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EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED
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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. 5-8. Gilda, the narrator, is thirteen and is deeply disturbed by the fact that her parents are getting a divorce. Her career-oriented mother is moving to a one-bedroom apartment in another school district. Her father is going to marry Pam, who has made it clear that she has room in her big house for Gilda and her siblings (Avery is a shy loner of eleven; Bliss is an eight-year-old clinger who wants only to be where her cat is accepted). Thanksgiving looms, and Gilda the traditionalist tries desperately to have the standard family dinner; however, Dad is joining Pam's family, Mom is eating with her support group, and Bliss has gone to Manhattan—with her cat—to be cosseted by Grandma. The title tells the ending: the tuna fish sandwiches at a depressing zoo cafeteria may be an unconventional holiday meal, but Gilda recognizes the fact that she will long remember it. This is one of Adler's best: the situation is realistic, the complexity of relationships is depicted with candor and insight, and the outcome is logical. Each person adjusts as is best for him or her, with Gilda moving into Pam's so that she can stay in the school she likes, Avery staying with Mom to get away from the bullies in his old school, and Bliss happily adjusting to a life of ease in the one place her beloved cat is welcome, her grandmother's house. ZS

D.V. Divorce, adjustment to; Stepfamilies, adjustment to


R Gr. 6-9. First published in Great Britain, this funny and sophisticated collection of ghost stories has one small black-and-white picture and one full-page, poster-simple color painting (in a style that resembles pointillism, and with collage) for each of the eight stories. In the title story, an activist ghost, Great-aunt Millicent, takes a vengeful lead when a developer proposes to dig up the entire graveyard (the Differentiated Baptist burying ground) and move it to a Garden of Remembrance. Like some of the other tales, this is even more funny than it is macabre. There are, however, some stories, such as "Light Work" and Beezlebub's Baby," that are permeated by an eerie quality heightened by suspense of the kind Aiken so often and so deftly maneuvers. ZS

**R Gr. 4-8.** The title may be romantic, but it’s not sexist: the focus of this book is the work men imprisoned in the New Mexico State Penitentiary do in gentling captured mustangs so the horses can be adopted by members of the public. The book actually begins with the roundup of mustangs (taking several pages to depict the procedure), before going on to describe the meeting between inmates and horses, the training process, and the show at which gentled mustangs are exhibited. The pictures suffer from gray overtones, and the book takes awhile to get to its main subject. It’s still absorbing on several levels, however, and the combination of wild horses and skilled, tough men will give it broad appeal. DS


**R Gr. 5-8.** A nature narrative opens with one of several suspenseful scenes when a pack of coyotes kills a pregnant doe, whose yearling twins escape. The male eventually goes his own way, ruts and mates, loses an antler to hunters, and, in a final chase scene, struggles furiously with the same coyotes. Although the text once or twice slips into slightly anthropomorphic terms (Long Spikes is once “entranced” by mayflies and again “enthralled” by his reflection), the story is generally as clear-headed as it is clearly written. The fate of an old buck that is shot suggests that Long Spikes’ life will be ended by humans if not coyotes. *National Geographic* specials will have prepared animal lovers for the kind of blunt, tooth-and-claw hunting action here, and readers who are not generally absorbed by wildlife lore will appreciate the story’s brisk pace. Occasional pencil drawings begin as quiet decoration but pick up darker dramatic tones as the story accelerates. BH

C.U. Nature study


**NR Gr. 2-4.** The metaphor is at the door. In this pretentious picture book illustrated with spooky soft colored-pencil drawings, Tal hears a wolf’s howling “worse than he could have imagined. It was worse than his nightmares. It was the worst thing, coming closer every night.” Tal’s mother boards up the windows and forbids the three children to play outside; Tal offers to sacrifice his cat, and then himself, to appease the prowling wolf’s hunger; after half a year of this nonsense Tal opens the door and lets in the wolf. “I’ve let the wolf in,” he said proudly. He smiled. ‘I think it might stay with us.’” Details in the text and pictures let us know that this is a contemporary story, meant at some level, that is, the level at which most children will interpret it, to be realistic. So what’s going on here? Is there a real wolf? (It is never pictured.) Is the wolf, for this fatherless household, a symbol of past tragedy still nipping at their heels? Or are we supposed to generalize about the wolves all children face, and so forth? That won’t work—for a story to resonate on an empathic plane it first has to succeed on the literal one, but this tale sacrifices event to emblem. Red Riding Hood’s wolf is scary because he bites. This wolf doesn’t
have any teeth—and is scarier for the lack. Unlike the wolves and witches of folklore, the threat in Barbalet's story is never made concrete and knowable, and therefore tameable. Readers won't be fooled by the happy ending. RS

D.V. Fear, overcoming


R Gr. 1-3. Well, maybe it isn't all twelve, and maybe mucking out the Augean Stables is a little more complicated than cleaning the stairs, but this Hercules—a contemporary boy—makes an appealing hero. Upon finding his mother's note listing seven chores (and with a mysterious torn-off bit at the end), Hercules is somewhat daunted by the amount of work involved but gamely makes an effort: "I'm not named Hercules for nothing." Everything—from fixing Grandma's vase to taking the dog for a walk—goes wrong, and the cumulating pile-up of disaster humor will be loved by kids in direct proportion to the degree with which it is loathed by some critics. The ending is a bit of a let-down (the note was meant for Dad; the torn-off bit said "Have a good day"), but the everyday empathy and mythic resonance combine for a story that will have depth for those at a heroic task themselves; namely, learning to read, a skill for which Bendall-Brunello's direct, brief text and many manic drawings give practice fine and fun. RS

C.U. Reading, easy

D.V. Perseverance


R 3-8 yrs. First published in England in 1990, this is an excellent choice for a family in which there are both very young children and independent readers. Thirty-five selections (all previously published material, some of it excerpted, much of it available in the United States) include the original art work. The range of sophistication is broad. While the material is varied in genre and mood and vocabulary difficulty, the quality does not vary but is consistently high. Familiar characters include Handford's Waldo, Oxenbury's Tom and Pippo, and Shirley Hughes' Trotter Street bunch; the picture-book edition of Waddell's title story about Big Bear is reviewed below. ZS

C.U. Reading aloud


M Gr. 4-6. Sixth-grader Nikki Savier falls in love with her dog's six puppies on the day they're born. She and her best friend, Tyler, concoct a plan to convince Nikki's parents to let them keep the whole litter. Tyler advertises Rent-a-Puppy, a temporary pet rental service, and soon puppy rental is providing enough cash to pay for vet bills and dog food. Naturally, this unorthodox scheme is doomed from the start, and the promising and light-hearted premise is doomed, too, by overwritten prose. For example, when Nikki nurses Hope, the runt of the litter, she becomes so attached to the puppy that "Hope seemed almost like her own creation, like a wilting flower one might save from
a frost and, with loving care, cause to bloom and be bright." Nikki feels things very intensely, as a child whose pets are threatened might, but the story gets overly dramatic when Nikki contemplates losing her pets in the chapter entitled "Woe": "She walked swiftly onward, facing straight into the wind, her mouth set in a rigid frown, her eyes dark with woe." When the puppies predictably get loose in the house, Dad becomes emotional, too: "In the deep blue of his eyes raged an approaching storm." Such pervasively heavy-handed writing weighs down a contemporary and interesting plot. KJ


R Gr. 1-3.  Cultural literalists may scorn this slender contemporary take on an old story, but beginning readers will be reeled right in. When Marco and his bossy sister Rosa finally catch a fish, Marco insists the fish is talking to him. "This fish says if we let it go, it will give us three wishes." Rosa is scornful, and then angry when Marco lets the fish go. "No more talk. No fishes and wishes!" She becomes even more angry when Marco hungrily (and absentmindedly) wishes a taco out of thin air, and she, just as thoughtlessly, wishes the taco onto the end of his nose. "It stuck there, sauce and all." Sisterly good will—and one last wish—prevail. Neat little line-and-watercolor illustrations of the rowboating duo are a tidy complement to a story in which justice, if not dinner, is served. RS

C.U. Reading, beginning

D.V. Brothers-sisters


R Gr. 1-3.  This followup to Kate's previous journeys, *Your Best Friend, Kate* (BCCB 3/89) and *Kate Heads West* takes Kate to the west coast: her father has been transferred from New Jersey to Seattle and apparently has unlimited vacation time, taking the family on jaunts to Alaska, San Francisco, Hollywood, Hawaii, and Yosemite. They also tour Seattle and its environs, and Kate faithfully records the details of all the jaunts in letters to her best friend Lucy. The tone is peppy, with a good balance of travelogue and family drama (mostly involving Kate's bratty brother Brian) and the cartoon illustrations are bright and sparky. This doesn't have the narrative drive of the first book, which covered one long trip, and the inclusion of a map showing the places Kate visited would have been useful (the endpapers do include a generalized map of the U.S). Still, it's painless geography, and a seductive vision of vacationing that's all high spots and no boredom. RS

