PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
The Bulletin
of the Center for Children's Books
July/August 2000
Vol. 53 No. 11

University of Illinois
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois Press
ONE LIGHTHOUSE,
ONE MOON
by ANITA LOBEL

Beautiful paintings are the heart of this concept book divided into three ‘chapters.’ The first shows a different pair of shoes in a different color for each day of the week. The middle section introduces the months of the year via the antics of a cat named Nini. The final section is a seaside counting exercise from ‘ONE lighthouse’ to ‘TEN trees bent back in the wind. And ONE HUNDRED stars and ONE moon lit up in the sky.’ This fresh approach to the concepts covered has great visual appeal.”

—Starred review/School Library Journal

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“A perfect concept book.” —Starred review/Kirkus Reviews

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$15.89 Lb (0-688-15540-5)
THE BULLETIN
OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS
July/August 2000
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* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.

R Recommended.

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

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

NR Not recommended.

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

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

The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (ISSN 0008-9036) is published monthly except August by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and distributed by the University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903.

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1 year, institutions, $60.00; individuals, $50.00. In countries other than the United States, add $7.00 per subscription for postage. Japanese subscription agent: Kinokuniya Company Ltd. Single copy rate: $5.50. Reprinted volumes 1-35 (1947-1981) available from Kraus Reprint Co., Route 100, Millwood, NY 10546. Volumes available in microfilm from Bell & Howell, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Complete volumes available in microfiche from Johnson Associates, P.O. Box 1017, Greenwich, CT 06830. Subscription checks should be made payable to the University of Illinois Press. All notices of change of address should provide both the old and new address. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books, University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903.

Subscription Correspondence. Address all inquiries about subscriptions and advertising to University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903.

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Periodicals postage paid at Champaign, Illinois
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Drawings by Debra Bolgla. This publication is printed on acid-free paper.

Cover illustration by David Small from So You Want to Be President? ©2000. Used by permission of Philomel Books.
THE BIG PICTURE

So You Want to Be President?
by Judith St. George; illustrated by David Small

While accounts of particular presidents abound, rarely are they as entertaining as this collective biography of chief executives. St. George interweaves facts and anecdotes in a breezily informative style in this tongue-in-cheek guide, which gains additional appeal by directly addressing the reader (“You probably weren’t born in a log cabin. That’s too bad. People are crazy about log-cabin Presidents”). Political accounts of presidencies are found elsewhere; this is primarily a personal history, presenting a cleverly arranged array of the most entertaining characteristics and habits of commanders-in-chief throughout American history.

Eschewing chronological order, St. George chooses instead to survey the presidents as a group of people with certain commonalities and distinctions. Topics include common first names for presidents (“If you want to be President, it might help if your name is James”), as well as the great variety of presidential stature (from 5'4" James Madison to 6'4" Abraham Lincoln) and girth (from 100 lb. James Madison to over 300 lb. William Howard Taft). Such facts are interspersed with intriguing and pithy anecdotes about presidential personalities (“Our first President did a mean minuet”), as well as most embarrassing moments (“Once when [John Quincy Adams] was skinny-dipping in the Potomac River, a woman reporter snatched his clothes and sat on them until he gave her an interview”).

Small’s line-and-watercolor illustrations draw from the tradition of political cartooning, showing caricatured figures with enlarged heads and exaggerated features; these illustrations complement the jaunty text with kid-appealing images of some of the most outrageous presidential behaviors described, such as Andrew Jackson’s fourteen duels, brawls, fights, and shootings, the victims of which are shown sprawled out into the distance behind a fist-swinging Jackson. Illustrations are also chock-full of jokes for adults, as in one scene showing Richard Nixon bowling a strike in the White House bowling alley, hands raised in victory signs, with Pat Nixon and Henry Kissinger clapping politely in the background while Gerald Ford steps up to bowl next.

While most of the tone is humorous, St. George and Small do not neglect darker moments in the history of American presidents. In a smooth segue from a discussion of presidential looks, St. George writes about the contrast between Warren Harding’s physical attractiveness and his severe shortcomings as president, while Small’s illustration shows a royally robed Harding strolling alone down a fashion-show runway. In the most somber spread in the book, St. George emphasizes the necessity for honesty as chief executive while the artwork depicts Clinton and Nixon walking down the shadowy steps of the Lincoln Memorial, their heads bowed in shame as Lincoln stares searchingly after them.
Since presidents from various time periods appear together (often humorously) in the illustrations, a presidential identification key appears in the back, along with a bibliography and a chronology including dates and major events of each presidency. Although St. George's approach tends to emphasize the diversity of presidential personae, she does not neglect to note that the group has been unleavened by variation in gender, race, and creed ("No woman has been President. No person of color has been President. No person who wasn't a Protestant or Roman Catholic has been President"). Despite a slightly rambling conclusion, St. George's final pages sum up inspiring with the president's oath of office ("Only thirty-five words!") and the affirmation that most presidents, "tall, short, fat, thin, talkative, quiet, vain, humble, lawyer, teacher, or soldier," have done their best to follow that oath, working to "faithfully execute the office of President of the United States." Future presidents in classrooms and libraries everywhere will giggle at and then applaud the quirkily inspiring individuals who have served as president of the United States. (Imprint information appears on p. 417.)

Kate McDowell, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ARONSON, MARC  Sir Walter Ralegh and the Quest for El Dorado.  Clarion, 2000  222p  illus. with photographs  ISBN 0-395-84827-X  $20.00  R  Gr. 7-12

In this closely argued essay on Ralegh and the Elizabethan court, Aronson explores several facets of Doradism (the fascination with the mythical golden city) embodied in the "upstart" courtier and his contemporaries. Of immediate importance are Ralegh's dual quests—for the kingdom of the "golden man" in present-day Colombia, and for the equally coveted prize of Elizabeth's patronage, and possibly her love. Aronson also presents a convincing case that Ralegh’s pursuits (and his deeply conflicted attitudes toward them) mirror Britain’s ambivalence toward the golden promise of far-flung colonies: were they innocent Edens to be held in awe and left inviolate, as a Virgin Queen? Or were they lodes of hidden treasure to be mined and exploited, as court favors? Aronson assumes that his readers bring some basic familiarity with European history to the text (certainly an introductory World History class should provide adequate background) but offers plenty of aids to brush up on facts—notably maps, a "Cast of Characters," and a four-topic timeline chart. Incorporating critical examinations of period art and poetry as well as standard historical documentary evidence and pausing frequently to review and explicitly support its thesis, this title is at once lively, accessible, and challenging. Period illustrations, an index, and fastidiously annotated endnotes and bibliography are included. EB
Avi Ereth’s Birthday; illus. by Brian Floca. HarperCollins, 2000 180p
ISBN 0-380-97734-6 $15.95 R Gr. 3-6

