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Toby loves to play hide-and-seek, and in this story young readers can join his parents in trying to find him. Steig's brief text has just the right amount of tension to draw young children into the game; and Euvremer's warm, cozy illustrations encourage them to follow Toby from one hiding place to another. A welcome addition to other popular hide-and-seek titles." —SLJ

"It's a charmer." —Kirkus Reviews

"Toddlers will have fun with the interactive game and the cozy mischief [in this] classic picture-book story." —ALA Booklist

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Editorial Correspondence. Review copies and all correspondence about reviews should be sent to Janice Del Negro, The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, 51 E. Armory Ave., Champaign, IL 61820-6601. E-mail: bccb@alexia.lis.uiuc.edu

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Cover illustration by Neil Waldman, from The Never-Ending Greenness ©1997 and used by permission of Morrow Junior Books.
The Never-Ending Greenness
written and illustrated by Neil Waldman

The goal is never to forget, but the question remains of how to remember the Holocaust for children, especially young children, who have no knowledge of World War II. Neil Waldman has given us his answer in *The Never-Ending Greenness*, which focuses on the survival of refugees from the Holocaust. Beginning with a tree-lined springtime scene in Vilna, the Jewish narrator recalls a childhood interrupted by Nazi soldiers who force his family into a ghetto, from which they escape into the surrounding forest. Later, in Israel, the boy transplants seedlings to his house where he can water them and nourish his dream of forests covering the barren hills around him. Postimpressionistic paintings flicker leaf-like shapes of colored light across panoramic landscapes. From the two dramatically gray ghetto scenes to pastel shades and deepening green hues, the illustration offers a spectrum of despair changing to hope, a hope celebrated every year with an Israeli tree-planting holiday called *Tu b'Shvat*.

Not for the primary-grade audience seeking standard suspense, *The Never-Ending Greenness* is nonetheless perfectly paced as an unfolding of personalized history reflected in a life cycle like an unfolding of leaves. And the intensity of the boy’s project is magnetic enough to build a bridge of identification with today’s young listeners who have no experience with devastated wastes of wartime gray. If the survival of a whole family is unrealistic or at least unusual in terms of what happened to millions of Jews, Waldman has ultimately projected the survival story of a people—perhaps the only happy ending for a story where so many individuals perished.

Our first impulse, of course, is to protect children from historical nightmares, and it took three decades for the Holocaust to make its way into juvenile literature at all. When it did, the format was young adult (Yuri Suhl’s *On the Other Side of the Gate*, BCCB 9/75, for instance, or Milton Meltzer’s *Never To Forget*, 9/76). As aging survivors felt compelled to pass on their stories in memoir or autobiographical fiction, and schools incorporated the subject into elementary curricula (sometimes mandated, along with other minority history), books about the Holocaust—including enduring, surviving, and escaping it—crept into younger formats, including easy-to-read works such as Isabella Leitner’s *The Big Lie* (1/93) that are accessible at a third- and fourth-grade reading level. The next step, inevitably, was picture books, a genre already prepared for wartime desolation by groundbreaking works such as Maruki’s *Hiroshima No Pika* (10/82). Just as inevitably, the subject was sometimes mishandled. Wild and Vivas’ *Let the Celebrations Begin!* (9/91) treats concentration camp liberation like a picnic, but other picture books—including *The Lily Cupboard* by Oppenheim (3/92) and *Elisabeth* by
Nivola (3/97), in which the main characters survive, and *Flowers on the Wall* by Nerlove (3/96) and *Star of Fear, Star of Hope* by Hoestlandt (6/95), in which they do not—have managed a better balance in reflecting tragic situations for young listeners, upon whom we all wish happiness along with a conflicting quota of truth.

Each of the picture books wrestles with a central question of how much to tell: in content, how much of the horror; and in form, how much of the context. These issues in turn raise a critical question of whether the picture book comprises a self-enclosed world like other literature or whether it must depend in some cases on adult interpretation. For instance, Sim’s *In My Pocket* (reviewed on p. 374) gives no historical context for a young Jewish refugee’s experience; it’s a book that would be incomprehensible without adult “translation,” but of course an argument could be made that these are books best left to explanation by the adults reading them aloud, anyway. Gallaz and Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche* is also mystifying without background commentary and connections. Are the Holocaust and its thematic variations too complex and terrible a subject for preschool or primary-grade understanding? That’s a decision every parent and/or educator must make not only for herself but also for each different child in her care and each different book in her ken. Like all “trends,” this one will go through cycles of truth (innovation) and consequences (commercialism). How many outstanding picture books have emerged, really, on the subjects of child abuse or AIDS?

What we do know is that social context affects and even effects text. No one in the 1950s could have imagined the publication of a children’s book as grim as Pausewang’s *The Final Journey* (12/96), which begins with the protagonist’s boarding a train to Auschwitz and ends with her stripping for the “showers.” Yet *Schindler’s List* is shown on TV, with children wandering in and out of living rooms all over the country. Through the pervasive presence of multimedia, the worlds of adulthood and childhood that underwent separation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are once again fusing. Children see all but know little. And we are left to explain what we can, through books such as Waldman’s *Never-Ending Greenness*, and to do what we can, which is sometimes nothing more or less than planting a tree. (Imprint information appears on p. 377.)

*Betsy Hearne, Consulting Editor*

**NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**ADA, ALMA FLOR**  *Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English;* English tr. by Rosa Zubizarreta; illus. by Simón Silva. Lothrop, 1997 40p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-13904-3  $15.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-13903-5  $16.00  Ad  5-8 yrs

A series of expository poetic pieces on the lives of migrant farm workers is arranged according to the Spanish alphabet in this bilingual picture book. From *Arboles* (Trees) to *Zanahoria* (Carrot), Ada selects various elements from the itinerant lives...
of farmworkers and creates short verses, most of which commemorate the fruits of the harvest and the closeness of family. Each double-page spread features two letters; each letter is in a red-bordered text box accompanied by a short piece in Spanish, with the English translation alongside it. Silva’s paintings are garish with summer colors, the verdant green fields aflame with red fruits and flowers, and, except for the spread where it’s raining on a field of lettuce, even the sky is a hot summer blue. While there is little differentiation between the old faces and the young ones, the massive compositions have an elemental appeal. Both the format and text dogmatically serve the theme, although Ada’s over-earnest approach to giving children a look at their own and other people’s lives is understandably sympathetic. JMD

ALARCÓN, FRANCISCO X. Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/ Jitomates Risueños y otros poemas de primavera; illus. by Maya Christina Gonzalez. Children’s Book Press, 1997 32p ISBN 0-89239-139-1 $15.95 R Gr. 2-4

Seventeen poems celebrating spring, each appearing in both English and Spanish, run riotously across the pages in this energetic collection. Every double-page spread seems to have something to shout about, from “Dew”/“El rocfo” (“the fresh/ taste/ of the night”; “el fresco/ sabor/ de la noche”) to “Las canciones de mi abuela”/“My Grandma’s Songs,” from “Strawberries”/“Las Fresas” to “Suefio”/“Dreams.” Sometimes the poem in Spanish is first, sometimes the poem in English, but the language is concrete and immediate every time, and it’s enriched by celebratory visual images. Gonzalez’ watercolors extend Alarcón’s poems, each double-page spread replete with blossoms, suns, dancing children, singing grandmothers, and fields bursting with corn, strawberries, and, of course, tomatoes. While the compositions are often crowded, sometimes uneven, and frequently unsubtle, the palette is bright with lavenders and pinks, and individual compositional elements have a joyful sense of magical realism that includes grinning portraits, tomato smiles, and floating chiles. Alarcón includes an Afterword/Posdata that talks briefly about poetry, the poems in this collection, and how he came to write them. The book opens with the words “A Poem/ makes us see/ everything/ for the first time”; “Un poema/ nos hace ver/ todo/ por primera vez,” and this collection certainly proves the point. JMD


This unusual fiction is based on the scientific writings of French scientist Fabre (1823-1915), who is known as the founder of experimental entomology. The narrative voice belongs to Paul, youngest son of Fabre, who describes his father’s “tricks” played on assorted insects; these were ingenious experiments designed to record and analyze their behavior. The format is a series of vignettes, each focused on a different insect, in which Fabre and his offspring learn something about the subject under study. Though this gimmick strains credibility, it does a serviceable job conveying scientific information. Indulgent readers willing to swallow the setup will pick up some fascinating bits: cossus grubs are great on the grill; scarab beetles can be lazy and deceitful; those deafening cicadas really are deaf; southern
France harbors scorpions (is no place perfect?). Read this one for its insect info only, not for its stick-figure characterizations and pedestrian prose. Keis’ illustrations competently reflect the historical period while depicting the respective critters in their environments. Included are a table of contents, biographical note, glossary, and index. SSV

AUCH, MARY JANE  
*Journey to Nowhere.* Holt, 1997  202p  
ISBN 0-8050-4922-3  $15.95  R Gr. 4-7

In 1815, Mem (short for Remembrance) Nye and her brother have been rather abruptly packed up with a few of the family's most vital belongings and are headed from their comfortable but overworked farm to Papa's new uncleared acreage in New York. The further they journey from civilized Connecticut, the cruder the roads, the accommodations, and their fellow travelers become. Upon arrival, Papa demonstrates that he doesn’t really know how to build a cabin or clear his new tract, and Mama threatens to alienate their new neighbors by railing against liquor. Mem's adventures on the early leg of the journey seem somewhat cobbled together; separation from her family in a thunderstorm smacks of a plot device to introduce some information on mountain lions, snake-bite treatment, and turkey droving. Still, Auch offers a refreshingly believable portrait of a family under stress; these hardy pioneers actually bicker and hurl a little cranky sarcasm at each other as the trials and errors of wilderness living take their toll. Readers who like to imagine themselves into times past will readily empathize with the testiness, bumbling, and perseverance of these survivors. EB

BIAL, RAYMOND  
*Mist over the Mountains: Appalachia and Its People;* written and illus. with photographs by Raymond Bial. Houghton, 1997  48p  
ISBN 0-395-73569-6  $14.95  R Gr. 4-7

In this strikingly beautiful photoessay, Bial again demonstrates his skill as a photographer as he takes readers to the “undeniably lovely” area called Appalachia. A textual overview of Appalachian culture, geography, history, and people weaves its way through an abundance of clear, crisp photographic images: the inside of a canning cupboard, old photographs adorning a log cabin wall, the stark whiteness of the clapboard siding on a country church, an exquisitely handmade dulcimer, a misty mountain scene. The text addresses popular beliefs about the region while supplying information in a highly readable text. Farming, religion, music, Jack tales, and folk arts are just some of the topics elucidated. Though somewhat touristy and pristine, this is not an entirely romanticized view of life in the mountains: the ravages of the logging efforts, the hardships involved with coal production, and the deep poverty of much of the region are addressed forthrightly. Although a glossary would have been beneficial, this volume will serve as a worthwhile introduction to “the spirit of Appalachia.” A list of further reading is appended. PM

