PRODUCTION NOTE

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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

Adkins, Jan. *String: Tying It Up, Tying It Down*; written and illus. by Jan Adkins. Scribner's, 1992. ISBN 0-684-18875-9. 48p. $13.95.  M  Gr. 5-.  The strength of this book lies in its section of descriptions and illustrations that teach how to tie several nautical knots. Although the pencil and ink drawings are sometimes too crowded for complete clarity, it is possible to learn the knots from this section if one is practicing with a piece of string. Otherwise, the disorganized text includes advice for tying plywood to the roof of a car, sewing on a button, and tying a tie. Some of the large-scale drawings (like that of the car) are so busy it can be difficult to locate the letters that match the step-by-step explanations within the text. Although there are sufficient definitions for knot-tying terms, plenty of mysterious words are used that are never defined, as in the phrase “hoist the topside mate using the main or jib halyard with a winch.” Adkins’ whimsical writing style is both amusing and distracting, as in the description of the bowline knot as “the Abraham Lincoln of knots—common, useful, strong, deceptively subtle, and elegant in its simplicity.” While intermittently useful—especially for young sailors—the problems of this book are too many to untangle. KJ

C.U. Hobbies

Avi. *Blue Heron*. Bradbury, 1992. ISBN 0-02-707751-9. 186p. $14.95.  R  Gr. 6-9.  Maggie, almost thirteen, has come to spend a month with her father and his young second wife, Joanna, in a rented lakeside cottage in Massachusetts. There’s a new baby, about whom Maggie is curious but ambivalent; Joanna is insistently but persuasively friendly. The problem is Dad. Preoccupied with work, moody, oblivious to the baby, and nasty to Joanna, he insists that Maggie have a good time but does little to ensure it. Maggie finds refuge in quietly, minutely observing a blue heron that lives in a nearby swamp; to her dismay, she also finds evidence that someone plans to kill it. The conflicts are tense and intense and prevent the basically interiorized story from becoming static. As in Paula Fox’s *The Moonlight Man*, the father here shows
traces of real love for his daughter that make his eventual betrayal all the more convincing and disturbing. A man with a few sad secrets, he is viewed through the insistent lense of Maggie’s perceptions. Joanna is a complicated, though always sympathetic, character; Maggie is lucky to have her, a fortune not extended to Maggie’s father, who, it may be, loses both women in the end. Honest and understated, this is a fine complement to Avi’s adventure stories, and an equally fine compliment to his craft. RS

D.V. Father-daughter relations; Stepparent-child relations


R Gr. 4-7. Color photographs add to the appeal of a book that will lure the spacestruck; the pictures are placed carefully in relation to the text, so that the absence of captions creates no problem. While unduly fictionalized (with exclamatory comments adding little), the text does give a full picture of what happens to a group of campers each day of their stay at the Huntsville, Alabama, Space Camp, and of how the camp is organized and (magnificently) equipped. What readers may miss is information on how campers become eligible to participate. Still, it’s a handsome book, and it provides facts not available in other space books published for young readers. ZS

C.U. Science


R Gr. 2-4. For fifteen years, Jacques d’Amboise and his National Dance Institute have worked with kids in New York public schools, giving dance classes throughout the year and building up to the Event of the Year, the performance where all the students (and adult dancers as needed) join together. This photo-essay follows d’Amboise through a year, starting with the selection of student dancers (the text always calls them “dancers,” never “kids”) not on the basis of their previous experience but their “desire to sweat like a professional.” The text then follows, month by month, preparation for the performance of *Chakra: A Celebration of India*; as both regular dancers and the particularly talented “SWAT team” (“It’s like the police have specialists, we have specialists,” says d’Amboise) rehearse, d’Amboise takes a research trip to India, and scenery and costumes begin to take shape. The pictures contain as much action as still photographs can: Jacques and the dancers with open mouths and flying feet, or the SWAT team with intense absorption on every young face. The design is distracting, however, with photos backgrounded by angled colored shapes (that emphasize the unevenness of the lighting in some pictures), and little color cutouts dribbling across the white space; the typeface is artistic at the expense of readability. The actual performance photographs are impressively displayed, with pictures and white text on black pages recreating the dark of the theater to dramatic effect. D’Amboise’s warmth and vitality come across more vividly in the Oscar-winning documentary *He Makes Me Feel Like Dancing*, but this is a good print chronicle of an unusual program, and one that succeeds in
conveying the pleasure of shared experience in a big production. A note on the history of the National Dance Institute is included. DS
C.U. Dance


R  Gr. 5-9. With commendable patience and optimism, Bauer undertakes the nearly impossible task of dissecting the essentially intuitive writing process into planning a story, developing characters, focusing a point of view, generating dialogue, enhancing story tension, and working through revisions. Her concepts are clearly stated, but her examples suffer from a random range; one short story given in full and drawn on throughout the book would have been more effective than frequently improvised scenarios or brief references to her own and others' books. However, the tone is accessible and the seasoned advice valuable, especially in relating succinct precepts to the child's level of experience: "I think of my main character's problem as a rope stretching from the beginning of the story to the end. I never drop the rope, nor do I hang things from it like a clothesline. Rather, I try to weave every part of the story in with it." Bauer is also honest about both problems ("You probably can't get it published anywhere") and possibilities ("There are many reasons for writing that have nothing to do with being published"). BH
C.U. Writing


Ad  Gr. 5-7. Eleven-year-old Emma finally wrests from her parents the pony they had promised her, and the result is nothing but disaster. She's too young and undisciplined to handle Freckles, a lively and stubborn pony, and after several disasters Freckles is returned to his original owner. Freckles then ends up in the hands of a riding stable where he is treated cruelly, and a pining Emma and her friends steal and hide him, hoping eventually to buy him back. Although the writing is smooth, there's not much characterization; the evil people, especially the riding-stable owner, are melodramatic villains, with the stable being a Dickensian place seemingly designed expressly for punishment of unloved children and animals. There's an appealing realism, however, in Emma's desperate obsession with the well-being of all animals, including the pony for which she's obviously not ready (and that's a nicely original touch in a horse story). Kids may be confused by abrupt Americanizations in an obviously British book (amid gymkhanas, Pony Clubbing, and hedgerows, mentions of dollars and the American Horse Show Association sound odd), but they will love the melodrama and the animal saga. DS
D.V. Animals, love for


R  Gr. 5-12. Rigorously documented, this is a sobering overview of the lives of New York City children who are homeless, and staying in squalid hotels, huge city barracks-style shelters, or—rarely—in small shelters run by
private nonprofit agencies. Chapters cover the economic climate that leads to homelessness, the kinds of shelter available, the impediments to health and education posed by homelessness, and the psychological burdens placed on children who don’t have their own places to live. Throughout, the dismal facts are given witness by the stories of homeless children themselves, recorded by Berck, who interviewed more than thirty young people, mostly adolescents, living in hotels or shelters. These kids speak of drug dealing in the hallways, the social stigma of homelessness, the need to care for parents who have given up hope. Helped by a selection of black-and-white photographs, the book’s balance between information and anecdote is excellent, avoiding both fact-packing and sentimentality. “You have to really be there to understand it,” says twelve-year-old Shama, but these stories and statistics go a good deal of the distance.

RS

C.U. Social studies


R Gr. 5-8. Bingo’s affection for Melissa has not cooled, but he has tired of the interrogative mode and has decided instead to give advice in the form of a *Guide to Romance, A Record of the Personal Ups and Downs of Bingo Brown. Dedicated to My Brother, Jamie, as a Guide and Comfort to Him When He Finds Himself, as He Surely Will, upon the Roller Coaster of Life*. As a narrative device, this is not quite as binding as Bingo’s burning questions (BCCB 4/88), and the plot is certainly less probing. On the light side, however, Byars is consistently funny in tone and dialogue: “Fine! Great!” says Bingo’s angry mother. “Her nostrils were so flared now that Bingo thought he caught sight of her brain. ‘Then go to your room for the rest of your life.’” The agonies of adolescence, too, have a naturalistic ring, as in Melissa’s appearing “bigger than life” when she returns to town after a significant growth spurt, or Bingo’s spying on her as she picks out “Health Supplies” in the grocery store. Bingo’s baby brother is the focus of some of the best lines (“You need teeth, because teeth dam up the drool”) and action (“Jamie did not know spaghetti was to be eaten. He thought you slapped at it in a violent way and, later, when tired of the violence, swept it off the tray onto the floor”). More episodic than cohesive, this is nevertheless keen-eyed and better-written than most series titles.

BH

D.V. Boy-girl relations


Ad Gr. 5-7. Twelve-year-old Punch Wagner’s family takes a two-week vacation in North Carolina. After he learns that the coastal town where they’re staying was once Blackbeard’s home, Punch excites two other boys with the idea of digging up the pirate’s fabled buried treasure. The local boy in the trio warns Punch away from Blackbeard’s old home, now claimed to be haunted, but Punch just won’t listen. As the boys search for the treasure, they have Hardy Boys-style misadventures, plus a Fenton Hardy Dad: “You and Tom learned more about yourselves in these two weeks than most people learn in ten normal years. And you did find treasure, though maybe not the kind you were looking for.” The plot’s climax is not as scary as it seems meant to be, but the
ghost story keeps some integrity as the hauntings cannot be fully explained. Pirate-crazy boys will enjoy daydreaming their way to riches along with Punch.

