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Mao, she was secure in her place as one of the foremost students in a Shanghai school. Then in 1966, when Ji-Li was twelve, her world turned upside down. Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution and suddenly everything formerly good was bad.

[With its] chronicle of humiliations, beatings, and relocations . . . Jiang’s engrossing memoir transcends politics and becomes the story of one little girl trying to survive.”—Booklist

“Jiang paints a detailed picture of everyday life in Shanghai while slowly adding the dark strokes of political poison that begin to invade it.”—Publishers Weekly

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You can't accuse Jack Prelutsky of resting on his laurels. This wide-ranging collection differs substantially from his sturdy and chantable anthologies, his high-spirited collections of his own verse, or even his focused partnerships with Peter Sís depicting creatures mythical and haunting. The poetry here is more musing and thoughtful than in those other compilations, with verse forms ranging from free verse to haiku to various metered rhymes. There's a diverse group of poets as well, with John Gay, Ted Hughes, and Yvor Winters rubbing shoulders with Jane Yolen, Valerie Worth, and Jonathan London (not to mention Prelutsky himself); selections are generally fresh and unanthologized, with a few more familiar entries (William Carlos Williams' feline "Poem," for example) balancing things out. Prelutsky's own original haikus introduce each of the five sections, which focus, respectively, on insects, fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals (the leaving of mammals to the last, which could be viewed as either humble or contrary, is refreshing). Tone and vocabulary also vary considerably; some poems are lighthearted, some intense, some lyrical, some plainspoken; there are some entries accessible to most readers immediately and some where the pleasure of sound may well precede a youthful understanding of sense. The book shines with the wonderful generosity of excess, containing a richness that has the patience to be savored slowly over several browsings and readings.

This collection would be at least enticing no matter what the setting, but the visuals here enhance the words' poetry with their own. So's watercolors bring an unusual rootedness to the medium: inky dark-edged billows of pigment contrast with rough print-like impressions and dry-brush scratchings, stippling here balances a sweeping curve there. Some of her animal figures evince an impressionistic, intensely colored speed reminiscent of early Brian Wildsmith, while other scenes offer a lightness and fluidity resembling the art of Lisbeth Zwerger. Choosing a picture for our cover proved to be a delightfully difficult task: was it going to be the velvety octopus floating through the dappled aqua deeps, or perhaps the pink-tongued tiger who dips his sketched paws in the edge of the pond as he drinks? What about the dun mare, whose arched neck and delicate, stiffly brushed mane are reminiscent of Japanese watercolors? Is there any way to use the spread depicting lines of geese soaring past the sunset, their wings at precisely individual angles? Can we live without the wonderful roundness of the rabbit amid the lacy grass and scarlet poppies? (In the end, as you doubtless gather, the answer to the last question was no.)
It's not just that the pictures are beautiful, it's also that the book is beautifully designed. The roomy picture-book-sized pages creatively interweave art and text on snowy-white backgrounds, with a multitude of critters per page. Bats swoop across the spread in smoky gray shadows as text appears in a beam of white light. The "Giraffes" poem descends between the lengthy necks of a pair of said animals. Schools of iridescent fish swim through the briny verses and circle the section title. The endpapers offer "what is this?" closeups of butterfly wings, leopard spots, shimmering fish scales, and tightly packed feathers. Even the cover under the book jacket is filled with the creatures of air, water, and land, offering rows of tiny thumbnail images of the beasts within. The overall feeling is that of a world bursting with poetry and creatures, the inhabitants of a literarily inclined ark streaming out of confinement.

The result is a dramatic, playful, and eminently browsable volume that makes the animal kingdom seem a royal one indeed. A worthy successor to William Cole's classic anthologies, *I Went to the Animal Fair* (BCCB 1/59) and *The Birds and the Beasts Were There* (3/64), this can be read aloud to just about any age, who can then be left with the book to hunt down—in poetry, that is—their favorite animal, and who will doubtless find themselves reconsidering their dismissal of others. An index of authors and titles is included. (Imprint information appears on p. 176.)

*Deborah Stevenson, Assistant Editor*

**NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**


Taken from Aardema's book *The Sky God Stories*, this tongue-in-cheek rendition of how stories came to belong to all humanity is given a fresh new look by Lisa Desimini's mixed-media illustrations. This retelling is both similar to and different from Haley's *A Story, A Story* (BCCB 12/70)—similar in that Anansi wins the tales from the Sky God, but different in that it is Anansi's clever wife, Aso, who engineers the feat. Desimini's collages are unusually involving, their apparent simplicity giving way to compositional richness on second and third looks, as Anansi (shown as a black spider in a kente-cloth vest) captures a python, a fairy, and forty-seven stinging hornets as payment for the stories. Desimini's media choices (oil glazing, cut paper, and black velvet paper, to name a few) are visually intriguing and give the illustrations a feeling of depth and density, from the image of the Sky God, a dark blue mass of sky with cloudy eyebrows, to the green textured paper foliage, to the changing colors of the backgrounds. The text is a bit old-fashioned and stiff, but Aardema's usual sound effects are here, and they add a participatory note that harmonizes well with the playfulness of Desimini's visuals. A glossary and source note are included. JMD
ADLER, DAVID A.  *Hiding from the Nazis*; illus. by Karen Ritz. Holiday House, 1997  32p
ISBN 0-8234-1288-1  $15.95  R  6-8 yrs

This picture-book biography focuses not on a famous subject, but on an "ordinary" German Jewish family driven first to the Netherlands and then into hiding because of Nazi persecution. Four-year-old Lore Baer watches her grandfather led away, never to be seen again, before she is sent to stay with a Christian family throughout the war years. The account realistically acknowledges the trouble Lore had in rejoining her parents, whom she believed had "given her away" because she had done something wrong. There's also a carefully developed description of the background situation so that listeners can get a clear picture of the public turmoil affecting private individuals. The appropriately subdued watercolor art is capable; the characters are expressive in feature, if sometimes awkwardly drawn or studied in pose. Adler's narrative style involves short, simple sentences and a documentary tone, complete with a concluding historical note. This would be an emotionally intense nonfiction companion to a reading of Oppenheim's *The Lily Cupboard* (BCCB 3/92). BH

ALTMAN, LINDA JACOB

*Forever Outsiders: Jews and History from Ancient Times to August 1935.*

See review under Holocaust, p. 162.

AYER, ELEANOR H.

*A Firestorm Unleashed: January 1942 to June 1943.*

_____.  *From the Ashes: May 1945 and After*; by Eleanor H. Ayer and Stephen D. Chicoine.

_____.  *Inferno: July 1943 to April 1945.*

See review under Holocaust, p. 162.

BAUER, MARION DANE

*If You Were Born a Kitten*; illus. by JoEllen McAllister Stammen. Simon, 1997  32p
ISBN 0-689-80111-4  $16.00  Ad  2-4 yrs

Eleven baby animals and a human baby are the subjects of this large and strikingly illustrated book for preschoolers. Repeating the phrase "If you were . . . ," the author presents each baby almost immediately after its birth—for example, "If you were born a kitten, you'd slip into the world in a silvery sac, and your mother would lick, lick, lick you free." The problem for observant lapsitters will be that there is no silvery sac to be seen in the illustration. This inconsistency plagues other double-page spreads as well: the opossum babies who supposedly would "fit into a teaspoon" are shown big enough to fit into a large soup ladle (or a small shovel); kids won't be able to find the teeth on the snouts of the baby snakes; and where is the "halo of long, brown hair" on the "brand new elephant"? This is not to say that the pictures are not extremely appealing—they are. You'll want to reach out and pet the "porcupette," and stroke that deer mouse's furry torso, because Stammen has done a fine job using the big format of the book to highlight the touchable details of many of the animals. While the reader winces, the little ones will enjoy the simple text, love the babies, and probably forgive the disparities with total aplomb. PM
As children, the Brontë siblings engaged with great seriousness in imaginative play, creating fictional worlds and writing about them extensively. Writing from the point of view of young Charlotte, Bedard describes life at the Haworth parsonage and the exploration of the children's fantasy world of Glass Town. The book is particularly good at conveying the intensity of the children's secret lives, and the suggestion that this intensity was poured out in writing in the Brontës' childhood and adulthood is subtle but clear. There's little here to absorb young readers unaware of the Brontës' adult achievements, however, and the prose's romantic phraseology sometimes becomes overly purple ("She is a child of the moors, a friend of all things wild and free. She feeds on cloud and drinks the wind"). Color paintings of the imagined worlds have an old-fashioned dramatic power to them, but the portraits of the children themselves make them look inappropriately modern, attractive, and tidy; pen-and-ink sketches, looking like white-line engraving, are more effective. This is more evocative than Ross' _Charlotte Bronte and Jane Eyre_, reviewed below, but it's not quite as well-done as Catherine Brighton's _The Brontës_ (BCCB 7/94). Kids hooked by the Ross biography and not yet ready for _Jane Eyre_, however, may find this an intriguing next step. DS

BERGER, BARBARA HELEN  _A Lot of Otters_; written and illus. by Barbara Helen Berger. Philomel, 1997  32p  
ISBN 0-399-22910-8  $16.95  Ad  3-6 yrs  
As her pajama-clad child drifts in a box on the sea reading a bedtime story, Mother Moon calls for her "moonlet." The little boy accidentally drops the red storybook into the water, where it is rescued by friendly otters. Mother Moon despaires, and "with every tear that fell from her eyes, a star fell into the sea." The otters dive for the stars, retrieve them, and then play with them. All this "commotion of light" gets the attention of Mother Moon who finally sees her child with the otters and gathers him into her arms for a cozy reunion. This is an affirmation of the bond between mother and child, but even fantasy requires a certain logic, and the connection between child, otters, and mother is tenuous at best. But although this is unapologetically sentimental and a bit confusing, taken at face value it is a sweet bedtime story full of adorable whiskey-faced otters, a rosy-cheeked moonlet boy, a star studded sea, and a beautiful Moon Mother illustrated in shimmery watercolors and pastels. Adult readers might look in vain for more reasonable causality, but young listeners may be perfectly happy with this moonlight sail. PM

BOND, NANCY  _The Love of Friends_. McElderry, 1997  296p  
ISBN 0-689-81365-1  $17.00  Ad  Gr. 7-10  
In this sequel to _A Place to Come Back To_ (BCCB 3/89, itself a sequel to _The Best of Enemies_, 9/78), sixteen-year-old Charlotte has traveled to England to visit her beloved friend, Oliver. Things are not as she expected, however, since Oliver's mother and stepfather have been called away suddenly (it becomes clear that they think Charlotte's visit has been postponed), and Oliver needs Charlotte's support to make a pilgrimage to Scotland in order to meet an old friend of his late great-uncle, who cared for Oliver and to whom he never had a chance to say a proper farewell. There's an effective amount of suspense in the story—readers will be curious first
as to why Oliver is being so peculiar, then if he and Charlotte will manage to make it to Scotland, and finally about what’s going to happen when the adults find out about it all. Charlotte’s emotions are sympathetically and believably portrayed as she tries to sort out her loyalties to her friend and her responsibility to both sets of parents. The book depends a great deal on the previous volume, however, and the references to and discussions of people from the earlier titles often distract from the plot. The inclusion of a plot thread about Ariadne, a girl Charlotte and Oliver meet along the way, involves too many coincidences, and Ariadne’s character is a bit purposively drawn. While it doesn’t ultimately stand on its own, the book treats with integrity the emotional dramas of the previous title, and those with an interest in the characters will want to see the new developments. DS

