PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
“Arrested and charged with murder, 16-year-old Steve Harmon is writing a screenplay of his ordeal. Interspersed with his handwritten journal entries, Steve’s script . . . [balances] courtroom drama and a sordid prison setting with flashbacks to the robbery that resulted in a shopkeeper’s murder. A novel that in both form and subject guarantees a wide teen audience . . . a natural to get teens reading — and talking.”

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—Starred review / Publishers Weekly

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—Highlighted review / ALA Booklist

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THE BIG PICTURE

What If?

by Frances Thomas; illus. by Ross Collins

We see a wide range of monsters around here, ranging from ferocious to friendly, carnivorous to cuddly, so it takes more than just another set of horrible horns to turn our heads. In Little Monster, What If? offers one of the most photogenic—illustrationogenic?—beasties we've seen in awhile, and he exudes the irresistible charm of vulnerability.

Little Monster's particular vulnerability is the fear of abandonment, which is apparently every bit the problem for fictional monsters that it is for real children. LM's worried about the unknown, quizzing his mom on the possibility of his waking up to a "big . . . black . . . hole in the middle of the floor" that gets bigger and bigger and bigger, leading to a series of increasingly terrible events ("and then there wasn't a ceiling and the sky was all horrible and I fell down and down and down . . . And then the house caught on fire!" ) ending with "falling forever and ever and ever," all because when he called his mother, she didn't answer, and she couldn't come and help him because she had gone away.

That's a terrific set of genuine fears—holes, fire, falling, and ultimately abandonment—with the authentic face of childhood. For many small children, holes are the dark corners where nonexistence breeds, just waiting to suck kids in and nullify them; fires are angry power without any control, capable of destruction from the most innocuous starts (there is also, for good measure, a "big, big spider" crawling through Little Monster's nightmare scenario). The illustrations keep these fears in check, but they don't diminish them. The hole is big, large enough to engulf Little Monster and his bed in one swallow (we see it from above while Little Monster peers over the brink) as it gapes across the spread's gutter, and when our hapless hero finds the fire he falls through a red world of flames. Immediately, however, he also falls back into a safe reality, wherein his calmly comforting mother agrees that his imagined events would be scary but takes charge with a different scenario: waking up to a breakfast of pancakes followed by an outing notable for the purchase of festive balloons and tasty treats and a cozy return to home and bed, which option Little Monster finds preferable indeed.

The text balances the fears and consolation well: Thomas manages both a soothingly incantatory quality in the I-thou dialogue and an individual turn of phrase without straying from the lexicon of credibility. (It's a particularly nice touch when Mother spins her way through similes, talking about buying "a red balloon like a red jewel," a "green balloon like the green sea," and "a blue balloon like the blue sky," and Little Monster insists also on a lovely purple balloon that's "like . . . a lovely purple balloon.") In Collins' oversized illustrations, the clean sweeps of color balance the creative monstrosities of mother and son, who evince bug eyes
worthy of Victoria Chess, but their benign anteaterly snouts, stripy ears, feet, and tails, and friendly knobbly horns make them a species unto themselves, cuddly and homely and absurd. Little Monster's body language is as eloquent as his spoken words: he’s prick-eared in alarm at his plummert, he bounces gleefully off of the porch at the start of the outing, he gazes, slightly ruefully, at his flaming marshmallow (which, in the secure evening scene with Mother present, is all that the destructive power of fire can manage), and he flops, ears sagging and limbs weighted down with somnolence, on the arm of the chair before heading to bed. Gently imaginative without being coy or fluffy, this is a solid reminder of parental love and security that will be warmly welcomed by sleepy little monsters. (Imprint information appears on p. 34.)

Deborah Stevenson, Associate Editor

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE


Adler’s succinct text combines with Tobin’s bold, clear illustrations to introduce the concept of measurement to youngsters. The lesson begins with basic questions: “How tall are you? How long is your block? How faraway is your school?” The book then travels to ancient Egypt to begin its exploration, focusing on the ancient units of measurement: digit, palm, span, and cubit. After inviting his readers to make measurements using their own fingers, hands, and arms, the author addresses the issue of standards (“In the past, people often used one man’s cubit or steps as a standard. That man was usually the people’s leader or king”). The title then examines the customary (inch-pound) and metric systems of measurement (with an opportunity for readers to create their own rulers by copying from the book) and takes a brief foray into odometers. Though the pages on the odometer seem crowded and less clear than the other visual explanations in the book, the art, thickly bordered cartoons with strong colors whose orderly modulation suggests computer graphics, presents concepts clearly and concretely. White text is superimposed on the illustrations (which often include subtle collage-print backgrounds) but isn’t lost in the detail. Kids will revel in the adventure of measuring objects with their appendages, as well as competing to see who has the longest stride. Any way you measure it, this one will go the distance. EAB


The life of the fast-food wage-slave is the lot of many teens, but that existence hasn’t gotten its due in young-adult literature—until now. When his beloved
girlfriend succumbs to the lure of a "handsome and dangerous" employee of the Kermit O'Dermott franchise, Anthony plots revenge and takes on a counter job at O'Dermott's. Anthony's nemesis, Turner, proves to be a difficult but worthy target: he cunningly and repeatedly sets Anthony up for trouble, torments him about the loss of Diana, and, despite his passionate loyalty to O'Dermott's, steals from the cash register on Anthony's watch. Anthony then forms an alliance with rebel Shunt, a burger-flipper whose Burger Proletariat seeks to undermine fast-food organizations from the inside, and our hero uses the alliance for his own ends by fomenting a war between O'Dermott's and Burger Queen and sabotaging a visit from the head elf, Kermit O'Dermott himself. Anthony's narration has an overheated yet comic desperation that sends the rat-a-tat sentences into french-fried orbit. His underlying pain at the loss of Diana gives the relentless satire some ballast, and the malevolent Turner is a villain of such satisfying hateability that readers will unhesitatingly support Anthony's campaign against him. Subject-wise, this is a far cry from Anderson's vampiric Thirsty (BCCB 4/97), but with its fast-paced humor, schemiel-fights-back theme, and frenetic fast-food atmosphere this too will sate the reading appetite of hungry YAs. DS


Seventeen-year-old Violet is a would-be screenwriter and filmmaker seeking actors with the star-power of a James Dean or Marilyn Monroe; enter Claire, a young woman who believes in fairies and who has the luminescence necessary to light up the screen. The two become fast friends, Violet protecting the vulnerable Claire, Claire caring for the thorny Violet. They cut school, go on adventures to transvestite bars and rock clubs, and look for themselves anywhere but home. Violet falls willing sexual prey to rock-and-roll icon Flint Cassidy and winds up working for his agent; Claire falls for a sensitive poetry-workshop leader who apparently makes a habit of seducing his students. Separated by doomed love affairs, parties, and drugs, the girls drift apart, until Violet straightens out and goes after Claire, who has fled to the desert. The novel is divided into three sections ("Violet"; "Claire"; "Violet & Claire") with scenes noted as in a screenplay ("Ext: High School Quad, Day"). The novel lacks momentum, relying on sensational high points to move the loosely connected incidents along; one-note characterizations (the men are all opportunistic slime and the mothers are vacantly ineffective) trivialize the emotional content of an already sketchy plot. Although there is the occasional flash of imagistic magic, readers seeking the spark of Weetzie et al. will find only flickering shadows of it here. Still, the friendship between Violet and Claire has promise, and that may be enough to redeem this title for Block's many fans. JMD


A dozen entries from writers who have been the targets of censorship attempts comprise this short story collection. The contributors are a stellar list of well-known YA authors: Norma Fox Mazer, Julius Lester, Rachel Vail, Katherine Pater-
son, Jacqueline Woodson, Harry Mazer, Walter Dean Myers, Susan Beth Pfeffer, David Klass, Paul Zindel, and Chris Lynch are all represented by stories written specifically for this collection (the late Norma Klein is represented by a story written in 1959, selected by her husband). Particular stories stand out: in Julius Lester’s “Spear” a young man decides against living the life his mother and his ancestry have ordained for him; Rachel Vail’s “Going Sentimental” depicts two friends who make a pragmatic choice about losing their virginity; Walter Dean Myers’ “The Beast Is in the Labyrinth” heartbreakingly presents John, who is torn between his past, his family, and his possible future; and in Susan Beth Pfeffer’s “Ashes,” a young woman realizes her beloved, charming father is the ne’er-do-well her mother always said he was. While the stories themselves are, for the most part, individually intriguing, the collection suffers from a disheartening tonal sameness that ultimately makes it unsuccessful as an anthology. Still, the authors’ notes about censorship add a thought-provoking dimension to the collection, as does Blume’s introduction, and the stories themselves are emotionally intense. All proceeds from the sale of this title go to the National Coalition against Censorship. JMD

BOND, REBECCA Just Like a Baby; written and illus. by Rebecca Bond. Little, 1999 [32p] ISBN 0-316-10416-7 $14.95 Reviewed from galleys R 2-4 yrs

An extended family prepares for their new baby by laboring on the forthcoming addition’s cradle: Father builds it, Grandfather paints it, Grandmother sews a quilt for it, Brother makes a mobile to hang over it, and Mother moves it to its proper spot beneath the windows. Each, after completing his or her task, tries out the inviting cradle just for a second and sleeps “just like a baby,” with each sleeper first admiring the cumulative work done on the cradle before settling in for a nap; when the baby comes, fulfilling all their hopes, she follows their lead and sleeps “just like a baby.” While the text may go on a bit for the babies of the audience, the baby-preparation story is cozy and the cumulation suitably lulling (though the cradle’s novelty makes one wonder what Brother slept in as an infant). The acrylic art has a rough-hewn texture appropriate to a story of craftsmanship, and Bond indulges in some intriguing fish-eye perspectives when looking at the cradle that emphasize its importance as well as preventing the loving images from tipping into sweetness. The riot of naive colors sometimes sails too close to ugly overcrowding, but the art generally has a homely charm that’s in keeping with the soft idealization of a bedtime story. This might offer additional service as a pre-baby read to an older sibling, especially if a grandparent gets in on the reading act. DS


In a companion book to Ruthie’s Gift (BCCB 5/98), Bradley explores the character of Matilda Graber, one of ten-year-old twins Hallie and Mallie, living in a rural Indiana farming town during World War I. After spending her life as a carbon copy of Hallie (minus Hallie’s chipped tooth), wearing matching outfits, having the same best friend (Ruthie), and wearing the same hairstyle, Mallie decides she wants to be unique. It’s a difficult summer for Mallie as she struggles to create her own identity separate from but still connected to her twin. When her mother
receives a piano and Mallie discovers, with the help of the new mail-order bride, Mrs. Jenkins, her facility for playing, Mallie begins to create the individual identity she desires. Unfortunately, the characterizations are on the flat side, and fast-paced this isn"t (Mallie's growth doesn't begin until over halfway through the book). Nonetheless, Bradley explores an aspect of growing up that any child, twin or not, will be drawn to, and kids ready for something a little longer than the American Girls stories may find this a useful step up. EAB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-027843-9 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027838-2 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

Brodie was looking forward to summer and its promises, including the possibility of going to the movies with the beauteous Pauline Genaro; unfortunately he's saddled with his creepy cousin Alex, who at twelve is a year younger than Brodie and requiring of supervision, which puts an end to summer dreams. When Brodie sees Pauline lazing by the river with raffish Otis McCandless, jealousy inspires some riverside roughhousing ("Pauline was the wishbone out of the Thanksgiving turkey, and Otis and I were pulling to see who'd win") that turns to tragedy when the swiftly running river claims Pauline and Otis. Alex rushes to report Brodie, with deliberate falsehood, as a hero who tried to save the kids rather than an instigator of the tragedy, and Brodie struggles with the horrific difference between the truth and the belief of his family, friends, and neighbors. Bunting deftly conveys Brodie's gnawing, corrosive guilt and his recoiling not just from what he did but from his unwilling bond with troubled Alex, who relishes fanning the flames of the drama. Though the events are a bit programmatic (an anonymous eyewitness leaves messages urging Brodie to tell the truth, and eventually he does come clean), the book makes the ethical dilemma as intense and suspenseful as any physical action, and the characterization of Brodie, a good kid who just can't muster the moral strength to swim against the current of public opinion, is sympathetic and credible. Kids not quite up to the complexities of Killing Mr. Griffin but looking for a darker ethical drama than Bauer's On My Honor (BCCB 10/86) will find this a gripping alternative. DS

