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Minna and her family are fictional characters, but their experiences are representative of many African-Americans from the mid-1500s to the mid-1800s. Johnson's moving artwork offers many details of African and plantation life. [She] recounts the African American story with honesty and sensitivity. — *Booklist*

“Minna and her family are fictional characters, but their experiences are representative of many African-Americans from the mid-1500s to the mid-1800s. Johnson’s moving artwork offers many details of African and plantation life. [She] recounts the African American story with honesty and sensitivity.” — *Booklist*

“Almost no historical fiction (or nonfiction) about slavery has been published for this age group, and Johnson manages to be honest without becoming brutal. The informational aspects alone make the book worthwhile.” — *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

Starred, *Publishers Weekly*

“A compelling, elegantly composed narrative.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

$14.95 RSBE/Ages 5-10/0-02-747699-5

RSBE indicates a side-sewn reinforced hardcover edition.
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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.
One way to hang onto a book you love is to slow down and read the last page over and over to keep it from ending. Such is the reluctance with which I finished *The Last Tales of Uncle Remus*, the final volume in a series of four collections celebrating the trickster who outflanked most of the animals around, be they big, little, smart, or dumb. Brer Rabbit made no allowances for political correctness. This, plus the fact that Lester updates the storytelling voice of Uncle Remus, has drawn flack from African-American literati as notable as June Jordan (*New York Times Book Review*, May 17, 1987). Alice Walker’s not too crazy about Joel Chandler Harris, either (see “The Dummy in the Window: Joel Chandler Harris and the Invention of Uncle Remus” in Walker’s *Living by the Word*). Uncle Remus was, after all, an Uncle Tom who accepted the outrage of slavery and passed on his priceless traditions to a little white boy. Or was he and did he? These stories are the soul of subversive irreverence, and maybe Remus/Harris had a trick up his sleeve in targeting a gullible white audience that dominated the marketplace and—all unawares of being the butt of the joke—made sure the stories went public. A more cultural point has to do with the commonality of tricksters to all societies. Any psychologically attuned folklorist (or folklorically attuned psychologist) will tell you the same thing Lester does in replying to Jordan, “... the trickster is in each of us. He is created in our image. Our task is to receive him and thereby uncover our humanity—if we dare.” (*Letters*, *NYT Book Review*, June 14, 1987)

Lester, who has written a distinctive introduction to each of the other books, specifically addresses the Uncle Remus controversy here, and then proceeds to retell thirty-nine tales with the natural narrative flow that distinguished their predecessors. Indeed, the narrator is one of the most vivid characters as he admonishes with verve (“Nothing in this world will get you in trouble quicker than your mouth”) and expounds with pizazz. A brief passage from “Why the Earth Is Mostly Water” exemplifies the casual style edged with satire: “I don’t have to tell you that when an Elephant steps on you, you have been stepped on. When the Elephant lifted up his foot, there was not even a memory of the Crawfish left. To make matters worse, the Elephant didn’t even know he had done it. All the other Crawfish got mad. They had a caucus, which is a little meeting which nobody could come to except crawfish.” Will children ever forget that definition, or fail to appreciate its irony as they get older?

Storytellers using the book as a resource will be happy to meet up with variants of other familiar tale types. “The Adventures of Simon and Susanna” contains motifs from Baba Yaga and several Jack tales. Both Wicked John and Big Sixteen lurk in “The Blacksmith and the Devil.” “The Little Boy and His Dogs” is a twin
of "Wiley and the Hairy Man," and "How Tinktum Tidy Recruited an Army for
the King" recalls "Travels of a Fox." Folklore is one place where African and
European influences were integrated early on. Ghost stories vie with tales of trans-
formation. You're bound to find several suited to your own particular telling. The
humor ranges from sass to slapstick violence; take your pick. Everybody gets a fair
share of backhanded ridicule, including feminists, chauvinists, ageists, handicapists,
and racists. Sometimes the storyteller confines himself to sideswiping one group:
"that's how men can be—adding two and two and coming up with seventy-seven."
Sometimes he manages to insult two with one blow, as in his under-the-breath
indictment of both politicians and voters: "You don't have to be smart to be king
or president. (I could name presidents who didn't have any brains)." Ultimately,
like Brer Rabbit, he makes fun of just about anything on two, four, or seven legs.

Jerry Pinkney, as he has done for the other books (BCCB 7/87, 10/88, 5/90),
supplies realistically detailed watercolors to illustrate a rustic world of talking ani-
mals invaded by the occasional stray human. Pinkney's drafting has relaxed,
smoothed out, and mellowed just as a good story does over time, and he manages
to underscore Lester's sly tone by treating the cast of characters with seriously
deadpan respect. Respect is a key word here. That's what Lester shows for the
largest body of African-American folklore collected in this country. You can't get
any more respectful of a cultural tradition than recharging the elements that helped
it survive—and that affirm its kinship with other peoples of the world.

Betsy Hearne, Editor

New Books for Children and Young People

Avi The Bird, the Frog, and the Light; illus. by Matthew Henry. Jackson/Or-
chard, 1994 [32p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-06808-0 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad 4-7 yrs

A bird's sweet serenade to the rising sun is rudely interrupted by the Frog King,
puffed up with his own magnificence, who demands that the Bird follow him
underground to view—to feel, rather—his kingdom: marble palace, ancient throne,
world's greatest library, the whole bit. Tired of living in darkness, though, the
Frog King forces the Bird to ask the sun for one of his rays to take underground,
where it reveals the truth: the palace is a small rock, the throne a chicken roosting
box, the library but one page ripped from the telephone book. "Can't even read,"
whispers the ashamed king, who, now chastened, comes up into the light for tu-
toring. The fable is cleanly told and aptly structured, despite a bit of contriv-
ance—while birds do sing to the sun, frogs don't live underground—and overcalculation of both story and moral. Illustrator Henry's colored-pencil por-
traits of the frog and bird are naturalistic, their postures expressive but their fea-
tures immobile; the sun is a rather conventionalized smiling yellow face and the pastoral landscaping is bland. Airbrushed backgrounds and sleek borders recall some of the Dillons' work, while the underground scenes have a savvy photorealistic pointillism. Pair this one with Ed Young's *Seven Blind Mice* (BCCB 3/92) for a consideration of pride and perception. RS

**AXELROD, AMY**  *Pigs Will Be Pigs*; illus. by Sharon McGinley-Nally.  Four Winds, 1994  34p  ISBN 0-02-765415-X  $14.95  R  5-8 yrs

"The Pigs were hungry . . . again," but there's no food in the house and Mr. and Mrs. Pig have forgotten to go to the bank. "Hunt for Money!" carols a double-page spread, and the parents and the two piglets root around the house for change—in boxes and pockets, under beds, six dimes here, seventeen pennies there—coming up with $34.67, enough to take them all to the Enchanted Enchilada for a filling (vegetarian) meal. The loopy pictures of the pigs messing up the house in their search are an attractive jumble, and kids will enjoy poring over the menu from which the family makes its dining choices. All the math adds up, and you can count the change as it's found, even the two hundred coins the piglets take from their pennies collection. Although the unexplained (until the end) presence of printed prices in some of the pictures adds a dispensable and confusing game element, the book is a good domestic companion to Schwartz's *How Much Is a Million* (BCCB 7/85) and may provoke a few money-hunts of its own. RS


"I can't stand being not able to read! Being Adam Zigzag!" cries dyslexic Adam, to whom written words look like meaningless zigzags. Diagnosed at seven, he's spent the years since then trying various doctors and fighting to survive schoolwork; now in high school, he can't seem to find the help he needs and his despair grows until he begins to take refuge in rebellion, pot-smoking, and dangerous friends. The narration, alternating between Adam and his older sister Caroline, depicts Adam's pain at his constant failure and portrays the turmoil of a disrupted family with sincerity and conviction, so much so that it's not quite clear why Adam's final upswing happens (although it seems to be related to communicating with his family and moving to a stricter, albeit more understanding, boarding school). The repetition of Adam's trials, while enhancing the emotional effect, lessens the book's narrative impact. It's still an understanding story, rawer than predecessors such as Jeanne Betancourt's *My Name Is Brain Brian* (BCCB 4/93), about a frustrating and widespread problem. DS


Soon after their parents separate and their mother moves out, twelve-year-old Brad and his eight-year-old brother Charlie find that a hostile stray cat has moved into the boys' old backyard shed. The cat, named Cat by the boys, soon has two kittens, and Brad, through some verbal sleight-of-hand ("Heads I win, tails you lose"), appropriates the more attractive kitten as "his," leaving the drabber twin to Charlie.
This is an intense exploration of sibling dynamics, the boys wrestling with their mother's "desertion" as they try to take care of their feline family. There are some tremendous fight scenes, especially when the boys discover that Cat has eaten Brad's kitten, and the writing is a model of close focus: the boys and their father are the only characters on the stage and almost all of the book takes place in the house or backyard. As a result, the mood sometimes becomes claustrophobic and the theme rather too thoroughly hewn to, but the vivid portrayals of angry, bullying Brad, and Charlie—seemingly docile, but knowing more than he lets on—keep the book centered on the action. RS

Bennett, James Dakota Dream. Scholastic, 1994 [144p]
ISBN 0-590-46680-1 $13.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-12

A few days ago, Floyd Rayfield was living in a group home (he's lived with foster families all his life), having trouble in school, and trying to adjust to a new social worker; now he's on the Dakota reservation, where he's made a pilgrimage on a stolen/borrowed motorcycle to fulfill what he views as his destiny: becoming a Dakota. The chief, nonplussed but thoughtful, sends Floyd—or Charly Black Crow, as he calls himself—on a hanblechaya, a four-day vision quest during which Floyd contemplates in flashback the events that have led him to this point. Although both the author and Floyd himself seem aware of how absurd the boy's quest may sound, this is a measured, serious story and Floyd, not your stereotypical problem kid, is admirable in his devotion and application. There's a refreshing implication that Floyd in fact does have the power and right to define himself, although he realizes that something other than destiny drew him to the Dakota ("Way back when, when I was just a kid, I felt real close to the Indians because their situation seemed just like mine"); he's also found a connection there that will shape his future. Readers puzzling out their own identities will empathize with self-possessed Floyd, fighting to define himself in a difficult world. DS

Bible The Easter Story; ad. and illus. by Brian Wildsmith. Knopf, 1994 32p
ISBN 0-679-84727-8 $15.00 Ad 5-8 yrs

