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**EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH REVIEWS**

* 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.

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Sky: A True Story of Resistance During World War II

by Hanneke Ippisch

For an adult, memoir is a matter of personalized history. For a child, memoir is a matter of personal story. These are not mutually exclusive categories, of course, and many books and readers cross over, but in general adults select autobiographies that center on a subject relative to their own memories or previously formed interests—a favorite movie star’s gossip, for instance, or an influential political leader’s reflections. For most children, on the other hand, autobiographies are an introduction to memories, which they haven’t stockpiled with much perspective yet, and to interests still unclarified. Juvenile memoirs must therefore first and foremost snag children’s attention with strong storytelling, including some elements of dramatic action.

Sky, Hanneke Ippisch’s recollection of her work as a teenage Dutch resistance worker, is an especially vivid narration comprising brief chapters that each centers on an involving incident, along with photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, popular poems, cartoons, and other graphic artifacts. The first six chapters reflect, in specific descriptions that are never nostalgic, Ippisch’s contented childhood before the war; the next thirty-three offer a contrast, beginning with May 10, 1942, when the Germans invaded the Netherlands, and ending with the aftermath of the occupation in 1945. The episodes of Ippisch’s constantly escalating involvement as messenger for the underground, guide for Jews escaping to the countryside, assistant to leaders of the movement, and political prisoner in a Nazi dungeon are all the more gripping for the simple, unsensationalized authorial tone. Ippisch is confident enough of her details to let them speak without too much embellishment, and the resulting understatement reinforces the factual nature of incredible situations, such as the time Ippisch is entrusted with delivering five million Dutch guilders (“worth about three million U.S. dollars in 1944”) one hundred kilometers on her bicycle before curfew. With the winds against her, she finally grabs hold of a passing German truck and, smiling broadly whenever the driver waves, hitches a speedy ride to her destination near the German border.

Through her assignments, readers learn about the highly organized, secret financing of the railway workers’ strike, which stopped all the trains in Holland and slowed the German transport of prisoners eastward and supplies westward. Readers also learn the specifics of hunger (“We ate toothpaste, which was still available, and tulip bulbs”) and the imperative of silence: “The Jews under the floor could not make any noises—absolutely none. They were totally silent for a whole week, all eight of them. After the Germans left [the house], seven came out of the hiding place, white and thin and very weak, but alive. One of them had died
very quietly." Readers learn the stress of arrest (Ippisch's colleagues were shot and she was sentenced to life imprisonment) and interrogation: "The [Dobermans] now started to growl and began to sniff my legs and skirt."

The section about Ippisch's period in solitary confinement (for shouting war news to other political prisoners through a drainpipe) without light, heat, blanket, bed, or food is especially notable for its interweaving of dreams, memories, and reality. And a final section is unusually honest as she admits to having enjoyed the sight of a crowd persecuting collaborators and considers how the war altered everyone's ethics. Ippisch spends little time, however, on expository passages: she makes her points through telling us what happened with a minimum of explanation or confession. There's no self-indulgence or self-pity in these tales of hardship; they function more as expression than self-expression.

At one point Ippisch states, "We in Holland never talked much to each other about feelings. It's not that we did not have feelings, we simply kept them to ourselves. The Dutch people were and are, in general, quite stoic." Even Ippisch and her father, a minister who was also active in the underground, never discussed their work, although she finds out after the war and includes here a story about his trying to deliver important Allied papers to resistance workers only to find their house taken over by Germans. He escapes detection by chatting amiably with the officers, in perfect German, about his intent to roust the inhabitants (whom the Germans later shoot) to church. The success of both father and daughter depended on self-control.

Because of Ippisch's control in carrying out her resistance mission, lives were saved; because of her control in writing about her resistance mission, we can remember the lives that were saved along with those that were lost. Memory thrives on strong storytelling. Born from oral narrative, memoir has become an increasingly productive genre of adult literature and, more slowly, of children's literature ranging from picture books to young adult nonfiction. In particular, World War II memoirs—for both adults and children—have emerged powerfully, as aging victims who remained silent for half a century feel compelled to bear witness before they die. As a survivor, Ippisch has shaped her past into memorable "chunks," sequential episodes that inject history with personality; instead of describing this book, I found myself telling stories from it to family and friends. Even the graphic records have a scrapbook appeal, each representing a mini-tale of its own: forged permits, for instance, or bits of folded toilet paper which the prisoners used to scratch messages, fold, and sew under laundry marks.

Sky is not a descriptive catalogue of self-revelation but an involving account in service of vital history. And it is above all a story—even pre-adolescents will stay for the story. This re-creation of one person's experiences can become an extraordinary experience for countless young readers. (Imprint information appears on p. 303.)

Betsy Hearne, Consulting Editor
**ANNOUNCEMENT**

*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* is pleased to announce the appointment of Janice M. Del Negro as Editor. Currently consultant for children's and public library services for the State Library of North Carolina, Del Negro brings to her new position many years and facets of experience with young people and their literature. Prior to her job in North Carolina, Del Negro worked for more than thirteen years as a children's librarian for the Chicago Public Library, including five years as Assistant Director of Systemwide Children's Services. As an adjunct faculty member of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Rosary College, she taught courses in children's library services and in storytelling. Del Negro has presented workshops on storytelling throughout the country. She has been a reviewer for *Booklist* since 1992, before which she contributed to *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews*. An active member of the American Library Association, Del Negro has served on the Newbery committee and is currently a member of the Caldecott committee. Del Negro replaces Roger Sutton, who left *The Bulletin* in March to become editor-in-chief of the *Horn Book Magazine*. Del Negro's stated priorities for *The Bulletin* include—in addition to the maintenance of high caliber criticism—electronic outreach and active networking with subscribers. She also plans to add new features such as subject-specific annotated bibliographies, a Blue Ribbon Reader list with suggestions for use of the books with children and young adults, and a selective annual guide for parents.

**NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Old—well, older Cam Jansen is already a mainstay of the early chapter book set; here the detecting whiz with the photographic memory gets a shot at beginning readers. The contrivance—that Cam can “click” a scene into her memory—has always allowed for a certain amount of convenience in her stories, and the bare-boned format here only exacerbates the artificiality of the device. Jason thinks someone has stolen the chocolate-chip cookie from his lunch box, but Cam's memory and natural smarts indicate that in fact Jason's dog took the cookie before Jason came to school that day. Her deduction that the fact that there are crumbs *inside* the box (rather than on a table) means that the cookie was eaten *from* the box is questionable; her appeal is not. Full-color pictures by Susanna Natti (illustrator of the older series as well) give a few clues and lighten the load. RS
ASHABRANNER, BRENT  *Our Beckoning Borders: Illegal Immigration to America;* illus. with photographs by Paul Conklin. Cobblehill, 1996  99p
ISBN 0-525-65223-X  $15.99  Ad  Gr. 5-8

While Ashabranner's latest in a line of distinguished immigration-themed books does provide an updated picture of this controversial topic, it unfortunately seems most like a desultory revisiting of *The Vanishing Border* (BCCB 3/88). Although the newer book makes brief mention of illegal immigrants arriving in this country via the Canadian frontier, or via boat or plane, the focus, as in *The Vanishing Border,* is on our border with Mexico and the various efforts of immigration officers to control illegal entries. The first book contained more personalizing anecdotes where this one relies more on statistical evidence, sometimes dizzyingly piled up: "A study by the INS in the 1980s calculated that each 1 million illegal aliens cost federal, state, and local governments $2.25 billion a year in education, law enforcement, health, and other benefits. Taxes paid by each 1 million illegals (principally federal and state income taxes and sales taxes on goods purchased) were estimated to $995 million, leaving a net cost of $1.30 million for each 1 million illegal immigrants." Although the book is not as involving as its predecessors (see also *Still a Nation of Immigrants,* BCCB 10/93, etc.) it is a useful supplement. Conklin's black-and-white photographic portraits of individuals—immigrants, border patrol agents, shelter workers—involved in the issue help counterbalance the abstractness of the text. RS

BAUER, JOAN  *Sticks.* Delacorte, 1996  [192p]
ISBN 0-385-32165-1  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-7

All that stands between ten-year-old Mickey Vernon and the youth nine-ball championship is thirteen-year-old Buck Pender, a bully with the dual advantages of professional coaching and skill at psychological intimidation. Mickey's secret weapon has just rolled into town in a shiny green Peterbilt—Joseph Alvarez, one-time friend of Mickey's deceased father, who is willing to help Mickey clean up his poor technique and handle Buck's aggression. There's never any real question as to the outcome of the match, and pool enthusiasts are assured of a happy ending. Bauer, however, has cluttered her table with several shallowly developed subplots: Mickey's mother has personal reasons to resent Alvarez, Mickey's best friend Arlen (a gifted math-aholic) orchestrates their joint science-fair project, and another friend, Francine, carries on about becoming a magician and a nun. While each story strand is individually entertaining, together they impede the momentum of the plot and detract from the main event. Readers who really want to soak up some pool-hall ambiance should try Sid Hite's *Even Break* (BCCB 1/96), but readers satisfied with just a dip in the pool could give this one a shot. EB

BLEGVAD, LENORE  *A Sound of Leaves;* illus. by Erik Blegvad. McElderry, 1996  [64p]
ISBN 0-689-80038-X  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 2-4

Citified Sylvie is both apprehensive and excited about her week at the seashore with Mom, Grandpa, and little brother Dell. No matter that their borrowed accommodations are austere; her room has luxuriant and exotic (to her) foliage just outside the window screen, and the ocean is as amazing as she had hoped. It even
looks as if her new acquaintance, Claire, will turn out to be a great friend. Claire’s local buddies, however, are skeptical of this “slum kid” interloper, and soon Sylvie is ditched and heartbroken. Finally, after some family support and a few hours to think things through, Sylvie concludes, “Couldn’t they get along, all of them, if they really tried?” and renews her friendship with Claire. This level-headed and comfortable resolution reflects adult wishful thinking rather than a child’s authentic experience, and readers who have been stung by the verbal barbs of strangers will recognize this for the idealized portrayal it is. However, this warm and leisurely chapter book may be just the ticket for youngsters counting the days ’til summer vacation. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. EB

Blos, Joan W.  *Nellie Bly’s Monkey: His Remarkable Story in His Own Words*; illus. by Catherine Stock. Morrow, 1996 [40p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12677-4 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 2-5

