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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introductory</th>
<th>Renewal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>$29.75</td>
<td>$35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>$34.00</td>
<td>$40.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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A LOOK INSIDE

193 THE BIG PICTURE
   The Trolls by Polly Horvath

194 NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
   Reviewed titles include:
207 • What a Truly Cool World by Julius Lester; illus. by Joe Cepeda
208 • Extreme Elvin by Chris Lynch
209 • Terror of the Spanish Main: Sir Henry Morgan and His Buccaneers by Albert Marrin
209 • Emergency! by Joy Masoff
210 • Black Cat written and illus. by Christopher Myers
218 • Raising Sweetness by Diane Stanley; illus. by G. Brian Karas
223 PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS
225 SUBJECT AND USE INDEX
**EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH REVIEWS**

* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.

**R**
Recommended.

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

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

**NR**
Not recommended.

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

**SpR**
A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

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Elaine A. Bearden, Reviewer (EAB)
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Cover illustration by Wendy Anderson Halperin from The Trolls ©1999. Used by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux Books for Young Readers.
The Trolls

by Polly Horvath; illus. by Wendy Anderson Halperin

Humor is a funny thing, ha-ha. Children's literature offers it in many different flavors: the rollicking, slapstick humor of Anne Fine, the verbal and slightly dotty humor of Hilary McKay, the raw-edged humor of Jack Gantos. Horvath herself has demonstrated a solid humorous gift in her previous books, whether it be the realistic family comedy of No More Cornflakes (BCCB 10/90) or the frenetic but effective silliness of When the Circus Came to Town (12/96). And now The Trolls offers memorable characters, fizzy narrative, and scenes worthy of a roll on the floor, but also an underlying emotional trajectory that makes the strongest comedy part of a larger and more complex picture.

Horvath starts with a tried-and-true catalyst, a classic eccentric aunt: Aunt Sally, Dad's distant Canadian sister, swoops down to child-sit Melissa, Amanda, and Pee Wee Anderson for a week while Mom and Dad are out of the country. Aunt Sally champions put-upon youngest brother Pee Wee, shares dramatic tidbits about life in exotic Canada, and tells tales of the wild events of her childhood and notable characters in the family all hitherto unknown to her charges. We hear about Great-Uncle Louis, “who came for two weeks and stayed for six years” and who had an obsession with the consumption of green vegetables; the murder of Mrs. Gunderson, the beagle next door, who was sacrificed to her owner’s desire to get a new puppy; “Maud who shot eighty cougars,” whose enthusiasm for adding to the number seems to blind her to the species of her targets; and the trolls, who “answer to the blackest evil in our hearts,” to whom Aunt Sally left the kids’ father when he was just Robbie, the resented baby brother.

Horvath’s helplessly hilarious relation of Aunt Sally’s interaction with the children at first puts the inset stories into the shade, but Sally’s narration is unstoppable, with digressions and stories flying out at warp speed. Gradually the sagas (and occasionally the sagas within the sagas) take on a rhythm and depth of their own, conveying effervescent humor but also the dark that makes laughter necessary: the family rifts of childhood that don’t go away (Aunt Sally’s relationship with her brother has never been the same, and Great-Uncle Louis left never to return), the tragedies (Great-Aunt Hattie’s husband and daughter died in a fire, Uncle Edward and Aunt Marianne drowned on their honeymoon), the unalterable changes (“And when I pass our old clapboard house that I loved so much,” says Aunt Sally, “I am a stranger”). The result is a book hard to slot but, with its refusal to restrict itself to the light-comedy side of the street and its pell-mell plunge into heightened family history, sharply involving to read. Like Aunt Sally’s Canada
and like family history itself, it is not an evenly mixed melting pot but a mosaic, with some pieces solid glittery humor, other pieces the various hues of daily life, and a few pieces flat black tragedy, all contributing vital components to the overall design. The book also subtly makes clear that Aunt Sally manages a piece of atonement by altering the next generation's design: she gently but successfully extricates baby brother Pee Wee, son of the baby brother she lost to the trolls ("We never did get Robbie back . . . We all drifted apart"), from the clutches of the trolls to which his sisters are, all unawares, leaving him.

It would be enough that *The Trolls* is very funny. It is splendid that it is more than merely enough. (Imprint information appears on p. 205.)

Deborah Stevenson, Associate Editor

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE


Those familiar with Agee's other palindromic collections, *Go Hang a Salami! I'm a Lasagna Hog!* (BCCB 10/92) and *So Many Dynamos!* (1/95), will know the drill: each page or spread treats a palindromic comment, motto, or caption, using scribbly black-and-white art to bring the verbally reversible concept to visual life. So yes, this is more of the same, but when the same is fine entertainment it's hard to quibble. The book hits some hilarious heights (as two cowboys peer at a Wild West wanted poster depicting a big feline who kidnapped the deputy sheriff, one says to the other "Darn ocelots stole Conrad"; a dissatisfied child stuck with her mother's interminable readaloud says to her brother, "Ma's story rots, Sam") and also riffs on some classic palindromes (a man crawling through the desert finds a crate of bottled water and proclaims, "Naive was I ere I saw Evian"; in what is presumably the way of expansion and progress, the old Panamanian collection of man, plan, and canal gets expanded to include a cat, a bar, a cap, a mall, a ball, a map, a car, and a bat). If you've got plenty of young patrons who enjoy the invertible aphorisms, you'll want to add this third member of the trio. DS


In interviews from eight different locales around the globe, approximately a dozen young voices relate experiences of struggling, fairly successfully, with major obstacles to survival and a stable life. Half of the interviewees are American, ranging from an HIV-positive San Franciscan, formerly homeless, who works as an AIDS activist, to an American Indian teen in South Dakota who's finding that a strong
great-grandmother and a mentoring program help him beat the odds of poor school performance and substance-abusing parents. Other subjects include a fourteen-year-old country girl who was sold to a Bangkok brothel and a pair of Belfast Catholics who have participated in a youth-group trip with Protestant counterparts. The obstacles are formidable and success often a realistically relative judgment, which, combined with the fairly literal transcriptions, makes the accounts sound particularly authentic; the problems these young people face are both diverse and common, with parental abandonment and drugs a recurrent and clearly international theme. The sleek and elegant format is smoother than some of the book’s contents—it’s not clear who the opening “Note to the Reader” is from, some interviews fail to explain necessary background and references, and, since those interviews that offer some indications of chronology suggest that they’re five or so years in the past, the book begs for “where are they now” reports on all interviewees, not just the young man who has since died. While the kids most in need of these examples are probably least likely to get their hands on the book, the point of the universality of the struggle and the possibility of hope in the face of despair-worthy events will have meaning for many young readers. Black-and-white photographs, some merely documentary and some memorable portraits, appear throughout. DS

ANHOLT, LAURENCE Stone Girl, Bone Girl: The Story of Mary Anning; illus. by Sheila Moxley. Orchard, 1999 26p ISBN 0-531-30148-6 $15.95 R Gr. 2-4

When Mary Anning was twelve years old she discovered an ichthyosaur skeleton in the cliff face of Lyme Regis, her childhood home. This picture-book biography briefly but capably tells the early life story of the fossil-hunting Mary in involving, accessible prose. The account opens dramatically with Mary’s recovery from being hit by lightning when she was just a baby. Her close relationship with her father, Pepper, was the mainstay of her life, and his death was a great loss. Anholt softens the blow of Pepper’s death by providing Mary with the solace of a stray puppy, found wandering near her father’s grave; the dog leads Mary to the skeleton in the clay cliffs, making Mary a national heroine and turning early nineteenth-century Lyme Regis into a fossil hunters’ paradise, which it remains today. Moxley’s illustrations are stylistically naïve; the palette is seaside-appropriate blues and greens for the outdoor scenes, and indoor scenes are warmed with touches of gold and orange. The whitewashed cottages sit precariously on the page, tilting toward the sea, and the benignly smiling village characters roam the pages in a rainbow array of dresses and bonnets. The compositional balance between text and illustrations is satisfyingly maintained throughout, the clean, slightly oversized typeface set in white blocks tucked in between color-intense illustrations. A historical note about Mary Anning concludes the title. JMD


Michael McCurdy recently essayed a treatment of the Endurance’s experiences for younger readers (BCCB 9/97), and now, in time for the upcoming exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History, Armstrong tells the tale for somewhat older
ones (as does Kimmel, reviewed below). The saga of Shackleton's expedition is one of the greatest in the annals of polar exploration: after their ship was crushed in pack ice, the men survived on the naked ice, sailed 600 miles in open boats, and then split up, most remaining on a tiny rock island while Shackleton and four others sailed on another 800 miles to a Norwegian whaling station for rescue. Armstrong effectively cuts to the chase, generally leaving discussions of politics and internecine tensions (and the other side of the exploration, the men who had landed in Antarctica to lay depots for Shackleton's crossing) to more sophisticated books, and the result is a rugged adventure story all the more compelling for being true. The author uses her sources well for provision of evocative details, such as the impact, a year after getting stuck in the ice and four months after abandoning the ship, of the discovery of a twig and the homesickness engendered by the smell of its burning. Nor does she shrink from harder truths about the fate of the ship's sled dogs and cat mascot, but the overwhelming impression is of the skill and luck that enabled Shackleton to bring all his men back alive. Liberal employment of the expedition photographer's pictures, including some of the most famous Antarctic images as well as portraits of the leading players, adds to the immediacy; also provided are maps and, niftily enough, the original plans of the Endurance, including deck-by-deck floor plans. Fans of Hatchet and other survival stories should get a chilly thrill from this authentic story of triumph against tremendous odds. There are no endnotes, but a bibliography is provided, as is an index. DS


In this series of readers, Golden Books offers titles by a variety of authors known and unknown at five different reading levels; here are two of the most successful so far. Hot Dog tells, in three-word sentences in bouncy simple rhyme, of an overheated dachshund's frustrated search for a break (“Dog is hot. Mom is not. Go play, Dog”) until finally the girl in the pool takes pity on him whereupon he becomes a—wait for it—“chilly dog.” There's a Thacher Hurd-like vigor to Coxe's scrawled lines and cartoon-edged faces, and Dog's aggrieved eyebrows are nearly as notable as his hanging pink tongue (which is complete with motion lines from the pup's panting). In the more advanced Marsha Makes Me Sick, older sister Lulu fumes as baby Marsha as usual steals all the attention, this time by coming down with chicken pox (“Lulu did not like Marsha today. Lulu did not like Marsha any day”). The lot of the sibling left out of the drama is entertainingly and realistically depicted, and Brunkus' line-and-watercolor art adds just enough formality to the draftsmanship to keep things crisp even as they become chaotic. Easy but never dumb, these will help convince struggling readers that decoding can be worth the trouble. DS