CALHOUN, DIA Firegold; illus. by Hervé Blondon. Winslow, 1999 [286p]
Trade ed. ISBN 1-890817-10-4 $15.95
Paper ed. ISBN 1-890817-28-7 $9.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

The people of the Valley and the people of the Mountains, the Dalriada, are mortal enemies, each preferring to exist with little or no contact with the other. Jonathon Brae is Valley, but he is unlike other Valley dwellers, set apart from his peers by the belief that, because of the unique color of his eyes, he will go mad. After his mother is killed by a Dalriada war party retrieving a stolen horse, Jonathon begins to seek answers to questions his parents have always refused to discuss. His search leads him into the mountains, to the Dalriada, and the secret of his own family origins. Calhoun has created a compelling mythology for two warring cultures, once one, now separate, and the boy who seeks to reunite them. Jonathon is a believable young adult hero, a confused adolescent at odds with his father and endangered by what he doesn't know. Characterizations are strong and motiva-
tions emotionally credible: Jonathon’s quest to find his place in the world is fueled by grief at his mother’s death; his discovery of his Dalriada roots and his triumphant completion of the Ridgewalk (the Dalriada initiation into adulthood) leads him back to the Valley to settle all that remains undone. The plot bristles with scenes of suspenseful action and potential danger, building toward Jonathon’s final reconciliation with his father. It is a credit to Calhoun’s plotting and characterization that the emotional resolution of her hero’s return to the quiet Valley has as much resonance as his successful completion of the perilous Ridgewalk. JMD

CAMP, LINDSAY Why?; illus. by Tony Ross. Putnam, 1999 [26p]
Reviewed from galleys R 3-7 yrs
Lily drives her father to distraction by repeatedly asking “Why?” Irritation turns to pride, however, when Lily and her irrepressible questioning stop a spaceship of earth-invading extraterrestrials, the Thargons: “Tremble, Earthlings! We have come to destroy your planet!” Well, maybe not, since Lily follows every alien directive with “Why?” Cartoon blocks of colored-pencil drawings in blues, greens, and yellows fill inviting double- and single-page scenes, while Lily’s wings of orange-red hair provide an eyecatching counterpoint throughout the visual narrative. The dot-eyed human and alien figures are expressive, humorous, and emotionally engaging. Energetic shading, irregular lines, and vigorous hatching texture the illustrations with depth, movement, and contour. The straightforward narrative, told outside the frames of the cartoons, balances the balloons of dialogue between Lily and her father. Among themselves, of course, the Thargons speak Thargonian, but the endpapers offer a cipher-key to decode their language—those who do so will find one Thargon asking a flower “What is your name?” or another wondering why Lily’s cat doesn’t speak. Fortunately, the Thargons go home before teatime, Lily is an unvanquished hero, her father’s love is unconditional, and the story’s closure will satisfy both children and adults. Readers seeking an enjoyable readaloud, a bedtime melodrama, or an excuse for code-breaking may find that this story gives the right answers—so why not? JNH

CARLSON, LORI MARIE, comp. You’re On!: Seven Plays in English and Spanish. Morrow, 1999 [144p]
ISBN 0-688-16237-1 $17.00
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 4-7
Carlson offers those interested in performing plays in English and/or Spanish a collection of short dramas suited to a range of ages and situations. All seven plays are by twentieth-century Hispanic playwrights and five are published here for the first time. New plays include two realistic dramas about immigrants in America: one by Gary Soto and another by Denise Ruiz, a young woman who won a prize for a previous play written when she was a New York City high school student. Other more magically realistic selections include a lyrical dream play by librarian Pura Belpre, a Christmas fantasy by novelist Oscar Hijuelos, a mime play by Argentinean modernist poet Alfonsina Storni, and a comic play by Federico García Lorca that revolves around a Spanish folktale. None of the plays presents insurmountable difficulties for staging. Elena Castedo’s fable-like play could be performed spontaneously in the elementary or middle-school classroom since it requires minimal costuming and few props and because it accommodates almost any num-
ber of students. Each play appears first in English and then in Spanish, regardless of which is the play's original tongue, but the translations are clearly marked and students of either language will appreciate the opportunity to cross-check their reading. Students and teachers at many levels should be able to find something in this compilation to help them dramatize their own or others’ experiences. FK

CLEARY, BEVERLY Ramona's World; illus. by Alan Tiegreen. Morrow, 1999. [192p]
Library ed. ISBN 0688-16818-3 $14.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0688-16816-7 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys

After a long literary absence, Ramona Quimby returns. Now a fourth-grader, she's excited at the prospect of a new school friend, Daisy; she's engrossed in the business of being a big sister to baby Roberta; she's also beset by the classic Quimby problems of family and school (her fourth-grade teacher finally lays down the law on that famous Ramona spelling). Ramona devotees will note the increasing prominence of Yard Ape (aka Danny), presumably as a result of his significance in the televised Ramona series; it's also interesting to see Susan of the boingy curls again and to acquire some additional understanding of Susan’s militantly virtuous character (she's forbidden to eat the cake at Ramona’s birthday party because her mother considers birthday cake unsanitary). Cleary doesn't strain the series continuity by hammering home newly contemporary details (though Beezus does go hog-wild and get her ears pierced without permission); instead, there's a snug and solid old-fashionedness to Ramona's titular world that makes it safely insular without being offputtingly out of touch. That and sympathetic but briskly humorous portrayals of what could be their own troubles are what readers want from Ramona; they'll be very pleased to have another title from which to get it. Alan Tiegreen’s fluid and energetic sketches don’t take their subjects overseriously but are nonetheless respectful of their growth. DS

CUTLER, JANE 'Gator Aid; illus. by Tracey Campbell Pearson. Farrar, 1999 [144p]
ISBN 0-374-32502-2 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys

Because Edward Fraser has been creeping around blissfully imitating the crocodile in Peter Pan, his family is skeptical when he claims to have seen an alligator in the local park's lake. Everyone else believes with a vengeance, however, and the alligator grows in reported size (Edward’s mother dryly notes that things can grow fast “once they get on the news”) and acquaintance (a media frenzy erupts in the park as limelight-seekers of all stripes are inspired to reptilian closeness). Soon a gen-u-wine gator-hunter (and his feisty granddaughter) is called in, and Edward begins to fear for the playful baby alligator. Cutler has two big pluses going for her: a completely original plot, and a sunny, individual style that keeps the proceedings brimful of life. The spirited family interchanges and spot-on observations of second-grader Edward’s actions (“He remembered to cross his fingers behind his back before saying, 'I never lie'”) are balanced by a larger and more satiric picture of the publicity circus and story expansion; underneath it all, however, is the vindication of Edward, who didn’t lie, who did see an alligator, and who is proven truthful in front of friends—and his big brother. There's real craftsman-
ship under the lighthearted humor, and kids will be happy to see Edward’s honor, general order, and the baby alligator restored. DS


Girls are offered quite a few cheery guides to girlhood and life, but guys aren’t so often favored with such literary mentoring. Daldry redresses that lack in this breezy paperback filled with creative emphatic fonts and a peanut gallery (including a bold young man in shades and his wide-eyed and nervous counterpart) commenting on the action throughout. The book’s first section, “Surviving Love and Sex,” is its biggest, packed with detailed advice about meaty matters such as how to negotiate the first kiss, how not to be a jerk when you break up with a girl, and what to do if your mom finds your porn collection (“Shrivels up and dies?” asks the worried guy). Other sections include “Surviving All the Changes in Your Body,” “Surviving Teenage Ups and Downs,” and “Surviving Teenage Social Life.” Gay kids aren’t that likely to make it through the fifty pages of intense girl-discussion to the accepting mention of homosexuality, and Daldry’s casualness of style occasionally leads to some contradictions (he first says there’s no wrong way to split up, and he then goes on to describe the wrong ways to split up) or confusion (the section addressing the funding of dates rather implies that one can invite a girl out and then stick her with the check). The matter-of-fact intimate confidences, however, tread where few books have gone before, making this a helpful big brother to Harris’ *It’s Perfectly Normal* (BCCB 10/94). Buy an extra copy and leave it around where the girls congregate too—they’ll relish investigating how the other half sees the world. DS


For children pummeled by adult reminiscences on the salad days of their youth, Finkelstein provides ammunition to launch a counterattack. Eight topical chapters take on such issues as health and safety, the environment, crime, and education, demonstrating with statistics and “expert” opinions that the 1950s and ’60s weren’t everything that aging memories sometimes crack them up to be. Finkelstein rightly notes some of the cloudier facets of these earlier decades: polio, the Cold War, lower graduation rates, poorer nutritional knowledge, lingering segregation in the aftermath of Brown vs. Board of Education. However, in dispelling one set of myths he inadvertently introduces another, portraying current social conditions as a comparative Camelot. Lauding the medical community’s victory over childhood diseases such as measles and polio, he blatantly ignores the post-’60s threat of AIDS; indicting the “lead-fuel-guzzling, smoke-belching automobiles of the 1940s and 1950s,” he fails to note the aggregate environmental impact of the vastly greater number of cleaner emission autos now on the roads; bashing the lack of cultural diversity in post World War II suburbia, he turns a blind eye to the tenacity of ethnic enclaves in “once-vibrant” cities. Kids whose research into the 1950s and ’60s hasn’t extended beyond Nickelodeon reruns will find this title an eye-opener, but more critical readers will quickly perceive that this is just one side of a very tangled argument. Photos, documentary notes, and a list for further reading are included. EB
FLEMING, CANDACE  
* A Big Cheese for the White House: The True Tale of a Tremendous Cheddar; illus. by S. D. Schindler.  
Kroupa/DK Ink, 1999  [32p]  
ISBN 0-7894-2573-4  $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  Gr. 2-4

There's no question in the minds of the citizens of Cheshire, Massachusetts that they produce the young nation's finest cheese, so it's no surprise that civic pride is piqued when they learn that the town of Norton's cheese is being served at President Jefferson's table. To bring the excellence of their product forcibly to Jefferson's attention (and of course to upstage their rivals), Cheshire-ites overcome obstacle after obstacle to make a wheel stupendous enough to grace the White House. No cheese press big enough to squeeze it? Use the cider press. No hoop big enough to hold it? The blacksmith can turn one out. No sledge big enough to convey it? Elder John Leland's horse-drawn sleigh can manage the job. News of the coming cheese arrives at the White House before Leland and his cargo, and fifteen footmen are at hand to haul the wheel into the amazed president's dinner party, where the honor of Cheshire is roundly vindicated. Schindler's line and watercolor cast are lighthearted enough to capture the joyous absurdity of the undertaking yet literal enough to preserve the kernel of historic truth at the heart of the tale (explained in a concluding note) and to respect the townspeople's determination. Where there's a will, there's a whey.  

GANTOS, JACK  
* Jack on the Tracks: Four Seasons of Fifth Grade; written and illus. by Jack Gantos.  
Farrar, 1999  [192p]  
ISBN 0-374-33665-2  $16.00  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  Gr. 4-7

Jack, hero of Heads or Tails (BCCB 7/94), Jack's New Power (12/95), and Jack's Black Book (12/97), returns here in an account of the year before his other adventures, when his family first moves to Florida. This is a Jack awestruck by his father's certainty in all matters ("And even when his lectures got him hot under the collar, it just meant that he cared enough to keep me from being a moron all my life"), tormented by his older sister ("She called me a crybaby, a wimp, a candy butt, a sissy, a pantywaist, a sniveler, and a mama's boy"), and determined to better himself (he earnestly explores his senses in a composition about a friend's eating a tapeworm). His struggle for maturation is enhanced by Gantos' effervescent writing style and grasp of the gross and horrifying (in addition to his friend's tapeworm—which turns out to be spaghetti—Jack finds philosophy in a case of hookworm and proves to be doom for each of three family cats in turn). This will reel kids right in without condescending to them, and you could start them on this volume and move them up through Jack's adventures chronologically—especially if you were prepared for a tapeworm-eating readaloud.  