Brooks, Martha Bone Dance. Orchard, 1997 179p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-30021-8 $16.95
Ad Gr. 7-12

Alexandra (Alex) Sinclair’s father was a ne’er-do-well, so she is doubly shocked when he dies suddenly and leaves her an isolated cabin on a lake. Lonny LaFreniere loves his stepfather but could never explain to him why he is repelled by the land his stepfather reveres so highly, land sold to Alex’s father and now belonging to Alex. The two teenagers are drawn together by visions of the spirits of their American Indian ancestors, some recently dead, some long deceased. These manifestations are simply handled, with Alex recognizing the spiritual significance of the visits and Lonny reacting with fear, seeing the visits as vengeance for a long-past, unintentional desecration of a burial site. While Alex reconciles her psyche with her father’s deliberate absence from her life, Lonny reconciles his grief at his mother’s death, and the two young people find in each other their soulmates. Brooks tips into foggy romanticism and a nonspecific, somewhat generic spiritualism, but it isn’t often enough to get boggy, and it is offset by the concrete, unsentimental language that depicts the religious (and the carnal) yearnings of the story’s characters. The pacing is steady if sometimes stolid, but there is a strange lack of intensity as even disparate scenes maintain an odd tonal sameness. Still, Lonny and Alex are well-realized characters, and readers will enjoy watching them find each other. JMD

Bunting, Eve Ducky; illus. by David Wisniewski. Clarion, 1997 32p
ISBN 0-395-75185-3 $15.00
Ad 4-7 yrs

Based on an actual incident which occurred in 1992, the story chronicles the adventures of Ducky, one of 29,000 plastic bathtub toys shipwrecked during a storm. Sea snakes, sharks, bad weather, and loneliness plague Ducky until he is found by a boy on the coast of Washington state and happily ends up in the boy’s bathtub. As anyone who has ever been a kid knows, toys are real and they have feelings, so there can be no doubt that young listeners will relate to the pathetic plight of this yellow plastic duck (“Our ship has disappeared. The sea is big, big, big. Oh, I am scared!”). Bunting’s text ably captures the poignant feelings of the lost and found protagonist, even if it is only yellow plastic. Wisniewski’s obvious expertise with paper is somewhat overshadowed by a disunity in the color scheme where primary colors unfairly compete with a more subtle palette. The composition is often erratic: the icy blues and whites of one wintry spread showcase the illustrator’s craft, while other spreads seem either overdone or lackluster. Children will nevertheless
be delighted to learn that the story is factual (a concluding author’s note gives details, which may be necessary to understand parts of the story), and everyone should have a, uh, ducky time. PM


Children who share Carle’s fascination and respect for animal life will enjoy these quiet, intimate stories from his life in Germany and in the United States. Each family tale revolves around a creature—a bug, a bird, or a bear—that touched Carle’s imagination or sometimes his funnybone. Opa (Grandfather) treats his arthritic fingers with ant and bee stings, Carle has a painful encounter with a wasp caught in the seat of his pants, Carle and his wife watch as state troopers stand guard over slumbering bears that have become intoxicated on fermented apples. Each anecdote is accompanied by a paper-collage vignette or two, gracefully poised against the tall white pages of dense, cramped type. The stories, best savored one or two at a time rather than tackled en masse, could provide soothing readaloud fare for youngsters at bedtime or older listeners at the close of a hectic school day.


Each of these books by Canadian writer Chan contains five stories, and all the stories focus on kids at Elmwood High School, so that minor characters in one story become protagonists of another, and one narrator’s enemy is another one’s friend. Entries in *Golden Girl* tell of an outcast’s relief that there’s someone lower on the totem pole than he, a popularity queen’s play for an attractive student teacher, and the school bully’s community service time. *Glory Days* offers a look at a girl’s longed-for date gone viciously wrong, a cruel prank that makes a kind boy the butt of school-dance humiliation, and a boy’s determination that his beloved younger brother will survive their father’s unloved sports dreams better than he did. While the writing rarely lifts above the ordinary and the characterizations hold little surprise, the gradual interweaving of the cast members’ stories is highly effective. The result is a convincing demonstration of the fact that every individual, whether nerd or bully or hanger-on or hipster, has an inner life of highs and lows, certainties and uncertainties that may have little to do with the appearance he or she presents to others, and it may encourage readers to consider their own classmates more thoughtfully. As in the Naked City, there are a million stories in every high school; teens will appreciate this sampling of Elmwood’s.


Here’s a breezy, accessible crash course in the evolution of American jazz, from its origins in the melding of African and European traditions through its permutations of Dixieland, swing, bop, avant garde, and jazz-rock fusion. Although personal idiosyncrasies of some of the jazz greats pop up in discussion, the focus is on style and technique, with enough music theory to serve as a listening guide for
serious young enthusiasts. A thoughtfully selected array of photographs gives readers a sense of the players' venues, from music halls to clubs to recording studios. Collier stresses the importance of understanding and appreciating more than one favorite style of jazz, and it is therefore a little surprising that he ends his chronological tour with jazz-rock fusion and "neo-bop," never examining or assessing contemporary Latino influences or experiments with world music. Nonetheless, Collier's passion for his subject (to say nothing of his excellent discography of "critically important recordings") should launch listeners on their own roads of discovery. EB

COLLINGTON, PETER A Small Miracle; illus. by Peter Collington. Knopf, 1997 32p ISBN 0-679-88725-3 $18.00 R 5-8 yrs

In this wordless book, a woman living in a shabby caravan trudges into the winter snow to earn some money; after pawning her beloved accordion, she loses her payment to a passing thief. Returning home in despair, she encounters the same thief plundering the church; though he escapes, she wrests the charity box back from his grasp and restores it along with the Nativity scene, whose figures had been flung all over the church. Those Nativity figures—Mary, Joseph, the three wise men, and a representative shepherd—come to life and rescue the woman, who has collapsed in the snow, and they fill her caravan with holiday provisions, including the reclaimed accordion. It's less complicated to watch in pictures than it is to describe in words: Collington is a master of the wordless form, and his narrative, which flows from panel to panel with clarity and rhythm, is effective and understandable. The panel sizes are fluid, changing to alter the cadence of the story as appropriate. The human figures are pale and indistinct, but the Nativity denizens are richly garbed and otherworldly, and the book isn't above giving them some humorous moments, as when the small figures (not much over knee-high) struggle to push a shopping cart through the supermarket aisle. The absence of text keeps the story from becoming overly sentimental, and the fantasy is similar enough to toys coming alive that the young audience will appreciate the idea whether they catch the theological overtones or not. DS


The air was so thick, you had to "cut it up to breathe it," and the heat had lasted so long, "even polite conversation was drying up." As the adults of the town gather on the porch of the grocery store to fan themselves and complain, little Brianna and her friends witness the arrival of a small, wild-haired woman with dangling parrot earrings and a "smile so big, it used up most of her face." The woman promises to bring the rain down by leading the community in song, but the skeptical adults turn away in embarrassment. The children, affected more by the music itself than by faith in its efficacy, sing along, and as their efforts bring results, the adults wholeheartedly join in while the rainmaker quietly slips away. Gilchrist's figures are unevenly rendered and awkwardly drafted, the faces poorly articulated and unexpressive. The textual crescendo of "Oo-sha-la! Bo-ba-lo-lee's," and the resultant welcome rains, however, are almost palpable, and storytime audiences may be happy to echo the refrain, "Sweet wonder!" EB

Sonam tells the story of her Tibetan childhood and her parents' eventual decision to send their children to India, away from Chinese oppression. The long and difficult journey takes them by truck to the mountain pass, through the Himalayas on foot, and then through Nepal to India by bus. It's a compelling story, but many aspects of it will confuse young readers. How did Sonam's brother get to India to become a monk if leaving Tibet is illegal? Just how long is the journey to India? What is Sonam doing now, and is she in contact with her family back in Tibet? How much of the story is actually true? There are plenty of atmospheric (though sometimes fuzzy) photographs of subjects ranging from the Himalayas to the milking of a yak, but the acting out of such a treacherous journey seems odd (and Sonam looks awfully tidy on her arrival in Nepal). Nonetheless, Tibet is increasingly prominent in the news these days, and this child's-eye-view of the situation may enlighten young readers. Afterwords, one from the Dalai Lama, further explain the situation. DS


Rayona, the heroine of Dorris' adult novels *Yellow Raft in Blue Water* and *Cloud Chamber*, is eleven years old in this prequel. In clean, elegant prose, Dorris tells the story of a young girl loved by her alcoholic mother and ignored by her charming but irresponsible father. When her mother is sent into court-ordered rehab, Rayona's father, Elgin, is forced to step in, and two foster homes later he takes Rayona to stay with her paternal grandmother, great-grandmother, and aunt in Kentucky. Rayona, who knew she was of mixed parentage (her mother is American Indian, her father is African American) is nonplussed by the discovery that this side of her father's family is white. She is taken to the bosom of these women, who surround her with affection and emotional support the like of which she has never really experienced. That there are family secrets she doesn't know becomes clear; that her mother doesn't know Elgin's family is mixed is also clear; that the richness of her family's diversity will make Rayona strong is only hinted at in this brief volume. Rayona is beautifully realized, her emotional complexity combining with her self-awareness and generosity of heart to make her a three-dimensional character that reaches out from the page. Characterizations are succinct and finely tuned, each player given an individuality that has the ring of reality. Knowledge of Dorris' two adult titles featuring Rayona are necessary for an understanding of this novel; it stands quite firmly on its own. JMD


To call this nicely designed title a lift-the-flap book seems a misnomer, but that's what it is—sort of. The heavy stock cover pages are in the shape of a work glove, and Ehlert's simple text discusses work, the much-loved work of a mother and father as they sew, build, and garden through the narrator's childhood ("My father
always works with his hands. He builds things in his workshop. . . . My mother makes things, too. She has lots of colorful cloth, ribbons, lace, buttons, and thread"). The mixed-media collages show the crafts juxtaposed with their relevant tools: a birdhouse is followed by photos of a ruler, pencil, hammer, etc.; a bright pin cushion and candy-colored buttons are followed by a pattern, scissors, and fabric scraps. The text comes to an emotional high point when the narrator is given a work table and joyfully says, "Now I have my own spot. . . . There are so many things I want to make. . . . I want to be an artist. Then I'll join hands with my mom and dad." This is a richly layered narrative with literally layered illustrations that simply and succinctly link the child to the parents and to the future. The glossy pages and saturated colors are warm and appealing, and the encouraging paper-engineering element gently leads the reader along to the satisfying conclusion. JMD


The compiler's own poem sets the stage: it's our protagonist's eighth birthday, and he's allowed to choose himself a pet. As spreads offer up a dozen verses from poets such as Karla Kuskin ("The Porcupine"), Lee Bennett Hopkins ("I Can Get an Ant"), and Theodore Roethke ("The Bat"), the boy examines and contemplates the menagerie of poetically described possibilities one by one, until he finally ends up with a puppy. It's an intriguing idea, but it's a bit contrived, and youngsters may find the imaginary animals (the Doze) and extinct critters (the pterodactyl) odd companions for the more mundane dog and turtle. Rogers has a nice touch with her animals and their realistic and fanciful settings (the yak in a barbershop, the porcupine throwing quill darts); the people are less memorable, with our hero inclined towards long-lashed and bland prettiness. This is still a pleasant gallery of animal poems with a useful twist, and it might prompt some poetical pet reflections from its audience. DS