Lacey is trying to pull her world back together following her parents' divorce, but the world isn't cooperating: her mother has moved from a sarcastic phase into a
dating phase, wherein Lacey becomes the parent figure to her nervous mom; the boy Lacey has a crush on seems only intermittently appreciative; and restrained, practical older sister Rosie is having sex in the basement with her boyfriend. Rosie in fact becomes pregnant, with Lacey initially her only confidante through drugstore-bought tests and clinic visits, until finally the family discovers the secret and Rosie's decision must be made in the full glare of family knowledge. Caseley draws an incisive portrait of a family that's clearly not hitting on all cylinders, though they somehow manage to get through their days, and there's no attempt to hide the pools of post-divorce bitterness. There are a few touches of contrivance—the way in which the girls' mother finds out the truth, and Lacey's discovery that her incipient boyfriend is adopted—but Rosie's gradual decision to place the baby (whom the girls plan to call Louisa) in an open adoption suits the logic of the story and the sense of the characters. While there are plenty of "uh-oh" pregnancy stories, this one is better than most at putting the event within a larger family context and making it clear that even when parents are not at their best they can still love their children very much. DS


Dolphins are a winning proposition. They are engaging sea mammals with close ties to humans; they are the stuff of story and legend; they make fine photographic subjects; and they are pretty remarkable when studied in their natural or man-made habitats. This title focuses on dolphins and their interactions with human beings, and what that interaction has meant to both species. The color photographs are excellent, the layout is clean, and the facts about dolphins are intriguing. The text suffers from a too-diffuse focus, however, jumping from example to example and spending little in-depth time on any one area. Dolphins used in physical and psychological therapy, dolphins as fish-herders for fishermen, dolphin behavior, dolphin communication, dolphin family life, dolphins in danger—all are topics touched upon briefly in prose that is interesting but dry and strangely incomplete. The explanation of echolocation, for example, would be clearer with a diagram; the text mentions that dolphin ear holes no longer open to the surface, but it doesn't say when and if they once did or posit any reason why they no longer do. Different varieties of dolphins are mentioned without accompanying illustration, and there are no maps. This doesn't have the narrative flow of Cerullo's more-focused The Octopus: Phantom of the Sea (BCCB 2/97), but it will add some color to the dolphin section nonetheless. A glossary, short bibliography, and index are included. JMD


Amos is a big pinto rocking horse who comes alive—at least in a child's mind—and takes his young mistress on an alphabetic journey through fields, over fences, until they're caught in the rain and return on home to the fantasy barn and, at last, the playroom where he is a rocking horse once more. It's an engaging fantasy, and the rhythmic meter makes it eminently suitable, if you can balance book, child, and bouncing knee, for a hobbledyhorse chant. The verses' reliance on near-rhymes
and variable scansion might distract listeners, however, and some of the phraseology (kids “kick their heels” instead of “kicking up their heels,” for instance) is a little strained. Narahashi’s watercolor art grounds the fantasy in a pleasing solidity but never loses the feeling of idyllic revelry. Except for the heroine, the figures are all toys come alive, and the critters have an exuberance and casual approximation that marks them as fantasy-enhanced. Kids yearning for their own pony peregrinations will want to rock along. DS


Rosemary is initially revolted when the class chooses a rat as the class pet, and it’s worse when she’s chosen as one of the rat’s first in-class caretakers (“Rat keeper. For a whole week. It was like a nightmare come true”). Perky little Cheese manages to endear himself to her, however, and by the time Brian, her fellow rat keeper, returns to school, Rosemary is fiercely protective—so protective that she ratnaps Cheese to her house for the weekend rather than leaving him in Brian’s pick-him-up-by-the-tail clutches. Cox is clearly no stranger to rats herself: her detailed description of Rosemary’s first skittish encounters with Cheese captures the wonder of an animal’s frightening strangeness gradually becoming an appealing familiarity, and her writing has a clarity and an energetic freshness that keeps the rodential hijinks (Cheese romps through Rosemary’s unprepared home, her little brother hot on his heels, and makes an unscheduled visit to the orthodontist) realistic rather than corny and contrived. Cynthia Fisher’s black-and-white watercolors add character as well as decoration—the people are lively individuals capable of holding their own against cheeky Cheese. Its welcome freedom from preachiness, its sound insight into grade-school psychology, and its furry appeal should keep young readers happily scampering through the pages. Helpful rat-care tips satisfyingly round out the volume. DS

COXE, MOLLY  Hot Dog

See review under Bottner, p. 196.


“Gregory Sampson woke one morning to discover that he had become a giant beetle.” This Kafkaesque situation is indeed reminiscent of “The Metamorphosis,” but primary graders who haven’t been exposed to the concept of existential dilemma may wonder just exactly why Gregory becomes a beetle, why nobody but his friend Michael notices, and why he changes back to a human. Otherwise, this is an entertaining picture book, with a funny fanged Carabus problematicus struggling to get into his school clothes (six legs for four openings presents more than an existential dilemma), to avoid stepping on his buggy new relatives at the bus stop, and to keep from offending his best friend the soccer goalie by scoring with his antenna. The spiky and skewed illustrations have a postmodern cartoon quality that extends a one-gag text to its fullest possibilities, with odd angles, thickly textured paint in dominant shades of brown and blue-green, and figures spread across a slightly disembodied flat space. Then, when Michael discovers Gregory’s iden-
tity in a reference book about insects and announces it in excited tones, there's that classic line: "'Shhh,' said the librarian." Parallel this with *The Shrinking of Treehorn* for an exercise in plot comparison. BH

**DIAKITÉ, BABA WAGUÉ, ad.**  *The Hatseller and the Monkeys: A West African Folktale;* ad. and illus. by Baba Wagué Diakité. Scholastic, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-590-96069-5 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Those of you who use Slobodkina's *Caps For Sale* as a storytime staple are going to love Diakité's energetic retelling of this West African folktale. "BaMusa the hatseller was a joyful man. He traveled from town to town selling hats, which he piled on top of his head," and when he hears about a big festival, he sets out to sell more hats than he ever has before. When he wakes after a nap under a mango tree to find all of his hats gone, his empty stomach keeps him from thinking straight. His discovery that his hats have been purloined by a treeful of mischievous monkeys doesn't help, but when the monkeys (playing "monkey see, monkey do") throw mangoes at BaMusa, he has enough sense to sit down in the shade and eat them. His full stomach helps him realize what to do, and when he throws his own hat on the ground, the monkeys follow suit. BaMusa picks up his hats and reaches the festival just in time. Diakité's paint-on-tile illustrations are a bit crowded, with a slightly muddy palette, but the white lines around the figures lighten the compositions. Black-and-white borders of monkeys with curly tails, grins, and mischievous expressions add to the overall joyous lunacy of the images. Full-page illustrations alternate with text pages decorated with small black-and-white and colored motifs from the larger painting. BaMusa is a handsome fellow dressed in festival garb, and the monkeys are the personification of monkey mischief as they wear BaMusa's hats and hang from their tails in the mango-laden tree howling, "Hoo, hoo-hoo! Hoo, hoo-hoo!" Diakité gives an extensive note about how he first heard this tale from his uncle after a visit from a Fulani milk-seller; he also gives several sources for written variants from other cultures. JMD

**DUFFEY, BETSY**  *Alien for Rent.* Delacorte, 1999 [80p]
ISBN 0-385-32572-X $14.95
Reviewed from galleys

At Lexie's suggestion, she and her friend J.P. answer a glowing green ad on the school bulletin board: "Alien for rent . . . two gugentocks per hour . . . meet at the third tree on the ground of play." When they arrive at the tree on the playground, nothing (or nobody) responds to their call, "Earthling calling alien," except for Bruce, the fifth-grade bully sporting purple-striped hair, a gold earring, and a shirt that proclaims "Be Afraid." Bruce is routed by some very weird phenomena, whereupon Lexie and J.P. find the little alien in Lexie's lunchbox snacking away on her gugentocks (Twinkies). Unfortunately, Bork the alien has paid for the Twinkies by responding to requests in J.P. and Lexie's conversation; the result—Bruce's becoming a giant baby—needs to be undone and fast. Bork is an appealingly pet-like alien, and Duffey's dialogue is snappy and believable. The book deteriorates somewhat after Bruce's transformation, however, with the events getting piled-on and frenetic and the resolution (the kids pass the action off as part of a "Just Say No to Drugs" presentation, to the congratulations of the principal) strained. Nonetheless, newly independent readers will appreciate this lighthearted tale of wishes, aliens, and bully-gets-his due. EAB
FLEMING, Candace  When Agnes Caws; illus. by Giselle Potter. Schwartz/Atheneum, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-689-81471-2 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R 5-7 yrs

In this gleefully unapologetic melodramatic farce, Agnes, the daughter of well-known ornithologist Dr. Octavia Peregrine, discovers a unique talent for birdcalling ("All went attwitter over the little girl"). When the World Bird Society sends Dr. Peregrine and Agnes on a search for the rare and elusive pink-headed duck, villainous hunter Colonel Pittsnap follows, watches, and waits. This he has to do for some time, since no one knows what the pink-headed duck sounds like ("Then I better get quacking," says Agnes) until our intrepid young heroine literally stumbles over it by accident. "Ouch-ow! Ouch-ow! Oh drat!
"Ouch-ow! Ouch-ow! Clack! Clack!" replies the duck, winging swiftly to the site. The colonel nets it and Agnes pursues him, only to be cornered herself. With Agnes and the duck both trapped, Pittsnap, obviously ignorant of the old folk adage to beware of what you wish for, demands that she call some birds for his collection. So she calls them—all of them. The sound effects and the final visuals make this a very satisfying picture book to read aloud, while Potter's prim, narrow-eyed figures offer a tidy satire on Victorian explorers. The watercolor backgrounds all have a maplike appearance, with objects and images clustered rather haphazardly across them, yet there's a compositional cohesion well supported by modulated ear tones. This is a cacophonously funny adventure. BH


Covering phenomena ranging from crop circles to dowsing to table-tipping, Gardner examines the story behind apparently supernatural events and belief therein. After discussing the why-nots and wherefore-it-can'ts, the book then offers up some do-it-yourself activities that give youngsters their chance to test their ESP within some reasonably strict guidelines and demonstrate how easy it is to reproduce supernatural effects with only worldly efforts. Though the author's approach is clearly that of a skeptic, his descriptions occasionally pull their skeptical punches or fail to support their explanations, so that the ironic result is that readers are required to take the debunking on faith to a certain extent; he also is slightly misleading and out of date on some of his accounts and facts (James Randi's standing offer to anyone proving to have supernatural powers has risen from the $10,000 Gardner mentions to $1 million). Still, it provides a useful counterbalance to books with less interest in evidentiary rigor, and the accessible writing and the possibility of experiments may lure reluctant readers dismissive of softer-edged fare. Diagrams and black-and-white photos provide visual referents; a bibliography and an index are included. DS

GERSTEIN, Mordicai, ad.  Noah and the Great Flood; ad. and illus. by Mordicai Gerstein. Simon, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-689-81371-6 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R 4-8 yrs

Gerstein's redheaded Noah is a man of great heart, who spends 120 years pleading with the residents of earth to change their ways before God destroys them with a
great flood. The flood comes, and Noah regretfully loads up and leaves the sinners to their terrible fate. Gerstein's tale of Noah borrows from myth and midrash to create a Biblical world populated by fantastic creatures and giants. Noah carries mythological animals such as the og, the rayeem, and the urshanas onto the ark (although Gerstein never explains their post-flood disappearance), and he and his wife and sons care for both legendary and everyday beasts through the course of the voyage. The illustrations, in a variety of frames and formats including full-page, small frames, and double-page, are all glowingly colored, from the round smiling face of a flame-haired Noah to the rainbow arching over a newly born earth. Gerstein's gift for retelling Bible stories is evident here—his combination of fresh language and innocent images gives a cheerful reverence to this familiar tale.