Ereth, a crotchety old porcupine, is so disappointed when his friends seemingly forget his birthday that he trundles off into the winter woods in search of solace (in his case, a block of salt). Unbeknownst to Ereth, he is being stalked by fisher Marty, a weasel-like creature with porcupinicidal intent. Marty’s plan for the prickly protagonist’s demise is foiled when Ereth discovers a fox caught in a hunter’s trap and promises to find her three kits and care for them until they can survive on their own. Not being the maternal sort, Ereth unwillingly seeks out the kits and appoints himself unofficial guardian. Avi’s animal fantasy, the latest in his Dimwood Forest series (Ragweed, BCCB 10/99, etc.) balances between anthropomorphism and natural history: the animals have emotions and feelings, but they are also true to their physical natures (i.e., the foxes are meat eaters, the porcupine isn’t). The plot is reminiscent of many an old-fashioned melodrama in which winsome orphans win over a grouchy guardian; the players are set characters (reluctant orphan, friendly orphan, ne’er-do-well father, evil villain) and their actions are predictable. Be that as it may, Avi has skillfully combined recognizable elements into an animal fantasy that rings an emotional carillon sure to please Avi devotees, newcomers to the series, and adults looking for a substantive readaloud. Floca’s expressive pencil illustrations provide respite from what could be daunting amounts of text. JMD

Banks, Kate The Night Worker; illus. by Georg Hallensleben. Foster/Farrar, 2000 [34p]
ISBN 0-374-35520-7 $16.00 Reviewed from galleys R 4-7 yrs

Alex’s papa is an engineer at a downtown construction project, a position which dictates he work while Alex is asleep. One memorable night, he claps a hardhat on his son: “And while Mama sleeps, Alex and Papa head quietly into the night.” At the site Alex watches his father in action, directing the workers and checking plans as the huge earth-moving machinery reshapes the land under the beams of the stars and artificial lights. The climax of Alex’s adventure comes when Papa lifts him onto the lap of the loader driver, who guides the boy’s hands as he works the levers. It’s an awfully long, exciting night for a little guy: “I’m tired,” says Alex. And they head back into the night.” Banks imparts the peculiar mystery nighttime lends to commonplace jobs: “An excavator rumbles and turns. . . . Then it sinks its teeth into the earth and lets out a groan like a giant rolling over in bed.” Hallensleben’s artwork is a worthy complement, featuring bedrock-solid shapes illuminated to jewel brilliance against the midnight sky. Listeners are bound to envy Alex’s nocturnal field trip and wish for their own “Take Your Child to Work” night. EB

Barasch, Lynne Radio Rescue; written and illus. by Lynn Barasch. Foster/Farrar, 2000 [34p]
ISBN 0-374-36166-5 $16.00 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 2-4

“The boy in this book is actually my father, and the story is based on his experiences as a young amateur radio operator, the youngest to be licensed in the United States at the time” (circa 1923). Barasch delivers on her tacit opening promise of veracity with a carefully constructed tale of a boy’s long journey from wireless
radio eavesdropper, to ham radio operator, to quiet hero and local celebrity. As the unnamed narrator relates, just memorizing Morse code is no mean undertaking, and the added requirements of building speed and learning abbreviated codes are a monumental challenge. However, with the help of a teenage mentor, the boy manages to obtain his license on the second try ("I studied and practiced until even my dreams were in Morse code"), set up a transmitting station in his New York City apartment bedroom, and become proficient enough to monitor distress signals in a Florida hurricane and help direct rescue operations (albeit by breaking the law). Despite the picture-book format, with its chipper line-and-watercolor pictures, this is a realistically detailed account of the hurdles to be leapt on the way to becoming a hero. Readers with a technical bent will appreciate Barasch's simple explanations of how the boy's radio was rigged, while everyone can revel in the excitement of the culminating rescue. A chart of Morse code and ample textual references to ham jargon may just add another dimension to notes passed in class.

Barrett, Judi  

In this playful book of rhyming and counting silliness, Barrett presents the numbers one through ten in nonsensical rhyming text. Each spread features a series of phrases ending with words (printed in a different color from the rest of the text) that rhyme with the featured number: "I watched five arrive/ and saw them dive/ off their hive/ onto the drive./ They're all still alive/ and I know they'll survive/ and most certainly thrive." Many of the rhymes are effective, particularly those that exclusively use one-syllable words. There's a lack of discernible rhythm, however, and some of the multisyllabic words require emphasis on the wrong syllable, which may lay snares for the unprepared reader. The illustrations faithfully reproduce every bit of nonsense in the rhymes: though there's a slickness and homogeneity to the art, the computer-generated style—neon colors, clean lines, and sharp shadows—incorporates funny details such as flying feathers and splashing raindrops that prevent the cleanliness of form from becoming overly sterile. The zany scenes often expand beyond a single page and onto the facing page, in a more active version of spot art that encroaches gleefully into text territory. Despite the glitches in rhythm, children will enjoy the language and pore over the detailed illustrations, looking for each "barbecue/ given by the kangaroo/ and the ewe/ at the zoo." KM

Bauer, Steven  
*A Cat of a Different Color*; illus. by Tim Raglin. Delacorte, 2000 [208p] ISBN 0-385-32710-2 $15.95  Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 3-4

Ulwazzer's two siblings are regular cats, while he's endowed with fur that changes colors and a penchant for wandering. After Ulwazzer wanders away from Felicity-by-the-Lake, the small town of his birth, the villainous mayor, Mr. Hoytie, begins to implement a series of proclamations that leave the villagers unable to go out at night or enjoy their lake. Mr. and Mrs. Hoytie have the charge (and endless household help) of an orphan girl, Daria Smart, who gradually emerges from the sea of less relevant characters as the main human protagonist. Ulwazzer returns, and,
despite the malevolent intentions of his cat siblings (who are smugly invested in the status quo), he and Daria save the town together. The charm of this story wears thin with the thickness of the book, and most children who are young enough to be taken with this simple story and its flatly functional characters are unlikely to make it through the unwieldy number of pages. Detailed black-and-white illustrations forefront images of pop-eyed village dwellers, adding some liveliness but also contributing to the overall impression of undifferentiated characterization. Despite the drawbacks, this small-town story of good vs. evil (and its not-so-subtle moral lesson about the danger of complacency) may appeal to some young people's developing sense of justice. KM


Narrator Henry Price recalls an event on the eve of the Revolutionary War when, under orders from King George, General Thomas Gage closed Boston Harbor and quartered his troops on the Common ("Most of us didn't like General Gage's troops in our town. Most of them didn't like us either"). On the morning of his December birthday, Henry receives a lovingly crafted sled from his father and is anxious to try it out with his siblings over lunch break from school; the best run on the Common, though, is occupied by lobsterbacks. Inspired by the courage of the adult Patriots of his acquaintance, Henry confronts Gage with his grievances and finds that the person he regards as an enemy is actually a respectful listener and a man of his word. In concluding notes, Borden observes the discrepancy between the date attributed to this Boston legend and the date of Gage's presence in the colony; she chooses to retain Gage as the central figure and shift the date back from 1775 to 1774. Parker's boxed full-page pictures and unbordered double-spread bleeds evoke the hazily defined edges of a memory drawn into focus—black ink lines are laid down in a hasty but disciplined scrawl and filled with roughly brushed watercolors in Redcoat crimson, homespun brown, and icy winter blue. The prose is simple, graceful, and accessible, and the encounter between a child deprived of his right to play and a sympathetic soldier under royal orders brings the epic conflict well within the grasp of an elementary-school audience. EB