BISHOP, NIC  
ISBN 0-395-77848-4  $14.95  R Gr. 3-6

Ever gazed at the sky and marveled at hawks gliding effortlessly, puzzled over the jerky movements of bats at dusk, been dive-bombed by mosquitoes, or wondered how flies can loop-the-loop? In clear prose, this book tells us exactly how different animals fly and shows us with crisp photos and detailed diagrams. Bishop makes a
convincing argument for the practicality of flight (no obstacles, safety from predators) and explains why our flying friends need to find lots of high-energy foods, such as worms, insects, and seeds. Along the way, the reader is treated to fabulous flight factoids: a 150 lb. person would need a wingspan of 120 feet to fly; bats can make sharp turns because their wings are made of skin and don’t leak air; insects and hummingbirds hover by flipping their wings upside down; a bumblebee can fly 2,000 miles on one teaspoon of nectar. With refreshing candor, Bishop admits that scientists still don’t know how birds fly 2,000 miles non-stop or why monarch butterflies migrate to the same corner of Mexico year after year, but that won’t keep this title from flying off the shelf. Suggestions for further reading are appended. SSV


Three short stories are divided into shorter chapterettes in this droll entry into the beginning reader genre. The “Hot Fudge Hero” of the title is Bertie (a hot-fudge-sundae lover), who wins a bet by making friends with the neighborhood curmudgeon, learns the difference between “fast magic,” “slow magic,” and perseverance with the help of his fairy godfather, and bowls his first strike with an ugly orange (but still lucky) ball. Brisson’s text is lighthearted and even-handed as the intrepid Bertie marches resolutely from adventure to adventure. The text is arranged in short lines with wide leading and margins that will tempt even the most reluctant or timid reader. Bluthenthal’s black-and-white cartoons have the same affectionate whimsy as the text, and they reflect and add to the inherent humor. This is going to be a favorite readalone for a lot of kids, and a favorite readaloud for their grown-ups, too. JMD


In this fourth book in the series, both Herculeah and her semi-stalwart sidekick, Meat, dodge the bullets of the Bull, a hit-man hired to kill Meat’s Uncle Neiman, the quiet owner of a mystery bookstore, Death’s Door. Meat does the grunt work, figuring out from a newspaper photograph why his uncle is the target, while Herculeah gets swept up into the hair-frizzling action (including a harrowing, curb-bumping car ride with a near-blind Uncle Neiman at the wheel). The quirky characterization and dialogue marking the earlier books run a small risk of predictability here, yet the appeal of Herculeah’s sixth-sense resourcefulness and Meat’s wistful romanticism takes a backseat only to an intense and suspenseful mix of mistaken identities and assumptions. The pace will no doubt drive readers past death’s door to the next Herculeah-an case. AEB


Verdi is a green tree python (*Morelia viridis*), who is enthralled with his youthful good looks (“He was proudly eyeing his bright yellow skin. He especially liked the bold stripes that zigzagged down his back. Why the hurry to grow up big and
green? he wondered”). Verdi’s distaste for the green oldtimers in the jungle whom he thinks are lazy, boring, and rude leads him to his impetuous resolve: “I will stay yellow and striped forever.” But there is no fountain of youth for the wide-eyed Verdi, and he finally realizes the benefits of maturity when the old snakes rescue the reckless young reptile in a particularly poignant scene where their green tails become a kind of emergency pallet for the injured snake. The tale ends with an enlightened but now very green Verdi who takes on some young yellow whipper-snappers declaring, “I may be big and very green, but I’m still me!” In this take on the generation gap, snake-style, Cannon again puts to good use her artistry with luminescent acrylic paintings. The text in this careful mix of snake fact and fiction is overlong for a picture book, but the brilliant yellows and verdant greens of the art ease the reader through the story smoothly. Double-page spreads divide most of the action of the story into pen renderings and text on one page and vibrant jungle scenes on the other. This pythonesque tale of midlife crisis may have as much appeal at the nursing home as it does in the nursery school. “Snake Notes” are appended. PM

CARLE, ERIC From Head to Toe. HarperCollins, 1997 26p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-023515-2 $16.95 R 2-4 yrs

Twelve lively beasts from the domestic cat to the dromedary invite children to imitate them as they stomp, wriggle, thump, and clap across the double-page spreads of this concept book. The movements are more original than the usual exercises of touching head, shoulders, knees, and toes—the crocodile wriggles its hips, the cat arches its back, the giraffe (you guessed it) bends its neck. This isn’t as bouncily rhythmic as Zita Newcome’s Toddlerobics (BCCB 2/96) but children will enjoy the calisthenic cavorting as they follow along with this rambunctious variant of Simon Says. An attractive picture book in Carle’s signature style of vivid cut-paper collage, this is a thumpingly good choice for toddler and preschool storytimes. PMc

CARLSTROM, NANCY WHITE Raven and River; illus. by Jon Van Zyle. Little, 1997 32p
ISBN 0-316-12894-5 $15.95 R 5-8 yrs

A raven flies over a frozen river, its black wings a startling contrast to the white snow below, calling for the river to awaken from its icy slumber. Set in the Alaskan wilderness, this is a prose-poem to the raven, the river, and the return of spring. Carlstrom’s language is rhythmic with hypnotically repeating elements, as squirrel’s “bright eyes sparkle, like a river shining,” wolf “takes off, like a river running,” and snowshoe hare “bounds over familiar paths, like a river dancing.” Van Zyle’s acrylic paintings have panoramic sweep and naturalistic views, sometimes placing the animals firmly in the foreground, where they dominate the compositions, or against the Alaskan landscape, where they are dwarfed by their surroundings. The understated text takes off slowly but builds momentum as it progresses, until the climax of the ice breaking on the river. Carlstrom’s concluding lines are disappointingly anticlimactic, and, considering the clarity of the previous text, somewhat cutesily obscure. Still, this is a different approach to change-of-season books, and it will make an interesting addition to other, more traditional seasonal tales. JMD

Among the strikers who suspended Philadelphia's textile industry in the summer of 1903 were thousands of children under the age of sixteen who performed monotonous and even dangerous factory work for a fraction of adult wages. Taking up the strikers' cause, Mother Jones organized a few hundred workers, about half of whom were children, into a march on New York City to force child labor issues before the public eye. Currie admits that little reliable information is available about the children who participated in the march; liberally peppered with "we don't know"s and "perhaps"s, the children's story essentially becomes Mother Jones' story, which is nonetheless a gripping one. She's depicted here in her media-grabbing glory, organizing the workers at a Hoboken hotel where she had been invited by the owner to stay for free and displaying some of the children in animal cages at a carnival to dramatize the confinement of underage factory workers. Plenty of sepia-toned period photos (many by Lewis Hine) tell as affecting a tale as the text; readers who want to know more might turn to Freedman's *Kids at Work* (BCCB 10/94). EB


During the Ming dynasty a Chinese emperor named Yongle demands the design and construction of four watchtowers, one for each corner of the wall around the Forbidden City. Despite the best efforts of his trusted minister, the master builder, and Kuai Xiang the carpenter, nothing pleases the emperor. Then the carpenter's lucky cricket designs himself a more comfortable cage; Kuai Xiang builds the cage; and the cage is mistaken for a model of the tower and taken to the emperor, who, in true folktale style, embraces it as the essence of what he has been searching for. Bright yellow dragon-patterned borders surround text blocks and paintings; the cricket is used as a repeating motif on the bottom of the text blocks, while the paintings themselves depict the action of the tale in rich reds and blues, with dramatic accents in black and green. The figures and settings are stylized and sophisticated, the compositions balanced and effective. The extremely formal language borders on the austere, and the insertion of double-page spreads without text tends to interrupt the flow of the story, adding to the somewhat distancing effect. Red endpapers with yellow dragons open the tale with a flourish, and an author's note (including the English translation of a Chinese poem shown in an illustration) gives extensive background information. JMD


There's a fair amount of truth about "Little Sureshot" laced in here among the whoppers, and half the fun for younger listeners will be in reckonin' which is which. Annie's early years supporting her widowed mother, her marriage to erstwhile shooting rival Frank Butler, her European triumphs of marksmanship, her
tour with the Wild West Show, and her friendship with Sitting Bull are all in the record. In the best tradition of frontier hyperbole, however, Dadey reminds her audience that it was Annie who shot those craters in the moon, reversed the flow of the Snake River, and blasted a star into Pike's Peak and the Hawaiian Islands. Oakley is cleverly and affectionately caricatured in Goto's flamboyant acrylic and oil paintings, and if the draftsmanship is somewhat stiff, the too-too solid figures boast a monumentality befitting a legend. Concluding notes, entitled "The Truth," are included to set the credulous straight. EB

DEFELICE, CYNTHIA  Willy's Silly Grandma; illus. by Shelley Jackson. Jackson/Orchard, 1997 [32p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-30012-9  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

"On Saturday his lovin' grandma said, 'Willy, don't you go walking by the Big Swamp at night. Something could give you a fearsome fright.'" But just as he has done the other six days of the week, Willy says "Silly Grandma" and methodically defies her superstitious warnings that it's bad luck to cut your toenails on Sunday, sing before breakfast, lay hats on a bed, walk with one shoe on and one off, count the stars, and bring an axe or hoe in the house. Still, when Willie does encounter a bogeyman—and this is one scary double-spread demon—Grandma is the first to reassure him it's only wind, branches, and starlight (having seen the apparition themselves, young viewers may not be so sure). The text is cadenced with rhythms born to be retold or read aloud, while the sly ink and crayon illustrations are skillfully drafted, dynamically composed, deeply textured, and formatted with variously shaped frames. The African-American characters radiate expression in face, gesture, and posture, their warm brown skin tones dominating coloration in many of the scenes. A mite spooky for the younger preschool audience, this will be a major hit with primary-grade listeners and a must for Halloween storytimes. BH

DEUKER, CARL  Painting the Black. Houghton, 1997 248p
ISBN 0-395-82848-1  $14.95  R*  Gr. 7-10

Ryan Ward's senior year takes an unexpected turn when Josh Daniels moves in across the street and persuades him to get into shape to catch for him during baseball season. A gifted but ego-driven athlete, Josh consistently makes magic on the gridiron and on the diamond; clinching his status among both students and faculty, he begins pushing the limits of school rules and social propriety, harassing female students and moving cafeteria furniture to establish a little kingdom for his fellow players. Ryan is uneasy about Josh's darker side but he remains loyal to his new friend, even when he discovers Josh sexually assaulting the class valedictorian. Realizing how close he himself has come to being seduced by Josh's win-at-any-price philosophy, Ryan finally gives evidence against Josh to the police. For those not up on their baseball jargon, the title term refers to a pitcher's ability to put the ball over the edge of the plate, "right between being a strike and a ball... so that nobody really knows what it is." Deuker drives his plot along the edge of the plate too, making Josh's slide to perdition seem so very understandable—and almost, but not quite, excusable. Josh really is as good an athlete as he claims to be; the girl he harasses in the lunch room is a tease; the girl he assaults is not above verbally humiliating him in class. After Josh's conviction, he is merely sentenced to com-
munity service and is, moreover, signed to a pro contract upon graduation. It ain't pretty, but it's real. EB