While the nuns never were terribly convincing in their insistence that Easter was a much more important holiday than Christmas, it remains true that the Easter story is much more complicated, narratively and theologically, than is the story of the Nativity. Wildsmith's retelling is straightforward enough, but lacks context. "Judas had betrayed his friend," says the text, but we don't know why or for what or to whom. The addition of a little donkey to the cast ("If I only I could help him," thought the donkey sadly") seems meant to give the story an empathetic linchpin for young listeners, but it also seems out of place against the otherwise scrupulous adaptation. Gold-accented watercolor paintings are large and theatrical and give both the human drama and the pageantry their due, with angels always watching from above. RS

ISBN 0-679-85713-3 $13.00 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 3-6

Sophie's devastated after her beloved cat is killed, but she's thrilled to see kittens for sale at the local fair. The only problem: Sophie's spent her money, so when she
finds her friend Mrs. Cochran's wallet she removes five dollars before returning it. Tangles, the kitten purchased with the ill-gotten funds, is a delight but also a curse that continually reminds Sophie of her breach of trust, until Sophie finally acknowledges her crime to the understanding Mrs. Cochran. This is quite good as junior Crime and Punishments go; Broome weights the sides evenly, with the motivation comprehensible and the temptation irresistible, but the crime an obvious betrayal of a kind and loyal friend. Sophie's first-person narration is simple and understandable (the print reassuringly large and interspersed with kittenish sketches), and the feline slant on the subject will keep readers interested. DS


John Young's dad acts young for his age, with cool clothes, cool haircuts, "and a whole den full of toys." One day he comes home with a suspiciously Perrier-styled bottle of ELIXA DÉ YOOF, drinks it, and turns into a baby, frustrated and unable to protest his fate save for inarticulate cries of "Boggaboggabogga." It all turns out to be a dream, maybe; and while any picture book that ends, "and he saw his first gray hair," puts you on notice that the audience might not be the usual story hour crowd, there's nevertheless something here for both kids and their aging parents. Grownups will appreciate the tweaking of their yuppie obsessions while the offspring can enjoy the opportunity of seeing the mighty brought low, dirty diapers and all. As the subtitle says, it's a little joke, and it's also a slighter story than Browne's equally pointed Piggybook (BCCB 11/86), but the moral is clear, and the artist's fine-lined hyper-realism shows Baby Dad, with his do-wop hairstyle and mouth spattered with muesli or plugged with a pacifier, at a baby's cranky worst. Sweet little nursery-frieze endpapers add a joke of their own. RS


In this personal view of names and places that have splashed across our TV screens and newspaper headlines for decades, the former president tells of his struggle to secure a peace agreement between Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel in the Camp David Accords and goes on to detail the establishment of the Carter Center, a private not-for-profit organization established to address issues of education, human rights, and global conflict. Carter's commitment to peace and democracy is exemplified as he recounts his activities and feelings during the conflict-resolution process he uses with leaders of war-troubled countries and during election day poll-watching trips to Panama, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Guyana. In a dignified tone, he explains the Carter Center's commitment to solving problems of food, health care, shelter, and the environment in other parts of the world as well as the United States. He details the help the Carter Center has provided for its home base of Atlanta and lists a number of ways that young people can become involved in their own communities. If the book has a flaw, it is in its sweeping, almost overwhelming discussion of world conflicts and concerns for which young people may not have enough memory of places or problems. Regardless, the book is such a genuine model of personal response to civic and global difficulties that it is inspiring and could be used to unwrap history or provoke action. CF
Okay, so it's February and you should have had this book before Christmas, but some holiday books deserve year-around attention and not many of them feature the elements that make this one so appealing. Danny lives in a trailer near the highway that takes him to school and his mother to work as a truck-stop waitress. They can't afford a Christmas tree this year, and the one Danny's schoolmate donates from a garden gets smashed by a truck. In an old roadside tradition, the truck driver saves the situation, and kids will find here a comforting sense that the value of gifts is all in the giving. It's a down-to-earth story, simply told, that projects feeling without getting too sentimental. The pictures, also, are unpretentious—literal enough to extend the action in closeup interior scenes, but skillfully varied with mysterious landscapes that leave room for magic of human or mythical proportions. At the risk of sounding both sexist and classist, it's hard to find working-class boy-books, so put this one on your Christmas list for next year.

**Cooper, Susan**  
*Danny and the Kings;* illus. by Jos. A. Smith. McElderry, 1993 32p  
ISBN 0-689-50577-9 $14.95  
R 5-8 yrs

First published in Britain, this comprehensive volume addresses not only the more traditional aspects of art appreciation but also social and cultural forces that introduction-to-art books rarely discuss. In the chapter "Looking and Seeing," for example, Davidson uses optical illusions to discuss the complicated process of seeing and how our expectations shape that process; in "What's Art For?" she examines the varied purposes of art (including storytelling, recording events and images, and just plain fun); in "Artists Earning a Living" she explores the changing notions of professionalism in art. There are also chapters on the meaning and conventions of faces and bodies in art, the decorative arts, and many other elements of art and art history. The examples included derive from many cultures, including the popular. Oversized pages are spacious and attractive, and they're liberally packed with line drawings and photos in both color and black-and-white; ample use of cutout images superimposed on the white page helps reduce the rigid sense of geometry that weighs down many a similar work. The language is straightforward, simple, and engaging (if at times a bit overemotional or overdirective), and sections often end with thought-provoking, clearly open-ended questions to the reader. A great book for browsing as well as curricular use, this is full of the kind of accessible detail that humanizes a sometimes dauntingly lofty subject. An index, a glossary, a timeline, and suggestions for further reading are appended.

**Davidson, Rosemary**  
*Take a Look: An Introduction to the Experience of Art.* Viking, 1994 128p illus. with photographs  
R* Gr. 5-9

This is a generous anthology of contemporary poems that young adults will find suitably subversive in some cases (Fleur Adcock's "For Heidi with Blue Hair," for instance) and surprisingly traditional in others, such as the title poem by Liz Lochhead, who protests sentimental clichés only to succumb to one—ironically, readers hope—in the last line ("I wouldn't thank you, I'd melt"). There's humor, sadness, kids' crushes and cavils, grownups' advice and admonition, pride, poli-
tics, and lots of Briticisms, with occasional American voices including Maya Angelou’s (“Phenomenal Woman”). The tonal range varies from slyly humorous (“Lovesick” by Carol Ann Duffy) to forthrightly obvious (“Unravelling” by Vicki Feaver), with no preaching and plenty of ethnic variety among the selections. Geometric pen-and-ink drawings are more decorative than reflective, but they lend a kind of new-wave look to the format. BH

FARRIS, DIANE  
*In Dolphin Time*; written and illus. with photographs by Diane Farris. Four Winds, 1994 [32p]  
ISBN 0-02-734365-0 $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys NR 5-8 yrs

“The day you discover dolphins in your pocket is a day of wonder . . . a day of delight.” Well, one could argue with the latter if not with the former, but in any case the sentimental meanderings of this photo-picture book do lead one to the intemperate conclusion that dolphins are fast becoming this era’s unicorn, another marvelous beast pummeled into whimsical soft-sculpture. Anyway, after the ellipsis-happy narrator finds the dolphins in her pocket, she puts them into a goldfish bowl (“they looked content . . . but crowded”) and then into the bathtub, and then starts seeing them everywhere: in the mirror, in the soup, nuzzling the dog, and swimming by an artichoke. Blue-gray, dim, duotone photographs superimpose photos of dolphins onto the most unlikely places while the words ramble on about “the stories they told, of cloud-dancing . . . swimming free . . . of coming close . . . and wishing on an underwater moon.” Kids might enjoy the trick photography, but the inanely new-agey text (“the water was alive with light that began with us and never ended”) would be more at home on a poster than in a book. RS

FISHER, LEONARD EVERETT  
ISBN 0-02-735365-6 $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys Ad 5-8 yrs

In 1421, a small village in Holland was swept away by a terrible storm, but left on a lonely dike as the sea subsided was a small baby and a kitten. To the villagers this was a sign of renewal, so they built their homes again and called the new town Kinderdike after the found child. This is the legend that Fisher tells in fatuous rhymed couplets (“A tiny Dutch village stood low near the sea, where a dike held the tide for a people carefree”) but illustrates in brilliant acrylics. He emphasizes light and shadow and uses sea-level perspective to accentuate the flatness of the land and the huge sky. His scenes are filled with people in motion to enliven a time and place of windmills and wooden shoes. The compositions are striking and the telling of the story, while it doesn’t capture the emotions of devastation and renewal, is clear enough to let the readers understand the drama. A comparison with the works of Dutch masters might be interesting for older children. CF

GEISERT, ARTHUR  
*After the Flood*; written and illus. by Arthur Geisert. Houghton, 1994 [32p]  
Reviewed from galleys R 4-7 yrs

Geisert’s *Ark* (BCCB 9/88) has landed; what happens next? After camping awhile atop Mt. Ararat, Noah and his sons build an inimitably Geisertian slide to take the
Ark down the mountain where birds and beasts and family settle, thrive and reproduce, until crowding forces the animals to go out and repopulate the world once again. It's a plausible, child-logical scenario, and both the concise text and the rustically elaborate pictures employ only the gentlest humor, such as Noah's turning the Ark over to make a house, where Mrs. Noah reads bedtime stories to the ever-increasing children and animals. Geisert has here colored his familiar, obsessively detailed etchings with light spring greens, autumnal ochres, and an opulent purple for the grapes. Animals, including lots of Geisert's famous pigs and piglets, are everywhere, and while kids may wonder at the apparently herbivorous amity—hey, maybe that's the real reason most of the animals had to leave. RS


The indefatigable Gail Gibbons here adds another entry to her list of holiday books, and while St. Patrick's Day may not have the larger appeal of, say, Christmas, Gibbons again does an efficient job of summing up the holiday's history and traditions. In fact, while the folkways of Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc., are replete with historical references, most people are content to leave St. Patrick's Day simply Irish and green, so this book is useful in that it gives some context for the celebrating, even though Gibbons does seem to acknowledge that it's all things Irish being saluted, not specifically the saint himself. The pictures are of course very green, done in the illustrator's simple, school-pageant style; pair the book with dePaola's Patrick (BCCB 4/92) and pass around the cupcakes. RS


Autrie loves to go out on the front porch at night while her mother watches from within, each "alone, and yet together." Autrie looks at the sky and stars, wanting them to stay forever but knowing that "clouds must sometimes come and hide the stars." Gilchrist's painterly evocation of a young African-American girl's evening meditations is much more a mood piece than a story, but it has a dreamy and mysterious atmosphere captured in the quiet text and swoony—if a little stiff—pictures of white-nightgowned Autrie against the night's starry sky. A good choice for bedtime, when young sleepyheads like Autrie find themselves poised between the cozy present and the call of dreams. RS