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027493-X  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 3-6

Although artist/scientist Charles Willson Peale has recently received biographical treatment (The Ingenious Mr. Peale by Janet Wilson, BCCB 6/96), Giblin zooms in on Peale's work at age sixty, when he and his son Rembrandt followed a series of leads to unearth "mammoth" bones from ancient sinkholes in New York state. The tale of discovery, reconstruction, and reception by the scientific community is well told, enhanced by details of the challenges associated with locating remains, bargaining with site owners, arranging dangerous excavations, and weathering a disappointing foreign tour. Likewise, the evidence which led other scientists to rename Peale's find a "mastodon" rather than a "mammoth" is clearly explained. Additional information on Peale's career and on the disappearance of mammoths and mastodons (which, it seems, could have been incorporated into the main text) is somewhat awkwardly supplied in lengthy addenda; report writers who like to shop for all their data in the same place will nonetheless appreciate the inclusion. Black-and-white illustrations, including some of Peale's sketches and paintings, illuminate the text, and an index and source notes are provided. EB

GLOVACH, LINDA  Beauty Queen. di Capua/HarperCollins, 1998  169p
ISBN 0-06-205161-X  $14.95  M  Gr. 9-12

Nineteen-year-old Sam—Samantha—is at loose ends after her high-school boyfriend dumps her for a rich older woman; her mother's an alcoholic pill-popper, her mother's live-in boyfriend is a creep with designs on Sam, and she's not finding much satisfaction in her job at Chicken & Ribs. She takes her diabetic cat, Dinah (one of the Alice in Wonderland references presumably meant to link the title to Go Ask Alice), and moves out, getting a job at a topless dance club and almost immediately discovering the wonders of heroin. The slide downwards from there is predictable, though Sam's sexual downfall is limited to falling for a crooked cop whom she believes to be her true love, until her fatal end. The flaws that have beset previous tomes on this topic, from Go Ask Alice to Shelley Stoehr's Weird on the Outside (BCCB 3/95), are rife here: Sam is so perfunctorily drawn from the beginning, with her breathy diary entries (she seems to have been rather a sheltered nineteen-year-old despite her rough life), that it's a shock to hear a final eulogy to
her "loving, generous spirit" when such distinct character traits have by no means been in evidence, and the book seems less concerned with plausibility than with ensuring she meets with disaster. Burgess' *Smack* (BCCB 4/98) at least made the sadness and spiritual impoverishment of those kids' lives with or without drugs its own point; here Sam is such a cipher, made to be sacrificed, that her literarily convenient passing leaves no more sense of loss than her tawdry life. Readers who relish a walk down tragedy lane may get a kick out of the vicarious slumming, but it's no more a cautionary tale or imaginative exploration of character than *Reefer Madness*. DS


As Spivak's *Grass Sandals* (BCCB 7/97) gave some insight into the life and haiku of Basho, this volume treats another great figure in haiku history, Issa. The book gives an overview of the poet's life, accenting the biography with relevant haiku (the verses also appear in Japanese calligraphy on the border of the page). The biography is clearly and simply phrased, its spareness effective in recounting the life of a man famous for verses of simplicity and its introduction straightforward and appealing ("He is known to people of all ages in Japan, and now he is known to you"). The translated haiku are variably successful, with some compact and imagistic but some rather pedestrian. The illustrations don't always complement the poems visually or conceptually ("The rare beauty of green bamboo shoots/sprouting here and there" captions a verdant scene where the bamboo's green blots out the horizon), and the figures (human and animal) tend towards the stilted; there's an accuracy in the botany and a droll precision in the cool melons, however, that liven the spreads. This isn't as absorbing as Spivak's book, but the two would nonetheless make interesting partners in a discussion of style and poetic history. Detailed notes about the translations, haiku, and Issa are included. DS


The *Sunflower*, a yellow side-wheeler paddleboat, is snagged by an underwater tree that "reached up from the river bottom... In rushed the river to pull her down, but other snags caught her and held her fast. There perched the *Sunflower* like a big, bright bird, half in, and half out of the water." Young Polly witnesses the rescue of passengers and goods, and, living by the river, she witnesses the river-change that the currents cause to the *Sunflower*. Sand and silt are deposited on the wrecked vessel, turning it into a small island complete with willows and cottonwoods, birds and animals. Polly grows old by the river and tells the story of the wreck of the *Sunflower* and the growth of Sunflower Island to her daughter, and then to her granddaughter, and finally, when the river floods and washes away the island and releases the "bleached old bones" of the *Sunflower*, to her great-granddaughter in the circle of their loving and extended African-American family. Jenkins' mixed-media illustrations are a delicate reflection of Greene's evocative text, and
the views of the river have a simple grace and power. The contrast between light and shadow is enhanced by a dramatic and rich palette of deep blues and mauves. It isn’t often that a picture book can convey a sense of the passage of time, personal family history, and the evolution of a river in thirty-two pages. Greene deserves clear sailing weather for this multilayered account. JMD

GREGORY, VALISKA  
A Valentine for Norman Noggs; illus. by Marsha Winborn.  
HarperCollins, 1999 [32p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027656-8  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  
R  5-8 yrs

Norman the hamster is in love with the new girl in his class, Wilhelmina: “Norman loved the way Wilhelmina’s eyes fluttered like butterflies. He loved the lace on her dress and the buttons on her shiny black shoes.” But he has rivals for the lovely Wilhelmina’s affections—Robert and Arthur, two tough-guy hamsters who are determined to keep Norman from delivering his homemade valentine to the object of his affection. Sure enough, the two bullies deprive Norman of not one but two valentines he made for dainty Wilhelmina, but they are stopped in their tracks when Wilhelmina herself comes barreling to Norman’s rescue. The two exchange valentines (the resourceful Norman has a third valentine pinned to his shirt sleeve) and romantic history is made. There’s a kitschy, old-fashioned look to this little confection, complete with candy hearts and homemade valentines; a little red heart character with legs and personality dances through the pages and adds energy by entertainingly reacting to the action. Gregory’s text is frothy without being sentimental and romantic while still being funny. Norman and Wilhelmina deserve each other in the nicest possible way. JMD

GRINDLEY, SALLY, ad.  
Bible Stories for the Young; illus. by Jan Barger.  
Little Tiger, 1998 95p
ISBN 1-888444-42-8  $16.95  
R  3-6 yrs

Grindley has selected some standard favorites from the Old and New Testaments for this readaloud compilation of Bible stories. The stories of Noah and the Ark, David and Goliath, Jonah and the Whale, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Last Supper, among others, are retold in a smooth, simple style that will appeal to readers aloud and their preschool listeners. While Grindley’s retellings lose some of the majesty of the Biblical language, she adds a cozy friendliness that young children will find inviting. Barger’s watercolors, done in a clean, unblended palette with dot-eyed, smiling characters (both animal and human), are reminiscent of Anne Rockwell and Helen Oxenbury in their gentle humor. The design of the book is open, with generous amounts of white space, and the text blocks are broken up into manageable increments by judicious selections of spot art. Grindley’s selections are unsurprising, but this is a solid collection that will help fill the great demand for Bible stories for the younger set. JMD

GUIBERSON, BRENDA Z.  
Mummy Mysteries: Tales from North America.  
Holt, 1998 74p illus. with photographs (Redfeather Books)
ISBN 0-8050-5369-7  $15.95  
R  Gr. 3-5

For readers whose fascination with Egyptian mummies is beginning to wear thin, Guiberson presents some homegrown mummies that may have escaped their at-
tention. The mummified corpse of an ancient Alaskan bison, dubbed Blue Babe, bears wounds that prove lions once roamed the northern regions; amber beads adorning the nose of an Aleut mummy suggest a migration path along the Aleutian Islands from Asia to North America; the frozen remains of stoker John Torrington indicate lead poisoning as the probable cause for the Franklin Expedition's demise. Guiberson also turns her attention to the limitations of studying mummies (Anasazi mummies have less to say about the culture's disappearance than packrat middens do), "medicinal" uses of ground mummies in the past, and tracing the identity of a mummified outlaw discovered in a Long Beach, California fun house. Illustrations in the Aleut chapter do not coordinate well with the text, the bibliography haphazardly mingles children's works with adult references, and "The Final Mummy Mysteries" quiz that concludes the book is misleadingly simplified and its answers unexplained. Still, the text is smooth and engaging, and the volume could pave the way to Patricia Lauber's more challenging *Tales Mummies Tell* (BCCB 7/85). EB

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027800-5 $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 1-3

Twenty poems—an even score, you might say—entice novice-reader sports fans to consider the thrills and quieter satisfactions of their favorite games. Many of the offerings display laudable grace within the bounds of controlled vocabulary: Nikki Grimes' track athlete boasts, "When the whistle blows/ I am ready and set/ and no one can tell me/ I am too anything/ or less than enough." The swimmer in Myra Cohn Livingston's "O Beautiful Here" sighs, "O beautiful here, water/ Bubbles in clear foam,/ Warming to the sun at top,/ Shivery to the bone." In contrast, however, more prosaic entries such as Lillian Fisher's "Play Ball!" sound downright clunky: "First base, second, third—I'm home free! Hurrah for my team! Hurrah for me!" With the exception of the shadowy gray tones of the empty gym that accompanies Tony Johnston's "After the Game," Floca's line and watercolor pictures are unremittingly chipper, often failing to catch the nuances of the illuminated verse. For example, Floca supplies simplistic visual humor for Grimes' "Any Excuse Will Do," landing a basketball in a planter to highlight the line "I can't quite see the hoop," and ignoring the more evocative passage "Summer basketball—drops of sweat blur my sight." Although this collection may not represent the dream team of sports poems, there are enough stars to make it a pretty entertaining game. EB

**Hopkinson, Deborah**  
*A Band of Angels: A Story Inspired by the Jubilee Singers*; illus. by Raúl Colón. Schwartz/Atheneum, 1999 [40p]  
ISBN 0-689-81062-8 $16.00  
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 3-5

Based on the life of Ella Sheppard Moore and the founding of the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, this title follows a fictionalized Ella from slavery to freedom, from scrubbing floors to singing to raise money for Fisk, the first university founded for freed slaves. The story of the Jubilee Singers is a moving one—a group of former slaves desperately try to raise money to keep their school open by singing popular tunes of the day but fail dismally. Only when they began to sing the pow-
erfully poetic spirituals from their own past do they find success. Ella is the one who moves them to it with her unplanned rendition of “Many Thousand Gone”: “But Ella’s voice seemed to lift them up with her. And as their voices joined hers, like streams flowing into a deep river, they could feel everyone in the hall leaning forward to listen.” Colón’s watercolor and colored pencil illustrations are rendered in an earth-toned palette suffused with a warm golden light that suits this inspirational tale. The players are handsomely and expressively characterized, and the endpapers feature mini-portraits of the real Jubilee Singers, with birth dates and places and a modicum of known history. An author’s note clearly separates fact from fiction at the conclusion of the text. JMD


See this month’s Big Picture, p. 193, for review.