Sixteen original tales by prominent young adult authors revolve around characters who are "called upon to make moral choices, to face the consequences of their actions, to consider what it means to 'do the right thing.'" Several are achingly poignant—Walter Dean Myers' "The Stranger," a near-despairing tale of a drug addict; Jack Gantos's darkly comedic and cruel "X-15s," in which prospective gang members must each procure a dead pet; Rita Garcia-Williams’s "Wishing It Away," in which a pregnant teen's family and community studiously ignore or deny her condition, only to turn against her when she abandons her newborn in a dumpster. Unfortunately, tamer entries set the tone—Jean Davies Okimoto's facile yarn about homework cheating, "Eva and the Mayor"; Lensey Namioka's wildly mismatched historical fiction/ghost story "Little Li and the Old Soldier"; and Will Weaver's "The Photograph," which finds the lesbian victim of a nasty schoolboy prank all too graciously letting the guilty protagonist off the ethical hook. Mazer's anthology *Twelve Shots* (BCCB 10/97), though narrowly focused on the issue of gun possession, offers a more consistent but equally challenging menu of moral dilemmas that demand disquieting choices. EB
Part biography and part tall tale, the formula Glass applied so successfully to Bill Cody in *The Sweetwater Run* (BCCB 12/96) works equally well in this account of Kit Carson’s early life and first journey on the Santa Fe Trail. From prairie fires and buffalo stampedes to flea infestations and emergency amputations, Kit recalls his adventures with homespun thunder and dash (“Huge, shaggy, horned buffalo broke wild-eyed through the thick dust cloud. Their hooves’ poundin’ made an awful uproar. Spooked horses fell and riders jumped to save themselves”). Gnarly men and horses, frenetically tossed across vibrant, intricately textured backgrounds, keep pace with the fast-moving text. A pair of meaty concluding notes fill in background on the trail and Carson, and endpaper maps allow readers to retrace the route. EB


Time serves both as a mile marker and a metaphor in this impressionistic biography of the motor maven, who set his inventive course by tinkering with watches, altered time management in his factory, and capped his career by attempting to recapture in his idyllic Greenfield Village a preindustrial past he had helped to dismantle. Brevity may entice readers, but a choppy text that jolts awkwardly from one chapter topic to the next does little more than sketch a few highlights of Ford’s career. Although worker dissatisfaction with the boredom of the assembly line is addressed, such notable but unflattering traits as Ford’s anti-Semitism and virulent anti-unionism are ignored. Profusely illustrated with period photos, this may provide a visual supplement to wordier accounts of Ford’s life. EB

**Gray, Keith**  *Creepers.* Putnam, 1997 134p ISBN 0-399-23186-2 $15.95  R Gr. 6-9

Our nameless narrator is, like most of his friends, a Creeper: whenever possible, he spends his nights dashing through rows of backyards evading detection and pursuit in a modern equivalent of counting coup, where youthful bravery, status, and skill are all related to one’s Creeping success. Our protagonist makes a grave error, however, which results in the worst shame of all—the arrest of his Creeping Buddie, Jamie. The boy’s attempts to get Jamie out of trouble (by getting in good with the complainant’s daughter, a cool sixteen-year-old named Ruth) are complicated when Jamie’s house burns, killing Jamie before proper amends can be made—but then Jamie appears in his friend’s room, apparently alive and well and determined to go out Creeping. This sounds sci-fi-ish but it’s not: the Creeping obsession is depicted in a realistic context as the longtime secret passion of teenagers (the narrator’s older brother, Carl, was a renowned Creeper in his era), and the fixation is believably portrayed. Though the setup, with all its jargon in capital letters and its sacred rules, seems a little mannered, the details of vaulting over fences, evading dogs, and ducking angry homeowners are genuinely exciting. The reappearance of Jamie (apparently not a ghost so much as a projection of the narrator’s wishful thinking) is less well-handled, but it’s peripheral to the main
appeal of the book—kids earning honor by engaging in daring adventures under
cover of dark. DS

GREENE, RHONDA GOWLER When a Line Bends . . . A Shape Begins; illus. by James
Reviewed from galleys

Get those sharp eyes and pointer fingers ready for this simple yet engaging intro-
duction to basic shapes. It begins by considering straight lines (“a tall pole for
fishing, a leash and a trail,/ a kite string, a shoelace, a whisker, a tail”), and then
swerves and bends those lines into ten familiar shapes, from the humble circle and
square to the decorative crescent, octagon, and heart. Each bright and busy double
page spread features a rhyme chock full of shape references and an imaginative line
and watercolor scene in which each example is boldly apparent or sometimes art-
fully concealed. When the text says, “A circle’s a button, a sock hole to mend, a
shiny blue marble, a penny to spend,” the youngest viewers should have no trouble
finding the button, marble, and penny cupped in an outstretched hand, but they’ll
have to look more carefully to spy the tiny hole in the sock of the stilt-legged man
strolling across town with his yo-yo. And for truly driven overachievers, some
shapes unidentified in the text are sprinkled throughout the picture (e.g., a dia-
mond carried off by a masked robber, four diamonds formed by the window cur-
tains). Happy hunting. EB

GRIMES, NIKKI It’s Raining Laughter; illus. with photographs by Myles C.

Poems here discuss topics ranging from names (“We got Zulu, Juji, Mojo
names . . . Leopard, Lion-spirit names”—“Where’d You Get Them Names?”) to
libraries (“I flip the pages of a book and slip inside”—“At the Library”) to body
shapes (“Sideways Beauty” and “Wallet Size”). The emphasis is on the positive
and the joyful, and the photographs—the African-American cast apparently con-
sists largely of Pinkney’s own children—reflect this emphasis with their vigor and
expressive energy (though shadows and focus problems occasionally detract from
the images). The book’s upbeat tone sometimes slips into the saccharine, and the
colored squares of the background layout don’t show the pictures to their best
advantage, but overall the themes of reverence, joyfulness, and self-esteem will
make this a lively family or Sunday School readaloud. DS

R Gr. 4-6

Eleven-year-old Will Glasser, a.k.a Worm, has just been informed by some snide
eighth graders that his father, separated from his mother, has spent the last two
days up on the roof of his house—not fixing it, just sitting there. Worm and his
older brother Todd set out on a walking odyssey to find their way to their father
and get him down. The brothers camp, hide, and run their way across suburban
housing developments; Todd and Worm have a falling out over the nature of their
father’s illness, and Worm goes on alone. Haas portrays a hero’s search for self in
the wilds of the suburbs as Worm seeks his father and an explanation for the up-
heavily in his life. The two boys' running gives the narrative a pell-mell feeling, which is intensified by Worm's introspective, solitary dialogue as he explains himself to himself. The conclusion doesn't go for the easy answer, but neither does it leap for the sensational—Worm finds his father on the roof, discovers a few things he's not certain he wants to know, and engages in the mental gymnastics necessary to adjust to his new knowledge. When his father asks, "Do you want me to start calling you Will?" Worm replies, "No,'... just like I'd had a long time to think about it. But I didn't need to think about it. It was Worm who'd trooped through the rain, and snared squirrels, and found his way here, and Worm who could maybe start thinking, one of these days, real late at night if he couldn't sleep, about his father having been in a mental hospital and his mother having a boyfriend. It was Worm who'd come down off the roof, at least." And it's Worm whom readers will take to their hearts and remember. JMD

HOLOCAUST series

ALTMAN, LINDA JACOBS  

AYER, ELEANOR H. A Firestorm Unleashed: January 1942 to June 1943. ISBN 1-56711-204-8

___  From the Ashes: May 1945 and After; by Eleanor H. Ayer and Stephen D. Chicoine. ISBN 1-56711-206-4

___  Inferno: July 1943 to April 1945. ISBN 1-56711-205-6

SHERROW, VICTORIA  Smoke to Flame: September 1935 to December 1938. ISBN 1-56711-201-3

___  The Blaze Engulfs: January 1939 to December 1941. ISBN 1-56711-202-1


Each book: Blackbirch, 1997 [80p] (Holocaust) $18.95 illus. with photographs

Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-9

This simply written, liberally illustrated history of the Holocaust reaches back to earlier periods of anti-Semitic persecution, discusses the step-by-step acceleration of legalized Nazi violence before and during World War II, reveals the extent of methodical extermination of Jews in Germany and German-occupied territories, and registers the aftershock of international discovery with the liberation of the concentration camps and testimony of survivors. Although Milton Meltzer, Barbara Rogasky, and Miriam Chaikin—among others—have given us better monographs blending background information with primary source selections, this series has the advantage of breaking down a factual monolith into manageable segments. It could, in fact, serve as fare for high-school reluctant readers as well as elementary and junior-high students. The historical photographs, maps, and period illustrations break up the text without distracting from it, and captioned sections offer organizational guideposts. The repetition of the same introduction in all of the
volumes lends an unfortunate uniformity, and the text sometimes assumes the
detached tone of a newscast in describing what were, after all, horrific individual
tragedies, as well as nations involved in catastrophic conflict. Perhaps this imper-
sonality lends the distance necessary for young people to incorporate the incom-
prehensible, and one book (Voices and Visions) does systematically interweave
eyewitnesses’ accounts with an overview of the whole period. BH

HUYNH, NHUONG QUANG  Water Buffalo Days: Growing Up in Vietnam; illus. by
ISBN 0-06-024957-9 $13.95  R  Gr. 3-6

A brief introduction explains, “I always planned to return to my hamlet to live the
rest of my life there. But war disrupted my dreams. The land I love was lost to me
forever. These are my memories.” In sixteen chapters, the author shares his recol-
lections of a prewar world where water buffaloes are an integral part of village life.
When Water Jug, the family water buffalo, dies of old age, the search begins for a
replacement. This is no small endeavor, and the importance of finding and train-
ing the perfect bull is engagingly related. In fact the whole book reverberates with
cultural vitality and affection as the villagers’ interaction is set against the life story
of Tank, the newly acquired family buffalo, who proves his worth by protecting
the valuable herds from wild pigs and the village from a marauding tiger. There is
a refreshing, wholesome quality that permeates this successful narrative, which
opens a new window on the tangible joys of affection between man and beast, in
this case a lumbering water buffalo instead of the family poodle. Inevitably the
war does catch up to the village and a stray bullet kills Tank, ending this story and
beginning another. PM

KIPLING, RUDYARD  Rikki-Tikki-Tavi; ad. and illus. by Jerry Pinkney. Morrow,
1997  48p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-14321-0 $15.93  Ad 7-10 yrs
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-14320-2  $16.00

“This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought, all by himself, through
the English family’s house in India,” but it’s a slightly dampened version of the
mongoose’s victory over the encroaching snakes. Pinkney has wisely left the bulk
of Kipling’s magnificent text intact, but his abridgments do rob the text of some
style and atmosphere in the interest of streamlining. The art relies on cream back-
grounds and dusty earth colors touched with garden green; Pinkney effectively
varies perspective from spread to spread, sometimes looking across at Rikki and
the rest and sometimes employing a more elevated human perspective. Unfortu-
nately the draftsmanship gets quite awkward—the people in particular are stilted
and stiff, and even Rikki occasionally appears more stuffed than live. Nag and
Nagaina, though, are sinuous and vivid snaky presences, and the textual world of
animal defense and justice is effectively visually realized. While not quite up to the
standard of Kipling, this might entice a child into the jungle. DS