C.U. Geography; Social studies


Ad Gr. 6-9.  In a novel set in Connecticut in 1810, fifteen-year-old Annie is sent to work in a textile mill by her father, charming but feckless. She is sexually harassed by the overseer, Mr. Hoggart, a drinker and a bully. When Annie learns from another worker that he is sure Hoggart is stealing from the
owner, she risks the overseer's anger by investigating. The pace and dialogue of
the story are adequate; characterization ranges from an almost melodramatic
picture of the evil overseer to the more subtle depiction of Pa, always in debt and
ready to sacrifice Annie's plans for teacher training. The Colliers show clearly
how powerful the male adult of the family was in this period, and they are
equally explicit in showing the harshness of labor conditions in the
industrialization of the society. As in Paterson's more subtly developed Lyddie
(BCCB 2/91), the details of social history are strong, but the messages of
Annie's story are purposive enough to overbalance the book as narrative. ZS
C.U. History, U.S.; Women's studies
D.V. Father-daughter relations

Coman, Carolyn. Losing Things At Mr. Mudd's; illus. by Lance Hidy. Farrar,

Ad 4-7 yrs. Six-year-old Lucy's visit to "a distant relative," Mr.
Mudd, sours almost immediately when he forbids her to wear the valuable ruby
ring he has just given her. All of Mr. Mudd's things are beautiful, and all of
them are off limits. When she defies him and loses the ring, they quarrel but
later reconcile over the loss of her loose tooth. The moral is everpresent here
("Lucy always found it easier to apologize when she wasn't mad"), as an aging
antique dealer learns to value human relations more than things. And a little
child shall lead them. Children who are interested in these lessons will probably
follow the story with bated breath. The book is illustrated with computer-
genenerated graphics effecting a superrealistic quality that at first seems almost
surrealistic—especially in the contrast between black and white outline and color
overlay—but eventually the perfection becomes cold and one longs for a human
quirk in the smoothly modulated colors and photographic shapes. BH

Cone, Molly. Come Back, Salmon; illus. with photographs by Sidnee
Reviewed from galleys.

R Gr. 3-6. Starting with a field trip of fifth-graders, Cone
describes the successful venture of Jackson Elementary School students to clean
up and restock a polluted stream in Everett, Washington. Between candid color
photographs and a detailed narrative that includes kids' natural, bantering
dialogue along with descriptions of Coho salmon eggs developing in a carefully
attended tank, the complexities of retrieving an environment from destruction
become readily apparent and even suspenseful. Readers will cheer when the first
fish swim back to Pigeon Creek to spawn. And maybe, just maybe, some
dedicated teacher, principal, or science student will be inspired to lead similar
recovery projects. BH
C.U. Nature study
D.V. Ecological awareness

Corey, Dorothy. Will There Be a Lap for Me?; illus. by Nancy Poydar.
galleys.

R 2-5 yrs. Realistic illustrations, watercolor and colored pencil,
are set in the home (large, apparently suburban) of an attractive black family.
Kyle is wistful and envious when his baby brother is born: having missed sitting on his mother’s lap when her pregnancy made that difficult, he does not enjoy later seeing the baby on Mother’s lap so much of the time. However, Mother makes it clear that she and Kyle will still have time together and that she enjoys the lap-sessions just as much as he does. This doesn’t have the poignancy of Ann Herbert Scott’s On Mother’s Lap (BCCB 12/72), but it is just as astute in reassuring young children that the advent of a sibling doesn’t lessen maternal love for the older child. ZS

D.V. Baby, adjustment to; Mother-child relations


Ad Gr. 4-8. “Adventure” may be putting things a little strongly; instead, this is is an attractively photographed survey of the Amazon and its flora, fauna and people. Sometimes all on the same double-spread, as in the one that shows ceremonially painted Txouamei men; a small photo of Cousteau’s famous Calypso coming ashore; an Indian child chewing on a frond, and (most peculiarly) a picture of four turtles floating on a log. Three different sizes of type are used, which makes it difficult to figure out what you’re supposed to read first; in all, this is more gallery than narrative. Given TV and National Geographic exposure, Cousteau’s name has become both brand name and imprimatur, and you might be able to use the book as bait for Peter Lourie’s rather better organized Amazon (BCCB 11/91) and other excellent titles on rain forests and the Amazon basin. Cousteau’s book includes a map and a sketchy, teensy-typed, index. RS

D.V. Ecological awareness


R Gr. 4-7. The fourteen artists here have already said a good deal to children through their illustrations, but Cummings’ set of candidly child-like questions (“Where do you get your ideas?”) brings out telling background patterns. Almost all of the interviewees drew compulsively from a young age—most of them astonishingly well, if the samples of their childhood art are indicative. They speak of art supplies with sensuous reverence and recall persons whose encouragement or direction was crucial to their development. Few have children living with them, and all work compulsively. The photographs of each artist as child and adult, along with reproductions of their early and recent work, combine with an easygoing text for the impression of—well, maybe not a fireside chat, but at least a classroom visit, something many schools find increasingly hard to afford. As inspiration for budding artists or information for reports, this will make a natural companion to picture books by the award-winning subjects, who are arranged alphabetically from Victoria Chess to David Wiesner and who represent a range of styles and interests. BH

C.U. Art; Children’s literature

Children will probably be more interested in the brief appended stories about Patrick's miracles than they will be in the story proper, an historical account of the saint's life. dePaola doesn't give any sources for his picture-book biography, but it sometimes reads as if necessary pieces are missing. For example, when young Patrick is a slave in Ireland and hears in a dream that a ship is coming to bring him to safety, how does he know that the ship "was more than two hundred miles away"? How does he escape? Where does he get the money he offers the captain for passage? Later, who is the "Victoricus" who, again in a dream, tells Patrick to return to Ireland? It seems as if compression has resulted in confusion. Illustrations are signature dePaola, using his familiar palette and formalized figures in decorative tableaux that are attractive if not very energetic. A boatload of baying wolfhounds, later lined up for a meal of boar, perks up the pageantry. RS

C.U. Religious education; St. Patrick's Day


Ad Gr. 7-12. This methodical examination of the controversy surrounding the use of public forests reads like an excellent term paper. It is thorough and progresses logically, with a brief survey of the differing kinds of public lands and the problems they face, a short history of the conservation movement ("Our National Parks: Their Story"), and more detailed chapters that focus upon specific kinds of wilderness and the threats they face from pollution, recreation, and logging. Meticulously evenhanded, Dolan only once allows himself some fighting words (and welcome spark), when he refers to the lumbering practice of clear-cutting as "carnage." The organization is clear, with a dependable series of rubrics ("The Plans for Yosemite," "The Troubled Mississippi") to keep readers on track. It's as dry as sawdust, but will be useful to those preparing term papers of their own. RS

C.U. Conservation
D.V. Ecological awareness


Ad Gr. 3-5. Led by Scruff, a strong-willed squirrel with Napoleonic tendencies, a group of pigeons and squirrels blocks all the roads into Central Park and, with the help of a ten-year-old girl named Sally, tries to take the park back from the loud and messy humans. The fantasy element is awkward, primarily because the animals can understand Sally and each other, but Sally can't understand them. A self-educated mouse named Mort partially communicates with her by ripping words out of newspapers, often with vague results. The difficulty in communication between Sally and her animal friends makes for a slow-moving story, although there is one exciting scene where Mort gets kicked up onto the conductor's head during an outdoor concert ("The man grabbed at his head and did what looked like a tribal rain dance. The orchestra, following his lead, picked up the tempo"). The funniest bits derive from the
takeoff on New York politicking by hapless humans in face of feral fury. Tiny pen-and-ink illustrations at the start of each chapter are lively and funny. KJ


R  Gr. 3-5. The first poem, “Pencils,” is the best (“There is a long story living/ in the shortest pencil”), but the others are not far behind. Unreliable cloud maps reshape with the wind; a geode contains “crystal traffic thin as a splinter”; a white bird breaks into a prism of “one cardinal one/ bluebird and five/ parakeets; “a rainbow will come/ fighting your thumb/ numb/ on the nozzle” of a hose; sand dollars spill “from the green silk/ pocket/ of the sea”; homework paper feels “lonesome/ for words and circles/ and/ spelling your name and/ assignments.” The images here are clean, simple, and surprising. The words are arranged on the page for special notice of sound effects and are surrounded by Beddows’ brightly lit, full-color images that play on a fifties’ tone without getting stuck there. Both the familiar subjects and the bountiful white space open these twenty-three poems to a child’s discovery. BH