GARDEN, NANCY  
* The Year They Burned the Books.  
Farrar, 1999  247p  
ISBN 0-374-38667-6  $17.00  
Ad  Gr. 6-9

Jamie is the editor of the high-school newspaper; her dear friend and fellow paper-staffer, Terry, has privately informed her that he has changed from Maybe gay to Probably gay, and the arrival of a beautiful new photographer makes Jamie think she's moving from Maybe a lesbian to Probably a lesbian. Her private life may be conflating with her public position, however, when an outspoken new school board...
member goes after the school's policy on condom distribution, teaching of sexual education, inclusion of books mentioning sex in the school library—and the responses of the school newspaper, under Jamie's leadership, to these actions. Jamie, Terry, and other newspaper staff respond to new strictures by publishing an underground newspaper, which, in light of increasing tension in the community, begins to make them personal targets. The plot components here are getting pretty worn around the edges (see Andrew Clements' The Landry News, BCCB 6/99, for another recent renegade-newspaper story), and Garden's occasional attempts to add some nuanced viewpoint never really succeed, leaving the ethical deck heavily stacked; the good characters' earnest high-mindedness and sensitive longings are also rather heavily hammered home. The crusade and anti-crusade dynamic still makes for energizing reading, however, and the book wisely avoids tying things up too neatly by giving Jamie a girlfriend (the beautiful photographer is straight, and she remains merely a loyal platonic friend). Readers with an activist bent may revel in the righteous anger of the censorship drama. DS

GORMAN, CAROL  
*Dork in Disguise.* HarperCollins, 1999 [208p]  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-024867-X $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-024866-1 $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R Gr. 4-8

If Bill Nye the Science Guy ever inspired a novel, it's this one about Jerry Flack, the sixth-grade science whiz who reinvents himself as one of the cool kids at his new middle school. He's assisted by Brenda, a self-assured classmate who sees through his disguise ("It takes one to know one," she says) and has the wisdom to let Jerry sort through his feelings on his own. It takes Jerry 150 pages to realize he'd rather spend time with Brenda and her friends than with Cinnamon, a lovely and popular-but-dopey redhead, whose admiration of his more-or-less successful disguise and of his inventive lies inspires him to keep his participation on the science team a secret. While some of the "cool" characters are stereotypically shallow, in other ways the book gives realistic attention to the preteen school scene, especially the way hormones can affect the ability of smart kids to make smart choices. Gorman also works in some way-cool science facts that, though presented in a dry Q & A form in the science team competition scene, come to life in Jerry's science project: a hovercraft built from a vacuum-cleaner engine. Go ahead and encourage kids to try this at home. FK

GOURLEY, CATHERINE  
ISBN 1-56247-768-4 $14.95  
R Gr. 3-5

Among the latest additions to the extensive American Girls product line is a series of historical guides serving as companions to each of the girls' novels. *Felicity's World* begins with a cogent thumbnail sketch of the political background of the American Revolution, continues with three chapters of social history focusing on domestic life (various types of homesteads, women's occupations and girls' tasks, clothing, medicine and health, the daily routine typical of young ladies of Felicity's privileged rank), and concludes with a chapter on the war itself and the life of soldiers and female camp followers. While the bulk of the information offered here can be found in other age-appropriate sources, the lavish photo illustrations
and period pictures, organization that encourages both browsing and close reading, and intriguing details of times past (from dolls in coffins that reflect the high child mortality rates, to the colonial custom of throwing stockings at the bride, to the gibbeting of executed criminals) make this particularly attractive to readers engaged by Felicity's series. Excerpts from letters and diaries of colonists and anecdotes from the lives of more august historic figures (the Washingtons' courtship, Jefferson's grief at his wife's death) breathe life into photos of artifacts and may suggest ways of extending doll play beyond dress-up and tea parties. EB

**GRIFFITH, HELEN V.** *How Many Candles?*; illus. by Sonja Lamut. Greenwillow, 1999 [24p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16258-4 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R 5-8 yrs

Alex (the dog) and the cat (the cat), from the easy reader *Alex and the Cat* (BCCB 12/97), make an appearance in picture-book form in order to celebrate the birthday of Robbie, Alex's young owner. Alex has made a cake for the occasion, but his limited intellectual powers are challenged when he tries to figure out how many candles he'll need as the cat, in a riff on the idea of "dog years," starts leading him through some questionable concepts of age ("Ten years in a boy is the same as seventy years in a cat"). A turtle chimes in ("Seventy years is nothing") and some gnats offer their perspective ("Nothing lasts that long"), leaving Alex no wiser than he was to start with but resulting in a merry chase for the cat. Griffith maintains the effective contrast between Alex's eager simplicity and the cat's laconic condescension (you can almost see the rolling of feline eyes) as he scrambles poor Alex's brains, and while the final diversion doesn't offer a satisfying closure to the math questions, the promise of cake will probably serve to smother any audience reservations. Lamut uses the canvas' rough surface for texture, cleverly also employing it as a frame to the illustrations, giving a geometric rectangle-on-rectangle precision to the spreads that underscores the mathematical theme. She doesn't overlook humor or character, either: Alex's worried visions pop up in thought bubbles containing geriatric cats and ever-multiplying candles, and the fluid line of Alex's cheerful countenance contrasts with the cat's lithe and enigmatic mien as well as with the straightforward botanical detail of their outdoor milieu. When the little ones start rattling on about dog years, break this out for some well-timed temporal silliness. DS

**GROVE, VICKI** *The Starplace.* Putnam, 1999 [224p]
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-8
Frannie's life is tightly bounded by small-town Oklahoma conventions and by her own insecurities until the arrival of Celeste, in 1961 the first black student at Quiver Junior High, changes Frannie's world and makes her question some familial and local assumptions about race. Frannie also finds herself drawn to Celeste, whose poise she envies, and as the two girls develop a friendship, she becomes intrigued by Celeste's father's quest to uncover buried family history, history wrapped inside a dark Quiver secret. Frannie's narration sounds credibly self-conscious and sheltered, and it also provides some quietly drawn portraits of the uneasy and disguised racism of the area ("I could sort of remember there being
stuff about Negros and schools in our seventh grade social studies book, but the
teacher skipped over that section because none of us were Negro so we didn't need
to know it). Celeste is overly saintly, however, and the friendship between the
two girls tips into the sentimental; the history sometimes trades social impact for
melodrama, and Groves’ chronology of Celeste’s family story is problematic. The
account of Frannie’s emerging conscience, increasing awareness of history, and
developing friendship with Celeste is compelling, however; readers will enjoy fan-
cying themselves retroactive heroes. DS

HEIDÉ, FLORENCE PARRY  
The House of Wisdom;  
by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland; illus. by Mary Grandpré. 
Kroupa/DK Ink, 1999  [40p]  
ISBN 0-7894-2562-9  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

Ishaq, the son of the chief translator for ninth century Caliph al Ma'mun, is fasci-
nated by the prestigious center for books and learning in which his father content-
edly labors, but he does not feel the passion for research that draws scholars from
all over the world to the Caliph’s House of Wisdom in Baghdad. Hoping to
someday join the Caliph’s trade caravan, he applies himself to his studies so that he
can understand and appreciate the foreign lands and customs he will encounter,
and he finally makes the journey. Among treasure and rare texts the caravan brings
back to the House of Wisdom, Ishaq discovers writings his father identifies as a
heretofore unknown work of Aristotle; fired with imagination from his world trav-
rels, Ishaq now devotes himself to studying the Greek philosopher and hopes to
become a bridge to the future: “Maybe someday someone from another land,
speaking another language, will be searching as I am. And maybe . . . I can light
his way.” In a concluding note Heide expands on the purpose of the House of
Wisdom and the historic contributions of Ishaq, his father, and the al Ma’mun;
although her remarks shed light on why this is all so important to Western thought,
they do little to bring kid appeal to so esoteric a topic. Pastel illustrations present
a bazaar of garishly hued images crammed to the point of distraction, and although
Heide’s text ambles gracefully along with poetic earnestness, it conveys little in-
sight into Ishaq’s intellectual awakening. A pronunciation guide is included. EB

HELLER, NICHOLAS  
Ogres! Ogres! Ogres!: A Feasting Frenzy from A to Z; illus. by
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16987-2  $15.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16986-4  $15.93
Reviewed from galleys

When we “take a peek through the trap door” we see “insatiable ogres feasting on
fabulous foods from A to Z,” starting with Abednego, who “adores anchovy but-
ter,” which leads us to Beulah, who “blows bubbles in her chocolate,” and so on
until Zuleika “zips zealously through her asparagus” and leads us back around to A
again. The oral pleasures experienced by the cavalcade of omnivorous monsters
are depicted in text offering similar pleasures, with lip-smacking alliteration and a
pleasant linkage in the last word. The pre- and post-alphabet framing stanzas are
extraneous, however, and they emphasize the absence of momentum in the text’s
listing of ogre after ogre. The illustrations too fall short of the saturnalian glee one
might hope for: the subjects look more like your slightly goofy neighbor than
creatures of fearsome aspect and ravenous appetite, and the food never attains the
delicious and chaotic excess that would fulfill young viewers’ secret wishes (nor is it clear why bits of famous masterpieces, such as Rembrandt’s self-portrait, are tucked into some of the illustrations). Still, Abednego et al. are an amusing collection of characters, and youngsters who would themselves enjoy being loose in the kitchen without a superego may wish to snack on this. 

HENKES, KEVIN  *The Birthday Room*. Greenwillow, 1999  [176p]
ISBN 0-688-16733-0  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-6

Ben isn’t as delighted as his parents would like him to be over their gift for his twelfth birthday—an empty, well-lit room to be used as an art studio. Although he enjoys art and shows considerable promise, what he’d really like is a trip to Oregon to visit Uncle Ian, his mother’s estranged brother whom Ben cannot remember. Mom harbors what Ben regards as an irrational mistrust of Ian, apparently blaming him for an accident in which Ben lost a finger at the age of two, but she reluctantly agrees to take him for the visit. During their stay, Ian is reassured that he hasn’t ruined his nephew’s life, the adult siblings achieve rapprochement, and Ben allows his interest in art to blossom under his uncle’s gentle tutelage. Henkes’ tale unfolds slowly, and readers expecting dramatic confrontations and startling revelations of family secrets will observe instead a gradual release of resentment and guilt and a quiet acceptance of family with all their warts and flaws. A subplot involving the risky pregnancy of Ian’s wife, Nina, and a trio of friendly neighbor children bent on welcoming the baby with an appropriate gift supplies enough action and tension to carry readers along as the family resolves its problems at their realistically languorous pace.

HERTENSTEIN, JANE  *Beyond Paradise*. Morrow, 1999  [176p]
ISBN 0-688-16381-5  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 5-8

Louise Keller and her missionary parents have barely settled into the Baptist compound on the Philippine island of Panay before the war in Europe extends its reach into the Pacific. Her father, on church business in Manila, is cut off from his family as the Japanese gain hold of one island after another; compound residents struggle to preserve some normalcy, even as they drill for attack and eventually go into hiding in the mountains. When Panay is taken, their hideaway is discovered and all enemy nationals are forced into concentration camps. Louise passes through her late teens within the camps, forced to socialize at close quarters with persons the like of which her strict Baptist family has never known. Rumors, privation, separation from her father, and fear of the unknown wear hard on her, and when her mother mentally collapses under pressure, Louise loses her last shred of family support. The drama inherent in Louise’s plight is never fully realized within this novel. Although flashes of genuine emotion erupt (suppressed anger boils over when Louise receives a long-awaited letter from her stateside older sister, filled with details of a brimming social life), underdeveloped incidents are, by and large, simply strung together. Nonetheless, life under occupation in the wartime Pacific is a topic rarely treated in children’s literature; pair and contrast this with Graham Salisbury’s story of troubled Japanese-American existence on hotly defended Hawaii, *Under the Blood-Red Sun* (BCCB 11/94).
HEWETT, LORRI  