The last leg of Bly’s famed seventy-two-day trip around the world is fondly recalled by McGinty, a monkey Bly purchased in Singapore. Modeled on Bly’s very real (but presumably less articulate) mascot, McGinty regards their adventures with serene curiosity and records them with prim formality (“Mishaps and misunderstandings awaited in San Francisco . . . it was feared that the ship’s bill of health had been left behind. . . . On hearing this, my mistress fell into despair”). Ink vignettes and softly blended watercolors with crisply defined details offer a pleasing mélange of exotic tourist spots, storms at sea, spacious staterooms, and smoky milltowns; a double-page printed map of the route is also included. Blos surprisingly makes no mention of Verne’s Phileas Fogg, whose fictional record Bly set out to beat, but she supplements her narrator’s necessarily truncated view of the tour with introductory and concluding material on Bly’s race against time and about her other journalistic and managerial work. EB

ISBN 0-385-32186-4 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 7-12

Bode, a collector of first-hand accounts of adolescent concerns in *Heartbreak and Roses: Real Life Stories of Troubled Love* (BCCB 9/94) and *Trust and Betrayal: Real Life Stories of Friends and Enemies* (BCCB 6/95), here examines juvenile crime and violence. Through poems, narrative prose, and cartoon strips, we hear a diversity of voices, including those of Sean, a seventeen-year-old who killed his mother; Randall Watson, the project coordinator who teaches writing workshops to teens in prison; and Tanya, the fifteen-year-old whose letter to the author describes her decision to lead a straight life. However, the text dedicates more time to recounting tales of the juveniles’ criminal acts than discussing their consequences. While the action-oriented cartoon strips mix humor with grim reality, the still-frame strips containing a group of students answering the question “Do crime and violence affect your life?” interrupt the flow and are full of contrived-sounding responses (“I’ve ripped a tag off a mattress”). The explanation for the background research is also problematic: the reader is left hanging as to the validity and accuracy of the study because Bode never clearly identifies the cities in which she con-
ducted her research, does not tell how much prose is the exact wording of an original speaker, and does not explain why she chose statistics from newspapers instead of primary sources. Teens will nonetheless find the subject topical and the variety of factoids, actions, and cartoons appealing. A glossary, a booklist, and a list of organizations are appended. TLR


Cast as the present-tense narration of a young girl named Tess, Bunting’s memory of a monthly event traditional in Irish towns has the idiosyncratic ring of truth: “There’s a bit of a commotion over by the churchyard. One of the goats got away and stole Mrs. McAfee’s petticoat off her clothesline and dragged it back to the square. He had the double frill eaten half off before he was caught.” What keeps the sights and sounds from becoming a descriptive catalogue is the friendship between Tess and Wee Boy (“He’s seven, same as me, but he never grew past four”). They alternate picking out and paying for candy from “Harry Hooey’s sweetie stall”—this week Wee Boy treats with a “penny poke of gob stoppers.” By the end of the day Tess has given away her penny, half to a musician on the street and half to get Wee Boy’s fortune told by Madame Savanna, who predicts from her seat beside the gypsy caravans that Wee Boy will be as big and brave as he ever needs to be. This is more portrait than story, but the place and persons portrayed are authentic and lively. The artist has done her homework, from the opening landscape of sheep grazing along steep seaside mountains, to the town square bustling with people and livestock, to details of clothing and even Wee Boy’s typical haircut. The shapes are rounded nostalgically and the contrasting hues softened by shadows and textured blending. A viewer could wish for less cartooned faces, since Berry’s drafting is otherwise subtle, and perhaps for a less obtrusive typeface than the bold and blocky letters jumping out from stark-white half- and full-page sections of text. However, visual motifs related to the compositions help unify each spread, and the overall design is jaunty. BH


Davey’s one dream is to have the baker Luke buy him away from service in Mother Shelley’s gang of rubbish kids, who pick through the city tip for salvage and, in return, are given some food and a place to sleep. When Davey (a.k.a. Fly Pie) and his shady colleague Sham stumble upon a dying kidnapper and his hostage, a baby “worth” seventeen million pounds, it seems that his ship has come in: if he simply enlists older sister Jane’s help and returns the baby for the reward, a contented life as a pastry-maker is assured. But between the tip and the good life stand rival gangs looking for a cut in the deal, death squads out to “clean” the streets of indigent children, and a divisive power struggle between Jane and Sham. Burgess evokes a convincing picture of future London plagued by overpopulation and inflation, and his stage is artfully set for a tense confrontation between the gamins and the privileged class. Though the plot suggests breakneck action, peril is threatened more often than it is realized. Rambling narration, which frequently digresses to Davey’s musings over his and his sister’s future, slows down the pace.
Only in the final chapters, when efforts to return the baby to her mother have backfired and the trio is destitute and on the run, does the reader reap any thrills. Still, readers who like their fiction played out in grimy streets and murky by-ways may enjoy this look at a future gone quite believably wrong. EB

Cavanagh, Helen  *The Last Piper*. Simon, 1996  [148p]
ISBN 0-689-80481-4  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-7

Christie is thirteen and her little brother Mikey is five; they’ve accompanied their mother on a long business trip to Scotland, but they weren’t prepared for the strange effect it has on Mikey. He seems to know things he couldn’t about the place they’re staying, and it becomes increasingly clear that he is, in fact, the reincarnation of their hostess’s murdered brother, returned to clear his name. This is a cheerfully unlikely story, which breezily invents and avoids facts to suit itself (the original murder would have taken place during World War II, but there’s no mention of the war, for instance), and it’s set in a Hollywood version of Scotland that has more kitsch than atmosphere (“See if it doesna get yer own Scots blood poundin’, lass”). The theme of the meeting between past and future, however, is one of enduring fascination. Cavanagh’s story is clear, dramatic, and internally consistent, and young readers will be drawn both by the concept and by the accessibility of the text. Fans of the supernatural not quite ready for Susan Cooper’s *The Boggart* (BCCB 4/93) or Alan Garner’s *The Owl Service* (12/68) may appreciate the cut of *The Last Piper’s* tartan. DS

Charbonneau, Eileen  *Honor to the Hills*. Tor, 1996  192p
ISBN 0-312-86904-3  $18.95  R  Gr. 6-9

This third entry in the Woods Family saga focuses on sixteen-year-old Lily, granddaughter of Asher Woods (featured in *The Ghosts of Stony Clove*), who seems destined to follow the family tradition of falling in love with outsiders and misfits. Just off the boat from Ireland, Hugh Delaney arrives at Stony Clove with a letter of introduction to the Woods family, and Lily is almost instantly smitten. Her affections are entirely requited, but Hugh, ignorant of local family rivalries and naïve concerning rising racial tensions under the new Fugitive Slave Laws of 1850, jeopardizes their romance through an unfortunate alliance with the bigoted Chase family. This latest title will be best appreciated by readers who already know the Woods family, as Charbonneau skillfully weaves in familiar personalities and subtle references to the family history with a new storyline involving this next generation’s attempts to secure justice for their black neighbors. Patient newcomers can certainly sort through the extensive cast of family members, but the initiated will know what to make of Sally Hamilton’s ghost, painted madam Rebecca Chase, and the red ribbon that Asher Woods takes from Gran Ginny’s hair on the day he dies, and they will be treated to both a good love story and a good cry. EB

ISBN 0-395-77944-8  $13.95  Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Not so much a counting book as a book of counting rhymes, this is a collection of numerical verse from Barbados, Cuba, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and other Carib-
bean islands. Kids from everywhere will recognize the cumulative or subtractive forms here, such as "Ten little green bananas hangin' on a line./ A bird eat one,/ Dat left nine" and "Mosquito one/ Mosquito two./ Mosquito jump in the old man shoe." Charles notes that he has attempted to retain the original rhythm and text in those verses he has translated; it's not clear which of the poems started out in a different language, but they all have the chanting swing of oral tradition and the lilt of Caribbean dialects. Scansion traps may sometimes slow down the unwary reader-aloud, but listeners will enjoy the verve of the verse and may wish to try out a few, especially the jump-rope rhymes, on their own. Stylized cut-paper collages, using simple figures in deep summery hues against white space or vibrant contrasting colors, occasionally recall Ed Young in Bitter Bananas (BCCB 10/94) and occasionally Synthia Saint James. No source notes beyond the island or territory name are provided.


While much of the country in 1936 suffers from unemployment, the Bush family feels fortunate to have steady work as migrant fruit pickers on the West Coast farm circuit. Returning for another season at a California strawberry farm, twelve-year-old Rosie is looking forward to renewing old acquaintance in a setting where her entire family is valued by the owners for their reliability and speedy, careful work. Instead, she finds a new friend in Maggie Campbell, a girl whose well-educated parents have been forced into migrant farm work by economic hard times. Cochrane acknowledges the hardships faced by the migrant labor force: alone in her section of the fields, Rosie is intimidated by the advances of the hiring boss Jake Porter, and Rosie's sister Lily Opal loses her firstborn child because local hospitals won't admit migrants without cash payment upfront. Still, hard work and family solidarity are simplistically presented as the panacea for all that ails the system, and Rosie's father, a pillar of the migrant community, unconvincingly (if happily) lands nasty Jake Porter's job and, with it, a promising new life for his kin. In an afterword, Cochrane offers background on the Dust Bowl and some personal observations on life during the Depression. EB


In the closing of Both Sides of Time (BCCB 10/95), Annie Lockwood made the agonizing decision to leave her beloved Strat and return to the twentieth century; now she finds she can't leave well enough alone and, while on a school field trip to New York City, finds her way back to the 1890s once again. To her dismay, she discovers that Strat, due to his talking about his time-traveling friend (and due to the machinations of the evil Walker Walkley) has been locked up in an insane asylum. His sister Devonny insists that Annie is the only one who can rescue him—and that after doing so, she must bring him to the tuberculosis sanatorium where his fiancée Harriett lies a different sort of prisoner. While maintaining the feminist stance she held in the first book, Cooney goes easy on the theory here, and the result is a suspenseful, focused melodrama along the lines of Philip Pullman's The Ruby in the Smoke (BCCB 5/87) but faster-moving and more romantic. The asylum where Strat is captive is a deliciously horrible Victorian nightmare, and his rescue involves a thrilling chase up the Hudson River, a chloroform-soaked scarf,
and a wild sleigh ride through the snowy Adirondacks. His reunion with Harriett is bittersweet—she dies in his arms, leaving him both his integrity and the girl he truly loves, Annie. Our heroine comes back to the present anyway (although not before some serious interference), but a third installment is promised, so maybe she’ll get another chance. RS