LEVINSON, NANCY SMILER  She’s Been Working on the Railroad. Lodestar,
1997  104p  illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-525-67545-0  $16.99  Ad  Gr. 4-7

In a half-dozen chapters, Levinson sketches the range of jobs women have held
with railroads and supporting industries since the mid-nineteenth century—from
switchers to engineers, from car cleaners to interior designers, from Harvey girls to on-board nurses. Some of the episodes are indeed exciting, such as the death of a telegraph worker during an electrical storm, and some of the women's achievements are impressive. Even the relentlessly celebratory tone cannot inject much life, however, into the account of nurses trying to calm fussy babies on a delayed run, or a Vice President for Public Relations who "may be flying across the country for a meeting" or "purchasing a railroad painting, photograph, or collectible artifact like a valuable old lantern." Historic struggles for entry into unions and enforcement of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation are adequately covered though, and readers are left with no doubt that, although women have risen impressively through the ranks, "prejudice, stereotyping, and resistance still exist." Period photos, a glossary, and an index are included. EB

LEVY, ELIZABETH  
My Life As a Fifth-Grade Comedian.  
HarperCollins, 1997  184p  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-026602-3  $14.95  
Ad  Gr. 4-6

Fifth-grader Bobby Garrick is the class clown, and his clowning is about to get him kicked out of school and into the "alternative" program for students with serious behavior disorders. Bobby is a good kid having a bad time: his father is sarcastic, his older brother has been thrown out of the house, his mother is passive, and his principal doesn't think there's any hope for him. Bobby's grandmother, however, loves Bobby's jokes, and so does his new fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Matous—at least within reason. Mr. Matous convinces Principal Deal to let Bobby make up his undone classwork by working on a school-wide project: a laugh-off, the students against the teachers, ending with a final match between the funniest teacher and the funniest kid. Bobby is a sympathetic, strongly articulated character, and his friendship with the almost perfect Janeen is charmingly drawn. The family dynamic depicted by Levy hits some realistically sour notes, but Bobby finally stands up to his scathingly sarcastic father and engineers an almost-reconciliation between his father and older brother. Unsurprisingly, Bobby and Mr. Matous are the finalists in the laugh-off, and, unsurprisingly, Bobby wins—not because he's funny, but because that's how the story is supposed to end. Levy unaccountably loses her humor-momentum right when the plot needs it most, at the maudlin, tie-up-all-the-loose-ends, have-all-the-kids-applaud-when-Bobby-forgives-Dad conclusion. Up until that moment, though, Bobby is a character worth rooting for—and most of the time, his jokes are even funny. JMD

LITTLE, JEAN  
The Belonging Place.  
Viking, 1997  124p  
R  Gr. 4-6

In the tragic opening of this short novel, the tiny Elspet Mary loses her mother: "She was knocked down by a runaway horse. Her head struck a paving stone. She was dead when they took her up." Her Mam's untimely death, followed by her seafaring father's demise shortly after he leaves her with her Aunt Ailsa and Uncle Will Gordon, creates the emotional background for this first-person narration set in Scotland and Canada in the 1830s. The young child's voice resonates with an immediacy and integrity as she tells her story. We follow her from Aberdeen to her new home in Glen Buchan, where she struggles to belong with the help of a reassuringly normal family and the feisty Granny Ross. Her child view filters events with a gentle poignancy as Elspet comes to terms with her origins and her
new place ("'She's not like us,' Grandmother Gordon had said. Mother almost erased those words by telling me, over and over, that I was not only like them; I was theirs"). While the plot is often driven by the simple dynamics of a happy, bustling, and sometimes stressful family life, there are just enough exciting episodes to pick up the pace: the death of Elspet's mother; the Gordons' harrowing journey to their new homestead in Canada; the fate of Jamie, a homely orphan baby. Young readers will appreciate this quiet but strong little page-turner with a protagonist learning to belong against the backdrop of one family's abounding love, simple faith, and pioneering spirit. PM


The War Between the States has been over for a decade, but Cilla's white Virginia neighbors have certainly not opened their hearts to Northerners or to the black residents of their own community. When artist Winslow Homer stays at the hotel owned by Cilla's family, guests buzz with gossip about the unwelcome Yankee who "only draws the people who live down the red clay road. He says they're the prettiest." Cilla secretly tails him on his sketching expeditions, and she begins to see these other neighbors through his eyes as he prepares studies for his controversial painting Dressing for the Carnival. Littlesugar bases her fictionalization on an actual incident in Homer's career, and her account closely follows his legendary staring match with a town bigot. Schoenherr's stiffly composed paintings convey a cool formality and occasional woodenness which, however thematically appropriate to this tale of an outsider, are emotionally distancing. Still, this portrait of the freedmen's Jonkonnu celebration is a refreshing alternative to more mundane flags-and-fireworks offerings for the Fourth of July. EB

LOWRY, LOIS  Stay!: Keeper's Story; illus. by True Kelley. Lorraine/Houghton, 1997 128p ISBN 0-395-87048-8 $15.00 Ad Gr. 5-8

The canine narrator is a mongrel with class, a poetically inclined, refined animal of good upbringing if not bloodlines. He leaves the relative safety of his first home (an alley outside a French restaurant) for the perils of the wide world in search of a human friend, and he finds one in the guise of Jack, a homeless alcoholic who lives under a bridge and is happy to use Lucky, as he calls the dog, to attract loose change from passersby. After Jack dies of unexplained causes, Lucky finds himself a new friend, a photographer who uses Pal's (Lucky's new name) natural talent for sneering on command to make himself rich. Pal runs away from this unsatisfactory arrangement and finds a home with a girl and her mother, who name him Keeper. He is ecstatically happy; then he sees another dog who looks remarkably like him on TV, recognizes it as his long-lost sister, and engineers a tearful reunion. Keeper speaks directly to the reader, à la Victorian heroes and heroines, and he sees himself in a heroic and literary light. The narration is tonally uneven, however, the style is mannered rather than involving, and Keeper's periodic essays into poetry distract from the story. That's too bad, because the lost-dog plot has a lot of kid appeal, and Lowry can be very amusing about aspects of canine life. Black-and-white illustrations are generously scattered throughout, and they lend an air of rakishness to the proceedings undelivered by the actual text. JMD

It is 1827, and Moses Williams, freed slave, is telling his life story to his almost twelve-year-old daughter, Maggie. His life story is inextricably bound with that of his former master, Charles Willson Peale, founder of Peale's Museum in post-Revolutionary War Philadelphia, and Peale's son, Raphaelle. Moses' life story reveals more about Charles Peale than it does about Moses: how Peale was forever striving to make more money, how he started and maintained the museum, and how he consistently rationalized his feelings about slavery. Moses feels in his heart that Peale was also responsible for the terrible death of Raphaelle, who was apparently poisoned from the arsenic used to preserve the specimens for museum exhibits. The volume is divided into museum locations, the first landing, the long hall, the main stairway, etc., presumably to give some sense of the all-important environment in which the characters live. Lyons incorporates a great deal of historical fact into this fictionalized biography but very little heart. So little is revealed about the narrator that any emotional involvement on the part of the reader is hard to come by. Moses as narrator has a solid if prosaic voice; he states repeatedly that he hated being a slave and he hated slavery, but this is told rather than shown, and his personality is sadly undeveloped. The language is stilted and formal, and the constant asides to the one-dimensional literary device of the listening daughter are intrusive. Notes are included. JMD


While there have been other picture book introductions to Anne Frank (including Adler's *Picture Book of Anne Frank,* BCCB 3/93), this one is distinctive for its clarity and naïve art. Starting with some background facts that resemble the account of Lore Baer (see review under Adler, above), McDonough describes the all-too-familiar progression of Nazi occupation, the Franks' escape into hiding, the famous diary named Kitty, the raid on the secret annex, and Anne's death in Bergen-Belsen. The low-key narrative is set in heavy typeface on cream-colored paper within thick-framed blocks, all the better to balance pictures that are bold with red, green, yellow, and blue contrasts. It could be argued that the colors are too cheerful or, conversely, that they represent the intensity of unnaturally magnified experiences. In either case, there is a fingerpaint effect here, and the compositions project childlike figures and flat perspectives that reinforce the reality of such events actually happening to a child. With the Holocaust introduced at early stages in the curriculum these days, this will be helpful in setting the stage for children's inevitable meeting with an international icon. BH


The Dudley of the title is a bespectacled hound, who has enlightened a little girl, à la Mr. Peabody and Sherman, about the workings of various aspects of daily life: the toaster, the dishwasher, the vacuum cleaner, and garbage trucks. Each item receives two spreads—the first describes the young narrator's previous understanding
of these machines’ functioning (“When you put the slices of bread into a toaster and push the handle down, an alarm goes off underground, telling the toast elves to spring into action”), the second provides Dudley’s accurate, step-by-step explanation, complete with labeled diagram. The explanations are clear and may well be revelatory to many readers, young and old, who aren’t up for more scientific explanations or even David Macaulay’s *The Way Things Work* (BCCB 1/89). The pre-Dudley explanations are cute to the point of being condescending, however, and the Dudley idea isn’t really worked into the book very well; the end, which simply lists other Dudley-explained processes without sharing further knowledge, finishes the book weakly. The art occasionally overcomplicates itself, but the processes are spaciously depicted. With all the nonfiction for the younger grades, very little of it explores the mystery of everyday objects; this is an appealing if flawed exception.

**Maguire, Gregory**  *Six Haunted Hairdos*; illus. by Elaine Clayton. Clarion, 1997 151p ISBN 0-395-78626-6 $15.00  R  Gr. 5-7

Readers of *Six Spiders Spinning* (BCCB 10/94) will be familiar with the rivalry between the all-girl Tattletales club, led by imperious Thekla Mustard, and the boys’ group the Copycats, led by Sammy Grubb. Here they’re clashing over the matter of ghosts: when the boys staunchly insist on the existence of specters, the girls decide to dress up as spirits and scare them silly. There’s a complication, however, in the form of real ghosts—and they’re not your garden-variety people haunts but the shades of woolly mammoths, which the girls and boys must join forces to assist. This has an entertaining Pinkwateresque bizarreness to it, with the plot galloping along in its own version of reality and random events coming together despite complete illogic just because they can. Maguire stacks the deck a little in favor of the boys’ club, whose sympathetic new member, Salim, is himself plagued by a ghost that followed him from India, and which benefits from the assistance of Pearl, the one classmate unaligned with either side. That’s okay, though, because Thekla is such an entertaining antagonist it would be a shame to water her obnoxiousness down with reader sympathy. Fans of the absurd and slightly satirical should feel right at home with this madcap ghost story.