It is difficult to separate the concisely elegant text from the nearly lyrical illustrations in this distinctive nature book. Dorros discusses trees—how they grow, their structure, root systems, leaves, seasonal changes and other qualities—in two different styles of text. The primary, unitalicized text gives basic information; the secondary, italicized text goes into that information in slightly greater depth, allowing the book to be read on several levels. In addition to the two levels provided by Dorros' text, there is a third level, provided by Schindler's illustrations. Etchings filled in with colored pencil on pastel and parchment papers, they are stunningly executed, with a breadth of detail that draws in the viewer. Each double-page spread contains a quarter-page panel paired with a one-and-three-quarter page illustration, the panel giving additional visual details not included in the larger picture. Both the layout and Schindler's technique add tremendously to the impact of this title, the etched lines providing a unique, delicate nuance. Trees, leaves, wildlife, and other design elements are all clearly labeled, as author, illustrator, and reader follow trees through the seasons. JMD


Gerald's life is haunted early: when he's only three, he accidentally sets fire to the apartment where his drug-addicted mother, Monique, has left him alone. After she's imprisoned for neglect, he lives with his indomitable great-aunt Queen, but when Monique is released from prison (with a new husband and a daughter, Angel, born during her incarceration) he ends up living with her following Aunt Queen's sudden death. Gerald bonds with his little sister but hates and fears his abusive stepfather, who soon also goes to prison for his molestation of Angel; unfortunately he is eventually released, and his hold over the family becomes stronger when Monique is seriously injured in an accident. Then Gerald's friend Rob dies, and then there's another fire which kills the stepfather. It's all too much for the reader as well as Gerald, and the writing isn't capable of turning this sequence of events into something other than relentless melodrama that ultimately numbs rather than engages. There's also a tendency for the point of view to wander, especially at the beginning, which makes it hard to focus as firmly on Gerald as one might wish. The relationships between Gerald and Rob's supportive family and between Gerald and Angel are strong and appealing, but that's not enough to overcome the heavy-handed plotting. DS


It's Cody of Hey, New Kid! back again, this time having to admit to the entire third grade that his parents gave him his really cool name to honor a loved one in their past. Okay, so it was a dog, as Cody discovers while checking out the family scrapbook, but Cody was a very special dog—a hero dog, according to his mom,
who claims the pooch rescued her from drowning when she was little. The "virtual" element here is thin indeed, and it mostly hinges on a rather gimmicky cyberdiary Cody keeps in which he comments on events, illustrating his feelings with little Internet hieroglyphics such as =:-o. What saves this slight story from wooferdom is Duffey's breezy writing and fast pace, which should hook kids just beginning chapter books.


Cuckoo has a very high opinion of herself, from the lovely way she looks to the lovely way she sings, but the other birds are beginning to get a bit tired of her preening ways. When a field fire threatens the seeds the birds have put aside to ensure they don't go hungry, it is cuckoo who braves the flames and rescues the hoard, losing her bright plumage and melodious voice to the sooty smoke. The other birds recognize her heroism, "and they all agreed in the end: You can't tell much about a bird by looking at its feathers." Ehlelt's simple retelling of this Mayan folktale features appealing characters, danger, suspense, and a happy ending. The design of this oversized picture book allows the placement of the bilingual text in such a way as to make both the English and Spanish equally accessible, while the large black type set against the vibrant backgrounds lends itself easily to both group readalouds and beginning individual reading. Ehlelt's illustrations, from cut-paper fiesta banners to tin work to wooden toys, are based on motifs in Mexican folk art and combine geometric forms and pulsating colors into strong, striking compositions suitable for large groups. A specific source note is included.

JMD


Ella Jackson couldn't be more excited when a new teacher, Ms. Sewall, shows up at her school on a grant to teach a term of filmmaking. Ella's great-uncle Buddy was among the earliest black filmmakers, and although he is now a barber and reluctant to discuss his doubtless colorful past, Ella is certain that her class project will lure him into opening up about celebrities such as deceased actress Ella DuChamps (for whom Ella was named) and the old film reels stored in an off-limits trunk. Evans and Dade keep the action rolling with the impish ten-year-old's misadventures in the film lab and her scheming onslaughts on Uncle Buddy's privacy. The revelation that Uncle Buddy's final film Heavenly Hostess is an embarrassing piece of exploitative black buffoonery is honestly and sensitively handled; Uncle Buddy explains how his own "sin of pride" led him to misplace his faith in the Hollywood studio system and to let down his actors: "In my eyes I had failed, as a man and as a director. I couldn't protect them. I sold out and they paid for it." The challenging issue of racism in the early film industry is approached here much more successfully than in Laurence Yep's The Case of the Goblin Pearls (BCCB 5/97), but readers may want to consider the parallels between those of Uncle Buddy's experiences and those of Yep's fictional Chinese screen star, Tiger Lil. EB

Murrow was an undeniable hero of his day, but the trick here may be in selling the subject to a CNN generation who find standard television network news stodgy, let alone radio broadcasts of World War II. Finkelstein’s somewhat adulatory biography opens with the story of Murrow’s famous broadcast unmasking Senator McCarthy, and then proceeds in standard chronological order delivered in accessible, if not zippy, prose. Along the way some of the lesser known events in Murrow’s life are revealed: his first national radio broadcast resulted from an inebriated Murrow snatching the microphone away from the regular announcer; despite knowing the enormous extent of U.S. losses at Pearl Harbor, Murrow chose not to report this in deference to the war effort; the correspondent’s frequent and heroic attacks on McCarthy almost cost him his passport. Going beyond the usual narrative of biographies, the author details the networks’ frantic postwar scramble to control and exploit a new medium, television, and the unhappy effect of the triumph of entertainment over hard news. While this is pure History 101, the issues haven’t changed and budding journalists will take comfort from Murrow’s courage and resourcefulness. A photogallery and index are included. SSV


In this retelling of a Miwok creation myth, Coyote gathers the animals to discuss “how to make the Lord of the Animals. If he is to rule over us, he has to be a very superior creature.” Each animal is convinced that the Lord of the Animals must possess the attribute he values most: mountain lion wants him to be strong, swift, and silent; bear wants him to have a big growl; deer wants him to have antlers, etc. The animals agree to make mud models of their ideal, but they fall asleep over the unfinished forms. Except for Coyote, who stays awake and makes his model by the light of the moon: man, who “is Lord of the Animals because he is cunning and clever—just like Coyote!” A specific source note indicates that the tale is a vestige from the once numerous Miwok, American Indians of coastal California, and there appears to have been some effort to incorporate images and motifs from the art of the coastal California nations. Still, the compositions are excessively crowded, with a clashing palette of uncomplementary colors that reduces the geometric patterns to a confusing visual muddle. French’s storytelling, however, is gracefully surefooted, and the text lends itself easily to a number of oral interpretations, from reading aloud to creative dramatics. Use this one with groups who like to make their own pictures. JMD


Christina Katerina has been in a multitude of eponymous picture books, and here she’s engaged in a classic neighborhood power skirmish. Obnoxious Tommy Morehouse co-opts Christina’s loyal lieutenant, Fats, and then excludes her from play; Christina calls in the reserves (Doris and Joanne), so does Tommy, and the
war is on. The scary ghosts and pine-cone pitching are fun, but Christina misses Fats and is hurt at his defection—until Tommy pushes too far and Fats proves true to his old loyalties. This isn’t quite as snappy as some books on the subject, and the incivility-rapprochement cycle is fairly predictable. There’s a nice blend of the joy and bitterness of neighborhood skirmishing, however, with Fats’ refusal to come find Christina in hide-and-seek more hostile than any missile could be. The acrylic and gouache art is suburban verdant with some enlivening reds and purples; the multiracial group of neighborhood kids is lively and authentically determined. There are some good possibilities for entertaining readaloud expression here, and kids familiar with uneasy neighborhood détente will relish a story about when it all breaks down. DS

GEISERT, ARTHUR. *The Etcher’s Studio*; written and illus. by Arthur Geisert. Lorraine/Houghton, 1997 32p ISBN 0-395-79754-3 $15.95 Ad Gr. 2-4

A boy helps his grandfather the etcher, and he watches and narrates the process as he assists (“I put wood in the stove while Grandfather inked and wiped his plate”). When it comes time for the boy’s most important job, coloring the prints by hand, he passes the time by imagining himself inside the pictures, where he’s sailing a boat round Cape Horn, flying over the town in a balloon, venturing undersea, and roaming through a jungle. The blend of story and information here isn’t as effective as one might wish: the process of etching isn’t described clearly enough within the story to be a plot of its own, and the concept of exploring the prints, though appealing, seems to be more a reason for energetic double-page views than an end in its own right. The detailed depictions of the old-fashioned studio and the impressive equipment and materials are intriguing, however, as are the colored etchings (including a few piggy homages) hung about the studio walls. Particularly enjoyable are the two final spreads, which offer a labeled tour of the studio and a step-by-step explanation of etching—which is the sort of information we were looking for right at the start. Technically minded kids looking for something beyond Kehoe’s *A Book Takes Root* (BCCB 9/93) may want to come up and see Geisert’s etchings. DS


This is a country-life selection of poems; they deal with ploughed fields, tadpoles, home-laid eggs, and farm dogs. The poems are quiet and observant, tending towards free verse and sometimes reminiscent of William Carlos Williams (“A crow stole the cone/ and six tiny sparrows hopped/ vanilla footprints/ across the sidewalk”—“What Happened to the Ice Cream Cone Someone Dropped”). The phraseology is fresh and apt, employing tactile as well as visual conceits, and the subjects are kid-appealing ones indeed. Kiesler’s oils are reminiscent of Ronald Himler’s watercolors, especially in palette, but an awkwardness with faces occasionally mars the human figures, whereas the delicate waterbugs and the sweep of the ploughed fields are impressively conveyed. Also useful as a source for poetic readalouds, this will provide an engaging entree for readers otherwise skittish of poetry. DS

In this take on an intergenerational theme, “Donkey was very old and knew a lot of things” and “Rabbit was very young and wanted to learn.” Donkey attempts over and over again to instruct Rabbit, but the hyperactive hare never contains his youthful exuberance long enough to hear the answer. Instead he goes solo to investigate why the earth is brown, why berries are red, why birds fly, what about the sun, the moon, the stars . . . you get the idea. The two characters, mildly reminiscent of Christopher Robin’s pals, play out the story on spreads of spring green fields dotted with white and yellow blossoms against eggshell-pale skies full of cottony clouds and lots of wide-open white space. The plump gray Donkey and his rollicking rabbit friend have an endearing, stuffed-animal quality that graces the whimsical mood of the story, which concludes with Donkey predictably learning a few things from Rabbit. A shared joke about why the sky is blue (“It’s because that was the only color left in the paint box,” says Rabbit), which Donkey finds wildly funny, probably won’t strike young listeners in quite the same way, but you could use this one in conjunction with George and Martha or Frog and Toad for a friendly storytime. PM


Pets are always an enticing subject, and Millbrook’s “Pet Friends” series provides a useful and appealing introduction to their keeping. Topics covered for all species include food, exercise, housing, breeding, and health; the cat’s full-volume treatment allows for more detailed discussion of behavior as well. The prose is brisk, avoiding the canned flavor prevalent in such series, and the emphasis is on responsible pet ownership throughout (the books advocate the spaying and neutering of cats, emphasize the caged pets’ dependence on their owners, and discuss the occasional necessity of euthanasia). Green’s colored-pencil vignettes, lively cartoons of absurd pet situations, don’t add any information but keep things humorous. There are more in-depth treatments of these subjects elsewhere (Jerome Wexler’s *Pet Hamsters*, BCCB 2/93, and Dick King-Smith’s *I Love Guinea Pigs*, BCCB 4/95), but readers will find here an accessible introduction that should provide them with useful ammo for a parental pet proposal. Each book includes suggestions for further reading and an index. DS