R* 5-8 yrs. An education specialist in charge of public programs at the National Museum of American Art, Gwen Everett has skillfully fitted a story to previously existing art without the artificial contrivance such amalgamations often display. The first-person narrative is a fictionalized recollection by the niece of African-American painter William Johnson, who returns to South Carolina from his travels in Europe, stays long enough to befriend her, returns to his wife in Denmark, and corresponds with Li’l Sis until he goes into a mental institution. The biographical and historical information is blended naturally into the observations of a child whose voice is clear and candid. The pictures themselves are gripping, with heavy lines, sharp angles, and deep colors shaped into direct, pared-down compositions that are spaciously and lavishly reproduced. Johnson’s style, although varied according to different periods of his work, has a consistently powerful simplicity that will particularly appeal to children, while his life makes an honestly dramatic story. BH

C.U. Art

D.V. Uncle-niece relations


R  Gr. 4-7. Sixteen children’s writers set their pens to being funny. For some, such as Marjorie Sharmat, it comes naturally; for others, such as Marion Dane Bauer, it’s a diverting stretch; still others, such as Walter Dean Myers, have been more effectively funny elsewhere. The best stories are from Barbara Ann Porte (“The Taxicab Family”) and M. E. Kerr (“The Author”); both tales are about stories and writing, and both demonstrate an instinctive
confidence in the short story form, a feature not always readily apparent in compilations of this kind. Most of the other stories are once-over-lightly realistic comedies, excepting Janet Taylor Lisle’s “Those in Peril on the Sea”; a peculiar tale of a little girl obsessed with death, this seems to have wandered in from another collection. Invitingly grouped as stories about family, friends, and school, the book has a range of reading and interest levels, and each story is followed by the (sometimes interesting, sometimes windy) author’s commentary. RS


Ad Gr. 5-7. Liza (the narrator), her mother, and three other homeless people live in the beautiful wilderness of a “hammock,” a Florida forest niche that is threatened by pollution and tourism. Sixth-grader Liza is particularly concerned because Dajun, the twelve-foot alligator they all love, seems to have disappeared. Jean George is a knowledgeable and polished science writer, and she gives a great deal of information in this story, which is more a plea for ecological conservation than it is a narrative; the facts overwhelm the story line (more a pastiche than a strong plot) and the use of dialogue to convey information weakens the impact of the narrative flow. ZS

C.U. Nature study

D.V. Ecological awareness


R Gr. 3-5. Giblin’s account of Edith Bolling Wilson’s life is brisk but never clipped, and it focuses on her role as the president’s wife. The subtitle refers to the responsibilities assumed by Edith Wilson after her husband was disabled by a stroke; her critics felt she assumed too much power, while her supporters admired her competence and industry. Giblin is objective in presenting the facts, and restrainedly admiring in his tone. An authorial afterword points out that all the dialogue, which is woven into the text with smooth naturalness, is taken either from the subject’s correspondence with her husband or from her autobiography. This is part of a publisher’s series that should be useful for both history and herstory units. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.; Women’s Studies


R 5-8 yrs. The subtitle is deceptive, since this is not a traditional counting book so much as an exercise in adding and even multiplication. For example, in one double-page spread the text reads, “On my way to my friend’s house I bought . . .” three bags of gum balls, each bag containing three boxes, each box containing six gum balls... “How many gum balls were there in all?” If children for whom the picture book format is
appropriate cannot multiply eighteen by three, they can count the pictured gumballs on the page, while primary graders can use their skills in sets and multiplication. Donald Crews’ paintings are vividly colored and are cleverly composed to ramify the mathematical concepts introduced by the author, a math teacher. ZS
C.U. Mathematics

R 4-6 yrs. Cheerful, busy family scenes bulge out of the frames of line and wash pictures, and the minimal structure of the plot is just right for easy assimilation by preschool listeners. The narrator is an amicable boy whose toddler twin siblings contribute more than their share to the chaos of too little space. After some unsuccessful (but interesting) house hunting, a do-it-yourself project is launched, and soon there is an additional wing to their old house. Good punch line, too: “And Granny says we have so much room, she’s thinking of selling her house and moving in with us.” ZS
D.V. Family relations

R Gr. K-2. Stylized, stylish, and strongly decorative, Goble’s distinctive paintings use symbol, design, and repetition to illustrate a retelling of a Plains Indians myth that is both a pourquoi story and a hero tale. The culprit is Crow Chief, who has driven the buffalo away so that the People have no meat; the hero is Falling Star, who tricks Crow Chief and ties him to the tipi poles—and there the white bird slowly turns black with soot from the fires where buffalo meat is roasting. And that is why crows, once white, are now black. Goble discusses the legend of Falling Star, “the Savior,” in a prefatory note that should be of special interest to storytellers. ZS
C.U. Storytelling

R Gr. 2-4. Writing for a series that emphasizes the roles of ordinary people in historical events, Goldin focuses on a Jewish immigrant family whose oldest child is involved (but escapes) in the tragic fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in Manhattan in 1911. Although this was by no means the “beginnings of the labor movement” claimed by the subtitle, it was indeed a catalyst, in New York City, for reform of fire safety legislation and for the strength of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. The book is carefully tailored for a primary grades audience, as are the author’s appended notes on her research. The protagonist is Freyda’s sister, eleven-year-old Rosie, and it is through her eyes that readers learn of the dangerous conditions at the factory, the horrors of the fire, and the determination of the survivors that such a catastrophe should not happen again. ZS
C.U. Social studies

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Ad  Gr. 3-5. This book follows a format different from Goodall’s earlier *Story of a Seashore* (BCCB 3/90), etc.; here, double-page, oversize spreads in formal frames depict aspects of life in an English country house, with captions indicating the historical period and describing the action within the scene (“Tudor Period, 1485-1603 . . . A great feast with music and entertainment”). There are some revealing images in the watercolor tableaux: a riotous and messy Tudor feast entices lesser mortals peeping from galleries above; an inset of an Edwardian maid’s dismal quarters contrasts with the sumptuous bedroom of her mistress; and a library graced by elegant guests in the late Georgian era houses wounded soldiers in World War I. Some things are never explained—whether the house stays in the same family throughout, for instance, or where the money for post-war restoration came from—and most American children won’t know the social history glimpsed through these vignettes. Nadia Wheatley’s *My Place* (BCCB 7/90) covers a similar idea better, but young Anglophiles in particular will enjoy Goodall’s verdant vision of aristocratic life. DS

C.U. History—England; Social studies


Ad  Gr. 4-6. Burton Knockwurst is trying to develop something that will help his friends with their various miseries: Tish has a new puppy with a destructive chewing habit, Jonathan has had his chemistry set seized by the school principal, and Kevin has a traffic ticket for speeding on his skateboard. Burton’s solution is the giggle machine, which by strategically tickling, joking, and releasing “risible ions” causes its users to view the world in a happier light. Meanwhile, the evil Professor Savvy from *Burton’s Zoom Zoom Va-ROOOM Machine* is back, plotting to steal all the Knockwurst family’s inventions from their workshop, until his encounter with the giggle machine brings an end to his plans. Haas’ *The Secret Life of Dilly McBean* (BCCB 11/86) has a better balance of absurdity and the everyday; the pacing here is off, and the characters aren’t quite silly enough to justify their one-dimensionality. They’re still fun, though, and Burton’s limitlessly inventive imagination remains a draw, especially for fans of the first book. DS


R  6-9 yrs. Louie has very cool clothes. Trouble is, his sisters think so too. Nora wants to wear his three-green-stripe tube socks, and even promises to wash them. “I really want to wear those socks—but I’m basically a good brother, and Nora’s not so bad, and they do need washing.” Ella wants his jams, Sarah wants his shark bite T-shirt, Heather promises to take Louie to a school football game if she can borrow his fluorescent orange windsurfing jacket . . . even baby Rachel has taken his favorite duckbilled fishing cap. So Louie goes to school in “plain socks, old jeans, boring T-shirt, plain old jacket and a regular, old baseball cap.” On the other hand, Louie’s sisters seem as cool as his

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clothes, and it’s clear they think their younger brother is pretty special. This might be an idealized treatment of sibling clothing wars, but the message is both apt and lightly worn. Generously sized and spaciously arranged illustrations extend the theme by contrasting black-on-white line drawn Louie with his brightly decked and magic-marker sisters. The hey-dude tone and look is akin to Pinkwater; the generous spirit is all Louie’s. RS

D.V. Brothers-sisters; Sharing


Ad Gr. 6-9. This collective biography of a dozen African-American heroes is by turn genuinely lively and minimally efficient. The author exhibits enthusiastic detail for millionaire Madam C. J. Walker and explorer Matthew Henson, but slows down to generic descriptions of Charles Drew’s scientific and Ralph Bunche’s political contributions. The other subjects—Crispus Attucks, Marian Anderson, Romare Bearden, Fannie Lou Hamer, Eddie Robinson, Shirley Chisholm, Malcolm X, and Ronald McNair—fall somewhere in between, with a balance of readable, generalized portraits in the nature of a survey that may lead students to discover an interest and pursue it further (a bibliography of books and articles is appended). One example of Haskins’ teasers is a reference to McNair’s two-year doctoral study of Lasers. “Then a flood destroyed all his notes. But he spent only a short time worrying about the loss.” What flood? How? When? Where? Equally puzzling is a reference to the death of Bunche’s mother. On one page, she “felt much better in the new climate” On the next, “In spite of the healthier climate, Olive Bunche’s health was getting worse.” The problem here is not so much misinformation as a compression of facts that leads to oversimplification. At the same time, there are memorable lines that will startle black and white readers alike into realizing just how many African American “firsts” have been buried outside the memorial pages of official U.S. history books. BH

C.U. History—U.S.