Jess is the apple of her grandfather's eye, his muse for his painting, his confidant in a way that his son, Jess' father, has never been. She's unsure of what to do, however, when Grandpa refuses to allow his serious heart attack to keep him from the family vacation back near his childhood home, where he plans to finish his final painting, River Boy. Natural swimmer Jess is also drawn to the river her grandfather lovingly paints, where she meets a strange boy whom she comes to think of as the "river boy" himself; it's the river boy who suggests that Jess be her grandfather's hands and enable him to finish the painting before he dies. Bowler, author of Midget (BCCB 11/95), creates quite a different familial world in this Carnegie-winning novel: Jess and her grandfather are close without being sentimentally so, possessing a bantering rapport that many young people will covet, and even the gap between Jess' father and grandfather isn't an unbreachable one. The restrained magic of the Tom's Midnight Garden plot is effective without being overly subtle
or heavy-handed (some readers will doubtless pick up the clues and realize before Jess does that the river boy is her youthful grandfather and the painting a self-portrait, but those who take longer to catch on will enjoy going back and looking for hints). The dynamics and emotions are sometimes overexplained, but the physical realities (especially the compelling setting of the river, which provides a murmurous background throughout the story) are expressively depicted. This is a lyrical and imaginative treatment of the connections between youth and old age both in one person’s life and across the generations. DS

BROWN, CALEF  

The stories are actually story poems, some more narrative than others, ranging in topic from shoes (“My Dutch Wooden Sneakers from Holland,/ the grooviest shoes on the block”—“Dutch Sneakers”) to unusual knights (“Here we’ve got/ Sir Dance-a-lot. He’s really quite a charmer./ With metal pants/ come watch him dance/ all night in shining armor”—“Sir Dance-a-lot”) to bugs on a doughnut (“Donut Beetles/ very slowly/ crossing Sugar Beach”—“Sugar Beach”). Brown has some diverting ideas and approaches, but unfortunately the variable verse forms and wandering scansion (which make reading aloud unnecessarily challenging) undercut the sharp organization that’s needed to give absurd verse its punch. The illustrations offer an entertaining collection of spiky-lined creatures, but Brown mutes the strong colors with a dark undertone that gives a dingy look to the palette; the compositions are often unbalanced, with too many small details detracting from the main images. There are nonetheless some amusing conceits here that may tickle youthful fans of silliness. DS

BROWN, DON  

Born in 1862, Mary Kingsley grew up as the dutiful daughter of a self-absorbed, often absent father and an ailing mother and, despite a gloomy childhood, managed to prepare herself for the larger life that opened to her upon her parents’ deaths. “Her world, once cramped and dark, was now as big as the globe,” and so, at age thirty, Kingsley set off to explore West Africa, heedless of social strictures and warnings that it “was not a place for a single woman to visit.” Always garbed with Victorian propriety, Kingsley crossed ravines and braved rapids, slid down hills and into animal traps, endured steaming heat and tormenting lice, and stoically encountered enormous insects, hippos, and crocodiles as she pushed her way deeper into the continent. The book lavishes enough attention on its subject’s constrained childhood to make her sudden release into the wide, wide world all the more startling, and although the picture-book format allows only brief glimpses of her many adventures, Brown brings each detail to life through vivid imagery (“sun-cooked swamps of ink-black slime”) and frequent quotes from Kingsley’s own writings (“I scratched [the hippo] behind the ear with my umbrella and we parted on good terms”). Brown blends his watercolors to the texture of fine suede and delicately defines shapes with a few gossamer-thin ink lines, creating lush African landscapes in which prim, heavy-skirted Kingsley is a gentle but insistent
reminder of the ubiquitous British imperial presence. A note on Kingsley's travels and a brief bibliography are included. EB


Talk about unrequited love: "On the lake was a boat shaped like a swan. Her name, Dora, was printed in black on her sparkling paint. Swan loved her." Swan follows the object of his passion around the lake as she ferries folks about, and, despite the muttering of the other swans ("He makes us look stupid. Doesn't he know she's not one of us?"), his love is true. He is encouraged by a voice "from the sky, or the lake, or the air itself" that tells him "don't ever stop loving," "you have found the answer," and similar platitudes. When the inevitable occurs (Dora springs a leak and is destined for kindling), Swan is desolate; then he hears the voice say "Love makes magic," and suddenly he and Dora are (apparently) transformed into "two water lilies resting quietly on the lake, nothing between them but the floating moon." This sentimental offering is visually depicted in misty pastel illustrations that, while technically competent and often beautifully composed, do little to mitigate the sheer affectedness of this fable. The message is murky, the conclusion unresolved, and the audience unidentifiable. Children seeking swan stories should be steered instead to the Pinkney-illustrated The Ugly Duckling (BCCB 3/99). JMD


Jamie is more fortunate than Davies and Ten Tons; he has a home and parents, while his orphaned friends live in a derelict boat, scraping a daily living from whatever they can find or steal on and around the London docks. While scavenging on board an empty vessel, the boys witness a fortune in copper sheeting crashing through the ship's rail and sinking into the river. Ten Tons devises a scheme to float the copper and redeem it for enough money to buy them all a place on a ship, the first step toward becoming licensed seamen and escaping from the grinding poverty that surrounds them. All the elements of a great adventure novel are here—excitement, danger, the exotic locale of Victorian England; what the story lacks is a player sympathetic enough to elicit an emotional response from the reader. The characterizations fall short of even genre-fiction archetypes, and the stilted dialogue detracts from the bang-up plot. Still, the novel is brief and action-packed, and the accessible format is attractive. Full-page black-and-white illustrations have the old-fashioned look of an R. L. Stevenson adventure; a glossary is included. JMD

CHRISTIAN, Peggy  If You Find a Rock; illus. with photographs by Barbara Hirsch Lember.  Harcourt, 2000  32p  ISBN 0-15-239339-0  $16.00  Ad  6-9 yrs

This meditative inquiry into kinds of rocks and their childhood significance employs an unusual second-person address ("If you find a rock, a nice flat, rounded rock, that sits just right in the crook of your finger . . .") and examines a rather impressive array of rocks (skipping stones, chalk rocks, writing rocks, wishing rocks,
splashing rocks, etc.). Christian's quiet, lyrical tone (the text's ragged right margins suggest free verse) and lucid specificity ("and as you sit down you feel the cool moss squish beneath you") provide mood and texture that will help slow listeners down to the rhythm of the narrative and the task of contemplation. It's still an awful lot about rocks, however, and the emphasis on thoughtful possibility rather than action will appeal to adults while leaving a lot of child audience by the side of the path. The hand-tinted photographs have some of the same problems: well-suited to the text and undeniably lovely in their stony tones, they're nonetheless more likely to draw adults enamored of their tastefulness than kids interested in rocks. The craftsmanship of text and art is solid, however, and this might offer a quiet way in to nature study. DS

CLEMENTS, ANDREW  Circus Family Dog; illus. by Sue Truesdell. Clarion, 2000. 32p ISBN 0-395-78648-7 $15.00 R 3-7 yrs