A red-haired pirate girl’s silver flute (“Toot toot/ Tootity toot’) begins an accumulation of animals and sounds in a long parade that wends its way over a countryside to end in the sleeping buccaneer’s bedroom. “She met a boy/ With a rumity drum,/ Rum tum/ Rumity tum,” a hooty owl with a hootity hoot, a gentle cow with a moodily moo, etc. until “they danced and sang,/ Tootity toot,/ Rumity tum,/ Hootity hoot,/ Yippity yap,/ Moodily moo,/ Neighdity neigh,/ Doodily
do...the whole day through." Demarest's watercolors are positively jolly, with the grinning characters singing and dancing their noisy way across a varied layout of single and double-paged spreads. This cumulative rhyming tale goes on a bit too long, but it still packs a strong rhythmic punch and will surely make storytime lively—and loud. JMD

**Hiatt, Fred** *If I Were Queen of the World;* illus. by Mark Graham. McElderry, 1997 [32p] ISBN 0-689-80700-7 $16.00 Reviewed from galleys Ad 4-7 yrs

Fiery-haired older sibling muses on how perfect her life would be if she were in command—she would, for example, possess an endless supply of lollipops that need never be shared and exhibit a flawless piano technique that requires no practice. She'd be a magnanimous monarch, though, bestowing upon her little brother a lick or two of the coveted lollipops and allowing him occasionally to accompany her on his screechy recorder. The sugary predictability of her imaginings is only somewhat mitigated by her tart concluding observation, "Sometimes I might even let him sit next to my throne and pretend to be a king. But NEVER of the whole wide world." Graham's oil paintings are hazily luminous, as befits a daydream, and the palatial settings should appeal to youngsters with their own aspirations to royalty. EB


It's been three months since the death of his mother, and Rob is still filled with anger. His father thinks that a hiking trip in the New Zealand wild will be just the thing for him, so Rob joins a collection of other teens on a camping trip. When the park ranger leading them dies in the night, the young people are left on their own. In their efforts to get rescued, they get themselves lost even further and one of the group suffers serious injury, whereupon Rob and one of his companions—and finally just Rob—must make it through the wilderness and obtain help. Survival stories are rarely particularly original, but this is more predictable than most, and the mowing down of characters that makes Rob a lone hero is quite contrived. The interspersed commentary from the search helicopter adds to the programmatic nature without enhancing the drama. On the good side, the book has the perennial appeal of the survival story, and the teen characters, though a bit representative, have a lively camaraderie that makes their plight involving as well as challenging. Will Hobbs fans who want a Down Under slant on their favorite themes will enjoy Rob's odyssey. DS


Dasie's world is starting to disintegrate. First, her beloved older brother Sam leaves home for military service, knowing that their tiny Pacific Northwest town holds no future for him. Then the lumber company around which Grace Falls revolves shuts its doors, and it looks like the end of the community. Dasie's friends move out of town, Dasie's school prepares to close and to bus the kids miles away to
another town, and even though Dasie’s father eventually gets another local job (as night watchman, keeping an eye on the silent lumber mill where he used to work) it’s clear that nothing will ever be the same. This is a real original: a sensitive but unsentimental exploration of a small-town way of life squeezed out by a changing economy. Honeycutt adeptly depicts the way the lore of lumber permeates daily existence, occasionally and effectively intercutting dialogue from the local lumberman’s hangout into the narrative and making plain Dasie’s father’s fierce pride in his skills and his hope that his nephew, if not his son, will follow in his footsteps. This kind of story doesn’t often make it beyond the headlines; for a lot of kids, this will be an introduction to a new world just as that world begins to disappear. DS

HOPCRAFT, XAN  How It Was With Dooms: A True Story from Africa; written by Xan Hopcraft and Carol Cawthra Hopcraft; illus. by Xan Hopcraft and with photographs by Carol Cawthra Hopcraft. McElderry, 1997  64p  ISBN 0-689-81091-1  $19.95  Ad Gr. 3-5

Dooms was a cheetah raised from a kitten by the Hopcraft family on their Kenya game ranch; seven short chapters describe his arrival and youth, his friendship with young Xan (who narrates), various aspects of his daily life, and his final sickness and passing. Flap copy states that this book was dictated to his mother by twelve-year-old Xan, and this approach has its drawbacks: the writing is sometimes awkward (“just like very small human babies who are too small for their shots, you have to be careful to keep [cheetah kits] away from diseases”), and the story of Dooms’ daily life doesn’t have much shape to it. The visuals are often enchanting (Dooms as a baby peeking out of a basket) and often startling (an angelic Dooms licking his lips clean of gouts of blood), but the scrapbook flavor makes things frustrating: the photos are sometimes small or poorly lit, it’s not clear who most of the subjects are and why some photos are where they are, and the younger Hopcraft’s drawings add little but increasing distraction to a layout that’s over-heavy on design. It’s hard to keep a good cheetah story down, however, and the combination of information and personal (feline?) biography will keep many kids intrigued until they’re old enough for Elspeth Huxley’s The Flame Trees of Thika. DS


While Elijah of the Bible is a holy prophet, Elijah of Jewish folklore is magical, and these eight tales celebrate his role as mysterious stranger, wish-bestower, and dream figure. “Things are not always what they seem” is the most common motif, for Elijah often appears as a pauper testing hospitality. Those who deny him may be punished in strange ways, as are the arrogant couple whose son is turned into a bear (ultimately redeemed, like Beauty’s Beast, by a beautiful loving woman). Those who honor him, like the old teacher hazarding a long journey at Elijah’s behest, are rewarded with material wealth as well as spiritual contentment. The collection is varied in tone and tale type: “Elijah and the Fisher Boy” echoes the old theme of “The Fisherman and His Wife,” but “Where Is Elijah?” seems to incorporate a more contemporary existentialist twist. A man who yearns for a glimpse of Elijah is instructed by his rabbi to provide the Passover meal for some immigrants. His rabbi then hands him a mirror: “Look closely and you will see, my friend. This
was the face of Elijah tonight." Longer than traditional folktales but fine for reading aloud or alone, these are elaborated with an accessible balance of narrative and dialogue. The jubilant watercolor paintings that introduce each story are light-filled, with vivacious coloration and spontaneous movement. The book is spaciously designed, the documentation generous. Specific source notes, glossary, bibliography, and list of recommended readings deepen a sense of the community from which the tales emerge. BH

ISBN 0-385-32299-2 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

Lifting prints, analyzing fibers, constructing a criminal's psychological profile, catching crooks with the aid of slime-shooting weapons—this is just the stuff to rivet the most reluctant middle-grade readers. However, in an effort to run the gamut of forensic science, Jones in fact covers nothing thoroughly, leaving the audience with plenty of leads but little explanation. "If a bloodhound finds a criminal, the testimony of the dog is admissible in court." How? "A crime lab can restore the [gun's filed down] number by using an acid or chemical etching solution.... The numbers reappear for only a short time, though." Why? "Researchers have tried to make smart guns for years. The idea is that an officer's gun would not work for anyone except the officer." Why haven't they succeeded? Lapses in logic mar the text ("The scene of a crime is nothing like a dentist's office. Things are not quiet and peaceful"), which occasionally sinks to downright silliness (a disadvantage to using detector pigs—"Pigs make disgusting noises"). Surrender this title to casual browsers, but set your serious sleuths on the trail of Donna Jackson's *Bone Detectives* (BCCB 4/96). EB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-027530-8 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027529-4 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Lang Penner is spending the summer of his seventeenth year in the caretaker's cottage at Roundelay, home of reclusive rock legend Ben Nevada. (Lang's mother is Nevada's summer chef.) Lang, a just emerging homosexual, is trying to "help out, hide out, cool out, come out," and it's not easy. Huguette, the daughter of Nevada's dead true love, comes to visit from France; Lang becomes her guide and friend, and, in a scenario worthy only of true confession magazines, they have Huguette-initiated safe sex. Afterwards she blames Lang because he's "supposed" to be gay. Kerr hints throughout this rather soapy summer spectacle that something terrible is going to happen, but unless you count Lang and Huguette's one "moment of madness," nothing terrible really does. Pacing is slow, the rock 'n' roll subplot is labored and self-conscious, and much of the surprisingly humorless text is message-driven—some people are gay, some people are straight, society ruins us with its expectations of conformity and normalcy, parents warp kids' minds, drugs are bad, music is good, etc. Lang, certain he is homosexual but uncertain he wants to deal with the difficulties of being honestly out, is believably ambivalent. His long-term relationship with actor boyfriend Alex is the honest crux of the novel, but it never gets enough attention to lift this title above its summer-beach-movie atmosphere. JMD
Those familiar with this creative duo's earlier books on artists (BCCB 11/95), writers (10/94), and musicians (4/93) will know what to expect here: a collection of biographies, each a few pages with some additional tidbits, a full-page caricature portrait, and a secondary thumbnail sketch of aspects of the subject's life. Hats off to Krull for variety—the twenty subjects here include Canadians (hockey player Maurice Richard) and Brazilians (soccer player Pelé), decathletes (Jim Thorpe) and surfers (Duke Kahanamoku), off-court heroes (Arthur Ashe) and off-diamond tempests (Babe Ruth), groundbreakers (Babe Didrikson Zaharias) and more recent phenomena (Flo Hyman). The continuity's occasionally a little jumpy, the neighborly-opinion device dips into contrivance, and the living are distinguished from the dead only by the absence of death dates. It's still a breezy, energetic, and eminently booktalkable collection, however. The art is sophisticated but friendly, adding to the appeal for many a reluctant reader. This may encourage single-sport fans to broaden their scope and those less sportive to take a lap around the biographical track. DS

Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 7-12

"It was the summer of 1957 when I turned fourteen and I met a man named Gene Tole ... and I fell in love with him, but didn't know it at the time," says protagonist Dave, essentially summing up the book's action on the first page. This story takes place against the backdrop of Dave's parents' separation, sending Dave off with his mother while Dave's brother is stuck with his angry and judgmental father. Through Gene Tole, a horticulturist, Dave begins to see the possibility of a different kind of manhood, and he attempts to come to terms with the meaning of his feeling for his hero when Gene proves to be gay. The resolution here is more one of worldly awakening and sexual questioning than coming out, however: it's not stated outright that Dave is actually gay, and none of his feelings are incompatible with a heterosexual adolescent's crush. Larson unfortunately has a tendency to catalogue at length rather than describe, which slows the pace down without ever getting us anywhere. It's nonetheless gratifying to see a nice kid discover possibilities beyond his own circumscribed life, and the story of mentoring and hero-worship has its poignancy. DS