KJ


M 4-7 yrs. The offbeat title and slick cover design promise a far more sophisticated book than this one actually is. The "white nineteens" are butterfly Buttercup's favorite pair of wings, and it seems that someone has stolen them. Owl saw "twooo blue eyes" but isn't otherwise helpful; the Queen (bee) suggests that Buttercup ask the Slithering Suzzies (worms); the culprit turns out to be the Cat, who stole them for the Troll to use as a pair of ear-warmer. A slight tale in any case, it is here overwhelmed by Christiana's paintings; large double spreads that juxtapose little Buttercup and big menaces such as the leaping cat and the gloomy troll. Lacking a story to support, the paintings exist mainly to call attention to themselves, inviting a scrutiny that reveals technical bravura (Buttercup perched on the brow of Owl, for example) but emotional sterility. Eyecatching, certainly; empty, unfortunately. RS


R Gr. 2-3. The (unnamed) narrator hates ballet practice: "First position. Second position. Third position. I make a face. There is only one position for me. Shortstop." Her mother insists on the dance class, and the girl and her best friend Mary Ann—likewise coerced—have made a pact not to tell anyone else on their baseball team, the Sharks. So what's with Mary Ann's getting all starry-eyed when Madame names her Queen Dandelion in the upcoming recital piece *The Dance of the Dandelions*? Mary Ann says, "I wonder if I get to wear a crown?" Sheesh. Baseball and ballet are successfully coexistent by the end of this beginning-to-read, and fans of both will find an ally in the narrator. The style has an easygoing swing, and crayon illustrations have a companionably casual lilt. RS

C.U. Reading, beginning
D.V. Sex roles


R* Gr. K-3. Stevenson's lively line and pastel ebullience are just right for an engaging first book about an intergenerational friendship. Anne meets Mrs. Simpson one day when the latter, elderly and erratic and a bit boisterous, is being taken for a walk by her wheelchair attendant. (Here, unfortunately, Stevenson's pictures contradict themselves most peculiarly, with Anne giving the old woman a cup of lemonade after spilling the pitcher on the ground.) Mrs. Simpson also turns out to be a yo-yo expert, who admits that she is pretty good. "I'm magnificent," says Mrs. Simpson, "and I know it." In a nursing home after breaking her hip, Mrs. Simpson is clearly not always in touch with reality—but Anne loves to visit her and, when she is given Mrs.
Simpson’s cat, sacrifices an object she loves (and one that’s appreciated by Mrs. Simpson) in an ending that is both funny and touching. This is a lively story and at the same time one of the best books about old age for a young child. ZS


Ad Gr. 4-6. Lucy’s the narrator, her friend Susannah is the brains of the group, and Knievel is the third member of a team of young amateur detectives. Who is setting fires at the home of Miss Quigley—and why? Is it the pushy real estate agent who’s trying to acquire the property? The grouchy neighbor? The testy middle-aged cousin Ruth, who lives with Miss Quigley? Or the new foster child, Theresa, who will be in the girls’ sixth-grade classroom next fall? There is an abundance of suspects and red herrings here, so that the suspense is maintained. However, the pace is slowed by the plethora of suspects, motives, and false clues. Only a reference to Lucy’s hair and Susannah’s participation in a Black Poetry Recitation tells the reader that this is an interracial friendship, a fact also evident in the illustrations. ZS


R Gr. 5-8. Although the writing has a plain and occasionally choppy quality, this honest account is one of the few children’s books that presents a non-Jewish German child’s view of the war (see Christine Nöstlinger’s *Fly Away Home*, BCCB 2/76, and T. Degens’ *Transport 7-41-R*, BCCB 3/75, for noteworthy fictional exceptions). In fact, the author makes no mention of anti-Semitism at all, either because she was unaware of it or because she was protected, in her natural state of childhood self-absorption, by the adults around her—as she was in the case of her grandfather’s repeated arrests for anti-Nazi activities. What she did suffer, even more than rationing or bombing, was the loss of her father, who died at the Russian front after serving in France and other combat areas. The chronological organization is not always clear-cut, but frequent section headings help orient browsers, who will also appreciate the abundant black-and-white photographs of family and wartime scenes. What commends this book are clearly remembered details of drudgery as well as drama during a time when even the relatively privileged died or survived by luck alone (a neighbor describes a couple’s fate next door to the author’s house after an Allied raid: “Rose is decapitated and Albert’s stomach is all out. My Daddy found them”). It becomes increasingly clear here that whatever their parents’ politics, in children’s lives, war is the ultimate villain. BH

C.U. History—Germany—World War II


Ad Gr. 4-6. Chapter by chapter Facklam discusses the domestication of various animals, from the expectable dogs and horses through
the more surprising silkworms and camels. In chatty, accessible language she outlines the importance (or, in one chapter, past importance) of these creatures as companions, beasts of burden, food, etc. She includes both animals selectively bred by humans (the traditional definition of domestication) and those merely used by them, which makes the definition of domestication somewhat confusing. Although she mentions animal rights concerns, they’re not explored deeply or consistently; the detailed description of battery hen farming, for instance, really needs a mention of the ethical questions involved. However, the book provides a useful overview of the way our species has adapted animals, including those that young readers may not have considered (such as ostriches and elephants), for use in our daily lives. Appearing throughout the text are black-and-white illustrations, frequently stiffly drawn and occasionally incorrect: in the horse section, for instance, the animal labeled “Appaloosa” isn’t—it’s a pinto, and the pair identified as Clydesdales look more like Belgians. DS


Ad Gr. 3-5. “Neep! Neep! Grandpa Putter honked his horn and waited for Jazz and Koo in the driveway.” Thus begins a visit alternating between the twins’ wealthy grandfather, on one side of the family, and their homespun grandmother, on the other side—and never the twain shall meet. The plot is not short on incident, but the only thematic focus is the adults’ bickering, which becomes overused to the point of contrivance in holding together disparate episodes. If the old people’s enmity becomes predictable, however, the ending is not: credibly, they don’t make up, but sound ready to launch into disagreements of more frenetic proportions when the children’s parents arrive home from Europe, “And Just in Time.” Pearson’s black-and-white drawings make light of selected scenes such as the children’s dinner at a ritzy club, their delivery of food to a homeless person, their call on a judge who raises chickens in his house, an illness, an accident, and an ill-fated excursion. Despite its two-dimensional aspect, kids will probably enjoy the sprightly details and childish behavior in adults who are supposed to know better. BH

D.V. Grandparent-child relations


R* Gr. 6-. Visually impressive, with its profusion of photographs and drawings, its clear print and wide margins, this tour de train is just as effective textually. Fisher covers an enormous amount of material in a book that is balanced, logically organized, and capably written. Occasionally there is a quiet note of humor, as when, in describing a case of transportation litigation, he says, “Farnam & Durant retained Abraham Lincoln, a reputable 47-year-old lawyer.” In discussing the early years of inventions and improvements of railroads and locomotives through applications of civil and mechanical engineering, the author makes clear the way in which each inventor (even those who make mistakes) contributes to the body of knowledge. An extensive index follows the bibliography, adding to the accessibility of a text that should appeal to a wide range of subject interests. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.; Transportation

Gr. 6-. A pair of unlikely travelers to the territory that is now North Dakota, naturalist/adventurer Prince Maximilian from Germany and artist Karl Bodmer from Switzerland settled among the Mandan Indians during the severe winter of 1833. Skillfully blending material from Maximilian’s account with background information on several Native American groups and how they were affected by white settlement during that period, Freedman has produced a readable, involving narrative with details lending great impact to descriptions. A vivid selection of Bodmer’s paintings and drawings, meticulously reproduced and captioned, illustrates the book, which has the same rare potential as David Macaulay’s architectural history books in satisfying both juvenile and adult audiences. The integrity of the research enriches the poignancy of the facts: three years after the Europeans recorded their observations of tribal life and culture, smallpox killed all but 130 of the 1600 men, women, and children who had befriended them. The bitterness of Chief Four Bears’ dying speech to his people tells more about the human cost of Western Expansion than most textbooks will ever care to admit. BH

C.U. History, U.S.; Art


Gr. 4-8. Thirteen-year-old Nick is the star pupil of his karate class, just three promotions away from receiving his black belt. In this text written by Nick’s karate teacher (although only those who look at the back flap will figure that out) and in Hausherr’s blow-by-blow photographs, readers will find a detailed log of karate training and competition, focused on Nick but including other students, male and female, as well. Basic terms and tournament scoring rules are defined within the context of the action; a history of the art is effectively woven throughout. Goedecke’s philosophy of karate as a mental and physical discipline provides a balance to the smash-crunch cliches of martial arts movies. The photos are sometimes grainy but always well-placed and informative, illustrating basic moves and positions as well as at-home vignettes of Nick and his family; a few tournament grimaces and some photos of martial arts weaponry also add excitement. The tone is entirely upbeat—does this kid ever lose?—and occasionally self-congratulatory, but both seasoned practitioners and only-hopeful karate-kas will appreciate the front row seat. A minimally useful note to parents about choosing a martial arts school is appended. RS

C.U. Recreation


Gr. K-3. Sandy Beach may be in Graham’s country, Australia, but the situation and its humorous development have a universal appeal. The narrator is a girl (nine or so, by the illustrations) who describes the family’s two-day outing at the beach, where they camp with apprehensive glances at some bikers called the Disciples of Death and at a busload of unruly children. If there

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is a moral to this laugh-a-page picture story, it's that one should keep an open
mind: the bikers are helpful and generous, and the ebullient children become
good playmates. Graham's line and wash pictures have a bright, sunny
nonchalance, plenty of action, and a comic sense that echoes the crisp throwaway
lines of the text. ZS

D.V. Family relations

40p. illus. with photographs. $12.95.
R Gr. 5-9. Alternating the stories of two former New York City
gang members, this photo-essay has a convincing immediacy in both its details
and its aims. Butch was a member of the 21 Junior Blackjacks and later, the
Crazy Homicides; Gino was part of a graffiti crew called the Kings of Graffiti.
Both are the rare success stories: Butch is now married, a father, and a member
of the Guardian Angels; Gino, after witnessing his gang beating up another boy,
left the gang and is now taking art and photography lessons. Black-and-white
photos are a little posed but give faces to the facts; the inevitably didactic text
may not keep kids out of gangs, but it will give comfort to those who refuse to
join, and it will also prove an eyeopener to more sheltered kids whose ideas of
gangs have been molded by glamorous Hollywood productions. A short reading
list is appended. RS

C.U. Social studies; Guidance

$14.95.
R Gr. 4-6. When Griffin's story of Liza and her older sister Kay
begins, readers know only that they are in Texas, that they are running away, and
that they have assumed new identities. What is hinted (broadly) is that Kay has
been abused by their stepfather but hasn't explained this to the little sister she is
protecting by removing her from danger. They camp out in an abandoned house
after riding a bus to a small town, and here they start a new life, Kay finding a
job and Liza staying home and learning how to keep house. What shouldn't
work, structurally, but does, is a fantasy element: Hobkin is a fairy who had
come over from England with an early settler, and (usually invisible) he turns a
helping hand, often saving Liza from domestic disaster, and at times from real
danger. Kay is impatient with Liza's reports of Hobkin, but most of the local
people simply take his existence for granted. Occasionally, he's been seen; at
the close of the story Kay sees him too. The author has made the two facets of
the book credible, but it's the seamless blending that is impressive; the people
and the plot are effectively interactive in this inventive tale. ZS