Whether it’s just fate or the Shackleton exhibit due to open in New York, we’re currently being gifted with books about the 1914 Endurance expedition (see Armstrong, above). Kimmel’s book is similarly a solid enterprise detailing the adventures of the exploring party who abandoned their ice-trapped ship, sailed 600 miles in Antarctic seas to an inhospitable and uninhabited island, and gained rescue only when Shackleton and companions took a further 800-mile journey and fought politics and war shortages to get a rescue ship. This title is even more thickly packed with photographs than Armstrong’s, and it focuses more on Shackleton himself, fleshing out his biography with details about his career and his personal life. The book is more inclined to gloss over interpersonal strife, however, and a little less familiar with the facts (a caption of the famous ghostly Endurance photograph seems puzzlingly unfamiliar with the circumstances of the picture’s taking). If Antarctic fever sets in severely enough you’ll want both titles anyway, and the possible compare-and-contrast exercise might well be an intriguing approach to historiography. A bibliography and index are included. DS


A dozen double spreads with foldout flaps of text cover the history of apparel in Europe and Anglo-America from the Roman Empire through the 1960s. In the equivalent of two pages of text for each fashion era, Knight reviews the political and economic events, as well as the availability and creation of fabrics, that affected attire. Central to each spread is the well-to-do, fashion-plate family of the period, with father, mother, and two children garbed in layers of heavy paper stock “clothing” that can be lifted in flaps to reveal the garments (or lack thereof) underneath. Borders of captioned vignettes detail hairstyles, footwear, and accessories that the well-dressed upper crust would have sported. Textual explanations of the
clothing items and their transformation over time tend to be a bit involved and dry, and occasionally a juicy tidbit fails to merit an accompanying picture. Inconsistencies in the text (information on children's fashions is absent from one spread but reappears in the next) and numerous Briticisms may cause mild confusion in readers. Still, this is a succinct sartorial overview, the peek-a-boo flap book feature is a nifty and apt pedagogical device, and readers who have long since packed in their paper dolls can indulge again here with impunity. EB

LAIRD, ELIZABETH Secret Friends. Putnam, 1999 [80p]
Reviewed from galleys

On the first day of school, Lucy lands Rafaella, whose ears stick out, with the cursed nickname "Earwig." The sobriquet is taken up with glee, especially by the super-cool popular girls, one of whom Lucy would dearly love to be, and Rafaella is an outcast at school. After school, however, Lucy and Rafaella form a friendship, with restrained English Lucy drawn to the quiet warmth of Rafaella's "foreign" family. Lucy's public denial of their private friendship finally comes to an end, but only in the face of a tragedy that leaves Lucy guilt-ridden as well as grief-stricken. Laird has the casual schoolyard cruelty and arbitrariness of school alliances down well, and Lucy's blinkered yet evolving viewpoint is authentic. The book tips its hand, however, with the heavy cautionary lesson of the plot when Rafaella dies under anesthesia after going in for cosmetic surgery on her ears; the result is the childish "I'll be dead and you'll be sorry" ethic turned didactic, and it's undercut by the easy exoneration at the end. The combination of dramatic event and accessible, quiet writing is one that will probably appeal to young readers; those looking for a less contrived treatment of the topic, however, should stick to Sachar's Marvin Redpost: Why Pick on Me? (BCCB 2/93) or Judy Blume's Blubber. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-531-33135-0 $17.99
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-30135-4 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

On her way to buy a muffin at the bakery, Jane puts her hand in her pocket and finds a frog wearing her dime as a hat. Irritably, she tells the storytelling frog she doesn't listen to stories, and still more irritably she listens as he tells her the story of the frog prince—sort of. The pre-frog prince is in love with Jaylee, a servant girl, and his father the king is not pleased; hence, the "anti-love potion" that turns the prince into a frog—a storytelling frog, as it turns out, who, by telling his own story to Jane, causes her to miss him, thereby breaking the spell and remembering her true identity as the loving Jaylee: "'I thought the princess had to kiss the frog,' said Jaylee. 'You're not a princess,'" says the former frog. "'You had to miss me.' 'Magnificent,' said Jaylee. 'I'd rather kiss you now, when you're not so green.' So she did... and happily ever after." McClintock's watercolor and ink illustrations just miss capturing the nature of this fairy tale redux—the visual images are a tad more precious than the text, which has a subtle, offbeat charm. Characterization is strong throughout, however, with the frog a terrific trickster-type personality who cajoles the initially unwilling Jane/Jaylee into a winsome happy ending. JMD
LEOPOLD, NIKI CLARK  *Once I Was...*; illus. by Woodleigh Marx
Hubbard. Putnam, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-399-23105-6 $15.99
Reviewed from galleys  M  3-5 yrs

A collection of before and after phrases—"Once I was the alphabet, now I am a book"; "Once I couldn't feed myself, now I love to cook"—make up this series of musings on growing up and into new skills and responsibilities. Hubbard's color-saturated graphics burst off the pages, the glowing yellow sky, intense cobalt sea, and red backgrounds easily drawing in the viewer. Unfortunately, Leopold's befores and afters lose their logical continuity with some unreined forays into poetic license. After setting up the pattern of the text, she abandons it in imagery that will provoke incredulity in the very literal audience at which this title is aimed. Understanding that the smaller is supposed to be giving way to the more complete or larger, phrases like "Once I was a penny, now I am the sun" and "Once I was a napkin, now I am a kite" strain for unsuccessful whimsicality, and the uneasy balance between real events and imagined ones interrupts the logical flow of the text. If you are looking for passage books, try Jonas' *When You Were a Baby,* or even McPhail's *Pig Pig Grows Up.*  JMD

LESTER, JULIUS  *What a Truly Cool World*; illus. by Joe Cepeda. Scholastic, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-590-86468-8 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Lester's story of creation features a God who, when he finished making the world, "felt as bright and sunny as love. He had never made a world before, and, if he said so himself (and he did), he thought he had done a very good job." That's before Shaniqua, "the angel in charge of everyone's business," comes in and tells him his creation is, well, boring. (Right about now readers-aloud will begin to realize that this might not be quite the way they remember this story from childhood.) God's secretary, Bruce, calls him names like "Mighty Maker," "Terrific Titan," and "Fearless Fixer," and it is Bruce who does the fetching and carrying when God is in a creative mood. Suffice it to say that between God, Shaniqua, and Bruce, the world gets grass, flowers, and butterflies and becomes truly cool. Cepeda's oil paintings are saturated with color, each page a different background hue; the characters are dressed in flamboyant fashions, from God's green sandals to Shaniqua's purple robe and red shoes to Bruce's yellow wings, and the tropical-punch palette is both soothing and exhilarating as the heavenly denizens float around a paradise that looks like a small town celebrating a national holiday. The text bounces along with exuberant glee and practically shouts itself off the pages. Lester's note relates this story to an earlier retelling of Zora Neale Hurston's "How God Made the Butterflies" but says that this version is both a departure from and tribute to a storytelling tradition he embraces. This is going to liven up the Bible stories shelf and make daring religion teachers very happy.  JMD

LEVY, JANICE  *Totally Uncool*; illus. by Chris Monroe. Carolrhoda, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 1-57505-306-3 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  6-9 yrs

The individual denigrated as "totally uncool" is Dad's new girlfriend, whom he calls "Sweet Potato" ("I don't call her anything," the narrator asserts darkly). Dad's
Sweet Potato has quite a pile of alien and alarming traits (“Her kitchen floor is too shiny. Mostly everything she eats is green”), which seem likely to sabotage any possibility of a relationship with Dad’s daughter. Eventually, however, the narrator begins to admit that Sweet Potato—okay, Elizabeth—has her merits (“At school plays, Dad’s new girlfriend claps the loudest. . . . She doesn’t call my stuff ‘junk.’ Or touch it without asking first”). While this will probably have more initial appeal for parental girlfriends than for the kids dealing with them, the voice here has a tellingly kidlike ring and the relationship with the not-quite-stepparent, rarely seen in picture books, is authentically ambivalent (there’s also a sense that shortcomings in Dad’s previous girlfriends have contributed to the narrator’s appreciation of Elizabeth’s qualities). The art matches the voice—childlike but savvy, the new-wavy figures peer at one another with gimlet eyes and stroll about on pipestem legs, but the solid oil pigments and sturdy, self-assured colors imply that Elizabeth isn’t fading away anytime soon. Getting used to the new person in a parent’s life is a chore indeed; this may help youngsters put it in perspective. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028210-X  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028040-9  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-10

Elvin, star of *Slot Machine* (BCCB 10/95), is now starting high school, where some challenges (dealing with predatory large guys who want to pound him to mush or sinister cool guys who seem to find him amusing) are old foes and some (dealing with girls at scheduled dances with the sister school) are new complications. Elvin’s friends, Frankie and Mike, somehow remain untainted by Elvin’s geekdom, but Frankie is desperately trying to push Elvin towards a higher social stratum—and a different girl—than Elvin hopes for. Elvin is mystified to find that, by some bizarre high-school alchemy, his brief encounter with one girl (which, in an escalating circle of pranks and lies, leaves him rumored to have acquired VD from her), his yearning for another (the cheeky Barbara, scarily like Elvin’s smart-mouthed mother), and his fast mouth have gotten him a sort of offhanded esteem with the School Big Guns. The ending is a bit abrupt and the high-school Hunter S. Thompson style nearly overwhelms with glibness at times, but Elvin’s narration is funny, charged, and authentically angst-ridden. Barbara’s appeal is also clear and understandable, as is her wisdom in eventually stepping back from Elvin the Unready’s over-intense pursuit. Fans of the first book will want to see Elvin in his school milieu, where as usual he’s often a loser but always a survivor. DS

MCCULLY, EMILY ARNOLD  *Mouse Practice*; written and illus. by Emily Arnold McCully. Levine/Scholastic, 1999  [32p]
ISBN 0-590-68220-2  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  4-7 yrs

Monk, a little mite of a mouse, gets his coveted chance to play ball with the big guys—and he flubs it on the field. Suffering the ultimate humiliation (“They weren’t angry. It was worse than that. They felt sorry for him”), he heads home to his sympathetic but athletically inept parents, who encourage him to practice his baseball skills while they rehearse with their musician friends. Once Monk catches the rhythm of the game, he’s invincible; at his next opportunity to strut his stuff on the diamond, “No one could get a hit off Monk. He pitched the whole game.
The big kids had a new ace.” Although the problem of keeping up with the older crowd will undoubtedly ring true for most listeners, the connection between the adults’ music and the child’s success is tenuous; in fact, it is never entirely clear whether Monk’s weeks of practice or his parents’ musical accompaniment on the ball field account for his triumph. Still, sports-themed picture books generally score with young audiences, and McCully’s warm and expressive mice, cavorting in their sun-dappled rodent suburbia, are an amiable bunch to hang out with. EB


