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Volume Two
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* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.

R Recommended.

Ad Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.

M Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.

NR Not recommended.

SpC Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.

SpR A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.
**Wagons West!**
written and illustrated by Roy Gerrard

Having logged a considerable number of literary miles on the pioneer trail west, this traveler reports that it’s a whole new trip with Gerrard as wagonmaster. Familiar scenery and familiar exploits are viewed here from the perspective of Munchkin-sized settlers clipping along to a brisk, extended jingle, and traditional textbook, novel, and memoir accounts of westward expansion can look a trifle pale and poky in comparison. And although Gerrard breezes past the darker implications of the western migration, he playfully deadpans traditional images of Easterners plodding their way to a Pacific Northwest promised land.

Buckskin Dan, seasoned guide and silver-tongued booster, convinces a community of Eastern farmers struggling with their barren soil that fertile Oregon country is the land of their dreams. Preparations and provisioning complete, they set forth across the plains, taking on hostile elements and terrain, until "folks began to get downhearted and to wish they’d never started/ On this death-defying, crazy wagon ride." But their greatest adventures begin when they temporarily adopt Little Thunder, a lost Arapaho child who has "mislaid his tribe." Reuniting the child with his grateful father, Mountain Snow, the pioneers make valuable allies of their native friends, who rush to their aid when the wagon train is attacked by dastardly cattle rustler Big Nose Percy and his band of varmints.

Narrated in flashback by a settled young matron recalling her childhood adventure over her tea, it’s a rousing story, zestily told, but adults who insist that every trip should be educational will also approve of the wealth of historic detail that suffuses text and illustrations. Consider the matter of diet: “We had only slender means, so we stocked up high on beans/ And some other wholesome vittles that were dried”; and later, “With our food stocks running low, Pa dispatched a buffalo.” River crossings, annoying at best and treacherous at worst, receive careful narrative and visual attention: “When confronted by a river that made strong men gasp and shiver,/ Dan soon showed us how to reach the other side.” Just above the falls, sturdy men haul the roped wagons, whose wheels have been removed to aid flotation, while livestock, horses, and the family dog must swim to shore. Indians and pioneers alike transact business at Fort Laramie, and if the whimsical mix of lacy pantaloons and beaded buckskin hanging on the clothesline is there for a laugh, the tolerant commingling of natives and whites suggested here is (at least in these early days of westward movement) more accurate than matinee images of prairie bloodshed.

Watercolor paintings, lush with detail, capture the changing landscape. Dramatic play of shadow among the craggy mountains, carpets of delicately brushed wildflowers, rivers serene and reflective or pocked with eddies, and cloud-swept robin’s-egg-blue skies rank among Gerrard’s most skillful work. But of course it is
his trademark race of diminutive folk that carry the day. The legion of expressive,
babyfat figures are extraordinarily individuated and fluently posed. Fisticuffs be-
tween the good guys and the bad guys gain heightened absurdity when played out
by roly-poly pugilists waist deep in black-eyed susans. Likewise, rivers seem deeper
and mountains passes seem steeper when confronted by these pint-sized pilgrims.

If the title for Most Cunning Rhymester hasn’t yet been awarded outright
to Sir William Gilbert, surely Gerrard is a serious contender. A mixed-meter
scheme with consistent internal rhymes provides some challenging fun for the
reader as well as giggles for the listener. Alerting their Indian friends to Big Nose
Percy's attack, the narrator relates, “My description took some time, for I did it all
in mime,/ But then Mountain Snow was quick to understand./ He grasped the
situation, expressed his indignation,/ And a daring rescue bid was quickly planned.”
Even listeners who can’t quite grasp the entire passage will understand that words
can be piled and arranged like building blocks, creating aural edifices that delight
as surely as they inform.

When our intrepid settlers finally arrive in "the fair Willamette" with
shirts unsoiled, hair unmussed, and equanimity only slightly ruffled, it is their
dignity rather than their stubbornness or glickness that leaves its impression. The
Oregon Trail was clearly no picnic, and listeners will readily concede that "tri-
umph must be earned,/ And that fortune often smiles on those who dare." (Im-
print information appears on p. 189.)

Elizabeth Bush, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

AHLBERG, ALLAN  The Better Brown Stories; illus. by Fritz Wegner.  Viking,
1996   97p
ISBN 0-670-85894-3 $12.99  M Gr. 5-8

When the Browns realize that their lives are dull, they go to see if the Writer will
spice things up for the family: “It’s about this story we’re in,” said Mrs
Brown. . . . ‘In a nutshell, y’see, the thing about this story is—it’s boring.” So the
Writer makes things exciting for everyone including himself, as, among many other
happenings, some Mysterious Men steal the Writer’s Mum, and the Brown chil-
dren (including Betsy, who demands to be two years older and renamed Nicola)
have to rescue her. The book is too clever by half: while its self-referentiality is
witty, its self-amusement is not, and because the story keeps reminding us of its
own arbitrariness, we don’t give a fig for what happens next. Ahlberg has done
better by postmodernism with Ten in a Bed, The Jolly Postman, and Each Peach
Pear Plum; this book has ideas that are fun to play with but that cannot stretch to
fill the pages they consume. RS
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-024522-0  $14.89
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 1-3

In an unusually somber beginning-reader set in 1980s El Salvador, María goes with her father to market to sell almost everything they own in order to get food. María’s father cannot get a job: “If I work at the government factory, the guerillas will punish me. But if I work for people who help the guerillas, the government will arrest me. So we must trade to get things from the market.” They trade a tablecloth for flour and sugar, a chair for beans and corn, and Papa’s tools for two chickens and a frying pan. When Papa goes away for awhile, María has her own swap to negotiate: a young couple has milk, eggs, and butter they are willing to trade for María’s beloved stuffed bear, Paco, which they would like to give to their little boy, “hurt by soldiers.” It’s hard but María does the right thing; while she regrets the loss of her bear, she appreciates knowing that she’s brought happiness to another child as well as providing food for her family. María’s resourcefulness and courage are the focus of the story, so that it will stand on its own without political/historical explanation; Alphin does provide a brief note as well as definitions and pronunciations for the Spanish words used occasionally in the story. Sturdy and rustic watercolors—including one picture of a group of armed guerillas—are effectively placed on the spacious page layout and provide the reader with visual clues. RS

Avi  *Beyond the Western Sea, Book One: The Escape from Home*. Jackson/Orchard, 1996  [304p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-09513-4  $18.95
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 5-8

While you actually do have to turn the pages for yourself here, the task soon feels like it’s out of your hands as Avi’s tense, twisting storytelling takes over. It is 1851, and brother and sister Patrick and Maura are escaping poverty and the landlord’s destruction of their wretched Irish hovel; Laurence, son to an English lord, is running away from abuse and his own guilty conscience. All three young people are—hope to be—on their way to America, with trouble and intrigue pursuing them every step of the way. Although the book has the harum-scarum action of melodrama, it never becomes pastiche; instead, Maura, Patrick, and Laurence seem like real people in really dangerous straits as various villains, for various and conflicting reasons, try to keep them from boarding the  *Robert Peel*, set to sail on Friday, January 24. (The book essentially begins on the Monday of the same week, so you can see that things move thick and fast.) The suspense and the shifting among various points of view are expertly deployed but do become slightly mechanical towards the last pages; you still won’t be able to stop reading. More of a problem is the cliff-hanging ending: the three kids are all on the boat but they’re still up to their necks in it, and you feel like you’ve only read half a book. Which you have—and the next installment,  *Lord Kirkle’s Money*, won’t be published until the fall. Libraries may want to wait and purchase both volumes at once. RS
Besson, Jean-Louis  *October 45: Childhood Memories of the War;* written and illus. by Jean-Louis Besson; tr. by Carol Volk. Creative Editions/Harcourt, 1996  96p
ISBN 0-15-200955-8  $22.00  Ad  Gr. 5-7

This is a child’s-eye view of the occupation and war in northern France; seven-year-old Jean tells of wartime life in Paris and in the village in Brittany to which his family evacuates. Details, ranging from instances of French collaboration to popular songs to rationing, are vivid and specific, and the narrative is shaped not by events but by time, indicated by page headings indicating the month and year. The narrator’s present-tense artlessness and passivity are authentically childish: he remarks with equal enthusiasm upon the nifty uniforms of the Germans and the clever ballpoint pens of the Americans. Unfortunately most American kids won’t be able to supply the external knowledge that gives the book its real impact; without adult assistance or literary contrast the relative security of Jean’s life and the irony of some of his opinions and experiences (such as his complaints about the uncomfortable train trip to Brittany) won’t be evident to young readers, so they may get an extremely misleading view of what constituted wartime hardship. The book is, however, a readable account of a wartime viewpoint—that of people neither heroes nor victims—we don’t often encounter, and kids not quite ready for the grit of Westall’s *The Machine Gunners* may find this an absorbing entree into a different world. Delicate and surprisingly cheerful line-and-watercolor vignettes and full-page illustrations keep the pages airy and the subject matter from becoming as dark as, perhaps, it ought to be.  DS

Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-6

A pervasive female art form that has recently attracted respectful attention from cultural historians, quilt-making is a subject with inherent visual appeal for a photodocumentary. Bial, who has focused on the domestic lifestyles of Shakers (BCCB 3/94), frontier families (10/93), and Amish (5/93), here makes the logical transition to a craft practiced by the women of all these groups. With illustrated examples of traditional patchwork patterns such as Flower Garden, Nine Patch, Ocean Wave, Log Cabin, Jacob’s Ladder, and Wheel Spoke, Bial describes the processes of marking, piecing, and quilting. An historical overview ranges from the Colonial period to the famous AIDS Memorial Quilt. Highlighting the multicultural scope of this art form, Bial shows work by Amish, African-American, and Hmong quilters. The narrative is accessibly simple, the photography is clear and colorful, and a bibliography will guide researching students to other sources of information.  BH

Brenner, Barbara  *Chibi: A True Story from Japan;* written by Barbara Brenner and Julia Takaya; illus. by June Otani. Clarion, 1996  64p
Reviewed from galleys  R  4-8 yrs

All Tokyo, it seems, makes way for ducklings in this true story about a duck who built her nest in a busy office park and then decided to take her brood across eight lanes of traffic to live in the moat of the Imperial Gardens. The ducks became an
obsession of the Japanese in general and a photojournalist named Sato in particular, who made a media star out of the smallest and weakest duckling, Chibi, and who led the search when Chibi was lost in a typhoon. Sunny, spacious paintings (intentionally or not, some compositions reflect McCloskey's) ensure that young audiences won't get too tense at this point in the action; they will, though, respond to the suspense and be relieved at Chibi's reappearance. So will you—the simple, friendly text builds up a great deal of empathy for the littlest duckling and for Sato-san, her courtly protector. Although we aren't told when the events of the book took place, a note states that Chibi and her siblings still return each year to the moat, where the Emperor has built them a shelter. RS