COOPER, HELEN  
R 4-6 yrs

Mom and Dad evidently realize there will be sibling jealousy when the new baby arrives, so they try to head trouble off at the pass by buying their toddler daughter a stuffed monster doll to take care of: “I loved him right away, and he loved me too. But he didn’t love what Mom brought home from the hospital.” According to the sulky narrator, the splattered baby lotion, leaking hot water bottles, and teething biscuits in the VCR are all the fault of Little Monster, and for the first half of the book it’s pretty clear that big sister is acting out her own hostilities. Our heroine eventually reconciles herself to the baby, but the mayhem continues: has Little Monster taken on a life of his own? When Dad threatens to throw him out, the little girl stows him in the “only one safe place,” baby brother’s crib, and in that sanctuary Little Monster is last seen teaching the baby to draw with crayons on the furniture. Will your audience be confused? Maybe a little—but they’ll be entertained as well. And the darkish, densely textured watercolors of the petulant toddler, cheerfully passive baby, and exhausted, befuddled parents have a cozy credibility that makes all this lunacy plausible as well as enjoyable. EB

CREWS, NINA  
R 4-7 yrs

A little girl looks out her window at the night cityscape and imagines herself climbing a ladder to the moon, dancing among the stars until finally she returns home to bed. It’s a simple story, but what makes it particularly intriguing here are Crews’ (author-illustrator of *One Hot Summer Day*, BCCB 6/95) photocollage illustrations. The sweep of the stars and the glitter of the nocturnal city are forcefully yet dreamily presented, with the colors largely muted to a monochromatic blue and white; against this color scheme the girl is full-color, standing out as warm life in the midst of the chilly star-spangled sky. The literal representation of the imaginative concept is a bit disconcerting, however, and the mundaneness of the photographed images makes the art seem more carefully crafted than otherworldly. As nighttime journeys go, however, this is an unusual one, and kids may enjoy the tantalizingly realistic bedtime fantasy. DS

DUEY, KATHLEEN  
Ad Gr. 5-7

Merriment on the Sabbath is strictly forbidden in 1650 Massachusetts, and not only has thirteen-year-old Sarah been playing in the snow with her free-thinking
friend Elizabeth, she has been mistaken for Elizabeth’s brother Roger (Sarah was wearing his heavy coat). Now Elizabeth and Roger face severe public punishment, and Sarah must gather the courage to confess. Although promotional copy describes this first title in a new series as “framed by diary entries [that show] how 24 hours can change a person’s life forever,” the three entries, which technically span two days, are brief and dispensable. The story itself occasionally bogs down in historical detail—in particular, an overlong dinner preparation scene laboriously catalogs everything from dried fruit to cooking pots; Sarah’s thoughts, too, tend to run on about her widowed father’s likely remarriage to the nasty Mistress Goddard. Still, Duey regards the Puritan community’s stoic religious principles with respect, and Sarah’s eventual confession realistically brings no romantic reprieve for Elizabeth and Roger, only a share in their humiliation and pain for herself. Girls who have outgrown, read through, or burned out on the American Girls series may want to sneak a peek at Sarah’s diary. EB


A seasoned storyteller takes on the cycle of legends about Saint Patrick, who was born into the luxury of a Roman villa in western England, sold into slavery by Irish raiders, matured by six years of isolation as a shepherd, and called by God to devote his life to converting the Irish to Christianity. Dunlop is unabashedly modern in her narrative tone: “That was fun,” says the young Sucat (Patrick’s Latin nickname, short for Patricius) after an afternoon of trout fishing; “No way!” shouts a captain, refusing to take the renegade Patrick on board a ship bound from Ireland to England. The result is both disconcerting and immediate. Outside of his own writings and a few ancient histories, upon which Dunlop has drawn in blending the factual and fictional, all we really know about Saint Patrick is that he lived sometime in the fifth century and became the first bishop of Ireland. What’s interesting is the power these legends still wield in a time when miracles such as those described here sometimes seem faraway. Patrick himself was evidently disdainful of rumors that he drove the snakes of Ireland into the sea or performed magic in the mode of druids, and Dunlop instead emphasizes his charismatic faith. Of particular interest in Catholic communities, this will also appeal to students of religious legend and Irish lore. BH


This is eco-biology with the gloves off, or perhaps you’d better keep them on, because there are a lot of things here that repel direct contact: ticks, corpses, sewage, etc. Each subject gets a huge (the book’s trim size is between jumbo and gargantuan) double spread or two which offers diagrams and illustrations alongside or amid a discussion of various processes: digestion, processing of wastewater, recycling, medical stages of human death, decomposition, and so on. The breadth here is appealing and the format, which includes activity suggestions and biographies of kids who have green stories to tell, is alluring, as is the book’s forthright attitude towards gross subjects: “When you blow your nose, you will probably dislodge several chunks of dried (and dead) nose mucus that are packed with tiny particles of dust, dirt, and nose hairs.” Unfortunately, the book’s roaming across
subjects weakens the focus, some of the explanations are vague or spotty (the imprecise term "germ" is used without a gloss), and the merit of some of the activities is left mysterious: how, for instance, does stenciling a storm drain help the environment? A flawed but entertaining cornucopia, this may make for a browsing session that leads to more. A list of resources, a glossary, and an index are included, as are instructions on how to join the publisher's ecology club for kids. DS

ENDERLE, JUDITH ROSS  *Nell Nugget and the Cow Caper*; written by Judith Ross Enderle and Stephanie Gordon Tessler; illus. by Paul Yalowitz. Simon, 1996  [34p]
ISBN 0-689-80502-0  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

What with Frank Remkiewicz' *The Bone Stranger* (BCCB 6/94) and Sarah Garland's *Tex the Cowboy* (9/95), we seem to be in a flourishing time for spoofy Western picture books, and here's another one. Nell Nugget lives on the Bar None Ranch "with her horse, Pay Dirt, and her little dog, Dust," and forty-nine cows. Tragedy strikes Nell's peaceful existence when her best cow, Goldie, turns up missing, and Nell discovers she's been rustled by "the baddest bad man anywhere, Nasty Galoot"; in a head-to-head confrontation, Nasty at first seems to have the edge, but finally Nell triumphs and brings Goldie back to the fold—er, herd. The plot rambles around a bit, but it's got some entertainingly silly turns (Nell's cows love to be serenaded and come a-plodding when she tickles the ivories) and some great read-aloud sounds ("‘WOO, WOO, WOO-O-O-O,’ Dust howled. ‘MOO, MOO, MOO-O-O-O,’ Goldie cried") and phrases (there's a repeated refrain of "And her little dog, Dust, trailed behind"). The illustrations are visually restrained but conceptually free-ranging—precise-edged colored pencil in an amusingly *Yellow-Submarine*-esque style, they offer smoothly textured expanses of pristine, pale earth-toned landscape inhabited by dot-eyed, poker-faced humans and beasts in creative shapes, flying flocks of musical notes casting shadows on the old homestead, and the bad guy's horse wearing a mask just like his master. The art is entertaining, but the noise is the thing here: shut your doors and get your audience using their Old MacDonald skills at the strategic places, and they'll look at the restoration of lost property in a whole new way. DS

FINE, ANNE  *Step by Wicked Step*. Little, 1996  [138p]
ISBN 0-316-28345-2  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 5-8

Five students on a school trip beat the rest of the class to the huge old mansion where they're supposed to spend the night; they elude their minimal supervision and find a Victorian-era journal that tells of a young resident's sticky relationship with his stepfather. This prompts them to take turns telling of their own step- and split families: Claudia tells of her gradual adjustment to her stepmother; Colin relates his longing for the beloved dad he hasn't seen in years; Ralph gaily chronicles his ever-increasing list of stepmothers and his crush upon the latest candidate; Pixie details her frustration with her stepsisters; and Rob recounts his sister's inability to come to grips with their new stepfather. The set-up is contrived, but the stories are lively, truthful, and touching. The family situations are all different but all credible, and the book is fair-minded about interpersonal dynamics, with culpability spread around and hope available to all, if sometimes at a cost. Fine is one
of the best contemporary writers about changes in individual families; while this substitutes breadth for the depth of *Alias Madame Doubtfire* (BCCB 4/88) or *My War with Goggle-Eyes* (5/89), it's a deftly written and insightful collection that will appeal to kids with their own similar stories to tell. DS

**FLEMING, DENISE**  *Where Once There Was a Wood*; written and illus. by Denise Fleming. Holt, 1996 34p ISBN 0-8050-3761-6 $15.95  
Ad  5-8 yrs

With simple rhymes and vibrant pictures, Fleming tackles a difficult subject—the relentless destruction of wildlife habitats. It's a risky business that could slip into preachiness, but Fleming starts with an effectively restrained tone, as the oversized pages are populated by brilliantly-hued, softly mottled images of rabbits, foxes, woodchucks, snakes, raccoons and all manner of birds—kingfishers, waxwings, horned owls, pheasants. The abrupt end, however ("Where once there was a wood, a meadow and a creek, sit houses side by side, twenty houses deep"), is both judgmental and underexplanatory, and the housing development looks paradoxically cozy. A four-page appendix, which seems at odds with the more poetic text, provides practical suggestions of ways to welcome wildlife into our own backyards—providing food and shelter, attracting butterflies and hummingbirds—as well as a list of other appropriate books on the theme. Since many primary-school kids will be able to connect the story to their own experiences, this might be useful for kicking off a spirited discussion on "progress." SSV

Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 7-12

Garza, an author practiced in the chronicling of social history (*Latinas*, BCCB 3/95), here turns her attention to the stormy history of women lawyers and jurists in America, starting with the problematic treatment of women under colonial law and ending with an examination of the contemporary status of the profession. En route, she covers a great deal of detailed and little-discussed territory, describing the efforts of various "firsts": first woman admitted to the bar, first woman to practice before the Supreme Court, first African-American woman lawyer, etc., and the only gradually yielding resistance to all of them. She is particularly good at linking these individual examples to larger movements and forces, noting, for instance, the tendency of women lawyers to work—or to have to work—in low- or non-paying sectors of law. While her account is enlivened by her passion, it is marred by inaccuracies (she wrongly describes Lydia Maria Child as black, and implies that Rosa Parks' civil disobedience was a spontaneous act), confusingly shifting chronologies, and her tendency to overemphasize and to make sweeping and misleading statements in the name of her cause (in discussing Marcia Clark, for instance, she makes the unlikely claim about the television audience that "few realized that until recently, women lawyers and judges were very rarely seen in courtrooms"). It's still one of the more effective books at depicting the difficult and continuing fight against unfairness in one of our most significant fields. Black-and-white photographs appear throughout; endnotes, a list of suggested reading, and an index are included. DS
GELLMAN, MARC  
ISBN 0-688-13169-7  $15.00