The brief and ruthless career of the infamous seventeenth-century privateer comes vividly to life in this carefully crafted history of cutthroat international rivalry in the Caribbean region, where by common political assent there was “no peace beyond the Line.” Little is known of Morgan’s early years, and fully a hundred pages pass before readers reach his documented exploits. They are unlikely to bemoan the pacing, however, as Marrin lays out the wretched social conditions that drove men to sea and the maritime policies that often caused them to jump ship; the origins of buccaneers as ship purveyors in Hispaniola; Spanish raids that impelled the buccaneers to revenge and ultimately sent them back to sea as quasi-legal raiders under the British flag. Morgan then emerges in the text much as he did on the Caribbean scene—a seaman skilled in military arts, ready to make his fortune from the misfortunes of Spanish colonists. Marrin’s obvious passion for military history, evidenced in his fine Civil War histories (Unconditional Surrender and Virginia’s General, BCCB 3/94 and 1/95), is in full play, with edge-of-the-seat depictions of the horrifying siege of Puerto Bello, Morgan’s brilliant escape from Lake Maracaibo, and the fiery sack of Old Panama. This is no romanticization of a swashbuckling hero, though; Marrin makes it clear that Morgan was every inch the self-interested and often cruel product of cruel times. Photos and historical illustrations, an index and bibliography, and exemplary notes are included. EB


Masoff’s just back from the Fire! (BCCB 4/98), and she’s roaring off to another disaster, this time exploring the heroics of the many teams that bring urgent medical aid to victims of sudden accident and illness. Again, flashy but genuinely informative spreads are cogently organized. “Help Is on the Way” follows the EMTs and paramedics who arrive by ambulance, plane, helicopter, motorcycle (and even by rappelling gear) to offer aid and transport; “Help Is Here” probes the emergency rooms, operating rooms, intensive care units, and remote medical sites where lives are saved and sometimes lost; “Medicine Past and Future” sets modern emergency care into historical perspective. Equipping and training of medical personnel is addressed, and the comments of practitioners regarding their emotionally draining careers are at once wrenching and inspiring. Crisp color photos, helpful cross-indexing within the text, and an index guide the audience smoothly through the frantic scenes. Next time a white-jacketed TV hero orders up “a Chem 7 for a train wreck,” readers will know just what’s on the way. EB
METZGER, LOIS  *Missing Girls.* Viking, 1999  [208p]
Reviewed from galleys  M  Gr. 4-7

After her mother's death, Carrie's having understandable problems adjusting to
life without her absentee father and with her often embarrassing immigrant grand-
mother. Three friendships rise, though, on the junior high horizon—with the
close-knit June and Regina, and with lovely, guarded Mona, whose skill at lucid
dreaming fascinates them all. The quartet meets to swap dreams, dabbling in
amateur interpretation and indulging in self-absorbed analysis (possibly a reflec-
tion of the self-actualizing 1967 milieu), until stories that are clearly more lie than
dream split them apart. Carrie's nonetheless hooked—on her promising attempts
at maintaining consciousness within her dreams, and on Mona's seemingly perfect
family, with whom she stays as often as possible—until a blow-up with Mona's
mother concerning Mona's dementia-afflicted grandmother shows Carrie how lov-
ing her own household really is. Action consists largely of switching scenes of
conversations, punctuated by Metzger's over-explanations of Carrie's thoughts and
reactions. The lucid dreaming theme becomes so convoluted that Carrie's big
moment of self-revelation becomes laughably abstruse: "And at that moment Carrie
knew why she'd gotten interested in dreams, in being awake inside dreams. . . .
Carrie had to know she was awake while asleep, so she could know she was awake
while awake." Readers who revel in psychological conundrums may want to take a
crack at this, but most others can give these girls a miss.  EB

MOLLEL, TOLOLWA M.  *Song Bird;* illus. by Rosanne Litzinger. Clarion, 1999  [32p]
ISBN 0-395-82908-9  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

All the cattle belonging to Mariamu's people have disappeared without a trace,
and the villagers have no milk. Mariamu discovers a small songbird that in ex-
change for a promise gives all her people milk, and the people cage the bird to
make sure their milk supply never runs out. When the sympathetic Mariamu frees
the bird, it rewards her by helping her retrieve the lost cattle from Makucha, the
monster who has stolen them. Mollel's storytelling voice, assisted by rhythmic
Swahili refrains and Tanzanian songs, rolls beautifully through this narrative.
Litzinger's watercolor and pencil illustrations are rendered in a palette that lends
an airy lightness to the compositions, even the ones featuring the dreadful Makucha
as the central focus. Full and double-page spreads have their own momentum,
many balanced to the right and drawing the viewer from page to page. An exten-
sive author's note gives Mollel's cultural sources for his retelling, with an explana-
tion of his use of the Swahili language and the words made up for such sounds as
swallowing ("gulum") and empty gourds rolling ("birim"). Musical notation is
given for the songs, and a short glossary and pronunciation guide translates the
Swahili refrains.  JMD

MYERS, CHRISTOPHER  *Black Cat;* written and illus. by Christopher
Myers. Scholastic, 1999  [40p]
ISBN 0-590-03375-1  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  All ages

Christopher Myers creates powerful collage art in this tribute to the urban lifestyle
of a black street cat as it prowls around neon- and sunlit thoroughfares. From the title page, with its film noir-ish play of street and traffic lights, to the unforgiving glare of daylight on graffitied bricks and playground asphalt in interior spreads, Myers captures the allure and intensity of big-city streets. His poem to the feline wanderer has a repeating refrain ("Black cat, black cat, we want to know/ where's your home, where do you go?") that unifies the mixed-media images comprising this walk on the wild side. The illustrations—a combination of photographs, collage, gouache, and ink—follow the slinky black cat with the slanting yellow-green eyes from street to alley, subway tracks to rooftop, basketball hoop to chain-link fence, in balanced compositions that use light, shadow, and black bars with colored text to concretize memorable poetic images. The resulting illustrations are an uncanny combination of gritty reality and urban fantasy. The focused and vivid free verse proves that Myers has control over poetic as well as visual imagery, and young readers will also appreciate the chantable couplets: "Black cat, black cat,/ is there a place of your own?/ we want to know,/ where's your home?// black cat answers . . . / anywhere I roam." Cool. JMD


A young woman who has been known as little more than a curious historical footnote now receives merited attention, thanks to Myers' extensive research. The life of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, as she would come to be called, boasts the elements of a compelling fairy tale. The tiny Egbado princess witnessed the slaughter of her family at the hands of the ferocious King Gezo of Dahome and was marked for ritual sacrifice, only to be saved at the last possible moment by British abolitionist naval officer, Captain Forbes. Raised by a succession of families and enjoying the financial patronage and official attentions of Queen Victoria, the child grew to womanhood in privileged circumstances. But mingling with royalty ultimately insured neither robust health nor a love match, and Sarah's destiny was a marriage of convenience, followed by death from tuberculosis at a relatively early age. Myers necessarily engages in some interpolation to connect the evidential dots in Sarah's recorded history, and he occasionally supplies a bit of padding to spin out her tale (a passage from Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor is inserted to contrast Sarah's circumstances with those of many Victorian orphans). Still, Myers addresses his source limitations frankly, and interprets the impact of Sarah's ambiguous social status on her prospects with admirable clarity and directness. This view of the respect and affection accorded by the nineteenth-century British elite to a young African woman will greatly enrich both Black Studies and European history collections. A bibliography is included; black-and-white reproductions of period images appear throughout. EB


Mary Veronica finds what seems to be a mysterious abandoned egg by the pond, so she takes it home to hatch it in hope of winning the Most Unusual Pet prize at
the pet fair. She doesn’t get much help: older sister Mary Louise says the egg is rotten, younger sister Mary Margaret is convinced it’s a dinosaur in the making and wants the egg herself, the science teacher wants it to be an experiment (and nearly causes it to get cooked). Mary Veronica perseveres, however, and enters the pet fair in hopes that the egg will hatch out in time to take the prize. Nethery has a cheerful and easygoing writing style, and her depiction of Mary Veronica’s loving attentions (“She washed what she thought might be the top of its head. ‘I’m sorry you lost your mommy,’ she said”) is engagingly specific. The ending, wherein the duck that hatches out (just after the awarding of prizes) attaches immediately to foster mom Mary Veronica and is therefore the best prize of all, is a bit sentimental and anticlimactic, but youngsters who long for an Anything of their own will grasp the significance of the reward. Yalowitz’s colored-pencil art depends on even-toned sandy surfaces of slightly misty colors, but the strong borders and sharp lines and dots that make up the characters’ minimal features keep things from being blowing-away nebulous. This might make a particularly entertaining read-aloud if you’ve got older classes doing egg babies or flour babies, but you’ll have to make sure the audience doesn’t then engage in wholesale egg plundering from their own nearby ponds—or from their home refrigerators. DS

Reviewed from galleys Ad 4-8 yrs

Nickle recounts the familiar scenario of a small child’s being picked on by a bully, but this time with a twist: the victim turns bully as he then picks on ants. The ants, though, have other plans for Lucas, shrinking him to ant-size and putting him on trial. Found guilty, he is sentenced to serve the colony and the Queen. Lucas works diligently, and his efforts don’t go unnoticed: the Queen offers Lucas freedom in exchange for a jellied candy available in Lucas’ parents’ house. After making friends with the two ants accompanying him on the foray to retrieve the candy, he is struck silent by their accusation that he treated the ants just as poorly as the bully treated him. When Lucas re-enters the world human-size, the ants give the bully his due in a satisfying ending. Nickle’s prose is sometimes unnecessarily sparse, and it jumps abruptly from one action to another. The vibrant oil paintings are polished, however, creating a three-dimensional look not unlike Disney’s Toy Story (and the bad guy here has the same name as the film’s villain). Angled pictures and changing perspectives add visual tension to this fantastical story, where the smallest serve up the just deserts. EAB

Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 7-12

Beautiful sixteen-year-old Charlotte is desperate to get away from her grandfather’s vicarage, desperate to get away from an arranged marriage with a cold-handed curate, and desperate for something, anything, to happen to keep her from a dismally dull if secure future. Her older brother conspires to take her mountain climbing in Switzerland with some friends from Oxford, including the very wealthy Milo. In developments that would have shocked the Victorian society in which they take place, one of the climbers dies, and the wealthy Milo takes in grieving
widow Clara and gives the other members of the climbing party jobs as servants in his newly acquired, dilapidated, but conveniently located manor house. Milo is having a scandalous affair with a married woman old enough to be his mother, but that doesn't keep Charlotte from falling in love with him. With breathtaking rapidity, the dominoes begin to topple—Milo's mistress dies in a hunting accident, Clara sings for the Prince of Wales and her future is made, Milo falls in love with Charlotte and then is handily killed in an avalanche, clearing the way for Mar (chum of Milo), who loved her truly all along. There is a tremendous amount of plot here, and most of it is unlikely. Still, incidents are engagingly strung together, and the characters, while definitely types, have enough charm to keep them interesting, making this a satisfactory if labyrinthine read for those looking for a historical romance with more romance than history. JMD