Harrison, Maggie. *Angels on Rollerskates;* written and illus. by Maggie
Ad Gr. K-2. Liberally illustrated with realistic pencil drawings,
this English import has six chapters, each a distinct episode about the three
children of a family in which the oldest (age seven) is called "Bigun," and his
siblings "Middlun" and "Littlun." The book's title is also the title of the last
chapter, and it refers to Middlun's drawings of angels. The simplicity of the
writing and the cozy, everyday situations of the mild plots are reminiscent of
Carolyn Haywood's stories, but here there is a bit less cohesiveness and a bit more cuteness. ZS
D.V. Family relations

Hazen, Barbara Shook. Alone at Home; illus. by Irene Trivas. Atheneum, 1992. ISBN 0-689-31691-7. 60p. $13.95. R Gr. 2-4. Amy, who has long yearned to be old enough to stay home alone without a babysitter, is delighted when the regular after-school caretaker can't come, and Mom and Dad (both work) agree that just this once, if an adult neighbor brings Amy home from school, she can be on her own. At first Amy revels in freedom; then she is perturbed because she's made a mess while preparing a parental surprise (no-bake cookies), then she feels lonely, and finally her nervousness turns to terror when she hears a strange noise. By the time Mom and Dad get back, Amy feels she's been a failure at being independent. Her parents point out that she's been brave, that she obeyed all the safety rules, and that her cookies are delicious. Illustrated with inviting ink drawings and simply told, this has enough action to hold a reader's interest, and the situation has a universal appeal. ZS D.V. Self-reliance

Henry, Joanne Landers. A Clearing in the Forest: A Story about a Real Settler Boy; illus. by Charles Robinson. Four Winds, 1992. ISBN 0-02-743671-3. [64p]. $14.95. Reviewed from galleys. Ad Gr. 3-5. Based on primary source material, this is historical fiction that has chapter/episodes rather than a continuous narrative structure. The time is 1834, the place is Indianapolis, and the protagonist is nine-year-old Elijah Fletcher (whose unpublished manuscript provides many of the incidents for the book). Elijah changes schools, has minor adventures with his brother Cooley, visits Cincinnati, and goes to a county fair, among other activities. The writing is smooth but rather flat, the characterization minimal, and the inclusion of historical information at times obtrusive; period details are, however, convincing. ZS

Herman, Charlotte. Max Malone, Superstar; illus. by Cat Bowman Smith. Holt, 1992. ISBN 0-8050-1375-X. 68p. (Redfeather Books). $14.95. Ad Gr. 2-4. Max and his pals, Gordy and Austin Healy, try to break into the TV commercial biz. Although Max gets annoyed with his sister Rosalie's suggestions for his audition, as Austin's manager, Max follows Rosalie's model in coaching Austin. Max's chutzpah in becoming a manager provides the humor, and Max's unsolicited advice to Austin provides the conflict, but the writing is sometimes choppy and the action overexplained. While not as funny and fresh as Herman's other stories about Max (Max Malone and the Great Cereal Rip-Off and Max Malone Makes a Million, reviewed last June) series followers probably won't mind much. Let's hope Max can get into more trouble in the next book. KJ
C.U. Reading, easy

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R Gr. 2-4. Mike and his fourth-grade classmates feel that the class honor is at stake: their very nice teacher, Ms. Parker, has confessed that she can’t play baseball, and the annual game between the teachers and the sixth grade is looming. Some of the best players organize a coaching squad, and their rookie, Ms. Parker, works hard and cheerfully in a series of very funny (but never slapstick) sessions that readers should find enjoyable. Mike suffers from ambivalence, having been urged by his parents to coach a sixth grade sister. In her first children’s book, the author has written a story with good pace, warm family relationships, a plug for reading (Mike moves from able-but-reluctant to engaged reader), and an ending that should please everybody without straining credulity. ZS

D.V. Family relations; Teacher-student relations


R Gr. 5-8. At the conclusion to The Street Dancers (BCCB 7/91), Fitzi had convinced her parents that their decision to be performers was not her own. An audition for a Broadway show, however, is apparently much more pleasant than one for a soap opera, and in this sequel, Fitzi joins her grandfather and parents by landing a part in the huge new musical in town. She loves her modest chorus role with its solo dance, and she’s pretty fond of Mark, the handsome teenage lead. As understudy, Fitzi learns the star’s role, but she’s not worried about having to play it—not with competitive Tiffany in the part. When Tiffany inevitably disappears, the story takes on a darker tone during the police investigation, but the show goes on. Many of the show business elements are suggestive of Streatfeild’s fifty-year-old Ballet Shoes and Theatre Shoes, including the self-centered Tiffany, Fitzi as reluctant understudy, and the daily life in a family of performers. Tiffany’s kidnapping gives a contemporary
slant, but there’s a good old Broadway happy ending. Stage-struck readers who loved the Shoes books will like the fresh new Fitzi stories. KJ


R Gr. 3-5. The format (44 pages of text and 3 of historical notes) does not vary in a simply written series of historical novels for the middle grades; the illustrations are correct in period details but pedestrian in caliber. In Two Chimneys, the feisty daughter of English immigrants tells of the events of 1628 in Jamestown, where she chose to stay despite the vicissitudes of hard labor and hot summers. Elsy, middle child of a slave family, is the narrator of a poignant tale of separation and mistreatment in See You in Heaven, set in 1836. Dear Dad is set between 1942-1945, the story of a Jewish family in Florida to which Dad returns when the war ends. Holmes creates believable characters and, throughout the “History’s Children” series, a real sense of the impact of incidents that are not historically significant in themselves but that shape the lives of everyday people in momentous times. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.


Ad Gr. K-3. In her first book for children, artist Jenkins presents such concepts as individual (and differing) reactions to colors, the use of colors in language (seeing red, feeling blue) and the range of hues for each color. To a limited extent, she succeeds, since a line of color-daubs (for example, rose red, flame red, strawberry red, crimson red, scarlet red, etc.) atop each spread affirms the existence of variations. Unfortunately, either the labelling or the color registration has led to some odd results (the so-called “royal blue” is actually purple), and the use of invented distinctions (“bruise blue,” “lobster pink,” “booger green”) may add to the confusion. Still, the combination of visually attractive colors and the message closing the double-page spread on black (“I am black and Simon is white. But we’re all the same inside”) make the book appealing. ZS


Ad Gr. 7-10. Terry, an English girl of seventeen, realizes that she is pregnant and, since she was in a dark room while drink-fuzzy at a party, doesn’t know who the father is. She is ambivalent about whether to keep the baby or give it up for adoption, finally deciding on the latter. The story is in the form of a journal intended for the baby to read at some later date, and some of the entries are unconvincingly long; while Terry’s ambivalence and the attitudes of her friends and family are believable, the text seems overextended. Characterization is adequate and dialogue is smooth and realistic. ZS

R Gr. 7-12. Promotional copy accompanying the galley claims for the book an affinity with Stephen King and V. C. Andrews ("in language and detail appropriate for young adults"—somebody at Walker needs to get out more often): while the Andrews analogy doesn’t hold, there are certainly ties with King’s books, particularly *The Shining*. And, at least for the first third, Kelleher’s book rivals, even better, much adult pulp horror for sheer scariness. *Del-Del* is the bleak and creepy persona assumed by seven-year-old Sam on the occasion of the anniversary of his sister Laura’s death. Sam’s grandmother believes he is possessed by the devil, and a kind of exorcism seems to turn the trick, but the second third of the book reveals that *Del-Del*, apparently unexorcised, is actually an alien refugee from a distant planet. It seems a bit lame, but as the last third shows, rightly so, as Kelleher reveals that both manifestations of *Del-Del* were the desperate psychotic attempts of a gifted little boy to hide from the reality of his sister’s death. The story is told by Sam’s other sister Beth, and the family tensions are fraught and well-wrought. Surely paced and pretty spooky, Kelleher’s book even has an advantage over King’s and Andrews’ sagas: it’s shorter. RS

D.V. Death, adjustment to


R 3-6 yrs. Bright, cheerful gouache and pencil pictures show an African-American father and daughter making all the preparations for what is obviously going to be a surprise birthday celebration for Mom. The read-aloud audience is given several clues about what’s going on, as Yvette and Dad shop for presents and flowers, make and frost a cake (companionsly licking the bowl), and thriftily use decorations saved from the Fourth of July. No sex-role stereotypes here, with Dad happily assuming his share of housework. There is a warm family feeling, a bit of suspense, and a nice little switch: Yvette has repeatedly asked “Is it time yet?” and been told “Not yet, Yvette,” but it’s Dad who asks, as Mom approaches the front door, “Is it time yet, Yvette?” ZS

D.V. Father-daughter relations


Ad Gr. 5-7. The Daffodils are a school softball team, and eleven-year-old Nicki expects to be elected captain this year, having led the team to a championship the previous year. A new girl (sophisticated, bra-wearing, rule-flouting, instantly popular) is chosen captain; Nicky has to overcome her jealousy and try to salvage what she sees as a deteriorating group, with both the level of play and personal relationships becoming worse. Readers who expect a sports story (player with bat on cover) may be disappointed; this is really less about softball than about the uneasy stage where some girls are happy to play with dolls and others are ready to play with boys. Since many in the book’s potential audience will be concerned with both, the story has the undeniable appeal of problems and situation with which readers can identify; however,
characterization is of variable depth and the pace of the book is uneven. This should be useful, however, as fare for reluctant readers. ZS