Reviewed from galleys

In his second collection of modern midrash (following *Does God Have a Big Toe?*), Rabbi Gellman offers some new takes on Scripture nearly everyone knows—Moses’ abridgement of Yahweh’s verbose Ten Commandments—and on Scripture nearly no one knows—why, for example, you don’t muzzle an ox when it treads the grain. A cumulative definition of holiness is effectively employed in a commentary on Genesis. In “The Pharaoh and the Frog,” a comic twist on the ten plagues of Egypt, wisdom sneaks up from behind the wisecracking: “You can’t stand against freedom, and you can’t stand against God.” At his best, Gellman can craft a witty and readable tale, but too often he slips a heavy sermon into the mouth of a character rather than allowing his story to lead naturally to an inescapable moral. While undeniably offering food for thought and nourishment for the soul, the collection is somewhat sugary and is best consumed one morsel at a time. EB

GIBBONS, GAIL  
*Dogs*; written and illustrated by Gail Gibbons.  Holiday House, 1996  32p  
ISBN 0-8234-1226-1  $15.95

In this straightforward picture book, Gibbons introduces the younger set to the basics of life as a dog. A brief mention of their common wolf ancestry leads to a rundown of the main types of canines: purebreds, crossbreeds, and mongrels. Gibbons pictures several of the most popular breeds from Chihuahuas to Saint Bernards but is careful to sing the praises of the common mutt. We are treated to a capsule summary of canine communication (minus the sniffing, tactfully) and behavior (“an angry dog can growl and bark”) and a brief mention of familiar facts, such as the extraordinary canine powers of smell (kids will be delighted to learn that Fido can smell that buried bone two feet under) and hearing (four times better than humans). There’s a brief set of operating instructions—feeding, watering, and walking your puppy or dog—but no mention of the harsh reality of pooper scooper laws that many kids find revolting. Throughout, the line-and-watercolor illustrations are rollicking and informative, if awkwardly proportioned, and doggedly make the point (although the breed names are occasionally terminologically or orthographically inaccurate—for instance, “Golden Labrador Retriever” and “Dalmation”). Her focus getting a little hazy at the end, Gibbons gives the nod to working dogs just before closing with a gallery of famous dogs from the past (Sater in ancient Greece) to the present (Beethoven, the film star). SSV

GILLILAND, HAP  
Paper ed. ISBN 1-879373-82-3  $8.95

Flint Red Coyote doesn’t want to leave the Cheyenne reservation and his beloved grandfather to go live in Butte, three hundred miles to the west, but his older sister’s husband has left her and she needs her family to come and help out. In his new school, Flint meets two boys who, like him, are having trouble fitting in: Jose, a quiet boy whose family has just come to Montana from Mexico; and David, nicknamed Tarzan, a troubled bully from Detroit. While the main story is Flint’s, the other boys’ points-of-view are regularly interpolated, making the focus too
wide for the rather thin story. The unlikely alliance is believable, though, and contrasts of cultural norms are worked in smoothly, as when Jose draws suspicion because he won’t, out of deference, look his teacher in the eye. The author conveniently has Grandfather die while Flint and Jose are visiting the reservation, allowing for a too-neat thematic wrap-up; more realistically, Tarzan’s problems are left unresolved. The book is in a series designed for American Indian children, but its concerns and appeal will speak more broadly; proofreading should have been more careful. RS


Famed poet Giovanni provides the text for this picture book, which exhorts young listeners to create and celebrate: “Take the air/ and weave the sky/ around the Black loom/ around the Black loom/ make the sky sing a Black song/ sing a blue song.” Over the text, a young African-American girl dances joyously by herself, with her mother, and with a large hand-holding gathering; Chris Raschka’s depiction of the celebration is strong-lined, fluid, and affectionate on rich tan paper. Giovanni’s lyric is strong and singing, gentled by the periodic refrain of “careful baby/ don’t prick your finger”; the poem certainly has more life than most picture book encouragements of self- and cultural esteem. It’s all frustratingly abstract, though, and beyond the attractive pictures and the warm if vague ideas, there’s not much point—most youngsters will miss the meaning of the verse and will wait impatiently for something concrete to happen, and at the end will wonder if anything did. Perhaps this would be most effective if read as part of a larger poetry selection or as a counterpoint to more literal prose. DS


Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

We’ve all had topsy-turvy days, but Morton has an upside-down night. Angry that he’s lost his spacious bedroom to his twin sisters and he has to take their warren of a room complete with bunnies on the wallpaper, Morton goes to bed scowling, only to wake up when he feels himself flying up to the ceiling. Heckman and Been succeed in showing how the ordinary can quickly become extraordinary—all it takes is a new way of looking at things. Upside down, a twirling kitchen stool is a perfect base for handstands, a ceiling fan fabulous for Cossack-style dancing, and an inverted fireplace chimney superlative for rock climbing—well, you get the idea. Finally, when he tires of walking on other ceilings, Morton returns to his own, curling up on the shimmering stars with a happy grin. Been’s eerie colored-pencil illustrations offer a spooky glow-in-the-dark ominousness while helping to orient us to Morton’s gravity-defying exploits. Kids will enjoy the wackiness of the story even as they’re ambushed with a stealth lesson in point of view. SSV


In snappy couplets, an infectious reprise (“Talk. Talk./ My crayons talk./ Yackity. Clackity./ Talk. Talk. Talk”), and big, scribbly drawings in which she is the center
of attention, a red-headed moppet conducts a rollicking show-and-tell of colors and their associations. “Silver toots, ‘Grand,/ Marching band’” while the girl strides across a musical staff and blows into an enormous crayon flute, until “Red roars, ‘No,/ Do not go’” and she screeches to a crimson halt before a roaring lion with a STOP sign. A twelve-pack’s worth of pictures and rhymes vigorous enough for preschool story time will have the audience eyeing their stubby Binney and Smiths with new respect. Who knows . . . they may even discover the secret life of burnt umber. EB


“I once knew two Mrs. Gibsons,” begins the narrator, depicted as a child playing ball with her African-American grandmother and her Japanese mother. The following pages describe the differences between the two women: one is big, dark, and loud; the other is small, light-skinned, and quiet. One lets the narrator try on Sunday hats and helps her catch fireflies; the other lets her try on kimonos and helps her make paper cranes. One cooks greens for a long time, the other stir-fries quick meals. One fixes the narrator’s hair in a thick braid hanging over her forehead, the other brushes the narrator’s hair straight again. “They were different, but they both had a lot in common. They both loved my Daddy and they both loved me.” An author’s note verifies this as autobiographical, which alleviates some bits of racial stereotyping that seem to glaze the portraits of these two women. The paintings are rich in earth-toned patterns but awkwardly drafted, with the figures often appearing stiffly posed. The text, too, is more patterned than plotted; in other words, there’s more situation than story, but listeners will enjoy the rhythm of contrast and the goodhearted if message-laden multicultural motif. BH


See this month’s *Big Picture*, p. 289, for review.


In what could have been an opening in a Somerset Maugham short story, a Chinese writer, while traveling on a train, hears a terrible tale from his compartment-mate, a disheveled artist who is carrying a mysterious package, and who agrees to let the writer take down his story. Artist Hia Xiayu had thought he had a bright future when he graduated from the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts in the early 1960s; instead, he is sent to a provincial pottery factory as punishment for political crimes. Perplexed at the accusation (“Had I ever privately said anything bad in front of someone else? Who can remember everything one’s ever said?”), Hia Xiayu nonetheless attempts to settle in and to learn from the master potters about their art. Marriage, though, to a woman who is loved by the head of the factory’s painting section, brings a cycle of harassment, torture, and betrayal, and Hia Xiayu
is sent to hard labor in a quarry (and his wife, convinced he is a counterrevolutionary, aborts their child). Although the writing and/or translation is a little stiff, this is a compelling story of Mao's Cultural Revolution, containing as well some subtle discussion of creativity and artistic response. Why it has been published as a children's book, though, is puzzling: all of the characters are adults, save for a dog, Jet, that befriends and protects the beleaguered artist even while he makes things worse, as when Jet rips down posters denouncing Hia Xiayu. There is some heart-tugging drama in the scenes between man and dog, and this may be enough to draw young readers into the adult story. RS

KAMEN, GLORIA  *Hidden Music: The Life of Fanny Mendelssohn*; written and illus. by Gloria Kamen. Atheneum, 1996  82p
ISBN 0-689-31714-X $15.00  R  Gr. 5-8

Writing to Fanny when she was sixteen, her father cautioned her of a future that would be different from that of her famous brother Felix: “Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament.” Kamen’s feminist theme can be clearly heard throughout this biography, but she wisely does not lean on it too heavily and avoids turning her early-nineteenth-century subject into a twentieth-century heroine. It is true that Fanny Mendelssohn wanted a larger stage for her compositions than the family home and relished the single chance she had to conduct an orchestra (again, in her own home). But she did not have the ambitions of a Clara Schumann, who played hundreds of public performances, and Fanny’s commitment to her brother’s career seems total, even after he presented her compositions as his own. While Kamen limits her discussion of Fanny’s music to stating that it was “romantic,” her portrayal of Fanny’s family and society is fuller, and she does not shrink from some of the darker aspects, such as Fanny and Felix’s father’s decision to change the family’s name and religion in order to avoid anti-Semitism. An epilogue sums up some more recent women composers and a musical glossary, index, and bibliography are included; given the renewed interest in recording Fanny Mendelssohn’s compositions, a discography would have been welcome. RS

KRUPP, ROBIN RECTER  *Let’s Go Traveling in Mexico*; written and illus. by Robin Rector Krupp. Morrow, 1996  [40p]
Reviewed from galleys NR  Gr. 2-4

In this old-school travelogue, readers are taken on a frantic tour of Mexico, guided by the Aztec divinity Quetzalcóatl: “My name slithers along your tongue. Let me guide you through my land. We’ll celebrate each season as we travel through a year. Let’s go to Mexico!” The plumed serpent and the book careen from coast to coast and north to south with no discernible order, but many famous monuments, moments in history, and festivals are visited; there’s even a stop for souvenirs. The mixed-media and collage art is busy as well: the coloring is loud, and double-spread paintings have to compete for attention with inset details, maps, and speech balloons (“Wow! It’s the plumed serpent, Quetzalcóatl”). Relentless and relentlessly cheery (the only problems mentioned are bumpy mountain roads and the fact that Mexican kids have to do homework too), the book is packed with tidbits and fun facts that get lost in the rush. Pass the Dramamine. RS
LESTER, JIM  *Fallout.* Delacorte, 1996  212p
ISBN 0-385-32168-6  $15.95  M  Gr. 6-9