Briggs has dealt with surprising visitors before (*The Snowman*, BCCB 1/79, *The Bear* 3/95), but here the visitor is a small one: a little man rudely awakens young John by hurling cough drops at his head. The visitor, who looks to be slightly over six inches in height, makes some immediate and peremptory demands: clothing (he directs John in refashioning an old sock), food (he reviles the household's high-fiber, low-fat tastes), washing and a haircut (with John as personal valet), and a toilet ("I'm dying for a pee"). Disruptive, bossy, and enigmatic Man (as John falls to calling him) stays for three days, during which time John runs hither and yon trying to satisfy the visitor's needs without revealing his existence to his parents, and during which time John is able to pry very little information from defensive and proud Man about his small but burly kind. The format here ranges from panel cartoons to sectioned pages to full-page art, with constant dialogue (John's and Man's words are differentiated by typeface) occasionally enhanced by speech balloons as well. The thorny relationship between the two has overtones of clashing class standards, child-parent relations, and sibling rivalry, all touched with a surrealism that makes the whole story satisfyingly mysterious as well as entertaining. American kids may have to stretch a bit to follow some of the more British references, but the thrill of the secret friend, the casually mundane depiction of the wondrous, and the prickly camaraderie make this a rewarding adventure for reader and protagonist alike. DS


In a quartet of vibrant read-alone stories, preschooler Ant(hony) requires that monsters be driven from under his bed, that stories be read to him right, that letters be written to Santa in midsummer, and that artwork scribbled on his brother's homework be fully appreciated. Each fresh challenge is met by his older (narrator) brother with patience, sagacity, and/or fraternal affection, as the situation demands. Rookie readers will empathize with the unnamed narrator, himself of an age at which the trials of homework loom large, and they will probably recognize some of Ant's antics from their own siblings, or even from their own not-too-distant pasts. Within the constraints of controlled vocabulary, Byars constructs remarkably believable dialogue ("Who is reading this—you or me? I asked. 'You are,' Ant said,
‘but you have to say pigs’”) that reads as well aloud as alone. Simont handily captures both the domestic arena and the boys’ imaginings in his witty watercolor vignettes. EB


An avaricious mother and dissolute father, denizens of a Pennsylvania shanty town in 1886, scheme to raise “a few coins” by selling off their comely but defiant daughter Nellie to any canalman willing to pay. The fourteen-year-old heroine is rescued from a fate worse than death by a mysterious stranger who wins her at the gambling table, becomes protector and legal guardian of her beloved little brother, and then virtuously offers her the choice to leave or to be wed. With its stock cast of repellent parents (“This here’s my girl, men.... Sweet, unspoilt heifer”) and lecherous villains (“The woman said I could examine the goods”), this could be a middle school step-up book to historical bodice-rippers (“Nellie mustered all her strength and twisted away from him, ripping the cloth of her bodice as she turned”). Nellie’s hero disappointingly exhibits more decency than passion and a couple of slender subplots are left dangling, but the potboiler formula has its charms, and Clark’s skillful pacing and evocation of period and place may turn this yarn into a guilty-pleasure read for the romance crowd. EB


Worshipped as a god in an ancient Egyptian temple, the titular feline longs for freedom from his pampered existence. Slipping out of the temple “like a wisp of smoke” in the night, the cat journeys for three days before reaching the seashore where, looking “scrawny and a little wild,” he is taken in by a fisherman’s family. “And then, before the cat even knew what his dearest wish was, it came true. He played with the children, and they loved him.” There’s not much to be learned here about why or how the Egyptians worshipped cats; the exotic locale simply supplies a fresh twist to a whisker-thin animal adventure tale. Kiesler’s hazy oil paintings are stiffly executed, but the dominant shades of warm gold and wheat underscore the loneliness of the soulful-eyed cat. EB


Each poet who has won the NCTE Poetry Award—David McCord, Aileen Fisher, Karla Kuskin, Myra Cohn Livingston, Eve Merriam, John Ciardi, Lilian Moore, Arnold Adoff, Valerie Worth, and Barbara Esbensen—is pictured at the beginning of a section that includes several representative poems and a significant quote. The portraits are watercolor renditions from photographs, with cheerful pen-and-ink sketches accompanying the verse; all are in black and white. A concluding section gives further information about and remarks by the poets. The format is accessible, and the selections themselves reflect popular appeal through a process involving several thousand young readers ranking their top choices, which proved once again “that children like poems they can understand: ones that make them
laugh and ones that tell a story." This neatly packaged anthology will make it easy for teachers to incorporate poetry into a preset curriculum—and to defend the time expended on literature-for-fun. BH


Dash offers here a zesty account and personal interpretation of the 1909 strike by women who worked the bundle system manufacturing shirtwaists. With the shaky support of their ill-funded, nascent union, the young women (many of whom were only in their teens) formed tenuous alliances with women further up the economic ladder—from sympathetic college girls, "high spirited, eager for a challenge," to society matrons with time on their hands and money to burn. It was these alliances, Dash argues, that assured the significant, if limited, victories of the strikers. Chronological coverage of the strike clips along with informal directness and smooth narrative transitions. Sweeping observations, though they often beg debate, are wittily packaged and likely to beguile readers unfamiliar with other interpretations of the strike ("Those who had lived under Russian tyranny seemed to have taken socialism in with their mother's milk"). A bibliography and index are appended; black and white photographs will be included in the finished book. EB


Sensationalism in the media is a hot issue these days, and this is a useful and well-researched treatment of the subject. Day discusses topics such as the history of tabloid journalism, trends in television news and newsmagazines, and the controversies surrounding talk shows and reality-based television programs. She's not quite as objective as she suggests the news should be (she tends to hold the tabloid defenders to stricter standards than the tabloid accusers), but her engagement with her subject keeps the book from being dispassionately bland, and her overall message—viewers should think carefully about what they see rather than just accepting it—is clearly and convincingly conveyed. Endnotes (referring to primary as well as print sources) and an index are included. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. DS


Gilbert is writing out his Valentine's Day cards for his class, and he's going along smoothly until he comes to Lewis and Margaret, of whom he's not so fond. For them, he writes some rather uncomplimentary verses (Margaret's reads "Roses are red, you wet your bed. I think that you have rocks in your head") and signs Lewis' name to Margaret's and Margaret's to Lewis'. Lewis and Margaret catch on when
they realize they have two cards from each other and none from Gilbert; after a day
of ostracism by the whole class, Gilbert comes to terms with Lewis and Margaret
in time for a happy Valentine's Day for all. The realism falters a bit come time for
the happy ending, but up till then the combination of primary-grades affections,
small-child insult, and scheming gone awry is absolutely accurate, and young lis-
teners will "Uh-oh" in sympathetic recognition the moment Gilbert gets caught in
his little plot. deGroat's multispecies animal cast are simply and sweetly depicted
without being bland: opossum Gilbert cowers behind his cards, with his short legs
dangling a foot from the floor, and there's a certain Lucy Van Pelt air to Margaret
that makes you think Gilbert wasn't entirely misled in his distaste. There's often a
little drizzle on much-anticipated holiday parades: this cozy and reassuring story
understands that but knows that holidays and friendships are still worth celebrat-
ing.

Dewey, Jennifer Owings. *Faces Only a Mother Could Love*; written and illus.

This attractively designed volume features large colored-pencil drawings of animal
mothers and babies (many are exotic), accompanied by dollops of information
sized for preschoolers. The best entries discuss the relationship between parent
and offspring, leading listeners to consider differences among species. The baby
sloth, for instance, "licks its mother's mouth and chin . . . and tastes the leftover
bits of leaves its mother has chewed. In this way it learns which leaves are safe to
eat." However, text and illustrations are riddled with inconsistencies. A Jackson's-
chameleon baby is pictured with its strikingly tri-horned mother, but mama is
never mentioned. Sphinx-moth camouflage is discussed, but neither mother nor
baby receives text space. All rhinos are drawn with horns, although the text speci-
ifies that "the baby rhino does not have a horn." Some of the animals are rendered
out of scale, with owlets nearly the size of their mother and the minuscule tarsier
the size of a baby manatee. Finishing on a strong note, though, Dewey presents a
sensitive, unsentimentalized spread on humans: "It is through looking, touching,
and feeding that a mother comes to know her child and the child comes to trust his
mother." EB

Dexter, Catherine. *A is for Apple, W Is for Witch*; illus. by Capucine

Reviewed from galleys

Apple's mother just looks like your basic suburban mom—she's actually a (good)
witch, potions, broomstick, and all, and she has promised Apple that she'll pass on
the family traditions when Apple turns sixteen. The problem is that Apple doesn't
want to wait six years, and when she accidently overhears one of her mother's
simpler spells, she gets herself into real trouble. The plot is formulaic and the
magic not very original ("Ribbetty, rabbitty, rug,/ Turn Barnaby into a slug") but
there's a big audience for this kind of lightly enchanted school-and-family story.
Dexter's writing, lively yet cozy, is better than her material, and some of the in-
triguing moments between Apple and her mother lead one to wonder what might
have happened if the book had taken itself a bit more seriously. RS
DICKINSON, PETER  Chuck and Danielle; illus. by Kees de Kiefte. Delacorte, 1996 [96p]
ISBN 0-385-32188-0 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R*  Gr. 4-6

Chuck belongs to Danielle; Chuck is a nervous whippet ("wimpet," Danielle’s friend’s sister scornfully calls her) who’s convinced that everything in the world is coming to get her. Chuck’s tendency to panic leads to some sticky situations, as she bolts repeatedly between people’s legs, but Danielle has bet her mother a Big Mac that Chuck will save the universe someday. Seven chapters, each offering a neat little Chuck story of its own, describe ways in which Chuck almost saves the universe, until finally she does indeed get Danielle her Big Mac. En route, Dickinson offers hilarious third-person (third-dog?) narration that attempts to unravel what goes on in Chuck’s little pea-brain ("He’d seen her! Her tail must be sticking out! No, it couldn’t be, because here it was right in under her belly, which is the proper place when you’re terrified. Ears right back, tail right under, tremble tremble tremble—that’s the drill"); beyond that, there’s Danielle’s life with her mother (and a brief appearance by her long-gone father) and her friend Jenny, plus the good fellowship of the people along the street who lend a hand to one another when needed. An uncutesy and accessible dog story of originality, humor, and charm, this’ll make young caninophiles sit up and beg for more. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley.  DS

FEIFFER, JULES  A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears; written and illus. by Jules Feiffer. di Capua/HarperCollins, 1995 [192p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-205099-0 $14.89
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-6

Roger, son of King Whatchamacallit, makes people feel good, and in this instance that’s not a very good thing. Everyone he meets bursts into unreasonable, uncontainable merriment, and so the king’s advisor, J. Wellington Wizard, packs Roger off on a quest in the hope he’ll return subdued. Unfortunately, as Roger ambles, the narrative rambles, and some dozen chapters pass before Feiffer takes a break from piling up comic literary devices and gives the prince some direction. Characters who pop out of the storyline and pop back in at will and winking asides from the author ("I came up with this title because it sounds like poetry, which is good, and it isn’t, which is better") garner some chuckles but are soon overplayed. When Feiffer buckles down to storytelling business, though, the reader is finally treated to some engaging episodes. Roger, transformed into an eagle, takes the dour residents of the Valley of Vengeance aerial joyriding, reunites lovers parted in a thirty-year game of hide-and-seek, and (back in his own hide) earns his own happily-ever-after. Scratchy cartoon sketches scattered throughout the text provide plenty of visual breaks along the way.  EB

GERRARD, ROY  Wagons West!; written and illus. by Roy Gerrard. Farrar, 1996 [32p]
ISBN 0-374-38249-2 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  R*  5-8 yrs
See this month’s Big Picture, p. 181, for review.