C.U. Reading, reluctant

D.V. Age-mate relations


Ad Gr. 2-5. Tailored to St. Patrick's Day reading, this focuses on the friendship between an Irish farmgirl and a 174-year-old leprechaun, P. V. W. R. H. O'Reilly, whom Brigid spots on her eighth birthday. The plot is more low-key than usual for King-Smith, whose *Foxbusters* (BCCB 10/88) and other novels have injected sharp wit into children's fiction about anthropomorphized animals. Occasionally slow-paced but easy to read and attuned to a child's perspective, this features episodes with various barnyard creatures, a climactic encounter with a fox, and a sad parting that entails one happy aspect—successful treasure-hunting—which children will relish. A touch stereotyped ("A pipe and a nice drop, and you have a happy lep"), and missing King-Smith's idiosyncratic dash, this nevertheless makes cozy holiday reading. Occasional pen-and-ink hatch drawings vary the format and hold special appeal for fans of the currently marketed, rubbery troll toys that O'Reilly so strongly resembles . . . in his own green-skinned, red-haired way. BH


Ad Gr. 2-4. Scratchy cartoonish ink drawings illustrate a rather patterned but pleasantly humorous story for independent readers in the primary grades. Ben, who considers his cousin Markie a weird character, is not enthralled when he hears his mother speaking on the telephone. "Sure, we'd be glad to have Markie for the weekend. I know Ben would——" His younger cousin, pesky and precocious? The outcome is predictable: Some getting into trouble, some achievements on Markie's part, some too-cute scenes with Ben's baby sister. Italicized passages of Ben's daydreams interrupt rather than link or reinforce the sporadic action of the plot, and the characterization is barely rounded, but readers will probably enjoy the humor and action of the author's first book. ZS

C.U. Reading, easy


R Gr. 2-3. Mary Marony is not happy about starting second grade in a new school, and the reason becomes apparent when the teacher calls on each pupil to "stand up, say your name, and tell us one thing about yourself." Mary stutters out her name and her favorite subject, "muh-muh-math": "Why did one of her favorite things have to be an M word?" Inevitably, there is a class pest who picks on Mary's stutter; it is also predictable (but satisfying) that Mary gets revenge, makes friends, starts speech therapy, and saves the day when a garter snake escapes from the terrarium. You-are-here classroom dramas have great appeal for those just mastering reading, and any child who's been teased
(that is, any child) will enjoy Mary’s triumph. Kline’s style is easy and conversational; Sim’s pencil illustrations show both humor and empathy. RS

C.U. Reading easy
D.V. School, adjustment to
Krasilovsky, Phyllis. The Man Who Was Too Lazy to Fix Things; illus. by John Emil Cymerman. Tambourine, 1992. Library ed. ISBN 0-688-10395-2; Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-10394-4. 32p. Library ed. $14.93; Trade ed. $15.00. Ad 5-8 yrs. In a story that should appeal to the young audience’s taste for disaster humor, Krasilovsky introduces a young bachelor who prefers rocking and reading to repairing his property and possessions the hard way. As the pictures (bright, breezy, cluttered, exaggerated) show, everything is done in slapdash fashion: cardboard instead of a new pane when a window breaks, gum instead of cement to patch a sidewalk, shoe polish instead of paint to cover a scratch in a door. When his family comes to visit, he directs—but does not take part in—a full-scale rehabilitation program. The running gag is stretched, and while the situation has humor, it has little plot development and ends with the man being given a birthday cake in the form of a house . . . which his cat immediately knocks over and ruins. ZS

Kuskin, Karla. Soap Soup; written and illus. by Karla Kuskin. HarperCollins, 1992. Library ed. ISBN 0-06-023572-1; Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-023571-3. 64p. (I Can Read Books). Library ed. $12.89; Trade ed. $13.00. R Gr. 1-3. With a slightly more advanced reading level than her previous Something Sleeping in the Hall (BCCB 11/85), Kuskin’s new collection of I Can Read poetry, at its best, uses short words and simple reversals that are both surprising and fun to read aloud. “In winter there is too much ice./ In summer/ ice is very nice.” While some of the selections are a little bland (“Isn’t it queer/ that an ear/ can hear?”) others have a deceptive naivete that recalls Stevie Smith (“I am very fond of you/ but/ I get tired of you too”). The many watercolor illustrations are closely cued to the poems, giving a figurative expression to the verbal imagery that will be helpful to beginning readers (as well as often spooky-funny in their own right—“There is a me inside of me,” for example). With most rhymes providing some version of a poetic punchline at the end, struggling decoders will quickly learn that reading provides its own rewards. RS C.U. Reading, beginning

Laird, Elizabeth. Kiss the Dust. Dutton, 1992. ISBN 0-525-44893-4. 281p. $15.00. R Gr. 5-8. In this exciting, behind-the-headlines story, Tara and her family are Kurds living in the Iraqi city of Sulaimaniya. It’s 1984, and Iraq is engaged in war with Iran while at the same time battling Kurdish insurgency. As Tara’s father’s involvement with the pesh murga (Kurdish fighters) becomes apparent to the government, the family is forced to leave their comfortable life in the city and go to the Kurdish-controlled mountains, the first step in a long journey to safety. Excepting an occasionally romanticized note, the novel easily incorporates cultural and political details within the fiction, and dots of everyday realism, often provided by Tara’s baby sister Hero, balance the drama. Fast-
paced and easy to read, the story has a number of booktalkable episodes, such as
the scene where Tara's family crosses a treacherous mountain range to reach the
(relative) safety of Iran. The author's brief afterword describes the terrible recent
history of the Kurds; the novel itself charges the facts with human interest. RS
C.U. Social studies

Lankford, Mary D. *Hopscotch Around the World*; illus. by Karen Milone.
R Gr. 3-5. Librarians couldn't ask for a more multicultural
approach than Lankford has featured in her survey of a pastime as popular with
the ancient Romans as it is with contemporary Texans. After a brief
introduction to the game's surprising history, the text comprises nineteen double
spreads that are each dedicated to the description and instructions for a variant of
the game, with a diagram and children depicted playing it. The organization is
alphabetical, including Aruba, Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, El Salvador, France,
Germany, Great Britain, Honduras, India, Italy, Nigeria, People's Republic of
China, Poland, Trinidad, USSR, and U. S. (Alaskan, Potsy, Texan). Milone's
friendly watercolors start with a map and proceed to scenes that suggest landscape
settings for the game as well as ethnic diversity among the players. An
annotated bibliography attests to the meticulous research supporting this playful
piece of folklore, which will give children a jump (sorry) on their playground
peers. BH
C.U. Recreation

R Gr. 4-6. Although the story's central premise involves a baby
who falls from the stars in response to a wish, more of a miracle is the fact that
such a whimsical conceit is developed without recourse to fey sentimentality.
Allie, turning "nine on the ninth day of the ninth month," wishes on a falling
star, per her grandfather's advice, for a baby sister. The star turns into a
bouncing baby, lighter than air, whom the family names Sammy (alas, it's a
boy) and of whom Allie quickly becomes jealous. While the tone is breezily
charming, ballast is added by Allie's grumpiness, and by her father's tart
bemusement: "We are not keeping this—this—little chunk of matter that fell
through the earth's atmosphere." Allie's friends, too, are a realistic lot whose
fascination with the Star Baby overwhelms their appreciation of Allie's birthday
party. "Hilary ran into the house screaming, 'Where is he?' at the top of her
lungs. Hilary never screamed or shouted. She was quiet and shy. We always
made her play the dead person when we put on plays." Pencil-and-charcoal
illustrations have a rounded retro flavor that enhances the flaky-fable tone. This
may be a little too cute for some people, but those who can manage it without
winking will find the book an offbeat selection for reading aloud. RS
C.U. Reading aloud
D.V. Baby, adjustment to

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R 5-8 yrs. The old man who drives his mule-drawn wagon into The Gap every Indian summer sells, along with practical odds and ends, "magic jars with mysterious labels—Sundrops, Snowrays, Moonbows, Rainflakes, and Whistling Wind." The village kids treasure these until a newcomer pries one open and declares that there's nothing inside. "Maybe you got a bad jar," says Mr. Bones, but the audience is disillusioned. Only after Mr. B. empties his last jar of moonbows into the creek does a curve of eerie light arch over the mountain waterfall and make believers of them all. A brief note explains that "the moonbow is an actual natural phenomenon that appears under certain weather conditions at Cumberland Falls, Kentucky," but Lewis has made a good story of it. Zimmer reinforces the legendary tone with a rustic setting and homespun characters; sharp pen-and-ink hatch patterns the lush-green watercolor illustrations, their pictorial frames ingeniously varied with insets and overlays. Even story-hour skeptics may fall for this one. BH


R Gr. 6-9. While the title is a play on soaps, this book is a suds-free realistic fantasy, distant kin to Freaky Friday. Garet writes the story as an assigned autobiography for her seventh-grade English class, but although her teacher may believe that her "troubles began in July, when I got my twin sister, Daisy," no one will believe that Daisy appeared suddenly out of nowhere. Daisy actually came down the laundry chute, whose slogan exhorts "Be fifty years ahead of your time"—which is what Daisy is. In fact, the maddeningly prissy and manipulative Daisy seems to be Garet's grandmother at the age of twelve, which makes things rather awkward since Garet's sole surviving relative, with whom she lives, is the same grandmother at sixty-two; as if that revelation weren't enough, it becomes clear that Garet herself is another version of her "grandmother," who had been pushed down the laundry chute at the age of two. This takes a different slant than time travel stories usually do: the girls aren't supposed to go back to the old time. The humor is astringent and domestic, and there's an offhand championing of environment and self-determination over heredity that justifies the differences between the three "versions" of the same person. The school-assignment framework is a bit mannered, but the relationship between Garet and the enigmatic Daisy makes the book readable to the light-hearted end; throughout, it's a funny and interestingly offbeat story. DS

D.V. Grandmother-child relations; Self-acceptance; Sisters


R Gr. 7-12. Ernest Hemingway may have yielded his hero status to more contemporary figures, but there will be Hemingway assignments and Hemingway followers for some time; this biography will be a useful resource for both fans and report writers. The author traces Hemingway's turbulent life,
including his journalistic work in and outside of wars, his four marriages, and his writing. Lyttle keeps a particularly close eye on the variance between the life and the legend, noting Hemingway's alteration of the facts in aid of his "tough guy" image, although the absence of notes leaves readers to wonder whether even more fabrication slipped by unnoticed. There's not much analysis of the Nobel prize-winner's relationships or even much description of his writing, so the book is a chronicle of his life rather than a portrait of his character, but it's a competent and readable chronicle nonetheless. Numerous black-and-white photographs, bibliography and an index are included. DS