**Marrin, Albert**  *Commander in Chief Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*. Dutton, 1997 246p illus. with photographs ISBN 0-525-45822-0 $25.00  R  Gr. 7-12

Marrin once again brings extensive research and his own considerable flair for military history to this third account of a Civil War leader (see *Unconditional Surrender*, BCCB 3/94 and *Virginia’s General*, 1/95), demonstrating how Lincoln’s passionate dedication to restoring the Union at any cost consistently informed his strategies and decisions as Commander in Chief. A wealth of details concerning Lincoln’s esteem for his enemies, his bitter disappointment with a string of ineffectual generals, and his deeply felt kinship with ordinary citizens humanize the legend, and an objective assessment of Lincoln’s contradictory views regarding emancipation demonstrates that he was first and foremost a military pragmatist and only a reluctant Liberator. The momentum stalls slightly as a lengthy second chapter on slavery separates the narrative of Lincoln’s early years from that of his political career, but that’s a small toll to pay to traverse Marrin’s road from Fort
MEDEARIS, ANGELA SHELF  The Ghost of Sifty Sifty Sam; illus. by Jacqueline Rogers. Scholastic, 1997  34p
ISBN 0-590-48290-4  14.95  R  6-9 yrs
This is a readaloud, tell-aloud ghost story with laughs, chills, and good food, in which Chef Dan takes on the challenge of staying overnight in the house haunted by Sifty Sifty Sam. Sam makes his presence known a little at a time, appearing piecemeal to the frightened Dan, and demanding to be fed (“MORE! MORE!” cried the ghost/ with a mighty bellow./ ‘GIVE ME MORE FOOD/ BECAUSE I’M ONE HUNGRY FELLOW’”). Dan cooks and Sam eats, and in the morning the sated spirit offers his services to the chef, and they make a deal—Dan will keep Sam fed if Sam will wash the dishes. Medearis’ free-verse, sometimes rhyming text is sometimes a little tough on the reader, as it doesn’t always scan, making the rhythms a bit forced, but it’s a fairly minor quibble given the appeal of both chef and ghost. The swirling, whirling watercolors show the haunted kitchen in all its messy glory, Sifty Sam as huge, hairy, and scary, and Chef Dan as round, big-eyed and plump, in compositions large enough to be enjoyed in a small group setting. This has echoes of “Wait Till Martin Comes,” but there’s a happier conclusion for the brave Chef Dan, who sticks to his pots and pans despite his terror and comes out a winner. JMD

MOORE, MARTHA  Angels on the Roof. Delacorte, 1997  186p
ISBN 0-385-32278-X  $15.95  Ad Gr. 7-12
Shelby’s mother’s latest self-improvement kick involves a minor obsession with Georgia O’Keeffe and a burning desire to move to New Mexico. Despite her resistance, Shelby finds herself in the passenger seat as Zoe, her evasive, slightly flaky mother, drives them not to New Mexico but to a small town in Texas called Red Valley. Zoe had lived in Red Valley years before, and Shelby is certain she will find the answers to her questions about her father’s identity there. Aunt Onie, Zoe’s foster mother, takes them in. With the catalyst of a sudden storm, Shelby has a dramatic recovered memory of herself at three years old, standing naked in the bath, her father beating her with a belt buckle, her mother turning her back and leaving the room. Aunt Onie explains that Zoe fled Red Valley years ago to protect Shelby from her abusive father and that she has returned now only to verify that he is really dead. Moore has a nice touch with the Texas environment, evoking a solid sense of physical place whether on the dusty plains, in the mountains, or at the counter of the local diner. The plotting is a bit coincidental—Shelby and Zoe’s reconciliation is a contrived piece of business involving a barefoot Zoe standing on a gas station roof to flag down Shelby’s northbound bus—but the small-town characters have an absorbing, eccentric reality about them that is attractive. Aunt Onie’s accident (she slips while whittling and cuts herself) and Shelby’s sudden memory recall are shockingly visceral, the descriptions of violence and blood juxtaposed against O’Keeffeian images of flatlands, blue sky, and curves of white bone. The pacing falters here and there, and Aunt Onie’s homegrown wisdom has a facility that is ultimately irksome, but the characters are emotionally real and quirky enough to keep the pages turning. JMD
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027436-0 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys M 2-4 yrs

Circus acts introduce the circle, square, triangle, and rectangle in this concept book. Murphy takes no advantage of the multitude of shapes that occur naturally at a circus; instead each shape is merely propped up by various circus animals for no apparent reason. Neither the stodgy rhyming text nor the bland illustrations do much to explicate the shapes: "Elephants make a circle/ and then march 'round and 'round./ The circus band starts playing./ The tent fills up with sound." Ah, but the elephants march in a line, and the circles on the drum and tuba are simply ignored. The "acrobats" who are "twirling to a special circus song" are actually aerial artists with no musicians in sight, but no matter . . . they have nothing to do with the shapes either. A list of suggestions for further shape identification activities is included, any of which should prove more entertaining than this outing. Save the price of admission for Rhonda Gowler Greene's offering, reviewed above.

EB

MYERS, ANNA *The Keeping Room*. Walker, 1997 135p
ISBN 0-8027-8641-3 $15.95 R Gr. 5-8

Thirteen-year-old Joseph Kershaw has sworn to defend the family from the British as his father, a respected South Carolina colonel, leads the local Camden militia in the Revolution. Camden's remaining civilians surrender at Cornwallis' advance and the British general seizes the Kershaw mansion as his headquarters, hanging traitors outside Joseph's window, incarcerating smallpox-infected prisoners in the outbuildings, and holding the Kershaws as virtual prisoners in their own home. With neither social status nor paternal guidance to support and direct him, Joseph clings desperately to his hatred of the enemy and vows to shoot at least one Redcoat with a pistol he has concealed in the keeping room. However, when a sympathetic occupying officer loses his life in Joseph's defense, the boy is forced to rethink not only his indiscriminate abhorrence of the British but also other unexamined notions he had once blindly accepted from his father. Joseph's narrative voice, that of a spoiled son accustomed to deference, occasionally betrays the frightened child within and subtly changes in tone from simple arrogance to hard-won self-confidence. Myers neither underplays the violence nor overplays the valor of war, making this a riveting entry for Revolutionary camp followers.

EB

NAYLOR, PHYLLIS REYNOLDS "I Can't Take You Anywhere!"; illus. by Jef Kaminsky. Atheneum, 1997 32p
ISBN 0-689-31966-5 $15.00 R 5-8 yrs

Naylor has a gift for immediacy, and that's no small thing in the limited space of a picture book. With a maximum of strong characterization and a minimum of text she gives us Amy Audrey Perkins, "sort of a klutz." The "can't take you anywhere" of the title is the refrain of Amy Audrey's affectionate but wary aunts, uncles, and parents, all victims of Amy Audrey's talent for clumsy disaster. Amy Audrey pulls herself together for her Aunt Linda's wedding and manages quite gracefully—no stumbling, tripping, or spilling—and her rather insensitive relations are so sur-
prised they trip all over themselves and wind up in a messy pile on the floor. The
(deservedly) smug Amy Audrey pats the corners of her mouth with her napkin,
saying, "Aunts and Uncles, I declare! I can't take you anywhere!", and goes on
eating her cake. Kaminsky's watercolor cartoons have a rakish, Jack Kentish flair
to them, with big-eyed expressive characters surrounded by lots of white space that
suit the story's (and Amy Audrey's) somewhat frenetic pace. Amy Audrey is a
character to take to heart, and her triumph has a wry humor that will please adults
as it tickles youngsters. JMD

NIKOLA-LISA, W. Till Year's Good End: A Calendar of Medieval Labors; illus. by
Christopher Manson. Atheneum, 1997 32p ISBN 0-689-80020-7 $16.00 R Gr. 3-6

As the author's note indicates, this is a pictorial of the monthly labors done by
medieval peasants. Rhyming couplet banners unfurl across each double-page
spread, announcing the month and its accompanying labor ("DECEMBER I hunt
with master, his dogs I tend—/ And rejoice full well at year's good end"), while
further textual details can be found below the illustrations. Visually, the artist's
use of a black pen heavily detailing the deeply shadowed watercolors creates a
Middle Ages mood; the somber-faced peasants go about their tasks amid earthy
fields, timbered dwellings, and dark forests. The clearly written text concentrates
largely on agricultural information, which is well served by the calendar format.
Though many unknown terms are explained ("the hayward, a peasant who was
responsible for watching the fields and the movement of farm animals, blew his
horn to call the peasants in for a feast provided by the lord"), a glossary would have
been useful for those that are not—will kids know what "demesne lands" or "priv-
ies" are? Nevertheless, this nonfiction offering may fill the gap in a Robin Hood
unit. PM

Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 3-6

From the opening scene where Shade, a young Silverwing bat, enjoys "the deli-
cious beetle meat as it squirted down his throat," we are initiated into a fully real-
ized fantasy world where bats, owls, pigeons, and rats do battle. This is a realm
where good and evil walk a well-defined line. Shade, the runt of the colony, be-
comes separated from the rest and meets up with Marina, a Brightwing bat, who
has been banded by humans. Together they seek their winter migration destina-
tion, Hibernaculum, using a mysterious map-song given to Shade by his mother.
In many ways, this tale is reminiscent of the swashbuckling Redwall series with its
unlikely hero overcoming great odds, its narrow escapes, its tragic deaths, and its
triumphant endings. Though the plot has a measure of contrivance and some
characters are of the stereotypical variety, the unceasing action and suspense will
propel readers past any complaints. There are plenty of bad guys that kids will love
to hate, but Goth, a huge and vicious vampire bat with a taste for other bat flesh,
is the most despicable: "Goth brought a bat back to the cave and tore into it
hungrily. His stomach churning, Shade saw that it was a Brightwing." Since
Shade doesn't find his long-lost father, Marina stays to help him search, and vengeful
bad guy Goth isn't dead after all, can Silverwing II be far behind? Send the Redwall
aficionados to this bat tale and watch them pant for the sequel. PM
OTTEN, CHARLOTTE F. *January Rides the Wind: A Book of Months*; illus. by Todd L. W. Doney. Lothrop, 1997 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-12557-3 $15.93  R*  5-8 yrs
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12556-5 $16.00

This poetic calendar depicts each month in a double-page spread and a compact free-verse poem. January “rides the wind,/ sideswipes deer and rabbits./ Their white tails billow/ like pillowcases on the line,” as well-wrapped children sled across the ground in a spray of snow; the year ripens through spring, summer, and autumn and then back to winter again. Otten’s deft use of soundplay—internal rhymes, alliteration, repetition, assonance—combines with fresh and vivid imagery to make the poems musical and atmospheric evocations. The multicultural cast of kids appear to be living each month to the fullest, and Doney’s oils have the medium’s characteristic depth and texture; he plays rich hues against one another, with the greens and blacks of the June evening contrasting with the luminescent yellow of a boy’s shirt, and the cerulean blue of an October sky balancing out the dappled golds and russets of autumn trees. Whether the climate reflects the audience’s or seems to them an exotic collection of extremes, listeners will appreciate the lyrical temporal tour and may wish to contribute their own similar offerings. DS


Midnight Son was born into slavery, but when Master goes off to fight in the Civil War, leaving his plantation in the hands of his ineffectual son, Midnight’s father steals a horse and sends his only boy off to freedom. After days of wandering and escape from a brief capture, Midnight is miraculously taken in by an English-speaking Mexican who just happens to be the foreman of a cattle ranch that is, wondrously, in need of a new hand. Quicker’n you can say gitalonglittledogie, he’s mastered the trade, is signed on as wrangler on a cattle drive, is befriended by the freeman cook, saves the spare horses from flood and twister, and happily ends his journey in a comfortable hotel room, with a free black boy to draw his bath and run for his clothes, the prospect of another genial cattle drive ahead, and gold in his pockets. Even readers who aren’t up on oater conventions will be suspicious of the trite dialogue: “It don’t matter to you, black, white, red, or brown huh? You sure about that?” . . . “Sure as that sun’s gonna come up tomorrow, pardner!” And as our hero packs his bedroll for the next drive, many will wonder why he doesn’t think to put some of his newfound wealth toward securing his family’s freedom. EB


With this novel based on coauthor Tang’s childhood, we peer into the life of Su Phan, a young Chinese girl growing up in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Because her family is relatively wealthy, her father is eventually torn from the family and taken to a prison (“So you think you’re too good to be Communist, eh?” shouted one soldier, delivering a kick”). We follow the rest of the family’s subsequent deprivation and relocation during increasingly frequent bombings by the Americans until the day her older-than-his years father returns to the family,
the war ends, Su Phan marries, and she immigrates to the United States. There is plenty of raw material here for a riveting tale of trial and triumph, but nothing substantial ever materializes. Stereotypical characterizations (a crotchety grandmother, a sacrificing mother) and wooden narrative (“Before long, I will not be a child anymore, but a young woman”) hamper a story that lacks emotional depth. It’s still intriguing to see the Vietnam War from the other side, however, and the story’s brief afterword provides some usefulness in terms of its historical setting.