R* Gr. 6-10. With the same kind of writing power Staples exerted in Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind (BCCB 10/89), Hiçyilmaz brings a faraway experience very close to home for readers following twelve-year-old Mehmet from his Turkish mountain village to the streets of Ankara. The future holds little promise for villagers, Mehmet’s parents decide, so they journey, along with relatives, to the big city in hopes of work and the comforts that wages can buy. A simple, direct narrative builds to inevitable climax as Mehmet becomes estranged from his family, who abandon their traditional way of life for a materialism impossible to attain. The orphaned friend whom Mehmet rescues, sick and starving in the street, turns from him to the promise of a comfortable life in the U.S. The urban poverty that engulfs the protagonist generates inevitable tragedy; here, the weak and vulnerable do not survive, even the loyal dog, the steadfast horse, and the true friend. But if Mehmet’s dreams are altered, they are also strengthened, as he returns alone to the village where he was born. Nuanced and honest in its projection of human dynamics, Hiçyilmaz’ first
novel—shortlisted for the Guardian and Whitbread awards in England—affords an intimate look at a humble hero’s coming of age. BH

D.V. Urban-rural contrasts


R Gr. 4-8. Illustrated with black-and-white photos of various juvenile detention facilities, this is a soberly matter-of-fact documentary on the juvenile justice system, fully living up to its prefatory aim: “The intention of this book is not to scold or preach.” Focusing on the true story of John, an adolescent inmate of Minnesota’s Red Wing Correctional Facility, the author and photographer record the details of his family life, arrest, detention at a juvenile center, hearing, subsequent sentencing to the Austin Boys Ranch (from which he ran away), and his stint at Red Wing. More general facts about juvenile crime and correction are carefully related throughout, giving the book a good balance of information and empathy. This is less melodramatic than many true-teen-dramas, and therefore more convincing, although the problems of the prison system are not examined. The introduction explains that models were used in photos that show faces of teens; even here, the lack of stageiness and sensationalism shows respect for readers. A brief reading list is appended; an index would have been helpful. RS

C.U. Social studies


R Gr. 1-3. Illustrated with neatly lined paintings that are attractively colored if a bit too placid, this is a read-it-yourself version of the famous Japanese folktale. Momotaro, born from a huge peach (unlike the miniature child in the original tale, which parallels the Thumbelina motif), is called to save his elderly adoptive parents and their village when it is threatened by the *oni* monsters. Enlisting the aid of a dog, hawk, and monkey, Momotaro defeats the monsters, a cartooned quartet of demons, in a sequence of pictures that wake up to the action. The design is clean and the reading easy, with none of the choppiness often associated with the easy-reader genre. RS

C.U. Reading, beginning


R 5-7 yrs. This is a picture book to pair with Cooney’s *Miss Rumphius* (BCCB 1/83) in discussing the contrasting lives of two women. While Miss Rumphius roams the world, Great-Aunt Arizona stays home in Appalachia and teaches her fourth grade students that “someday you will go” to the faraway places she won’t ever see. Arizona’s life seems none the less satisfying for spending it in the Blue Ridge Mountains, which beckon with tantalizing beauty in these verdantly idealized double-page spreads. The red-haired (and later, white-haired) heroine charges through each illustration with an
infectious energy that will convince young listeners how far, as a last line asserts, “she goes with us in our minds.” BH

D.V. Education, valuing and seeking


R Gr. 4-6. Born in a refugee camp in Malaysia, Hoang Anh, the youngest of four children in a “boat family” that was luckier than many, describes his family’s history and the way they live now in San Rafael, California. Color photographs of good quality are carefully placed in relation to a text that is direct, informative, and convincing as the voice of a young adolescent. There is a good fusion here of cultures, as Hoang Anh talks of his Vietnamese heritage and the pattern of daily life that includes school, sports, chores, holidays, and the diversity in a multietnic classroom. An index and a glossary add to the usefulness of a fine photoessay. ZS

C.U. Social studies
D.V. Adaptability


R 5-8 yrs. The trick to recasting an episode from the Aeneid in picture book format depends upon selection and tone. Both factors have been carefully weighed here in a matter-of-fact narrative that reduces the gory details to straightforward statements (“by morning the Trojans who were still alive left their broken city in a weeping trail of conquered people”) but doesn’t flinch from epic proportion, as in the picture of two sea snakes consuming the soothsayer Laocoön and his sons. The fixed smile on Hutton’s wooden horse is disconcerting, but then, it probably was to the Trojans, too. The watercolor paintings project a sense of monumental scale through cleverly shifting perspectives and vertical figures. The tragedy is not so much softened as distanced, and the emphasis on the horse offers a lasting symbol, as “over the smoking ruins of Troy its bright painted eyes still gazed.” BH

C.U. History, ancient


R Gr. K-2. Eighteen poems comprise this mini-anthology; the selections include both previously published original poems and traditional material. Some of the cartoon-like pictures seem excessively laden with neon pink or orange, but they have a vitality that matches the bounce of the verses. Among the authors are Ogden Nash, Nikki Giovanni, Lillian Morrison, Jack Prelutsky, and Langston Hughes (although Jabar seems to miss entirely the dark irony of his “Dream Boogie”). Almost all the poems are funny, and most have a lively, lilting, suitable-for-jumping-rope appeal. ZS

R 5-8 yrs. In a twist on Eastman’s classic *Are You My Mother?*, baby bird Choco goes searching for a mom, but no one seems to look enough like him to fill the bill: Mrs. Giraffe may be yellow, but she doesn’t have wings; Mrs. Penguin has wings, but she doesn’t have big, round cheeks; Mrs. Walrus has the cheeks, but not the striped feet. Finally Choco meets Mrs. Bear, who looks nothing like Choco, but holds him and kisses him just like a mommy, so he goes home with her and joins her other children (a pig, an alligator, and hippo). The watercolor illustrations are a blend of the touching and the comical, with lots of soft round shapes and white space. The message—that parents are defined by what they do rather than how they look (or how one acquires them)—is warm and reassuring, particularly to adoptees, stepkids, and other children who for various reasons don’t resemble their caretakers. Many young readers, however, will be concerned about the unexplained absence of Choco’s first mother, and they might also wonder if they could also be so easily replaced if they disappeared. Still, it’s bright and upbeat, and the animal cast usefully distances the idea for children not quite up to the directness and truth of MacLachlan’s *Mama One, Mama Two* (BCCB 4/82). DS

D.V. Adoption, adjustment to


R Gr. 5-9. Pastel pink-and-green cover art and the Lord Tennyson title seem like harbingers of nostalgia, but while the eleven related stories in this collection are optimistically breezy, they are saved from sentimentality by the specificity of their details. Set in rural Australia just after World War II, the stories focus on the four Mellings girls. Grace, the oldest, is poised to leave home after her “debut” down at the Mechanic’s Hall; Heather is thirteen and suitably superior; Cathy will do almost anything to win snobby classmate Marjorie Powell’s approval; Vivienne, the youngest and dreamiest, is the one who discovers Marjorie’s sad secret. The joker in the pack is cousin Isobel, a breathtakingly imaginative troublemaker who aspires to the convent (when, that is, she isn’t blowing smoke rings and pretending to be Joan Crawford). As in the author’s previous collection, *Tearaways* (BCCB 5/91), the stories sometimes rely on “trick” endings that are in fact predictable, but since the trick usually involves the girls’ putting one over on their parents or enemies, readers won’t mind a bit. Sunny and funny. RS

D.V. Sisters


R Gr. 6-8. Denise and her mother have come to stay in the old family house on a Maine coastal island; her father’s sudden death has left them with little money. Denny dislikes the house, the island, the school where she is a freshman, and—above all—the boy, Spence, who teases her on the school bus. It is the boat *Misty Day* and its mysterious elderly owner, “Mr. Jones,” that provide a new interest for Denny. Who is the man, and where did he get a boat that supposedly had disappeared (over thirty years before) with its original owner,
Rufus Day, aboard? Koller paces the mystery's solution deftly and develops it logically; characters and their relationships grow and change believably. The story moves to a dramatic ending in which Denny and Spence (now a friend) and the daughter of "Mr. Jones" unite in giving him the right to spend his final days (he is terminally ill) on his beloved boat, making a long-planned voyage. ZS