Reviewed from galleys M 4-8 yrs

"The rain fell on the city, the town, and the forest." So begins this tribute to rain in an eye-catching collection of paintings rendered in darkly beautiful pastels that depict the gray and moody loveliness of a rainshower and the people in it. We view a man boarding a commuter train, a teacher grading homework by an open window, a girl and boy exploring the forest, and an old man on a city street experiencing the rain in a series of vignettes that eventually reveals their connection to each other (everyone's related except the old man). The idea has merit but it never delivers anything more than a pretty layout. The minimal text endeavors to in-
volve the reader emotionally as the rain stirs a kind of awakening in each character
("Seeing that no one else was around, he tipped the umbrella to the side and let the
rain fall on his face. The drops on his lips made him smile") but only succeeds in
seeming sentimental, adult-oriented, and vapid. Inconsistencies further water down
any effectiveness this tome might have enjoyed as observant viewers will notice
that the children (who "were so wet that their clothes stuck to them and their hair
straggled down in front of their eyes") have dry hair and are wearing raincoats. By
the last line ("Later, when they were all asleep, the rain became softer . . . and
softer . . . and then it stopped") kids may be clamoring for some thunder and
lightning. PM

LEE, DENNIS  Dinosaur Dinner (With a Slice of Alligator Pie); comp. by Jack
Prelutsky; illus. by Debbie Tilley. Knopf, 1997  32p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-679-87009-1  $17.00  R  Gr. 2-4

Dennis Lee is probably Canada’s most popular children’s poet, but his work isn’t
all that well-known in the U.S. Jack Prelutsky has selected a pleasing variety of
Lee’s poetry covering a multitude of topics. There is verse on child-rearing ("Mrs.
Murphy,/ If you please,/ Kept her kids/ In a can of peas. . . ."), unmentionables
("Mrs. Mitchell’s underwear/ Is dancing on the line/ Mrs. Mitchell’s underwear/
Has never looked so fine . . . ."), and the ever-popular topics of food and eating
("Alligator pie, alligator pie,/ If I don’t get some I think I’m gonna die"). Some
poems are thematically familiar ("I Eat Kids Yum Yum!" recalls Nash’s "Isabel,
“Being Five" is reminiscent of A. A. Milne, and a multitude here are drawn from
nursery and playground rhymes), making them all the more appealing. Lee is
particularly good at chantable verse, which would lend this collection to reading
aloud as well as individual discovery. Tilley’s illustrations are eminently suitable
for their job; the line-and-watercolor images range from vivid spot art to shadowy
full-page spreads, and she’s always fleshing out the poetic picture with details with-
out outshining the text. Hand this one to kids who aren’t yet (ready for) Brats
(BCCB 7/88). DS

LERMAN, RORY S.  Charlie’s Checklist; illus. by Alison Bartlett. Orchard,
1997  26p
ISBN 0-531-30001-3  $14.95  Ad  5-8 yrs

Charlie is a black-and-white puppy looking for an owner, and, as any normal dog
would, he runs an ad in the personals to find one. Assisted by his friend Chester,
the boy from the farm next door, he sorts through the responses according to his
criteria and eventually settles on a girl in a ritzy London penthouse—until he
realizes how well faithful Chester stacks up against his checklist. The plot has
tingses of both contrivance and predictability, and a few glitches may confuse read-
ers (it takes several spreads, for instance, to make clear that Charlie’s the dog and
not the boy). There’s nonetheless an endearing charm to the idea, and the kid ’n’
dog pairing will please the young audience. The illustrations are filled with broad
brushstrokes and vivid hues, with Chester’s red-and-white striped overalls firing
up the scenery and Charlie possessing a loopy and lop-eared appeal. The happy
pair’s final rural idyll will evoke envy in many young applicants for dog-owner. DS
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-12561-1  $15.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12560-3  $16.00  R 6-9 yrs

Ali is finally old enough to go on the yearly cross-Sahara journey to the Rissani market, and he is determined to "show his father that he was ready to be a man." A violent sandstorm separates the boy and his father, and Ali is fortunate to come upon a Berber goatherd, his grandson, and his flock on their way to the mountains. They give Ali dates, bread, sweet mint tea, and the option of coming with them if his father does not find him. They pass the night with the old man’s stories of his life as a warrior-tribesman of the Berber, and in the morning Ali decides to wait for his father. The goatherd leaves Ali with his musket, telling him to "fire the musket every time the sun moves a hand’s width across the sky." Ali’s father finally locates him, and the boy says simply, "I waited for you." While this is an affectionate snapshot of Saharan cultures, it is also a survival story told at a very elementary level. The theme of a young boy proving himself to his father and achieving manhood is a universal one, and this strongly plotted title communicates that theme quite successfully. Lewin’s watercolors are nearly photographic in their realism, and the expanse of sand and sky is effectively utilized to give a sense of the immensity of the desert. JMD

LOPEZ, LORETTA  The Birthday Swap; written and illus. by Loretta Lopez. Lee & Low, 1997 [32p]
ISBN 1-880000-47-4  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R 5-9 yrs

In her debut as an author, Lopez borrows from her childhood to give children a warm, handsome pictorial of five-year-old Lori’s surprise birthday party. Her teen-age sister, Cookie, is the intended birthday girl, or so Lori thinks, but as Cookie explains later, "Because my birthday is in the summer, I always get a big party. But since your birthday is in winter when it’s too cold, you never get one. So this year I thought I’d swap with you. After all, I’m getting a little old for this." Textual and visual hints layer this offering with clues that let observant readers in on the secret: Dad and Mom inquiring what Lori would want for her birthday (a puppy); Mom speaking quietly with the pifiata maker; Mom making Lori wear her new dress to church that day; her brother slipping out of the church early to pick something up for the party (the puppy). Brilliant, deeply hued pictures done in gouache and colored pencil possess a ’60s retro flair and exude the festive atmosphere. Decorative borders surrounding much of the text extend the party mood while showing the contents of the broken pifiata, luscious party food, a cavorting puppy, mariachi band instruments, and more. This is a birthday treat that succeeds in portraying this Mexican-American family in a sweet story without a sugar overload. Team this with A Birthday Basket for Tia by Pat Mora and don’t forget the pifiata. PM

LOWELL, SUSAN  Little Red Cowboy Hat; illus. by Randy Cecil. Holt, 1997 26p
ISBN 0-8050-3508-7  $14.95  R* 5-8 yrs

Okay, maybe we don’t actually need another new version of Little Red Riding Hood, but it can still make life fuller. Lowell’s variant is awash in Western flavor, with Little Red ducking rattlesnakes and wending through canyons to get to
Granny's, and the wolf wearing a "cowboy hat three shades blacker than a locomotive." The showdown at Grandma's ranch moves along the classic lines, with Grandma finally chasing the "low-life lobo" off with a shotgun ("You'd look mighty good as a rug, Mister Wolf!"). There's a rawboned energy to the writing that invigorates the tale and suggests from the beginning that the arrogant wolf is in way over his head. The line-and-gouache art avoids the Santa Fe clichés and sticks to yellows and browns enlivened by green cacti; the images are deliberately two-dimensional and wittily exaggerated, with Red's impossibly shaped horse a particularly appealing absurdity, resembling an oil-drum on stilts. (Alert viewers will appreciate Little Red's felicity with a slingshot, though the stunned rattlesnake doesn't.) Round this up with Lisa Campbell Ernst's *Little Red Riding Hood: A Newfangled Prairie Tale* (BCCB 10/95) and see where else your audience can envision the heroine hanging her cap. DS

**McCaughrean, Geraldine, ad.** *The Silver Treasure: Myths and Legends of the World;* illus. by Bee Willey. McElderry, 1997 129p ISBN 0-689-81322-8 $19.95 R Gr. 4-6

From Bolivia to France, from the Middle East to the Catskill Mountains, McCaughrean capably retells twenty-three myths and legends. The design echoes that of McCaughrean's earlier collaboration with illustrator Willey (*The Golden Hoard*, BCCB 7/96) with generous borders, profuse and colorful paintings, and involving language. McCaughrean includes a Maori myth about the acquisition of the fish net, the Greek story of Oedipus, the Swiss legend of Wilhelm Tell, and the Alaskan Merit myth of Raven and the Moon, all with a liveliness of tone that adds spark to the retellings. It is impossible to judge how much of the humor and unique slant is McCaughrean and how much belongs to the originals, as the notes are generic with only one specific source cited, so those seeking evidence of authenticity will have to look elsewhere. The stories jump from hero legends to origin myths to romances, and the lack of thematic cohesion makes this a series of strong stories strung together on a very slender thread. Willey's culturally disparate characters have a tendency to look remarkably alike, but her dramatic palette combines reds, blues, and greens into oddly lit tableaus, and adds a visual flair to the proceedings. JMD


Here is an enticing gallery of animals on the move to inform and entertain a very young audience. The first in each pair of double-page spreads provides a set of clues. First there's a fallen tree (gnawed to a point at one end), a heap of piled sticks, a paddle-shaped tail following a sleek brown body into a stream, and a rickety tower of block letters forming the word "Build"; flip to the next page to see "Beaver" swimming into its island lodge. Two curvy gray-brown shapes and the tip-top of a bulky head are accompanied by the word "Touch"; the next spread, of course, reveals those shapes to be a pair of caressing "Elephant" trunks. Animals and their environs are fashioned in tissue-paper collage, thickly textured with acrylic paints—big, bright, and inviting for little hands to point and paw. The typeface and typeset of the motion verbs cleverly mimic the action itself: each tipsy letter of the word "Touch" does just that; "Wade" creates ripples as it dips into the flamingo's
pool; “Reach” climbs and angles parallel to giraffe’s long stretch of a neck. For listeners ready to venture beyond simple identification, MacDonald includes an informative paragraph about each of her stars in an appended section of “Animal Facts.” Sit, snuggle, and share. EB

McKISSACK, PATRICIA C. Ma Dear’s Aprons; illus. by Floyd Cooper. Atheneum, 1997 32p ISBN 0-689-81051-2 $16.00 Ad 5-8 yrs

In this tribute to her great-grandmother, McKissack tells the story of Ma Dear, African-American single mother and domestic worker in the turn of the century South. Her son David Earl always knows what day it is by the “clean, snappy-fresh apron Ma Dear is wearing—a different one for every day of the week.” Divided into aprons and days of the week, the story follows Ma Dear as she accomplishes the jobs that support them: laundry on Monday, ironing on Tuesday, etc., until finally it reaches Sunday, the one day there are no chores and no aprons. Interspersed with Ma Dear’s back-breaking jobs are brief, warm scenes that illustrate the obvious affection between mother and son, as Ma Dear tells David Earl stories of his father, takes him to hear the music of Madam Pearlie, and saves hard-earned money for his schooling “come next year.” The ending, however, is perplexingly abrupt, and readers may turn the page looking for some more obvious closure. While the compositions are uneven and the scenic renderings are generic, Cooper’s oil wash paintings have a golden glow, and the close-ups of mother and son have a remarkably loving aspect. JMD