Grumps is an old circus dog with just one trick: he lies down in the center ring in front of a flaming hoop with his feet in the air and resists the efforts of the clowns to get him to jump through it ("The children loved it"). Then a new dog is added to the show, and the cheers that greet Sparks for jumping over Grumps and through the hoop motivate Grumps to try to learn a new trick. The sketchy, slightly elongated figures of Truesdell's line-and-watercolor illustrations capture the humor and integrity of Grumps' dogged efforts, the perkiness of the puppy, and the cheerful warmth of the circus "family" that decides to make sure Grumps gets his "fair share of the smiles and the cheers." The well-paced text complements the clean, varied layouts of the illustrations, and together they flesh out the homely message that frames the story: "The circus is like a family, and old Grumps was the family dog." This should have genuine appeal for a broad range of readers and readees, whether they relate most to the aching bones of the old dog or the innocent energy of the young one. FK

COWELL, CRESSIDA  Hiccup the Seasick Viking; written and illus. by Cressida Cowell. Orchard, 2000  32p ISBN 0-531-30278-4 $15.95 R 5-8 yrs

Hiccup is an oddity in the Viking world: his age-mates are marauding around on their junior pillages while he's "tiny, thoughtful, and polite"; worse, he's afraid of going to sea. His father, Stoick the Vast ("Wherever Stoick walked, the ground trembled, flowers wilted, and bunnies fainted"), insists that Vikings are never afraid, so Hiccup's in a bit of a quandary. His first sea outing brings not only fear but also seasickness—happily, not just to Hiccup, but to the rampaging Viking crew when the storm hits, whereupon Hiccup takes charge and overcomes his fear. The ocean voyage with its feel-good message isn't quite as fresh as the story of the little Viking out of water, but the sweetly absurd set up (which has a grounded lunacy reminiscent of Babette Cole's work) is a hard act to follow. The whole thing has enough breezy, tongue-in-cheek energy (Stoick's Viking song is particularly ripe for dramatic performance) to make this not only one of the more invigorating accounts of dealing with fear but also a humorously offbeat swashbuckler. Cowell's art has a Cole-esque flavor too in its speedy comic lines and informal feel, but the Vikings are solid individuals; the seascapes, with their palette of sea-blues and greens and generous helpings of spume, suggest that Hiccup's fear is a reasonable response. This neatly turned adventure is a Viking saga with a difference. DS
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028419-6  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 5-8

"Spindle sickness" causes its victims to have a series of progressively more terrifying nightmares; drained and shaken, the victims finally fall into a coma and die. Conventional wisdom says that the disease is a mutant virus, but in reality it is an alien being, the Dream Eater, that lives on the psychic energy of its victims. Ms. Tietz, the nurse who delivers Starbright from her mentally challenged mother, Esther, knows that Starbright is the child named in an interstellar message from the future as the world's only hope for survival. Starbright does not believe the prophecy at first but slowly comes to the realization that all she loves is doomed if she cannot find a way to defeat the Dream Eater. There is action and immediacy to the plot, and the characterizations, while not deep, are strong. Starbright is a daring heroine, who acts on her impulses and faces the resultant trials squarely and bravely. The tension between what is revealed and what remains hidden is held taut until the climax, and the story retains its power despite a somewhat simplistic conclusion. The plot leaves something to be desired in terms of logic, however, and there are many questions unanswered: is Starbright's father an alien? Why is she the chosen savior? How, exactly, does Starbright send the extraterrestrial psychic piranha back to the stars? Cowley's pace leaves little time for reflection, though, and budding science fiction fans will probably take these queries in stride. JMD

CUMMINGS, PAT  *Angel Baby;* written and illus. by Pat Cummings. Lothrop, 2000 [24p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-14822-0  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-14821-2  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  4-7 yrs

"'Amanda Lynne,' said her mother/ 'Come help me feed your baby brother./ Grab that towel and Mr. Bear./ Oops! There's oatmeal in his hair./ Wipe off his face. Now look, you see/ What an angel he can be.'" Amanda Lynne obeys her mother's unrelenting rhymed imperatives, but she is too busy to really appreciate her rambunctious toddler brother's angelic appearance until he is asleep. The rhyme is sing-songy, but its steady lilting rhythm suits the resigned cheerfulness of school-aged Amanda Lynne. Large uncomplicated blocks of color in gouache, watercolor, and colored pencil are loud and glitzily unsubtle, but careful composition keeps the layouts from being as busy as the siblings. Cummings' African-American family handles their lively preschooler with encouraging capability that will bolster exhausted young caretakers of similar little angels. FK

DALY, JUDE, ad.  *Fair, Brown & Trembling: An Irish Cinderella Story;* ad. and illus. by Jude Daly. Farrar, 2000 [27p]
ISBN 0-374-32247-3  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Trembling is forced to stay home when her two sisters go to church; they tell her that they need her to do the housework, but in fact they keep her home because Trembling is very beautiful and her sisters don't want the competition. In classical Cinderella fashion, Trembling's fairy henwife appears, summons a magical garment for her to wear and horse for her to ride, and sends her off to church, where
she attracts the attention of several princes. Three Sundays she goes to church, with each Sunday’s dress more exquisite than the last (illustrations show the other two sisters sporting comically poor copies of Trembling’s magical finery). On the third Sunday a prince grabs her shoe as she is riding away, and the quest for the foot that fits (and its attached beautiful maiden) is launched. The artwork suggests medieval portraiture and friezework, showing expansive and softly textured backgrounds that occasionally dwarf the expressively delicate and elongated human figures. The costumed suitors for Trembling’s hand, however, include stereotyped representatives of China, Spain, and Africa, who are jarringly out of place in a sea of Irish visages and dress. Despite these unfortunate images, the text reads smoothly, with the charming lilt of a well-told fairy tale, and many libraries will want to purchase a copy to add to their collection of Cinderella tales from around the world. A note cites both sources and tale types. KM

DATLOW, ELLEN, comp. A Wolf at the Door; comp. by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. Simon, 2000 [192p]
ISBN 0-689-82138-7 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-10

Datlow and Windling have already established themselves as connoisseurs of the modern fairy-tale retelling with their story selections for such adult anthologies as Snow White, Blood Red and The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror annuals. They are branching out for a YA audience with an on-the-money selection of thirteen tales compiled from a variety of authors. Delia Sherman sets “The Months of Manhattan” (a takeoff on “The Month Brothers”) in a deserted New York City museum gallery; Michael Cadnum features the giant’s point of view in “Mrs. Big: ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ Retold”; Neil Gaiman gives free verse “Instructions” on how to traverse the land of folk and fairy tales and successfully return; and Garth Nix brings “Hansel and Gretel” into the present with a very creepy retelling called “Hansel’s Eyes.” The tonal variety of these short stories makes the collection an intriguing one: in “Cinder Elephant” Yolen takes amusing liberties with the physical appearance of traditional characters (Cinderella’s stepsisters have “hearts so thin, you could read a magazine through them”) and does a riff on pesky singing birds (“Fairy tale birds always sing like this. It’s annoying to everyone except the heroine”); Nancy Farmer acerbically retells the story of the Goose Girl and her horse, Falada; and Kathe Koja’s “Becoming Charise” is a subtle, evocative retelling of Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling” set in a modern high school. While a certain familiarity with more traditional versions of these tales wouldn’t hurt, the possibilities for textual comparisons and creative writing leaps should make YAs and their adults read happily ever after. JMD

DENSLOW, SHARON PHILLIPS Big Wolf and Little Wolf; illus. by Cathie Felstead. Greenwillow, 2000 [32p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16174-X $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16174-X $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R 3-5 yrs

Little Wolf asks his father, Big Wolf, to sing him a good-night song, so Big Wolf does: “I’m a wolf. I’m a wolf. I’m a big gray wolf./ I sleep all day, I sing all night,/ I snap my teeth in an overbite! I’m a wolf. I’m a wolf. I’m a big gray wolf./ I like to chew, I like to eat,/ I use my nose to smell my feet.” Big Wolf’s silly song goes on until “Suddenly... there was a rustling and a growling in the bushes behind
them... Something was in the bushes!” It turns out to be Mama Wolf, having fun (“I scare silly wolves, I make them run”), and the three wolves settle down for the night—but not before singing one last good-night song: “Our sleep is deep,/ Our snores are long,/ and in our dreams/ there is one more song./ AARROOOO!/ AARRROOOOOOOOOOOOOO!/ Good night!”