**Pfirsch, Patricia Curtis  ** *Keeper of the Light.* Simon, 1997  [144p]
ISBN 0-689-81492-5  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 5-8

Faith has kept the lamp at the Port Henry Lighthouse burning steadily since her father’s death months before, and now she is resentful that Mr. Chesterfield of the Lighthouse Board has appointed a new keeper, Nathaniel Kent. The teenager cringes at the thought of moving to town, where she will be expected to attend school and engage in more “ladylike” pursuits, and the casual naivété of her replacement feeds her fears for the safety of the Lake Superior sailors who, with the limited technology of the nineteenth century, rely on the guidance of the light. Once in town, Faith is further troubled by her discovery of a longstanding relationship between her mother and Mr. Chesterfield, who seems to be dictating too much of their lives. When a storm on the lake threatens the safety of her mother, who is returning by ship from a brief family business trip, Faith defies her mother’s orders to stay away from Port Henry, and she joins Kent in an effort to rescue crew and passengers from the grounded vessel. Faith’s ambivalent but increasingly cordial relationship with Kent is skillfully drawn, and the climactic rescue scene is charged with tension. However, the longstanding relationship between her mother and Chesterfield, which plays a large part in Faith’s story, is never explained, and Faith’s unresolved future will leave readers puzzled rather than enlightened.

Trade ed. ISBN 0-679-87058-X  $25.00  R*  Gr. 4-8

See this month’s Big Picture, p. 176, for review.

**Qualey, Marsha  ** *Thin Ice.* Delacorte, 1997  261p
ISBN 0-385-32298-4  $14.95  R  Gr. 7-10

Arden is seventeen, a talented crafter of picture frames living in northern Wisconsin with her older brother, who has been her guardian since the death of their parents a decade ago. Tragedy comes again when her brother goes missing while snowmobiling, and all signs point to his falling through the river ice to his death—or do they? Initially in mourning, Arden begins to believe that her brother, overwhelmed by responsibility (his girlfriend had just informed him she was pregnant), has staged his death in order to escape to a new life, and she dismays all her friends and advisors by devoting her time and money to finding him. Qualey (author of *Nobody’s Daughter*, BCCB 3/91, and *Revolutions of the Heart*, 5/93) writes some of the best YA heroines, strong and necessarily self-sufficient in a world that makes depending on oneself advisable; here she’s made that psychological situation lit-
eral, with Arden having to go it alone in the house that once held her parents and her brother. That’s a compelling story, and Qualey capably keeps the question of Scott’s death enigmatic, offering a fair amount of clues either way, while Arden struggles to come to grips with the implications of both possibilities and what her future may hold. Unfortunately the intensity is cheapened by an overly neat, tie-everything-up ending that treats the book as a thriller, calling into question the point of the carefully wrought psychological drama. Arden’s an impressive heroine and her predicament is fascinating; she deserved a better, if perhaps less happy, ending. DS

**REES, DOUGLAS** *Lightning Time.* DK Ink, 1997 [172p]  
ISBN 0-7894-2458-4 $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

When fourteen-year old Theodore Worth meets the abolitionist, John Brown, for the first time, it is because Theodore’s father reluctantly agrees to allow Brown to hide in their Boston home. Following this encounter, Theodore witnesses the capture of Jacob, his grandfather’s servant, by brutal slave catchers and Jacob’s subsequent suicide, which experiences hurl young Worth into his part in Brown’s crusade. Although Theodore and his family are fictional the rest of this tightly drawn narrative is historically derived (a historical note details the facts of the story) and never stops gathering momentum. Theodore’s voice resounds with authenticity whether he speaks of his fancy education (“Weems’s school was exclusive, expensive, and run on the highest principles of dullness”), his friendship with Bob, a fellow telegrapher, or his newfound zeal (“Only one thing seemed clear to me. If I had had old John Brown’s pistol with me that day, Jacob would still be alive”). The conflicted generational gap between Theodore and his Quaker mother and austere father is another fully realized and significant story element which nonetheless remains true to the context of the times. In the suspenseful climax, Theodore’s skill with his telegraph key provides his integral role at Harpers Ferry and ultimately furnishes his deliverance and his destiny. Rees shows remarkable skill in distilling a complicated period in U.S. history into a boy’s honest delivery of his own coming-of-age story. This would serve as a perfect complement to Clinton Cox’s *Fiery Vision: The Life and Death of John Brown* (BCCB 7/97) PM

**ROBERTS, LAURA PEYTON** *Ghost of a Chance.* Delacorte, 1997 183p  

Melissa and her best friend Chloe have everything a girl needs: they’re gorgeous and well-dressed, and boys are crazy about them. Chloe also has a ghost haunting her house, a really hunky eighteen-year-old guy named James. Chloe arranges for Melissa and James to meet and a love triangle emerges—Melissa loves James who loves Chloe who loves a friend of her brother’s named Brett. The plotline has occasional moments of lucidity as it follows the predictable path of Melissa’s searching out information on James’ short life and tragic death. There’s some intense if ghostly making out, but finally Chloe decides James is too possessive; she wants him to go on to the great beyond, and he conveniently does. Melissa assuages her broken heart with dates with a school hunk and Chloe’s college-student brother, Chaz. Characterization is minimal, and a subplot about Melissa’s parents’ divorce is sublimely shallow. This is clueless about anything even remotely resembling depth, but the combination of plot elements—gorgeous girls, hunky guys, and a
romantic ghost who has the consideration to depart when things get complicated—may be enough to keep romance fans reading till the predictable end. JMD

ROGERS, FRED Let's Talk About It: Stepfamilies; illus. with photographs by Jim Judkis. Putnam, 1997 32p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-399-23144-7 $15.95
Paper ed. ISBN 0-399-23145-5 $7.95 R 5-8 yrs

Those familiar with the estimable Mr. Rogers and with the other books in this series (Adoption, BCCB 4/95, etc.) will recognize the calm and reassuring tone here. The text discusses the problems of new stepfamilies (“Sometimes it might seem like there are too many changes. . . . When you’re part of a stepfamily, you may not like some of the new ways of doing things”) and ways to cope with them (“If you can talk about things that make you happy, sad, or angry, your parents and the other people in your stepfamily can better understand what you’re feeling”). Photographs of two new stepfamilies appear throughout; their lives seem tidier than the average, but some of the resentful and lonely faces will strike a chord with readers. There’s nothing especially new here, and the approach is a little bland, but its solidity and authority make it effective. Particularly likely to reassure adults in search of a way into the topic, this is a helpful low-key approach to the issue. DS

ROHMANN, ERIC The Cinder-Eyed Cats; written and illus. by Eric Rohmann. Crown, 1997 36p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-517-70896-5 $17.00 Ad 4-7 yrs

A young boy climbs into his sailboat and sails—through the air, along with gulls and other boats—to a distant tropical shore. There he drops anchor and creates a sand-sculpture, a huge fish against whom he comfortably leans while napping. Soon the sand-fish awakes and five cinder-eyed cats join him in play, and then all the denizens of the briny deep begin to cavort through the air about the entrapped boy. They disappear at dawn, and the five cats collapse into a doze as the boy sails away from the island in the morning sun. This is, of course, a dream book, and the initial logical fantasy of sailing one’s boat through the air to faraway places has the appropriate wishful allure. The sinewy grace of the tigerish quintet of cats also has its imaginative appeal, but the explosion of fish is more crowded and confusing than glitteringly otherworldly. There’s a solidity and a drabness to the fishy spreads that take the magic out of the idea that the water-dwellers have escaped to the air, and the rhyming text is merely descriptive rather than enhancing the vision; nor is it ever quite clear what the titular cats have to do with this panoply of fish. Youngsters who don’t insist that books make more sense than their dreams may appreciate some of the make-believe here. DS

ROSS, STEWART Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre; illus. by Robert Van Nutt. Viking, 1997 [46p]
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-7

Chronicling the life of Charlotte Brontë and the story of her most famous novel, this starts with the family’s arrival at Haworth and goes on to describe the Brontë siblings’ childhood of sadness (two beloved elder sisters dead before they were in
their teens), wildness (running across the Yorkshire moors), and closeness (creating worlds and books together). In describing Bronte's later life, Ross is honest about her love for her married teacher in Belgium, her incompatibility with her students, her uneasiness in company, and her unassuming appearance; he also takes pains to point out the inaccuracies in Elizabeth Gaskell's famous early biography of Bronte. The book is compact and informative, but the writing is sometimes disjointed and there's little discernible pacing or differentiating emphasis; the potted *Jane Eyre* in six pages unfortunately reduces the subtle and powerful novel to soap opera. Van Nott's occasional pencil sketches have charm and fluidity, but the color full-page paintings are stiff and sometimes ungainly, removing their subjects further rather than bringing them to life. Young readers looking for an author biography or an introduction to Jane Eyre may nonetheless find this concise account useful and unintimidating. A chronology and list of books for further reading are included; there is no index. DS


Sean is fifteen, and his life is a disaster: his divorced mother's an abusive alcoholic, his father's been only a support check for years, and his drug-dealer classmate has it in for him. After a fight, he's suspended (again) and sentenced to community service at Mr. Hassler's horse farm. Mr. Hassler is stern but fair and supportive, and Sean begins to develop a connection to the place, the horses, and the people. Between his mother's physical collapse, his father's reappearance, and his dangerous classmate, he may find life's obstacles too much to overcome even with Mr. Hassler's help. This is a well-meaning book, and the rescue fantasy aspect of the plot has its appeal. The contrivances, plot clichés, and cardboard characterization, however, keep the story flat and unbelievable; much of Sean's misery seems piled on merely to make his triumph the more dramatic, and the book's ethics are not always clear (there's little questioning about saintly Mr. Hassler's hitting of Sean's father, for instance). While it's hard to be opposed to redemption, the complete unsubtlety of the message makes the dark more interesting than the light here—surely not the intended effect. The readers likeliest to overlook the book's flaws in favor of its drama may well be put off by the tiny print. DS


When Allison gets a new red kimono for her birthday, she looks just like her doll, Mei-Mei—and hardly at all like her parents. This is because she's adopted, a fact that hits Allison like a ton of bricks and leaves her angry and destructive. She finds peace, however, with the adoption of a stray cat, whose embrace by the family reassures her. Say doesn't shrink from the seriousness of Allison's anger, and the depiction of her recognition of difference is convincing. Nonetheless, this is a complicated subject and the book's quick leap to a solution gives it an air of contrivance and may leave young listeners behind. The watercolor illustrations underemphasize the adults, making Allison, with her penetrating dark stare and realistically stubborn expression, more immediate. There aren't that many youthful adoption books that acknowledge the process doesn't have to be all roses; this may be rather set up, but some young listeners might appreciate the acknowledgment of discomfort. DS