Ever since Dickie Francis died in Vietnam sixteen years ago, his three war buddies have been keeping an eye on his son Kenny, who, now entering his junior year in high school, has a belligerent attitude and has been involved in some minor scrapes. At the advice of his "uncles," Mom packs Kenny off to Bedford Academy, a prep school where, according to family lore, Dickie had been a star athlete and all-around big man on campus. Kenny is off to a bad start when he inadvertently becomes responsible for the star football player falling out a window, but still he is determined to make the best of his stay at Bedford. When a tornado devastates the town, Kenny gets his chance to be a hero like his father, but he flinches when looters beat up his best friend, the dweeby Mickey Holland, and Kenny is too scared to come to Mickey's aid. It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn (after all sorts of emotional baggage have been conveniently unloaded by the "uncles" in the final chapters) that Dickie was no hero; in fact, Dickie had killed himself, unable to take the pressures of battle or the teasing of his buddies. Lester fashions a thoroughly unconvincing voice for narrator Kenny. Overuse of teeny-bopper constructions—"heart attack city," "prep school city," "pukesville," "nutsville"—and vapid phrases such as "It was a pretty cool scene," and "Fun is the name of Uncle John's game" will have the audience wondering if anyone ever talks like this. Kenny's sophomoric tone even trivializes his father's tragedy: "I mean, I felt sorry for my real dad. Killing himself and everything." Kids looking for tales on the legacy of the Vietnam War might consider Katherine Paterson's *Park's Quest* (BCCB 4/88) instead. EB


This companion piece to *Celebrations* (BCCB 4/85) takes its audience around the calendar once again, this time celebrating holidays from different countries and religious traditions. Livingston offers a medley of poetic forms, rhyme patterns, and metric variations ranging from the graceful haiku of "Cherry Blossom Festival" to the rhymed dialogue of "Las Posadas (The Inns)" which, Livingston suggests, can be presented as a play. Much of the subject matter here will not be as familiar as that in the previous title, and listeners are likelier to learn about the festivities than to join empathetically in the celebration. The poetry isn't among Livingston's most memorable, and an aura of pedagogy hovers around some entries ("Each night/ we break/ our daily fast,/ but Id-Ul-Fitr/ comes at last"), but even these lessons-in-verse are painless and pleasant. Fisher's bold-hued and rock-solid images, which are ideal for classroom viewing, provide visual continuity with the earlier collaboration. EB

LUGER, HARRIETT  *Bye, Bye, Bali Kai.* Browndeer/Harcourt, 1996  [192p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-15-200862-4  $11.00  R  Gr. 4-6

Not only can Suzie not come up with her twenty-dollar share in the Halloween costume she and best friend Meredith are supposed to be putting together, she can't tell Meredith why. Suzie's father is out of work, her mother has only just
started a job, the family is due to be evicted from the Bali Kai apartments, and "Suzie had to lie about why their phone was cut off, why she couldn't go places with her friends, why she couldn't buy clothes and treats like everybody else." Suzie, who is in fifth grade, fights with her older sister and with her parents, but sudden affection flares as quickly as do tempers. The shifting alliances of friendship (Meredith dumps Suzie for another student who has basically bought her way into Meredith's affection) are just as realistically handled ("Twice she caught Meredith looking at her, but they both slid their eyes away. She's probably wondering why I'm so dirty"). Aside from an out-of-the-blue happy ending, this is a spare, often funny, and unsentimental picture of a family's slide into homelessness.

LYON, GEORGE ELLA  
_A Day at Damp Camp_; illus. by Peter Catalanotto.  
Jackson/Orchard, 1996  26p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-09504-5  $14.95  
Ad  5-8 yrs

And a busy day it is, here chronicled in computeresque "windows" and what Bruce McMillan called, in his volumes of similar rhymes (Play Day, BCCB 2/92, One Sun, 5/90), terse verse. The campers apparently start with a nature walk ("Frog log. Bug tug. Snake shake"), then proceed to arts and crafts ("Seed bead. Craft raft. Float boat"), then go for a swim, a long hike, and a cookout followed by an overnight campout. The depiction of energetic girls clad in traditional shorts and t-shirts performing traditional summer-camp activities is familiar and engaging (the before-and-after endpapers, with the front showing Megan's togs neatly laid out and labeled and the back showing them stained, worn, and rubbing hems with a few neighbors' belongings, are amusingly accurate), and the unusual format—each spread's three scenes appear as a trio of concentric layered rectangles—is intriguing. The text, however, is sometimes forced and often confusing, with the rhyme taking precedence over clarity: What does "bug tug" actually mean, since no pulling by or of bugs is evident? The interjection of two differently formatted rhymes ("Dive in. Live skin") seems an inexplicable pattern change rather than an interesting variant. Time is also mysterious: if this book starts in the morning, why is the girl lying on the "hot cot" dressed, and what happened to breakfast and lunchtime? Or is it only part of a day at damp camp? Nonetheless, Catalanotto's sturdy but inventive watercolors and the book's understanding of outdoor-life delights will make this book appealing to little campers despite its patches of rocky ground.

McCaffrey, Anne  
_Black Horses for the King._  
Harcourt, 1996  [240p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-10

Galwyn resents his tyrannical uncle and employer and relishes his assignment to assist Lord Artos (better known to us as King Arthur) in obtaining war horses and bringing them to Britain. Once in Britain, he casts his lot with Artos, who retains him to translate the local dialects and to look after the horses. Galwyn finds that his talent with horses earns him friends and enemies; he also joins with old Canyd, esteemed horseman, in developing an effective and necessary horseshoe, learning to shape and shoe, and convincing leaders and allies of the shoes' benefit. Developed from a previously published short story, this is an unusual slant both on Arthurian legend/history and on military strategy. McCaffrey keeps to the histori-
cal Arthur and depicts only this early pre-marriage period but ladles the charisma on—this is clearly a leader who is going places, whether on horseback or not. The military importance of the horses and the significance of the small strategic advantage inherent in the use of horseshoes is well-depicted without becoming dryly factual; these horses whinny and prance and thunder across the field of battle as well as playing a crucial part in defense and conquest. Galwyn himself is a familiar kind of narrator, the young person whose gifts and inherent merit raise him above others and bring him close to the great; his hero-worship and his modesty stale a bit but his enthusiasm will be shared by the readers. Arthur fans, historical fictionites, and military buffs can all find satisfying material here, and they'll all think more seriously on the old adage that begins "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. . . ." DS


A lone spider named Nobb searches for someplace to set her egg; the Air is willing but insufficient, and the Moon, Sun, and Cloud all shoo Nobb away. The clever spider then catches the three unhelpful elements in her web and takes a piece of each of them before letting them go. With these pieces Nobb creates the Earth and the Water, and her newly laid egg hatches out to produce all the creatures that live there. Original pourquoi tales are hard to pull off, but this is an elegant and well-structured one that spins its story thread with a gentle formality, careful progression, and pleasing rhythm. Karas' illustrations are a departure from his usual style: acrylic and gouache paintings show a few thickly bordered stylized figures on each page against a coolly toned, pigment-washed background, which sometimes contains its own subtle pattern and sometimes is crisscrossed by delicate white strands of cobweb; the whole spread erupts into color and action when Nobb's egg finally hatches. There's a dreamy overlay to the enterprise that would make this an suitable bedtime story—perhaps one particularly welcome where a young sleepyhead needs to be reconciled to a resident arachnid. DS


Well-timed to find its way into schools and libraries before November 5th, this is a steady illustrated overview of the election process, with a particularly close eye on the race for president. As with their previous volumes, such as A More Perfect Union (BCCB 10/87) and The Discovery of the Americas (4/91), the Maestros here don't provide any more information than does a well-organized encyclopedia article; it's the large format and even tone that win the ticket. Some of the material is too cursorily treated, such as the difference between a direct democracy and a representative one and the limitations the Bill of Rights places on majority rule (plus there's some confusion between majority and plurality), but overall this is a smooth synthesis. Watercolor-and-colored-pencil illustrations are airy and appealing on the whole, yet manage to make all of our various elected officials—from George Washington to Bill Clinton—look distinctly unattractive. Appended
material includes a summary of the Constitution and its Amendments, a list of presidents, and other tidy facts including an explanation of that pesky old Electoral College. RS

MAIZLISH, LISA  The Ring; illus. with photographs by Lisa Maizlish.  Greenwillow, 1996  [26p]
ISBN 0-688-14217-6  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  4-6 yrs

In this wordless picture book, a series of photographs depicts a boy's adventure on a cold day in the park. Into his dismal black-and-white world comes a bright yellow ring; through the ring, he can see color, and when he puts it on, his world turns to bright-hued summer and he gains the ability to fly. Which he does, soaring through the skies of Manhattan, whizzing past a startled young visitor to a skyscraper's observation deck, hurtling past the face of the Statue of Liberty, and finally returning to the park to leave the ring for another child in need of a literal pick-me-up. The fantasy photography is more convincing here than in Nina Crews' I'll Catch the Moon, reviewed above: the images blend the impossible and the possible effectively, and the concepts (except in one double spread, where an attempt to show the boy's airborne progression may result in youngsters' thinking he's got company) will be clear to young viewers. The plot is actually rather slight—kid flies, kid touches down—but the execution of the idea and the verisimilitude of the images lift this off the ground. DS

MARRIN, ALBERT Plains Warrior: Chief Quanah Parker and the Comanches.  Atheneum, 1996  [208p]
ISBN 0-689-80081-9  $18.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 6-9

Marrin has roamed the Old West before, literarily speaking (Cowboys, Indians, and Gunfighters, BCCB 9/93); here he focuses on the Comanche and their losing nineteenth-century battle for their traditional life and lands on the Great Plains. The book starts with a prologue about the Comanche kidnapping of Cynthia Ann Parker, Quanah's mother; it then describes Comanche history and culture, the increasing hostilities between Indians and Europeans, and Quanah Parker's leadership during the bitter last years of the struggle. While noting that "much of the history of the American West is, and must forever remain, one-sided," the author makes an impressive attempt to be even-handed about the behavior and attitudes of both sides, clearly depicting cultural differences and political wranglings and painting neither side as totally virtuous. His inclusion of detail and his reliance on first-hand sources helps bring the period to life, and his careful analyses keep the images from becoming Western-movie simplistic. Kids may come for the adventure, but they'll leave with a deeper understanding of what it all meant. Black-and-white photographs appear throughout; endnotes, a reading list, and an index are appended. DS