The classic ballets have romantic stories, and this collection of eight of the most famous gives them their lush due.  *Giselle, The Firebird, Swan Lake,* and five other terpsichorean tales unfold as the deep-hued art depicts scenes exotic, eerie, and alluring within delicate pastel borders; each tale has a floral motif running throughout as well.  Balletomanes will especially appreciate the foreword and extensive performance notes by ballerina Irina Baronova, who first appeared as the young star of Balanchine’s post-Diaghilev Ballet Russes; Mme. Baronova’s exuberant and chatty anecdotes of backstage life and performances great and small describe some inspiring pas de deux, some entertaining faux pas, and one piquant glimpse of skulduggery (when a rival cut through the straps of Baronova’s costume, almost causing her to be the first topless Firebird).  The total effect is rich and insider-y, and young dancers (and would-bes) will enjoy a trip through the glamorous side of ballet before they hit the barres.  DS


Appealingly packaged and appended with activities, these four math (arithmetic, really) primers demonstrate various numeric skills through easy-reader texts.  *Monster Math* is the simplest in both concept and language (“Twelve little monsters/ wake up at seven./ One jogs away.  Now there are ...”); *Slower than a Snail*, the conceptually weakest in the series, fuzzily defines comparatives (“I’m wider than a string bean/ I’m narrower than a truck/ I’m lighter than a ton of bricks/ I’m heavier than a duck”);  *A Quarter from the Tooth Fairy*, in equally dispensable rhyme, explores making change; a truly fatuous story, *How Much Is That Guinea Pig in the Window*, teaches children how to count to fifty.  Although nothing is distinguished in this series, everything adds up; still, you could create a more engaging arithmetic lesson and save money simply by emptying your pockets onto a table.  RS


April and Erica are jump-ropers extraordinaire, but they can’t find that crucial third person to jump Double-Dutch with: tying the ropes to the fence fails, and
their youngest sister Carmen is just too little to do it right. When their Uncle Zambezi turns up and gives them a set of rainbow-colored, wish-granting “magic moonberry” jump ropes, the sisters wish for a jump-rope playmate and are thrilled when Takara Brown, their age and also an aficionado of the sport, moves in next door. The story here is pretty slight, and the brief tale of the magic moonberry jump ropes seems calculated to bring in a discussion of Africa rather than to move the plot along. This is one of the more evocative books, however, of summertime hanging-out-in-the-neighborhood pleasures and free-time-has-lost-its-thrill blues, and the casual interplay of the kids is recognizably authentic. The watercolor illustrations also excel at depicting the everyday milieu, with hot sidewalks draped in purple shadows contrasting with cool interiors of white walls and hardwood floors; the neighborhood, with its gardening neighbors, leafy trees, and bouncy jump-ropers is a pleasant place to browse through as well as to live (although one wonders where people keep their cars). A note about rope and dye origins as well as the sources of the jump-rope rhymes within is included. DS

HURD, THACHER  
Art Dog; written and illus. by Thacher Hurd. HarperCollins, 1996 32p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-024424-0  $14.95  R 5-8 yrs

He's a mild-mannered art-museum guard most days, but during a full moon Arthur Dog becomes black-masked, beret-adorned Art Dog, who whips up murals on city walls and disappears without leaving a trace. When the Mona Woofa is stolen from the museum, the police mistakenly nab Art Dog, who paints his way out of jail and into the rescue of the famed painting and the defeat of the art thieves. The story has a camp, cartoonish Batman zaniness to it that kids will sink their canines into; the illustrations, with their kennel of transformed famous paintings (the self-portrait of Vincent Van Dog is eerily effective), Thurberesquely drawn cast, and explosions of literally colorful action sequences will entertain artist and philistine alike. DS

JACKSON, ISAAC  
Somebody’s New Pajamas; illus. by David Soman. Dial, 1996 32p
Reviewed from galley

Things go well on Jerome's first overnight at classmate Robert's upscale brownstone, until Jerome discovers to his chagrin that he is expected to wear pajamas, and he doesn't own any. Jerome fast talks his way out of this social disgrace, but finds no sympathy back home when he asks his father for a pair (“A pair of what? Boy, you got to be crazy”). Eventually Jerome accepts that each “family has its own way of doing things,” but he is still overjoyed when he receives two pairs of pajamas from his parents for his birthday. The angst expended on the pajama crisis will puzzle many listeners, for whom new p.j.s would rank just above new underwear on a birthday wish list. Soman's softly focused watercolors overlook any social distinction between the boys, and Jerome's posturing—from cowed pajamaless despair to pajama-clad elation—is often overdrawn. Still, it's a nice portrait of two loving African-American families, and the message that it's the warmth of the welcome that makes a child comfortable in a friend's home is a reassuring and amiable one that comes through loud and clear. EB
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027151-5 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-7

The bumbling menfolk have all been killed or disabled by falling buffalo (yes, falling buffalo), and now it's up to the sagacious womenfolk to git this wagon train to the Oregon Country. Twelve-year-old narrator Phoebe observes the trials of the trail and the machinations of her peers and elders with wry detachment; her breezy tone, together with plenty of bantering conversations, will appeal to readers who favor sitcom over drama. Some anachronistic feminism occasionally creeps into the characters' rhetoric ("Gunpowder is . . . the means of a final, total reliance upon ourselves as a competent female society"), and an extensive subplot involving the courtship of two flighty teens by lovestruck Pawnee braves is far-fetched, to say the least. Still, readers who have had their fill of tales that regard the settlers with awed reverence should find this romp a pleasant change of pace and be glad the gals get only as far as Fort Laramie—there's definitely more to follow. EB

ISBN 0-374-32339-9 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R 6-9 yrs

"First," says our protagonist, "I stepped out singing a song." Second, his friend Pete comes along and joins him; third, they find the shortest man in the world ("no bigger than a jug") and they all three travel together, whistling songs; fourth, they find a very long man . . . You may think you get the idea, but soon the merry troupe turns Aesopian as they figure out how to make use of a donkey they find along the way, how they (now, including the donkey, five in number) can cross the river in a tiny boat, then fit into a car, then retire to a hotel room, and then go on their merry way in the morning. Kharms, an early twentieth-century absurdist, is absurd indeed: the cumulation here is entertaining and also misleading, since part of the point of the tale is that it's a shaggy-dog story, leading to nothing ("What happened to us next is another story"). The contrast between the folkloric motifs and the cheerful illogic reminiscent of dreams (it's pointed out that the appearance of an elephant is impossible, but one turns up just in time to give the long man a ride) makes the tale droll and near-parodic in a warmly dopey way. The line-and-watercolor illustrations smack of early comic strips (there's a distinctly Karzenjammerish air to the narrator, for instance), with movement and noise lines adding emphasis, Kilroyesque figures poking their noses over walls and whatnot in the background, and lots of zany supporting details (shadows going in all different directions, hatted worms peering out of hollow trees at the action). Kids with a budding taste for neo-cartoons such as *The Simpsons* will see just why this is silly, and relish the vision. DS

KINDERSLEY, BARNABAS *Children Just Like Me;* by Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley; illus. with photographs by Barnabas Kindersley and others. Dorling Kindersley, 1995 80p
ISBN 0-7894-0201-7 $16.95 Ad Gr. 3-6

Dorling Kindersley turns its clean if busy hand to an "It's a Small World" theme
with this compilation of facts, photographs, and interviews with thirty-seven children from thirty-two countries, including the U.S. Each child gets a full-page or double spread built around a large color photograph of the child and, often, his or her siblings; smaller photos show other family members, home and school, favorite foods and toys, homework or schoolbooks, and file photos of famous sights. Although the format is packed and visually treats its subjects more as design elements than people, the book focuses finely on just those things kids want to know about other kids, and the quotes from interviews are fresh and ingenuous: speaking of his future plans, eleven-year-old Yong-Koo of South Korea says, "I would like to marry a polite and sincere woman. I'd also love to go to Australia to see kangaroos and koalas." Nuclear families predominate, but nine-year-old Tadessee lives in an orphanage in Addis Ababa, and twelve-year-old Suchart is a novice in a Buddhist temple in Thailand. The book is arranged by continents, and each one gets its own spread with a basic map and facts; an opportunity to join the "Children Just Like Me Penpal Club" is offered at the back. An index of geographical names is included. RS

Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 3-5

Sophie, now eight, is as indomitably Sophie as ever in her quest for her farm; she's therefore in heaven when her family decides to spend its summer on Sophie's great-aunt's Scottish farm. Soon after their return, elderly Aunt Al (familiar to readers from previous Sophie books, such as Sophie Is Seven, BCCB 5/95) dies, leaving Sophie saddened at the loss of one of her dearest friends. The family, however, is astounded to learn that Aunt Al has left them all a legacy that will change their lives. In what is apparently to be her last outing, Sophie is still tough and endearing, but the book's humor is more at her expense than previously (her malapropisms in particular provide fodder). The Scottish trip doesn't come until halfway through the book, and the small events beforehand aren't Sophie at her pugnacious best and don't have the memorability of previous adventures. This is, however, Sophie achieving her heart's desire, and readers who have grown attached to our heroine won't want to miss it. Line drawings, heavy on hatch and cross-hatch, give a pleasantly scratchy homeliness to the book. DS

Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 7-10

Jimmy Doyle is the star player on his small-town Minnesota high-school basketball team, and he's good enough to go farther—which is just what he does when an all-American Teen Dream Team is selected for international competition in Italy. First at training in Los Angeles and then in Italy, Jimmy is plagued by culture shock, self-doubt, and teammate troubles: the most gifted player on the team, an African-American kid from South Central LA, resents Jimmy for taking his best friend's spot. This is a fairly traditional sports story, and the team's characters are stock as well (the clown, the angry prodigy, the easygoing kid); the addition of a Italian terrorist plot against the team makes the story more unlikely but not less predictable. There's plenty of exciting basketball action, though, as the
team wends its way to the top, and the probing of issues of race relations and national identity is thoughtful if not deep. Most of all, there's a likeable and humble narrator whose talent takes him places he's never been before; hoop fans will enjoy reading about his well-deserved triumphs. DS


The Mellings sisters, previously met in *All in the Blue Unclouded Weather* (BCCB 4/92) and *Dresses of Red and Gold* (5/93), have had to leave rural Wilgawa with their mother, and it will be clear to readers if not to the girls themselves that their parents' marriage is in some disarray. The fully realized setting of Wilgawa focused the previous collections of stories, but here, as the family moves three times among the suburbs of an unnamed Australian city, readers will themselves feel like the Mellings, always sorting out with no time to get settled. Those already acquainted with the four sisters will enjoy seeing their lives and dreams progress (as well as watching snotty cousin Isobel's comeuppance); those newly introduced may have a hard time keeping the girls straight. Klein's penchant for neat endings leads to some predictable stories, but one first-class entry shows Mother and oldest sister Grace asking Aunt Elsie to take the family in: "'It's not called asking. It's called . . . begging,' Grace said in an odd voice, and Cathy saw with a shock that her eyes were full of anguished tears." The book needs more such tough moments, but it does offer a chance to visit a likeably obstreperous bunch. RS

KRAMER, STEPHEN  *Theodoric's Rainbow;* illus. by Daniel Mark Duffy. Scientific American/Freeman, 1995 32p ISBN 0-7167-6603-5 $17.95 M Gr. 2-4

In this fanciful account, Kramer speculates on how the thirteenth-century Dominican monk Theodoric of Freiburg may have investigated the physics of rainbows. An adequate explanation of light refraction, awkwardly broken by some fictional digression, will perhaps be less interesting to young readers than the superstitions about rainbows expressed by Theodoric's fellow monks ("I heard of a miller who pointed at a rainbow once. The next week, his finger fell off"). Glitzy paintings are stiffly composed and rendered; the monks' eerily photorealistic heads perch atop rigid, stylized bodies. No single spread simultaneously depicts the light source, water-filled glass bubble, and object onto which the beams are projected, making it difficult for young viewers to visualize the concept presented. An afterword comments on the little that is known of Theodoric's life. EB


After relating her own life in *Little By Little* (BCCB 7/88) and *Stars Come Out Within* (12/91), Canadian writer Jean Little now turns to the story of her mother's childhood and adolescence in Taiwan and Canada as the daughter of missionaries. This book is less immediate than the others, not so much for its biographical remove but because Little doesn't settle upon a particular point of view, preferring that of her mother, Flora, but inconsistently wandering into the heads of the other family members as well. (The fact that Flora is known to her siblings and friends as "Gorrie" can also cause confusion.) Best are the early chapters, when Flora/Gorrie is still a little girl and undergoing the pain of leaving Taiwan and her father
behind when her mother takes her and her sisters to Ontario to live with their grandparents; dislocation comes again when Mother decides to rejoin her husband and sends the girls to live with her sister. Later chapters, covering the death of Gorrie's brother in the Great War and her entrance into medical school, are not developed with as much patience—one chapter, for example, takes the girl from eleven to sixteen. She remains, though, a tough yet bookish heroine; those who came to admire Flora Gauld Little in Jean Little's previous memoirs will enjoy this opportunity to know her better. RS

MACCARONE, GRACE *Monster Math.*

See Holtzman, p. 190, for review.


Library ed. ISBN 0-8027-8293-0 $20.85
Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8292-2 $19.95

Reviewed from galleys

This actually starts with some fairly extensive history of African-American participation in the U.S. military and in aviation, explaining the background of prejudice and exclusion behind the famous squadron's triumph. Detailed accounts of administrative decisions, command assignments, and wartime experiences (including capture by the Germans) follow; the breadth of the McKissacks' research, which included interviews as well as secondary sources, is impressive and obvious. Sometimes, though, the very comprehensiveness results in detail at the expense of involvement, as with the dizzying lists of names, dates, and combat units, and the only European map is crowded and confusing. This is still a usefully thorough account of black heroes engaged in courageous action, and kids who have had their interest piqued by books such as Hart's *Flying Free* (BCCB 12/92) will appreciate the in-depth investigation, while military aficionados will relish the meticulousness of the chronicle. A panoply of historical photographs gives readers a look at heroic faces both famous and little known; the squadron's war record and other Air Force facts, along with a bibliography and an index, are appended. DS

MAESTRO, BETSY *Coming to America: The Story of Immigration*; illus. by Susannah Ryan. Scholastic, 1996 [40p]

ISBN 0-590-44151-5 $15.95

Reviewed from galleys

As she did for the subject of money (BCCB 4/93) and the exploration of the Americas (4/91), Maestro here provides a simple overview of American immigration, scant on details, perhaps, but cohesive and easy-to-follow as a survey. The real interest here is Ryan's watercolor illustrations; happier than Sendak's but more intense than Diane Goode's, they share those artists' ebullience and attention to expression and posture. Vignettes, full-page paintings and double-spreads are theatrically alert to mood, shifting from a dramatic night view of the Aztec pyramids to a Laura Ingalls Wilder pastorale of the westward movement to a snow-dappled picture of Ellis Island's first arrival, fifteen-year-old Annie Moore from Ireland. Darker moments, such as a child reaching out to a relative being sent back to the
old country, are shown, but both text and pictures are essentially optimistic and happy to be here. RS

MARKLE, SANDRA  
with photographs  
ISBN 0-689-31824-3  $17.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

If anyone actually needed an excuse to repeatedly open and close the freezer door, here it is. Markle’s survey of science of and in the polar regions is regularly extended by suggested experiments that rarely require more than ice, water, and plastic containers. They’re simple but provocative and fun to do. The main text, though, is sometimes awkwardly written and organized. The section asking “How Is Technology Helping Scientists Explore?” is less than grammatically answered by such subsections as “They’re Breaking a Path through the Ice,” “They’re Diving under the Arctic Ice,” and “They’re Dressing for the Cold.” Too, the sections seem arbitrary, so that a page on building shelter in Antarctica is followed by another on polar-bear tracking in the Arctic. Although the book needs some maps and some of the photographs need an indication of scale, the emphasis on scientific inquiry makes the book a valuable complement to titles more focused upon the regions’ natural history or exploration. An index is appended. RS

MATTHEWS, MARY  
*Magid Fasts for Ramadan;* illus. by E. B. Lewis. Clarion, 1996  [48p]  
ISBN 0-395-66589-2  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

With that pedantic title, this book seems at first like another one of those self-consciously “multicultural” offerings that’s really an encyclopedia article in disguise, outlining the beliefs and customs of a people. But Matthews actually has herself a story here: Magid, a contemporary Egyptian boy, does fast for Ramadan, but he has to do it in secret because his parents think, at “almost eight”-years-old, he’s too young to endure the month-long, sunrise-to-sunset abstinence. Thus Magid skips breakfast with the promise to eat lunch; thus he takes his lunch outside and secretly feeds it to the ducks. Thus, too, he gets caught by his older sister, Aisha, who, none too pleased by her own first participation in the fast, tattles. Matthews explains the significance of the holiday and the reasons for the fast in natural conversation between Magid and his grandfather (“Fasting teaches us self-control, and it reminds us that everyone is equal before Allah, because we all feel hunger and need food”), but the story stays in front. Magid’s spiritual fervor is believably braided with his wish to be a grownup, and he is rewarded with a satisfying but realistic conclusion: admitting that an all-day fast is too hard for him, Magid gets permission to not eat until lunchtime, and Aisha, still a bit too young herself, will be allowed a snack after school. Lewis’ watercolors are a little stiff but matter-of-fact in their portrayal of a contemporary urban Egyptian family; a “Note on Islam” and a glossary are appended. RS

MEDEARIS, ANGELA SHELF, ad.  
*Treemonisha;* from the opera by Scott Joplin; illus. by Michael Bryant. Holt, 1995  37p  
ISBN 0-8050-1748-8  $15.95  

Michael Bryant’s watercolors give a rich autumnal setting to Medearis’ retelling of
Scott Joplin's 1915 opera about a young African-American woman of mysterious origin who faces and defeats the evil forces bent on destroying her community. Carny man Zodzetrick has the folks of Liberty in thrall to the empty promises of his "magic" bags of luck, and when Treemonisha threatens to put a crimp in his business ("I'm going to tell everyone I know that there's no such thing as buying luck") he kidnaps her to his lair deep in the piney woods. But, just in time to rescue the lady from being pushed into a wasps' nest, along comes a hero—Treemonisha's handsome suitor Remus—and the rascals are run out of town. While long for a picture book, the adaptation, incorporating pieces of Joplin's libretto, is smooth and lively, and its three-act structure gives natural stopping places for reading aloud. Bryant takes the action away from the footlights and into the woods, with vignettes, full-page paintings, and three climactic double spreads that capture both characters and atmosphere with theatrical flair. RS


Merbreier is the host of a long-running Philadelphia-area children's show, and he brings his expertise to bear here. Spreads carrying a multitude of thumbnail sketches, diagrams, multi-character scenes, and television studios explain aspects of television ranging from technical information about signal transmission to the various jobs in a newsroom to predictions for the future capabilities of television. The spreads are amusing (with visual and verbal jokes permeating each scene) and informative but also often confusing both visually and conceptually. It's hard to know where to look first on each page, so information is often disordered, and explanations aren't always clear (and a few needed ones, such as the difference between film and video, aren't included); the unwary may also mistake some of the jokes (such as the cans of "canned laughter" and "wide pans") for literal depictions. It's still an enticing and lively introduction to a world that most kids (and adults) know very little about, and it's filled with televusual tidbits that young readers will enjoy using to edify the less-knowledgeable. DS