Denslow’s plot moves rapidly, the rhymes are funny (and worth repeating), and the conclusion is satisfying. Felstead’s line-and-watercolor illustrations have a Sunday funnies quality (down to the frames that house each picture and text block) that suits the story’s humorous tone, and the depictions of the wolves and their environs echo a more laid back Frank Asch. With its momentum, suspense, and giggles, this bedtime story in wolf’s clothing will surely be a howling success. JMD


Despite the science teacher’s assurance that their experiments would be safe in the lab over spring break, children return from a particularly rainy vacation to find that the fungus has in fact run amok. Each room of the school brings fresh disaster—fungus is devouring the library books, fungus is dishing out lunch in the cafeteria, fungus is taking phone messages in the principal’s office. Help is promptly summoned, and Professor Macadamia arrives with the Fungus Unit (a “special branch of the Sanitation Department”) and scrubs the school back into order. This bit of lunacy doesn’t quite fit the mold of lighthearted science, as there is precious little to be learned here about fungus except its propensity to grow in damp, enclosed places; nor is there any real plot beyond a tour of the besieged building. The fun is strictly limited to Catrow’s bug-eyed trio of students (two with heads like inverted pears on spindly bodies, the third shaped like an onion) and the floor-to-ceiling fungal monsters (slime green, charmingly accented in purple and magenta) that gleefully run the school. That might be just enough fun, though, for students who cling desperately to any hope for a school cancellation. EB


With strong echoes of Don and Audrey Wood’s The Napping House (BCCB 9/84), Downey and Firehammer imagine the effect of a sneeze on slumbering barn animals: “On a dark, dark night/ On an old, old farm/ In a rickety, crickety/Tumbledown barn,/ Everyone slept peacefully—/ A rat, a cat, a black-eyed bat;/ A cow, an owl,/ A feathered fowl;/ A dog, a hog,/ An old barn frog,/ Everyone slept peacefully—/ But not the flea.” The catalogued creatures continue to slumber, oblivious to the flea’s coughing, sniffling, and final request for a tissue (“Does eddybody hab a tissue for be?”), before the insect finally awakens everyone with a gigantic “Ah-CHOO!” The hog unwittingly receives the brunt of the sneeze (“Eeeeeeww!”), foreshadowing another disruption soon to come: “Everyone slept just like a log—/ Except the hog . . . / No one heard his garbled wheeze,/ ’I think I'b godda sdeeze.’” Warm acrylics illustrate this sleeptime book: though the colors are so well-modulated as to be sometimes insufficiently differentiating, the world of toylike barnyard critters is an inviting one. While children will enjoy hunting for the flea, and waiting for the anticipated disruption, some inconsistencies (animals shift locations without explanation, the backdrop suffers some inexplicable alteration) may confuse observant viewers. Even the most enthusiastic
listeners may waver at the description of the sleepy barn (and it's a pity more use isn't made of the cumulation), but children will enjoy the repetitive phrases, the antisocial sneezing, and the ensuing havoc. EAB

EHLERT, LOIS  
*Market Day: A Story Told with Folk Art*; written and illus. by Lois Ehlert. Harcourt, 2000  [36p]
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  5-8 yrs

A simple rhyme delineates a farm family's preparations for and trip to market (“We're all going to market. It's in the town square. To buy and to sell—that's why we go there”). Although the text is predictable both in rhyme scheme and content, it flows fairly well when read aloud, and the wordplay is moderately diverting and inviting. The narrative largely serves, however, as a background on which to hang the folk art pieces featured in the illustrations. These pieces—clay and cloth human figures, basketry, samples of embroidery, painted wooden animals, and various textiles—are combined in blazingly colorful photo-compositions to reflect the action of the rhyme. While this is an interesting idea, the execution is muddied; the compositions are crowded and hard to see, and it is difficult to extract meaning from the visuals. Still, adults with a fancy for folk art may appreciate this approach. A key to the folk art pieces used in the text is provided. JMD

ETCHEMENDY, NANCY  
*The Power of Un.* Front Street/Cricket, 2000  148p
ISBN 0-8126-2850-0  $14.95  R  Gr. 4-8

Chaos theory gets an age-appropriate exploration when a middle-school boy is given the opportunity to undo the myriad interconnected events preceding the accident that left his impulsive six-year-old sister comatose. Gib Finney tells his own story in a voice that is down-to-earth, sophisticated, and funny, explaining that “stories used to be easier to start before I found out about the innermost workings of the universe and all that stuff,” before “the power of Un changed everything.” Using the “unner” given him by a mysterious old man who “smelled like hot metal or lightning,” Gib is able to rewind his life but goes a bit too far due to a math error (“Everybody, including my teachers, keeps telling me I'd be great [at math] if I'd just be more careful”) and has to renegotiate a bigger hunk of his past than he had planned. This leads to interesting developments and, eventually, to some fairly substantial philosophizing about what we can learn from the bad things that happen, suggesting both a religious explanation (in which God is characterized as a “Big Teacher” with “Major Lesson Plans”) and a more secular point that the bad things help us recognize and appreciate the good things. Though the willfulness of the little sister on which the plot revolves seems forced, her brother’s new appreciation of her as more than “a set of problems to get around” rings true. This absorbing story about a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day—and a more suspenseful but happier rerun of it—has something to offer even kids who don’t normally like sci-fi. FK

EVANS, DOUGLAS  
*The Elevator Family.* Delacorte, 2000  87p
ISBN 0-385-32723-4  $14.95  Ad  Gr. 4-6

This uplifting (and unusually tall) novella chronicles a vacation spent by the clueless but cheerfully hospitable Wilson family in a San Francisco hotel elevator, which they appreciate as “a mobile room” with “extras” like “a full-length mirror, a tele-
phone, wall-to-wall carpeting” and “soft marimba music.” Their ability to make themselves—and the guests who pass through—feel at home endears them to a lonely traveling salesman who specializes in trendy merchandise, the exhausted members of the rock band “What,” assorted tourists, and Mrs. Goldengate, a busy socialite whose late husband’s name adorns the local bridge. By the end of their stay, the Wilsons have helped the socialite slow down, brought together the bellboy and the salesgirl he adores, rescued a kidnapped heiress, and inspired the salesman to create a new fad: “We could sell Elevator Family dolls and Elevator Family books.” The writing skitters along on the surface and readers of this mild, amusing tome will probably not clamor for an Elevator Family lunchbox, but they may appreciate the treehouse appeal of its premise, its benign, accessible satire, and the insouciance of these kinder, gentler Stupids. FK