Dancer. Dutton, 1999  214p  
ISBN 0-525-45968-5  $15.99  R  Gr. 6-10

Stephanie is a devoted and promising student of ballet, consecrated to her art despite being the only African-American in her class. She’s beset by pressure, however: her own pressure to be the best when a new student outshines her, her family’s pressure to consider college rather than post-graduation ballet, and the social pressures at her tony private school, where as the janitor’s daughter she receives a scholarship. Stephanie’s talent is encouraged by Miss Winnie, charismatic former ballerina who danced in postwar Europe because American ballet companies wouldn’t accept black dancers (George Balanchine told her that “ballerinas should have skin the color of a freshly peeled apple”), and Stephanie is drawn to Miss Winnie’s resentful but attractive nephew Vance, who excels in ballet under his aunt’s tutelage but yearns to break away to his own world of club dance. Hewett has an unerring grasp of the ballet novel, nurturing an intense hothouse atmosphere of rehearsal, obsession, romance, and intriguing practical details that will make balletomanes pirouette with delight. Stephanie’s ambivalence over her situation at school possesses the same kind of febrile angst and blends in effectively, and the book makes repeated but never preachy points about ballet’s problematic limitations in the name of homogeneousness in dancers (there’s an intriguing observation about the Dance Theatre of Harlem’s practice of dyeing pointe shoes to match their wearer’s skin tones, thereby extending the artistic line of the body). Lovers of this classic literary choreography will relish seeing this appealing young dancer in the starring role. DS

HOBBIE, HOLLY  

Toot & Puddle: You Are My Sunshine; written and illus. by Holly Hobbie. Little, 1999  [32p]  
ISBN 0-316-36562-9  $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys  R  4-8 yrs

Those redoubtable piglet buddies Toot and Puddle (from Toot & Puddle, BCCB 2/98) are back: “The sun was shining, the birds were singing, blossoms were bursting . . . and Toot was moping.” Nothing Puddle does can shake Toot out of his funk—his ears are too big, his eyes are too small, he’s too pink (“You can’t be too pink,” says Puddle). Although Toot’s smile pops out when Puddle makes him a “five-berry cobbler with heaps of whipped cream,” it takes a thunderstorm to really cheer him up (“Sometimes you need a big whooping thunderstorm to clear the air,” says Puddle). A very slightly acerbic sense of humor manifests itself here and there as Toot simply refuses to be jollied out of his doldrums, and it’s that humor that keeps Hobbie’s woodland friends from cloying. Watercolors featuring cotton puff clouds in blue skies, sunny yellow kitchens, and sylvan glades sit lightly on the pages, providing backdrops against which Puddle and friends attempt to modify the sour Toot’s behavior. Young listeners will cheer the efforts of Toot’s buddies to lift his spirits, even as they recognize his moody disaffection. JMD

HOLM, JENNIFER L.  

Our Only May Amelia. HarperCollins, 1999  253p  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028354-8  $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027822-6  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 5-8

A Finnish-American community in Washington State in 1899 is the setting for this story of twelve-year-old May Amelia, the only girl in a family of seven older brothers. May Amelia chafes against being a “Proper Young Lady” and longs for
the freedom of her brothers, so much so that she is constantly getting into trouble. Narrated by May Amelia, each chapter relates an incident in her young life, from boating on the Nasel River, to being chased up a tree by a bear, to taking care of her newborn baby sister. May Amelia tells her story in a conspiratorial style, with dialogue absorbed into the main narrative instead of being set off by quotation marks. While this gives a casual, family-storytelling feel to the text, stylistically it lacks emotional differentiation; the result is a sequence of incidents without emphasis or high points. Because of the discrete nature of the chapters, however, the novel lends itself to reading aloud, which mitigates the somewhat measured pace and tonal sameness of the text. May Amelia is an admirable, often humorous character, and the picture she provides of life in her community is a vibrant one. Her impressions of her neighbors, her relationships with her parents and brothers, and her descriptions of daily life on this not-often-seen terrain contain involving details and realistic emotions. Give this to your readers who have outgrown the Little House books and are seeking new frontiers. JMD

HOLTWIJK, INEKE  Asphalt Angels; tr. by Wanda Boeke. Lemniscaat/Front Street, 1999
184p ISBN 1-886910-24-3 $15.95

Recently translated from the Dutch, this novel is a fictionalized account of the life of Alex, a thirteen-year-old boy living on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Alex, who goes by the nickname Crusoe (after Robinson Crusoe), comes to the city after he’s kicked out of his poor rural home by his stepfather after the death of Alex’s foster mother. The horrifying facts of life on the street are not glossed over in this novel: the reader and the naive Alex learn about its dangers and moral compromises together. Through it all Alex maintains a sense of himself as “different” from his peers, distancing himself as much as possible from their thieving, prostitution, and glue-sniffing, and at one point describing them as “animals.” He succeeds to a remarkable extent, finding a guide and protector his first day on the street and falling in with the gang who provides the book’s title later on. The subject matter is by its nature involving, and teen readers are old enough to be moved by the younger kids’ pathetic games and to imagine themselves in Alex’s situation. But the novel’s journalistic style—a mix of realism and sentimentality—has surprisingly little emotional depth, and it offers little of the flavor of the city. A glossary provides literal translations of selected place names and adds some information to that available in context. The author’s afterword provides background about the street children of Brazil and explains what is being done to help them. In spite of its weaknesses as a novel, young adults will find this a readable, fact-based introduction to an important subject, one that provides sensitive readers with a balance of emotional involvement and intellectual distance. FK

HOOBLER, DOROTHY  The Ghost in the Tokaido Inn; by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. Philomel, 1999 [224p]
Reviewed from galley

Set in eighteenth-century Japan, this is historical fiction with a suspenseful edge. Seikei, son of a tea merchant, longs to become a samurai, despite the fact that that aim is high above his station. On a business trip with his father to Edo, the Shogun’s city, Seikei meets samurai Lord Hakuseki, a coarse, unrefined man with more
sense of self than sense of honor. When Lord Hakuseki is robbed of a priceless gem meant as a gift for the Shogun, legendary Judge Ooka is called in to investigate. Seikei becomes Ooka's willing assistant in the investigation, and his inquiries lead him to a troupe of Kabuki players and the mysterious actor, Tomomi. The Hooblers recreate the setting of Japan under the Shogun, depicting the cultural and social hierarchy against a dramatic backdrop of theatrical and festival events. Precise characterization, suspenseful plot twists, and a pace defined by swift and sometimes violent action make this a lively period thriller. Readers will appreciate the clues discovered by the investigating Seikei, along with the strong foreshadowing that only makes the climax that much more resonant. By the conclusion, all that is hidden is revealed, honor is avenged, and Seikei achieves his impossible dream. Young adults will close this book with a sense of having finished a whopping good yarn. JMD

Horton, Joan  
Ad Gr. 2-4

A score of Halloweeny poems come a-trick-or-treating in this collection, providing youngsters with glimpses of phenomena ranging from "The Ghost and Goblin Ball" to "Aggie Witch's Ads." The verse doesn't have the sparkle of Prelutsky or Florian, and the Halloween hijinks are pretty predictable; the book does engage in some entertaining conceits ("The Scaredy-Cat Ghost" has been a nervous wreck ever since somebody "crept up behind me and shouted out BOO!"); however, and the poems are serviceably spooky. The spattery art relies on the traditional orange and green contrast, topping the colors up further with loud purples, greens, and blues; the intensity enhances the MTVesque edge of the figures but sometimes leaves the compositions cluttered or unfocused. Still, this is a sassy and chantable offering for the 31st (make sure you point kids to the tombstone couplets on the endpapers); it's also eminently suitable for reading aloud to younger monsters. DS

Ibbotson, Eva  
R Gr. 5-8

The dashingly handsome Arriman the Awful, Wizard of the North, guardian of all that is unpleasant and evil, is in a slump. He has given up waiting for his foretold replacement wizard and decided to seek a wife, hoping that their union will produce the wizardling of prophecy. Not being what you'd call a wizard about town, he holds a contest, vowing to marry the witch who performs the darkest magic. Unfortunately, the witches who turn up for the contest are a motley bunch, from old Mother Bloodwort (who has a disconcerting habit of turning into a coffee table) to Mabel Wrack (who specializes in fish magic) to the seriously evil Madame Olympia, sorceress par excellence, whose ambitions include power but not love. Belladonna, the youngest of the contenders, hasn't got a chance, because all she's got on her side is white magic and the fact that she fell for Arriman at first sight. Enter Terence the orphan and his pet worm Rover. Belladonna takes Rover as her familiar and Terence as her friend, and suddenly her magic is blacker than a dark night and her chances improve considerably. There is an Addams Family feel to Ibbotson's wizards and witches as these gruesome but gleeful malefactors engage in matchmaking and magic. The descriptions of each witch and her attempted dark magic is tongue-in-cheek funny, and the settling of the wizard's romantic dilemma, while foreshadowed and forewarned, is eminently satisfying. JMD
Mitch is having problems with everybody—his coach, his best friend, his brother and sister, his parents—and he is convinced that a) nothing is his fault and b) nothing he can do will change things. An encounter with old friend Annie (who used to be a pal but isn't anymore since girls and boys can't be pals) in which she explains that Mitch is just going through a slump energizes Mitch, and he begins to actively seek to make amends to all. This is a purposeful depiction of one individual's taking responsibility for his actions and making his life better; unfortunately, the shallow characterizations reflect shallow motivations, and Mitch's impetus for all this troublemaking is barely indicated. His problems communicating—his anger, his frustration—are vaguely chalked up to his age and/or stage of development and are never adequately explained. His miraculous turnaround due to the kind words of the long-ignored Annie is not credible, and the relative ease with which he returns to the fold is also a bit rosy. Jarzyna has a good handle on adolescent dialogue, however, the scenes between the siblings have an irritated ring of truth to them, and the occasional humorous aside leavens the pace somewhat. Readers in emotional conundrums of their own making may take some comfort from Mitch's efforts to regain control over his life. JMD

The "language of food" examined here is both language about food (edible eponyms such as Reubens, graham crackers, and sandwiches, meals named for places, such as baked Alaska and turkey) and food-influenced language (phrases and words such as "bring home the bacon," "salary," and "carnival"), and it's enhanced by a seasoning of other tasty tidbits such as food folklore, food-related laws, food festivals, etc. While there's plenty of fun here, Jones often doesn't distinguish clearly between etymological myths and truths and usually gives more space to the former, and her reliance on secondary sources means that some questionable material makes it in here as facts (the food-related laws section is particularly lore-ish). This isn't as mouthwatering as James Solheim's It's Disgusting—and We Ate It! (BCCB 4/98), but as a quick crunchy snack, it may nonetheless tempt reluctant readers and trivia nibblers. O'Brien's live-wire line drawings lend some visual absurdity to the proceedings. A bibliography and index are included. DS

Willojean knows that when you're horse-shopping you shouldn't fall for the first horse you see, but when she sees the skinny and mistreated Thoroughbred mare Tess, she's head over heels in love. Unfortunately, all Willojean's distant father sees in the mare is trouble, and he gives his daughter a deadline by which time she either has to succeed with Tess or get rid of her. That's a sturdy old nag of a plot, here fetchingly if unbelievably romanticized, but Keehn burdens it with a pack of heavy-handed subplots—Willojean's adjustment to her mother's death, her father's alcoholism, her budding romance with her trainer's son, her trainer's husband's
villainy—and there’s little characterization to give heart to the melodramatics. Though the present-tense narrative flows along easily, lines such as “By God, Willojean, that mare’s got spirit” are more cliché than classic. While fervent horse lovers might find the pony passion here enough to carry them through, they’ll be better off with Jessie Haas’ *A Horse Like Barney.* DS

LEVINE, GAIL CARSON  *Dave at Night.* HarperCollins, 1999  [272p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028154-5  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028153-7  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Papa is barely cold in his grave when stepmother Ida announces her refusal to care for his two sons on her own; an uncle from Chicago willingly takes in his quiet, studious nephew Gideon, but no one will take on eleven-year-old Dave, who’s always been a handful, to say the least. Off he goes to the Hebrew Home for Boys (dubbed “Hell Hole for Brats” by its inmates), but its locked gates and brick fence cannot keep the rebellious little soul inside. Despite well-founded threats of brutal punishment by the orphanage director, Dave’s up and over the wall at lights out whenever he can manage. His guide and guardian through the nighttime world is *gonif* Sol Gruber, a compassionate con man who introduces Dave to jazz-infused rent parties and upscale salons of 1926 Harlem. Dave makes friends with Irma Lee, the lonely, overprotected child of a black society hostess and philanthropist, and plots an imaginative runaway scheme, which is finally abandoned not only because of its impossibility, but also because conditions at HHB improve as Dave elicits the help of friends within the Home and without. Dave’s two-page wrap-up of events brings his lengthy adventures to an over-abrupt close, leaving readers thirsty for more detail about the childhood years stretching out ahead, not only for him but for pampered Irma Lee. Still, Dave’s tales of life on the “inside”—dodging sadistic masters, outwitting bullies, sharing midnight food revels with loyal buddies—will engross orphan-story devotees. A closing note on the setting describes New York’s Hebrew Orphan Asylum, in which the author’s father spent much of his childhood, and comments on the Harlem Renaissance. EB