D.V. Adaptability; Older-younger generations


R Gr. 7-12. Kronenwetter's historical treatment of the organized white supremacy movement in this country not only allows us to appreciate the ironies of an 1845 anti-foreigner group called the Native American Party; it also tempers sensationalism with perspective. While not dismissing the current threat of the several KKKs, for example, Kronenwetter does point out that their combined membership amounts to less than six thousand (a number not footnoted; the notes in general are adequate but less than thorough). The historical survey is clear and well-organized, as is the picture of contemporary groups ranging from the Klan to LaRouche followers to skinheads. A chapter on "Why People Join Hate Groups" is superficial, with the stated reasons (the need to belong, self-hatred) as applicable to members of Weight Watchers as they are to neo-Nazis. Missing is any discussion of the Bill of Rights, an important context for the analysis of such events as Nazi demonstrations and cross-burnings. Still, the comprehensive approach is valuable, and caption heading included with the bound galley promise a variety of intriguing photos. RS C.U. History—U.S.; Social studies


R 4-8 yrs. In a spacious format that will work well for both the preschool listener and independent reader, Kuklin's newest photoessay presents three young children growing up in bicultural circumstances. Sanu's father is Senegalese, her mother black American; Eric's father is from Puerto Rico, his mother is an Hispanic-American born in New York; April's parents were born in Taiwan. Each of the chapters is told through the voice of the child, a device Kuklin manages less self-consciously than most. Says Eric, "when my parents are at work, my mommy's mommy, Nana Carmen, takes me shopping at the *carniceria*, the Spanish meat market. I get to pay." The profiles casually blend everyday America (playing baseball, eating pizza) with specific cultural activities (Sanu's Senegalese clothing, April's Chinese calligraphy). Definitions aren't always clear, with Sanu, for example, seeming to call herself African-American because her father is African, a more restricted usage than that currently in vogue, and Kuklin does not make the distinction between Puerto Rico (a U.S. Commonwealth) and the foreign countries of Senegal and Taiwan. Still, the level, amount, and kinds of cultural detail (lots of eating, for example) are appropriate for the intended audience, and Kuklin's color photos show happy families, lively parties, and tasty foods. One recipe from each family is
appended, but a don’t-do-this-alone note should have been included, particularly
for a recipe that involves deep-frying a whole stuffed fish. RS
C.U. Social studies
D.V. Intercultural understanding

Lavies, Bianca. *The Atlantic Salmon*; written and illus. by Bianca Lavies.

R Gr. 3-6. With her usual informative competence, Lavies here traces the life cycle of the Atlantic salmon from freshwater eggs through stages of growth, exit to the sea, and return for spawning. The text is clear and realistic (particularly about predator-prey relationships, with one page showing a dragonfly nymph ingesting a tiny salmon, the next showing a larger salmon snacking on a dragonfly nymph), and it’s admirably honest about our ignorance of the species (“How they find their way to their feeding waters—what guides them—is still largely a mystery”). The real draw here, though, is the photography (although some indication of scale would have been useful): amazing shots of a salmon egg, looking like some undiscovered planet in an underwater galaxy; vivid images of spiky, prehistoric-looking aquatic predators; a double-page spread of battered adult salmon returning home to spawn. Many readers will enjoy Lavies’ brief note about the lengths to which she went to obtain the pictures; it should make all of them give more thought to the fish on their dinner plate. A good companion to Cone’s *Come Back, Salmon*, reviewed above. DS
C.U. Nature study


R Gr. 4-6. Forty-two poems, none more than a page long (and most considerably less) show a range of form (concrete poetry, haiku, cinquains, free verse, etc.), tone, and subject, but Livingston retains her usual sharp focus throughout. Some of the best poems here are imagistic reworkings of familiar ideas, as in “Calgary,” about Canada geese in flight, or “Lasiocampidae,” about tent caterpillars “building/ webs of camp tents/ stretched between trees, covered/ with endless yards of mosquito/ netting,” or “S: Silent Shark,” where alliteration is made elegant. Kids who are bored stiff by discussions of poetic form will unknowingly savor it here, and confirmed poetry fans will revel in the variety at hand. DS


Ad Gr. 3-5. Sam and Anastasia Krupnik are a team that has displayed an astonishing degree of talents and precocity; unfortunately, this latest installment in their saga shows both at a far more generalized level. Sam Krupnik, who knew Morse code at two (*All About Sam*, BCCB 10/88) here gets kudos for tapping out S*A*M on the typewriter. His big sister Anastasia, who gave her teacher poetry when she only wanted verse (*Anastasia Krupnik*, BCCB 1/80) is churning out doggerel. In honor of her mother’s birthday, she writes: “I’m glad that you are 38. I’m glad you’re Katherine, not just Kate. I’m glad
our father is your mate. Your size and shape are really great. Okay, it's supposed to be bad, but why is Anastasia writing bad verse? The attenuated plot follows Sam as he collects his mother's favorite smells to concoct a homemade perfume for her birthday: his father's pipe, some hair, baby poop and spit-up ("I've always loved the smell of new babies," says an unsuspecting Katherine), chicken soup, sea water... and yeast. A similar plot, more gracefully handled, can be found in one chapter of Judith Caseley's Hurricane Harry (BCCB 11/91). While Lowry's latest has little of the fresh detailing of others in the series and veteran fans may be dismayed to see two well-loved characters played a little lazily, the broad humor will probably find a broad audience. RS


R 4-8 yrs. Apples are a popular picture book subject, with two new titles this spring. The Maestros' How Do Apples Grow?, part of the reliable Let's Read-and-Find-Out series, is written for a young audience. Their simple explanations of the processes of pollination and apple growth make a good introduction for a preschooler's first field-trip to an orchard. On the other hand, Micucci's slim The Life and Times of the Apple (imprint below) includes not only the basic information about apple development, but also has interesting apple trivia scattered across its pages ("Stone Age lake dwellers preserved apples by drying them in the sun," "About one in five apples is pressed into juice and cider"). Micucci describes pollination more thoroughly than do the Maestros, but his explanation of grafting omits a definition for the process. The pencil and watercolor illustrations in the Maestros' book are bucolic and in pastel shades; the same medium in Micucci's is comical and cartoon-like. For older children, An Apple Tree through the Year by Claudia Schnieper (BCCB 11/87) or The Apple and Other Fruits by Millicent Selsam (BCCB 2/74) feature more sophisticated explanations and detailed photographs of apple development. With so many good books about apples around, an interested kid could stay supplied for days. KJ

C.U. Botany


Ad Gr. 6-9. Ted convinces his best friend Will that the two of them should try out for the local lifeguard squad: "Face it, Will, swimming is the only sport we don't stink at." Ted is tired of being a wimp, tired of being picked on by super jock Ray Denson, and wants to impress girls. The lifeguard training involves a lot of work and time, causing Ted to shirk his other responsibilities, such as a summer lawn-mowing job and his guitar study; in fact, his music teacher tosses him out after it becomes apparent that Ted has not been practicing. Marino has a light touch, and Ted's narration is convincingly that of a fourteen-year-old boy, but the book is message-laden and -driven, as Ted, in his misguided efforts to swim with Denson and the rest of the fast crowd, messes up his summer and his relationships with friends and family. In an agreeable conclusion, Ted comes through at a time when Will really needs him and, at the same time, gets a little perspective on his priorities. Most readers
will probably feel themselves one step ahead of Ted throughout the novel: some will feel superior, some empathetic, and some may lose patience waiting for him to catch up. RS

D.V. Friendship values; Responsibility


R Gr. K-2. Just as he does with his episodic easy-to-read/read-aloud texts, Marshall endows his bright pictures with an exaggerated humor and spatial improbability. His fans, who have come to expect just such nonsense from him, will appreciate these three brisk anecdotes in which Fox is a bit too clever for his own good, so that he suffers logical consequences (twice involving his beloved comic books) that can evoke sympathy as well as amusement. ZS