Twenty-two creation tales and two prophetic tales of Armageddon and Ragnarok are made accessible in this eclectic collection. Ranging across a variety of cultural landscapes, Matthews’ retellings include the Biblical Genesis, the Pima Indian tale of Walking Man, the Yoruba story of Olodumare, creation myths from the Indian Upanishads, the Mayan Popol Vuh, the Norse myths, and others. The absence of source notes seems odd in a collection of origin stories, and the lack of cultural context is a serious flaw to any in-depth appreciation. A “Who’s Who?” type glossary identifies players, but adds little to the overall understanding of the text. Moxley’s acrylic interpretations of the tales are a panoply of hot colors, primitive drafting, and unusual if occasionally crowded compositions that dramatically reflect the text. This can be used most effectively in combination with other similar collections, such as Penelope Farmer’s Beginnings (BCCB 11/79) and Virginia Hamilton’s In the Beginning (BCCB 10/88), which give some notion of the religious and cultural framework that surrounds and sustains these myths. JMD


Amber is visiting her Aunt Phoebe, “a collector of life” as Amber’s mother calls her, and reveling in the Africana that decorates her apartment. “Aunt Phoebe knows things,” and she explains those things to Amber and her skeptical father. Phoebe explains the origin of adinkra cloth to her niece, telling her that the cloth
originated with the Ashanti people in Ghana, and that each cloth "talks" because each color and symbol means something. Amber then imagines herself an Ashanti princess connected to a long line of ancestors, all wearers of the adinkra. This is an African-American family history lesson set forth in an accessible, gentle narrative. Aunt Phoebe and Amber's father are brother and sister, and their banter has the tone of a long-standing, well-understood family joke. Amber is a glowing, smiling young girl with a believably strong interest in her aunt's stories of her travels and of African culture. While the human figures are somewhat stiff, the compositions of Mitchell's oil paintings are inviting, the colors warm and rich against the cool white background. Large text with generous leading adds to the simple layout making this a visually uncluttered, easy-to-read title. JMD


Oakland is a rough place for young African-American men, and these three kids have it even worse for being outsiders even among their classmates: Wyatt is substantially overweight, Pook is gay, and Dante, born to a crack-addicted mother, has heart problems that make exertion dangerous. Their tight friendship helps them survive, but that may change when they find a substantial package of pure cocaine and must decide whether to sell it, thereby poisoning people, or to destroy it and forego the badly needed money. Grim, atmospheric, and passionate, this is a compelling portrait of life against astronomical odds. Mowry is occasionally a bit programmatic with his plot, but he can also be marvelously inventive: Dante begins attending drug rehab under false pretenses (he just wants the associated in-class candy privileges), has his first (not entirely satisfactory) experience with sex, and ends up unintentionally finding a boyfriend for Pook. It's a hard-edged, well-written description (Mowry is particularly adept at dialogue) of a violent world with tough choices (Dante fears he's "a house nigger himself who might be selling everyone down the big river"). Kids who relished Myers' Scorpions (BCCB 7/88) will want to have a look at life on the other coast. DS


Shanta Cola Morgan's thirteenth summer is a difficult one. World War II ration booklets are not a problem, but the lack of folding money is. The family is desperately poor, and Grandmorgan (her grandmother) can barely make ends meet. Uncle Louie and his wife Louray have separated, Louray moving out with five-year-old daughter Honey, leaving an achingly empty space in their lives. When the Walling family moves in across the street, Shanta gets her first good break in a long while—she and Denny, the twelve-year-old daughter of the house, and Earl, Denny's twenty-one year old brother (who has a steel plate in his head and insists on being called Roy Rogers)—become fast friends. The action of the novel is split between the Morgan family's adjustment to the separation and Uncle Louie's progressively more severe arthritis, and the increasingly apparent abuse of the Walling family by Mr. Walling. It is that abuse that finally propels Mrs. Walling to flee with her daughters, leaving Earl at the scant mercy of his father and uncle. Sharp characterization sparkles cleanly through Oughton's novel, from Uncle Louie to Grandmorgan to the neighbor who hasn't left her house since her son went away to war, but as the prologue and epilogue make clear, this is an adult narrator's memory of her youth, and an adult voice informs and shapes the narrative. Shanta's
mature sensibilities are colored by the advantage of hindsight, and they have the bittersweet tone of a time treasured and lost. JMD

Parks, Rosa  *I Am Rosa Parks*; by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins; illus. by Wil Clay. Dial, 1997  [48p]  (Dial Easy-to-Read)  
Library ed. ISBN 0-8037-1207-3  $12.89  
Reviewed from galleys Ad  Gr. 1-3  
Divided into four chapters, this easy-to-read autobiography opens with a simple explanation of segregation, concretely illustrated by Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on the bus. Flashbacks give the outline of Mrs. Parks' upbringing, marriage, and subsequent involvement in the civil rights movement, culminating in an account of the bus boycott that is often seen as the start of the civil rights movement in the United States, about which Parks says, "I know that many people started the civil rights movement. And many people worked very hard to win the rights that black people have today. But I am glad that I did my part." Awkward drafting of the human figures and uninspired compositions mar the watercolor illustrations, and Parks' inspiring story is ill-served by a choppy text. Still, this will give beginning readers easy access to an integral piece of American history, written by a living witness with outstanding credibility. JMD

Petersen, P. J.  *White Water*. Simon, 1997  [112p]  
ISBN 0-689-80664-7  $15.00  
Reviewed from galleys R  Gr. 4-6  
Greg is a timid urbanite, more interested in rock concerts than rock climbing, but his father wants him to be more adventurous. This means a vacation of whitewater rafting with Dad and James, Greg's young half-brother; it also turns out to mean terror and daring when a rattlesnake bites the boys' father and they have to struggle downstream unaided carrying the dangerously ill invalid. This has the classic, if predictable, trajectory of a survival story, where the unlikely hero meets the challenge of physical danger. The whitewater scenes here are excitingly depicted, and Greg's travails suspenseful. The particular advantage of Petersen's narrative is its accessibility to younger readers; even those kids not quite ready for *Hatchet* can enjoy the boy-against-nature thrills. DS

Pinkney, Brian  *The Adventures of Sparrowboy*; written and illus. by Brian Pinkney. Simon, 1997  40p  
ISBN 0-689-81071-7  $16.00  R*  5-8 yrs  
Before he does his route, Henry the paperboy always reads the paper, first the headlines and then the comics. The headlines are depressing but the comics alleviate their impact, especially Falconman, a motorcycle policeman who trades powers with a falcon to become a superhero "sworn to defend the defenseless." Henry's encounter with a sparrow (à la Falconman) causes him to become Sparrowboy, local paperboy hero, who saves a cat from a bully, saves a pair of twins from the bully's mean dog, and saves the sparrow from the cat, making Thurber Street a safer place: "All was quiet along Thurber Street as Henty rode home. Trouble was nowhere to be seen. And everything felt just a little better." The illustrations are vintage Brian Pinkney, the scratchboard and gouache technique instantly recognizable, but a stronger, more vigorous line enlivens the solid compositions as Pinkney combines comic and picture-book design elements for a remarkably successful ef-
fect. Traditional double-page spreads are interspersed with comic-strip frames and text boxes as Henry takes control of his own little piece of the world. This likable picture-book fantasy addresses a common anxiety, and it gives the solution with the imaginative empowerment of an African-American child hero. JMD

PRYOR, BONNIE Toenails, Tonsils, and Tornadoes; illus. by Helen Cogancherry. Morrow, 1997 166p ISBN 0-688-14885-9 $15.00 Ad Gr. 3-6

Martin is a fourth-grade middle child who feels out of place in his family of over-achievers: mom’s the mayor, dad’s a doctor, big brother’s a star athlete, big sister’s a brain, and little brother’s terminally cute. In addition to all that, he’s been ousted from his room by his eccentric great aunt, Henrietta, who’s settled in to train for the Boston Marathon (even with a bruised toenail, hence one of the titular elements) and shows no signs of ever leaving. And thank goodness for that, since it’s Henrietta who links what is essentially a series of unrelated vignettes, giving some semblance of plot to the story. This one’s got sequel written all over it (check Martin’s earlier appearances in Vinegar Pancakes and Vanishing Cream, etc.), which isn’t necessarily terminal: Martin is likable enough, and you’ve got to feel for a boy who has to play the role of Becky Thatcher in a musical about Tom Sawyer (don’t ask), loses his tonsils, has one too many girlfriends, and endures a family reunion, but his sudden transformation into a town hero (saving Henrietta from a tornado) seems like overkill. Pryor does clearly make her point—most folks are pretty durn nice if you just give ‘em a chance. Cogancherry’s pencil drawings, liberally scattered throughout, are affectionately rendered and help brace up the comedic tone. SSV


Connie, a thirteen-year-old from Queens, elects to spend some quality time with her great-aunt Cornelia, a Manhattan grande dame. The plot situations recall the movie hijinks of madcap heiresses as Connie gets a close-up look at the foibles of the rich and urban, meets the girl genius next door, and finds out the truth behind a deep dark family secret. The conversation is lively if occasionally arch, and characters are amusing if shallowly drawn (the most interesting is Connie’s older sister Eleanor, who apparently believes everything she hears from talk-show psychics on Cassandra Live!). Connie-as-narrator has a patient, long-suffering sort of voice as she tries to reconcile her two worlds—the doggedly middle-class Queens community she lives in, and the glamorous, nifty cultural world of Great-Aunt Cornelia. Readers will want to know more about Connie (and Eleanor), and next time it would be okay if they never made it downtown. JMD


When Ann is called to dinner, she’s not the only one who’s hungry: her unfin-
ished drawing features a cat, Merl, and dog, Jasper, sitting with uplifted forks at a dining table, waiting for their supper. Even though they are merely outlined figures, the two come to life when a breeze blows them off the page; true to their nature, the cat and dog begin to search for food. Luckily for them, Ann has left several open books on the floor, and the critters leap from the pages of one familiar fairy tale to another looking for a handout. An original conceit, to be sure, and the cognoscenti will delight in anticipating the proper meal (such as porridge in the bears’ cottage and a pie filled with blackbirds on the king’s table) in the proper story. The cat is the brains of the duo; realizing that their food must be created, she picks up a pencil and does just that—on the pages of their own story. Ann is none the wiser upon her return (the feast having been inhaled) and promptly adds to the drawing an enormous pie for dessert. The final picture shows the pie cut, with Merl and Jasper hunkering down to their slices. Rankin’s strong black line drawings contrast effectively with the softer pastel-hued backgrounds; the white space within their outlines hold up against the richness of the color. These unruly characters bring a winning anarchy to Fairytaleville.

Reeder, Carolyn. *Across the Lines.* Atheneum, 1997 [224p]  
ISBN 00-689-81133-0  $16.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

No sooner do the Yankees land near Edward’s Virginia plantation home than Simon, a family house slave and Edward’s constant companion, claims his freedom by joining the Union side as a “contraband” camp follower. Accepting any menial work that comes his way, Simon rudely awakens to the fact that the Yankees who supposedly espouse his freedom are often outright bigots (“It struck him that Negroes who had been valuable property to their masters might be worth nothing at all to a northern general”). Meanwhile Edward, his mother, and two siblings flee to relatives in Petersburg, which quickly comes under siege by the Yankees, and Edward’s disgust with his older brother Duncan’s virulent militarism leads him to welcome Southern defeat, if that defeat secures peace. Ultimately the two boys function more as observers than participants in the epic events swirling around them, and their mutual regret at parting, though often reiterated, is contrived and thinly sustained. Camp scenes and battle plans may appeal to middle-grade military tacticians, however, and Civil War buffs reading their way across the many battlefields will want to add Petersburg to their list.