C.U. American literature


R Gr. 4-6. This collection of nine short stories (culled from four of Mahy's previous collections) finds the author in a mixed mode, agreeably companioning the goofy zest of her fiction for younger children with the lyricism of novels such as The Changeover. Some of the tales—involving nature spirits, talking plants, a baby dragon—are pure fantasy; others, such as the one about a little boy who makes a mud pudding for a tree, are cozily realistic. "The Good Wizard of the Forest" is a gentle, Oscar Wilde-ish blending of the natural and magical worlds, a theme Mahy pursues throughout all the stories. While an arch note pipes up here and there, the collection provides funny dialogue, luscious descriptions (matched by Hughes' ink sketches), a generous ecological lesson, and fair evidence of Mahy's abundant imagination. RS

D.V. Ecological awareness


Ad Gr. 5-8. From grubs and caverns to tunnels and pipelines, the subterranean world is a very active one. In his slim volume, McFall wastes no words while describing underground phenomena—both natural and man-made. Interesting facts about mining, the water table, geysers, and places where the U.S. government keeps its oil reserve are included. Although there are ample black-and-white photographs, drawings, and maps, no depths are given for underground objects, nor is there a cut-away illustration of subterranean layers to explain visually how everything fits below the surface. McFall's terse style becomes deficient when he devotes only two pages to hazardous and nuclear waste and dismisses those issues with the concluding sentence: "The completion of this task [getting rid of waste] will have to be carried out by future generations." Despite its flaws, America Underground is a competent survey of a deep subject. KJ

C.U. Science

The clue here is purple alligators and mauve fish, and the tone is tall: in Bayou Capateaux, say the two fishermen to young Hugh Thomas, they once caught a wild turkey weighing five hundred pounds, were chased by a cottonmouth with legs, fought off an attack by giant mosquitoes, and found a Spanish lantern from 1542—still burning. But that’s nothing like what happens to Hugh after the two men leave. If listeners don’t quite believe the million fish that Hugh catches, and the fate of all but three, they’ll be all the wiser to yarns and how to spin them. The play between fantasy and reality is neatly handled, with action following exaggeration in an ambiguous way that leaves the ending open as to who’s telling the truth and who believes what. The African-American characters and swamp setting swirl across the pages in thick, rounded strokes of brazen-hued paint, well-matched with the story’s brassy flash.


Illustrator Brusca gives the Old West a historically appropriate multicultural tilt here, picturing the cowboys as a mixed bag of whites, Hispanics, and African Americans. The “educated greenhorn” who tames the fabled Zebra Dun is black; the horse itself is striped and bronzy-yellow. Medearis’s adaptation of the cowboy lyric is sometimes thumpy but has a Western twang, and the music is provided on the endpapers (although you might have some trouble matching all the syllables to the given notes). The tone is broad but pointed by Brusca’s watercolor illustrations, which are spiky and kinetic, colored with an unlikely light that adds to the fabulated flavor. A historical note is appended, and while the adaptor states that she found the song in a “book of cowboy songs,” she doesn’t supply the title.


The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse have nothing on Dale, on the farm, and Leda, in the city. “They really hate each other.” These two kids envy just about everything about each other, so they meet one day for a fight. “Leda goes first. OAF.” The battle revs up quickly (“DIMWIT, KLUTZ”), with Small’s shifting, delightfully surreal landscapes providing the fighting ground, as well as grounding for the metaphors. Shoulder-deep in a river, for example, the two exchange appropriately aquatic epithets: “Dale flounders. FLUKE. Leda fishes around for a retort. SMELT.” And in the end the two, exhausted, shake hands and agree to “meet halfway again soon.” The elegantly lined watercolors are a crisp complement to this wacky vocabulary lesson, which shouts for audience participation.

R Gr. 4-6. With his family recently emigrated from Shanghai to Seattle, Yang's father thinks his children could be (should be) a first-class string quartet. While Eldest Brother (first violin), Second Sister (viola), and Third Sister ('cello) love music, Yingtao, the youngest, is tone deaf and his playing of the second violin part clearly demonstrates the fact. Too bad his father doesn’t approve of baseball—that's where Yingtao's true talent lies. His best friend Matthew's father is a baseball coach . . . but Matthew prefers the violin. Although a bit too patterned, this story of mix-matched family expectations and the powers of best-friendship has a lively first-person perspective on being the new kid in a new culture. Yingtao learns not to stand when a teacher enters the room (alas); Matthew learns to use chopsticks. While many of the cultural exchanges are on a fairly superficial level, the book has a sobering side, deftly introducing the racism Yingtao's mother faces at the supermarket, the repeated failure of Matthew's father to remember Yingtao's name, and the tight situation Matthew's family is facing since his father has been laid off. The general tone is light, though, and the reading easy. RS

D.V. Intercultural understanding


R 5-8 yrs. "In the whole world, Grand Ma Mere loved two things best: Pierre, and her wonderful tulips. . . . As for Pierre . . . well, Pierre loved to play tricks." Set in a magnificent Paris mansion, this is an arch-sophisticated trickster tale in which young Pierre, despite the family's wealthy breeding, pursues a boys-will-be-boys course of obnoxious, non-stop practical jokes. It's not till he tries to fool proper-looking Grand Ma Mere with a black tulip amidst her beds of red that he meets his match and gets a grand comeuppance from all the servants he has plagued each summer. Veteran storyteller O'Callahan knows his trade, and Santini capitalizes on fashionable 1920s attire with chic pen lines and elegantly modulated watercolors. Both paintings and text are haute style, but young listeners will relish Pierre's brattiness and relate, despite the upstairs-upstairs atmosphere, to a finale in which love is tempered with mutual respect between mischief-maker and peacemaker. BH

D.V. Grandmother-child relations


R 5-8 yrs. A more abstract story than Rodanas' Zuni tale, reviewed below, this Navajo myth describes First Woman's attempt to write laws by carefully patterning stars in the sky. Coyote comes along and offers to help but then, impatient to be finished, throws all the stars up at once, resulting in the chaos and confusion with which we must live. The adaptation is spare, with details shorn away for a primal effect. A note attributes the legend to a turn-of-the-century medicine man, Hosteen Klah, though no textual source is given for purposes of comparison. (Is the first phrase—"When the pulse of first
day carried it to the rim of night”—a ritualistic opening or contemporary poetic fancy?) Desimini’s paintings maintain a surrealistic distance, with simply focused compositions, dark colors, and smoothly sculpted shapes. Combined, the artistic and narrative images make a striking introduction to the constellation of Native American creation myths. BH


Ad Gr. 1-3. A frog named Winston narrates his history, beginning with his capture from a pond to his life at the zoo. The dry text, written for early readers, presents Winston’s story seriously. The cartoon-like illustrations display a wit that the text does not—a zookeeper hops high into the air to throw a net over Winston, Winston tries to impress a scientist with the length of his legs, a dejected Winston slumps in the holding tank, and Winston gnaws on a cigar-shaped worm. The narrative could serve as zoo propaganda, since Winston gradually comes to accept his role as a zoo-display as though he is fulfilling his civic duty (“Winston—Working Frog”). He contents himself by watching the “new faces, new hats, new coats” and is proud that he has “not missed one day of work.” This book contains a lot of information about bullfrogs and zoos, mixed in with an undeniable lesson of conformity. KJ

C. U. Nature study


R Gr. 5-8 In a sequel to *The Sky Is Falling* (BCCB 6/90) Pearson continues the story of Norah—now thirteen—and her younger brother Gavin, who have become thoroughly at home after three years as “war guests” of a large, extended Canadian family. They cannot go back to England until the war is over (it’s now 1943) and life with the Ogilvies seems more real than England, anyway. This is the story of an island summer and of Norah’s romantic love for one of the older cousins, Andrew. Andrew is being pressured by his patriotic family to enlist while the fighting still goes on—but he confides in Norah his misery at the prospect of killing someone. As she does with other facets of the story, Pearson keeps the concept of pacifism in perspective; like Norah’s adoration, it is treated with dignity but never overwhelms the narrative flow. This balanced and perceptive approach also governs the characterization; the story is a worthy successor to the winner of the Canadian Library Association’s Book of the Year Award for Children. ZS

D. V. Adaptability; Brothers-sisters


R Gr. 1-3. Dragon (blue and bulbous) finds Cat (fat, gray and frozen) in his snowy yard one day, and a friendship—among other things—is born. Dragon tries to take good care of Cat, and even his mistakes stem from affection; feeding Cat ice cream and catsup, for example. Pilkey’s text is simple and straight-ahead; most of the humor is delivered visually in the luridly colored,
loony but loving illustrations. Both Dragon’s tender stewardship and his mistakes (trying to put Cat on the toilet!) are childlike; kids will want to take both creatures home with them. RS

C.U. Reading, beginning
D.V. Pets, care of


R 5-8 yrs. The father of the Duncan family had talked to Serena Katz on the telephone (she was one of his best customers for housepaint) but had not met her until she invited them to visit her in New York City. In an amicably improbable story, the Duncans hear Mitty-like hero tales about Serena: one says she’s a great pool player, another neighbor of the Duncan clan recognizes the name as a famous motorcyclist, a third wonders if it’s the same Serena Katz who is a great magician. The visit is made, the friendship is sealed, and Serena promises to come to Elmsville to visit in turn—and she does, deftly landing her hot air balloon in the Duncans’ yard. The youngest set will enjoy the exaggeration, the nonsense, and the action in the story of a bespectacled, hair-in-a-bun living legend, brought to life with lightly-hatched watercolor cartoons. ZS