The baby blanket Joseph's grandfather makes for him gets worn out and then remade successively into a jacket, a vest, a tie, a handkerchief, a button, and finally—with nothing left—a story. This favorite old Jewish folktale (no sources acknowledged) gets fresh treatment that will have young story hour audiences chanting along, "There's just enough material here to make . . . " The page flow enhances the suspense and the rhythm. Warm, brown-toned illustrations reflect a good-humored family in an East European shtetl setting, with lots going on in cutaway household scenes that include, under the floorboards, a mouse nest whose
inhabitants make efficient use of the fabric snipped away by Grandpa's scissors. It's one of those naturally happy stories which, accompanied as it is by lovingly (and accurately) drawn pictures, bubbles over ethnic boundaries with pure popular appeal. BH

GINSBURG, MIRRA, ad.  *The King Who Tried to Fry an Egg on His Head*; illus. by Will Hillenbrand. Macmillan, 1994 [32p]
ISBN 0-02-736242-6 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys

When an impoverished king gives his daughters in marriage to the Sun, the Moon, and the Raven in exchange for assistance in gathering the family's grain, the arrangement works out well and the girls are happy with their new spouses. Unfortunately the silly king tries to emulate the deeds of his new relations, but he can't cook an egg on his head like the Sun, light up the bathhouse with his fingers like the Moon, or sleep in a tree like the Raven; he eventually retires, bruised and dismayed after falling out of the tree, to the arms of his long-suffering wife. This story has an appealing blend of the noodlehead and the supernatural, with enough repetition to involve young listeners, who may themselves have encountered the pitfalls of imitation. Hillenbrand's pastel on rough paper illustrations have a pageant of hues and some intriguing characters whose surreally enlarged heads cause their tiny features to appear humorous and slightly mournful, although the cheerful countenances of the magic sons-in-law are counterbalanced by some ethereal night scenes and a distinct—if genial—sense of power. There's no source note for the supposedly Russian tale, and the ending is a little flat, but the general happiness, loony slapstick, and hints of majesty in the tale will satisfy all manner of young eggheads. DS

GREENE, PATRICIA BAIRD  *The Sabbath Garden*. Lodestar, 1993 214p
ISBN 0-525-67430-6 $15.99 Ad Gr. 7-9

An ambitious first novel set in New York takes on the ethnic strains of a deteriorating Lower East Side neighborhood, in which hopeless poverty and family dissolution have created a breeding ground for violence. Having recovered from a previous suicide attempt, graduating eighth-grade basketball star Opal Tyler is fighting through another depression as her half-brother turns criminal, her mother becomes addicted to tranquilizers, and the girl she perceives as her best friend betrays her. Into this unhappy mixture bungles Solomon Leshko, sometimes the victim of racism and sometimes its perpetrator in decrying the loss of his Jewish community to "them"—i.e. African Americans and Puerto Ricans. Opal and Sol are an involving pair of main characters, and both of them develop convincingly; less credible is the melodramatic plotting that twice threatens Opal's life, once when her brother burgles Sol's apartment while she's in it and nearly kills her, and later when she's shot by a pawnbroker aiming at her brother. There are other imbalances: the garden that Opal and Sol organize is a moving resolution, but the subsequent telephone call from Opal's long-lost father is too pat; Opal's slowly evolving relationship with a local boy is poignantly realized, but Sol's niece's appearance late in the book seems contrived for effect. Some of the observations are sharply individualistic ("Down here the ones who don't bargain are either fools or Christians"), some are thematically representative ("you keep wanting more from life down here, you got to rob, rape, and maybe even kill to get it"). A social worker for ten years, the author seems torn between telling a story about human
beings and delivering a message about the human condition. It's promising to see the story win out. BH

GRIMES, NIKKI  From a Child's Heart; illus. by Brenda Joysmith.  Just Us Books, 1993  26p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-940975-44-2  $15.95
Library ed. ISBN 0-940975-43-2  $7.95  Ad  Gr. 2-4

"Sis always says/ 'If you're gonna do something, do it right.'/ So when I do my homework every night,/ I draw my letters straight and neat in my notebook./ I know the teacher may not take the time to look,/ but Sis says do it anyway, even if nobody else can see—/ except You, Lord, and me.” That’s the tone and tenor of these thirteen poems reflecting inner conversations between African-American children and the God whom they variously confide in and petition. There’s a modicum of rhyme, a conscious if informal sense of innocence, and more than a little sentimentality, which is echoed in the soft, idealized pastels that face each page of verse. The pictures are well drawn, with a kind of Norman Rockwell nostalgia that will please fans of the poetic messages packaged here. BH

Library ed. ISBN 0-8249-8631-8  $15.00
Trade ed. ISBN 0-8249-8622-9  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  4-7 yrs

In an original story drawing on the simplest of folkloric elements, a young boy goes to fetch water for his sick mother in their drought-stricken African land. On the way back, he shares the water with a hedgehog, a family of hyenas, and an ant bear, whereupon his enraged mother breaks the empty jar; but the animals appear to him in a dream and urge him to dig a well “as deep as your heart and as wide as your thirst.” It is this well that provides for the entire village and turns the surrounding desert green. Despite the overgeneralized picture of Africa suggested by a vague geographical setting, this is effectively written and illustrated. The dark watercolors, overlaid with translucent blocks of text, are subtly blended and the compositions, like the words, limited to basic patterns. Human and animal figures are expressively stylized. Though it’s cast in the form of a traditional tale, this is one of the few picture books to reflect current conditions of famine that devastate vast sections of the world, and it’s a picture book well paced for sharing aloud in context of children’s discussing news they’ve heard or overheard. BH

HANSARD, PETER  A Field Full of Horses; illus. by Kenneth Lilly.  Candlewick, 1994  26p (Read and Wonder)
ISBN 1-56402-302-8  $14.95  R  5-8 yrs

An unseen narrator approaches a pasture and watches a fetching herd of horses graze. Hansard addresses small aspects of horse behavior (“one rolls on her back in a dusty wallow”), horse care (“their owners groom them with tools like these”), and equine information (“A horse is measured in HANDS, from the withers to the ground”) as Lilly's calmly realistic line-and-watercolor pictures display the expressive charm of their subjects. The book is more general than other entries in the Read and Wonder series (such as Think of an Eel, BCCB 5/93), with a slightly British flavor (and the not-found-anywhere use of “snicker” to describe an equine
HENEGHAN, JAMES  *Torn Away.* Viking, 1994  [192p]
Reviewed from galleys

Forced to go live with his Uncle Matthew in Canada after his mother and sister are killed in an Ulster terrorist bombing, thirteen-year-old Declan, intent upon joining up with the IRA, does everything he can to return to Northern Ireland. Only handcuffs and an armed guard get him on the plane to Canada in the first place; once at Matthew’s home in coastal British Columbia, he steals a series of boats to get back to Vancouver, where he almost manages to smuggle himself aboard a plane bound for Scotland. While the action-adventure qualities of the novel are never quite convincing, Declan’s rage is, as he swears revenge for his mother’s and sister’s deaths as well as for the death of his father some years before at the hands—Declan thinks—of Protestant loyalists. Realizing he cannot escape the kindly ministrations of Matthew and his family, Declan strikes a deal: he will stay until after Christmas, four months hence, and then, if he still insists, Matthew will send him back. Given how saintly Matthew and his family are, there’s little suspense as to Declan’s decision, even though the author drags it out until the last page; what will hold readers is the vivid drama of the scenes in Belfast and Declan’s halting, grudging acceptance of Matthew’s love. Declan seems older than thirteen; on the other hand, we get a sobering, immediate picture of a country and civil war that would quickly make kids grow up too fast. RS

HUSAIN, SHAHRUKH  *Mecca.* Dillon, 1993  46p illus. with photographs  (Holy Cities)
ISBN 0-87518-572-X $13.95

As well as being a travelogue and history of Islam’s most sacred city, this is a cogent and uncontroversial explanation of the religion and its people. Husain’s survey is chronological, tracing the history of Mecca from Ibrahim’s discovery of the miraculous Zam-zam spring, through Muhammad’s revelation from God that his followers should pray in the direction of the Kaaba, to the contemporary, streamlined focus of the pilgrimage (the *hajj*) that Mecca is today. Throughout, color photographs link the present with the past, and while the design is typical of the double-columned, slightly crammed, nonfiction series English import, the photos and the clearly outlined information give the book a browsably accessible format. Unfamiliar words are defined in the text proper or in “Key word” boxes; a timeline, a six-title reading list, and an index are appended. RS

HYDE, MARGARET O.  *Know about Gays and Lesbians;* written by Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth H. Forsyth. Millbrook, 1994  96p
ISBN 1-56294-298-0 $15.90

As with many other young people’s books about homosexuality, this one assumes that its readers are heterosexual, beginning in the first chapter with “A gay or lesbian may be your best friend and you may not even know that person is homosexual.” In fact, the core audience for this book may be gay teens themselves, seeking information and emotional support even as they tell you that “it’s for a report.” What they will find here are some mixed messages. The attitude is en-
tirely pro-gay, but while the book is thoroughly footnoted, it is careless in its handling of statistics and theories. At first, for example, Hyde and Forsyth state that "estimates of the incidence of homosexuality range from 1 percent to 10 percent of the population"; then they go on to accept the 10 percent figure throughout the rest of the book, even though this figure is a subject of great controversy. They also cite a very peculiar scale of the seven types of male homosexuals—from "trade homosexuals" to "gay guys"—that is self-contradictory and ill-informed, more benevolent than Morton Hunt's "queer gays" and "straight gays" (BCCB 3/88) but confusing nonetheless. The writing is sometimes slapdash: "Although many heterosexuals grow up in families with single parents, the boy-girl tradition continues." What does that mean? "Others claim that it [a butch and femme lesbian relationship] is one form of relationship to be explored as long as it does not exploit the female partner." Which one would that be? Several first-names-only anecdotal case studies are included, but there is no indication of whether these are fictional or taken from real people. There's a comprehensive overview of biology, social science, and history here that's often lacking in other YA books on the topic, but it is too often difficult to discern. Notes, a reading list with nineteen nonfiction books and one Norma Klein novel, a directory of gay and AIDS organizations and hotlines, and an index are appended. Susan and Daniel Cohen's *When Someone You Know Is Gay* (BCCB 6/89) remains the best YA nonfiction on the topic, particularly in its acknowledgment that the "someone you know" may be you. RS


Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 3-6

Although one double-page spread features pictures of some of the country's most famous libraries, such as the Library of Congress, the rest of the book is, as the title says, devoted to Jaspersohn's own local library, the Guilford Free Library in Connecticut. This library seems a comfortable blend of the traditional (card catalog, flannel boards, and a pencil-tallied accessions book) and the modern (automated checkout system, videos, Infotrac), with Jaspersohn's camera focused closely on all the specific objects, procedures, and services that comprise a busy library of today. The color photos are a crisp survey of all the departments, including their tools and staff, and while there's an appropriate emphasis on the children's department, Jaspersohn doesn't neglect the historical room, technical processing, or adult services. Most every public library will offer some version of the services offered at Guilford, so the book could be used as an introduction to your place as well, and the libraries-are-great theme that runs throughout is a welcome tonic: "The library is part of a community. Its job is to nourish that community with flavorful food for the mind." Well said, and well-shown. RS


Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 1-3

Cheerful, imaginative Lionel (*Lionel at Large*, BCCB 4/86, etc.) is back with four easy-to-read stories that will invite warm smiles on any day, cold or not. Lionel delights in winter weather without realizing that his family doesn't share his en-
thusiasm, explores the “Arctic” in his backyard, learns more quickly about New Year’s resolutions than his sister Louise expects, and keeps a potato-nosed snowman from becoming lonely. The dialogue is natural and the language flows smoothly. These gently funny stories have sprightly watercolor illustrations that match their mood and develop the characters. Lionel readers won’t be disappointed with his new adventures. CF

KROLL, STEVEN  
By the Dawn’s Early Light: The Story of the Star-Spangled Banner; illus. by Dan Andreasen. Scholastic, 1994 [40p]  
ISBN 0-590-45054-9 $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  Gr. 3-5

The war with the British has been going on for over two years when, on the last day of August in 1814, a young Washington lawyer learns that a friend has been arrested by the British and taken to one of their ships. In an effort to rescue him, Francis Scott Key seeks and secures President Madison’s permission to visit the British fleet under a flag of truce. A day later, Key and a federal agent bravely set sail in a small cartel boat looking for the enemy. Handsome full-page oil paintings in warm golden tones blend nineteenth-century romance with twentieth-century realism in this story of how the American national anthem came to be written. The paintings’ compositions are reminiscent of the art of the period, while the strained emotions on the faces of the men remind us that even a heroic war is harrowing. Kroll’s details of this dramatic story match those told at Fort McHenry today; judicious use of dialogue moves the story along while remaining true to the facts. The author sets the context for the story with an introductory page on the War of 1812, and a note at the end of the book provides a few more details about the flag, the song, and its author. Song, music, maps, pictures, bibliography for children, and index round out a well-planned book that revives a story nearly fossilized by hyperbolic retellings; the rather formal quality of the storytelling, along with the advanced vocabulary, indicate that the book is best suited for independent readers. CF

LANDAU, ELAINE  
ISBN 0-02-751389-0 $13.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
Ad  Gr. 7-10

“The beauty trap,” says Elaine Landau, “is actually a way of thinking that asserts that a woman’s true value and desirability are essentially tied to the way she looks.” First-person accounts of pain from trying to meet an impossible ideal (ranging from a girl whose mother desperately wants her to be thin to a brunette who fried her hair off in an effort to be blonde) alternate with chapters about the cultural emphasis on female beauty, the obsession with female weight, and the prevalence of plastic surgery. There are some telling anecdotes, ranging from a discussion of the Christine Craft case to a recounting of a slender woman who went “undercover” as a fat one, and the medical facts on eating disorders and ruptured breast implants are certainly alarming. The book is a little superficial, however, never addressing some important questions (Are men’s reactions to their bodies different from women’s?) and relating sad but unsurprising stories rather than demonstrating the quirky and individual response to self-image displayed by Jill Dawson’s How Do I Look? (BCCB 9/91); it also strays occasionally from its chosen subject (the importance of the appearance issue to feminism doesn’t quite explain why
Landau moves so frequently to more general discussions of women and their role. Nevertheless, for girls not ready for Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*—to which Landau’s book owes a great deal—this will make sobering and thoughtful reading. Endnotes, suggestions for further reading, a listing of organizations concerned about the status of women, and an index are included. DS


If snakes send you shrieking, beware: “a wriggling, writhing carpet of snakes covers the bottom of a large pit” on the first double-page spread here, but if you persevere you’ll begin to see, as Lavies does, the fascination inherent in what at first appears to be a vat of scaly green spaghetti. Thousands of red-sided garter snakes spend the winter in pits like these in Manitoba, and this book documents their habitat and habits as they hibernate, mate, eat, shed their skins, and interact with local residents. As usual, Lavies combines her ability to write clear and informative prose with a boundless curiosity about the natural world; this text is made particularly lively by accounts of the nearby town, where snakes fall from the inhabitants’ ceilings, Kelly the snake-retrieving dog lovingly brings herpetological gifts to his mistress, and Mrs. Lillequist happily shares a kitchen with handsome serpentine George and occasionally her living room with his friends (“We sit very still at night as the snakes come into the living room and play with each other on the carpet”). Photographs include images of patterned and gleaming scales, stop-action shots of lithe exploring tongues, an informative yet gruesomely fascinating picture of a frog, his hands extended in apparent supplication, disappearing down a snake’s throat, and human-interaction photos in which the tiny snakes are downright cute. Don’t miss the final page, where Lavies sprawls comfortably, like an unrepentant but clothed Eve, among her snaky subjects; it may well prompt requests for “that snake lady book.” DS


See this month’s Big Picture, p. 179.


With the controlled surrealism that characterized his illustrations for Claude Clément’s *The Voice of the Wood* (BCCB 6/89), Frédéric Clément has illustrated a Japanese tale familiar from Lafcadio Hearn’s earlier adaptation. Many storytellers already know what a great ghost story this makes for Halloween sessions: an artistically talented little boy, trapped in an abandoned temple, paints screen after screen of cats that come alive to defeat the giant rat haunting the place. It’s an eerie legend which, according to an informative author’s note, grew around a well-known fifteenth-century artist, and these acrylic paintings heighten the suspense at a sym-
bolic level without sensationalizing it. They have the flat perspective and spare composition of traditional Japanese prints, with somber hues that warn of danger and with a well-integrated page design incorporating calligraphy of Japanese characters whose pronunciation and meaning is indicated at the end of the book. Try this with the older picture-book crowd; sophisticates who’ve progressed beyond Harold and the Purple Crayon will be on the edge of their seats. BH


Illustrated with jaunty pastel art, Lewis’s latest collection offers twelve poems, one for each month, along with a concluding reprise that brings them all together. The rhythms are catchy and the imagery ever-crisp, from “January” (“Great days of ice!/ Refrigerated/ Paradise”) through “December” (Two carolers on the green,/ Who just became a trio/ With my snowman in between”). Hall’s pictures dance right along with the verses, which convey surprising sounds in formal meters. You’ve got twelve story-hour starters right here, and the collection as a whole would also make a nicely unpedantic introduction to the shifting seasons; in any case, the poems are fun to read aloud. RS


Bessie’s best friend and playmate has been her grandmother, “who had speckled eyes like birds’ eggs, bendy thumbs, and a crinkle at the top of her nose.” They do card tricks, tame birds, and play hopscotch, but suddenly Grandma dies, and the little girl wonders where she went. Heaven, says Mommy; “Grandma was now a part of nature,” says Daddy; “born again as an animal or a bird,” offers next-door neighbor Krishna. It turns out Krishna was closest to the mark, for many years later, Bessie marries and has a baby, complete with speckled eyes, bendy thumbs, nose-crinkle and bird-taming ability. The story, illustrated with suitably tender, simple line-and-watercolor paintings, seems meant to be a gentle reflection on time, memory, and cycles, though literal children may be left thinking that Grandma has actually come back as a baby, “just like grandma, only a little girl. . . . it was as if Grandma had never been away.” RS

LOWELL, SUSAN I Am Lavina Cumming. Milkweed Editions, 1993 200p
Paper ed. ISBN 0-915943-77-8 $6.95 Ad Gr. 4-6

Lavina loves her home in the Arizona Territory, but her father worries that she’ll grow up wild, so he sends her to live with his cultured sister in Santa Cruz, California. There Lavina meets spoiled cousin Aggie, sturdy hired girl Bridget, and dignified yet strong-willed Aunt Agnes, who begins to teach Lavina how to be a lady and makes her realize that there is a wider world beyond Lavina’s beloved ranch. Based on the life of the author’s grandmother, the book rings true although it never really rises above the mundane despite the historical setting and events such as the 1906 earthquake. The story of turn-of-the-century daily life is smoothly written and the historical details appealing, but there’s little surprise or development outside of Lavina’s rather sudden decision at the end to pursue her education. DS

An ambitious introductory survey, this is much needed to counter the persistent under-representation of African history in U.S. children’s literature, but it has some of the problems of an encyclopedia article in trying to organize huge amounts of material under general headings such as “Ghana’s Government,” “Ghana’s Kings,” “The Military,” “Ghanaiian Justice,” etc. In a section called “Daily Life,” for instance, the text leaps from a paragraph describing family relationships among the Mande to an example of poetry that seems unrelated except for broad connections of time and place. What stands out most clearly from the names, dates, and political complexities are leaders such as Sundiata, whose stories have an unforgettable epic quality. Indeed, the authors make a point of balancing Arabic and European accounts with the oral narrative of griots, whose records they strongly credit and whom they say still function importantly in West African society today. Despite the textbook tone, this will be extremely useful as a springboard to books and articles that offer more depth but are less accessible to students. Maps, black-and-white photographs, and clearly marked sections open up the format, while a time line, notes, a bibliography, and an index will prove helpful to readers involved in researching specific topics. BH


This sequel to the author’s award-winning Sarah, Plain and Tall (BCCB 5/85) tells of a drought that threatens Anna’s new family situation as the fields dry up and neighbors abandon their homesteads. When the barn burns down, Sarah takes Anna and Caleb back to her old home in Maine. After a yearning exchange of letters and a rainfall, Papa comes to bring them back to the prairie, where Sarah finally writes her name in the dirt as a sign that the skylark has “come to earth” to make her home. This has less impact than the first book, partly because the children’s concern that Sarah may not stay with them is repetitive and partly because the drought as a plot device is less dynamic than it is simply looming. However, MacLachlan’s writing is still lyrical, and the story’s continuation and happy ending will be a must for fans of both the first book and its television special. This one seems tailor-made for filming as well (apparently it was, with the movie of Skylark shown last year on TV): “There will be flowers in the spring, and the river will run again. And in the spring there will be the new baby, Papa and Sarah’s baby.” BH