LITTLE, KIMBERLEY GRIFFITHS  *Enchanted Runner.* Avon Camelot, 1999  [160p]
ISBN 0-380-97623-4  $15.00
Reviewed from galleys

Kendall is half Anglo and half Acoma Indian. His mother is recently dead, his father and older brother are on a summer-long truck haul, and Kendall is staying the summer with his maternal great-grandfather, Armando, at the Acoma pueblo. Kendall is uncertain of his welcome, and his great-grandfather does little to reassure him, indulging instead in long silences interspersed with cultural stories and lore. Armando finally reaches out to the boy when he realizes that Kendall knows the Acoma stories from his mother, that he truly wishes to belong to the pueblo, and that he has in him the ability to become a ritual runner of the Snake Clan. When Armando is injured on a pilgrimage to a desert shrine, Kendall finds him and brings help, but the old man dies. The book ends with the understanding that Kendall will come back to the pueblo: “The horses were gone. Any spirits of past Snake runners were also gone—forever. But part of Kendall ran with them, would always run with them. He was an Acoma runner of the Snake Clan. And he would be back.” The writing is choppy and, except for Kendall, the characterizations are
flatly functional. The climax, in which Kendall experiences the spirits of his great-grandfather and his mother, strains credulity, and Kendall's stoic great-grandfather imparts some heavy-handed cultural messages. These are lightened, however, by the occasional lyrical descriptions of Kendall running through the desert, and Kendall himself, searching for both a place to belong and relief from his grief, is a sympathetic portrayal. JMD

LOWRY, Lois  
*Zooman Sam*; illus. by Diane de Groat.  
Houghton, 1999  
[160p]  
ISBN 0-395-97393-7  $15.00  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  Gr. 2-5

Sam decides to dress up as a zookeeper for "Future Job Day" at nursery school. With the help of his mother and sister, he contrives a costume that's just right, and he is unique among the many firemen in his class. Sam's search for the perfect costume parallels his search for meaning in those collections of letters called words. By the end of this book, Zooman Sam has turned into Bookman Sam, and he feels that "Chief of Wonderfulness" feeling because he has become a proud reader. Lowry has the dynamics of nursery-school participants down pat, and listeners are bound to recognize themselves and their friends in Sam's classmates as they interact, interrupt and interfere in daily lessons. (Sam's nursery school teacher, Mrs. Bennett, is a saint.) Sam's internal thought processes are winningly depicted, and his anxieties and accomplishments are both realistic and funny. Subplots involving training the family dog, Sleuth, and Anastasia's romantic interest in friend Steve are duly commented on by the point-blank-frank Sam, whose reflections provide a close-up view of the congenial Krupnik family. There is an ease to Lowry's prose that makes this a surefire readaloud, and older readers-alone may enjoy looking back (with an independent reader's sense of indulgence) and remembering when they were little. Black-and-white line drawings head each chapter, with full-page illustrations making an amiable addition to an amiable text. JMD

MAYHEW, James  
*Katie and the Mona Lisa*; written and illus. by James Mayhew.  
Orchard, 1999  
32p  
ISBN 0-531-30177-X  $15.95  
Ad  5-8 yrs

While Grandma dozes on a bench in the art museum, Katie strikes up a conversation with Mona Lisa and learns that the enigmatic smile barely conceals the loneliness of a solitary life within a picture frame; Katie entices her to step out of her picture and meet some folk who can restore her happiness. Raphael's Saint George is so smitten with Mona Lisa that he abandons his princess-in-distress to kiss her hand, leaving the dragon to pursue his prey; Mona Lisa tries to dance with the cast of Botticelli's *Primavera*, while Katie has a mishap picking oranges in the enchanted grove. Before returning to Grandma, Katie and her companion unleash Carpaccio's *Lion of St. Mark*, and it takes *An Angel with a Lute* to restore harmony within the gallery and restore the errant images to their proper settings. Although concluding notes offer a few lines about each masterpiece (Mayhew remarks that "the winged lion . . . is the symbolic protector of Venice" but never connects the image to St. Mark) and where it is currently displayed, Mayhew leaves viewers with the sense that all these works can be found in a single museum. Other works by the featured masters peek coyly off the gallery walls (e.g., Leonardo's *The Virgin of the Rocks* and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*), but no identification or reference is offered. A small but adequately reproduced photo of each work is incorporated into Mayhew's
slightly cartoonish watercolor fantasies, effectively emblazoning this handful of famous figures onto young memories and scoring a few points for cultural literacy.


The power of lively language ("Spiny with hail and sleet, rattling and bristling with icicles, the North Wind heard, and came howling down from the Arctic") enriches this collection of twenty-eight legends, myths, and stories from a variety of cultures including Inuit, Maori, Sumerian, Egyptian, Hindu, and Bantu. McCaughrean brings together familiar tales ("The Pied Piper," "The Flying Dutchman") with a wide array of the unfamiliar: "Mommy's Baby" relates the adventure of an Inuit mother who digs for a baby and ends up in the land of giant infants; "A Prickly Situation" tells of the war between porcupines and beavers; and "Lamia" reveals the fate of the unfortunate prince who marries an enchanted snake. Generic notes make it difficult to know how the stories were adapted from their sources, and only a familiarity with the tales gives some indication of McCaughrean’s shaping. The writing is uneven, occasionally suffering from choppy sentence structure that interferes with the flow of the stories, and some of the tales lack the cultural context necessary to make them meaningful. Still, the collection will be enjoyed by those seeking unusual and accessible materials for reading aloud or storytelling. Willey’s luminant, stylized, mixed-media vignettes and full page spreads, although not culturally specific, add visual interest.


It’s "Hot, hot, hot!” and all the animals are drooping, but baby elephant knows just where to find relief—at the water hole: "Lovely water. Water to drink. Water to ... squirt, squirt, squirt!” In no time mother elephant and rhino and hippo and tiger are splashing and sploshing and whooshing and splooshing ("What a happy, cool, clever little baby elephant"). Big, big, big! creates the charm here: oversized format befitting the massive animals; thickly brushed, substantial images to point at and pat; tall, bold type inviting emergent readers to follow along; uncluttered backdrops that keep the focus simple and immediate. The searing golds of the savanna scene in the front endpapers transform to the cool, earthy shadows of the back endpapers—a promise of refreshment for children dragging their way toward steamy summer’s close. EB


Mic Parsons just wants to be a normal seventh-grader, attending junior high and hanging out with his buddies Freemont and Stolks, but it’s hard when you live on Bixby Court (known for its weird inhabitants) and you have an older sister like Stephanie (she is deaf-blind) with a household centered on her needs. Things get worse with the arrival in Bixby Court of Vern Chortle, complete with his nerd glasses, electric socks (one of three hundred and eighty-two pairs), and plastic-coated map of the school sporting lift-off stickers declaring “YOU ARE HERE!” De-
spite Mic's attempts to avoid Vern, he has somehow attached himself to Mic, joining him for lunch, inviting him to practice baseball, and dubbing him "Four-Twelve" (Mic lives at 412 Bixby Court). Mic's biggest problem, however, is his failing math grade, which will keep him from playing the baseball season. Vern and Mic are endearing characters: kids will marvel at Vern's spunkiness in the face of being the new kid in school, and they'll be able to relate to Mic's desire to be normal or even cool like his longtime buds. They'll also realize long before Mic that his old pals aren't such great pals ("I looked around Freemont's room. It looked even more different in the bright sunlight. Who was this guy? When had he changed? Had I changed?"), that "Nerd Boy" Chortle is his true friend, and that Stephanie, whose embarrassing behaviors the novel capably balances with her admirable qualities (it's she who finally steps in to teach Mic fractions) is a friend for life. McElfresh's adult characters are less developed, tending instead towards the stereotypical (caring but overprotective mother, distant, rational engineering father), and Vern's family is too good to be true. Sports fans will nonetheless appreciate Mic's devotion to baseball, special-education kids will relish their colleague Vern's quirky worthiness (Mic initially thinks Vern's "special classes" are for the gifted, which evokes helpless merriment from an unembarrassed Vern), and everybody will enjoy watching Mic grow into himself.

MICHELSON, RICHARD  
A Book of Flies Real or Otherwise; illus. by Leonard Baskin. Cavendish, 1999 56p
ISBN 0-7614-5050-5 $18.95  
R  Gr. 3-6

"A 'cowpie' was my birthing place,/ that's why I have a dirty face./ My classmates call me 'stinkerbell,'/ but I love all of nature's smells," chants the Latrine Fly in this poetic collection of buggy verse. Each fly (or putative fly—Michelson makes it clear that we toss that word around without regard to entomological accuracy) receives a pithy poem opposite a whimsical watercolor portrait; then a second spread offers a slightly more technical black-and-white sketch and a brief prose description of the fly's habits. The obvious comparison is to Florian's Insectlopedia (BCCB 7/98), which similarly offered a gallery of poetry and portraiture of the buzzing brethren (and, like this volume, floated words and pictures in a glossy sea of white space); Florian's verse is a bit snappier, and Michelson's prose explanations are a strange blend of fact and fancy, but this volume too treats an intriguing allotment of insects. Baskin's rough-textured insect figures often have a hint of ferocity in their huge eyes and bristling legs; that approach contrasts with the delicate, sometimes lacy precision of the line drawings that offer a more straightforward depiction. Between this, Insectlopedia, and Paul Fleischman's Joyful Noise (BCCB 2/88) you could have a terrific collection of insect poetry—now all we need is the book of roadapple verse. DS

MILLS, CLAUDIA  
You're a Brave Man, Julius Zimmerman. Farrar, 1999 [160p]
ISBN 0-374-38708-7 $16.00  
R  Gr. 4-6

Julius, introduced as Ethan's best friend in Losers, Inc. (BCCB 4/97), is not looking forward to his summer: his mother, determined to make him an achiever, signs him up for Intensive Language Study in French and insists he get a job, which means babysitting for energetic and not-yet-toilet-trained toddler Edison Blue. A French whiz Julius isn't, requiring special assistance from the teacher.
("Lower than a private lesson in le Hokey Pokey you could not sink") and ending up as a rat in the class production of Cinderella in French; babysitting Edison brings its own share of daunting challenges, though it also brings a friendship with the spirited Octavia, who lives next door to Edison. Mills creates a humorous but touching portrait of a good kid whose abilities don't necessarily lie in the best-rewarded areas and who feels, accurately, as if he's disappointing people as a result (about his mother, Julius "just wished that he could be the son she had always wanted, or else that she could learn to want the son she already had"). The sad-sack touches, such as Julius' discovery that he's taken a week to try to obtain A Tale of Two Cities from the library when his family owned a copy all along, are ruefully funny as well as telling. The book also believably crafts Julius' modest heroics as he offers succor to a stricken Octavia at the cost of teacherly disapproval and assists Edison in first potty success in the middle of the Cinderella performance. Even in literature nice guys often finish behind the more flashily accomplished—kids will appreciate seeing one finally get his due. DS


It's difficult to predict how far Miss Manners might bend the rules of etiquette in the cause of science; certainly this title will undermine decorum in even the most casual of eateries. Organized by courses ("appetizer" introductory activities, "main course" experiments) and rated according to the attention one might attract among fellow diners, these table top demonstrations elucidate scientific method and principles relating to sensory perception, matter, electricity, and air pressure. Not all experiments described here are equally engaging or even successful—the tic-tac-toe game (demonstrating the need to follow rules) is a fizzle, the solar-system model cannot be accomplished at the table, and the condiment-packet-diver "main course" is a repeat of an "appetizer." It's also questionable whether a waiter will comply with a child's request for a pair of martini glasses or a bill-footing parent will appreciate the experiment that requires pieces of steak to be immersed in a water glass. But then there's the "lava lamp" demo on density that's really fun to watch, and the elegantly simple and dazzlingly effective "atomizer" (air-pressure demo) that's bound to be such a school cafeteria hit, it's almost sure to be banned. Instructions, explanations and cartoony illustrations are generally clear and direct, and few experiments require adult supervision. Kids who devour Vicki Cobb's quickie experiments will probably want to sample some of these. EB