C.U. Reading, beginning


R 5-8 yrs. An Algonquin Indian Cinderella variant sometimes anthologized as Little Scar-face or Burnt-face (no source notes are given here), this has many features in common with the European version, except that the heroine is tested for her truthfulness and vision rather than for her small feet! The Rough-Face Girl is disfigured by sparks from the fire that she is forced to tend by her evil sisters, who are determined to marry the somewhat prosaically described “very great, rich, powerful, and supposedly handsome Invisible Being.” Neither proves able to see him, however; it is only the Rough-Face Girl who can win him by describing his bow (a rainbow) and sled runner (the Milky Way) to his sister. A *pourquoi* aspect of the tale—the proud sisters turning into aspens that quake before the wind—is omitted here. While the illustrations have a darkly classical quality, the wording is sometimes colloquial (“Off from the other wigwams of this village stood one great huge wigwam”) or explanatory (“When she looked at you she didn’t see just your face or your hair or clothes... And she could tell if you had a good, kind heart or a cold, hard, and cruel one”). Yet the total effect is nonetheless striking. The story is strong enough to thrive on almost any straightforward retelling, and the paintings, while romanticized, are warmly drawn and richly colored, with firelit bodies and hints of historical landscapes and ritual masks. Along with Ai-Ling Louie’s *Yeh Shen* (BCCB 3/83) and other culturally varied picture book versions, this will make an impact on youngsters in folklore units, Native American studies, and story hour sessions. BH

D.V. Truthfulness


R Gr. 6-9. “I’m gonna hide and you find me,” says Eddie Chavez. When Alex can’t find his friend, he assumes that Eddie has gone back to where the two had left their bikes at the base of the mountain trail. But Eddie isn’t there, isn’t anywhere, and back down in Albuquerque, no one believes Alex’s story of Eddie’s disappearance. The police, Eddie’s mother, Alex’s own
mother, think Alex is hiding something, perhaps covering up the fact that Eddie has run away to visit his older brother imprisoned in Texas. Alex, though, gradually becomes convinced that Eddie died on the mountain, and what seems to have been simply a well-wrought mystery/survival story becomes—as well—a complex picture of a teen absorbed in feelings of guilt and consequent depression. Despite occasional passages of fancy writing, Mazzio generally keeps the story taut, its suspense maintained by a proper balance between narrative and psychological elements. The friendship between the two boys includes cultural conflicts and comparisons (Eddie is Hispanic) and is well-conveyed through the very ordinariness of its details; other characters, such as Alex’s bartending mother, add presence and depth. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to; Intercultural understanding


R Gr. 5-7. Mary, Theo, and Scott didn’t know each other at the beginning of the summer. As the only children on a scientific expedition to locate a Scottish sea monster (*not* the Loch Ness), they discover they have a lot in common—fighting boredom. At first, it’s enough to explore the ruins of a nearby castle. When they turn their attention to their parents’ frustrated research, the three friends find a way to create a pseudo-monster for the expedition’s high-tech instruments to detect. The action moves along briskly due to the combination of the energetic characters and several subtle mysteries that don’t seem connected until the book’s end. The disjointed introductions of Mary, Theo, and Scott make for an awkward first chapter, but by using this technique McHargue is able to avoid singling out one main character and labeling this a “boy” or “girl” book. A well-knit combination of adventure/mystery/animal story, in an exotic setting, with broad appeal. KJ


R 4-7 yrs. Gentle, rather pale, colored-pencil drawings have a ’fifties feel to them that adds a bit of nostalgia to a quiet but direct story of a little girl who does not remember her father, a captain in the Navy. “There was a picture of him on the mantel in the living room. I knew to say ‘Good night, Daddy,’ when I went to bed. But I didn’t remember him.” Now, though, Daddy is coming home, and Sara and her mother go down to the dock with all the other waiting families. And when Daddy hugs her, Sara remembers her father. The brevity and restraint of the text allows the ending a poignant surprise, and the simplicity makes the story immediate to young children in a way that Jane Yolen’s similarly themed, but overcomplicated *All Those Secrets of the World* (BCCB 4/91) is not. Gourbault’s illustrations have a sophisticated, fluid line that saves them from sentimentality; the whole is a successful exercise in understatement. RS

D.V. Father-daughter relations

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Ad Gr. 6-8. In seventh grade when she begins her story, Ellen Gray is not delighted when her mother, Loretta, announces that she is pregnant. Ellen, already upset by her father’s long absences (he’s a naval officer aboard a nuclear submarine), is further upset when she learns that her newborn brother Barry has cerebral palsy. At first she wants nothing to do with Barry, but once she begins to love him, Ellen spends all her time caring for her brother and helping him learn motor and communication skills. The book is a bit too heavily weighted with information about cerebral palsy to be wholly effective as a story about familial reaction to a child who is limited by it—but those reactions are believable, as are the changes in the attitudes of most of the characters. This is, although less effective as a narrative than Elizabeth Laird’s *Loving Ben* (BCCB 10/89), a novel comparable in its sensitivity and compassion. ZS

D.V. Brothers-sisters; Handicaps, overcoming


R Gr. 2-4. See review under Maestro, above.


R Gr. 7-10. Fifteen-year-old Nicole, the narrator, had been very happy to be Michael’s girl; she wasn’t in love with him, but she enjoyed his devoted attention. Then she met Shane, who was neither as handsome nor as popular as Michael, yet was far more appealing to her. Although this novel develops slowly, its pace contributes to the tension, as Michael becomes increasingly agitated and hostile, posing a danger to Nicole and Shane, and at times seeming suicidal. The psychological framework is credible, especially in Michael’s relationships with his parents (his domineering father refuses to believe there is danger when Nicole’s worried mother telephones to warn them) and in Nicole’s ambivalence about how best to handle the situation. The presentation is convincingly adolescent; the ending is convincingly sugar-free. ZS

D.V. Boy-girl relations


R Gr. 4-6. At lower school, Dinah was a big frog in a little pond; as a sixth-grader just starting middle school, she feels “like a tadpole adrift in the Atlantic Ocean.” She decides to make a splash by becoming the first female class president (her loyal friend Suzanne is running for secretary), and she eventually seizes upon, with characteristic zeal, in-school recycling as her platform. The subplot of Dinah’s growing friendship with an old lady to whom she reads *The Wind in the Willows* (Dinah begins, with discomfort, to realize her own resemblance to Toad) is well harmonized with the main story, where Mills fortunately does not feel obliged to let Dinah win the election. The
lessons, such as the offhand reminders that friends can be found in unexpected places, are light-hearted, and Dinah remains the same ebullient and wayward heroine as in *Dynamite Dinah* (BCCB 4/90); this is one campaign that will claim a high reader turnout. DS

D.V. Civic competence and responsibility


R Gr. 2-4. Large-scale color photographs on the left answer the easy-to-read poetic riddle posed on each preceding right-hand page. Some of the fourteen riddles will be comparatively easy to solve, others may baffle readers: “It turns a nothing/ into a street/ where opposite ends/ can easily meet.” (A bridge). Still the sometimes-rhyming verses may amuse and challenge readers. The last is cleverly shaped like its answer as it ascends the page, levels off, and drops again: “a/ sharp/ square/ stair/ that/ builds/ and builds/ until/ it’s/ up there then it/ slips away/ down/ under/ I/ wonder/ where?/?/?” (an escalator). ZS


Ad Gr. 7-9. In a sequel to *High Trail to Danger* (BCCB 7/91) in which Sarah had come west to Colorado to find her father, she is now dedicated to clearing his name and solving the twin mysteries of why he was accused of murder and where to find the clue of which his dying words had hinted. Joined by her young sister Susannah, Sarah is slow to realize that the fifteen-year-old is trying to win over one of Sarah’s two suitors. The time is 1880, and the story has good details of period and of locale; it is less effective in its characterization (static and with little depth) and in its plotting, which is both stretched and predictable. ZS


R* Gr. 6-9. As in so many books in which he championed the cause of the oppressed, Scott O’Dell here identifies with the persecuted Nez Perce, attacked by the United States Army in 1877. The narrator is the daughter of Chief Joseph, and the dramatic story is beautifully told by O’Dell and his wife (finished by Hall at her husband’s request and after his death) through the brave, sad voice of Sound of Running Feet. Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians were forced to leave their beloved valley in Oregon and begin a long journey; although they did not protest, they were attacked and forced into militant rebuttal as their numbers dwindled. Hall cites sources and provides, in an afterward, information about the survivors. Poignant and powerful. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.