A small snake and a young boy meet on a summer afternoon, and the snake suddenly finds itself far away from the sunny pond. Escaping from its glass jar prison,
the snake spends days in the boy’s house searching for a way out. Rand’s richly colored, realistic watercolors, drawn from the snake’s perspective, give pots and pans, the vacuum cleaner, and the household cat dramatic size and importance and emphasize both the smallness of the snake and the enormity of its task in trying to leave the house. Faith McNulty succeeds in telling the story of the snake without slipping into sentimentality or anthropomorphism. She gently reminds readers to treat animals with care while affirming that a child’s natural curiosity and the creatures of nature can meet and, with a little luck or thought, both will survive. CF


The creaky door scares Nathaniel Willy silly, so his grandmother piles his bed ever-higher with barnyard friends, each of whom, of course, adds its own warff (dog), snoink (pig), moo (guess) to the cacophony when the boy squeezes the catscroll—for comfort. The sound effects encourage chanting along, as does Gramma’s repeated rhyme: “She pulled up the blanket and tucked them all in,/ Then kissed them resoundingly—smack! on the chin.” Watercolor illustrations have a rustic, folksy feel, tumbling the boy and the animals about the pages until Gramma, in despair, consults a neighbor and finds the answer: oil on the hinges. A natural companion to The Napping House, this folktale—no source cited—has a similarly cumulating appeal and surprise. RS


“Children have always worked,” begins Milton Meltzer in this discourse on child labor which starts with a history of practices including slavery, servitude, apprenticeship, and the early period of industrialization. He moves next to the recent child labor abuses cited in fast-food chains, farming, and industrial home work. Comparing incidents before and after labor laws were enacted in this country indicates that current cases are more likely to represent neglect and irresponsibility on the part of a minority rather than reflecting widespread injustice. The exceptions are farm workers, both children and adults, who were excluded from labor legislation as a part of the compromise to get the legislation passed in the first place. Although Meltzer tries to prove, through example, systemic and systematic abuse and exploitation of child workers in this country and worldwide, he succeeds primarily when he talks of farm laborers and children in less regulated countries such as India and Mexico. What Meltzer does show is how closely children’s issues are tied to the problems of their parents. The last decade or more has seen a rise in poverty, homelessness, unemployment, political instability, war, and loosened government regulation; the rise in child labor, and thus in the abuses of child labor, is a symptom of these larger social problems. Keenly aware of this, Meltzer takes indignant swipes at a system that appears to be slipping, even charging, in the wrong direction. His broad coverage sometimes compromises the book’s focus, but does allow the reader to select details for building a case of his or her own. Meltzer’s research is commendable and his sources are well documented. CF
MORI, HANA  *jirohatten*; tr. by Tamiko Kurosaki and Elizabeth Crowe; illus. by
Elizabeth Crowe. Bess Press, 1993  76p
Paper ed. ISBN 1-880188-69-4  $5.95  R  Gr. 4-7

This brief novel from Japan gives a quietly told and accessible picture of rural wartime life in that country, as focused on the “gentle giant” figure of Jirohattan, a mentally retarded young man beloved by his entire village. When Jirohattan’s best friend, Shinyan, is drafted, Jirohattan can’t understand why he cannot accompany him and tries to count the days until his return—nor can Jirohattan understand the news that Shinyan’s transport ship has been torpedoed and all hands drowned. When the village takes in refugee children sent from Kobe, Jirohattan becomes a leader in making them welcome, finding them food, and protecting them from the taunts of other children. The portrait of Jirohattan is spare enough to counter sentimentality, and the story, told in retrospect by a retired village schoolteacher to her grandson, has the feeling of a nonfiction memoir, beginning with her coming to the remote village in 1928 and ending with Jirohattan’s death in 1950. The war itself is offstage here, but it’s a distinct presence that shapes the destinies of all the characters.  RS

MOUTOUSSAMY-ASHE, JEANNE  *Daddy and Me: A Photo Story of Arthur Ashe and His Daughter, Camera*; written and illus. with photographs by Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe. Knopf, 1993  40p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-679-85096-1  $13.00  Ad 4-6 yrs

Moutoussamy-Ashe’s photographs of her late husband Arthur and their daughter Camera are technically adept and undeniably moving: we see father and daughter playing and praying together, helping each other out when one of them is sick, hugging and comforting each other. But as an introduction for young children about what it’s like when a parent has AIDS, *Daddy and Me* will probably prove vague and confusing. “Do you know what having AIDS means? I do,” says Camera, and goes on to explain that “it means that sometimes Daddy runs a fever and feels very tired.” This is true for many illnesses, of course, and when Camera further reports that, like her daddy, she has “good days and bad days too,” young listeners will probably misunderstand the comparison, particularly the girl’s assertion that “on my good days I like to hang upside down.” What the book does exceptionally well is to show the easy physical affection between Camera and her father and the love that keeps them both going. Only in the prefatory note to parents does Moutoussamy-Ashe say that Ashe is dead; the narrative proper neither states nor implicitly acknowledges that AIDS is a fatal disease, an omission that one could read as evasion or protection, or simply as acknowledgment that some hard facts are best left to parents.  RS

NICHOL, BARBARA  *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*; illus. by Scott Cameron. Orchard, 1994  [48p]
ISBN 0-531-06828-5  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R*  Gr. 3-5

“I write, Uncle, because something terrible has happened. A madman has moved into our house.” The new lodger about whom Christoph writes to his Uncle Karl is Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven is disrupting the whole household with his noise (four pianos), his parties, and his eccentric personal habits, such as sluicing
water over his head while stamping on the floor, and causing a leak in the down-
stairs ceiling. What Christoph learns from Uncle Karl’s letters in return is that
Beethoven, now deaf, is in the midst of composing his Ninth Symphony, and the
epistolary story culminates with one of music’s most famous—and poignant—
events, when Beethoven had to be turned around to view the ovation for what
would be his last completed symphonic work. Illustrated with thickly textured,
candlelit oil paintings that are realistically rumpled more than they are Romanti-
cized, the book (based upon an audio recording) moves from a picture of Beethoven
as growling nuisance to a deeper understanding of his genius. “To feel so much
inside, even so much joy, must be almost more than he can bear,” realizes Christoph
at the end. It’s a pleasure to see a children’s book about classical music take its
subject seriously, communicating successfully the passion of artistic creation. RS

Osborne, Mary Pope, ad. Mermaid Tales from Around the World; illus. by Troy
Howell. Scholastic, 1993 84p ISBN 0-590-44377-1 $16.95  R  Gr. 4-6

Fans of Disney’s Little Mermaid should know there’s more to the story, and this
anthology of a dozen tales will entertain them without sentimentalizing the leg-
endary creatures, who in fact show a variety of characteristics that often include
quirks of magical power. Melusine of France, the Native American Menana, the
Greek nymph Galatea, an African fish husband, and several Asian, European, and
British Isle variants are included for cultural balance. In general the texts are smooth,
though retelling Hans Christian Andersen’s version always seems unnecessary, given
its cadenced wit. Osborne’s style occasionally flattens out, as in the exchange
between the fantastical princess of Tung Lake and her human friend Chen: “The
beautiful princess lowered her eyes. ‘I would like to be your friend forever,’ she
said. ‘Oh, how wonderful,’ he said.” Kids will swim right by this, however, enjoy-
ing the unusual, subtly feminist power of the cast along with Howell’s illustra-
tions, tastefully lyrical and aesthetically tailored to traditional art modes of the
various societies represented. An author’s note gives brief background and specific
sources for each story. BH

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw What Good Is a Tail?; illus. with photographs by

What good is a tail? Well, “some tails are beautiful . . . tails show feelings . . . tails
are handy for getting around,” points out Dorothy Hinshaw Patent in describing
the function of this particular appendage. Separate sections examine the importance
of tails in steering (birds and fish, for example), balancing (many tree climbers),
communication (creatures ranging from predators such as wolves to prey such as
deer), and defense (snakes and porcupines). The topic has inherent appeal, since
tails are fairly mysterious to tail-free humans, but Patent’s writing here lacks her
usual precision—she defines tails rather vaguely as “the part of the body that sticks
out beyond the end of the digestive system” and doesn’t really explain why lobster
tails or tailfeathers on birds aren’t “real tails.” Photographs of varied wildlife have
a surprising amount of charm considering the tail’s location on the anatomy, and
they drive home the message of diversity and usefulness of this particular creature
feature; some of the captions, unfortunately, are poorly written to the point of
being misleading (“Rattlesnakes warn potential enemies that they might strike by
rattling their tails"). The anatomical approach to zoology (used with more success for younger readers in Hana Machotka’s *Breathtaking Noses*, BCCB 7/92) makes for a nice change, and this could be informative pre-zoo reading. An index is included. DS

**PATRICK, KATHERINE**  *Flip-Flip Girl*. Lodestar, 1994  [128p]
Reviewed from galleys  R*  Gr. 4-6

Paterson’s signature and most memorable characters are almost anti-heroines . . . almost but not quite. Even Gilly Hopkins found redemption, while Vinnie, the protagonist of *Flip-Flip Girl*, finds a friend. It’s not much, by the standards of the rest of the fourth-grade class in the small Virginia community to which Vinnie and her mother and little brother move after her father’s death from cancer, for Vinnie’s friend Lupe is also an outcast whose father is in prison, falsely accused (perhaps) of murdering his wife. What’s developed here is a complex situation in which Vinnie callously behaves to others—including her little brother, mute since their father’s funeral—as others do to her; Paterson never oversimplifies in the name of faith. Especially effective is the crush Vinnie develops on her teacher, as well as the ferocity with which she wreaks vengeance after feeling betrayed and the dread with which she awaits punishment. This is a child with an adult-size problem, and readers will immediately recognize her in and around themselves. BH