Apart from chores, there isn't much for eleven-year-old Rebecca and younger sister Abigail to do at the Scituate, Massachusetts lighthouse where their father tends the lamp. They amuse themselves with mediocre fife and drum playing, attempting to emulate the stirring music they've heard from the Home Guard corps. Now in September 1812, with the guard away patrolling the far side of the harbor, the British have landed on a supply raid and taken the girls' father captive. Rebecca devises a spontaneous plan to strike up their music in the echoing lighthouse, frightening the British into a hasty retreat. The cluttered illustrations lack focus and occasionally detract from the text, but the brief chapters and teasing cliffhangers make this fictionalized account of a true event appealing to readers who are just moving into historical adventure novels. Minahan's version of the story is slightly more difficult than Janet Greeson's *An American Army of Two* (BCCB 12/92), but, oddly, he makes the sisters nearly ten years younger than they seem actu-
ally to have been. An afterword comments on the genesis of the tale and the history of the Scituate lighthouse. EB

MYERS, EDWARD  *Hostage*. Hyperion, 1996 [192p]
ISBN 0-7868-0115-8  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  M  Gr. 5-8

A wicked fossil thief and a series of narrative contrivances take teenagers Alyssa and Rob on a forced march through the desert of Dinosaur National Monument and, eventually, into the rapids of Green River. Told, alternatively, from Alyssa's and Rob's points of view, the story is thoroughly predictable, from the first glimpse of the villain ("The man's hair caught Alyssa's attention at once: pure black except for a white streak running from his brow to halfway across his head. He looked like a skunk!") to the final battle ("Rolling, heaving, twisting, plunging, the raft was helpless in the river's grip"). This isn't as focused as the author's previous adventure story, *Climb or Die* (BCCB 12/94), but it does have lots of action and a pair of resourceful young heroes. RS

NEWCOME, ZITA  *Toddlerobics*; written and illus. by Zita Newcome. Candlewick, 1996 [26p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  2-4 yrs

Newcome's sly and bouncy pictures of dancing toddlers will probably be lost on the audience once it hears the equally bouncy rhyme: "Hats off, coats off, all rush in—everybody ready for toddler gym!" Who could sit still? A miniature chorus line of eight (pictured and named on the endpapers) demonstrates the moves suggested here from stretches ("Stretch up high and touch the sky, bend down low and touch your toes") to shimmies ("Make a circle, ring-around-the-rosy. Let's bump bottoms, let's rub noses") to the touchdown ("Turning, twirling, like a spinning top. Bump on your bottom when it's time to stop"). If you can settle everyone down enough to look, the Oxenburyish pictures reveal lots of zest and scraps of mischief; memorize the text for a big-bang story hour finale. RS

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-024501-8  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 1-3

Newt learns lessons in charity and unconditional love in this beginning reader, but, ahem, this Newt is a newt. In the opening chapter Newt learns that a flower he's taken looked a lot better where it was in the first place; in the second place, it wasn't his to take. Next, Newt finds a bug/pet that can't do anything his friends' bugs do, such as fly or make music or give rides: "Newt hitched the bug to a wagon of rocks. 'Pull!' Newt shouted. The bug only looked at him with its twenty sad eyes." But Newt learns that his bug is pettably soft and makes a nice buzzing sound, and that that is enough. In the last chapter, Newt teaches the moon not to be afraid of the dark and comforts himself in the process. Illustrated with Novak's zappily amiable cartoons, these episodes wear their lessons lightly and give new readers a hero who deserves at least another book of his own. RS
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-09516-9  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

As she did in Ariadne, Awake (BCCB 6/94), Orgel here elaborates a romantic Greek myth into a novella that will have appeal for teenage reluctant readers (who may be drawn in by the sexy cover) as well as for junior high students who have outgrown—but still secretly enjoy—fairy tales. Told primarily by Psyche, the story occasionally lapses into an omniscient voice (italicized) describing behind-the-scenes action by Cupid/Amor, his mother Venus, and various other gods whose behavior is all too human. Unlike many revisionist retellings of folklore, this presents no twist on the traditional point of view, but simply personalizes the story. Psyche's youthful beauty arouses the jealousy of Venus, who commands Cupid to shoot her with an arrow that will make her fall in love with a fool. Instead, he falls in love with her himself, abducts her from a mountaintop to a magic palace, and comes to her by night until she tries, at her sisters' urging, to look at him by the light of a lamp. The lamp oil burns him, he flies away, and Psyche must undergo trials before she recovers her love and becomes immortal herself. This is a complex tale, and readers might benefit from hearing an unembroidered version of the myth before reading Orgel's on their own, but the style is plain and the emotional situation of intense interest to girls in the throes of first love. BH

PANDELL, KAREN  Learning from the Dalai Lama: Secrets of the Wheel of Time; written by Karen Pandell with Barry Bryant; illus. with photographs by John B. Taylor. Dutton, 1995 40p
ISBN 0-525-45063-7  $16.99 M Gr. 4-6

A bit of Buddhist history, a dash of Dalai Lama biography, and a set of instructions for a do-it-yourself sand mandala enclose this brief account of the Kalachakra Initiation held in Madison Square Garden in 1991. The complex Kalachakra teachings and rituals which lie at the heart of this work are ill-served by a thready text which, despite its good intentions, poses more questions than it answers. Pandell indicates that only initiates who pledge "never to reveal the secrets of the mandala" may view the sand wheel. Why, then, is her readership treated to color photos, complete with interpretation of the wheel's symbols? Reasons for the Dalai Lama's appeal in America and the hoopla that accompanied his visit are never discussed. Several photos are equally problematic or underexplained: why does a little boy hold a "China Out Of Tibet" sign; why is a "colorful mix" of Kalachakra sand white; what does actor Richard Gere (who wrote the introduction and appears in a couple of the pictures) have to do with all this? Adults may know, but the intended audience will remain unenlightened. EB

PAULSEN, GARY Brian's Winter. Delacorte, 1996 [192p]
ISBN 0-385-32198-8  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-9

In his epilogue to Hatchet, Paulsen wrote that "had Brian not been rescued when he was, had he been forced to go into hard fall, perhaps winter, it would have been very rough on him." That's the tack in this what-if sequel, where Brian does manage to retrieve the survival pack from the downed plane but does not find the emergency transmitter, and so must endure the north-woods winter with little
more than his newly acquired survival skills and, of course, his hatchet. Unlike *Hatchet*, where Brian's concern over his parents' divorce pervaded the story, the conflict here is entirely physical, boy against the elements: "The problem—well, he thought smiling, one of about a thousand problems—was that he didn't honestly know how cold it would get or how much snow there would be or what he could do to live." That he does survive until rescue is an expectation of the genre; that he manages *credibly* is a tribute to Paulsen's outdoor savvy and focused writing. While hardened and sharpened by his previous months in the wilderness, Brian is still an ordinary kid, and his accomplishments (making a bow and arrows, clothing, shelter, snowshoes) are admirable precisely because we know how difficult they are to do, composed as they are of equal shares of ingenuity, hard work, and trial-and-error. Brian is a popular hero because he makes kids think that they could do it, too, and Paulsen provides enough step-by-step instruction so that, maybe, they could. (And for readers who can't get enough, don't forget Paulsen's previous sequel to *Hatchet*, *The River*, reviewed in the 6/91 issue.) RS


Pellowski, a longterm laborer in the comic-book world, here shares tips of the trade with young readers. After a brief overview of comic-book history, the text describes the making of a comic book, explaining the various jobs people hold and the various stages books must go through. The writing is choppy and not always successful at recreating the comic joie de vivre it occasionally imitates, but it's got a nice confiding tone that aspiring comic-book artists will appreciate. The book shifts around between several different sample comic-book ideas, which causes it to lose a certain amount of cohesion, and the photographs, as opposed to the comic-book reproductions, are indifferent and rarely elucidatory. Serious comic fans will relish Pellowski's detail-oriented and knowledgeable pragmatism, however, and may find that this emboldens them to set pen to paper for homegrown Marvels of their own. A glossary, list of further reading, and an index are included.

DS


Calvin is nine, and he wants a pet, something that "would be busy with him" after school while his little brother reads, his friend Jenny practices magic, and Ms. Eva, who watches them all, plans for her dance class. Unfairly enough, Calvin's parents deem him too irresponsible for a pet and it's Jenny who gets Pizzazz, the hamster. A jealous Calvin can't stay away from Pizzazz, and he tries to undermine Jenny's confidence in Pizzazz's suitability for her magic act in the hopes that she'll pass the pet over to Calvin. This is solid if not sparkling middle-grades fare: the pet dilemma, including Pizzazz's escape and illness (and Calvin's eventual possession of the hamster) is predictable and the climactic show, where Miss Eva's dancers, the Silver Threads, perform and Jenny does her magic act, is somewhat contrived. Quattlebaum, author of *Jackson Jones and the Puddle of Thorns* (BCCB 3/95), has a fresh and easy voice, however, and the interpersonal relationships, especially Calvin's guilty sabotaging of Jenny's confidence, are convincing and believable.
Donna Jo Napoli’s *The Bravest Thing* (BCCB 10/95) is a better pet book, but this is a light-hearted and entertaining rodential read. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. DS

**ROCKLIN, JOANNE** *How Much Is That Guinea Pig in the Window?*

See Holtzman, p. 190, for review.

**RODOWSKY, COLBY** *Remembering Mog.* Farrar, 1996 [144p]; ISBN 0-374-34663-1 $14.00 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Annie is getting ready for her high-school graduation, but she finds it brings more pain than pleasure: her older sister, Mog, was murdered two years ago just as she was preparing to graduate. Annie and her family, especially her mother, who simply refuses to talk about Mog’s death or her life, have adjusted poorly to the loss, and now that Annie faces reaching an age and a milestone that her sister never will, she finally seeks counseling to help her come to terms with her grief. Rodowsky touchingly depicts the barrenness, anger, and yearning that are part of bereavement; the authentic twist of Annie’s guilt and confusion at growing beyond her older sister (as well as the book’s leaving around of some realistic loose ends) sets this title apart from many on the subject. The visits to the therapist and their fairly speedy efficacy are a bit predictable, but the reader’s investment in Annie is strong enough that the relief in the resolution dominates; we can’t help but wish Annie well as she embarks on the life after high school that Mog will never have. DS

**RYLANT, CYNTHIA** *Gooseberry Park*; illus. by Arthur Howard. Harcourt, 1995 [144p]; ISBN 0-15-232242-6 $15.00 Reviewed from galleys M Gr. 4-6

In this animal fantasy, the denizens of Gooseberry Park—Stumpy the squirrel, Kona the dog, and Murray the bat resemble stuffed toys come to cartooned life more than they do recognizable inhabitants of the animal kingdom. The crisis is this: Stumpy has just given birth to three darling babies when an ice storm comes and knocks the nest from the tree, parting Stumpy from the young ones. Her friends Kona and Murray (and Gwendolyn the hermit crab) rescue and feed the babies (“‘Ouch!’ Murray yelled. ‘Ouch! Doesn’t Stumpy ever feed these kids?’”) until they are reunited with their mother. Despite some jokes aimed over the heads of a child audience, Rylant is a good, clean writer, and she manages to gather some dramatic impact for the hackneyed plot and some sympathy for the clichéd characters; still, those children old enough to read the book on their own might be embarrased by the cutesiness, so you might want to save this for a readaloud for younger and less sophisticated audiences. RS


San Souci borrows from several Bahamian sources (credited in an author’s note) for this energetic tale of a younger brother’s greed and an older brother’s cunning.
Boukee is willing to share with younger sibling Rabby the secret of how he provides so well for his family—he has been purloining food from a monster's magical house. When Rabby accompanies him on a raid, he lingers too long gobbling goodies on the spot, falls asleep in a monster's bed, and finally escapes, in a painful fashion, with the aid of the monster's daughter. The text is a read-aloud delight, with its magical chant, wordplay, and comic conversations. Clay's luridly hued acrylic paintings, however, are crowded and frenetic; the relative sizes of the giant monsters and humans vary erratically from spread to spread. Nevertheless, listeners will be well satisfied with the broad humor and approve of the resolution: "I been thinking it one bad idea to go thiefing other folks' food." "Bro', this the first thinking I ever hear from you." EB

SCHREIBER, ANNE  
**Slower Than a Snail.**
See Holtzman, p. 190, for review.