R Gr. 2-4. Ten friendly stories about the Rabinowitz family feature Abigail, the narrator; Sam, her brother; Dad, a cab driver; Mom, an ex-cab driver turned painter; and their small dog Benton, “brave and well behaved.” Except for Benton, this is a conversational family, with Abigail retelling tales their father has narrated about his fares—a famous actress, a wealthy boy taking his goose to show-and-tell, a television producer who uses the children in a show, a little girl on her way “to get chicken pox,” a man masquerading with a donkey head. Mom spins pretty good yams, too, and both kids seem to have inherited the talent. Porte’s own storytelling is varied and inventive; if there’s any weakness, it’s in the occasional anticlimactic ending (“Chicken Pox,” Parts I and II, for instance). Overall, though, the humorous tone and easy text project the same warm quality that has attracted beginning readers to her Harry series. Abolafia’s black-and-white cartoons have a tongue-in-cheek dash that polishes many a verbal scenario with comic visual effects. BH


M Gr. 4-7. Although this sports bio of an important African American tennis pro begins with a teasing, “can-she-do-it?” chapter about Garrison’s 1990 Wimbledon Final against all-time champ Martina Navratilova, it’s not until the last chapter that we learn, barely, that Garrison lost the match. There’s lots of hype here, lots of sports page prose, but curiously little information about the game of tennis itself or Garrison’s style of play, which is simply described as “fast.” The sports history is weak as well: while Althea Gibson is twice pictured, she’s never mentioned in the text; and while the book correctly states that the United States Tennis Association did not admit black
players, it does not state that, much less when, this policy changed. The book
is better on Garrison's personal life, her bulimia, struggles with her mother's
death, playing temperament, and claim to powers of clairvoyance. There are no
sources or index; photos are carelessly placed but include some good action
shots.  RS
C.U. Physical education

R  Gr. 8-12.  The question of the title is given a lovely coup de
grace on the last page; in between is a funny and tender tale of an unlikely
friendship.  Biff, eighteen, is a slightly nerdy pinball fan whose best friend is a
ninth-grader and who has never had a date; Heidi is a tough-talking fourteen-year-
old who meets Biff while visiting her aunt, Biff's big sister's best friend.  Heidi
pushes Biff around, making him drive her to the store and buy her cigarettes;
blithely, she also apparently informs the beautiful Tommie that Biff has a secret
 crush on her.  And he does—so why is this obnoxious Heidi making his life so
pleasantly complicated?  As in many YA novels, the adults here are ineffectually
ephemeral, leaving Biff and Heidi plenty of room to sort things out for
themselves.  Fans of Ron Koertge (*The Arizona Kid*, etc.) will feel at home with
this pair, whose sparring is innocent, exasperating, and ultimately rewarded with
the promise of romance.  RS
D.V.  Boy-girl relations

Poynter, Margaret.  *The Uncertain Journey: Stories of Illegal Aliens in El
photographs.  $14.95.
Ad  Gr. 7-12.  *El Norte* is the United States, and as Poynter states in
her introduction to these twelve personal narratives of illegal immigrants, "*El
Norte* represents their only hope of survival.  They must work or their families
will starve."  What Poynter does not say, nor is it indicated in any of the case
histories, is that many immigrants come and they and their families starve
anyway.  Each of the chapters is a success story, sometimes a qualified one,
ending with a where-are-they-now postscript:  "Despite the fact that each man is
sending $150 a month to his family in Guatemala, business is so good that they
have saved almost enough money to buy another truck and set up shop at
another street corner."  There's a bleaker story at the core of the problem of
illegal immigration, but Poynter has not gotten at it.  This is not to say that she
scants hard facts: all of the people profiled here (mostly from Mexico and
Central America, two from the Caribbean) had difficult, dangerous journeys, and
many have been sent back to their countries, only to return again.  While in its
entirety the book gets repetitive, the individual escape stories are authentically
sad and scary, and some have the suspense of adventure fiction.  They could be
fiction:—although there are photos of some of the subjects, Poynter does not
indicate where or how she got her material (and one reference to immigrants
working in "the stockyards of Chicago" is out-of-date; there are no stockyards in
Chicago).  Like Brent Ashabranner's *The New Americans: Changing Patters in
U.S. Immigration and Into a Strange Land* (BCCB 9/87), however, this is a
personalizing perspective on an important dilemma.  RS
C.U.  Social studies

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M  Gr. 3-5.  The Darlings, "(for that is what everyone called them, and so they thought it was their proper name)," are a family of dolls who live in a posh London toy shop, and Mrs. Darling's greatest fear is that they will be bought by a Serious Collector. "Serious Collector" did not sound like someone who would truly play with them. For dolls cannot truly come alive, cannot have adventures or birthday parties or a cosy evening meal round the dining table unless a child plays with them." The absence of a child, however, does nothing to keep the little Darlings from enjoying these very things, and the book consistently suffers from an inconsistent fantasy matrix. In any event, the family is purchased by what appears to be a Serious Collector whom the dolls call The American Lady (and nickname "Tally") and taken to America where they undergo a series of small dramas that will be familiar to genre fans. Aside from some talk among the dolls that sounds suspiciously like recovery jargon ("Emma, Emma, my dear, remember that each of us has his own needs and you do not control everything") the story has a dated, sentimental tone that is not helped by a surfeit of author asides ("And now you probably think this is the happy ending. But if you've been looking at this book carefully, you'll know there are more pages and the story isn't finished at all"). The closing revelation that the American Lady is actually the author would be self-congratulatory if only one could figure out for what. RS


R  Gr. 6-9.  Possibly because A—the author doesn't try to be too cute or too funny, B—there's a good balance of other aspects of Gilly's life, and C—the voice (and angst and self-preoccupation) seems truly that of a young teenager, this story sustains interest despite the strictures of the format. Gilly is thirteen (later fourteen) and suffering a familiar gamut of woes: the inadequacies of her appearance, the hostility of an older sister, the temporary rift in a best-friendship, the worry about Mum and Dad sparring, and of course the agony and ecstasy of being smitten by the class dreamboat who is dating the class siren. The letters are written to the editor of an advice column, and although this is set in England, it speaks for and to adolescents anywhere. ZS

D.V. Self-confidence


R  5-8 yrs.  A tale prominent in Zuni lore is here adapted to picture book format with large-scale illustrations in desert-warm hues. The message is unobtrusive, yet applicable to our own time through a story smoothly told. The ancient Ashiwi people are so blessed with corn harvests that they show off their wealth with a mock battle, throwing bread and dough as weapons. After the godly Corn Maidens, disguised as beggars, witness this travesty and are turned away by all but two children who offer them food, they punish the people with a drought. It is a toy dragonfly that one of the children fashions from corn leaves that intercedes with the Corn Maidens on behalf of the starving children. Literal pictures have the textured effect of pastel and colored
pencil, with costumes and landscapes drawn in careful detail. The art has a studied quality that is occasionally stiff but more often statuesque, as in the scene of the villagers' trek against a bleak background of snow-covered mesas. A source note introduces the tale, which will enrich primary-grade discussions of Native American cultures and make an unusual yet natural selection for special occasions such as a library's Thanksgiving story hour session. BH

C.U. Storytelling


Ad Gr. 5-7. Jerry's mom leaves him for a few months with his grandmother in small East Bent, Wisconsin. Maybe because he's new, lonely, or destined to become their friend, Jerry is the only person to see the "ghosts" who inhabit the windowless tower in the local museum. Mattie and her little brother, Edward, aren't traditional ghosts—their bodies were destroyed over a hundred years ago in their uncle's electrical laboratory, but their insubstantial life forces remain. Ever since the children's accident, the evil uncle has kept his life in his body with electricity, but now he's searching for a new body to occupy. Jerry is the intended victim. This spooky story has a great set-up, but it doesn't live up to its potential. Jerry and the uncle never even see each other, much less have the expected confrontation in the laboratory. There is too much time spent on Jerry and Mattie's frustrated romance and not enough on action, or even on any other character's reactions to Jerry's unusual behavior. Nevertheless, the ghost story is effective because of Jerry's averageness—readers will identify with him easily and start looking around for their own ghost friends. KJ


R Gr. 7-12. "We are only guests on the land," says sixteen-year-old Fiona in this story of three young people struggling to define their relationship to the land, the past, and the Maori and white cultures of New Zealand. Half-wild Fiona is white, but Maori-speaking and identified, since her traveling father leaves her under the eye of Maori friends in his almost constant absence; Simon's biological father is Maori, and despite Simon's upbringing in a white home and community he seeks a connection with his Maori origins; Paul, Fiona's distant cousin, is a white New Zealander by birth but has only reluctantly returned from his beloved American home. When Simon and Paul travel in search of Simon's Maori father, they focus on the village where Fiona lives, trains horses, and waits eagerly for the day when the property will pass to her. Although she attempts to help Simon in his quest, she is distracted by her attraction to both boys, disturbed by her own trouble with the past, and finally devastated when her Maori "cousins" seek to lay tribal claim to the land she hopes to inherit. Although the Maori are occasionally romanticized, the book is both subtle and powerful, with an overlay of mysticism and sensuality that keeps the atmosphere charged. Serious questions are raised about the sins of the past ("That's your blood," says Simon about Fiona and Paul's common ancestor, who appropriated land, including a tapu burial ground, from the Maoris. "He passed that violation down to you") and the nature of belonging; readers may find the portrait of Simon particularly thought-provoking as he comes to grips with being a hated other in a white-dominated land. Readers who
found Savage's *A Rumour of Otters* (BCCB 10/86) rewarding will enjoy this well-written and at times haunting story. DS

D.V. Pride in background and heritage


Ad Gr. 5-7. Some family photographs and many black-and-white drawings illustrate a biography in the publisher's "African American Contributions" series. The life story of Sylvia Stark, born a slave in 1839, is interesting not because of great deeds but because she and her family are a fine example of the courage and stamina of those pioneers, white and black, who followed the westward trails to begin a new life. After painstakingly purchasing their freedom, the Starks left Missouri, first to Salt Lake City, then to California, and at last to settle on a British Columbian island where their descendants still live. The writing is choppy and has an uneven pace, but the book is illustrative of the concept of history as a cumulation of the lives of ordinary (if extraordinarily tenacious) people. Most of the material was obtained from archives and interviews. ZS

C.U. History—U.S.