R Gr. 5-8. The author of *Seal Child* (BCCB 12/89) holds to realism here, though fantastical elements seem to hover near a plot centered on
an old raven that transforms the life of thirteen-year-old Kelsey Martine. The chimney sweep who helps recover the injured bird from the Martines' New York city apartment falls in love with Kelsey's mother, Aubrey, which increases Kelsey's desperation to know who and where her father is. Given the rich mother-daughter relationship so vividly detailed here, it seems a bit out of character that Aubrey has been unwilling to discuss this matter, but the other aspects of the novel are credibly developed, especially the jealousy that grows between Kelsey and her best friend over the first boy to whom they're both attracted. The two girls' shifting interests between the boy and their old fantasy game, in which they imagine themselves as part of a secret society of "cloakwomen," is realistic in reflecting early adolescents' back-and-forth movement between adult and childhood concerns. A climactic (and unnecessary) gas explosion strains the subtlety of tension here, but the romantic ending will appeal even to those readers who see it coming a mile away. BH

D.V. Animals, love for; Friendship values; Mother-daughter relations


*R* 4-7 yrs. Puss in Boots has been richly caparisoned lately (BCCB 12/90), and this appearance may top them all. In fact, if Puss weren't such a swashbuckling figure, Vaës' art might overwhelm him with Cocteau-like landscapes and an oversize cast of ogreish characters (including a king who looks like W. C. Fields). Of the actual ogre, we never see more than his foot and fingers. It's enough. He does appear as a lion, with Puss in a position that may win awards for an all-time feline posterior view. But Puss triumphs and, despite a civilized demeanor at the royal wedding of his master, looks with catlike appetite at the seven mice that brush and polish his now-pure-gold boots. The play of light and dark in these subtly satiric paintings creates an almost surrealistic glow over the baroque backdrops—all well worth another investment in Perrault. BH


*R* 2-4 yrs. Set off by ample white space, nicely composed line- and-watercolor pictures echo the humor of the text, a plaintive record by two little girls of the devastation caused by every appearance of their toddler brother, Tom. Although repetitive, the story uses the predictability of Tom's mayhem to amuse the read-aloud audience that particularly enjoys disaster humor and can anticipate the next catastrophe when Tom comes along. Cereal-spillers and crayon-snatchers will enjoy being teased, and their older siblings will appreciate this exposure of the indignities they suffer. ZS

D.V. Brothers-sisters


*Ad* Gr. 7-12. Ginny's mother, a Haitian artist, died when Ginny was only a week old; now sixteen, Ginny lives with her white father on the coast of Wales. Ginny is also an artist, proud of her black heritage and hoping
to pick up where her mother left off: “I’m going to grow up, live, and be a painter in the way she couldn’t.” Ginny’s certainty is shattered when her father announces that her half-brother Robert, of whom she’s never before heard, will be coming to live with them, and her shock deepens when she discovers that her father had been married to Robert’s mother, not hers. That’s the beginning of a series of revelations, misconceptions, and eventual understandings that lead her through a dizzying summer of exploration of the past and contemplation of her own future; the turns are too numerous to list, but Ginny does learn that her mother is not dead—she disowns Ginny, however, when they meet. Pullman is an excellent writer and he evokes mood and relationships well, but there’s way too much going on here: Haitian voodoo themes, the metaphor of the title (it involves a local legend about a bridge), Ginny’s experience growing up black in a virtually all-white area, the abuse Ginny’s father suffered as a child, and so on. Despite the lack of focus, this is still a thoughtful realistic novel, as well as an interesting change of pace from Pullman’s Ruby in the Smoke (BCCB 5/87).

DS

D.V. Family relations


R Gr. 7-12. A tragic family secret is revealed when Beth, sixteen, and her slightly younger brother go with their mother Hannah to spend the summer with her parents and older sister Iris. Hannah hasn’t spoken to her family in years; Beth eventually learns that a teenaged Hannah had made a play for Iris’ fiancé Clifton, who was killed when he was pushed down some stairs during a confrontation between the two girls and their parents. Every one of them now has a different version of what really happened that night; intermittent flashbacks show readers the truth. It’s all terribly complicated and melodramatic, but Reiss is a good storyteller and at her best with family hell (see also her first novel Time Windows, BCCB 10/91, for another variation on the theme). Iris, crippled by polio, embittered, and often drunk, is a Tennessee Williams refugee; the teenaged Hannah (shown in flashbacks) a pouty sexpot. Gossipy, gothic, and the teensiest bit trashy, this is perfect for those kids ready to move on from V.C. Andrews but not quite ready for Rebecca. RS

D.V. Sisters


R Gr. 2-4. Following her eloquent portraits of Tibetan and Saharan culture (BCCB 11/91), author/photographer Reynolds here offers child-sized visits to opposite sides of the world: Sisters Kari and Sara are part of the Sami tribe that follows the reindeer in the northern Lapland region of Finland; Amprenula is a Tiwi aboriginal girl who lives on Bathhurst Island off the coast of the Northern Territories in Australia. In both books, the details—finding food, racing reindeer—are appropriately child-centered, and while the photos in Far North are sometimes Krementz-glossy, they will appeal to children intrigued by “distant lands.” Reynolds’ viewpoint is respectful if culturally
overcompensatory ("[Amprenula] is proud to be an aborigine living with her family in the bush"); afterwords to adults are a bit gushy but contextually informative. RS

C.U. Social studies


R Gr. K-2. Spiky-haired Dolores (of Faye and Dolores, BCCB 4/85, and Duncan and Dolores, BCCB 3/87) wants desperately to be included when her tidy big sister Faye invites over supercilious Cindy Snappleby ("Let's play jacks," says Cindy. "I haven't lost a game in years"). Dolores tries to join in with the big girls, much to their horror, but Faye's family loyalties finally win out after Cindy screams at Dolores (Miss Snappleby's jacks game is upset after an up-close and personal encounter with Howie, Trina, and Uncle Bob—Dolores' frogs). The text here is inventive and witty without losing childish authenticity; Dolores is irritating as well as endearing, and Samuels makes such good fun of the odious Cindy that it's rather a pity to see her routed. Fastidious yet lively line-and-watercolor illustrations float pleasantly in lots of white space, although Dolores' mess sometimes overpowers the composition. Young Doloreses may not pick up on the satire at their own expense, but they'll still relish this fantasy-inspiring triumph of a younger sister. Be sure to draw their attention to the cover, where Dolores puts the final touches on her painting of the soon-to-be-late great Cindy disappearing into a shark's mouth. DS

D.V. Sisters


Ad Gr. K-2. Pale black-and-white pencil drawings are spacious and graceful (although not always anatomically accurate), the lines of dancers' figures expressed by an author/artist who has been a dancer. The text is minimal and poetic, perhaps too static to appeal to most readers, as a child describes rehearsing and then taking part in the first theatrical performance by her class. Children who are also dancers or who are dance buffs may respond to the unnamed protagonist's rhapsodic comments on the joys of dancing—others may find the mood rather tenuous. ZS

C.U. Dance


R Gr. 3-5. This chatty ramble past a dozen American homes shares a little architecture, a little sociology, a little history; most of all, it will give readers a brief look at what it's like to live in a trailer, a pueblo, a log house, or a California adobe. While built as long as seven hundred years ago, all the houses included are extant, a fact emphasized by Seltzer's (sometimes awkward) montaging a hand-tinted photo of a young person in front of every painting. Each dwelling gets a double-spread, three-quarter-page illustration); the
pictures contain some distracting elements (dogs, birds) and facile coloring but are careful to provide lots of brick-by-brick detailing that will have readers picking their favorite places to live. RS

C.U. Architecture


R Gr. 7-10. Centering on the rights implied in the first amendment, this book examines the history of the idea of religious freedom and analyzes the United States’ landmark status in stipulating that freedom in its Constitution. Specific legal cases (*Minersville School District vs. Gobitis*, where a school board expelled a pupil for refusing for religious reasons to salute the flag) and issues (why churches don’t generally pay taxes and under what situations they must) are discussed in light of the words of the amendment. The author traces the complications and contradictions of the subject well enough to make it interesting as well as useful for research, and her material is solid and up-to-date (for instance, Gulf War reservists who objected to fighting are mentioned), with a particularly intriguing overview of the results of America’s unique commitment to religious liberty. Endnotes and a bibliography are included; the text of the Williamsburg Charter is appended; the finished copy will have photographs and an index. DS

C.U. Social studies


Ad Gr. 5-7. After a few pages about Rosa Parks’ childhood, the author focuses on the boycott that became a landmark in the struggle for civil rights. Save for omission of some background information (the NAACP discussion of a test case before the December 1, 1955, incident that was the catalyst for the boycott) the important facts are all included and are accurately presented. The book is weakened, however, by the author’s penchant for florid writing and by a tendency to be adulatory, particularly in reference to Martin Luther King, Jr. A selected list of sources and a brief list of additional titles for young readers are appended. For a fuller account, readers may wish to look at Rosa Parks’ autobiography, reviewed in the February issue. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.—Civil Rights

D.V. Devotion to a cause


R Gr. 5-8. Twelve-year-old Mary Jack Jordan desperately tries to hold together her new foster family: a well-intentioned but weak-willed Episcopalian priest, his resentful wife, and two other foster children—a young girl who has been so severely abused she will not speak, and a teenage boy embittered by rejection. The precarious balance of the group shifts when Father Matt’s sister, nerve-damaged and aphasic from an automobile accident, adds one too many burdens and is shipped off with all the kids to a vacation cabin where their caretaker deserts them and they must either pull together or fall apart. In
spite of the large cast, the character dynamics are subtly developed except for a gratuitous villain who threatens the children's hard-won security. There's plenty of action without his interference, and the narrator is convincingly voiced. If the ending seems too good to be true, it is nevertheless carefully prepared and satisfying. BH