**PROPP, VERA**  
*When the Soldiers Were Gone.* Putnam, 1999  [112p]  
Reviewed from galleys  

Henk is shocked when a strange couple who claim to be his parents come to the Dutch farm that has been the only home he remembers; when they call him Benjamin, take him away to the city, and introduce him to a baby whom they call his brother but who is really his cousin because the baby's real parents have been killed in a concentration camp; when they enroll him in a school where a bully calls him "dirty Jew" despite the fact that his father reassures him the Nazi soldiers who used to hunt him are gone. The author has succeeded in revealing the gradual stages of Henk's recovering his memory of earlier days, especially in scenes where an object or sound triggers off alarm. However, some of the conversations seem expository: "Your father explained to you last week that the soldiers we were all afraid of were called Nazis. Do you remember?" "Yes ... He told me that Germany's ruler was a bad man and he wanted to rule Holland, too." "His name was Adolf Hitler, and he also wanted to get rid of all the Jewish people in Germany and Holland. . . ." The development is thin, and there's no sense of how Benjamin's parents have managed to renovate their home, serve Sabbath meals with silver candlesticks, and otherwise recover so completely from years of hiding in destitution. This is in many ways an easy introduction to the Holocaust, perhaps too easy. Both parents and child—the only characters we connect with—have survived, and adjustment is just around the corner. On the other hand, Benjamin's sense of dislocation and yearning for his foster parents is well realized, and U.S. children today are likely to understand separation anxiety more keenly than wartime trauma. BH

**QUALEY, MARSHA**  
*Close to a Killer.* Delacorte, 1999  [224p]  
ISBN 0-385-32597-5  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Former suburban girl Barrie is giving her new life a try, staying with her mother in the city while her father and stepmother spend a year in Paris. The complication is that Barrie's mom is an ex-convict, running her beauty parlor with the aid of ex-convict friends, and there have recently been two murders of people with a connection to the salon. Further developments suggest that the salon itself is a target of revenge, and Barrie begins to suspect acquaintances in her orbit as well as drawing closer to her mother in the face of danger. The book wavers uncomfortably between thriller and emotional exploration and ends up shorting both genres; the
secondary characters, including the red herrings and the murderer, aren’t well-differentiated, and some of the plot points are never sufficiently explained. The details of the salon milieu and the shades of the prison past are imaginative and compelling, however, and the writing has an effective flow. Ethical questions about the taking of a life are interestingly if overbriefly contemplated, and the eventual fate of the murderer will wow readers with its diabolical flair. Joan Lowery Nixon fans looking for something with a little more depth and social conscience may well snap this one up. DS

REEDER, CAROLYN

Captain Kate. Avon Camelot, 1999 [192p]
ISBN 0-380-97628-5 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

Twelve-year-old Kate’s mother has remarried a year after Kate’s father’s death, providing Kate with an unwanted stepfather (now fighting in the Civil War), stepsister, stepbrother, and step-baby-on-the-way. Kate is in a grief-riddled fury that she takes out on everyone around her, being malicious to her twelve-year-old stepbrother, Seth, and downright mean to her nine-year-old stepsister, Julia. She is further chagrined to learn that her mother must have bedrest until the new baby is born, which effectively cancels the family’s moneymaking coal trips from Cumberland, Maryland to Georgetown on the C&O Canal. Kate comes up with a mad scheme to take the family canalboat downriver with only Seth as crew, in a trip that ends up punctuated by an accumulation of nasty spats. She and Seth manage to reach Georgetown with their barge of coal, and their return home is triumphant. Kate undergoes a miraculous change of heart, her understanding stepfather (home wounded from the war) takes his place as canalboat captain, and the whole family happily plans to spend the canal season transporting coal. Reeder often tells more than she shows, and the dictionary-style explanations of locks and canalboating are a bit intrusive. As a character, Kate is strictly one-note, and her sudden transformation at the end of the novel is predictable but not credible. Readers interested in canalboat history may want to sail along; others will just breeze on by. JMD

RICE, DOROTHY MARIE

The Seventeenth Child; by Dorothy Marie Rice and Lucille Mabel Walthall Payne. Linnet, 1998 [100p] illus. with photographs
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-10

Like Leon’s Story (BCCB 12/97), this is a simply narrated recollection of growing up poor and black in the rural south. Co-author Payne, known as Mabel, is “the seventeenth child from four marriages: the knee baby,” born in 1929 to a Virginia sharecropping family and subject to the hardest years of the Depression. Her parents, however, are strong in mind and body, her extended relatives and community are supportive, and her intelligence is sharp. The tone is remarkably even-handed: descriptions of racial injustices coexist with accounts of interracial acts of kindness and of whites even more deeply impoverished than the Walthall family. There emerges a sense of intimacy especially among women, though the ultimate power dynamic is clear in incidents such as a white teacher’s refusal to give Mabel her seventh-grade certificate—despite Mabel’s nine months of babysitting for her in exchange for tutoring—without getting a sugar stamp ration, which Mabel defiantly gives to her own sister instead. The account is lively with down-home
incidents; the voice is warm, sometimes funny, and never self-pitying; the past assumes an immediacy that will convey far more than the textbook history imposed on most students. Black-and-white period photos illustrate the book, which joins a growing trove of valuable family narratives for the young reader. BH

RINALDI, ANN My Heart Is on the Ground: The Diary of Nannie Little Rose, A Sioux Girl. Scholastic, 1999 [208p] (Dear America) ISBN 0-590-14922-9 $10.95 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-8

Rinaldi joins the roster of contributors to this popular series with the journal of a twelve-year-old girl who has been sent with her brother to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879. Although Nannie Little Rose's considerable grasp of English gives her some educational advantage over other newcomers, who communicate in broken English, it does not mitigate the shocks of a forced name change, separation from her brother Whiteshield, chopped off hair and "citizen's clothes," and anxiety for her family back on the plains. But while Little Rose adapts and prospers, committing herself to caring for a dear but delicate friend, Whiteshield resists, bringing punishment upon himself and possible shame to his family. Rinaldi weaves into her tale a real-life mystery concerning the unexplained death of a child (Little Rose's friend) at the Carlisle School, and the reports of her premature burial and subsequent haunting of the premises. On a less sensational note, she also incorporates the strains upon the Sioux back home, who have not entirely accepted the fact that their way of life has irrevocably changed. The honorable intentions and the deplorable paternalism of the staff are equitably balanced, and there is enough ambiguity in Little Rose's future to set readers pondering whether assimilation into white culture was successful or even desirable for this generation of American Indians. Photos and historical background on the Carlisle School are included. EB


Six components of balanced nutrition—carbohydrates, protein, fat, water, vitamins, and minerals—are introduced and explained in kid-friendly terms, with running commentary by a multicultural cast of children who wholeheartedly embrace the notion that healthy eating is the way to go. When the text states, "Starchy foods give long-lasting energy. Sweet foods give quick boosts of energy. The energy from sweet foods is used up very quickly," a chipper little girl informs her friend via speech balloon. "If you ate candy for breakfast, soon you would feel tired and hungry. A breakfast of whole grain cereal would keep you going 'til lunch." Rockwell does a particularly creditable job in presenting the relative amounts of nutrients required for good health—it's hard to get too much water, but it's all too easy to overload on sodium. The watercolor and colored pencil pictures, in a cheerful but bland retro style, are not especially appetizing, but the textual information is definitely wholesome; a section of easy-to-prepare recipes (with nutritional information supplied) encourages listeners to put their new found knowledge to the taste—uh, test. EB

Simple prayers linked to the months of the year comprise this collection of brief child-appealing verses. Each spread features a devotional verse on the left-hand page with a full-page illustration of a seasonally appropriate scene on the right. The acrylic paintings, done in a deliberately naïve style, are framed with a variety of quilt-like fabric squares that crowd the somewhat slapdash compositions. While reading the lullingly rhythmic eight-line verses one after another tends to be monotonous, taken singly they have a certain childlike whimsy, as evinced by the verse for March: “Bless the whoosh/ that takes our hats,/ Bless the dogs/ and kitty cats,/ Bless the crocus/ and the trees/ Bless the birds/ and God bless me!” The studied simplicity of the blessings doesn't wear well, and Rylant leans heavily on the ABAB rhyme scheme and the assumption that her readers have pets (dogs and cats figure prominently in the verses). Still, these short blessings will be a boon to those seeking nondenominational prayers to use with young children. JMD


Boy Regis is tired of older brother Damon coming to his rescue, but he doesn't know how to stop it. Damon thinks Boy can't take care of himself and calls him “sissyboy,” but Boy is a capable, thinking kid who has a lot more sense than his older, gang-member brother. Tension between Boy and classmate Gabriel causes a confrontation between Damon and Crowboy, Gabriel's older brother, and serious violence is avoided only when Damon and Boy's father steps in and takes charge. The jungle dogs of the title are, in a subtle parallel to the gang members, a pack of wild dogs that terrify Boy; the novel's adults keep denying the existence of the dogs, but Boy (and the reader) knows that they are real. With precise description and intelligent dialogue, Salisbury expertly delineates the tension between Damon and his father, with Boy witnessing his father's struggle to reach the older son who has drifted so far away. The lush Hawaii setting adds a physical dimension that strongly colors the action as Boy faces both canine and human packs with tenacity and nerve that will hearten young readers confronting their own demons. Hard-to-reach junior high readers will latch on to this one. JMD


This salute to Melville Murrell, the creator of “the very first human-powered airplane to take flight” is a fanciful tribute to eccentric genius. The refrain “Our neighbor, Mr. Murrell, is a strange, strange man” recurs throughout the conversational narrative that follows Murrell through his life until the day his glider-like contraption actually gets off the ground. The tone of the story is like nothing so much as a community anecdote everyone in town knows: “They say he used to jump off the old stone wall flapping cabbage leaves to FLY, for goodness' sake,
when he was a boy." The illustrations are nearly as amusing as the spare but witty text. Full-page and double-page spreads with framed text-boxes have an old-fashioned formality that makes the character of Murrell and the "land sakes"-style voice doubly amusing. Krudop's rich-hued, color saturated acrylics feature an Ichabod Crane-like Murrell in a severe black suit and derby poring over his notes, drawing diagrams, and getting ready for the big event: "He's built a weird contraption made of wood and pulleys, bolts and strings to FLY, for goodness' sake... And he expects the clacking, whumping, whizzing thing to go! Our neighbor is a strange, strange—OH!... It FLIES! For goodness' sake." A diagram of Murrell's "aerial navigator" is included, and a brief author's note gives historical context.

**Silverman, Erica** *Raisel's Riddle*; illus. by Susan Gaber. Farrar, 1999 [34p] ISBN 0-374-36168-1 $16.00 Reviewed from galleys R 6-10 yrs

Cinderella takes on a cerebral spin in this original fairy tale set in a preindustrial Jewish community in Poland. Raisel has been well educated by Zaydeh, her rabbi grandfather; loathe to accept charity after his death, she travels to the city in search of work and lands a job as scrub girl in the kitchen of a well-to-do rabbi. The cook works her mercilessly and laughs at Raisel's notion of attending the costumed festivities at Purim. But a kind deed to an old woman garners Raisel three wishes, and she makes a grand entrance at the party (dressed as Queen Esther) and wins the favor of the rabbi's son, leaving him with a riddle to ponder as she flees at midnight. The motif of proving one's worth through an erudite riddle is at once elegant and apt, and lovers who "lived and learned happily ever after" make a refreshing change from the typically vacuous princes and ash maidens of more pedestrian lore. Gaber's softly stippled spreads evoke a quiet seriousness appropriate to this thoughtful retelling. A brief note on Esther and the Purim feast is included.