R Gr. 5-7. In her efforts to be different from the crowd, Mandy starts a secret "WEIRD" club in which she's the only member. When Owen moves to her small Iowa town from California, Mandy recruits him and they become best friends. The day they go to the public library to begin an English paper on mythology, a sudden storm knocks out all the power in the building except for the computer terminal they're using for research. It speaks to them in cryptic messages, and the next thing they know, Mandy and Owen find themselves the most ordinary members of a team created to save the earth from space aliens. The rest of the team are the mythological figures they were researching in the library: Coyote, Siegfried, Dragon Princess, Baba Yaga, and the Horned King. The enemy is a race of garbage-can-shaped beings who are approaching earth in a huge ship. In this fantasy, the allegorical garbage is eventually sent spinning back into space, but not before Siegfried and Dragon Princess have chopped several of the oozy things in half. Like a comic book, this plot has several superheroes but not the visual aids to help describe some otherwise unexplained scenes, such as exactly how Baba Yaga travels in her mortar and pestle. The story is too crowded with legendary characters to sort out, unless you're already a fan of mythology. If you are, pick this up to see how Baba Yaga has adjusted to the twentieth century, and Siegfried has not. KJ


M Gr. 5-7. A vague, determinedly offbeat story about a girl and her little brother who live with their inventor mother in an abandoned house in the desert encloses an equally quirky, unfinished short story written by the
children’s missing father. Evelyn’s mother has taken the children to the desert so that she can study its cyclical storms and design the Ultimate Raincoat. The interior manuscript concerns a little boy who receives a letter that only says, “You must kiss a whale.” Or does it say, you must kill a whale? This question is not as compelling as Skinner would apparently like it to be, and the book as a whole has a pretentious postmodernish aura that would be more at home in an adult literary magazine than it is in a book for children. Despite the presence of two stories, this book doesn’t really have a plot, or even much in the way of characters; instead, it’s an uncompelling picture of a thematic landscape, filled with portents and purpose, but emptied of anything that would connect us to them. What the book does have is a clean, transparent style that promises well for a more focused effort. RS

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


Gr. 2-4. Like Smith’s *Birds and Beasts* (BCCB 3/91), this book is elegantly decorated with the woodcuts of Ukrainian artist Jacques Hnizdovsky, who died in 1985. The text here, however, comprises poetic riddles, both folk and literary. Arranged into lyrically titled sections that include riddles about the sky and weather, plants, animals, tools and equipment, household items, bodies, and a concluding miscellaneous assortment, the collection offers wide variety in subject and range of difficulty. Each riddle is followed by the answer in italics and is footnoted if there’s an author; sources are included in the acknowledgments. Along with traditional riddles are skillfully composed ones by the two editors and by a number of other authors, from Symphosius and the Bishop of Sherborne to J. R. R. Tolkien and Richard Wilbur. Perhaps William Jay Smith’s personal best is the last: “It leads you a chase through a tangle of words/ And gives but the bones when you look for the birds.” (Are you stumped? The answer is *Riddle.*) Rhyme and wordplay cast these into a genre all their own, one that can combine popular appeal with critical attention in language arts programs, or simply yield some fun for friends’ and family sharing. BH

C.U. Language arts


Gr. 5-7. Well contented with her family, ten-year-old Annie Rye deeply resents the three stepsisters whom her mother suddenly incorporates into the household. Although this is the central conflict in the book, a number of chapters instead focus on dramatic action, including a brother’s near-fatal illness, a sudden plague of snakes, runaway hogs, a cross burning and violent racial confrontation, a rescue from a well, and a major baseball game for which Annie Rye’s father must have a uniform the family cannot afford. All these events may have taken place—Smothers’ first novel is autobiographical—but they are crowded together into episodes that are simply too much to develop in one short novel. The heavy dialect (“Brat done stuck up for me. She sho nuff did”) will have its champions as well as its detractors: on the one hand, it

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represents authentic spoken record; on the other, it may summon stereotypical images and deter less confident readers. The rural Georgia setting of the 1950s is capably established in this first novel, as are the character dynamics of the principal cast. BH

D.V.

Stepfamilies, adjustment to


R 5-8 yrs. Yes, this is another picture book version of Southey’s aqueous poem; although it will inevitably be compared to the one illustrated by Mordicai Gerstein (BCCB 11/91), with which it has some similarities, it’s an engaging romp in its own right. Here Papa Southey sits firmly in his armchair, feet on hassock, informing his children “how the water/Comes down at Lodore” while remaining oblivious to the cataract rushing through his house (a portrait—the Duke of Wellington?—looks down in dismay). Our diligent hero does not notice, despite his children’s gestures, that his chair, hassock and end table (complete with lamp) have been swept up in the flood and are now carrying the family apace through the rapids. Although a bird begins to nest in his lamp, and the children’s hair and the dog’s wiry ears are streaming like banners from the velocity, nothing, neither precipitous drop nor the passage of salmon in the other direction, will divert the poet from his explanation. The humor here is broader than in Gerstein’s version, particularly the valiant efforts of the family mutt to guard the nest of eggs from harm, and the closeups of Dad unperturbed in rolling waters that seem destined to douse him, his offspring, and his really ugly orange plaid chair. The repetitive parts of the text are left en bloc, possibly the better to speed through; the pen and watercolor Constable landscapes and realistically depicted fish and birds blend companionably with the more outrageous images of pets and family. Kids will love the approach and the extraneous jokes—be sure to point out the now-hatched eggs illustrated on the back flap. Don’t think of it as a choice between this version and Gerstein’s, both topflight picture books; think of it as a chance at two effervescent waterfalls in a genre full of mere dribbles. DS

C.U. Reading aloud


R Gr. 5-7. Eddie’s luck is always bad, according to Eddie. His parents and teachers think most of Eddie’s misfortunes are caused by the fact that he plunges ahead before he stops to think. Eddie just blunders along—accidentally siphoning out a school fish tank, rushing down a blocked-off stairway during a fire drill, climbing on top of the gym lockers to rescue a frisbee. His funniest mistake is when he doesn’t listen to his medieval history assignment and reports on “A Day in the Life of Fred, the Pheasant,” complete with a stuffed bird as a visual aid. Eddie means well, he just always does the wrong thing. But he finds he has to start using his head when his grandfather, Pop, gets out of the hospital and comes to recuperate with Eddie’s family. Pop helps Eddie both out of a tight spot and into some big trouble by including him in a scheme to get Pop back to his own house. Stevens avoids heavy-handed morals—if Eddie learns any lessons during Pop’s stay he’ll realize it later, like a
normal kid. Although the ending is a little weak, the family interactions are always natural: "An eleven-year-old comedian. Or is eleven your IQ?" KJ

D.V. Grandfather-child relations


R* 4-8 yrs. Admirers of Anthony Browne have learned to look carefully in the corners of his pictures, and Gwen Strauss’ readers know to read between her lines (Trail of Stones, BCCB 4/90). Here is a picture book about the recovery of Eric, who “did not like to talk.” His alter ego, the Night Shimmy, takes care of his emotional needs, including the dispersal of bad dreams (which involve lizards) and companionship in games of spy. A girl in the park changes all that, offering the quiet companionship of flying a kite shaped like that verbal bird, the parrot. The Night Shimmy resists Marcia at first, but Eric manages to reconcile his old and new selves in the end, when Marcia and Eric make “silent wishes” and say goodnight. This could have been a case study, but it is instead a series of spare, mysterious images that will capture children’s imaginations in much the same way as Sendak’s work does. In fact, Mickey in the Night Kitchen appears on the back cover of Eric’s bedtime book. The black frames around each picture give way at the end to open sky and a clear promise of light (and flight). The art itself includes a stunning variety of Browne’s characteristic pattern-changing wallpaper, portraits that alter expression as they watch the characters, a symbolic scene of Marcia and Eric romping in an apple tree complete with serpent, and a luscious primeval forest scene with brilliant parrots and a gorilla slipped in from one of Browne’s earlier books. A triumphant book to look at and think about. BH

D.V. Fear, overcoming


R Gr. 7-9. Fourteen-year-old Deidre is smitten by Jeff, the twenty-six year old composer/pianist who’s moved into the Florida apartment building where she lives with her mother. This is far from a formula treatment of the not-smooth course of true love; Sweeney treats both the course of Deidre’s crush, and the supporting sub-plots about her mother (Deidre feels that her mother ought to be more responsive to the man who’s in love with her) and her best friend (whose boyfriend gets treatment for exhibiting psychotic violence) with a realism that avoids both rapture and tragedy. Jeff goes back to the woman he loves but salvages Deidre’s friendship. The plots are smoothly integrated, the characters are well-defined and consistent, and the writing has, in both dialogue and exposition, a natural flow. ZS

D.V. Love; Mother-daughter relations


M Gr. 7-12. Attempting to convey to junior high and high school readers questions that have bedeviled thinkers for centuries, Terkel has set herself a tough task; that she only partially succeeds can be faulted as much to the
complexity of her topic as to the watered-down treatment it receives here. The book is excellent in describing the ways in which children as well as societies develop moral codes; the reports of moral reasoning experiments done by social scientists are intriguing. However, what Terkel often presents as self-evident fact is actually opinion—a dicey proposition where ethics are concerned. In discussing the Kitty Genovese case, for example, she states that while onlookers should have called police, "bystanders have no moral commitment to risk their lives to rescue someone else." That is arguable, something the author also misses in an earlier discussion of My Lai, which she sees only as a conflict between following orders or opting out of the killing. To ask "if we are selfish and aggressive, as Freud suggested, can we learn to be good?" is a loaded question that begs several definitions. (This same kind of slippery construction is used later when Terkel states that "people who value self-interest set a very different course from those who value justice," and it goes haywire when she proceeds to say that the former tend to be interested in money and power while the latter "choose helping or teaching professions.") To state that slavery and sexism and apartheid are categorically "immoral" seems like simple virtue—except to those, using the very methods of moral reasoning Terkel explains, who don’t agree. "Follow your heart," as Terkel advises in her closing chapter, is not necessarily a dictum that will take readers where she wants them to go. RS