Reviewed from galleys  

What could be more appealing (to kids at least) than an illustrated history of the uniforms, equipment, food, weapons, and armor of soldiers from Roman times until World War II? Decked out in period uniforms, modern men (yes, men, since the book includes only male soldiers) pose for the large, sharp color photos, which clearly show the equipment at their disposal. The book is a U.S./British collaboration, concentrating on western Europe and North America. The design of the pages is visually appealing, with a crisp and uncluttered look that makes picking out the details enjoyable. Author Robertshaw is a military historian who draws his subjects from various reenactment groups on both sides of the Atlantic. Helpful appendices include a timeline (509 B.C. to 1945), glossary of military terms,
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INDEX, and a list of American battlefields to visit. This is a bang-up job on an
eternally enticing topic. SSV


These simple, effective board books are warmly colored, solidly made and, even with their minimal text, strongly plotted. In Ollie All Over our anthropomorphized puppy hero Ollie “was hiding. His mother wasn’t finding him, so he hid some more.” Discerning toddlers will chuckle as Ollie hides “behind a chair/ in front of the curtains/ up on a shelf/ down the stairs” and “ON his mother’s lap/ where he was finally found!” In Only One Ollie the young pup is suffering from a perennial dilemma—everyone is just too busy to play with him. “So he decided to count. He counted two blue sofas/ three round carpets/ four large steps” etc., until he reaches his “ten brothers and sisters, who now had time to play with only ONE Ollie.” Roche’s simple text rolls right along in both titles, through Ollie’s cozy house where his bespectacled mother absentmindedly wanders past her son’s hiding places and through the very simple counting concepts illustrated by a bustling bunch of siblings doing household chores. The compositions are uncluttered and the palette is bright without being garish. These do what board books are supposed to do—they introduce concepts easily and with toddler-appealing style. JMD


Young Eli leaves George, his stuffed elephant, in the woods after a picnic with his magician uncle, Dawn. Eli frets about George and, in a fantastical turn of events, wafts gently out his bedroom window on blue shade to retrieve him—only to meet up with his magical uncle (now a bear) engaged in the same errand. The evening ends with George safely home and everyone enjoying a midnight snack in Eli’s room. This is a simple story with some appealing elements—the lost stuffed animal, a magician uncle who pulls flowers out of sugar bowls, a dreamlike flight through a nighttime sky—illustrated in full-page spreads and smaller visual vignettes in an appropriately subdued palette. Gaber’s watercolor, acrylic, and colored pencil compositions vary in their effectiveness, and the facial expressions are sometimes jarringly cartoonish, but kids will warm to the uncle hanging out the attic window, the little boy worriedly gazing into the darkness from his front porch, and the large but gentle bear-uncle looming over young Eli in the nighttime woods. Though Rosenberg overcrowds this simple tale with the inclusion of too many subplots (why does Uncle Dawn live in the attic? Why doesn’t Eli’s father appreciate Uncle Dawn? And who named him Dawn, anyway?), listeners probably won’t care. It’s enough that Eli lost George and found him again, and nighttime snacks of banana and peanut butter sandwiches are bound to put visions of midnight picnics into sleepy little heads. JMD


It’s senior year, and Ben’s not so sure he wants his planned career as a garage mechanic in his small Pennsylvania town. His dreams lie with his gifted Appaloosa
stallion, Galaxy, whom he has trained from a foal, and on whom he would like to compete. The private girls’ school next door brings Ben’s family revenue from boarded horses, and it also brings Lara, a troubled adoptee who is drawn to Ben but afraid to reveal her secrets to him. As Ben’s dream moves tantalizingly closer, Lara’s fears increase, threatening to destroy them both. There is way too much going on here, with a passel of subplots on both Ben’s and Lara’s side, so that the drama of each individual event is lost in the crowd. The components also slip into cliché (the unfettered bond between boy and horse, the angry adoptee, the small-town limitations), and the over-romanticized writing exacerbates the problem as well as making the pace plodding rather than collected. The ultimate effect is to render the reader indifferent to the lengthily depicted storms of emotion. Savage’s To Race a Dream (BCCB 11/94) was a better horse book; for a better one still, hit the old classics by Patsey Gray and Dorothy Lyons. DS


The chronology of Gandhi’s life—his childhood, his education in England, his awakening to his life’s mission—is juxtaposed against the historical crises of his day, including apartheid in South Africa, British colonialism in India, and religious conflict between the Hindus and Muslims of his homeland. Severance spends a substantial portion of this biography tracing the development of Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence, or satyagraha, his insistence that the untouchables of India’s caste system be included in the free India, and his unswerving belief that right would prevail over might. The book does not deny the man in favor of the saint: Gandhi’s schism with his sons and his disagreements with his wife are not ignored, although the outcomes are sometimes unclear. Did Gandhi ever reconcile with his sons? Why did he refuse to allow his wife to be treated with penicillin when she had pneumonia, possibly hastening her subsequent death? Although the text refers often to Gandhi’s beloved status among the people of India, it never quite makes the emotional connection between the man and his followers. However, the life of Mahatma Gandhi, entwined as it was with the emergence of India from British colonialism, is a complex one, and Severance does a credible job in making it accessible against the background of Gandhi’s time, culture, and religious beliefs. The physical layout is an attractive one, with black-and-white photographs on nearly every double-page spread breaking up widely leaded text blocks. A map, pronunciation guide, bibliography and index are included. JMD

SHARRATT, NICK Ketchup on Your Cornflakes?: A Wacky Mix & Match Book; written and illus. by Nick Sharratt. Scholastic, 1997 24p ISBN 0-590-93106-7 $10.95 R 2-8 yrs

Yes, horizontally split pages are a gimmick, but they can result in some wonderfully amusing projects. The opening spread here asks on the left, “Do you like ketchup on your cornflakes?” and on the right shows a tilted bottle of the red stuff ready to drip onto a bowl of cereal. Flipping through the Dutch-door pages, however, allows one to replace “Do you like ketchup” with “Do you like toothpaste,” “Do you like a wool hat,” “Do you like a teddy bear” and other incongruous substances, while “on your cornflakes” can become “on your apple pie,” “on your head,” “in your bathtub,” and a variety of other locations. This resembles
Margaret Miller's *Where Does It Go?* (BCCB 10/92) with all the added fun of doing it yourself. What's particularly nicely crafted about this book is the combination of absurdity and simple puzzle-solving; yes, it's a giggle to talk about ice cream on somebody's head, but oh, how satisfying it is to find that wool hat. The drawings are simple and declarative in bold and contrasting colors; the rainbow of background hues allows the "right" answers confirmation through color-coding, since the orange top goes with the orange bottom (the first and last spread of necessity both employ pink, but the ketchup will still find its way to the french fries). The spiral binding makes opening and flipping around easier, and the tough glossy card-stock pages should withstand being used as handles and perhaps even some more aggressive attempts at separation. Useful as toy, game, and concept book, this seems likely to provoke endless giggles and riffs on the theme. DS

**Singer, Marilyn** *Deal with a Ghost.* Holt, 1997 [192p]
ISBN 0-8050-4797-2 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10
Sent to live with her grandmother after her mother deserts her for a new boyfriend, Deal (short for Delia) has a firm policy of maintaining her emotional distance from those around her. But things aren't working out exactly as planned: her grandmother, though frosty, is clear-eyed and attentive; and Laurie, her (male) partner in a glee club duet, has an unusual talent for bypassing her defenses and getting uncomfortably close. This doesn't stop Deal from playing "the game": an expert flirt (a skill she apparently learned from her man-crazy mother), she snags golden boy Mark from his golden girlfriend Tina, almost without effort or desire. Her romantic shenanigans disturb the ghost of Marie, a teenage girl killed forty years ago in a car accident after her boyfriend was snagged by (are you ready?) Deal's grandmother and namesake, now revealed as a high-school vamp. The
ending is straight out of a fifties' teen-angel ballad: Mark has a motorcycle accident, golden girl Tina confronts Deal in the hospital cafeteria, Mark recovers, and Deal decides that she wants to be a good girl after all: "Providence or heredity? Curse or coincidence? What was this game played out generation after generation? . . . Whatever it is, it ends now, with me. I can change. I have changed.” Too neat? Undoubtedly. But gripping nonetheless, as the ghost of Marie Scarpetti manifests in the school music room moaning, “Delia, oh, Delia . . . the heart . . . I want the heart . . .” Brrrr. JMD

SOLA, MICHÉLE  Angela Weaves a Dream: The Story of a Young Maya Artist; illus. with photographs by Jeffrey Jay Foxx. Hyperion, 1997 [48p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7868-0073-9 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

This photoessay presents a fictionalized account of a young girl from the village of San Andrés in Chiapas, Mexico, who enters a contest for novice weavers. Only after months of initiation into the folklore of weaving, preparation of yarns and loom, memorization of the seven village patterns, and practice under the exacting supervision of her abuela can Angela actually begin to exercise her skills. Solá stresses the sacred nature of the craft, which blends ancient Mayan and Catholic religious traditions: Abuelita tells Angela several of the myths associated with patterns; boxed inserts guide viewers to interpret the sacred symbols within the patterns; Angela prays beneath the statue of Santa Rosario, her village’s weavers’ saint, and finally hangs her winning entry on the saint’s huipil. This over-ambitious mélange of fiction and explication, however, is erratically organized (e.g., weaving is begun before the reader is shown how the loom is threaded), and photos are often out of sync with the text (the yarn dyeing process is shown two pages before it is explained). Glossary, maps, and notes, combined with the substantial text, will offer patient readers a thorough introduction to this contemporary Mayan art.