MARTIN, TRUDE Obee & Mungedeech.  Simon, 1996  [112p]
ISBN 0-689-80644-2  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  M  Gr. 4-6

A cute and quirky prologue introduces Obee and Mungedeech, babies who meet—and talk—in the hospital nursery. It turns out all babies can talk but soon learn
that revealing this talent to their parents can provoke alarm, so, à la the twins in *Mary Poppins*, they forget. The main story begins "4,015 sunsets later" (we did the math—about eleven years) when Obee, renamed Kate by her parents (the babies called them "landlords"), is trying to survive the trials of school and family, neither of which seem to be going too well. A new boy, Edgar, takes an interest in her, and guess who he turns out to be? There isn’t really enough connection between the prologue and the realistic story to justify the former’s existence: Kate doesn’t remember the nursery until it comes back in a dream at the end of the book, which is when her previous friendship with Edgar is also revealed. The story, too, is disjointed, uninvolving, and vague, particularly in long stretches of unattributed dialogue where it’s easy to lose track of who is speaking. In her first novel Martin does demonstrate a fresh, aphoristic style and a pot of interesting ideas about Education and Life, but she doesn’t quite cohere them into a convincing fiction. RS

**Meyer, Carolyn** *Gideon’s People*. Gulliver/Harcourt, 1996 [320p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-15-200303-7 $12.00
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

It’s 1911, and things couldn’t be going better for Isaac Litsky; this is the first time his father, Peddlar Jakob, has allowed him to come along on his route through Amish territory, and the trip is a good one until their wagon overturns at the Stolzfus’ gate and Isaac is injured. Jakob must return home to his pregnant wife, and he leaves Isaac temporarily in the Amish family’s care; here, Isaac observes that a deep animosity between Datt and Gideon (father and son) seethes beneath the apparent calm and order of the devout household. When it’s time for Isaac to return home, he and his orthodox Jewish family prove sympathetic to Gideon’s desire to join his uncle’s less strict household, and they provide him the moral support and financial means to make his getaway. The Stolzfus family dynamics and the cautious friendship that develops between the two adolescent boys are credibly drawn. However, contrasts between the families’ religious practices are laid on thick, and several dialogues concerning ritual taboos seem to have been included to instruct the reader rather than to develop the plot. A series of letters exchanged among Isaac, Gideon, and Gideon’s sister Annie provides an awkward and strained wrap-up, but it reassures the audience that Gideon has made the right move and has not burned his last bridge to his family. EB

**Morpugo, Michael** *The Ghost of Grania O’Malley*. Viking, 1996 [144p]
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 6-9

Jessie loves her life on the small Irish island of Clare, but she resents the way other people treat her as different because of her “lousy palsy,” which makes it difficult for her to keep up physically. She finds allies in her American cousin Jack, over in Ireland for the summer, and in the ghost of pirate Grania O’Malley (biographized in Emily Arnold McCully’s *The Pirate Queen*, BCCB 10/95), who headquartered for a time on the island. Soon the trio faces not only Jessie’s private problems but the threat of ecological devastation as the Big Hill, the island’s spiritual heart and the home of Grania’s castle, is slated for destruction in order to hunt for gold within. There are some appealing ideas here and a romantic setting, and Jessie’s growing camaraderie with Jack is warmly depicted. Unfortunately, between Jack, his family problems, Jessie, her physical and social difficulties, Jessie’s parents fighting...
over the fate of the Big Hill, and Grania O'Malley, the book's many plot elements cause it to sprawl; more unfortunately, the great pirate queen is disappointingly mundane, stripped of most of her glamourous danger despite her flashy appearance. Still, fans of Dunlop's Finn's Island (BCCB 8/92) and other readers who enjoy a good island drama will appreciate Jessie's fight for her home.

DS

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-025871-3 $14.95
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-446700-7 $4.95
Reviewed from galleys

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-025873-X $14.95
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-446701-5 $4.95
Reviewed from galleys

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-025878-0 $14.89
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-446702-3 $4.95
Reviewed from galleys

Like the Hello Math Reader series (see review under Holtzman, BCCB 2/96), MathStart attempts to demonstrate spatial and arithmetical concepts to a very young audience. Each of the three levels features a read-alone text, well-matched to the age at which the math concept is likely to be introduced, along with suggested activities and a three-entry list for further picture-book reading. The Best Bug Parade tackles size comparisons, with a red ladybug parade marshall as a constant referent in ever-changing trios. The critter that announces "I am the shortest bug of this sort" is taller, albeit less lengthy, than the other bugs on the page, and he is only one in a pair of the same sort of bug, meriting a comparative rather than a superlative. Give Me Half, in which a sibling squabble over pizza equity culminates in a food fight, loses mathematical credibility with its ending "We'd better each clean half! There's so much work to do. / We'll be done in half the time . . . / If Buddy [the dog] helps us too." In Ready, Set, Hop!, two frogs' preliminary debate on their relative size and predicted hop length turn out to have no bearing whatsoever on the outcome of their hopping contest. When all the addition and subtraction smoke has cleared, readers are left to sort out a confusing result, which then reverts to a tie, and an even more confusing joke. Wasn't two plus two easier before math was supposed to be fun? EB


Smiff Blue and his sidekick/straight man Jeremy Joe (and Smiffy Blue's dog named Dog) have a busy time of it in this early chapter book, solving four mysteries in
seventy-four pages. These aren't mysteries in any conventional sense: each time, Smiffy makes dumb conclusions from dumb clues, but he always gets his man in the end. In the title story, for example, Smiffy deduces from an empty notebook and an old newspaper that the missing ruby was stolen by a stranger using a gold-painted lobster riding a poodle; the culprit was actually the museum guard Girard the Guard using none of the above, but Smiffy nabs him nonetheless. It's as fatuous as it sounds, and the lack of logic in the stories makes them both confusing and pointless, not exactly the qualities you're looking for in a book for newly independent readers. Even while they don't add up to anything, some of the jokes in and of themselves are funny in an absurd way (when Jeremy Joe wonders how they put the holes in donuts, Smiffy Blue loftily replies that "they do not put the holes in donuts. They wrap the donuts around the holes") and yuck-yuck character names (Nick Nasty, Doc Terdoom) indicate that the book knows just how silly it's being. Blue-accented ink cartoons, as broad as the text, depict an African-American cast. RS

NESS, CAROLINE, ad. The Ocean of Story: Fairy Tales from India; illus. by Jacqueline Mair. Lothrop, 1996 [123p] ISBN 0-688-13584-6 $17.00 Reviewed from galleys

Although this doesn't have the easy informality of oral tradition captured by Madhur Jaffrey in Seasons of Splendour (BCCB 1/86), it's a vivid collection with variety of tone and pace. Some tales will seem familiar: "The Magic Lamp," for instance, is a variant of Aladdin; "Three Fussy Men," of "The Princess and the Pea"; and "A Likely Story," of the contest motif in which each of two storytellers tries to trick the other into doubting a tall tale. Other stories introduce patterns unusual in western folklore, or they end, as does "The Man Who Went to Seek his Fate," on a somber note more common to fables than to fairy tales. Long selections are often separated by brief parables, and Neil Philip, who chose the stories that have been retold by Ness, is meticulous about providing source and background notes. Mair's densely patterned, full-page illustrations depend on an intense contrast of hues to shape the compositions; while some of the graphic motifs draw on India's traditional art, the overall effect is distinctively modern. In addition to enriching a folklore collection generally, the book will have special appeal in communities with a large Indian population. BH


Nye and Janeczko have each independently produced worthy poetry anthologies (This Same Sky, 12/92, Wherever Home Begins, 11/95); here they join forces for a collection with a twist. The poems come in pairs, the male-authored entry always leading and the female-authored one always getting the last word. The coupled poems sometimes share a subject, sometimes a setting, sometimes a theme or an image (Agha Shahid Ali's "Snowman" and Robin Boody Galguera's "Alloy" both address questions of culture, E. Ethelbert Miller's "Dressed Up" and Naomi Stroud Simmons' "With Reservation" offer quirky takes on fancy dress) that directs read-
ers to a specific way into each poem. The poems themselves, almost all contemporary free verse and from poets ranging from famous (Rita Dove, W. S. Merwin) to less known, are of a high standard. Though the gender counterpoint really plays little part in the juxtaposition, the pairings are piquant and provide a manageable way to start talking about a very large collection of poetry. An engaging marginal dialogue, taken from Nye's and Janeczko's collaborative fax correspondence, appears alongside the appendix and permits a revealing peek behind the scenes. Highly readable notes from contributors are included, as is an index of poems and a gender-segregated index of poets. DS

OSTROW, VIVIAN  My Brother is from Outer Space (The Book of Proof); illus. by Eric Brace. Whitman, 1996  32p ISBN 0-8075-5325-5 $14.95 Ad Gr. 2-4

Young Alex and his family have a picture-book-perfect life until younger brother William is born. It's not the real William who's the problem, exactly, he's just a normal human baby, but during a noisy storm aliens kidnap William and substitute one of their own in the nursery. At least, this is Alex's fervent conviction, one that will ring true to lots of kids, although Mom and Dad laugh uproariously at the idea. Stung, Alex begins "The Book of Proof," documenting Weird William's habits: talking non-stop (frequently on the phone, perhaps to his home planet of Dinkville), excelling in school (even though he cuts up and exhausts his teachers into early retirement), sleeping like an alien (falling out of bed and onto the floor), and playing sports (his basketball game suggests supernatural powers). Alex puts aside this incriminating document until the world is ready to hear and believe; finally, just when he's leaving for college, William discovers it and confesses that—he always thought Alex was the alien. This is awfully neat, overly cute, and rather patronizingly unbelievable—even young readers will see through a college-age kid who believes his little brother is an alien. Brace's mixed-media illustrations, with their PoMo cartoon edginess, contrast entertainingly with the scrawled text on blue-lined notebook paper and add a kid-appealing dimension of hipness to an otherwise predictable tale. SSV


Organized by the four seasons and, within each season, six typical activities of early American pioneers, these twenty-four traditional quilt patterns each receive a page with descriptive text, design closeups, and an illustration depicting the activity represented. Beginning with Spring, for instance, the pattern "Album" describes prenuptial gatherings during which a young woman's friends make a quilt with blocks featuring their names to remind her, wherever she goes, of her childhood community. "Crossed Canoes" describes the various Native American canoes that criss-crossed lakes, rivers, and ocean shorelines, often in front of white men's ships. After the first several patterns, which seem firmly rooted in fact, the descriptions slip into conjecture: "Maybe a young girl worked this pattern to thank the First Lady for the wonderful time she had one Easter Monday" ("Dolly Madison Star"); "Perhaps someone, grateful to the jack-in-the-pulpit plant for curing her children, sewed this patchwork" ("Jack-in-the-Pulpit"); "It's possible a courageous African American woman sewed this patchwork, remembering the North Star and her
escape to freedom" ("Rising Star"). Some of the origins seem natural, others stretched to fit the framework of the book. What's consistently excellent are the meticulous scratchboard illustrations, with their fine lines, plain earth tones, and homespun style. Raymond Bial's *With Needle and Thread* (BCCB 2/96) has more historical continuity for older readers, but this is nevertheless a handsome book for browsing and absorbing useful details. The author's introduction and afterword are helpful; the selective bibliography comprises adult books about quilting and/or frontier life.