SCHUR, MAXINE ROSE  
**When I Left My Village;** illus. by Brian Pinkney.  
Dial, 1996  64p
Ad  Gr. 4-6

In this sequel to the picture book *Day of Delight* (BCCB 11/94), Menelik and his family are leaving Ethiopia because of the famine that is starving the entire nation, and also because of the increased persecution of Menelik's people, the Beta Israel, the Ethiopian Jews. Where the first book was basically a cultural description, this one does have a plot, as the family secretly and perilously makes its way to Sudan and then to Israel; still, the characters seem to function more as markers for a documentary account than as beings in their own right. Menelik makes an improbably poetic narrator ("a great gale blew across the black desert like wind from some infernal bellows"), and the book's tone is too noble and high-minded, and, as a result, too distant. Although Schur is not always clear about the factual background behind her story (she has the Ethiopian government helping the Jews on one page and persecuting them on the next) it is one most children won't know, and the picture of exile and relief is powerful. Pinkney's scratchboard, here in monochrome, heightens the drama with glints of white gleaming against the darker backgrounds. RS

SCOTT, ANN HERBERT  
**Brave as a Mountain Lion;** illus. by Glo Coalson.  
Clarion, 1996  [32p]
ISBN 0-395-66760-7  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  
R  5-8 yrs

Spider, who lives on a Shoshone Indian reservation, is proud of his no-mistakes spelling paper. He is less happy—petrified, in fact—about his subsequent participation in an upcoming spelling bee to be held in the big gymnasium at his school, with parents and family invited. But taking some advice from his father, grandmother, and brother, Spider decides to be "brave as a mountain lion, clever as a coyote, silent as a spider," and manages to get himself up onto the stage, where to his relief and his family's pride, he takes second place. It's good to have a reservation-set story that is contemporary and not unduly heavy; as she demonstrated as far back as *Sam* (BCCB 2/68), Scott knows how to take a universal childhood anxiety and particularize it to the needs of a story. Glo Coalson (who also illus-
trated Scott's *On Mother's Lap*, BCCB 12/72) here contributes warm and comfortable watercolors of family life as well as of the scary stage. RS


Unlike Jeannie Baker's *The Story of Rosy Dock* (BCCB 3/95), which was beautiful but vague in its explanation of the problems of introduced species, this picture book is straightforward, even blunt, about what happened when cane toads were imported into Australia to control crop-consuming beetles and grubs: "The toads were much happier in town, where it was easy to find a satisfying meal." Not only did the toads prefer pet food to beetles, they reproduced at an alarming rate, causing the original introduced population of 101 to grow into the millions, extending their range to the entire northeast coast of the continent. Listeners will enjoy the details (the toads are as big as dinner plates, they squirt poison, some children dress them up like dolls) but the science should be more specific. Surely Seibert could be more precise than stating that there are "millions and millions of toads"; the ecological impact is left at "scientists are trying to find out"; and the book limply and puzzlingly concludes with "Once these big toads came, they conquered! Well . . . almost." Colored pencil illustrations are somewhat grainy but large enough for a science story hour; an appendix includes some q-and-a's about the toads and a map showing their range. RS


Great-Uncle Alfred and little niece Emily trim his Christmas tree—but it's midsummer, not December, and Emily is patiently humoring her elderly relative, who apparently suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Although Great-Uncle forgets Emily's name, his shoes, even the seasons, Emily realizes that if she guides him out into the sunshine and onto the subject of his childhood, his mind clears. Limning Alfred's condition with neither humor nor pity, Shecter challenges his audience to accept the man's frailties with the same sagacity and selflessness Emily offers. However, children who have experienced the frustration of loving an older relative who is tenacious of the past but forgetful of the present will recognize this as an idealized portrayal, and the somewhat melancholy, somber-hued oil paintings reflect the situation more accurately than does the text. If the story is unconvincing and the last line, "Then we still have some time," abstruse, Shecter still provides an alternative to more clinical what's-wrong-with-grandpa tales. EB

**Shreve, Susan** *Zoe and Columbo*; illus. by Gregg Thorkelson. Tambourine, 1995 71p ISBN 0-688-13552-8 $15.00 R Gr. 2-4

The family dynamics change when Zoe and Columbo's family moves from their old town, where the sibs were inseparable companions and Columbo was the star of the neighborhood, to Providence, where Zoe starts finding her own friends and identity and Columbo is afraid that his being adopted sets him apart from his classmates and his sister. Columbo's uncertainty has actually led him to tell the
kids in his new fourth grade that he and Zoe are twins (their birthdays are only, after all, four months apart), and as his ostensible and Zoe's actual birthday approaches, his fear of being found out and being excluded increases. Characterization here is particularly strong, with the deep bond between the near-twins touchingly portrayed. As ever, Shreve investigates middle-grades angst subtly and respectfully, and Columbo's bewilderment and uncertainty will strike a chord with young readers, all of whom will recognize the problems of newness. Awkward pencil drawings, unfortunately dorky, appear occasionally.

Sierra, Judy, comp. and ad. *Nursery Tales Around the World*; illus. by Stefano Vitale. Clarion, 1996 [114p]
ISBN 0-395-67894-3 $19.95
Reviewed from galleys R* 3-7 yrs

This richly illustrated compendium of folktales does double duty as a nursery story book for lap-sharing and as a sourcebook for parents and professionals. Each of six themed sections, ranging from Runaway Cookies to Fooling the Big Bad Wolf, contains three tales, carefully balancing familiar standards with lesser-known stories. "This Is the House That Jack Built" teams with the Italian "The Rooster and the Mouse" chain tale; "The Hare and the Tortoise" speedster fable shares the bill with the Chinese "The Fox and the Crab." Most entries feature strong rhythms and repetition that invite audience participation and develop memory, and introductory hints to the novice reader/teller suggest how these devices maximize the stories' impact and appeal. Meticulous source notes include tale-type and motif index references for readers interested in expanding their repertoire. Top this engaging text with Vitale's lavish oil-on-wood ethnic borders, motif vignettes, and full-page illustrations, and you have a handsome work to be valued by readers and treasured by listeners.

Smalls, Irene *Ebony Sea*; illus. by Jon Onye Lockard. Longmeadow Press, 1995 [44p]
ISBN 0-681-00679-X $12.95
Reviewed from galleys M 5-8 yrs

"And the waves kept rolling, to and fro, to and fro. Swoosh, swash, swish, swoosh, swash, swish, splish, splash, splish-splash, splatter." This onomatopoeic chorus projects an oddly lighthearted tone for a story of mass suicide, when an entire shipment of Ebo people who have survived the Middle Passage walk silently into the Wateree River rather than submit to the horrors of slavery. The witness is a boy named Benriver who, "because he was part spirit could not go into the water ... with them." This explanation may raise more questions than it answers in a picture book that tries to condense a complex historically grounded legend. Since the facts are not cited in an informational source note, listeners have no way of distinguishing fact from fiction here—whether, for instance, the "African queen" who leads the group ("In her Ebo beliefs an African who dies goes back home to Africa") comes from history or imagination. Other problems arise from the text itself: how did Benriver, newly arrived, understand an old slave's comforting words spoken in English? Why did the slave masters stand back and watch while their investment sank in irons? The art serves to further the mythical aspects of the story more than underscore its historical basis. Melodramatic colors characterize the compositions, and larger-than-life figures represent the heroic Africans, while the whites are cartooned with comedic proportions that break the tragic tone of
the text. On one page, Benriver appears to be a boy in Auntie Louisa's arms; in the next picture, with no passage of time indicated, he seems to be a young man. Parts of the narrative are lyrical enough to move listeners and the art shows potential illustrative power in some of the portraits, but the overall effect—despite a romanticized vagueness of factual detail—is more polemic than poetic. BH


Smith, a biologist and member of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services' Red Wolf Recovery Team, explains the near extinction of the red wolf, which formerly roamed the southeastern U.S., and the recent effort to save the species through capture, breeding, and reintroduction into a wild refuge. Because the author has chosen to fictionalize some of his material ("I tried to see both through the eyes of the red wolf and through the eyes of the people who met the wolf on its journey"), it is not always clear what really happened: while reports from the wolf's point of view thoroughly resist anthropomorphism, the accounts of human actions and conversations are unreferenced, leading us to wonder what was made up and what was not. Explanations are not always clear (children will wonder why the biologists wanted to kill coyotes so that the red wolves would not breed with them) and are marked by a peculiar use of quotation marks ("Wild pups stay with their parents for a longer period, forming what is commonly known as a 'wolf pack'"). Smith is much better when he outlines the reintroduction program itself, which led to the successful adaptation of the red wolf into a refuge in North Carolina. Color photos show the procedures of trapping, feeding and radio-collaring; along with an index, there is a directory of zoos that have breeding programs for the wolves. RS


Riddles, of the old-fashioned "what am I" variety, have a certain perennial fascination, and here's a tidy and inventive collection of them. Not only do Spires' free-verse poems offer punny and explanatory hints (the arrow slyly confesses, "Out of many,/ I was chosen./ I quiver/ at the honor"), Blegvad's detailed watercolor vignettes always contain the answer without necessarily making it obvious. Some of Spires' phrases misstep (it's surely rather misleading to call a mosquito a "kamikaze"), but most are neatly clever and some are inspired ("When you leave I get bored," says the mirror, "and pretend I'm a room"). The poems are deft enough to be interesting even to youngsters who can guess most of the answers without difficulty, and the visual/verbal clues are enough to nudge wordaphobes to enjoyable success. DS


Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-205078-8  $14.95

Reviewed from galleys R  5-7 yrs

A story is all in the point of view, and this is Tom Thumb from the sibling's perspective. It's set in the Middle Ages but narrated with sly modern digs and
illustrated with Steig's signature wit. The story has lots of familiar ingredients, but they're mixed well. Yorick, who considers younger brother Charles "a first-rate pain in the pants," is apprenticed to his father, the famous alchemist Magnus Bede. With their parents away, Yorick messes around in his father's laboratory and drinks a shrinking potion that he can't reverse, even with Charlie's help. Charlie, meanwhile, is rather enjoying the situation ("Okay, peanut, take it easy") until he realizes the danger (Yorick "could be seriously injured by a fieldmouse who was feeling his onions"). When Mr. Bede finally comes home and finds the antidote, the whole Bede family go "altogether out of their medieval minds" with joy and live happily ever after, Yorick still dreaming of turning donkey droppings into gold and Charles developing a passion for making toy dolls that resemble Yorick. Framed in purple borders, the watercolor cartoons feature plain compositions with homely characters. Steig's strength has always been a good story with funny pictures, and this book has enough child appeal to transmogrify any storyhour audience. BH


A blend of folklore, morality tale, and absorbing fiction, Stevenson's story tells of a man, Keawe, who buys an imp in a bottle. This bottle will grant him all he requires, but he must sell it before he dies or else be damned for eternity, he must sell it for less than he paid, and the payment must be in coin. Well and good: Keawe uses the imp to give himself a beautiful and happy house and to win himself a lovely woman, Kokua, and then sells the bottle—unfortunately he then discovers he is suffering from leprosy, so buys the bottle back to cure himself and stay with his beloved Kokua. Now, however, the bottle must be sold for less than one cent, and who would buy it even if that were possible? The story is both moving and slyly clever, but it is long and leisurely paced. The oversized format makes the volume resemble a picture book, but the design makes the text dauntingly dense on the glossy pages. Thickly brushed watercolors in intense and vivid island hues appear periodically; they are decorative but don't enhance the story much. DS

SZABLYA, HELEN M.  The Fall of the Red Star; by Helen M. Szablya and Peggy King Anderson. Boyds Mills, 1996  166p  ISBN 1-56397-419-3  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 5-8

Szablya and Anderson's fictionalized account of the inspiring yet doomed Hungarian revolution of 1956 shows many parallels with more recent events. The book views the revolution through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old student, Stephen, who, along with many other young people, became a "freedom fighter" when the Soviet Union tried to squash popular Hungarian resistance against its occupation and control. There are street battles, secret plots, guerilla attacks, and even an emergency childbirth scene, but the drama of the action is compromised by unlikely dialogue ("Mária, empty the rest of the tomato sauce into that big pan. We will need more bottles for the Molotov cocktails," says Stephen's grandmother) and formulaic writing ("His grandmother. She was always happiest cooking—her way of showing love"). Less introspective than most recent war fiction, but less exciting than war adventure stories such as Serailler's The Silver Sword, this could still find an audience stirred by youthful heroism. RS
TURNBULL, ANN  
*Room for a Stranger.*  
Candlewick, 1996  [112p]  
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 5-7

The Dyer family of northern England, chronicled in *Speedwell* (BCCB 11/92) and *No Friend of Mine* (11/95), is back; now it’s wartime, Dad’s been dead for a year, the older girls are gone, Lennie’s working down in the mine, and twelve-year-old Doreen is the protagonist. She’s not thrilled about the idea of putting up an evacuee, and when Rhoda comes Doreen’s peeved to discover that the new girl apparently outshines Doreen in every way: getting along with adults, preparing for a fund-raising concert, dressmaking, and, most of all, glamour. Doreen’s jealousy leads to a blow-up between the two girls, which results in Rhoda’s running away to the old mine works and getting injured in a cave-in; in the aftermath it becomes clear that Rhoda’s glamorous life isn’t quite what she’s made it out to be. The dynamics here are fairly predictable, with Rhoda rich in experience but poor in love, the neglected child of the single stage mother, but this is still a lively and involving account of non-sibling rivalry and wartime peer-group society (“Being bereaved gave Barbara status. Doreen hoped that having an evacuee might help her catch up”). Kids who prefer their wartime adventures on the lighter side and readers who followed the saga of the Dyer family in the first two books will enjoy following the struggles of the sisters-of-circumstance. DS

VAIL, RACHEL  
*Daring to be Abigail.*  
Jackson/Orchard, 1996  [144p]  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-09517-7  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 5-7

Abigail tells her frightened little brother that “camp is for learning to be brave,” and she’s determined to be a different, braver person there. No longer timid Abby but bold Abigail, she will dive off the high-dive, fit in wherever she goes, and be the kind of daughter that her father, now dead for two years, had really wanted. Fitting in, however, often means excluding and tormenting one camper, Dana, to enhance solidarity with the other girls (“Abigail knew that being mean was what Tracy liked best about her, too. Maybe the girls at home would notice her if she acted nastier”), and Abigail eventually pulls a prank of serious and unforgivable nastiness on Dana (whom she actually rather likes). Although the point of view is occasionally muddlingly inconsistent, Vail is, as ever, unerring without ever oversimplifying in her depiction of shifting middle-grades alliances, and Abigail’s anxious ambivalence is both realistic and immediately understandable. The book has the courage to allow sympathetic Abigail to do really rotten things (and get nailed with the proper repercussions on a personal as well as an administrative level), but her vulnerability and her poignantly, desperately upbeat letters home will engender reader sympathy and understanding. DS

VAN LEEUWEN, JEAN  
*Blue Sky, Butterfly.*  
Dial, 1996  [128p]  
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 5-7

Twig is devastated by her parents’ separation and by the ensuing deterioration of her life. She won’t talk to her father when he calls from his new apartment, and she can’t talk to her mother, who, sunk into a depression, can’t even manage the cooking and the laundry, let alone deal with her children’s emotional needs. Fi-
nally she calls her grandmother, who helps Twig, her brother Nathan, and their mother not only by visiting, but also by sending encouragement and material for the starting of a garden, whose required hard work helps heal the family and whose gradual blossoming parallels their recovery. Van Leeuwen’s depiction of the shock and sadness even an amicable divorce can wreak on a family is telling and authentic; it’s clear that the absence of any bad guys here (despite Twig’s initial blaming of her father) doesn’t make the situation any happier. The garden motif isn’t overplayed but instead provides a cheerful and accessible symbol whose details blend in with the other small individualities of the family drama. DS

WADDELL, MARTIN  The Kidnapping of Suzie Q. Candlewick, 1996  [176p]
ISBN 1-56402-530-6  $15.99
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-10

It’s an ordinary day in the life of fifteen-year-old Suzie Quinn, who’s dropping by the market with her mother in preparation for her older sister’s return home from university when a robbery of the store goes wrong and the robbers kidnap Suzie instead. The kidnappers are panicky and not very bright local youths—a nineteen-year-old, a seventeen-year-old, and his pregnant sixteen-year-old girlfriend—who are convinced that Suzie has recognized them and that they need to find some way out of this predicament. Suzie’s narration tells of her captivity and her efforts to escape it, alternating with descriptions of the furor on the home front as the police hunt for the kidnapped girl and the family struggles to cope. Waddell has written an absorbing thriller with a plucky yet believable heroine, and he’s incorporated some complexities of attitude—the kidnappers really are pathetic and pitiable, although undeniably dangerous—that freshen the story without making it too difficult. It’s also interesting to see a suspenseful story set in Northern Ireland that deals with troubles other than the Troubles; it’s clear that limited employment and educational possibilities have taken their toll on the kidnappers more than political disputes have. This is classic kidnap fiction in the tradition of Lois Duncan’s Ransom and Robert Cormier’s After the First Death. DS

ISBN 0-8050-3794-2  $16.95  Ad  7-10 yrs

Despite its surtitle of “Eric Knight’s original 1938 classic,” this is actually a substantially shorter picture-book version of the story about the collie who finds her way back across 1000 miles from the house of the rich duke to the cottage of the poor miner’s boy she loves. While the plot retains much of its essential pathos, the clichés of characterization become painfully evident in this adaptation, and we don’t get enough sense of Joe and Lassie’s initial attachment to justify real investment in the drama. The figure drawing is inclined to be stiff and literal, but the watercolor landscapes have an appealing sweep and imagination. It’s a pretty and effectively sentimental story that will, despite its flaws, reliably tug on youthful heartstrings. DS

WESTALL, ROBERT  Gulf. Scholastic, 1996  [96p]
ISBN 0-590-22218-X  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 6-9

Fourteen-year-old Tom has always been close to his sensitive little brother Andy,
but he has also always worried about Andy’s eerie, clairvoyant empathy that sometimes permits him to focus on nothing but the plight of someone or something injured or in danger. When Andy’s twelve, Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait, and Andy somehow forms a link with a boy Iraqi soldier, shouting Arabic in his sleep and going through the motions of a soldier on the march and, eventually, a soldier under attack. Andy eventually becomes more Latif than Andy; his parents see it as mental illness and hospitalize him, but Tom and a wise psychiatrist who believes the truth see through Andy/Latif the struggle of the besieged Iraqi troops in the last days of the Gulf War, as Latif’s unit loses soldier after soldier to American bombs. The late author shows his usual evocative way with atmosphere, and this is an unusual treatment of a military conflict that passed largely unnoticed in children’s literature. Unfortunately the premise seems contrived, and the moral questioning about warfare is obtrusive rather than arising naturally from the story as it did in Westall’s classic The Machine Gunners. This is still a good book for kids interested in a creepy, ethically questioning story or simply a different look at war.