EB

SPRINGER, NANCY  Secret Star. Philomel, 1997 138p
ISBN 0-399-23028-9 $15.95

Tess Mathis is a musically gifted fourteen-year-old who lives in grinding poverty with her disabled stepfather. She can’t remember anything about her life before she was ten years old, and it doesn’t bother her much, until the appearance of Kamo Rojahin, a scarred, one-eyed stranger who insists he’s her half-brother. Kamo (who is searching for the man he believes to be his and Tess’ biological father) motivates Tess into examining her recurrent nightmares for clues to the traumatic incident that robbed her of her memory. Confronted by a gun-wielding co-worker (who tried to force himself upon her sexually, but that’s another plot thread), Tess is jarred into remembrance: her stepfather shot her biological father, was then shot by his wife, her biological mother, who then shot herself, all of which Tess witnessed. When she reveals this to Kamo, he regretfully acknowledges that he is not her half brother; when she confronts her crippled-since-the-shootings stepfather, he claims self-defense and she forgives him. Then she discovers that Kamo is the current media rock-and-roll darling “secret star,” and she decides to be a drummer in his band when she grows up. The multitudinous plot lines have all the elements of a daytime soap opera, and about as much logical continuity. This chronology
THE BULLETIN of events may constitute a booktalk dream come true, but it’s still not enough to overcome the deep purple prose and the shallow movie-of-the-week characterizations. JMD

Stine, R. L. It Came from Ohio!: My Life as a Writer; as told to Joe Arthur. Parachute/Scholastic, 1997 140p illus. with photographs ISBN 0-590-36674-2 $9.95 R* Gr. 3-7

In this disarmingly amiable autobiography, Stine tells of his upbringing near Columbus and his high-school and college creative projects, writerly and otherwise. Then he chronicles his colorful professional career, ranging from teaching (“I emphasized the comic books because I loved comic books and I thought maybe some of my students did too. Besides, they might have a few titles I hadn’t read”) to writing for a magazine (“My job was to write article after article about soft drinks, soda cans, syrups, and the people who made them”) until finally he happens on books and the motherlode of Goosebumps. This isn’t the most sophisticated writing in the world, but the straightforward language and multitude of exclamation points keep things appealingly colloquial, while the plethora of pictures (including bits and pieces of Stine’s early work) make the enterprise into a goofy gallery. Stine is a gleeful raconteur, sophomoric in the best sense of the word; the strong impression here is that his success comes from sharing his audience’s tastes. The end result is almost irresistibly collusive, including the audience in the fun and presenting writing as an attainable goal. R. L. Stine’s “Top Twenty Most-Asked Questions” are answered in an appendix. DS


Tucker’s last volume of verse treated pirates (BCCB 10/94), and now she turns her attention to the riders of the range. Fourteen spreads with a stanza apiece lightly answer various questions about cowboys: where do they live? What do they wear? How do they talk? The poems don’t match the zing of those in the previous book; the constant shifting between anapests and iambs makes the rhythms confusing, and the concepts aren’t as whimsically imagined. Westcott’s effervescent watercolors depict flashily clad cowpokes astride big balloony horses while tending oversized and good humored cattle. This doesn’t quite have the music of the jingle of spurs, but young buckaroos may still want to mosey through. DS


Neither the luridly hued cover art nor the misleading subtitle prepare readers for these twenty-one insightful poems, which capture the dreams and experiences of a trio of siblings journeying West by covered wagon. In the opening entry, “Leaving,” eldest daughter Amanda catalogs her hopes for their new home, especially “land where I could run and shout/ with no one to tell me/ I was not a lady.” “Town” describes her disappointment upon passing through a shabby prairie burg: “It’s gone already, like a peppermint sliver/ swallowed up whole. . . . What if after all this way/ what we come to is less/ than what we left behind?” Brothers Caleb
and Lonnie have quite different concerns. In "Jake," Caleb tells of the death of a stray dog they picked up along the way ("Pa says it's no use mourning a dog, but he don't sleep regular, now Jake is gone") and Lonnie chronicles the coming of their baby sister in "Columbia" ("They never tell you, not the important things, but I'd been watching Ma's aprons, how they got higher and higher. I knew what was growing underneath"). Blake's double-page paintings—stiff, literal interpretations of Turner's poems—detract from the delicacy of the text. Fortunately, the poems will see their best service as readalouds, rendering the artwork expendable. EB

**VanOosting, James**  *The Last Payback.* HarperCollins, 1997  [144p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027491-3  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-7

Sixth-grader Dimple Dorfman and her twin, Dale, were inseparable, until one night at the home of Dale's friend (and Dimple's prospective fiancée) Ronnie Delaney the boys' playing with a gun leaves Dale dead. Dimple's parents are devastated, but she is almost entirely angry: angry that no one will tell her what's going on, angry at the way outsiders are making this into their event, and most of all angry at Ronnie Delaney—and she's planning vengeance. There's a straightforwardness to Dimple's narration that is both realistic and heartbreaking, and VanOosting is unerring in his depiction of community and familial responses to death. The final dramatic resolution and realization (Dimple discovers the shooting was Dale's own fault) is a little set up, but the characters are telling and true throughout. Unsentimental but deeply felt, this is a well-wrought account of a strong girl going through a very tough time. DS

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-14479-9  $16.00  R*  5-8 yrs
See this month's Big Picture, p. 347, for review.

**Weitzman, David**  *Old Ironsides: Americans Build a Fighting Ship*; written and illus. by David Weitzman. Houghton, 1997  32p
ISBN 0-395-74678-7  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 4-7

Weitzman begins with a concise, lucid explanation of how piracy against our young republic impelled Washington to commission the first U.S. naval vessel, and he ends with a rousing epilogue recounting the *Constitution's* first battle. It is the lengthy description of the ship's construction, as witnessed by young John Aylwin, the son of a ship carpenter, which comprises the bulk of this title. A densely detailed text covers model making, design transfer, wood selection, copper sheathing, cannon forging, and sundry aspects of rigging and arming the frigate. Readers are broadsided with the jargons of naval engineer, carpenter, smithy, sailor, and gunner, most of which go un- or under-defined; those interested in a casual flip through a picture-book presentation may quickly find themselves at sea. Acknowledgments indicate that the John Humphreys mentioned in the text was indeed the ship's designer, but whether Aylwin or construction chief George Claghorne are historical figures is never addressed. Handsome line drawings in ample, creamy
space invite close, leisurely examination; the ship's elevation is copiously labeled fore to aft on the front endpapers, while back endpapers reproduce the same elevation, relabeled in alphabetical order. EB


This year (1943) June's cousin Lillie is making her annual summer visit to Texas in time for the Juneteenth picnic and celebration, which commemorates the day on which Texas slaves finally learned they had been freed. Lillie, a New Yorker, regards her rural relatives with ill-concealed disdain and, spying a "whites only" water fountain, she taunts, "Living in the South makes you like a slave, June. A dumb old slave." Aunt Marshall, herself an ex-slave, describes for the girls the joy of being reunited with her sister on the first Juneteenth, but acknowledges Lillie's criticism of Southern-style segregation: "We're as free as I'll be in this lifetime. Free as I'll be before I die. But not as free as you'll be someday." The lengthy text yields scant plot, as the little girls sulk, Aunt Marshall holds forth, and Lillie precipitously decides that Juneteenth is a pretty good holiday after all. Nor does Wesley give readers any indication that 1943 New York wasn't the mecca of racial harmony Lillie implies to her cousin. Wilson's grainy pastels, however, conjure the festivities of a summer long past and make this a visually attractive, serviceable introduction to a lesser-known holiday. EB


"This sounds like nonsense to me. After walking all day, I long to hear a sensible voice..." Young readers and/or listeners may identify deeply with this statement by Tottem Perhaps, a strange horned cloth-doll that gets lost in a cornfield on the way to his cousin Bottom's 100th birthday celebration in Minneapolis. A magic moving mailbox transfers Tottem's confused messages onto postcards that are sent from oddly named towns all over the U.S. (Dime Box, TX; Bird-in-Hand, PA; Peculiar, MO; Chicken, AK; etc.), duly processed with appropriate stamps. Facing the postcards are full-page color photographs of objects surreally posed against painted or realistic backdrops. Some of these pictures are amusing—a napkin-wrapped crab claw poised to steal a bite of meringue pie, for instance, reflects Truth or Consequences, NM—and some are sinister, such as the two raging wooden horses "following a little girl who was whistling 'Yankee Doodle'" (Hungry Horse, MT). Overall, though, text and art appear to be a random meandering of imaginative free associations that finally wind down when a Baroque angel buying canned goods for the poor (Shopville, KY) promises to carry weary Tottem to the border of the cornfield. The message, according to some happy children playing near his exit point, seems to be that "you could have left the cornfield a long time ago if you hadn't believed in magic." And so he should've, because the last scene shows him sadly ensconced with Bottom in snowbound lawn furniture, several months too late to "enjoy the garden" to which his cousin has invited him for angel meringue pie, and there's not a bite in sight. Perhaps the
crab claw ate it all? A disappointing trip for one who guided us to the stars in *A Visit to William Blake's Inn* (BCCB 12/81). BH

**WILLIS, NANCY CAROL**  *The Robins in Your Backyard*; written and illus. by Nancy Carol Willis. Access/Cucumber Island Storytellers, 1997 32p ISBN 1-887813-21-7 $15.95  R Gr. 2-4

From the arrival of robins in your backyard in March to their departure for warmer climates come the following autumn, Willis gives readers a close-up look at exactly what's going on in those nearby but hidden nests. The robins claim their territory, mate, build a nest, and lay the eggs; they defend the eggs from predators, care for the hatchlings when they emerge, and teach the fledglings what they need to know to survive. While the humans (only appearing in the first and last spreads) are somewhat stiff and awkwardly drawn, the bright-eyed robins are intriguingly personable. Willis' full-color illustrations fill the single and double-page spreads with compositions designed to appeal to individual readers or groups, including a close-up look at the embryonic robin, the featherless hatchlings, and the rapidly growing nestlings. The text is straightforward and simple, downplaying anthropomorphism in favor of a more naturalistic approach to the robin's life cycle. Willis includes such kid-pleasing details about the young birds as "If you grew at the same rate, you would weigh 90 pounds by the time you were ten days old!" and "The young robins stretch their necks, clamoring for food. Each can eat fourteen feet of earthworms in one day." A section on "How to help a baby songbird," a glossary, and a timeline are included. JMD

**YUE, CHARLOTTE**  *Shoes: Their History in Words and Pictures*; written and illus. by Charlotte and David Yue. Houghton, 1997 92p ISBN 0-395-72667-0 $14.95  Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 4-8

Following hot on the heels of Laurie Lawlor's *Where Will This Shoe Take You?* (BCCB 1/97) is this take on the fashions and foibles of footwear. The Yues tread some of the same ground, but trim their categories of foot coverings to three (sandal, shoe, boot), add prefatory material on the anatomy and the physiology of feet and their relation to shoe design, and devote more attention to the actual manufacture of shoes. Illustrated with black-and-white drawings rather than photos, this entry less successfully conveys the relation of footwear to the complete contemporary costume with which it was worn. Still, the modest sketches of towering chopines, long-toed poulaines, and lace-trimmed cavalier boots more than adequately illustrate "what foolish things humans are willing to do for fashion and beauty." EB

Based on an exhibition mounted at the Chrysler Museum of Art, “this undertaking explores the art of illustration in a broader and more meaningful art-historical and sociological context.” It’s certainly a more visual one than many books afford: the pages are thick with color reproductions large and small as well as the more usual black and white. The text is an inviting combination of historical overview, technical description, and chatty account (including a few bits of racy adult gossip). It doesn’t approach Barbara Bader’s *American Picturebooks: From Noah’s Ark to the Beast Within* for scholarly depth, and the thematic divisions between the chapters aren’t entirely clear, but the currency and the plethora of visual examples keep things both fresh and informative. Michael Patrick Hearn contributes an introductory chapter; endnotes and a detailed catalog of the illustrations are included. DS


This collection features fifteen picture books from sixteen different countries (a few joint efforts, a few overlaps) combined into one oversized volume; there is brief commentary for each title, as well as an introduction by Jeffrey Garrett and an explanatory afterword by the editors. The stories within may well appeal to children, but the coffee-table size and compendium flavor of the volume direct it more towards adults, who are less likely to mind the books-within-a-book appearance of the framed and multipaneled pages (text translations are included alongside wherever necessary). The commentary is more promotional than analytical but does include valuable information on significant writers and illustrators who may be unknown to many American readers and professionals. Ultimately, however, what’s important here are the books, titles that have been feted in their country of origin but overlooked, if released at all, in the U.S. They don’t all epitomize the American idea of a picture book, but their difference is as educational as their appeal. DS
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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