FITZPATRICK, MARIE-LOUISE  
Lizzy and Skunk; written and illus. by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick. DK Ink, 2000 [26p]  
ISBN 0-7894-6163-3 $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys R  

Lizzy is a flyaway-haired little charmer who gets through life with the assistance of Skunk, her skunk hand puppet (“Lizzy was afraid of shadows in the dark . . . but Skunk wasn’t. Lizzy was afraid of falling down . . . but Skunk wasn’t”). Veterans of the genre will easily predict that something’s going to interfere with this idyllic partnership, and they’ll be right: Skunk goes missing, and Lizzy is devastated. When he turns up in a tree (thanks to the tender ministrations of the family cat), Lizzy musters her own courage to rescue him, and girl and skunk are together again. The classic story is effectively told (though many plot-savvy kids are going to expect the tree from which Skunk is rescued to be part of the “dark, scary woods” feared by both Lizzy and Skunk), with deft employment of simple rhythms and pared-down, unassuming text. Fitzpatrick’s effervescent watercolors add a perky and unforced energy to the proceedings: dot-eyed Lizzy whizzes by in her blue overalls across a cream background, and the conquering Skunk, his arms outstretched like a superhero, is a bolstering presence. Particularly effective are some interesting perspectives—we look through the scary spider’s web and past the looming arachnid to a triumphant Skunk on Lizzy’s outthrust arm, or over the heads of appreciative stuffed animals at Lizzy’s back and the wall beyond her as she and Skunk make shadow art in the glow of the lamp. This is a satisfying treatment of a venerable topic that will be enjoyed by loyal puppets and stuffed animals as well as their owners. DS

FREYMAN, SAXTON  
One Lonely Sea Horse; written and illus. by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers. Levine/Scholastic, 2000 26p  
ISBN 0-439-11014-9 $15.95  
Ad  

After finding herself on her own in the ocean, the sea horse of the title bewails her solitude (“In all the cold and salty sea/ I’m all alone—there’s only me”) until other deep-sea denizens (two crabs, then three puffer fish, then four lobsters, five turtles, and so on) come forth to explain she’s among a multitude of friends, whereupon Bea the sea horse is cheered indeed. The text never rises above innocuous: the rhyming verses are stilted, the counting component is superfluous, and the warm and fuzzy message is better intentioned than executed. This is a classic example of an illustration-driven title, however, and the art is sufficiently cleverly executed to
offer some redemption. Like others in the Play With Your Food series, this creates its characters from strategically altered and posed produce: the sea horse is an assembly of chioggia beets, bananas make splendid dolphins and even better octopuses, and lumpy hands of ginger become convincing lobsters (the sea floor is largely mushroom rocks and chive or fava bean seaweed); set against an intense blue-green background, the creatures are brought vividly to life. Food fun has an undeniable “let me try that” appeal that will get the young audience poking around in their produce drawer. The concept is sophisticated enough to interest somewhat older kids than will be able to tolerate the chirpy rhyme; if you can cover up the verses you might be able to extend the age range for some entertaining—and maybe even edible—art projects.

Freymann-Weyr, Garret  
*When I Was Older.*  
Houghton, 2000  
[176p]  
$15.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

Sophie was twelve when her brother, Erhart, died of leukemia; she’s now fifteen, and her family is still struggling to recover from the blow. Sophie is perhaps the most affected: she engages in two “on-purpose memories” of Erhart every day, she refuses to forgive her father for having an affair and leaving the family during Erhart’s illness, and she brings a grim focus to her daily life that leaves no time for the frivolity of boys and friends (“It seems to me that love always needs to be regulated”). This begins to change when she meets Francis, the seventeen-year-old son of her mother’s new boyfriend. Having also known loss (he wears a teardrop tattoo in memory of his late mother), Francis understands Sophie’s anguish and admires her drive, but he also sees the price she and those around her pay for her severity with her fellow humans. Freymann-Weyr creates an indelible portrait of a girl whose strength is verging on becoming her weakness. Sophie’s voice is completely authentic and continually compelling, and the picture of her family relationships is compassionate yet sharply insightful: her father has been a jerk and will always have his limitations, but Sophie’s been so superbly punitive that the distance between them is hardly all his responsibility. Her gradual softening towards her father (“He tells me to sleep well and hangs up just in time for me to tell the dial tone I love it. And then, since I have its complete and undivided attention, I add that I don’t think it gave Erhart cancer”) and friends and her embarkation on a relationship with Francis are realistically hesitant and tentative. Ultimately, this is an absorbing and eloquent account of a girl learning young how to balance loyalty to the dead with connection to the living.  

Friedman, Robin  
*How I Survived My Summer Vacation and Lived to Write the Story.*  
Front Street/Cricket, 2000  
[160p]  
$15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Jackie is the junk-food-eating son of health-food-eating parents (who publish New Age books for a living), and he is striving for normalcy. Determined to write the “Great American Novel” during the summer before entering high school, he even has the opening sentence for his opus—in fact, he has a bunch of opening sentences, all representing different genres of popular literature. Jackie’s writer’s block is complicated by his crush on beautiful (but shallow) Kelly, who just happens to be the daughter of his tough new swimming coach. Confusion appears to be Jackie’s natural state: his best friend, Mallory, has got herself a beau and Jackie is
reacting with all sorts of conflicting emotions; his friends Nick (the would-be heartthrob) and Garus (an affected Anglophile) have all sorts of reasons why Jackie should hang with them instead of staying cooped up in his room with his typewriter. The plot revolves around all the things Jackie does to distract himself from his unsuccessful writing attempts: car-painting, sewer-exploring, swimming, dating, etc. While the dialogue is funny in spots, the pace lags, and characterizations are strictly one-note. Jackie’s naïveté is overdrawn to the point of unbelievability, which is particularly problematic since he’s the narrator. Jackie’s summer winds up being amusing and relatively painless, which is also a good way to sum up this book. JMD


If you have to pick a definitive American artist, it’s probably Rockwell; even young people who don’t know who he is will likely recognize some of his art. Gherman examines his life and art together, tracing his artistic talent from his youthful endeavors to his study and work for the army and then to the pivotal connection with the Saturday Evening Post. Unfortunately, the writing is choppy and awkward (“Norman was no different. But he wasn’t going to depend on luck. He intended to work hard and make it happen”) and sometimes ungrammatical (“With an axe in one hand on his way to split logs and a book in the other, Norman portrays Lincoln as well as himself”), and some events and references are underexplained (contemporary youngsters are unlikely to be familiar with Dictaphones). There is still quite a collection of interesting information here, though, with details about Rockwell’s methodology (he embraced photographic assistance after initially rejecting it) and successes and failures (a Post cover that depicted a child’s discovery about the truth of Santa Claus upset people whose myth-believing children happened upon it). The page layout is attractively airy, and the art reproduced to good effect; Rockwell is well represented by pictures that demonstrate the range of his capabilities and not just the images that have suffered from overexposure. Despite the textual weaknesses, this is a serviceable introduction to an American icon. Endnotes, a bibliography, and an index are included. DS