D.V. Family relations; Friendship values


R Gr. 6-9. Born in 1862 to parents who were slaves, Wells-Barnett was a fighter all her life, a seeker of justice, an advocate of civil rights, a militant activist who campaigned for black equality and who, because of her writing and speaking, became a nationally known figure. Never one to mince words or make concessions, Ida Wells-Barnett had loyal supporters in the United States and in England, but she also made enemies among some more conciliatory members of the black community, as well as among white Southerners. Her biographer gives full credit to Wells-Barnett for her courage and persistence but is candid about the fact that this remarkable woman was an irritant to many. Chapter notes, bibliography, and a glossary add to the usefulness of a well-written book that explores an important aspect of civil rights history; the finished copy will include photographs and an index. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.—Civil Rights

D.V. Courage; Devotion to a cause


R Gr. 6-10. Eleven biographical sketches describe the lives of American women who gained distinction in a scientific field; many were pioneers in areas that had been the prerogative of male scientists; several won or shared a Nobel Prize. Some were native-born, others immigrants; some worked alone and others as part of a team; all made significant contributions to the body of scientific knowledge, and all were in time honored for their work. A chronology and bibliography follow each account, and a good index gives access to the book's contents. Veglahn is a dependable and clear writer of nonfiction; what adds to the usefulness and appeal of her lively writing is the fact that her chronological arrangement of material gives historical perspective, and her focus on the emergent roles of women creates its own commentary on the subject of the changes from the mid-nineteenth century (when botanist Alice Eastwood was born) to 1984, when Mildred Dresselhaus became the first woman to be elected President of the American Physical Society. ZS

C.U. Science; Women's Studies


Ad Gr. 9-12. Framed by an initially confusing and ultimately unnecessary Vietnam setting, the core of this story takes place on Cape Cod during the Korean War, although it is the events of World War II that inform the novel's greatest thematic concerns. As all this might indicate, Voigt's latest
book is an ambitious effort. Henry and Jonathan, both sixteen, are best friends until Jon's cousin David, a twenty-year-old survivor of the Holocaust, comes to live with Jon's family. David, who has spent many years in a posh mental hospital, is beautiful, difficult, and cruel, shrugging off—mocking—all of Henry's efforts to "feel sorry for him." David seduces Jon's sister, sexually taunts Henry, and resists any efforts at friendship. Eventually, David kills himself, an act that seems more vengeful than despairing. The relationship between the three boys makes a powerful triangle; unfortunately, the characters seem but to exist only for what they can reveal about history and the Holocaust. Voigt isn't didactic or preachy; in fact, she is far more daring on the subject than most writers for children or teenagers, but the novel is overintellectualized, consisting of too many Talmudic, often confusing, sometimes obscure, occasionally incomprehensible, paragraphs that take readers away from the story. "Picking up information piecemeal, that's what Henry was doing. But he didn't know what Jon was thinking. And he didn't know what Jon was thinking." On the other hand, there are characters (such as Jon's weepy but funny mother) and conversations (such as a desperately ironic exchange between Jon and Henry's Yankee grandmother) that further theme and story. As a dark contrast to such Holocaust heroics as Number the Stars, this is a valuable effort; unfortunately, the intensity of theme is not supported by a grounded story. RS

Waddell, Martin. Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?; illus. by Barbara Firth. Candlewick, 1992. ISBN 1-56402-007-X. 32p. $14.95. 4-7 yrs. "Big Bear is the big bear, and Little Bear is the little bear." They live together in a cozy Bear Cave, but Little Bear, afraid of the dark, can't sleep. Big Bear, who only wants to relax with his book, goes to the Lantern Cupboard for the "tiniest lantern," then a bigger lantern, then the "Biggest Lantern of Them All" and still Little Bear can't sleep: he's afraid of the dark outside the cave. A moonlight walk satisfies Little Bear's fears, and Big Bear finally gets to finish his book. The storytelling is repetitive in a way that seems meant to be cozy but comes across as coy and a bit patronizing. While this pair isn't as engaging as, say, Gabrielle Vincent's Ernest and Celestine (and Little Bear is no Little Bear), their sleeptime patter might make for satisfactorily soothing fare. Firth's crayon-and-wash illustrations have a gently lined warmth that nestles dark and light together for a lulling effect. RS D.V. Fear, overcoming

Weaver, Lydia. Child Star: When Talkies Came to Hollywood; illus. by Michele Laporte. Viking, 1992. ISBN 0-670-84039-4. [52p]. (Once Upon America). $12.00. Ad Gr. 3-5. In a story set in the Coolidge years, Joey's widowed mother makes a scant living as an extra and a pianist in the film industry. One day when Joey is with Mama at the studio, a jovial comedian puts the boy in some shots. And that is how a star is born. The book gives some period details and some facts about movie-making, but it is more an exposé of how juvenile actors were treated (no child labor laws, no mandate about schooling) than a convincing narrative. Occasional full-page pencil illustrations have a sophisticated, jazzy tone. ZS

R  Gr. 2-4. Handsome color photographs, many highly magnified, are carefully integrated with text in a book that may be of as much interest to independent readers as it is to the read-aloud audience for whom it is also appropriate. Because pussy willows have either staminate or pistillate forms, it is easy to see how reproduction takes place as Wexler goes through the life cycle and explains each stage. This is botany presented in a way that should encourage observation and perhaps even further interest in plants. ZS

C.U. Botany; Nature study


R  Gr. 9-12. The “bad boy” is A. J. Brandiosa, a good, hardworking hockey player who turns into a monster on the ice after he discovers that his best friend and teammate Tully Brown is gay. A.J.’s anger is fueled by conventional sexual fears, but perhaps stronger is his resentment of Tully’s secret: “For three years I told him everything, and he didn’t tell me this.” It’s good to see a gay-teen theme thoroughly immersed in a real plot; the hockey action provides a fast and furious background for the equally violent emotions. Tully’s lover Derek, another hockey player, is a sexy, menacing creep, and, again, it’s good to see a gay character who is less than sympathetic, sanctimonious stereotyping being the usual order of things in the YA novel. The tone is rough-and-ready, the small-town Saskatchewan setting is gritty, the resolution optimistic but sermon-free. RS

D.V. Friendship values; Tolerance


R  Gr. K-3. Adapting to the vicissitudes and delights of first grade, Joey King may prove to be as much an everychild as Beverly Cleary’s Ramona. Joey learns (at last!) to read, adjusts to the substitute for wonderful Mrs. Fulks, copes with a bully who teases him about his name, and learns to respect the social gulf (at least on the playground) between a first grader and the lofty third grade status of his brother Daniel’s circle. (Daniel is the hero of Williams’ first novel, *Baseball and Butterflies*, reviewed in the 10/90 issue.) Light, pithy, funny, with good writing style and characterization, this is enjoyable for a read-aloud audience as well as for independent readers. ZS

D.V. Adaptability; Age-mate relations


Ad  Gr. 5-8. The title is a bit melodramatic for what is a pleasant story of a young black girl’s attempts to earn herself a pair of contact lenses the summer before her tenth-grade year. Miranda is frustrated because, on one hand, her parents say there is no extra money for the lenses; at the same time, the school counselor tells Miranda that her parents earn too much money for her to qualify for the school summer jobs program. But Miranda is persistent, and

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although her money-making efforts are not always believable (what sleepaway camp would hire a junior counselor based on a fifteen minute phone interview?) they are consistently admirable. Wilson’s writing is sometimes awkward and repetitive, but Miranda’s dogged (literally, in her dogwalking business) persistence makes a strong and sympathetic focus for an engaging summer story.

R S
D.V. Persistence


R  Gr. 6-9.  In the fourth volume of a high fantasy series (BCCB 11/82, 5/85, and 7/91), the exiled dragon Princess, Shimmer, and her companions move through one episode of danger/quest/magic to another. Their ultimate goals include restoring the Inland Sea, rescuing the human boy who is an enchanted captive of the evil Boneless King, and reinstating Shimmer. The story is told by Monkey (sage and wizard) and will undoubtedly have a special appeal to buffs of the genre and to those Yep fans who have responded to the drama and suspense of the previous volumes, which were just as action-packed as this mission-accomplished volume, presumably the last in the series. ZS


R  4-6 yrs.  When a child who has never seen the sea asks his mother what it is like, she invents a day at the shore, with her son as contented protagonist. From the gray of pre-dawn, through sunshine and tidal flow and surging water, the small boy’s day is filled with creatures of shore and sea, with the pleasures of having a picnic and being warmed by the hot noonday sun after a bracing dip. For children who know the seashore, this is a nostalgia trip; for others it may be a bit static. The illustrations are very attractive realistic paintings, but there are pages—an off-scale crab, an ocean that is blue rather than green as the text describes it—that may raise questions among younger listener/viewers. ZS

D.V. Environmental concepts

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