**Simon, Francesca** *Calling All Toddlers*; illus. by Susan Winter. Orchard, 1999 33p ISBN 0-531-30120-6 $15.95 R 2-4 yrs

Get ready to do the toddler-time boogie, because this bubbly little picture book is going to inspire a lot of activity from the babies of lapsit storytime age. This energetic collection of action verse and readable rhymes is illustrated in sweet if somewhat bland watercolors depicting a menage of characterful toddlers engaged in toddler-type activities, such as finding missing shoes, explaining favorite colors, and having temper tantrums. The entries include seek-and-find games like "Hunt the Circle," and many of the rhythmic verses are a blueprint for acting-out fun. Little ones will delight in activities and rhymes aimed just at them, and parents looking for some storytime inspiration will certainly find it here.

**Sobel, Ileen Smith, ad.** *Moses and the Angels*; illus. by Mark Podwal. Delacorte, 1998 64p ISBN 0-385-32612-2 $16.95 R Gr. 4-6

Drawn from Jewish folklore, midrash, and the five books of Moses, these ten stories remind us that the Hebrews' journey from Egyptian bondage to the promised land was indeed an epic, including many features in common with Greek, Scandi-
navian, Far Eastern, and other sagas of cultural foundation. Although there is but one God and one hero, many good and evil angels act as deus ex machina forces who interfere and intercede with humans in a mode as energetic and capricious as that of some Olympians. Beginning with the Angel of Dreams, who shows Pharaoh “a huge balancing scale with all the pyramids of Egypt on one side and only a baby goat, a kid, on the other,” this wends from baby Moses’ rescue to the announcement of his death by the Angel Semalion. Given the complexity of cast and scope of action, it is well that Sobel has an uncluttered and graceful style: “Since Creation, when they were made, this was the first time the angels did not sing.” Podwal follows suit by projecting monumental, often mystical, episodes with symbolic images resembling naïve fingerpaints outlined in crayon; his whispery pastel palette stands out effectively against the elegant layout. Many of the legendary details here may need some cultural context, but the basic structure is biblical. Elie Wiesel gives a brief, adulatory introduction, and Sobel ends the book with a list of sources that includes Wiesel’s Messengers of God. BH


The sheriff, who pursued runaway orphan Sweetness and then adopted her and her seven orphanagemates in Saving Sweetness (BCCB 11/96), is housekeeping happily with his brood (“Every dang day I sweep their little beds and hang their clothes out on the line to get clean!”) when their peaceful domesticity is upset by the arrival of a letter. Unfortunately, neither the sheriff nor any of the orphans can read, but Sweetness acquires enough book-larnin’ (school is taught by the rotten former mistress of the orphanage, Mrs. Sump, so Sweetness just peeks through the window to absorb her alphabet) to untangle the mystery of the letter and write one in response, which brings the sheriff’s long-lost love back to Possum Trot for marriage and for taking over Mrs. Sump’s place as schoolmarm. What makes the story so successful is not just its exaggeratedly rawboned style (“Well, Noah’s flood coulda dried up afore we got through that there applebet”) but that it’s really a noodlehead tale: the affectionate father is, unbeknownst to himself, an avatar of domestic chaos, who gives Sweetness a soap wrapper for writing paper and then exclaims, “I’ll be dogged if the soap didn’t work much better after that, too!” (After each of his housekeeping “triumphs,” a hopeful child inquires, “Pa, you ever think about gettin’ married?”) Karas’ mixed-media illustrations capture the parodic edge of the orphan saga (the bow atop Sweetness’ little head is ever-perky) as well as the physical comedy of the alarmingly creative housekeeping (the sheriff’s fiancée and three little ex-orphans peer down with nausea at the fish skeleton in their catfish chili). Kids will take to this “like a hog to persimmons.” DS


Six familiar fairy tales—“Rumpelstiltskin,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “The Frog Prince,” and “Jack and the Beanstalk”—are retold in a sprightly, energetic style. Jeanne Steig has a knack for
slipping humor into simple language (when the bragging father tells the greedy king in "Rumpelstiltskin" his daughter can spin straw into gold, the king's response is "Why, the sweet thing! She sounds enchanting ... Bring her around tomorrow at dawn. I'll give her a little test") and providing silly rhymes as welcome refrains and pithy conclusions. The tales themselves hold no surprises and are quite comfortable—any dark corners left in the retellings are chased away by the cheery watercolors of William Steig, whose Beast looks like nothing so much as an overgrown mutt, whose wolf is cousin to the fox from The Amazing Bone, and whose giant is just a greedy eater who naps a lot. Even the princess, caught cold in the act of throwing that poor frog prince against the pink-diamond wallpaper, is only cartoonily violent. This is literally a sturdy little collection (only six inches tall) with tales in commendably abbreviated lengths that both parents and children will welcome. JMD


Newly hatched and enamored with the beauty of the world around him, the little chick can't help singing, "The sky is so blue! The sun is so yellow! The trees are so green! And I'm a happy fellow!"—That is, until he abruptly becomes a fox's lunch. The fox soon discovers his own irrepressible urge to burst into song and irritates a wolf into gobbling him up. Wolf's vocalizations offend a bear, who eats him as well, with the predictable result. But when the suddenly joyous bear tumbles into a tree, all the animals pop out; they make friends, and the chick is soon reunited with his mother, the singing hen. The reassuring dénouement extends, perhaps, a spread or two longer than necessary, but listeners should still be giggling enough from the antics of the smitten songsters to pay much heed. Cecil's cast of simply shaped and outlined animals is amiably dopey, and their wide-eyed horror at finding themselves doomed to cheerfulness makes a direct hit on the funny bone. This story could prove a rollicking complement to Jack Kent's The Fat Cat (BCCB 9/71). EB


An Internet newsflash says a comet is going to hit the earth and the world is going to end by dawn, and the students at Time Zone High are spending their possible last hours in pursuit of possible bliss. Legs (Allegra) Hanover is in pursuit of her own bliss—Andros Bliss, that is, the leather-jacketed, motorcycle riding man of her dreams, and she winds up being spontaneous beyond even her most wild imaginings. Legs is an articulate, literate heroine with a sense of humor and a healthy helping of common sense, and her narration of the comet-induced chaos is by turns dryly droll and frantically driven. From the opening scenes in the school parking lot (where Legs realizes things are different because the usual cliques aren't cliquing) to the closing scene in the high-school hallway, when she walks toward Andros (still the man of her dreams), the pace is as frantic as an Internet virus rumor. This is Armageddon-lite, and just the thing to chase away the winter blues. JMD
Francine Pascal has now backtracked from Sweet Valley High and SVU to address Jessica and Elizabeth’s junior-high days. The drama here is that redistricting means that Jessica and Elizabeth are off to start afresh at Sweet Valley Junior High while their old friends stay at Sweet Valley Middle School. The narration is taken in turn by each twin and by two of Elizabeth’s new school friends, revealing that Jessica has been so accustomed to possessing popularity as a right that she may not know how to become popular, which she dearly desires, and that Elizabeth is actually finding some unexpected social possibilities at the new venue. The book has enough insight into the realities of junior-high social structure to offset its contrivances (particularly the tragic past of one of Elizabeth’s new friends) and perfunctory writing, resulting in an enjoyable and even somewhat sympathetic account of Jessica’s desperation at her plight. There’s also a general avoidance of preachiness, so that readers looking for an easy, straightforward glad-you’re-not-there tale of a new school will find this capably fills the bill. DS

In fourteen brief verses, Swann offers an encore to his recasting of American Indian riddles in Touching the Distance (BCCB 6/98). There is, perhaps, a bit less poesy here than in the previous title: “I stepped on it./ It stepped on me” (shadow), “I make long journeys/ flat on my back” (canoe). The teasers, however, remain entertainingly puzzling, and they again often leave the door ajar for more than one solution. Bryan’s complex tempera and gouache paintings fairly quiver with rainbow color, but there’s little difference in intensity from spread to spread. Composition does, however, ably support the welcome ambiguity of the verses, hinting at a second, or even third, possible solution to each riddle. The original answer to “The spots are leaving./ They are going into hiding” may have been “leopard,” but viewers can make a good case for the giraffe, deer, snake, or fowl that head for the brush. If this doesn’t quite reach the bar set by Touching the Distance, it should still please the puzzlers in any young audience. EB

Jordan Scott, the Cobra gang’s newest recruit, is about to purchase a requisite gun with money from a family heirloom he has stolen and intends to pawn; the ticking of his grandfather’s precious watch, however, hurls him onto a plantation in a past era, where he meets Uriah Henning, a ten-year-old slave who will become his great-great-great-great grandpa. Without traveling papers or proof of freeman status, Jordan is naturally considered a runaway slave, and his efforts to return to his contemporaries are hindered at every turn by his new “duties” in the cotton fields and his maneuverings to spirit Uriah away via the Underground Railroad, thus assuring the family lineage is uncompromised. Jordan’s travails as a field
hand, and later as chattel in a slave market, provide a gripping twist on traditional
time-travel themes, and although there is little doubt he will return safely to famil-

iar turf, his homecoming is not without cost, as the Cobras beat him mercilessly
for abandoning the gang. Whitmore, however, drums her message—gang involve-
ment is its own kind of slavery—with a heavy hand, and the conclusion, with its
popcorn and checkers and grandfatherly advice, is unnecessarily preachy. Still, the
sulky youth's brush with a cruel past may lead readers to rethink their definitions
of hardship and injustice. EB

WILLIAMS, CAROL LYNCH  My Angelica. Delacorte, 1999  [144p]
ISBN 0-385-32622-X  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R  Gr. 6-9

Sage and George are sophomores who've known each other since second grade,
and they've been friends ever since—and George has also harbored secret love for
the beauteous Sage. Sage's fire burns in a different direction, however, that of
writing romance fiction—and, unbeknownst to her, she's absolutely, pervasively
awful at it. Williams alternates between Sage's narration, which includes hefty
chunks of her opus about the wonderful Angelica; George's narration, which in-
cludes his squirming away from hurting his beloved Sage by telling her the truth
about her prose in the face of a writing contest; and unsigned poems of love, which
readers will early on guess are by George about Sage. With its lighthearted farcicality
and undertone of genuine warmth, this is somewhat reminiscent of Lisa Fiedler's
Curtis Piperfield's Biggest Fan (BCCB 10/95). Williams deftly makes the book as
romantic in its own way as Sage's stories, with George's tenderness towards perky
Sage meltingly endearing. The book also creates some memorable bad writing; it's
awful in a way that's consonant with Sage's energetic character and that will be
evident to young readers, but there's also a suggestion that a wiser Sage may well
go on to write better and that her enthusiasm is a good thing. Between the enter-
taining and original obstacle to true love and the pleasures of seeing nice-guy George
finish first and Sage win the man of her dreams, this is a satisfying romantic con-
fection. DS

WORCESTER, DON  Cowboy with a Camera: Erwin E. Smith, Cowboy Photogra-
pher; illus. with photographs by Erwin E. Smith. Amon Carter Museum,
1998  48p
ISBN 0-88360-091-9  $18.95  Ad  Gr. 3-6