GRIMM, EDWARD  The Doorman; illus. by Ted Lewin. Orchard, 2000  32p  Ad 4-7 yrs
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-30280-6  $16.95

With a cup of coffee and a last-minute adjustment to his navy blue uniform, African-American doorman John begins another day of greeting tenants as they come and go, handling deliveries and mail, and overseeing the building “as if he were the captain of a ship.” But this is to be John’s last day on the job—Bill, his evening replacement, sadly informs the residents the next morning that John passed away in the night (“It’s a shame that John had such a bad heart,” Bill said to Nellie. “He did not,” she said, stamping her foot. ‘He had a good heart’”). The best intentions and sincerest sentiment (Grimm offers this in memory of his own “beloved doorman, John”) cannot mitigate the fact that John’s duties, however important to his tenants’ security, will hold little interest for a child audience. Moreover, the optimistic promise that John’s memory “stayed as fresh as the wind after a springtime shower” seems unwarranted, given the residents’ condescending and/or thought-
less behavior evidenced throughout his last day. (Most barely respond to his small talk, and it's doubtful John takes much pleasure in the children's trick of "breathing on the front doors he had just cleaned.") Lewin imparts a near-photographic realism to his watercolor cast, but the constrained lobby setting quickly becomes monotonous. There are good intentions and attractive visuals here, but there's also an absence of genuine connection (for the building residents and for the audience) with the title figure and too much adult-oriented sentiment. EB

HADDIX, MARGARET PETERSON  
*Turnabout.* Simon, 2000  [240p]  
ISBN 0-689-82187-5  $17.00  
Reviewed from galleys  
Ad  Gr. 6-9

Melly and Anny Beth are teenagers in the year 2085, but the progress of time hasn't provided a solution to their dilemma: subjects of an age-reduction experiment in the year 2000, when they were centenarians, they have yearly grown younger ever since. Datelined chapters switch between accounts of the initial undergoing of the process at the nursing home that was essentially an unethical laboratory, excursions into previous moments in the girls' second life, and explorations of their current quandary as they plan for the time when they're no longer able to live independently. Determined to avoid a return to the "Agency," the scientific bureaucracy that monitors the subjects of the secret experiment, they're nonetheless conflicted when it looks like a reporter is hot on their trail—has their secret been discovered? Haddix doesn't pull her details together as credibly as the plot requires (the device of the girls' evaporating memory of their upward lives, for example, is a good idea weakly executed), the conception of the future isn't particularly imaginative (it's a lot like now only higher-tech), and the writing's on the pedestrian side. The premise, however, is gripping indeed, with the additional appeal of relying on teenagers with more experience than any adult can hope to match. The eternal conflict between scientific capability and individual ethics is accessibly played out, with the personal cost of this particular scientific advance dramatically demonstrated (most of the other subjects found the results less bearable than the death they escaped). The solution to the problem (the reporter turns out to be a descendant of Melly's, who sought her for familial rather than journalistic reasons and who will take care of the girls) is convenient, but the book doesn't turn it into an overall happy ending. This is digestible sci-fi-lite that will draw readers just starting to grapple with some classic philosophical issues. DS

HARRISON, MICHAEL  
*Facing the Dark.* Holiday House, 2000  [128p]  
ISBN 0-8234-1491-4  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
Ad  Gr. 7-10

When Simon's father is accused of murder, Simon goes to the scene of the crime to investigate. He sees a girl bringing flowers to the same site and realizes that she must be the victim's daughter. Though the girl, Charley, is initially hostile, she eventually believes that Simon's father is innocent and joins Simon in his investigation. Simon and Charley narrate in alternating chapters as they try to identify the real culprits. Their fathers each owned small cab companies, and clues point towards "Uncle" John, a friend of Charley's mother who is now trying to convince her to sell him the family business so that he can expand his own cab company. Harrison sustains suspense throughout, introducing close escapes and thrills at an involving pace. Unfortunately, events often strain credibility (Simon himself says,
"No one could believe this or take it seriously. No one. I couldn’t") and the identity of the culprits is never satisfyingly revealed (they are only known as owners of another hostile cab company). Nevertheless, Charley and Simon are likeable characters in an unusual investigative partnership, and the classic appeal of the premise, teens outwitting all the adults in the county, will have readers ripping through this suspenseful page-turner. KM

HAUSMAN, GERALD  
Tom Cringle: Battle on the High Seas; illus. by Tad Hills. Simon, 2000  [224p]
ISBN 0-689-82810-1  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

With a bit of help from an admiral uncle, thirteen-year-old Tom Cringle slings his hammock as a midshipman in the English navy and sails off toward Jamaica on a mission to control the piracy rampant in the Caribbean waters of 1812. The Bream is swamped at sea, and Tom is one of only three survivors (not counting Sneezer, the faithful dog who saves his life). Obediah Glasgow, a charming free- man whom the boy correctly suspects is a pirate, offers them passage on his Blackbird; leery of Obed’s activities, Tom makes his escape, but not before cultivating a genuine admiration for the pirate. When he is later recaptured and forced into service against the British, Tom finds himself torn between his regard for Obed and his sworn allegiance to his country. Neither seasickness, open warfare, storms, shipwreck, earthquake, kidnapping, or pirate raids keep Tom from recording his adventures carefully and completely in a most personable journal, which is convincingly cast in a slightly archaic (but very readable) tone reminiscent of Richard Henry Dana’s nautical memoirs (the book is in fact based on a popular historical novel from 1834). However, without a well-defined, truly black-hearted villain anywhere in sight (pirate Obed is a pretty nice guy at heart, and Tom isn’t aboard the Bream long enough to delight in the pursuit of Napoleon or his allies), Tom’s travails ultimately hit the doldrums for want of a worthy adversary. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. EB

HAYES, JOE, ad.  
ISBN 0-938317-49-0  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad 5-9 yrs

Adapted from a cuento popular in the mountain communities of New Mexico, this tale of politeness and good hearts rewarded will sound a familiar chime with young listeners. Arcia, the Cinderella character, encounters a hawk when out washing wool to weave her father a blanket. The hawk swoops down and steals the wool, but when Arcia politely requests its return, the hawk drops a star on her forehead and clean, already woven wool cloth into her hands. Needless to say, Arcia’s step-sisters want stars, too, and they attempt to repeat her encounter with the hawk; being impolite, bad-natured girls, they end up with a donkey’s ear and cow’s horn on their foreheads instead of stars. As in many familiar variants of this tale, all ends well, with Arcia married to the prince and her stepsisters chastened. The text is serviceable, but it lacks the vibrancy necessary to mitigate the predictability of the plot. The paintings (a joint effort between mother and daughter) have a folk-art feel to them, with flat backdrops and simple perspectives. The setting is more modern than timeless, which gives an unusual air of currency to this traditional
tale and clashes with explicit statements in the text. The intense palette features deep blues, pinks, and yellows, in compositions that emphasize the players and not their setting. Although the faces of the characters tend toward a sameness of expression, they still have a certain controlled energy. The text is in both English and Spanish, and an extensive source note is appended. JMD