MURPHY, CHUCK Bow Wow: A Pop-up Book of Shapes; written and illus. by Chuck Murphy. Little Simon, 1999 12p ISBN 0-689-82265-0 $12.95 R 2-6 yrs

The opening spread offers a black "circle" on white background; open it and up pops a bicyclist with a dog springing at his side. Who could miss the big circles that form the wheels? A closer look, though, reveals lots of identical shapes, from the tiny circles on the dog's neck tags to the hubs and gears of the bike itself. "Square" on the facing page lifts into a cozy bed on which a dog snoozes at his young master's feet, and there are plenty of squares to be found among the head-
and footboard panels, the quilt pieces, and even the picture of boy and dog that hangs at the head of the bed. Triangle, oval, rectangle, arrow, star, crescent, and heart get equally clever treatment, with special kudos to the wild dog whose head can be moved as he howls at the crescent moon and to the alerting retrievers who demonstrate "arrow" with their entire bodies. The big finish recaps the lesson with a simple panel of nine white-on-black shapes that open to an intricate scene of two children making construction paper cutouts, and an endearingly chunky Dalmatian from whose jaws dangles a mobile of all the shapes. The soft colors of the pop-up scenes offer a startling contrast to the stark black and white of their covers, making the surprise all that more, well, surprising. Reasonably sturdy construction and smooth "action" of the figures should assure that children will sit up and beg for many readings. EB

MYERS, WALTER DEAN  The Journal of Scott Pendleton Collins: A World War II Soldier.  Scholastic, 1999  144p (My Name Is America) illus. with photographs  ISBN 0-439-05013-8 $10.95  R  Gr. 6-9

Scott Pendleton Collins is a wet-behind-the-ears, green-as-grass soldier right out of boot camp when he lands on the coast of Normandy in 1944. His journal entries indicate he grows up fast—they change from disingenuous naïveté to shell-shocked horror as he survives battle after battle in the fight to take France back from the Nazis. The opening entries are clumsily written and shallow as Collins writes about what a creep Hitler is and "English girls all hot to trot for American guys"; his tone becomes grimmer as more and more of his fellows die around him and he is promoted to sergeant by virtue of still being alive. Myers captures the mind-numbing fatigue and sheer randomness of wartime. Intense fear is ever present, and it can be dealt with only through humor: "I'm so scared that if I ran right into myself I'd shoot me three or four times before I even said hello. Only thing that keeps me from running is I don't know which way to run and I'm too tired to get up and look around." The entries evidence a growing maturity in Collins as he grimly determines to fight, to survive, to live. Myers hints at things not always emphasized in history textbooks: the fate of German prisoners wounded too badly to travel, the contribution of African-American troops to the war effort, the lack of information that often left troops without a clear picture of the progress of the war. Those readers old enough to see Saving Private Ryan will appreciate this close-up look at one individual's military experience. A historical note, black-and-white photographs, and a foldout map of the Battle of Normandy are included. JMD


An intricate retelling of "Rumpelstiltskin" provides a provocative look at the nature of love, lust, and familial affection. In a desperate effort to win his beloved by producing a golden wedding gown, a tailor steals the enchanted wheel of an elderly spinster. Tailor-turned-spinner spins straw into gold, but at a terrible price—the spinning takes his good looks and leaves him with a cramped, twisted leg. The tailor/spinner's love, pregnant with his child, cannot bear the sight of him and
marries an older but wealthy miller; when she dies in childbirth, the spinner takes to the road, returning years later to discover that his daughter, Saskia, has grown into an expert spinner. When the miller swears to the king that Saskia can spin straw into gold, the girl is doomed. The spinner comes to her aid three nights running, bargaining on the third night for her firstborn, his grandchild, to satisfy his need for family. From the opening scene of the aftermath of lovemaking between the spinner and his beloved ("The waning sunlight gilds the downy hair on her arms and calves"), the language is shot through with gold- and weaving-related images (golden hair, golden light, golden straw; the sound of the wheel spinning, styles of weaving, the texture of yarn). The novel's emotional content is a stirring mixture of unwise entanglements, foolish father figures, and broken promises; the plot is built firmly upon the events of the traditional tale, but with an embroidery of rich detail through which passionate motives glitter like gold threads woven into a dark tapestry. After the finely tuned nuances of the story's beginnings, the violent conclusion is surprisingly abrupt and even somewhat ambivalent, but that is small criticism for such a thoughtfully designed and well-woven interpretation of an ancient and disturbing tale. JMD

PATSCHKE, STEVE  
The Spooky Book; illus. by Matthew McElligott.  
Walker, 1999 [32p]  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8692-8  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

In a dark, candlelit room in a big old house, a lone boy, Andrew, begins to read a spooky book. The book tells of a girl, a redhead named Zo Zo, who also is reading a spooky book, a book in which a lone boy is alarmed by goblins in his old house. When the spookiness gets too much for Zo Zo, she flees her house and runs to another house—and as Andrew reads this, a knock comes at his door, revealing the redhead Zo Zo waiting outside with a book under her arm. The twist is an engaging one, the spooky-reading atmosphere and theme, which make this book a likely Halloween candidate, are appealing, and the verse refrain has a pleasingly haunting flavor. There are some glitches in the concept, however—if Zo Zo has "the very same book," that oddly puts her in the position of reading a book about herself rather than reading the more interesting counterpart to Andrew's story—and some of the text is blandly written. While the illustrations proffer some piquant perspectives and obligingly unsettling interiors, the human figures are somewhat stolid and cartoonish, and the text sometimes gets lost amid the watercolor hatching that comprises the grassy background. The idea is creative, however, and youngsters who get a kick out of the convergence of fiction and reality may enjoy the self-fulfilling narrative—especially if there's a well-timed knock at their door. DS

PAULSEN, GARY  
Alida's Song.  
Delacorte, 1999 88p  
ISBN 0-385-32586-X  $15.95  
R Gr. 6-10  

Working on a dairy farm during his fourteenth summer, a young man discovers his own sense of purpose and self-worth under the loving eye of his Norwegian grandmother. Paulsen's short autobiographical novel follows his hero from a life of parental neglect in near-squalor to the healthy outdoor life of a farm where he is well fed, well loved, and well looked after. It is a simple story of a few months of wholesome living that transforms the way the hero looks at the world. Gunnar
and Olaf, the farmers who employ Alida as cook and who take the boy on as summer help, are men who appreciate beauty, make music, and love the earth; Alida, the grandmother, is a wise woman with her grandson's best interests at heart. The pace here is measured but not slow, and the language concentrates on concrete images that provide a backdrop for the boy's spiritual and physical rejuvenation. The unnamed boy possesses both Everyboy anonymity and an able vulnerability that allows him to respond to the positive opportunities around him. While the action is less than gripping, this is an affectionate character study that will appeal to readers moved by The Cookcamp (BCCB 3/91), wherein they first met Alida. JMD

PRIEST, ROBERT  *The Old Pirate of Central Park*; written and illus. by Robert Priest. Houghton, 1999 32p ISBN 0-395-90505-2 $15.00 R 5-8 yrs

When a retrospective Old Pirate, now retired to an apartment in New York City, longs for the piratical days gone by, he creates a model boat ("a perfect replica of his old ship, *The Laughing Dog*") and launches it on the pond in Central Park. Unfortunately, a retired Queen sets her own model ship to ruling the seas—er, pond—and her *Uppity Duchess* provokes a gun battle with *The Laughing Dog*; the warfare startles and disrupts the park until the Queen, late for her afternoon nap, sues for peace and amicable sharing of the pond. This eccentric book nearly sails too close to the winds of whimsy, but its pokerfaced approach to its offbeat story keeps cuteness from spoiling the matter-of-factly odd charm. Priest's illustrations assist the effect: airbrushed enamel on clayboard, they offer planes of slightly muted color demarcated and shaped with white line rather than black; their crisp lines simultaneously suggest the Decoesque illustration of the thirties and contemporary computer graphics, while giving the Old Pirate and the Queen an otherworldly and marionettish appearance that suits the story perfectly. Want to make youngsters reconsider a day in the park? Take this one for a sail. DS

RAY, MARY LYN  *Basket Moon*; illus. by Barbara Cooney. Little, 1999 32p ISBN 0-316-73521-3 $15.95 R 6-9 yrs

Our young narrator lives in the Catskills, where his family weaves baskets for a living. He desperately wants to join his father on the trip into town to sell, and finally Dad invites him along; the boy is thrilled with his view of the bustling river port but crushed when he and his father are taunted by a townie with "A tisket, a tasket, hillbilly basket! That's all a bushwhacker knows." Eventually, however, with the help of a neighbor, the boy rediscovers the quiet beauty of his home and his family craft, following in his father's basket-making footsteps. The text's length and serenity will restrict its audience, and it tends to lean a bit too heavily on poetic statements; its understated thoughtfulness and detailed account of an unusual existence, however, makes this an atmospheric slice of history. Though Cooney's human figures are occasionally a bit on the elfin side, her forest landscapes are simply stunning: feathery trees congregate around meandering paths, and the weathered boards of the basket-maker's cabin shine like gold under a warm spring sun. This might make an interesting pairing with other picture books of rural lifestyles now disappearing, such as Kirkpatrick's *Plowie* (BCCB 10/94) or Ray's *Shaker Boy* (BCCB 11/94). An author's note gives background information on the basketmaking community of Columbia County. DS
RIDDLE, TOHBY  *The Great Escape from City Zoo*; written and illus. by Tohby Riddle. Farrar, 1999  32p  ISBN 0-374-32776-9 $16.00  R  5-8 yrs

In this picture-book parody of jailbreak stories, it's Elephant, Anteater, Flamingo, and Turtle who are over the wall and on the lam. Donning a variety of street and professional attire that could have been lifted from the Village People's costume closet, they blend in with the big city. With Zookeepers dogging their steps, three of them hop the first freight train out of town, leaving anteater to try his luck solo (“He actually ended up living on the outside quite successfully—renting a tidy flat, and holding down a regular job . . . until the day he fainted outside a taxidermist’s. The incident came to the attention of the Zookeepers, and within hours he was recaptured”). Elephant and Turtle eventually blow their cover as well and only Flamingo's fate remains unknown (“there were reports of unconfirmed sightings . . .”). Gray-toned illustrations create a slightly spoofed film noir mood, and the narration is unrelentingly deadpan. A plethora of visual references, from King Kong to Hopper’s *Nighthawks* to the Okies’ migration, will undoubtedly fly past the intended audience and roost with the adult reader. But then again, the Rocky and Bullwinkle effect may come into play, happily and cleverly supplying children with images into which they can grow. EB

ROWLING, J. K.  *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*; illus. by Mary Grandpré. Levine/Scholastic, 1999  341p  ISBN 0-439-06486-4 $17.95  R  Gr. 4-6

To paraphrase an old movie trailer, Harry’s back and Scholastic’s got him. The comparison is fairly apt, as the Harry Potter series is somewhat reminiscent of old movie serials, full of secrets, revelations, death-defying deeds, and hair-raising escapes. In this, the second of Harry’s continuing saga, he returns to the Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry after a dreadful summer with the Dursleys, from which he is daringly rescued by his good friend Ron and Ron’s always-ready-for-mischief older brothers. All is not well at Hogwarts, thank goodness—Harry is being harassed by a bizarre little house-elf, something truly creepy is turning students to stone, and a diary belonging to a long-ago student is revealing things to Harry that he doesn’t really want to know. There are some minor inconsistencies in the plot and Hermione’s role in this sequel is disappointingly small, but Rowling has a flair for the dramatic, and her suspenseful pace is such that the pages just keep turning. Plot twists and pithy characterizations (the self-absorbed new professor, Gilderoy Lockheart, is screamingly funny) make this magical boarding school story roll to its breath-stealing climax. With only his true friends to stand by him, Harry the underdog comes from behind to overcome self-doubt and false accusations in order to win the day. Stay tuned for the next one. JMD

RUSSO, MARISABINA  *Mama Talks Too Much*; written and illus. by Marisabina Russo. Greenwillow, 1999  [32p]  ISBN 0-688-16411-0 $16.00  Reviewed from galleys  R  4-7 yrs

Celeste is in a hurry to get to the store with her mother, but “then we see Mrs. Green and I say, ‘Oh no!’ Mama stops. Mrs. Green stops. Now I have to stop . . . They talk and talk and talk.” Celeste waits impatiently (“I watch the cars go by. I count the red ones. I count the white ones”) and finally manages to move
her mother along, only to run into Mrs. Walker, resulting in more socialization instead of forward progress, and then Mr. Chan, with similar results. Russo effectively captures the fidgety, foot-shifting frustration of a kid beset by grownup distraction; the repeated text pattern matches the repeated stops, and the enumeration of Celeste's time-killing methods is authentic as well as humorous. The final twist—Celeste looks at stopping in a different light when they run into Mrs. Castro, who has an adorable new puppy with her—doesn't bury the book's realism under its subtle message that one doesn't travel merely to arrive at one's destination. Russo's gouache illustrations have the pigmented intensity of acrylic; the solidity of the planes of color gives the city landscape a liveliness that is sufficiently organized to avoid overcluttering. Just about every young listener will have been there and done that; they'll appreciate a book that recognizes their silent suffering and perhaps take a new look at the upside of the process.