Erwin Smith used his camera to capture the ways of the cowboy in the early part of
the century just as it was disappearing forever. The book speaks in Smith's fiction-
alized voice, giving details about cowboys, trail life, cattle, and horses while sepia-
toned photographs provide indelible images of life on some legendary spreads.
The pictures unfortunately aren't used to their best advantage—they'd benefit
from greater size and less complicated background formats (the watercolor frames
are attractive but distracting, and they interfere with the captions' readability) and
diagrams and sidebars aren't worth the space they steal from the pictures, but the
images of cowboys dancing with one another, the choking dust surrounding the
drag riders, and savvy cowponies cutting cattle bring the West to the fore in a way
words can only hint at. And these words too have their drawbacks, though they do
convey quite a bit of information: in his effort to make clear the substantial con-
tribution of Tejano and black cowboys, Worcester makes some confusing state-
ments ("At one time there were at least four thousand black cowboys in Texas, and I'm sure there were"); dates and explanations often don't come when they'd be useful; and the use of Smith's persona as narrator is somewhat disorienting. The result is an impaired but evocative picture of cowboy life that would partner effectively with lighter cowboy texts such as Cody's *The Cowboy's Handbook* (BCCB 3/96). A glossary is appended. DS

YAMANE, LINDA, ad.  *The Snake That Lived in the Santa Cruz Mountains and Other Ohlone Stories*; ad. and illus. by Linda Yamane. Oyate, 1998 40p

Paper ed. ISBN 0-9625175-6-9 $10.00 R Gr. 4-6

A valuable resource for American Indian cultural studies, this introduces the Ohlone people of Monterey, California, with background on three storytellers who were recorded by John Harrington in the 1930s. The seven stories that follow vary from *pourquoi* tales ("Trura—the Thunders") to descriptions of customary lore ("How They Used to Make It Rain at San Juan"). These tales follow narrative conventions quite different from European folklore, though some motifs will seem familiar—"How Shelp Made the Acorn Soup" (which also appears in Spanish) bears an uncanny resemblance to Jesus' loaves and fishes. The tales represent an authentically diverse viewpoint, as in "The Man Who Was Swallowed by a Whale": "The Carmel Indian people used to tell the story of a man who was swallowed by a whale down near Los Angeles or Santa Barbara or somewhere. By the time the whale got to the Monterey area, it was feeling sick and coughed the man out on a stretch of sandy beach at Point Lobos. And do you know that when the man was first swallowed, he was dark? But when he came out of the whale, he was white! It was ever since then that there began to be white people."

Capable pen-and-ink sketches, photos of the storytellers and author, pronunciation aids, and a map of Ohlone language groups (unfortunately with no geographic labels) complete the attractively designed paperback. BH

ZEMSER, AMY BRONWEN  *Beyond the Mango Tree*. Greenwillow, 1998 166p

ISBN 0-688-16005-0 $15.00 R Gr. 5-8

This autobiographical novel begins in the pounding rain with the eleven-year-old narrator tied to a tree by her diabetic mother, who is a victim of rages, periodic memory loss, and a possessiveness that keeps Sarina prisoner in their yard. Sarina's family has recently moved from Boston to Liberia, where Sarina's father spends weeks working in the bush and counting on Sarina to take care of her mother, who hates living in Africa. When a Liberian boy, Boima, cuts Sarina loose from the tree and befriends her, she finds temporary happiness and freedom; the forces of her mother's illness, her father's neglect, Boima's poverty, and Sarina's own desperate loneliness nonetheless drive events toward tragedy. The novel is spare, even stark, with the power of early memories; each episode is like an intense memory replayed. Though some of these scenes could have been more smoothly connected or extensively developed, they nonetheless will remain embedded in readers' consciousness. The book is deeply moving and unsparing of its protagonist as she discovers an aspect of herself that is disturbingly reflective of her mother's behavior and then tries to change. BH

MacRae, young adult librarian and editor of VOYA, has compiled a hefty reference tool for accessing modern fantasy aimed at young adults. The first chapter discusses a definition of fantasy, using quotes from reviewers, writers, and readers. The remaining six chapters focus on particular types of fantasy: Alternate Worlds, Magical Realism, Myth, Legends, Magic Bestiary, and Time Fantasy. Each chapter expounds on the particular type of fantasy, discusses its history, gives examples of important works in the genre, features an in-depth look at a particular popular and/or critically acclaimed author, and includes bibliographies and extensive lists for recommended reading. The chapter-specific notes and references will be a boon to those researching this topic as they include complete citations to both monographs and journal articles. The appendix contains a selection of fantasy fiction awards and lists of recommended fantasy titles; selections from ALA's Best Fantasy Books for Young Adults, 1970-1997; copies of the surveys and questionnaires used in MacRae’s study; and an extensive index. MacRae is obviously enamored of her subject and its writers; her enthusiasm is contagious, and her research outstandingly useful. It is a bit optimistic to hope that this densely packed title is one YAs will use on their own, as MacRae states in her introduction, but it is a title that librarians, especially those who are not by nature fantasy fans, can and should use to connect young adult readers with their genre of choice. JMD


How-to books on various aspects of library programming for youth proliferate, and while many are concrete guides to when and how, they are sometimes short on the why. Carole Fiore, library programming specialist with the State Library of Florida, has done two important things with this title—she comprehensively addresses an important area of library programming for youth by pulling together pertinent information from a wide variety of resources under one cover, and she tells readers the “why” of summer reading programs, backed up by some dandy quotes from studies of the impact of summer reading on the reading scores of young participants. In the process, she sets up a model for literature-based programs of all types, not just summer reading programs. An introduction discusses the origin and history of library summer reading programs, followed by five chapters dealing with summer reading specifics: The Literacy/Learning Value of Summer Library Reading (which includes a discussion of goals and objectives, research supporting the impact of summer reading programs on reading skills of attendees,
suggestions for writing grant proposals); Serving the Community of Users and Non-Users (serving the whole community, including non-reading children, young adults, and the differently abled, through the summer reading program); Organizing Your Program (the planning and execution of summer reading programs, including selecting a theme, scheduling, promoting, and dealing with media); Sample Programs (brief descriptions of programs including art activities, book discussion groups, contests, film and video programs, celebrations, read-to-me programs, storytelling, etc.); and Evaluating Your Success (various types of information gathering such as sample questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, and surveys). Sample timelines, form letters, charts, logs, etc. featured throughout will simplify the planning process; all chapters include notes, bibliographies, and pertinent websites. The appendix contains a list, organized alphabetically by state, of statewide summer reading program themes since 1990; there is also an index. The emphasis here is on making the summer reading program as inclusive as possible, and doing everything necessary to make the program a positive library experience for all participants. Fiore brings years of practical experience and a can-do attitude to this manual that will re-inspire old hands and make new librarians confident that they can achieve summer reading program greatness. JMD
SUBJECT AND USE INDEX

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

ADVENTURE STORIES:
   Armstrong; Kimmel
   Africa—fiction: Zemser
   Africa—folklore: Diakité; Mollel; Swann
   African Americans: Rice
   African Americans—fiction: Hopkinson; Marrin
   African Americans—stories: Greene
   Africans: Myers, W.
   Aliens—fiction: Duffey

ALPHABET BOOKS: Chandra

American Indians—fiction: Rinaldi
American Indians—folklore: Yamane

Angels—stories: Lester
Animals—stories: Stenmark
Antarctic: Armstrong; Kimmel

Ants—stories: Nickle

Archaeology: Giblin; Guiberson

Aunts—fiction: Horvath

Aviation: Seymour

Baseball—stories: McCully

BIBLE STORIES: Gerstein; Grindley; Lester; Sobel

BIOGRAPHIES: Allison; Anholt; Gollub; Marrin; Myers, W.; Rice; Seymour

Birds—stories: Fleming

Books and reading—stories: Stanley

Brothers and sisters—fiction: Horvath; Reeder

Brothers—fiction: Salisbury

Bullies—fiction: Duffey; Lynch

Bullies—stories: Nickle

Cats—poetry: Myers, C.

Civics: Masoff

Community helpers: Masoff

Contests—stories: Nethery

Cowboys: Worcester

Crime and criminals—fiction:
   Qualey; Salisbury

Dogs—fiction: Coxe

Dolphins: Cerullo

Dreams—fiction: Metzger

Drug addiction—fiction: Glovach

Eggs—stories: Nethery

Ethics and values: Caseley; Laird

Explorers and exploring:
   Armstrong; Kimmel

Explorers and exploring—stories:
   Fleming

Extrasensory perception: Gardner

Families—stories: Levy; Stanley

FANTASY: David; Duffey

Fashion: Knight

Fathers and sons—fiction: Salisbury

FOLKTALES AND
   FAIRYTALES: Diakité; Lamm; Mollel; Silverman; Steig; Yamane

Food and eating: Rockwell

Friendship—fiction: Laird; Lynch; Metzger; Zemser

Frogs—stories: Lamm

FUNNY STORIES: Horvath; Stanley; Strasser; Williams

Gangs—fiction: Salisbury

Growing up—stories: Leopold

Health: Masoff

HISTORICAL FICTION:
   Hopkinson; Metzger; Peyton; Propp; Reeder; Rinaldi

History, U. S.: Worcester

History, world: Knight; Marrin; Myers, W.
Holocaust—fiction: Propp
Illness—fiction: Bottner
Insects—stories: David
Inventors and inventions: Seymour
Japan—poetry: Gollub
Jews—stories: Silverman
Judaism: Sobel
Language arts: Agee
Literature, world: Gollub
LOVE STORIES: Strasser; Williams
Mental illness—fiction: Zemser
Mice—stories: McCully
Monkeys—stories: Diakité
Mothers and daughters—fiction: Caseley; Qualey; Zemser
Mothers and daughters—stories: Fleming
Mummies: Guiberson
Music and musicians—fiction: Hopkinson
MYSTERIES: Qualey
NURSERY RHYMES: Simon
Nutrition: Rockwell
Oceanography: Cerullo
Paleontology: Anholt; Giblin
Pets—fiction: Cox
Pets—stories: Nethery
Photography: Worcester
Pirates: Marrin
POETRY: Gollub; Hopkins; Myers, C.
PRAYERS: Rylant
Pregnancy—fiction: Caseley
Reading aloud: Cox; Hopkins; Myers, C.; Yamane
Reading, beginning: Bottner; Cox
Reading, easy: Cox; Guiberson

Reading, reluctant: Agee; Glovach; Guiberson
Religious education: Grindley; Lester; Rylant; Sobel
RHYMING STORIES: Coxe
Riddles—stories: Silverman
RIDDLES: Swann
Rivers—stories: Greene
ROMANCE: Peyton
School—fiction: Cox; Duffey; Laird; Lynch; Rinaldi; Suzanne
School—stories: Gregory
Science: Gardner
Science experiments: Gardner
Sports—poetry: Hopkins
Sports—stories: McCully
Steamboats—stories: Greene
Storytelling: Diakité; Gerstein; Grindley; Lester; Mollel; Silverman; Steig; Stenmark; Yamane
Storytelling—fiction: Horvath
Storytime: Simon; Stenmark
Time travel—fiction: Whitmore
Urban life: Myers, C.
Valentine’s Day—stories: Gregory
Voyages and travel: Armstrong; Kimmel; Marrin
Voyages and travel—fiction: Reeder
West, the: Worcester
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