Exclamation points abound in this true science thriller for the beginning-to-read set: "In Africa some horseflies even suck the blood of crocodiles!" Enough said—while the information here is accurate enough, it's the grossout appeal of insects doing dastardly and disgusting things that provides this book with its *raison d'être*. New readers will learn about the bombardier beetle (which "fires boiling-hot gas from its rear end"), the black widow spider ("Sometimes the female spider kills and eats her mate!"), and the assassin bug ("Suddenly it plunges its sharp beak into the caterpillar's furry body. Then it squirts in poison. The caterpillar's insides turn to mush"), among others. The hook is gruesome but undeniable. Watercolor illustrations are well-drawn and often dramatic, and, compared to the text, remarkably restrained.


"I had just dropped out of school in the middle of my senior year in Philadelphia and came back to Richmond jumpy and underweight, with what I called a bad cold, and a face in the mirror that looked like an advertisement on poor mental health," says Willie Steinberg. Her poor mental health seems to come from inner conflicts about her gifts as a composer and cellist and about her father, whose job forces—or allows—him to travel so extensively that he is never home, leaving parents divorced in all but law and acknowledgment. Her aimless existence gets a complication when Katherine, an acquaintance from music school, also a Richmondite, asks for Willie's help with a problem: Malachi Gelb, the music-school student in love with Katherine, is attending her coming-out party, and Katherine needs Willie to come as his date so that she, Katherine, is not escorted by a Jew. Despite her resentment, Willie does attend Katherine's party with Malachi, which results in an evening of disaster and drunkenness but also, ultimately, a certain understanding and a new strength. Rosenberg writes with lyricism and delicacy, and Willie's fog of gloom and fear is convincingly depicted. The fog turns to murk, however, when it comes to emotional undercurrents and interpersonal dynamics: Willie's changing relationship with eccentric Malachi is confusing and the bond between them unconvincing, and it's never clear what exactly her creative blockage has to do with her father or even how talented she was in the first place. Readers may be unsure as to just how Willie gets to the hope she
achieves, but the book offers a compelling portrayal of depression’s stultifying effects and a young woman’s gradual release from its grip. DS

ROSS, STEWART  
*Fact or Fiction: Witches*; illus. by McRae Books and with photographs. Copper Beech, 1996 48p  (Fact or Fiction)
Paper ed. ISBN 0-7613-0467-3  $ 6.95  M  Gr. 4-7

Witches’ scattered format is a mélange of history, trivia, and pop culture: on each double-page spread images and small blocks of text tenuously connected by a general theme such as “Popes and Pagans” or “Shamans and Spirits” stand out against a background that simulates worn parchment. The attempt to place witchcraft within a historical context largely fails since history is so broadly generalized: “As Christianity was spreading through Europe, missionaries tried not to upset people of other beliefs.” While anecdotes and trivia featured on a page may fall under the same broad topic, often they aren’t sufficiently well-related to one another to provide a sense of continuity. Vague or unsupported statements mar the text, as in the bald assertion that *The Witches’ Hammer* was “one of the worst books ever written” or that “In some ways, Eve was the first witch, tempting Adam to take a bite from the apple.” Some anecdotes are so sparsely detailed that they provide neither satisfying information nor entertainment. “Part of an ancient tradition of magic, in 1909 three psychics helped the Indian police track down the murderer of a French official,” Ross tells us in a manner so parsimonious as to make the intriguing dull. Pictures include stills from movies and TV shows, original illustrations featuring bland figures in poorly realized settings, and a few paintings, the provenance of which are left a mystery. A glossary and timeline at the back of the book are more coherent and useful than the main body; an index provides quick access to terms scattered through the text. Reluctant readers with a taste for the morbid or those with a new or superficial interest in the subject may find the book intriguing; others are more likely to deem it frustrating. LM

SCHROEDER, ALAN  
Library ed. ISBN 0-8037-1889-6  $16.89  

Young Araminta, or “Minty,” who will later in life be known as Harriet Tubman, proves too clumsy and defiant to be a house slave and is sent by Mistress Brodas to work in the fields. Despite the counsel of parents and fellow field hands to avoid confrontation with owners and overseers (“Pat the lion, Minty. It ain’t gonna kill you”), the child purposely frees the muskrats from the traps she has been ordered to empty and is cruelly whipped and threatened to be sold “downriver.” Certain that his headstrong daughter will one day attempt to run away, Minty’s father begins to instruct her in outdoor survival and navigation, skills the audience knows (or learns in the appended Author’s Note) will serve her later as conductor on the Underground Railroad. Schroeder introduces his account with the explanation that “some scenes have been invented for narrative purposes,” but he fails to define specifically the boundary between fact and imagination in each fictionalized episode. Nor does he provide source notes for adult readers using this material with young children. Still, if the text takes literary liberties with Tubman’s life story, Pinkney’s signature watercolors offer an accurately and lavishly detailed portrayal
of Maryland plantation life. If not precisely Tubman’s tale, this is a well-told and plausible look at the often brutal experiences of a child field slave. EB

SNEVE, VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK. *The Cherokees;* written and illus. by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. Holiday House, 1996 32p (First Americans) ISBN 0-8234-1214-8 $15.95  R  Gr. 3-6

Like other books in this series, which has covered the Sioux, Navajos, Seminoles, Nez Percé, Iroquois, and Hopis, this brief description of the Cherokee nation begins with a creation myth and includes some traditions, history, and contemporary socio-cultural information. Although the facts are sometimes tantalizingly compressed (what is “the black drink” that adults sipped during the Green Corn Ceremony to “make them vomit to get rid of the bad things inside the body”?), the clean format and consistent assessment of whites’ impact on Indian life make this a first-class introduction for students researching reports or browsing on their own (an index and source notes assist further). Himler’s illustrations dignify the subject with well-composed, knowledgeable paintings that vary the page design, supply maps where needed, capture something of the majestic woodland setting from which the Cherokee were driven, and portray a few of the powerful leaders who helped them survive physically and spiritually—including John Ross, Sequoya, Tsali, and, more recently, the first woman to lead all of the Western Cherokees, Wilma Mankiller. BH


Crash is a seventh-grade football hero, macho to the bone, who revels in his buddyhood with his neighbor Mike, the companionship of his beloved grandfather, and the fresh possibilities suggested by a pretty new girl in his class. He also enjoys teaming up with Mike to torment Penn Webb, the weird (vegetarian, Quaker, and not well-off) kid on the block, whose parents offer their son the kind of time and attention that Crash desires from his own parents. When Crash’s grandfather suffers a stroke, Crash finds the world and the way he looks at it changing, and he discovers that it’s necessary to reexamine his loyalties. Spinelli manages to make Crash both a credible junior-high jock-jerk with bullying tendencies (his attempts at coercing the girl he likes into a dance are particularly chilling) and a sympathetic narrator, and the book strongly implies that the groundwork for many of Crash’s unpleasant tendencies was laid by his busy and sometimes offhand family. The story isn’t particularly surprising or subtle (the last chapter, summing up changes over an intervening year, makes some particularly big leaps), but the milieu is believable and the writing lively (Crash’s younger sister, Abby, is an energetic figure). Crash’s character has a raw edge that often doesn’t get acknowledged in pre-YA fiction; kids not ready for Chris Lynch but looking for that kind of grit will appreciate Crash’s story. DS


An extravagantly scruffy Coyote lies down to die, complaining about old age all the way through Buzzard’s countdown: “I need food, but I can’t see it, and if I
can’t see it, I can’t catch it. Even if I did catch it, I couldn’t chew it.’ . . . ‘Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five . . . You’re almost dead,’ screeched Buzzard.” But then Coyote cooks up one of his infamous plans: to borrow strength, youth, and power from Buffalo. Of course, once he’s strong and young again he defies Buffalo’s conditions for helping him and tries to assume the power to change other oldsters (Rabbit, Lizard, Kangaroo Rat), which proves his downfall. Literally. But Coyote doesn’t give up. Ever. Stevens’ deep blue skies, purple mountains, and dusty green flora form textured landscapes against which the heavily furred brown buffalo stands out in large scale. One of the funniest touches, in fact, is the scraggily Coyote tail attached so incongruously to the buffalo that is Coyote’s transformed self. (And don’t miss the back cover, which features a conclusive detail.) There’s lots of action in the art, which balances nicely between smudgy backgrounds and loose-lined but accurately drafted animals. A note on the double-spread title page cites the printed source for this Shoshoni tale, freely adapted into a picture book that’s relaxed in tone but fast in pace—a satisfying companion to Stevens’ Coyote Steals the Blanket (BCCB 5/93). BH


Woolly Bear, which listeners will learn is the term for a tiger-moth caterpillar, “huffle-shuffles along” looking for a place to sleep, while all around her other bugs make their own kind of racket: “Some bugs whine. Some bugs zoom round and round your head.” Woolly Bear continues along, oblivious to her neighbors, until she find “a quiet place to spin her bed and dream”—a cocoon from which she finally emerges as a tiger moth. Sturges fudges a bit on the sound theme, sometimes citing a bug’s movement instead of its noise (“Some bugs chirp. Some bugs skate”), and listeners may argue with his onomatopoetic choices, for while mosquitoes “mmmmmmmm” and bees “buzz,” grasshoppers are not known to “zik zik zikkerrr.” Big, stylized creatures of cut and painted paper flit across a mixed-media background, while oversized lettering of the bug noises darts and winds among them, resulting in a cramped collage. A concluding spread, possibly more entertaining than the main text, features thumbnail sketches of each bug’s habits (“June bugs feed at night, are attracted to light, and are loud and clumsy fliers. They don’t stop easily—they crash!”). Although this title won’t offer The Very Hungry Caterpillar much competition, it just may have its audience swatting, scratching, and digging imaginary no-see-ums out of their ears. EB