DS


Novels about homelessness are often solemn or sentimental; here’s one from England that’s funny and brave. After her stepfather Mack loses yet another job, Elsa and her family have to move into a bed-and-breakfast hotel: “But I’m not on vacation. This is a shelter hotel. We live here because we haven’t got anywhere else to go.” In her determined, breathless narration—regularly punctuated with selections from her repertoire of truly terrible jokes—Elsa gives the rundown on the shelter, their tiny room, her school and condescending teacher, and her abuse at the hands of Mack: “Mack the Smack. That’s not a joke. He really does smack. Especially me.” Elsa is matter-of-fact about Mack’s punishments, and the author is daring in the way she encourages our sympathy for the man, who’s clearly been pummeled along with the rest of the residents of the “oyal H t l” (“We saw the big gilt lettering was all wobbly and some of it was missing”). There’s a bit of a fairytale ending in which Elsa loudly alerts the hotel to a fire, and the family gets to move to a much nicer place. We do know that this is only temporary, and there’s no telling when Mack’s temper will flare again. Plentiful and funny ink drawings that give Elsa’s view on things tell their share of the story, and fresh footnotes in Elsa’s voice define British terms: “knickers This is getting personal! Knickers means underwear. I say underwear, you say underpants.” RS

WOLKSTEIN, DIANE   Esther’s Story; illus. by Juan Wijngaard.  Morrow, 1996  [40p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-12128-4  $14.93 R  Gr. 4-6
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12127-6  $15.00

The story of the Jewish girl chosen by King Ahasuerus to replace his deposed queen Vashti and destined to save her people from massacre is recounted from Esther’s own point of view. All the key players and events from the Biblical account are here, but are presented to focus on Esther’s vulnerability even as the queen of Persia, ever at the mercy of her husband’s benevolent whim (“I do not think I shall ever forget my fear during those three days . . . [n]or shall I forget the
sound of the shofar or walking through the seven gates, one by one”). Although the voice and perspective are clearly fictionalized, Wolkstein clings closely to a Scriptural outline, with the notable exception of Esther’s bold flirtation with the king upon their first meeting. Although the opulent, jeweled, and gilded gouache paintings, reminiscent of Marilee Heyer’s lush fantasies, will attract a younger audience, the political machinations and court cabals which give rise to Esther’s act of heroism are accessible only to a more attentive readership. Wolkstein notes that she has drawn from the Book of Esther, oral legends, and her own musings, but no source notes demarcate their boundaries. EB

**YEP, LAWRENCE** *Ribbons.* Putnam, 1996 [192p]
ISBN 0-399-22906-X $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Robin lives for ballet, adoring her stern teacher, Madame Oblamov, and anticipating a glorious career. She’s therefore devastated when her parents call a halt to her ballet on financial grounds: they’re devoting every penny they’ve got to bringing her mother’s mother over from Hong Kong and getting her settled—in Robin’s old room, while Robin shares with her little brother, Ian. The unfairness of Robin’s predicament is accentuated by her grandmother’s obvious preference for Ian and her parents’ reluctance to intercede when the old lady’s favoritism makes Robin’s life difficult. The Little Princess aspect of the story, with poor put-upon Robin beset at every turn, isn’t especially believable but will be very gratifying to readers, particularly when they realize, along with Robin’s parents, that Robin’s year of deprivation has led to permanent physical consequences (Robin’s constant home practicing of ballet in ill-fitting shoes has led to deformation of her feet) and that her parents are wracked with guilt. The rapprochement between Robin and her grandmother is a bit sudden but is warm and engaging, and the family dynamics here are soapishly absorbing. Most memorable is Robin’s cranky but strong-minded grandmother whose granddaughter definitely takes after her; kids who appreciate a story about fighting for one’s dreams will enjoy Robin’s saga. DS

**ZINDEL, PAUL** *The Doom Stone.* HarperCollins, 1995 173p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-024726-6 $14.95 M Gr. 6-9

There are, alas, no crop circles in this book, but it includes just about all the other supernatural motifs: cattle mutilations, Stonehenge, telepathy, phases of the moon, and an ancient species whose survival depends on remaining hidden from human-kind. Fifteen-year-old Jackson Cawley encounters all these when he visits his anthropologist aunt in England and discovers that a vicious missing-link-type hominid has been killing and eating people. After the creature bites Aunt Sarah, thereby causing her to begin changing into such a creature herself, Jackson hunts through the countryside and history to find a way to destroy the evil menace without destroying himself in the process. This has the same brisk pacing and old-fashioned, satisfyingly kid-driven adventure as *Loch* (BCCB 11/94). Zindel’s excesses here, however, are often more histrionic than dramatic, which makes the book seem self-parodic at times (as when the transforming Aunt Sarah begins to howl “BEEF! GIVE ME BEEF!”). There are also several questionable plot points: it’s not clear how Jackson knows that the den of hominids he and his friend Alma stumble into are, unlike the man-eater, friendly; the creature’s telepathic capabilities aren’t well-
explained; and Jackson’s repeated and successful use of pig Latin as a secret code isn’t particularly believable. Still, the creature is scary enough and the action lively enough that horror fans (who will appreciate the snarling skeletal face on the cover) probably won’t mind. DS


Using familiar examples of a tree, a bird, and a cat, the author guides a young audience toward a scientifically feasible definition of life. In a straightforward discussion, she demonstrates that living organisms share a common need for food, air, and water, and that they are capable of growth and some form of movement. Dead creatures are carefully and sensitively distinguished from non-living things: “A stone, or other non-living thing, can never eat or grow. . . . A non-living thing can never die, because it has never been alive.” Those with more sophisticated understanding of the complexities of defining life will not fault Zoehfeld for ignoring anomalies such as anaerobes, viruses, etc.; her failure to factor reproduction into the definition, however, is decidedly problematic (and the last line—“You will always be able to tell what’s alive, and what’s not”—is an optimistic oversimplification). An adult who is prepared to broaden Zoehfeld’s discussion will find this title, with its cheery watercolor pictures and well-crafted extension activity in classification, to be useful for introducing biology basics. EB

A man who puts guns, Barbies, and Babar in the same sentence is a man on a mission. Should we burn Babar?—well, no, states Kohl, but we must ensure that any sharing of it with children come accompanied by a critique of the story's patriarchal and colonialist attitudes. Although there is something rather moving about Kohl's earnest, unreconstructed old-leftism, his knowledge of children's books seems rather thin, and he also seems unaware that much of his argument for a "radical" children's literature has been made many times before. Accusations against Babar, for example, aren't new (See Ariel Dorfman's *The Empire's Old Clothes*), and Kohl rather overplays his hand by making much of the fact that de Brunhoff named Babar's benefactor "The Rich Lady" when, of course, she is actually called *la Vieille Dame*, the Old Lady. His essay on the mythologizing of Rosa Parks and what he calls the "Rosa Was Tired" story, is more interesting, but his suggestions for how children's books and textbooks should relate the history of the Montgomery bus boycott are paralyzingly dull. (Kohl's attempts at a few "stories" of his own in this book don't do much more than demonstrate that his heart is in the right place.) Among the few books that win Kohl's approbation are the novels of Geoffrey Trease and Virginia Hamilton, the picture books of Vera Williams, and *Pinocchio*, albeit with some caveats: "'Boys will be boys!' is a very dangerous attitude, one that leaves the door open for the sanction of male violence." RS


Former *Horn Book* editor Silvey has here compiled an enjoyably browsable encyclopedia of children's literature with its focus and discussion weighted towards books published and authors and illustrators prominent after World War II. Entries are of three kinds: biographical *cum* critical essays about authors and illustrators; bibliographic essays on topics such as "Canadian Children's Literature in French," "Easy Readers," and "Holocaust Literature for Children"; and "Voices of the Creators," brief essays by authors and illustrators about how and why they do what they do. All entries are signed or initialed and contributors are identified in an appendix. While the point of view throughout is less analytical than appreciative, the coverage is broad and writing accessible. A comprehensive author, title, and subject index as well as plenty of reproductions of children's books illustrations (mostly in black-and-white, with an eight-page color insert) aid both enjoyment and usefulness. RS
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: McKissack
African Americans—fiction: Medearis
African Americans—stories: Hru; Jackson; Smalls
Alzheimer’s disease—stories: Shecter
American Indians—stories: Scott
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ESP—fiction: Westall
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Ethiopia—fiction: Schur
FANTASY: Briggs; Dexter; Feiffer; Rylant
Fathers and daughters—fiction: Alphin
FOLKTALES AND FAIRYTALES: San Souci; Sierra
Food and eating—stories: San Souci
France: Besson
Friends—fiction: Levy; Quattlebaum; Vail
Friends—stories: Jackson
FUNNY STORIES: Ahlberg; Dickinson; Feiffer
Grandmothers—fiction: Van Leeuwen; Yep
Gulf War—fiction: Westall
HISTORICAL FICTION: Avi; Clark; Karr; Little; Minahan; Szablya; Turnbull

History, U.S.: Dash; Maestro; Minahan

Homelessness—fiction: Wilson

Horses—fiction: King-Smith

Hungary—fiction: Szablya

Immigration: Maestro

Islam—fiction: Matthews

Japan—stories: Brenner

Jews—fiction: Schur; Wolkstein

Kidnapping—fiction: Myers; Waddell

Labor movement: Dash

Literature, children’s: Stevenson; Wells

LOVE STORIES: Clark; Orgel

Missionaries—fiction: Little

Mothers and daughters—fiction: Dexter

Music: Medearis

MYTHOLOGY, CLASSICAL: Orgel

Nature study: Dewey; Seibert; Smith; Zoehfeld

Northern Ireland—fiction: Waddell

Pennsylvania—fiction: Clark

Pioneer life: Gerard

POETRY: Cullinan; Gerard; Sierra; Spires

Polar regions: Markle

Princes—fiction: Feiffer

Quilts: Bial

Rainbows—fiction: Kramer

Ramadan—fiction: Matthews

Reading aloud: Avi; Cullinan; Dickinson; King-Smith; Rylant; Stevenson; Wells

Reading, beginning: Alphin; Byars; Novak

Reading, easy: Dexter; Minahan; Quattlebaum

Reading, family: Byars; Newcome; Schreiber; Sierra

Reading, reluctant: Briggs; Karr; Merbreier; Myers; Waddell; Zindel

Religious education: Matthews; Pandell; Schur; Wolkstein

Riddles: Spires

SCARY STORIES: Stevenson; Zindel

School—stories: deGroat; Scott

Science experiments: Markle

Science: Kramer

Scotland—fiction: King-Smith

SHORT STORIES: Klein

Sisters—fiction: Klein; Rodowsky

Slavery—stories: Smalls

Social studies: Kindersley

SPORTS STORIES: Klass

Story hour: Brenner; Clements; deGroat; Dewey; Gerrard; Hru; Hurd; Jackson; Kharms; Newcome; San Souci; Scott; Sierra; Steig

Summer—stories: Hru

Survival—fiction: Myers; Paulsen

Taiwan—fiction: Little

Television: Day; Merbreier

Toads: Seibert

Uncles—stories: Shecter

Valentine’s Day: deGroat

War of 1812—fiction: Minahan

West, the: Gerrard; Karr

Witches—fiction: Dexter

Wolves: Smith

Women’s studies: Dash

World War II: Besson; McKissack

World War II—fiction: Turnbull
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