SAN SOUCI, ROBERT, ad. Tarzan; illus. by Michael McCurdy. Hyperion, 1999 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-7868-2334-8 $15.49

A simple retelling of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan of the Apes, this picture-book rendition is sure to find a ready and willing audience among reluctant and other readers. San Souci distills the story to its most basic elements, opening with the rescue of the orphaned Greystoke baby by compassionate she-ape Kala. Tarzan grows into a clever and strong young man. He investigates the abandoned hut of his parents, securing a hunting knife for protection and later discovering books, which he uses to teach himself to read. Action is paramount—Tarzan battles Bolgani, the gorilla, defeats Sabor, the lioness, and vanquishes Kerchak, the ape king, before deciding to leave the apes and seek his "true tribe," human beings. Scratchboard and colored pencil captures the energy of the story in full-page illustrations framed in white. The occasional awkward drafting of the human figure is offset by the larger than life perspectives and massive figures of the apes, which impart a primitive power to the images. The layout and design encourages reading alone or aloud, the clear, oversized font and wide leading making what could be daunting text blocks simple and easy to access. An author's note provides background on Burroughs' Tarzan, likening him to other literary and mythical heroes.

SANDBURG, CARL The Huckabuck Family: and How They Raised Popcorn In Nebraska and Quit and Came Back; illus. by David Small. Farrar, 1999 34p
ISBN 0-374-33511-7 $16.00

It's hard to think of a better pairing than Sandburg and Small. Small's watercolors have a translucent, airy quality that suits the fantastical elements of Sandburg's story, and his drafting is solid enough to ground the illustrations in the rich earth where Sandburg set his uniquely American tales. In this picture-book version of one of Sandburg's most well-known Rootabaga tales, Small takes full advantage of his form, using double-page spreads for cornfield, farmyard, and urban vistas. A wide variety of perspectives and points of view add sweep and drama to the compositions, from Pony Pony Huckabuck holding out a glowing silver slipper buckle to her mother in the dim light of the barn loft, to a farmyard full of inadvertently popped popcorn, to the interior of a watch factory, where Jonas Jonas Huckabuck
watches watches. Sandburg's language is as bracing as a tonic, and the inherent humor and rhythms of his tale are as invigorating today as when it was first written. Use this freshly joyous little picture book to point your listeners toward Sandburg's collection of *Rootabaga Tales*, and bring these stories to a waiting generation of readers and listeners. JMD


From the moment Pip-Squeak caught sight of the S. S. Gigantic looming above the coastal town of Hyperbole, Ireland and heard Captain Bragg sing her praises to sailors gathered at the Blohard Inn, "I knew I'd do anything to sail on her." With nothing to offer but hyperacute eyesight (he reads the fine print on Capt. Bragg's buttons), Pip-Squeak gains a berth on a ship "so gigantic, it can travel around the world without moving!" and "so gigantic, you need a rocket ship to get from the bottom to the top." Its maiden voyage, booked with passengers "so rich, giant cranes were needed to load their diamonds and gold," is doomed, though; imperious to myriad icebergs that turn the North Atlantic into a graveyard of sinking liners, S. S. Gigantic's "waterproof, rubber, quadruple hull" ultimately succumbs to the deadliest scourge of the deep—"the dreaded sea thumbtack." This briny lunacy will appeal to any reader with a taste for tall tales, but enjoyment of its references, broad and sly, to the Gigantic's more famous sister ship will rise in direct proportion to the audience's Titanic obsession. Frenetic, retro-styled cartoon images are packed tighter than hammocks in a forecastle and decked out in pride-of-the-fleet red, white, and blue with a liberal gilding of gold; Pip-Squeak is a goggle-eyed innocent, and Capt. Bragg a bewhiskered, medal-laden nutcracker. If this can't make the Titanic set pop their rivets laughing, what will? EB


Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

This is a serviceable biography that gives an overview of Einstein's personal life and professional commitment to physics research. Severance opens with a chapter designed to establish Einstein's place in and contribution to history in which he outlines how Einstein's theories sparked advances in many scientific fields. The succeeding chapters deal with Einstein's life chronologically, from his childhood, when he was thought to be learning disabled, to his later years, when his genius became apparent. Severance is careful to place Einstein in the context of his world, making links between Einstein's research genius and contemporary events, especially the rise of Hitler in Nazi Germany and the impact this had on Einstein's long-held belief in pacifism. While the tremendous changes in science and politics are evident in this biography, those characteristics of Einstein, the personal details that readers find engaging, unfortunately are not. Severance makes several references to Einstein's eccentric and quirky personality but gives readers disappointingly lackluster examples to support them, and his attempt to make Einstein's theories understandable to young readers is cursory at best. The writing is dry, and it is only the occasional quotes from friends, relatives, and Einstein himself that give some insight into the man David Ben Gurion called "the most illustrious Jew
in the world, and possibly the greatest man alive.” Illustrated with black and white photographs, this volume includes a chronology of events, bibliography, and index. JMD


Under the streets of New York City is a community built among the forgotten ruins of a subway constructed in 1867. The Downsiders, as they call themselves, live underground, raiding the Topside for goods and medicine, taking in stray Topsiders who need a new start, and maintaining a strict code of secrecy regarding their existence. When Downsider Talon risks exposure to seek medicine for his sick sister, he meets Lindsay, a lonely girl recently come to live with her emotionally distant father and obnoxious stepbrother. The two become fast friends, and Talon risks all by taking Lindsay to the Downside. The collision of their two worlds is inevitable: Lindsay seeks the truth about the origin of the Downside, Topside engineers excavate for an aqueduct, and Talon is convicted as a traitor and sentenced to death for revealing the secret community to an outsider. Shusterman creates a believable underground culture, including humorous references to wild alligators and even a herd of cows that live in the city’s sewers and forgotten tunnels. The pace is quick and suspenseful, punctuated by Talon’s and Lindsay’s chases and escapes through underground passages and the near-discovery of the Downside. At the climax Talon seizes the moment and becomes leader of his people, protecting their secret by an explosion that effectively closes them off from the Topside. The conclusion, in which the Downsiders expand to live secretly in the water towers atop city buildings, lacks the realistic intensity and supportive logic of the Downsiders’ underground culture, but readers will still be fascinated by these full-size Borrowers and their secret lives. A map of the Downside is included. JMD


Got youngsters coaxing for a coatimundi, ferreting around for a ferret, or rooting for a potbellied pig? Here’s a book that’ll give them the skinny (with the pig’s pardon) on those and seven other unusual pets, from armadillos to sugar gliders. Each animal receives a collection of fast facts (scientific name, cost, required food and housing, notes on legality, etc.) and then a few pages of narrative treatment (one color photo per section) that includes anecdotes about pets, tips on special problems, and sidebars on more familiar relatives, zoological tidbits, and other miscellanea; a list of website resources is appended to each section. Though the writing is choppy and the treatments are often cursory, this makes for a tasty smorgasbord of rare companion animals; it’s particularly wise of the book to send readers straight to the World Wide Web, where such recent and specialized knowledge is more accessible than in print, for more information. There are also some fair warnings about the unsuitability of many of these animals as pets (though the encomiums may overpower the warnings) and the short lifespan some of these critters have in domestic circumstances. A breeze to read and a treat to browse, this will add some spice to your pet collection. DS
SNICKET, LEMONY  *The Bad Beginning*; illus. by Brett Helquist. HarperCollins, 1999  [192p]
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-440766-7  $8.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-8

*The Reptile Room*; illus. by Brett Helquist. HarperCollins, 1999  [192p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028313-0  $14.89
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-440767-5  $8.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-8

These Aikenish takeoffs on unfortunate orphan novels promise a fast and funny series, and they very nearly deliver. In *The Bad Beginning*, the three Baudelaire children, Violet (age fourteen), Klaus (age twelve), and Sunny (a baby), are orphaned when the family manse burns down. They are given over to the care of Count Olaf, their wicked cousin. The count is a no-account villain, who proceeds to make their life a misery, conspiring to marry Violet in order to gain control of the family fortune. Violet foils the plot, the evil Olaf escapes, and the three children are taken in by the somewhat dense Mr. Poe, executor of their parents' estate.

*The Reptile Room* continues the saga of the siblings, opening with their being transported to the home of yet another distant cousin, herpetologist Dr. Montgomery, aka Uncle Monty. Uncle Monty is a jolly fellow, but unfortunately not for long—the evil Count Olaf shows up and makes short work of the orphans' guardian. Olaf plans to kidnap them (and gain control of their fortune), and he nearly succeeds but is foiled (and escapes) once again. Snicket has a way of speaking directly to the reader ("I wish I could tell you that the Baudelaires' first impressions of Count Olaf and his house were incorrect, as first impressions so often are. But these impressions—that Count Olaf was a horrible person and his house a depressing pigsty—were absolutely correct") and of defining words in the context of dialogue that is, taken in large doses, irritatingly precious. The author does have the traditions of the genre down, however, and the lively misfortunes of the Baudelaires have a careening momentum that is well-served by the humorous if occasionally self-conscious text. The Baudelaire children have personality and tenacity, and their devotion to one another will hold readers when the mannered text does not.

JMD

STEWART, JENNIFER J.  *If That Breathes Fire, We're Toast!* Holiday House, 1999  118p
ISBN 0-8234-1430-2  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 3-6

Rick is eleven years old and not happy. He and his mother have just moved to Tucson, where his mother hopes Rick will be safe from the urban dangers of Los Angeles, and he is not accepting the change gracefully. The first chapters play out like a typical moving and adjustment story, at least until the new furnace comes from Dragonwerks, Ltd. Rick and newfound friend Natalie unpack the box and discover not a replacement furnace but a dragon named Madam Yang. Madam Yang is not your typical dragon, however—she's a time-traveling dragon, and she's there to help Rick adjust to the additional changes soon to come from the romantic relationship between his mother and a local veterinarian. The justification for Madam Yang's fantastical presence is a bit lame since Rick appears pretty well-adjusted already, but a fire-breathing, flying dragon with attitude is a handy character: when the plot lags Madame Yang threatens to eat a nasty beauty-contestant...
princess or turn a mongrel (competition in the ugliest pet contest) to toast. Rick is sensitive and Natalie is feisty, but not in overly stereotypical ways, and mothers, kid brothers, vets, and especially Madame Yang are an agreeable bunch of secondary characters. The time-travel jumps are sidetrips with little impact on the present, and the plot doesn’t bear much examination in terms of logical continuity; still, this is an undemanding romp well-suited for summer pleasure reading. JMD

Stock, Catherine Island Summer; written and illus. by Catherine Stock. Lothrop, 1999 [32p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-12781-9 $15.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12780-0 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys

Some places seem to come alive in summer with the influx of vacationers, and Stock depicts such an island awakening after winter and preparing for the onslaught. Soon the holidaymakers arrive in bulk and kids are playing in the former quiet streets, napping in the warm afternoons, and sneaking down to the beach at night for a quick skinnydip. While the focus on the summer visitors is a bit disproportionate (the book implies that no one actually lives on the island year round), the text is jolly in its evocation of authentic summer details (“By late afternoon even the losing soccer team is okay, once they’ve thrown the winning team into the water and rubbed sand in their hair”), creating a picture of a welcomed summer routine and refreshment that’s a tradition from year to year. The art, watercolor textured with a few colored-pencil highlights, effectively captures the striated hills of the Greek island and the pristine blue-white of the village buildings, using the clean idyllic landscape as a backdrop to the bustling multitudes of vacationers. While this is a quick literary vacation rather than a story, youngsters encountering the chill of fall and resumed school will appreciate the retained bit of summer here, and they may then want to share their own vacation stories. DS

Teague, Mark One Halloween Night; written and illus. by Mark Teague. Scholastic, 1999 [32p]
ISBN 0-590-84625-6 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys

“Anything can happen on Halloween,” declares Wendell to friends Floyd and Mona as a black cat crosses their path on the way home from school. And a lot of things do happen, initially mostly bad: Wendell’s mad scientist costume turns pink in the wash, Floyd has to take his baby sister trick-or-treating (“Pirates don’t have little sisters” he objects), and Mona’s mother makes her dress up like a fairy princess (“I look ridiculous”). When trick-or-treating lands them more tricks than treats, and bully Leona Fleebish and her cackling friends (all dressed as witches) corner the quartet in an alley (“Yo Ho Ho! I see something funny./ It’s Pirate Floyd/ And his baby bunny!”), it begins to look like the black cat really was bad luck. They’re goners, until Floyd draws his saber and takes on the powers of a real pirate: “He kept the witches at bay so his friends could carry little Alice to safety. Then, growling like a movie pirate, he swung out of reach on an overhanging tree limb, turned a quick flip, and somersaulted backward over the fence.” Later, Wendell (brewing an invisibility potion from his mad scientist supplies) and Mona (summoning the powers of her magic wand) execute similar miracles to bring the passel back home to safety complete with hot chocolate, a fire, and good candy.
Teague's acrylic paintings balance stylized characters with dynamic expressions and body language to create a rollicking tale. The palette of muted yet strong colors, with plenty of pumpkin oranges and dusky blues, summons the reader, while Teague's use of perspective creates tension and suspense. While the transition from mangled costumes and baby bunny sisters into movie pirates, capable scientists, and powerful fairy princesses requires a leap of faith, kids will jump right in for a ride to where the underdog triumphs for the evening, the black cat is a companion instead of a curse, and the world is a place where anything can happen. 

**EAB**

**THESMAN, JEAN** *The Other Ones.* Viking, 1999 181p  
Ad Gr. 7-12

Thesman weaves a contemporary coming-of-age tale laced with fantastical witches, threshold guardians, and shape-shifters who force sophomore Bridget Raynes to confront her own witch-ness. The narrative initially focuses on the protagonist's school life and intimate relationships: with school bully Woody, with her clueless parents, and with her neighbor and classmate Jordan, with whom she feeds quail every day and in whom she's developing a romantic interest. With the arrival of new classmate Althea Peale (who attracts attention immediately from class bully Woody for her odd appearance and behavior), Bridget is warned by her Aunt Cait and her threshold guardian xiii (pronounced "shhh") to acknowledge and harness her powers to prevent disaster in her Pacific Northwest coastal community ("Trouble! ... Trouble is coming and you must be prepared!"), but Bridget is torn between the reality of her daily life and the reality of her dreams. Thesman draws the reader through this fantastical story with xiii's eerie predictions, but she locates the dénouement later than some readers will want to read. Adult characters remain static, which reinforces the intensity of Bridget's problems but flattens the dynamics. Young adults will nonetheless be drawn to Bridget's struggle to fit in, and they'll cheer her on as she chooses to control her powers. 

**EAB**

**THOMAS, FRANCES** *What If?*; illus. by Ross Collins. Hyperion, 1999 24p  
R* 3-6 yrs

See this month's Big Picture, p. 3, for review.

**TRAYLOR, BETTY** *Buckaroo.* Delacorte, 1999 [208p]  
ISBN 0-385-32637-8 $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-6

Preston Davis hasn't adjusted well to his dad's remarriage, and after a confrontation with his new stepsister, he's packed off to stay indefinitely with Aunt Eugenia Goodwin, not the least of whose eccentricities is her openly pro-integration stance in her late 1950s Arkansas community. Eugenia takes every opportunity to promote companionship between Preston and Ivy Johnson, a black neighbor close to Preston's age. Preston is having none of it, though; not only does interracial friendship defy attitudes he's learned from his father at home, it also threatens a more promising friendship with a boy across the street. Traylor's message is earnest but bland, packed with folksy dialogue ("Someday—I don't know exactly when—there'll come a time in this old South when the coloreds and the whites can offer a hidy to each other without worrying if it's the proper thing to do") and peppered
with a distracting number of subplots ranging from Preston's obsession with Roy Rogers and his yen to ride in a fire truck to an unconvincing encounter with an escaped convict (a jail buddy of Ivy's father, no less). Though well-meaning and serviceable, this is ultimately outclassed by Mildred Taylor's writing on the same subject. EB

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-12516-6 $15.93
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-12515-8 $16.00 Ad 5-8 yrs

A loving mother weaves an elaborate brocade for her dutiful son, Kai, only to have it snatched up by a thieving breeze sent by greedy goddess Qin. Kai is no ordinary son, however; his strength and speed enable him to defeat the divinity's champions, the white tiger and blue serpent of the title, only to find himself faced with a vengeful goddess determined to keep what she has stolen. The whirlwind she conjures to blow Kai away blows the creatures stitched into the brocade into the air: "Birds took flight, deer leaped forth, bears lumbered, peacocks screamed. Trees and flowers flew through the air. And beneath them all, a shining rainbow stretched itself out and formed a path for Kai and the rest... All that remained in the goddess's lap was a faded cloth full of holes." The natural bounty of the cloth's design is transferred to the barren countryside, "and Kai and his mother lived peacefully and happily in the beauty of the magnificent brocade." The text effectively depicts Kai's loving relationship with his mother, and the action scenes have dashes of derring-do; the story itself, however, is wordy, and the lengthy text is hampered by a self-consciously literary opening and conclusion. The illustrations (full and double-page spreads and panels) are rendered in a rich gold-toned palette enlivened with sparks of red and blue. Architectural, natural, and textile details are delivered with a panache that offsets the sometimes inarticulate facial expressions of the human characters. A cultural note identifies this tale as based on a story from the Drung tribe of the Yunnan Province in southwest China; the watercolor and pigment illustrations are inspired by masterworks of the Ming dynasty. JMD

TUNNELL, MICHAEL O. *Halloween Pie;* illus. by Kevin O'Malley. Lothrop, 1999 [24p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16804-3 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys R 5-8 yrs

A spooky recipe for readaloud fun, this picture book is both trick and treat. "On Halloween, Old Witch baked a pie. A pumpkin pie. A scrumptious pie. A big-and-wide-as-a-full-moon pie," and put it on the windowsill to cool. Before she "flies into the dark night to make some mischief," however, she puts a spell on the pie to "protect this treat... for me alone to eat." Good thing, too, because the aroma of that fresh-baked pie attracts a vampire, a ghoul, a ghost, a banshee, a zombie and a skeleton, and it draws them from the graveyard to the witch's window, where they proceed to devour the pie. The witch returns and discovers her confection gone—but it doesn't matter, because the diners have all been turned into the ingredients for another pumpkin pie. When the witch sets the new pie on the windowsill, "the spell was broken. Riding on sweet-smelling steam, the graveyard creatures rose into the air, floated home, and settled sleepily into their beds,
their tummies still full of Halloween Pie.” O’Malley, who has proven that he is
the man for gleefully illustrating spookiness (*Welcome*, BCCB 11/97), has a fine
old time depicting ghouls, skeletons, and vampires in oil wash and ink, endowing
them with a domestic solidity that makes them downright neighborly. The tomb-
stones are adorned with old groaners like “Here lies Anna./ Choked on a banana”
and “Who’d a thunk/ I’m buried in a trunk” that will have readers chuckling and
looking to make a groaner-graveyard of their own. The ending is a tiny bit anticli-
mactic, but the final page has a recipe for pumpkin pie that may motivate listeners
to bake one, put it on a windowsill, and see what happens. JMD

**WHYBROW, IAN**  *Sammy and the Dinosaurs*; illus. by Adrian Reynolds.  Orchard, 1999  26p
ISBN 0-531-30207-5  $15.95  R*  3-6 yrs

Sammy and his grandmother are cleaning the attic: “Sammy found an old box all
covered with dust. He lifted the lid . . . DINOSAURS!” Sammy adopts the
prehistoric foundlings, unbending them, mending them, washing them, and finding
them a new home in a bright blue bucket. Despite the opinion of his older
sister Meg (“She said it was stupid, fussing over so much junk”), Sammy takes his
dinosaurs everywhere. On an outing with his gran he becomes so excited that he
leaves his bucket on the train, and he is inconsolable. Gran takes him to the Lost
and Found, where Sammy calls his dinosaurs by name: Scelidosaurus, Stegosau-
rus, Triceratops, Brontosaurus. “All correct!’ said the man. ‘These are definitely
your dinosaurs!’” And Sammy and his friends go home. The gently effective
whimsy of this book is that the listener (or reader) sees through Sammy’s eyes: his
colorful plastic dinosaurs are alive. They peer over Sammy’s shoulder when he’s
reading, try to sneak candy from Meg’s candy box, and sleep cuddled around Sammy
like a pile of puppies, and the impact of their loss will be instantly understandable
to the young listener (Sammy’s sister Meg is not as fortunate—she winds up with
a bowl of cereal on her head when she calls the missing dinosaurs “Dusty old
junk!”). Reynolds’ watercolors are the perfect accompaniment to Whybrow’s
dinotale. Single and double-page spreads feature the thoroughly lovable dinosaurs
peeping out of the thoroughly lovable Sammy’s pockets, swimming in his bath,
and clambering over the edge of the bucket. Big oversized shapes, simple but
expressive features (on humans and dinosaurs), and unusual perspectives combine
in compositions easily large enough for group viewing; with a coziness that never
falls into the saccharine, text and art bring the story home. JMD

There's now quite a body of literature on the Holocaust, which makes it increasingly more challenging to sort through it for titles that will best serve a particular collection or curricular use. In this resource, Sullivan offers considerable assistance. Roughly half the book is annotated bibliography, which includes everything from picture books to plays to adult memoirs to reference sources, with various other genres in between. The rest of the book consists of appendices listing professional resources, electronic resources (including CD-ROMs, listservs, and websites), relevant organizations and museums, suggestions for booktalks and classroom activities, and guidelines for building a "core Holocaust collection." While the book has some proofreading glitches (one significant book is listed twice with the author's name misspelled both times), it's also packed full of useful sources. Sullivan takes a broad approach to the subject, openly encouraging connections with other human-rights disasters of this and previous centuries and including titles and resources suitable to a variety of different approaches. His annotations often include evaluation as well, and though his responses are generally positive, he doesn't shirk from the occasional flat condemnation (Wild's *Let the Celebrations Begin*, unsurprisingly, gets a stern assessment). Those looking to consolidate their library's approach to this part of history will find this an immensely useful text. Five indices (author, geographic, grade, subject, and title) are included. DS


Eighty rounds for choral singing from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries are presented in this easy-to-follow resource book. According to the introduction, the rounds are playable on many recorders, too, making this a boon for the beginning musician as well as more experienced programmers. The eighty rounds are divided into eleven themes and include such familiar ditties as "Day Is Done," "Are You Sleeping?" (Frère Jacques), "Make New Friends," "Kookaburra," "Christmas is Coming," etc., along with more unusual tunes. If you can already read music this is a handy source, and even novice sight readers will have little difficulty with these selections. The musical notation is beginner-basic, with the times clearly marked; additional verses, sources, and instructions for singing are included with many of the rounds. Addenda include a brief history of the round, suggestions for leading rounds (beginning, ending, pitch, etc.), a list of additional titles containing rounds, and a title and first line index. Black and white line drawings open each section, and spot art is scattered throughout. Use this for a melodic supplement to story and other literature-based programming. 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 read aloud audience; “fiction,” to those books intended for independent reading.

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