C.U. Philosophy
D.V. Value building


R Gr. 7-12. The title and subtitle say it all: Emma Lou Thayne (mother) and Becky Markosian (daughter) here relate, in alternating sections, the story of Becky’s slide into mental illness after graduating from high school in Salt Lake City. Becky’s anorexia led to compulsive dieting and bulimia, but it was not until a manic period in Seattle that her friends conspired with Becky’s parents to get her onto a plane, back to Salt Lake, and into a hospital. Recovery was slow, and both mother and daughter credit the use of antidepressant medicine for Becky’s current stability and happiness (now thirty-nine, Becky is married, a mother of three, and has a productive career). While the focus is on Becky, most of the story, as told here, is the mother’s, an empathetic and sensitive witness. The book may have too much adult perspective (on both authors’ parts) for some adolescent readers; on the other hand, there’s a welcome lack of troubled-teen melodrama. While it’s long and occasionally repetitive, here’s a good, clear look at a parent and child coming through hard times together. RS

D.V. Mother-daughter relations


R 5-8 yrs. Talk about lazy. On this farm, “the duck did all the work. The farmer stayed in bed.” Oxenbury’s first picture gets this relationship straight right off, with the fat farmer lolling in bed with the paper and a box of bon-bons while the clearly long-suffering duck presents the next course. The duck fetches the cow from the field, herds (on his back) the sheep, saws the
wood, does the ironing, all to the bedridden call, “How goes the work?” Revolution is soon at hand, and the farmer is driven out of bed and off the farm, where the animals create a worker’s paradise of cooperation, celebrated by the artist in a sunny double-spread that contrasts with the moody and miserable weather that had held thus far. Oxenbury’s animals are a superbly drawn and empathetic bunch; her farmer a monument to sloth. Animal Farm without the irony, this will undoubtedly inspire young couch potatoes to clean up their acts. Oh, sure. RS

Wallace-Brodeur, Ruth. The Godmother Tree. Zolotow/HarperCollins, 1992. Library ed. ISBN 0-06-022458-4; Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-022457-6. 120p. Library ed. $12.89; Trade ed. $13.00. R Gr. 4-7. Laura is not happy to be suddenly moving across the county during the last week of fifth grade, but her father, a farm hand, needs a new position after being fired for telling off the alcoholic owner of the farm where the family had lived. Ryan, Laura’s soon-to-be-eighth-grader brother is even more unhappy; he had big plans to star on the local summer baseball team, and there’s no team at all in their new town. In some ways, this is a sensitive-girl’s summer story, as Laura learns to love their new home, finds a special place (the “Godmother Tree” of the title) to cherish, and grows to understand her difficult brother and herself. That’s a time-honored plot, but Wallace-Brodeur writes forthrightly and freshly, allowing the rural Vermont setting to inform and envelope the story without waxing excessively lyrical. There’s some sentimentality in a scene where Laura and her mother go to Gramma’s house, but the emotional effects, like the landscaping, are generally understated. The book was originally published for the Vermont Migrant Education Program, an association implicit in the theme that even though Laura has found security and happiness in her Godmother Tree, the possibility of being uprooted again is always before her. RS

Walsh, Jill Paton. Grace. Farrar, 1992. ISBN 0-374-32758-0. 256p. $16.00. R* Gr. 7- Grace Darling, twenty-two, was alone with her parents on the morning of September 7, 1838; during her dawn watch in the lighthouse tower, she saw a shipwreck and persuaded her father that she was capable of rowing with him on a rescue mission. This true event, and much of the aftermath, have been used by the author to blend fact and fiction with consummate skill in creating a narrative that is powerfully dramatic in its initial impact and sharply observant in describing the consequent events. Idolized by press and pulpit, Grace (who tells the story) is disturbed by the concurrent animosity of those who feel they should share in the praise and the financial rewards. Jill Paton Walsh, citing her sources in an appended author’s note, corroborates the fact that coastal residents expected and usually received a bounty for a rescue mission. Grace was therefore resented because local residents, some of whom had gone to the rescue not knowing that the Darlings had taken all survivors back to the lighthouse, felt cheated. The characters are drawn with depth and nuance, the language and idiom are appropriate to the place and period, and the whole story has the tight-knit feel of a tapestry in word. ZS

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Gr. 6-9. A fine second novel by the author of *Sweet Creek Holler* (BCCB 10/88) chronicles Tiny Lambert’s high school years from 1956 to 1960, which include a realistic range of incidents lent suspense by the protagonist’s attempts to avoid and then overcome sexual abuse by her stepfather, Vern. His characterization, along with those of Tiny’s mother, the rest of the family, and a cast of friends, is vividly rendered, the plot following variably but believably from their patterns of action. Vern’s portrayal, for instance, is of a man soft enough to swap his most cherished possession, a gun, for a dog he doesn’t want just to hush his daughter’s crying, yet selfish enough to violate her. There’s a lot going on in this story: subplots include Tiny’s discovering her musical talent, inheriting a mountain farm from her alienated grandfather, and identifying a mysterious figure who has haunted her fantasies. The end is telescoped too neatly, but the blend of family problems, peer dynamics, and period details is ultimately a smooth one. BH


Ad 6-9 yrs. According to this literary creation myth, Mahtmi, “the Blessed One,” created the first man, Kwanza, in his image, that is, black. Cultures across time and around the world have viewed God in their own images, so there’s no lack of precedent for this; however, the story becomes troubling when Mahtmi gets around to creating the other races. “He created another being out of the red soil of what we now know as Georgia, another out of the sandy beaches of Normandy...another with horsehair for its head...fish eyes for this one’s eyes, and on and on after that fashion, biding his time till the original one came home.” Mahtmi loves all of his children, but Kwanza remains “the finest creature ‘cause he had created him first and was fond of him in a special way.” The idea that one race finds special favor with the Almighty has found terrible expression in the 20th century; how would we feel, for example, about a story in which God awards first place to the blonde and blue-eyed, because the “glistening of his skin is second only to my own”? And in the end, when Mahtmi gives Kwanza something special (curly hair) to raise his self-esteem, it seems a sad and dubious honor that this “will set him apart from every other man forever.” While the storytelling here is overelaborate and sometimes confusing in its narrative shifts and vague pronominal antecedents (too many hes), there are some lilting, affectionate touches, and Kwanza’s need for proof of his father’s affection is a feeling with which any child can identify. Roth’s watercolor paintings are finely drawn, sophisticated and a little cool, emblemizing rather than characterizing, but their misty tones provide satisfying atmosphere. RS

D.V. Self-acceptance


Gr. 7-10. Well-crafted, genuinely young adult short stories are hard to come by, but the nine included in this volume, a recipient of the Canadian Young Adult Book Award, qualify. Set in Nova Scotia, many scenes are illuminated by vivid writing. Most of the protagonists and/or narrators are
adolescent girls in conflict with their mothers, though a few plots involve a friend, cousin, or sister. Although the collection as a whole occasionally strikes a repetitive thematic note, the characters are invariably delineated with a focused clarity that will have readers wishing for longer fiction from the same author. The tone is varied and the age appeal broad, ranging from the tragedy of a high school student's denying her favorite teacher ("The Metaphor") and the sophisticated irony in a tale of twins ("Waiting") to a family's romance with a lodger or a thirteen-year-old's confessions about menstruation to a pen pal she has mistakenly assumed to be another girl. While the adult characters form a strong presence, the adolescent voices take center stage in a collection that could inspire classroom discussion as well as leisure reading. BH


R  3-6 yrs. "Silly Sally went to town, walking backwards, upside down," and along the way she acquires a number of unusual friends, including a jigging pig, leapfrogging dog, singing loon, sleepy sheep, and even a handsome prince in the guise of Neddy Buttercup, "walking forwards, right side up." As well as providing plenty of scope for some Simple-Simon story hour charades, this silly tale satisfies appeals of rhyme, repetition, cumulation, reading along, and disaster humor à la *The Napping House*, as Neddy tickles the whole crew awake after the sheep has made them sleep. Although the art is unsubtle and flat, relying on cartoon cliches, the tone is appealingly goofy, and kids will enjoy looking ahead on the road to town and finding each new animal that joins the parade. Limber up! RS

C.U. Story hour


R*  5-9 yrs. Sarah and Penny have a volatile relationship, but their squabbles usually end in tolerant reconciliation; after all, they are best friends. It was probably because they had already been testy about assembling a hideaway that Penny became so angry when Sarah called her a "gloop." That did it. Penny climbed high into the sugar-gum tree and announced that she wasn't coming down until Sarah said she was sorry. Wrightson, one of Australia's most eminent writers, shows (again) that she is as adroit in realism as she is in fantasy: the social impasse is handled in distinctive style and with affectionate humor as two sets of firm but tactful parents and a team from the Fire Department try to talk Penny down. It's Sarah who succeeds, and both girls make it clear—without being rude—that they're a team and can solve their own problems. Invitingly scrawled pen-and-wash illustrations have a summery tone, capturing the backyard atmosphere as well as the vicissitudes of friendship. ZS

D.V. Friendship values


R  Gr. 5-7. The time is 1939, the setting is a small town in Utah, the narrator is Matt, and his deftly-knit story is concerned with his friendship with Two Moons (a Navajo who lives with Matt's family) and with
Matt's burning desire to fly after seeing a stunt flyer. While heavy on accent ("they kept handin' me food, and I kept eatin' . . . ") the narration has a convincing young-teen tone. The boys have already tried flying with home-made wings after hearing the story of Daedalus and Icarus in school, but when Matt's father tows home part of a real plane, the determination to fix it and fly it becomes an obsession. Threaded through this often-funny story of friendship and small-town life is a deeper theme of human relationships (all kinds) and the inevitability of change. When Two Moons' grandfather dies, the arrangement he had made for the boy ends, and Two Moons is forced to leave his loving friends and become his unpleasant older sister's ward. There is no improbably happy ending but a wistful closing tone that is touching without being sentimental.

ZS
D.V. Friendship values; Intercultural understanding


R 3-5 yrs. A minimal text and subdued, affectionate tone make this picture book just right for the very young child being introduced to concepts of change and family continuity. Lobel's album-style paintings, with flowing line and soft colors, show a small girl (the narrator) on each verso page. Her first comment is "This baby smiling in her bassinet under the crocheted throw is my mother," and on the facing page is a full-page picture of the baby. Other pictures, in chronological development, show mother going through childhood and adolescence, being a happy hippie, going to college, and moving on to marriage and motherhood. A gentle book that should appeal to young children ends, appropriately, with that most important of events, the narrator's birth; it's labeled "The Beginning." ZS
D.V. Mother-child relations
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