This lullaby book bids goodnight to seven different babies—a little whale, tiny kangaroo, baby bear, infant panda, penguin chick, little elephant, and fuzzy eaglet—and exhorts them each to “sleep safe” as they drift off, cozy and protected (“Sleep safe, baby panda,/ clinging to your mama’s fur,/ hidden in the old hollow tree./ Sleep safe”). Sfs’ illustrations use two thematic border rows for each image, holding the sleepy babies safely in their frames, and the babies themselves are made particularly pettable and endearing by textural hatchmarks that give a tactile sense to the precise drawings. While the text and individual portraits are on one side of the accordion fold-out, the other side features a global panorama that proceeds gradually through ocean and mountain, forest and savannah and includes not only the babies serenaded in the text but a multitude of other cuddling infant/parent pairs—including a final human mother and child on the last page. While the accordion-fold format doesn’t make this the easiest book for the bedtime sharing it’s otherwise well-suited for, it’s nice to see a title that really uses the format artistically; kids will relish traveling over the folds of the world or surrounding themselves with it while searching for other sleepy babies. DS

SEIBOLD, J.OTTO  *Olive, the Other Reindeer;* written and illus. by J.otto Seibold and Vivian Walsh. Chronicle, 1997 [34p] ISBN 0-8118-1807-1  $12.95 Reviewed from galleys R  5-8 yrs

When Olive the dog mishears a line from “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” as “Olive, the other reindeer,” she decides she must really be a reindeer. After making her way to the North Pole, she joins Santa’s sleigh team (firmly fastened to it, since despite her delusion she can’t actually fly) and finds her canine capabilities (chewing, fetching, scenting) invaluable to the team on their Christmas deliveries. This isn’t a pointed tale, wherein Olive learns to appreciate herself as a dog, but rather an enjoyable dozy joke that continues as it started, with comic twists on the original song keeping things moving. Those who have seen this pairing’s earlier Mr. Lunch books will recognize the hi-tech neo-retro look of the computer-drawn art; its muted yet contrasting hues keep the skewed figures in their packed compositions humorous but not garishly so, and olive-drab Olive is an appealing toylike pup. Youngsters who enjoyed books such as Yorinks’ *Christmas in July* (BCCB 11/91) will celebrate this sleighride through the silly side of Christmas. DS


Slight, hazy memories suggest to thirteen-year-old Melitte that once she was lavished with a mother’s love. Her only clear knowledge has always been that she lives in Monsieur Duroux’s one-room cabin, that Madame Duroux is harsh and demanding, that Monsieur is reluctant to curb his wife’s outbursts, and that neither will give her a straight answer concerning her mother. Through snippets of strangers’ conversation she learns she is a slave, and the full implication of her status is driven home to her insistently as she ages. Slaves on a neighboring Loui-
siana plantation caution her that the affection of the Duroux's little daughter Marie, who is generally entrusted to Melitte's care, will disappear as soon as the youngster becomes aware of their disparate social status. The strong sisterly bond between the two girls is in fact tested when Monsieur Duroux, who Melitte learns is actually her father, prepares to sell her. Marie reasons, speaks, and acts with a precocity difficult to credit, and Melitte's plight is resolved (six-year-old Marie helps her escape) with too little difficulty and too much sentimentality. Still, Shaik's prose is graceful and often lyrical, and her sharp description of a slave's life under a master who is powerful even in dire poverty offers an alternative to readers for whom "slavery" conjures images of Tara and Twelve Oaks. EB


The fact that Shakespeare lifted his plots wholesale from works that are little remembered today suggests that his merit lay in something other than simple plotting; compressed accounts of the plays tend to support this theory, since Shakespeare reduced to bare bones invariably ends up losing something. Coville, who previously adapted *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (BCCB 7/96), unfortunately doesn't escape this trap. He's made judicious choices and cuts here, leaving the incorporated dialogue in a form close to the original while saving time by using narration to move the plot along. The result is accessible but rushed and superficial, and certain ambiguities (the Macbeths' intentions towards their kingly guest, for one) are more confusing than tense. Kelley's dark and shadowy pastel illustrations often set the mood effectively (though the unvarying palette resists vitality), but except for some pleasingly unprepossessing weird sisters, they don't bring the events any closer than the text does. This will undoubtedly be useful as an educational introduction to Shakespeare, and it will help keep kids from getting lost in the plot, but the absence of actual drama means that they may be puzzled as to what all the fuss is about. DS

SHERROW, VICTORIA  *Smoke to Flame: September 1935 to December 1938. The Blaze Engulfs: January 1939 to December 1941.*

See review under Holocaust, p. 162.


When dinosaurs brush their teeth to get ready, it's got to be for something important: "Hey dinosaurs, it's rock 'n' roll time! Slick back your scales and get ready to romp. On Saturday night at the Dinosaur Stomp!" Taking poetic license to jurassic lengths, this large, shareable rhythmic romp will rock young listeners back to prehistoric (or is that prehysteric?) times. Toothy, googly-eyed dinosaurs of all shapes, colors, sizes, and species are cartoonishly rendered in watercolor and pen making "dinosaur tracks" for the party. Old (over-the-hill dinosaurs sans dentures) and young (nervous first-time-party-goer dinosaurettes) join the rest for stuff like "The Triassic Twist and the Brontosaurus Bump./ The Raptor Rap and Juras-
sic Jump.” This is not meant to be anything but fun, so don’t quibble about whether it is wise to let Tyrannosaurus Rex lead a conga line. Roll up the rug and invite your own dinosaur wannabes for a dinosaur stomp of their own—just get out of the way. PM


See review under Holocaust, p. 162.


In the ongoing debate over whether Betsy Ross actually stitched the first national flag, St. George votes a resounding affirmative, relying on the affidavits of Ross’s family and acquaintances that Washington and his committee had met with the now-famed upholstery shop proprietor. Yea or nay, focusing on this bit of trivia deflects attention from the broader significance of Ross as a scrappy survivor in politically troubled times—Quaker outcast, three-time widow, and savvy shop owner who catered to Tory and Patriot as business exigencies dictated. While short chapters bring St. George’s offering within easy grasp of younger history buffs, thinly developed episodes and choppy prose somewhat dampen the interest: “George Ross had an idea. His nephew’s widow was the perfect person to sew the flag.... She could be trusted to sew the flag without a word to anyone.” Still, readers looking for easy accounts of the Founding Mothers can cut their teeth on this beginner biography. EB

STEVENSON, JAMES The Unprotected Witness. Greenwillow, 1997 [176p] ISBN 0-688-15133-7 $15.00 Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

This sequel takes up where Bones in the Cliff (BCCB 6/95) left off. Pete is living with friend Rootie and her grandmother in New York City when his criminal father is killed despite being in the witness protection program. The people who killed him think Pete knows the location of the two millions dollars apparently stolen by his father. Pete doesn’t know, but he and Rootie figure it out, and together they determine to retrieve it. They enlist the aid of Mooshie, a disenfranchised rich kid who drives a Lincoln Continental held together by duct tape. The plot turns are strictly movie-of-the-week, with the death of Pete’s father’s only friend in a suspicious fire, a federal agent who turns out to be a crook, and the discovery of two suitcases full of money. No grownups have salient roles in this mystery, and the plot is pretty lightweight—a struggle on a slippery ferry deck takes care of the bad guys, and Rootie and Pete go home to Grandma and a vacation trip to Saratoga—but it’s still involving. Pete has a fairly strong narrative voice, and while the suspension of disbelief will have to be positively gargantuan, the action is so fast that it leaps over plot holes. The text is not nearly as choppy as in the previous title, and Pete’s voice is more mature, as suits his age and experience. JMD
STOEKE, JANET MORGAN  *A Friend for Minerva Louise;* written and illus. by Janet Morgan Stoeke. Dutton, 1997  24p
ISBN 0-525-45869-7  $13.99  R  3-6 yrs
Stoeke's snoopy hen is out on neighborhood reconnaissance again, and this time she concludes that the people down the road must have a new bunny. They seem to have provided it with every comfort; there's an indoor hutch (a crib), and just beyond the pot of flowers on the kitchen window sill (a jar of bottle brushes) she can see an outdoor hutch (play pen). When she doesn't find the bunny under the gardening workbench (changing table) or in the cozy nest (diaper bag), Minerva Louise heads outdoors and spots him being wheeled in a carriage. It's just as she suspected all along—there's a purple bunny (stuffed, of course) surrounded by "some great toys," including the real baby. Simple matte paintings, outlined and bordered with a black crayon, guide little sleuths along the trail of visual clues. Listeners who aren't quite ready to decode Amelia Bedelia's verbal gaffes will relish this headstrong hen's latest outing. EB

SZEKERES, CYNDY  *The Mouse That Jack Built;* written and illus. by Cyndy Szekeres. Cartwheel/Scholastic, 1997  26p
ISBN 0-590-69197-X  $5.95  Ad  2-4 yrs
In this take-off on the traditional cumulative rhyming story "The House That Jack Built," small bunny Jack builds himself a snow mouse. Szekeres' rhyming text has balance and rhythm without sacrificing fun or spontaneity: "These are the whiskers/that wiggled and twitched,/causing poor Jack to giggle and itch,/put next to the raisin,/used for a nose,/on the face of the mouse that Jack built." The watercolor and ink illustrations, reminiscent of a cuterier Rosemary Wells, enliven and extend the text with small visual additions to the story, such as a pair of happy mice, dressed in mufflers and wool hats, who build themselves a whole line of snow bunnies. The rhyme scheme loses its consistency toward the end, and the preciousness of the animals wears a little thin, but this is a jolly little book that is going to strike a happy chord with a lot of preschoolers. Its small size doesn't lend itself to group tellings, but turn it into a flannel board and it will become a toddler-time staple. JMD

TABOR, NANCY MARÍA GRANDE  *We Are a Rainbow;* written and illus. by Nancy María Grande Tabor. Charlesbridge, 1997  32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-88106-646-X  $15.95  M  4-7 yrs
Bilingual paper ed. ISBN 0-88106-417-3  $6.95
Tabor uses brief text and rainbow tinted, paper-dollish collages to illustrate the concept of same and different, and up to a point it works. Comparisons between "there," the home left behind, and "here," her new home, are simply made: "There I would eat tortillas for breakfast. Here people have them for dinner." Unfortunately, sappiness overpowers simplicity midway through the book. It then becomes one of those well-intended "we're all the same so let's all get along" sermonettes for kids that ends up in a tangle of sentimental clichés ("Our tears and our smiles are like the rain and the sun. They help our friendships to grow") and doubtful generalities ("We all like to dance and sing"). The likely result of all this silliness ("And friendships are like rainbows . . . they shine for everyone!") is that
kids will try to find a better book. Give them Frog and Toad—they’re much more eloquent. PM

TASHJIAN, JANET  
**Tru Confessions.** Holt, 1997  167p  
ISBN 0-8050-5254-2  $15.95  
R   Gr. 5-8