**PAULSEN, GARY**  *Mr. Tucket*. Delacorte, 1994  [176p]
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 6-9

“Mr. Tucket” is actually fourteen-year Francis Alphonse Tucket, kidnapped from his wagon train by Pawnee but liberated with the aid of mountain man Jason Grimes. Francis hooks up with Mr. Grimes, who calls him “Mr. Tucket,” and from whom he learns much about survival and the frontier. Western lore abounds as Francis learns to ride, shoot, trade with Indians, and trap beavers, as well as getting to meet Jim Bridger and fight Pawnee (one of whom has a particular vendetta against both Francis and Mr. Grimes). Unfortunately there’s not a great deal of characterization, and some of the story is perplexing: it’s not clear why Francis never thinks to send word to his family that he’s still alive, and his final epiphany (“He was not and did not want to be a ‘mountain man’”) seems rather surprising. There are more subtle takes on the frontier experience, but adventure fans will enjoy the whoopin’ and hollerin’ action here. DS

**POGORELSKY, ANTONY**  *The Black Hen, or the Underground Inhabitants*; ad. by Morse Hamilton; illus. by Tatyana Yuditskaya. Cobblehill, 1994  32p
ISBN 0-525-65133-0  $14.99  Ad  5-8 yrs

When Alyosha saves a black hen from the chopping block, he discovers that the hen is really chief minister of a kingdom of magical little people who live under Alyosha’s St. Petersburg boarding school. His reward is a wish, and he foolishly asks for the ability to memorize his schoolwork without even reading it; while the magic king tut-tuts his choice, he grants the wish but cautions Alyosha never to tell anyone about the wondrous underground kingdom. Based on a famous Russian children’s story from 1829, this picture book is somewhat oppressively didactic as Alyosha not only smugly neglects his studying but eventually spills the beans about
the little people, who are then forced to flee, taking Alyosha's amazing ability with them. (We're never sure exactly from whom they are fleeing, nor why the chief minister is led off in chains.) Old-world watercolors combine fine-lined backgrounds with some smudgy figure drawing for a total effect that is sometimes crowded but that often conveys the ornate magic of the story. Kids will probably ignore the sermon, content to enjoy the fantasy world that—who knows?—could lie under their own school or bed. RS

Priceman, Marjorie  How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World; written and illus. by Marjorie Priceman. Knopf, 1994 [32p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-679-83705-1 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys R* 5-8 yrs

Apple pies are generally as easy as—well, pie, but this one demands some effort: the poker-faced instructions tell the reader to "get all the ingredients at the market. . . . Unless, of course, the market is closed," whereupon you must show some initiative and take a steamship to Italy to gather semolina wheat for the flour, hop a train to France to acquire a chicken for its eggs, travel to Sri Lanka so you can peel a piece of cinnamon bark for seasoning, head to England to pick up a cow for the necessary butter, stow away on a banana boat to Jamaica (scooping up some salty seawater on the way) so you can get some sugar cane, soar by balloon to Vermont to collect some apples, then go home, refine all your ingredients, and finally bake them into a pie! A delightful contrast to more sober-sided narratives of food origins, this offers an entertaining adventure, complete with a free-spirited, straw-hatted young heroine who's clearly happy to circumnavigate the globe while brushing up her languages and making new friends. The illustrations show slightly Provensenesque pointy-toed figures capering, with more motion than detail, across verdant landscapes, golden wheatfields, and azure skies (check out the parachuting cow on the back cover). For those with a literal mind, a recipe for apple pie and a map showing the places visited are included; others can simply contemplate the lengths necessary to obtain a complementary scoop of ice cream. . . . DS

Reviewed from galleys R  Gr. 9 up

After two forays into contemporary "problem" fiction (The Broken Bridge, BCCB 4/92; The White Mercedes, 6/93), Pullman here returns to the Victorian sweep and setting of his three Sally Lockhart books (5/87, 4/88, 10/90). Sally makes a cameo appearance here, but the focus is on a young language tutor named Becky and on her student Adelaide, who will be remembered from The Ruby in the Smoke and who has married into the royal family of Razkavia, a Mittel-Europa hotbed of political intrigue. The plot is far too complicated both for its own good and to go into here; readers who appreciated the twists and turns of the Sally Lockhart stories, as well as their large measure of feminist heroics, will find plenty to keep them turning the pages. While Pullman appreciates the excesses of Victorian melodrama, he is never seduced by them, and the book has a dark, unsentimental core that banishes any sense of pastiche. The sophisticated writing and labyrinthine narrative make this a book for the more adult end of young adult; Pullman fans of any age
shouldn’t hesitate, but those new to the author will be better served by a first encounter with the more straightforward adventure of *The Ruby in the Smoke*. RS

Roth-Hano, Renée  *Safe Harbors*. Four Winds, 1993  214p
ISBN 0-02-777795-2  $15.95  M  Gr. 7-10

A sequel to Roth-Hano's *Touch Wood* (BCCB 5/88), in which she described her survival as a Jewish child in a Catholic convent school during the Germans' World War II occupation of France, this autobiographical novel takes the form of diary entries during the author's first seventeen-month visit to the United States in 1951-52. As a memoir, the book has historical interest, but as fiction, it proves unfocused. What may have been factual becomes fragmentary as the protagonist exclaims over newly discovered interests tangential to the plot (“The whole subject of the early settlers and the pioneer spirit is just fascinating to me. It must have been an exciting period!”) or meets old friends whom we don’t know and meet here only briefly (“How heartwarming to see the white-haired, tired-faced Mrs. Barth remember smile a genuine, carefree smile, and the wiry, always-worried Mr. Barth of my youth rush to me and hug me”). Even the observations of New York are sometimes oddly out of sync with the book’s main theme, as when the protagonist, who frequently recalls the fear of hiding from Nazis, suddenly exclaims “Two women pass me, conversing in German. I get a heartwarming sense of being in Europe.” The pace picks up when the book concentrates on development of main characters, such as the complex woman who sponsors Renée and hires her as housekeeper/baby-sitter, or on the realization of primary situations, such as Renée’s yearning for her French boyfriend and resolution of guilt over her father’s death. Tonally uneven, this may nevertheless hold the attention of those who want to follow what happened after the first book. BH

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-023023-1  $19.95
Reviewed from galleys  M  Gr. 4-6

The time is somewhere between 1820 and 1890 and the place is the West, i.e. anywhere from Kentucky to California. The topic is pioneers, who are variously identified as mountainmen, cowboys, gold miners, frontier families, frontier women, and loggers. Here is “a story larger than fiction, filled with real people with real dreams facing and overcoming enormous challenges,” according to the author. The real people are pictured in archival material from the Library of Congress but none of the photographs, lithographs, paintings, engravings, line drawings, or posters is captioned, dated, or referenced. Sandler writes, sometimes confusingly, in the present tense, and more than once strays into generalities bordering on the grandiose, as in his description of the pioneer woman: “She is mother, wife, nurse, cook, doctor, comforter, teacher, and farm laborer . . . She will be regarded as a true heroine, and she will earn a proud nickname—the Madonna of the Plains.” A vague chronology guides the work, moving back and forth whenever the need arises to discuss first the mountainmen (identified as Daniel Boone and Kit Carson), then the California Gold Rush, the prairie schooners, the railroads and the cowboy, and finally the settling of farm families on the prairies and plains. Song lyrics, song-sheet covers, and broadsides have such identifying treatments as “From song, ‘Greer County.’” The page layout is attractive and the print is inviting, but the
Poor Tully—last year Honey "Fearsome" Kotcher was his bullying enemy, but now in sixth grade he's become the object of her ferocious affection. She beats up Tully's opponents and scares the girl whom Tully really likes until his response finally becomes cruel enough to drive the message home, after which a more diplomatic and platonic friendship seems to be arising. Characterization isn't deep and the story takes at least one extraneous turn, but Schenker's understanding of the raw agony of preteen embarrassment will win empathy from readers. The setting, Texas' Matagorda Island, provides some unusual southwestern atmosphere that's enhanced by the zesty and earthy writing ("If God was to listen to the prayers of buzzards," says one character philosophically, "there'd be dead cows all over the dunes"). The downhome yet exotic flavor spices up a familiar story that kids will relish. DS

When the greedy goldsmith Jarlo forces his honest brother Drashi and their mother out of the village, the two outcasts go into the mountains, barely surviving until Drashi meets a stone lion who rewards his goodness with a shower of gold. Jarlo hears of the lion and also tries to get the gold, but his greediness turns on him and instead the lion takes Jarlo's hand into his mouth and doesn't let go until Jarlo sees the error of his selfish ways. Folktales rarely allow for such repentance, and the Tibetan customs seem viewed from the outside, rather than naturally arising from the tale itself: "Once a week [Drashi] watched his mother patiently braid her hair into one hundred and eight strands. In Tibet this was a holy number, and to keep the braids in place, Tsomo would smear her hair with yak butter." It's an interesting detail, but irrelevant to the story. Still, the book does give a picture of a culture not well known in the West, and Doney's dramatically lit pictures, backgrounded with the vistas of the Himalayas, are well composed and visually absorbing. While jacket copy calls this a "retelling of a traditional tale," there's no source note. RS

Like Matas' Sworn Enemies (BCCB 4/93), this is a historical novel about two boys who have fought throughout their village childhood but who must cooperate to escape being caught in nineteenth century Czarist Russia's conscription of Jewish youth. The two books will make intriguing companions for discussion, since Circlemaker provides the thorough background detail lacking in Enemies, while Enemies suggests more ambiguous moral issues. Schur's first-person narrative is well plotted and paced; she has an ear for Yiddish inflection ("If things don't get better, depend on it, they will get worse!") and suspenseful narrative ("I heard tree
trunks creak with the sound of bones cracking”). She’s especially good at crises, and the hero and anti-hero’s border-crossing from the Ukraine into Hungary is harrowing. Except for a few longwinded conversations, information is inserted without fictional disruption, and the characters, both primary and secondary, are memorable. In fact, readers may well find themselves remembering them in a sequel, for which the ending here certainly leaves room. BH

SHULEVITZ, URI The Secret Room; written and illus. by Uri Shulevitz. Farrar, 1993 32p ISBN 0-374-34169-9 $15.00 R 4-7 yrs

Traveling through the desert, a king asks a stranger, “Why is your head gray and your beard black?” “Because my head is older than my beard,” comes the reply. “You must not tell this to anyone until you have seen my face ninety-nine times,” orders the king so he can go home and riddle his chief counselor. The stranger does tell the answer—after accepting payment of ninety-nine copper coins stamped with the king’s face—and eventually replaces the jealous counselor after showing wisdom equal to his cleverness. Shulevitz has laced together folkloric motifs with an admirable simplicity that matches his clean compositions. The tempera paintings are intensely focused, with plenty of white space to offset sharply contrasting hues and angular shapes. There’s an especially sly humor of expression—or expressionlessness—in the royal entourage and a certain kinship of features between the supercilious camel and the bad-tempered counselor. Despite its flaring color patterns, this is an understated book that will give young listeners solid satisfaction. The setting and costumes appear to be Russian-influenced Muslim, but there’s nary a hint of the story’s source. BH


