly feminist ending: "From that day on Maylin was renowned in Chinatown as a great cook and a wise person." BH

Ad 2-4 yrs. Large-scale pictures, softly colored and simply composed, show an engaging African American child and the toy bear (almost as big as he is) that is the boy’s constant companion. The song-text, for which the melodic line is supplied on the endpapers (front and back), describes the bear’s participation in the child’s activities. There is a minimum of print on the oversize pages; “Cozy on the big green rug/ Talking to a little bug,” is a typical page of text, and another is “Making snowmen in the snow.” The concept of toy friends will appeal to many young children, but the book may be limited in appeal because of the textual brevity, and the lack of plot or humor that might offset it. ZS


NR 4-7 yrs. Sam and Lucy, dogs, meet one nice summer day in the park. “Sam and Lucy liked each other a lot. They played tag . . . they danced . . . they rolled in the dirt . . . and they mated.” The cozy portrait, complete with accompanying butterflies, of these two mating is evidently the raison d’etre of this book, and adults should forgive themselves for gasping at the picture, coming as it does after several pages of pointless, anthropomorphic banality about two dogs on a date. Sam is a gentleman: after the dogs mate, they sleep together under a bench, and then spend idyllic weeks awaiting the birth of their puppies. When they arrive, Sam, a proud papa, takes Lucy and the puppies back to his house and a happy welcome. Ha! The illustrations are pleasant enough, although Sam and Lucy both look disconcertingly like stuffed animals. It’s hard to figure out exactly what Ziefert was intending with this tale, but all that it succeeds in doing is giving kids sentimentalized and inaccurate information about canine behavior, not to mention a blithe disregard for leash laws and responsible animal care. A rather stunning example of barking up the wrong tree. RS

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