SWEENEY, JOYCE Free Fall. Delacorte, 1996 [240p]
ISBN 0-385-32211-9 $15.95 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Lost while exploring an obscure cave in Ocala National Forest, brothers Neil and David and two of their friends, Randy and Terry, seek escape not only from the cave, but from the anger and guilt still festering from a tragic fire that killed Neil and David’s younger sister. Although the characters initially threaten to fall into stereotyped patterns (Randy the hothead who rips sinks out of bathroom walls, Terry the frightened peacemaker), Sweeney reveals each as a complex person struggling to cope with problems that range from abusive parents to claustrophobia to romantic crushes. Both dialogue and narration portray emotions and relation-
ships with sensitivity; Sweeney accurately captures the insulting and earthy banter of teenage boys, then successfully switches gears as Neil reveals to the others his secret passion for Baudelaire's poetry or Terry tells how his father hits him. A few false notes jar the story, such as when Neil survives a sixty or seventy-foot fall to a hard cave floor with, apparently, no more injury than one badly damaged leg. Otherwise, the story drives along at a fast pace which seldom bogs down, not even when characters grapple with the emotional difficulties that are intensified by—but are not an intrinsic part of—the effort to escape the cave. Sweeney's descriptions of the physical environment are sharp: "The walls all around at his eye level seemed alive, stalactites dripping water, mica glittering in the limestone ledges. The watery sounds were richer up here, more melodious." Her depictions of emotion are just as effective; when Neil first realizes they are lost, Sweeney notes that "his body felt like a stone falling through water." In the midst of exciting physical action, Sweeney keeps the focus primarily on the characters' equally gripping emotional struggles. Readers who enjoyed the adventure of Alden Carter's *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (BCCB 12/95) will appreciate this involving tale of guys against the odds. LM

THOMAS, ROB  *Rats Saw God.*  Simon, 1996  [224p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-689-80207-2  $17.00
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 9-12

An ambitious school counselor sets Steven York a task: if Steve can explain, in a hundred-page writing assignment, what life experience made his grades plummet from stellar to terrible beginning midway through his junior year, the counselor will count the assignment as Steve's missing English credit and he will graduate with his high-school class in the spring. It's a long but not complicated story, involving first love gone wrong (Steve's passionate involvement with a young Dadaist ends with the discovery of her infidelity with their English teacher) and family stresses (Steve, distant from his demanding father and blaming him for his parents' divorce, finally goes to live with his mother). Intercut with the writing assignment about the past is Steve's narration of coming to grips with it in the present as he finds a new romantic possibility, begins to understand his parents, and prepares to enter into college and adulthood. The story tends to sprawl, with its emotional impact marred by pacing problems, and Steve's doomed romance, though touching in its awkward sexuality and genuine affection, never quite rises above writerly contrivance. What will appeal here are the tone and the atmosphere: wisecracking Steven tells his story with an authentically adolescent shallow glibness, his camaraderie with his self-consciously offbeat friends is both warm and fragile, and his present-tense attraction to his overachieving classmate is engaging. This isn't up there with the best YA-turning-a-man novels, such as Shoup's *Wish You Were Here* (BCCB 11/94), but readers who enjoy the company of Chris Crutcher's or Julian Thompson's smartass yet thoughtful teens will appreciate Steven's story. DS

URE, JEAN  *The Children Next Door.*  Scholastic, 1996  [144p]
ISBN 0-590-22293-7  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-6

A brief hint as to what the heroine's been reading ("I'm reading a book," she said, eagerly, "about a girl who was born in the reign of Queen Victoria") acknowledges
this book’s debt to Philippa Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden*. Like Tom, Laura is lonely in a new house; she likes the brash girl next door, Zilla, but is more intrigued by the children whom she thinks are Zilla’s brother and sisters playing in Zilla’s garden. Meanwhile, a dying old woman, Zilla’s grandmother, sleeps and dreams of her childhood... Ure’s book hasn’t the ambitious technical precision of Pearce’s time-fantasy, nor does it have the pathos: Laura lacks Tom’s neediness and sense of wonder, and the revelation that the children next door are actually ghosts is clear to readers long before it becomes apparent to Laura. It’s an easier book than Pearce’s, though, and Laura and Zilla are briskly contrasted against the ghostly goings-on to make a story that will be accessible to those not ready for the more complex entries in the English time-fantasy canon. RS

Reviewed from galleys

A versified dialogue between Abuela and her granddaughter Maria guides listeners through the nuptial festivities for Alfonso and Luisa, a Mexican couple whose Zapotec wedding is, as Van Laan notes in her introduction, “a mixture of ancient customs and Catholic tradition.” Abuela makes an observation—“And here come los tíos”; Maria repeats it—“The uncles, Abuela?”; and Abuela explains further—“Yes, the uncles, Maria./ These three uncles announce la boda.” This kind of repartee, which is printed in two colors and italicized to highlight English translations of Spanish terms, may have instructional value, but the repetitive device makes Maria sound like a slow-witted tourist ("Here come los músicos." “The who?”). Still, the topic is enticing, and the details—from the vows to the vittles—will hold an audience’s attention. Watercolor and ink pictures, with curvy, crayon-colored figures celebrating amid their slightly tipsy surroundings, balance the solemnity and jubilance of the occasion. A glossary of Spanish words and pronunciations is included. EB


The prosaic title belies an engaging account of the eighteenth-century French aerialist’s passion for ballooning and, particularly, his triumphant flight from Woodbury, New Jersey to Philadelphia. Blanchard speaks candidly about his childhood mania for flight, his early failures at ballooning, and his mild jealousy of rivals’ accomplishments. After a string of successes in Germany and a flight across the English Channel (for which he is probably most noted), “Americans’ free spirit” lures him in 1793 to attempt a flight in the young country. After conducting several scientific experiments aloft and nearly losing his mascot dog over the side of the basket, Blanchard lands safely, only to be mistaken for the devil by a nearby farmer. Primary students generally delight in foreign words, and they’ll get a kick out of the dialogue-bubble comments in French and German, translated at the end of the book. Wallner’s solid, naïve figures move through their flat surroundings with dignity and grace, but the abundance of dark frock coats against tan backgrounds becomes a bit monotonous. Although this story can go solo, see how it flies with Provensen’s *The Glorious Flight* (BCCB 1/83). EB
ELIZABETH, or Bett, Freeman, a colonial slave who in 1781 successfully sued for her freedom under Massachusetts law, is provided here with a fictional younger sister Aissa who recounts her own and her famous sister's life in two successive households. Readers gain a tantalizing glimpse of a slave community still closely bound to African cultures; however, this mingling of cultures and the community’s manipulation by white masters is suggested rather than developed. Walter frequently employs stilted dialogues to provide historical background (“When [Bett's father] was not readily sold, the slave merchant used him to translate the languages of the slaves to determine from where the slaves had come,” Bett explains to her sister). Likewise, Aissa’s melodramatic musings tend to supply more drama than substance (“[They] say I took my time coming and when I finally arrived I screamed loud and long. Did I know that I was being born a slave?”). History and chronology are confusingly handled: it’s difficult to fix the ages of the two sisters, and historical characters whom Walter concedes probably never met one another interact here. Readers with an interest in the subject would be better served by Joyce Hansen’s The Captive (BCCB 3/94). EB


This collection of ten stories, evenly split between new and previously published, offers a road map to enchantment—this way to the egotistical unicorn, turn right at the giant feathered snake, careful or you’ll end up in the Frying Pan of Doom. Wrede enhances enchantment with novel effects (in “Roses by Moonlight” the heroine is shown differing futures according to which rose she sniffs) and gives traditional folklore a few twists (in “Stronger Than Time” Sleeping Beauty promises her deceased lover’s ghost to join him shortly, “The Lorelei” attempts to lure a contemporary high-schooler to his doom, and “Cruel Sisters” takes a second look at an old Child ballad). Wrede leapfrogs from princesses to werewolves and from the past to the present, but, hey, that’s life in the Enchanted Forest. The stories also range in tone from dryly amusing (“Utensile Strength”) to mystical (“The Earthwitch”); the short-story format occasionally shortchanges the more serious tales, which could have used more room to flower. The concepts, however, are clever and inventive and the writing involving, encouraging younger readers trying to work their way up to full-length fantasies to begin with this collection. Wrede concludes with the winning recipe (“Quick After-Battle Triple Chocolate Cake”) from a medieval bake-off in which knights had to prove their versatility; she also attaches “Notes from the Author” in which she provides the sources of inspiration for each story. SSV

This attractive, oversized book offers, as did Selma Lanes' The Art of Maurice Sendak, an appealing blend of the academic and the coffee-table traditions. Cech goes deeper than Lanes did into scholarship, showing a particular interest in psychoanalytic interpretation of Sendak's work, but also examining pertinent issues of national identity, artistic influences, and cultural impact. The focus is clearly on Sendak's individual contribution rather than on his place in and influence on children's literature generally; Cech concentrates on careful close-reading and analysis of patterns within Sendak's oeuvre. The author's evident enthusiasm for Sendak's work adds warmth, albeit a certain sense of partisanship, to the project. A sheaf of color plates and a plethora of black-and-white images (both preliminary and completed work) keep the discussion rooted in the concrete; notes, a generous bibliography, and an index are included. DS


This multivocal anthology offers an overview of contemporary issues in children's literature from an education point of view: sections address censorship; questions of gender and culture; historical and realistic fiction; fantasy; and practical and professional experiences. Voices range from authors (Allan Baillie's account of his travels in Cambodia is one of the most involving entries) to scholars (Barbara Kiefer, Carl Tomlinson, and Joel Taxel are all represented) to teachers and booksellers (team-teachers John Milne and Sharon Scavone and bookstore proprietor Sally Oddi offer front-line perspectives). While the articles are thought-provoking, the quality of the writing varies and the effect is sometimes more collagistic than cohesive, with the editorial commentary rarely addressing contradictions between entries. The book deserves special credit, though, for the inclusion of Violet Harris' unflinchingly challenging afterword, which avoids the easy assumption of agreement upon which many such anthologies depend. It's a usefully broad introduction to some significant contemporary concerns in the field; each entry has a bibliography, and notes on contributors are appended. DS
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.

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African Americans—poetry: Giovanni
African Americans—stories: Igus; Schroeder
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Arithmetic: Murphy
Asian Americans—stories: Igus
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Burgess
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