Even as accomplished a novelist as Stolz must be ambitious to write, for children, a fictional memoir of a slave who escapes to Canada, returns to the U.S. to fight in the Civil War, becomes a cowboy in Texas so he can look for his long-lost mother, and—as an old man—intermingles accounts of his life story with philosophical asides about the racism that shaped it. Some of this works and some of it doesn’t. The characters are vividly realized; the events are believable except for instances of deus ex machina rescue (as when a wealthy Canadian plucks Cezanne and his mentor from two villains bent on reclaiming them in the name of the Fugitive Slave Act); the historical explanations are sometimes integrated naturally into the narrator’s asides but at other times seem intrusive; the details are a mixture of careful research and odd anachronism, including the terms black, African-American, and Negro all applied at different points by the narrator in 1940, as well as his unlikely reflection about “Ol’ Massa,” who sometimes hired out his slaves to neighbors in “a sort of nineteenth-century rent-a-slave deal.” Most debatable, perhaps, is the narrator’s use of heavy dialect (“When we’se gwine go?”) in his memoir as he recollects his gradual but determined effort to rid himself of that dialect, an act that Stolz makes a metaphor for true freedom through educational improvement. There’s a lot to debate in both the subject and the treatment here; couple this one with Gary Paulsen’s Nightjohn (BCCB 2/93) and Mary Lyons’ Letters from a Slave Girl (BCCB 11/92). BH
STROM, YALE  *Uncertain Roads: Searching for the Gypsies*; written and illus. with photographs by Yale Strom. Four Winds, 1993 112p  ISBN 0-02-788531-3 $19.95  R Gr. 5 up

Far from indulging in the flashing-eyes-and-violin stereotypes of gypsy life, Strom has provided an urgent, contemporary look at the dangers that Gypsies (called "Rom" here, as the group prefers) face in a newly fragmented Europe. The Rom had some semblance of equality and employment under the communist regimes of the Eastern bloc; but changes in government and increasing ethnic animosities have shut the Rom out, causing many of them to recall their terrible fate during the Holocaust. Strom visited Romania, Hungary, Ukraine, and Sweden, taking pictures, making music, and talking with the Rom, who are quoted in extensive first-person interviews. While the interviews, viewed separately, lack individualizing distinction, with many of the sources sounding the same or covering the same topics, the book taken as a whole is an urgent manifesto defending the basic human rights of a minority. There have been many books arguing for the "cultural survival" of various indigenous populations, but this one is not about saving the "old ways"; it's instead about saving people from physical attacks and discrimination in housing and employment. The book is liberally illustrated with color and black-and-white photos of the Rom, showing lively traditions of dance and music along with grim reminders of prejudice and poverty. The interviews are, sometimes distractingly, side-barred with Strom's comments about his trip; an introductory essay gives historical context, and the inclusion of music for four Rom songs adds flavor. RS


In the folkloric tradition of humble heroes who receive a mysterious call and follow it to find their destinies, a poor Japanese farmer heeds an inner voice that urges him to visit the Iseh shrine. On his way, he takes a shortcut that leads him into the frightening Black Swamp, where a captive maiden begs him to take a letter to her parents in the dangerous Red Swamp. It is compassion that fuels his courage, but it is gold that rewards him. In fact, there is a golden glow dominating many of the watercolor paintings that complement the story. Spacious compositions and broad, soft-edged brush strokes suggest more than define the spare shapes, which reflect traditional elements of Japanese painting injected with mystical effects. There's no note on the source of the tale, which lacks the classic confrontation with antagonists that would lend folktale suspense, but both text and illustration are lyrically styled. BH


"Deaf people can do anything hearing people can except hear," said I. King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University, in his acceptance speech; Jordan became president only after Gallaudet students, supported by many other members of the deaf community, mounted a battle against the board's appointment of a hearing president to a university for deaf people. In addition to the
landmark Gallaudet episode, the book traces the educational history of deaf people, focusing especially on the long-lasting split between oralists, led by Alexander Graham Bell, who believed that deaf people should communicate via lipreading and speech only, and manualists, led by Edward Gallaudet, who believed that signing allows deaf people to communicate fully on their own terms. Walker, the hearing daughter of deaf parents and author of several books on deafness, treats the subject as a cultural history and civil rights issue, writing with clarity as she explains matters ranging from nuances of signing to various attitudes towards the deaf. Most young readers won’t have thought about deafness this way, or even thought about it at all; Walker’s well-constructed account may open a few minds. A gallery of “Twentieth-Century Deaf People of Achievement” and a bibliography are included.

**Weaver, Will.** *Striking Out.* HarperCollins, 1993 272p

The hard work behind a Field of Dreams fills this coming-of-age novel about a Minnesota farm boy, Billy, who must live with the legacy of his thirteen-year-old brother’s death under the blades of a disk that lurched forward while eight-year-old Billy was trying to drive the tractor. Now it’s 1970, and Billy is turning thirteen himself, trying to keep up the impoverished farm with his bitter father, when some changes unexpectedly affect the family: a local baseball coach discovers Billy’s pitching arm, and Billy’s mother gets a town job. This has the classic trimmings of an American bildungsroman, with subtle incorporation of the young hero’s initiation into adult complexities that include sex, work, honor—and dishonor. The canvas is broad, with some intense subplots and secondary characters, and occasionally the point of view slips from Billy’s to the coach’s; but for the most part the narrative is clearly focused and will hold junior high and high school readers on the strength of its fine-tuned psychological and physical pacing.

**Wilson, Barbara Ker,** ad. *Wishbones: A Folk Tale from China;* illus. by Meilo So. Bradbury, 1993 26p

The Chinese girl Yeh Hsien is persecuted by her stepmother but, in return for her kindness to a fish, is rewarded with fine clothing for a trip to the festival—and ultimately with marriage to a king. All told, she makes a considerably stronger heroine than Perrault/Disney’s Cinderella, and Wilson’s picture book offers a sharp visual contrast to Ai-Ling Louie’s *Yeh Shen* (BCCB 3/83), which was illustrated in subtle pastels by Ed Young. This version features art with a satirical edge and flat perspectives patterned in sharply contrasting hues. The text that accompanies Meilo So’s contemporary-style paintings has an ironic twist at the end, too, when the king whom Yeh Hsien marries wishes for so much that the magic fish bones refuse to grant any more of his desires. Ashamed, he buries them near the seashore where the tide washes them away forever. Both picture-book versions are well worth having as family readalouds, and the two together will generate intriguing discussion among students of folklore, especially when compared to the animated cartoon version shown periodically on television. Wilson provides no background note on the folktale.
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-6
Although Andy Manetti wonders about his dead mom, he loves his dad and his baby half-sister and even likes his stepmother, but his stepbrother Jason—AKA "Mr. Gifted"—is wrecking his life. Andy's ordinary ten-year-old accomplishments no longer seem enough for his family, so he's happy when a weird experience in a museum, where a mummy's spirit apparently enters him, leads him to make a much-praised drawing that has the power to grant his wishes. Along the way, Andy discovers that his stepbrother has problems of his own and that, despite the loss of his mom, Andy himself is pretty happy with his new family. Although enjoyable, none of the story is particularly convincing, and the predictable path to rapprochement in the blended family isn't really lightened by the slapstick that the magic powers cause. Although it's not quite up to the author's previous *Dear Napoleon, I Know You're Dead, But...* (BCCB 12/92), the book's blend of silliness and moderate seriousness will probably please Woodruff fans. DS

Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7 up
At first, this novel, written by Wright in the '40s but published for the first time now, seems like it's going to be an innocent boys' book of a generation ago. "Goody goody," says fifteen-year-old Johnny when he learns that his best friend's big brother will be taking them to the movies. But when he goes home and discovers that he is to be removed from what he always thought was his real family and sent to another foster home, Johnny, refusing to go, finds himself in the dark streets of Harlem, his only refuge a vicious gang of muggers. "If I was white, I'd never trust a nigger sonofabitch," says Baldy, leader of the gang until a fierce initiation fight puts Johnny reluctantly in charge. As Arnold Rampersad points out in his perceptive, if somewhat pedantic, afterword, *Rite of Passage*, like *Native Son*, demonstrates what white racism makes black people do to themselves and each other. The writing is bold, humorless, sometimes heavy-handed; the story is swiftly, even excitingly told, and unrelentingly brutal. This is not a book for those who insist upon at least a glimmer of hope in books for young people, but kids will respect the honest portrayal of Johnny's bleak journey to nowhere. RS

Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-7
Daughter is eleven, and she's struggling with some difficult questions. Where did she get her unusual name? Since she comes from a multi-racial and multicultural family, is she black or white, Russian, Irish, Italian, or Jewish? Will her separated parents reconcile? Can she make friends at her new school if she has to take care of her little brother all afternoon? Fortunately, Daughter does find friends—as well as enemies—at school, and her loving grandparents teach her family history, which helps her come to terms with her own identity. The concerns expressed in the
story are legitimate and understandable and the preteen friendships authentically uneasy, but the novel doesn’t develop much beyond a superficial level. The excessive sunniness of the ending (all Daughter’s enemies were misunderstood and Daddy and Mom are getting back together again) belies the real-life difficulties of the situation. There are also too many plot strands (bully trouble, a car accident involving Daughter’s brother, and an heirloom gold coin—in addition to the main themes), which detracts from the impact. Kids in the mood for a cozy and generally undemanding family story, however, may have a good time. DS

YEPE, LAURENCE The Boy Who Swallowed Snakes; illus. by Jean and Mou-Sien Tseng. Scholastic, 1994 [32p] ISBN 0-590-46168-0 $14.95 Reviewed from galleys R 4-6 yrs “Out of the mouths of babes..." goes the traditional epithet, but Yep gives that a twist here with a story set in southern China, where Little Chou decides to rid himself of a dangerous magic snake by swallowing it down. Because of his pure heart, Little Chou doesn’t die the horrible death predicted but instead emits lots of little ghost snakes from his stomach. Eventually, a greedy rich man tries to retrieve the snake he’d tricked Little Chou into taking, eats it himself so it will multiply and steal silver for him, and dies after one bite. The ever-proliferating magic makes this a complicated story which, without a note, readers must assume is original rather than folkloric (the jacket says “original folktale,” but you can’t have it both ways). The illustrators have kept their watercolor images literal, picking up Yep’s dabs of humor (“I’ve never had so much meat in my life,” declares Little Chou as he fries the snakes in garlic) with cheerfully exaggerated expressions and providing a verdant background for the characters’ shenanigans. This has the same appeal, at a younger level, as How To Eat Fried Worms, and kids will find unusual gratification in the moral, which suggests that a pure heart strengthens the stomach for almost anything. Into the mouths of babes... BH

Philomel Books wishes it to be known that the bound book of Justin Denzel’s Land of the Thundering Herds will not include the state names mentioned in the Bulletin’s November review.
“Bought me some candy,/ ain’t got it no more,” writes Eloise Greenfield in “Things.” “Made me a poem,/ still got it.” Sadly, when it comes to African-American poetry, most children “ain’t got it.” The voices of African-American poets too often remain undiscovered. Librarians, who help determine the literature and the literary heritages that children enjoy, can bring that poetry to children through creative programming.