Twelve-year-old Tru wants to be the star of her own television show. She also wants to find a cure for her developmentally delayed twin brother, Eddie, and she spends secret hours searching the Internet under her mother’s login. The novel is in the form of a computer journal, which gives it a technological immediacy. Tru has the voice of a buoyant, creative adolescent, and the media she uses to express herself—computers and video—suit her intense adolescent desires and youthful determination to just not admit defeat. But ultimately, Tru has her intelligent if unwilling eyes opened to the fact that there is no cure for Eddie, and that someday, despite her best efforts, she will leave him behind. For the most part, Tru’s voice has the tone and point of view of a twelve-year-old, complete with yearning, exasperation, and grief. Near the end, when Tru sees the reality of her—and Eddie’s—situation and all those threads begin to tie up, the author’s voice disconcertingly takes over, and an adult speaks instead of an adolescent. Still, readers will enjoy following Tru through her bouts of sibling and creative angst, and they’ll cheer her on when her video documentary about Eddie wins the local community cable award. Readers will walk away from this book with visions of an optimistic, bright future for an optimistic, bright character. JMD

WALLACE, BARBARA BROOKS  
**Sparrows in the Scullery.** Atheneum, 1997  152p  
ISBN 0-689-81585-9  $15.00  
R   Gr. 5-8

Colley Trevelyan, apparent heir to his recently deceased parents’ fortune, is kidnapped in the night from his ancestral home and finds himself a new “boarder” at the Broggin Home for Boys, where he is underfed, overworked, and most certainly destined for a short life and a terrible death in the glass factory. But for the first time in his life Colley has friends—the other orphans (the “sparrows” of the title) bought and sold by the nefarious Broggin and his wife. This is fully realized Victorian melodrama, with horrific villains, spunky child-heroes, and a sense of coincidence that would make Dickens (or Joan Aiken) proud. After suffering through the horrors of the Broggin Home, surviving the food and the physical dangers, and recovering from a near-fatal illness, Colley is miraculously rescued by his long-lost black-sheep-of-the-family cousin, Jeremy, now a ship’s captain engaged to marry the young woman who discovers Colley in the home in the first place. The ending is cheerfully neat, and the loose ends tie up with remarkable tightness, but this is a suspenseful, nicely rendered piece of historical fiction. Wallace’s language is evocative and consistent, her sense of place is startlingly vivid, and her orphans deserve their own musical. Just booktalk the scene where Colley is tossed into the Hole and watch Sparrows fly off the shelves. JMD

WALLACE, IAN  
**A Winter’s Tale;** written and illus. by Ian Wallace. Groundwood/ Douglas & McIntyre, 1997  32p  
ISBN 0-88899-286-6  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
Ad  6-9 yrs

For her ninth-birthday present, Abigail wants to go winter camping in the bush like her older brother. She and her father and brother leave their city home and
head off into the frozen Canadian wilderness, where they dig a snow trench and fill it with pine boughs for their campsite; the zenith of the trip, however, is when the family frees a trapped fawn from fishing line frozen into the ice. The story is hampered by the absence of conflict and there's a bit of snowy schmaltz in the writing, but the specifics of winter camping and exploration, which will be unfamiliar to many readers, are fascinating and desirably adventurous. The acrylic art on rough canvas has some appealing details (the trees growing around Abigail's bed at home, the lacy purple shadows of trees on snow), but much of the delicate coloration of winter landscapes is lost amid brazen blasts of color, and the land as well as the figures seem stiffer than life. The unusual outing is appealing, however; it's also a rare outdoor rite-of-passage story about a girl, many of whom will relish the idea of this icy expedition. DS


This is an inviting first look at the popular Little House author who "wanted the children now to understand more about the beginnings of things, to know what is behind the things they see—what it is that made America as they know it." This easy biography provides youngsters a brief but straightforward introduction to Wilder and what lies behind those many stories of her life long ago. Wallner's paintings of Laura's life vividly recreate its adventures, hardships, numerous moves, and warm family times. In one sweeping scene, "land that looked like a sea of grass" textured with layers of hatchmarks ripples with the prairie wind, while in another spread an army of green grasshoppers invades the serenity of the Ingalls' yellow clapboard home. The art's Americana look is right in step with the heart of this little biography and the woman who inspired it. This is an engaging overture for budding Laura fans, and it would make a good readaloud biography as well. PM


Opening with the confession, "I didn't really want a dog," Wegman treats his readers to a chatty, affectionate account of how Weimaraners insinuated themselves into and ultimately overtook his art. First came the brainstorm: "There was a similarity between this sock and Man Ray. Man Ray looked like the sock. The sock looked like Man Ray. Man Ray looked like many things. This idea grew on me." Then came the early poses with Man Ray's successor, Fay. And with Fay's motherhood (Wegman discusses the delivery of her first litter with detailed enthusiasm rarely witnessed outside a coffee klatsch) came the new venture into puppy photography. "Just set them down, or up, and shoot... Watch them flow into one another—one organism, seeking heat and its mother's scent." Interspersed between brief chapters are glorious galleries of photos taken at various stages of the dogs' development. Viewers who are troubled by the circus-like manipulation of the canine subjects must be impressed, and perhaps even relieved, by Wegman's solicitude for his pups in his various roles of obstetrician, matchmaker, and proud "papa." For avowed fans of Wegman's art, this is obviously mandatory reading. EB
YACCARINO, DAN  *Good Night, Mr. Night*; written and illus. by Dan Yaccarino. Gulliver/Harcourt, 1997  34p  
ISBN 0-15-201319-9  $15.00  R  4-7 yrs

In a vibrant Rousseauian landscape, Mr. Night, a black shadow lit with stars, walks the soon to be sleeping earth, closing the flower petals, quieting the animals, and calming the sea. The child narrator sees Mr. Night as a cozy friend who plays music for him while he sleeps and whispers dreams into his ear. “Then, when the sun starts to rise, Mr. Night grows tired. He lies down just over the hill and drifts off to sleep. And when I wake, I whisper, ‘Good Night, Mr. Night.’” The simple text is set against an opaque, naïve landscape of undulating hills and trees and dramatically clouded skies, with an intense but not harsh palette of petal reds and grass greens. The only real darkness is Mr. Night himself, whose comfortably round form is textured with little white stars and who has a crescent moon for an eye. This is a storytime natural, daytime or bedtime, and both reader and listener will appreciate Yaccarino’s controlled text and flamingly colorful illustrations. JMD


Just as Donna Jo Napoli has elaborated “Rapunzel” fictionally in *Zel* (BCCB 7/96), Zelinsky has elaborated the fairy tale visually, with a sequence of paintings that reflect Italian Renaissance art in their refined modeling of feature and drapery, antique burnish of hues, and idealized drafting of landscapes and interiors. Rapunzel’s tower, for instance, combines the effects of marbled mosaic and intricate cloisonné, projecting a seductive safety rather than an ominous detention. The sorceress herself, like Trina Schart Hyman’s witch in Paul Heins’ *Snow White* (BCCB 5/75), is a portrait of aging elegance rather than an unattractive crone, lending psychological force to the interpretation of generational conflict. Graphically articulated with lavish attention to detail, this is strongly balanced with a formal but flowing text that shows a depth of familiarity with the tale’s history (summarized in an extensive author’s note). There’s a fine echo in the wife’s dress tightening from pregnancy at the tale’s opening and Rapunzel’s asking the sorceress to help her with her tightening dress after the prince’s nightly visits; this is a version in which Rapunzel gives birth to twins in the wilderness before her reunion with the prince and her healing his blindness with tears. Although romantic, the overall tone is distant, appropriate for a story with action and implications as traditionally forbidding as these. BH
Selecting the best books of the year can be an invigorating, exasperating experience. We find that some books we thought would age well don’t, and some books we thought would fade in the memory turn out to have remarkable staying power. We have a short fiction list this year; the picture-book list, on the other hand, is quite lengthy; and the nonfiction list is equally packed, with journalism and snakes and science experiments jostling for attention. Lest it be said we do not have passionate opinions, take a look at our website (http://edfu.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/bccb) in January for the “Blue Ribbon Dissents,” a look at the books reviewers think should have made the list and didn’t. We can lament over the lack of stellar fiction for younger readers or rejoice over being able to offer them Prelutsky’s poetic abundance, Lester’s pithy autobiography, and Mochizuki’s triumph of the human spirit. We choose to rejoice.

Janice M. Del Negro, Editor

FICTION:
Anderson, M. T. Thirsty. Candlewick. (April)
Bloor, Edward. Tangerine. Harcourt. (March)
Deuker, Carl. Painting the Black. Houghton. (June)
Dines, Carol. Talk to Me: Stories and a Novella. Delacorte. (September)
Fine, Anne. The Tulip Touch. Little, Brown. (September)
Hopkinson, Deborah. Birdie’s Lighthouse; illus. by Kimberly Bulcken Root.
Kindl, Patrice. The Woman in the Wall. Houghton. (March)
Pullman, Philip. The Subtle Knife. Knopf. (November)
VanOosting, James. The Last Payback. HarperCollins. (June)

PICTURE BOOKS:
Demi, ad. One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale; ad. and illus. by Demi.
Diakiô, Baba Wagué, ad. The Hunterman and the Crocodile: A West African Folktales; ad. and illus. by Baba Wagué Diakiô. Scholastic. (February)
Ho, Minfong. Brother Rabbit: A Cambodian Tale; illus. by Jennifer Hewitson.
Lowell, Susan. *The Bootmaker and the Elves*; illus. by Tom Curry. Orchard. (December)

Manna, Anthony, ad. *Mr. Semolina-Semolinus: A Greek Folktale*; ad. by Anthony Manna and Christodoula Mitakidou; illus. by Giselle Potter. Schwartz/Atheneum. (July)


Pinkney, Brian. *The Adventures of Sparrowboy*; written and illus. by Brian Pinkney. Simon. (June)

Pyle, Howard, ad. *Bearskin*; illus. by Trina Schart Hyman. Books of Wonder/Morrow. (November)

Riley, Linnea. *Mouse Mess*; written and illus. by Linnea Riley. Scholastic. (December)

Soto, Gary. *Snapshots from the Wedding*; illus. by Stephanie Garcia. Putnam. (April)

Stewart, Sarah. *The Gardener*; illus. by David Small. Farrar. (October)

Voake, Charlotte. *Ginger*; written and illus. by Charlotte Voake. Candlewick. (April)

Wells, Rosemary. *Bunny Cakes*; written and illus. by Rosemary Wells. Dial. (March)


**NONFICTION:**


Bierhorst, John, ad. *The Dancing Fox: Arctic Folktales*; illus. by Mary K. Okheena. Morrow. (July)

Bishop, Nic. *The Secrets of Animal Flight*; written and illus. with photographs by Nic Bishop. Houghton. (June)

Davies, Nicola. *Big Blue Whale*; illus. by Nick Maland. Candlewick. (November)


Jaffe, Nina, ad. *The Mysterious Visitor: Stories of the Prophet Elijah*; illus. by Elivia Savadier. Scholastic. (June)

Lester, Helen. *Author: A True Story*; written and illus. by Helen Lester. Houghton. (April)

Ling, Mary. *The Snake Book*; by Mary Ling and Mary Atkinson; illus. with photographs by Frank Greenaway and Dave King. DK. (May)

Mochizuki, Ken. *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story*; illus. by Dom Lee. Lee & Low. (September)


Simms, Laura, ad. *The Bone Man: A Native American Modoc Tale*; illus. by Michael McCurdy. Hyperion. (December)

Wick, Walter. *A Drop of Water*; written and illus. with photographs by Walter Wick. Scholastic. (February)
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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Nancy K. Barrett
Assistant Business Manager, University of Illinois Press
October 21, 1997
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