Children are often introduced to poetry through nursery rhymes, but, because of the traditional popularity of Mother Goose, librarians may not share similar rhymes from other cultures. Children can develop their language skills and learn to appreciate the music of many cultures other than their own. African-American chants, children’s games, folk rhymes and folksongs, for example, can all build a foundation for sharing poetry and enjoying picture books. Librarians can find additional materials by selecting poems from well known African-American poets or by searching for small gems among the works of lost African-American children’s poets such as Mary Lee Newsome and Gertrude Parthenia Brown. These poems need not be confined to isolated readalouds; there is more than one way to share poetry. Reading poetry aloud and teaching children the sounds of language, librarians can also show children how language draws on all their senses. Eloise Greenfield’s “Pretty,” for instance, can be recited and presented on a flannel board to help children visualize the poet’s words. Children can pretend to dress up, repeating the poem as a creative drama. Encouraging this form of participation helps build a bridge between poetry and the African-American oral tradition. Call and response, choral reading, singing, visual props, and dramas are only a few of the limitless ways that children learn to enjoy the works of African-American poets. As with all poetry, librarians merely need to imagine the possibilities. “This Little House,” by Langston Hughes, is perfect for fingerplay. Gwendolyn Brooks’ “Tommy,” in the hands of a creative librarian, can turn into a puppet show, while “Sweet Talk,” by Ashley Bryan, can become a flannel board drama.

While preschool and primary grade students are often poetry enthusiasts, interest in poetry begins to wane as students advance in elementary school. Children start to think that poetry extends no further than Shel Silverstein or Jack Prelutsky. Librarians can show students their own pleasure in poetry, promote poetry through programming, and introduce children to poets they may not find on their own. African-American poets can speak to every child, not only to African-American children. The struggle for a goal comes alive in “Touchdown,” by Sharon Bell Mathis. Lucille Clifton’s “September” brings out the frustration of having to go back to school. The pain of losing a friend comes out in “Poem,” by Langston Hughes, and Eloise Greenfield finds the triumphant self that every child dreams of in “Buddy’s Dream.” These poems are not just an exercise in multiculturalism. They are part of a literary heritage and birthright, especially—but not only—for African-American children. African-American poets celebrate the oral tradition, charismatic language, wordplay, and values of African-American culture. Librarians can spark interest in poetry by beginning where children’s interests already lie. The jump-rope rhymes and chants that African-American
children use every day are all poetry. Poetry is everywhere, in a favorite song as well as on the playground. Librarians can celebrate the hand claps that children share with friends and can make children’s folklore a springboard into poetry. Poetry concerts, theatrical presentations, poetry parties, and guest poets are all good ways to share the work of African-American poets. In addition to programming, librarians should also give children a chance to discover African-American poetry for themselves through such things as poetry displays, poetry jars, banners, bookmarks with student poetry, poetry pockets, dial-a-poem, and poetry corners. (Caroline Feller Bauer’s *Handbook for Storytellers* remains a fine source of ideas for doing things with poetry.)

Besides engaging children with metaphor and language, poetry is also a cultural experience. Through poetry, children can learn about African-American history, explore musical traditions such as jazz, blues, or rap, and get a feeling for African-American culture. Like all children, African-American youth are struggling to build personal identities. What does it mean to be African-American? What experiences have other African Americans had? What are my responsibilities as a member of a community? African-American poets condense African-American experience and reshape it into images that will touch children’s emotions. By hearing the voices of these poets, African-American children join an ongoing cultural dialogue about identity. As Greenfield shows in “Things,” poetry endures. But to help it endure, librarians must lift it from the shelves and into the imaginations of children.

A Sample of Recommended Books

Alternatives to Mother Goose:

Burroughs, Margaret Taylor, comp. *Did You Feed My Cow: Street Games, Chants, and Rhymes*. Follet, 1969.


Books of Poetry:


Janice Harrington, Head of Children’s Services, Champaign Public Library

**SUBJECT AND USE INDEX**

Keyed to *The Bulletin*’s alphabetical arrangement by author, this index, which appears in each issue, can be used in three ways. Entries in regular type refer to subjects; entries in **bold type** refer to curricular or other uses; entries in **ALL-CAPS** refer to genres and appeals. In the case of subject headings, the subhead “stories” refers to books for the readaloud audience; “fiction,” to those books intended for independent reading.

**ADVENTURE STORIES:**
- Pullman
- Africa: McKissack
- Africa—stories: Guthrie
- African Americans: Moutoussamy-Ashe
- African Americans—fiction: Greene; Wright
- African Americans—folklore: Lester
- African Americans—poetry: Grimes
- African Americans—stories: Gilchrist
- AIDS: Moutoussamy-Ashe
- **Arithmetic:** Axelrod
- Art and artists—stories: Levine
- Art: Davidson
- **BEDTIME STORIES:** Gilchrist; Mathews
- Books and reading: Jaspersohn
- Books and reading—fiction: Barrie
- Books and reading—stories: Avi
- Brothers—fiction: Bauer
- California—fiction: Lowell
- Canada—fiction: Heneghan
- Cats—fiction: Bauer; Broome
- Child welfare: Meltzer
- China—folklore: Wilson
- China—stories: Yep

**Christmas—stories:** Cooper
- Civil War—fiction: Stolz
- **CONCEPT BOOKS:** Axelrod
- Crime and criminals—fiction:
  - Wright
- Deafness: Walker
- Death—fiction: Paterson; Weaver
- Death—stories: Limb
- Divorce—fiction: Bauer
- Dolphins—stories: Farris
- Drought—stories: Guthrie
- Dyslexia—fiction: Barrie
- Easter: Bible
- Education: Walker
- **Ethics and values:** Broome; Carter; Landau
- Fables: Avi
- Family problems—fiction: Barrie; Wyeth
- **FANTASY:** Woodruff
- Farm life—fiction: MacLachlan; Weaver
- Fathers and daughters:
  - Moutoussamy-Ashe
  - Paterson
- FOLKTALES AND FAIRYTALES: Gilman;
Ginsburg; Guthrie; Lester; Levine; Mathews; Osborne; Pogorelsky; Schroeder; Shulevitz; Uchida; Wilson

Food and eating—stories: Priceman; Yep

Friends—fiction: Wyeth
Frontier life: Sandler
Frontier life—fiction: Paulsen; Gangs—fiction: Wright
Gay rights: Hyde
Government: Carter
Grandfathers—stories: Gilman
Grandmothers—stories: Limb
Gypsies: Strom

HISTORICAL FICTION: Lowell; MacLachlan; Nichol; Paulsen; Pullman; Roth-Hano; Schur

History, Africa: McKissack
History, U.S.: Kroll; Sandler; Stolz
History, World: Carter; Meltzer

Holidays: Bible; Gibbons
Holocaust, The—fiction: Roth-Hano

Homosexuality: Hyde
Horses: Hansard
Islam: Husain

Japan—fiction: Mori
Japan—folklore: Levine; Uchida
Jews: Roth-Hano
Jews—fiction: Greene; Schur
Jews—folklore: Gilman
Kings—stories: Shulevitz
Libraries: Jaspersohn
LOVE STORIES: Osborne

Mecca: Husain
Mental retardation—fiction: Mori
Music: Kroll; Nichol
Native Americans—fiction: Bennett

Nature study: Hansard; Lavies; McNulty; Patent

Netherlands, The—stories: Fisher
New York City—fiction: Greene
Noah’s Ark—stories: Geisert
Northern Ireland—fiction: Heneghan

Parents—stories: Browne
Peace: Carter

POETRY: Duffy; Grimes; Lewis
Prejudice: Strom

Prejudice—fiction: Wyeth

Reading aloud: Lewis; MacLachlan
Reading, beginning: Krensky
Reading, easy: Woodruff
Reading, family: Bible; Browne; Gilchrist; Limb; Moutoussamy-Ashe

Reading, reluctant: Wright
Religious education: Bible; Husain
Runaways—fiction: Bennett
Russia—fiction: Schur
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Russia—stories: Pogorelsky
School—fiction: Schenker
Slavery—fiction: Stolz
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Snakes—stories: McNulty
Social studies: Husain; Meltzer; Strom

St. Patrick’s Day: Gibbons
Stepfamilies—fiction: Woodruff

Story hour: Avi; Axelrod; Bible; Fisher; Geisert; Gilman; Ginsburg; Guthrie; Lester; Lewis; Mathews; Osborne; Pogorelsky; Priceman; Schroeder; Shulevitz; Uchida; Wilson; Yep

Texas—fiction: Schenker
Tibet—folklore: Schroeder
Traveling—stories: Priceman
Trucks—stories: Cooper
Uncles—fiction: Heneghan
War—fiction: Heneghan
Winter—fiction: Krensky

Women’s studies: Duffy; Landau

World War II—fiction: Mori; Roth-Hano
Starred in Booklist, School Library Journal and The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

The Outside Dog
An I Can Read Book®

by Charlotte Pomerantz
Full-color pictures by
Jennifer Plecas

"Grandfather discourages Marisol from befriending any of the stray dogs in their Puerto Rican neighborhood. But [she warms] his heart toward Pancho, the sweet mutt who becomes her 'outside dog.' Numerous illustrations add charm, context clues and a sense of place to... an outstanding selection." — SLJ

"Some Spanish words and phrases (defined at the beginning) deepen [this engaging] story. A perfect example of what an easy reader can be when thought and heart are put into the story."
— ALA Booklist

Ages 4-8. $14.00 TR
(0-06-024782-7)
$13.89 LB
(0-06-024783-5)

Another HarperCollins story by Charlotte Pomerantz
THE CHALK DOLL
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