HEYNEN, JIM  *Cosmos Coyote and William the Nice.* Holt, 2000  [192p]  
ISBN 0-8050-6434-6  $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Seventeen-year-old Cosmos has gotten into trouble once too often, and now he's faced with the choice of either juvenile detention back home in Washington or a year with his religious aunt and uncle in an Iowa farming community and a strict Christian school. Choosing the second, he becomes William the Nice, trying to avoid suspicion and painlessly get through the day in the squeaky-clean, insular Dutch community that his father fled when he was about Cosmos' age. There are some complications, however: Cosmos is the immediate suspect in a school theft, and, much more importantly, he falls in love with the beautiful and devout Cherlyn, pillar of the community. Heynen's portrait of the small farming community is credible without being either adulatory or overly condemnatory; everybody Cosmos meets has Dutch surnames, everybody knows (and to some extent polices) one another, and violent crime is a thing of elsewhere. The book's sincere and in-depth treatment of Cherlyn's faith is unusual and refreshing, and there's sympathy and insight in the depiction of her negotiation of boundaries on sex (her "no clothes off" rule doesn't preclude some very sexy encounters) and on filial obedience (seeing Cosmos without breaking her disapproving father's restrictions on their contact). The narrative is slow and talky, however (Cosmos' song lyrics are included), and the characters never really move beyond mouthpieces to full personalities: Cherlyn's a neoChristian ideal and Cosmos is mostly reactive, so it's not clear what draws Cherlyn to him; it's also not clear what the book makes of Cosmos' Washington life as a wannabe rocker and small-time vandal with his laissez-faire dad, since the picture it paints is considerably bleaker than Cosmos' view of it. Still, this is an effective portrait of change, adjustment, and widening horizons. DS

HOOBLER, DOROTHY  *The First Decade: Curtain Going Up,* by Dorothy and Tom Hoobler. Millbrook, 2000  160p  illus. with photographs (The Century Kids)  
ISBN 0-7613-1600-0  $21.90  

*The Second Decade: Voyages,* by Dorothy and Tom Hoobler. Millbrook, 2000  159p  illus. with photographs (The Century Kids)  

In the first entries of a proposed series of ten novels, the Hooblers revisit some landmark events of the twentieth century through the adventures of a fictional theatrical family, the Aldriches. Perhaps "adventures" is an overstatement, for although some of their experiences do incorporate a strong dramatic element (the automobile/horse grudge race in *Curtain*, and the loss of relatives aboard the *Titanic* in *Voyages*), no single episode is cast with genuine suspense or explored in history-revealing detail. The Aldrich family's illustrious career (three extant generations literally share the stage) allows a parade of notables to march through their lives, including Theodore Roosevelt, who becomes a house guest, and Lionel
Barrymore, who encourages some of the younger Aldriches in their thespian ambitions. If the thinly drawn characters are less than memorable, their "portraits" (which have been culled and cleverly assembled from period photo collections) are fascinating; a family tree of cameo images is appended to each novel, and as the younger characters age, so, most convincingly, do their pictures. Historical notes relating to the narrative and a timeline of the featured decade's notable events are also included. While The Century Kids doesn't yet hold promise as an engrossing family saga, it should prove an amiable, undemanding read for middle graders who settle comfortably into series fiction. EB


This fractured Frog Prince set in the American West features a courtly horned toad as the amphibious hero and a red-headed cowgirl as his undependable princess of the plains. Hopkins' retelling has a fast pace and colloquial style that will pull in both listeners and readers: the gardens of the palace have been replaced by desert flora and fauna, the spoiled princess by lasso-twirling, range-riding Reba Jo, and the castle dinner dainties by a bowl of hot chili. There is a sly cleverness to the toad that adds both humor and tension to the plot, and Reba Jo is a spunky antidote to the passive princess stereotype. The horned frog turns out to be a bespelled Spanish caballero (which explains the sprinkling of Spanish throughout his conversations with Reba Jo), and, although Reba Jo does kiss and release him from the spell, he claims not to be bound to marry her. (It is clear by the last picture of Reba Jo's lasso flying through the air, however, that Reba Jo has other ideas.) Austin's illustrations combine David Catrow's warp-and-morph style and Kevin O'Malley's turn-them-upside-down perspectives in slickly finished, framed compositions that have the gloss and detail of airbrushed paintings, and bits of spot art throughout extend the desert motifs. Readers-aloud and listeners who have a hankering for the Wild West are going to bust their britches when they get a look at Reba Jo and her heroic toad. JMD


This brief survey of aeronautics traces flight from wing-flapping and balloons through Kitty Hawk and the twentieth-century flying boom, then examines the breadth of current aviation and some future possibilities. The text is unthreatening and digestible; though it's fairly superficial, it doesn't need to do much more than link the facts and images together. Unfortunately, the art isn't really up to taking the center stage. The apparently computer-generated images are clean and clear, but the colors are diagram-unsubtle, there's little creativity in approach (the old and comparatively rare 707 appears repeatedly as a sample jet), and the captions are sketchy and confusing (successful and unsuccessful flight attempts are depicted together with no indication as to which is which; the 707-100 series is misleadingly labeled with its colloquial name of 701). This won't hold up for a transatlantic voyage, but it'll serve to fire up the propellers for a quick flight. A page offers guidelines for paper-airplane construction, and endpapers provide a labeled gallery of aircraft. DS

James, author-illustrator of *Leon and Bob* (BCCB 3/97) here compiles nineteen short offerings from poets such as Aileen Fisher, Eve Merriam, Ogden Nash, Charlotte Zolotow, the ubiquitous "Traditional," and James himself. Simple rhyme schemes, homey topics, and a musing sense of wonder contribute to the accessibility of the verses. The poems are brief and child-centered, their cheerful tone reinforced by James' light-infused line-and-watercolor illustrations. A meld of the styles of Quentin Blake and James Stevenson, James' pictures have an inviting airiness that gives the impression of breezy, wide-open spaces. Each poem gets its own spread and its own setting, from stepping stones across a river ("Stepping Stones," a traditional verse) to a snowy hillside (Wendy Elizabeth Johnson's "Sledging") to a busy city street (Eve Merriam's "A Lazy Thought"), and always the implied speaker is the observing child commenting on the viewed action. Poems (and children) sweep across the uncluttered compositions, the poems in a large font with generous leading that makes this a good choice for beginning readers as well as reading aloud. JMD

JEPPSON, ANN-SOFIE *Here Comes Pontus!*; tr. by Frances Corry; illus. by Catarina Kruusval. R & S Books, 2000 30p ISBN 91-29-64561-1 $14.00 Ad Gr. 2-4

Pontus (billed as "the naughtiest pony in the stables") tells his own story: he's moving to a new home, where he'll be trained by "a little girl with a long yellow mane." He's excited by the novelty and eager to meet up with his brother, who's also at his new stable; once there, Pontus undergoes some training and a few adventures (he befriends a kitten secreted in his stall and survives a minor barn fire). The events are cheerful but mild, and there's not a lot of cohesion or even sense in the narrative (he's ostensibly there to be trained, but nobody seems to be interested in actually training him); there's also some confusing and incorrect information, some of which is doubtless due to translation/importation issues (the use of the term "pace" for the gait of the Icelandic horse) and some of which is incorrect anywhere (the suggestion that there's no moment in the trot when all four feet are off the ground). The plethora of horsey details is the real attraction here, and the illustrations offer lots of thumbnail sketches with explanations of equipment (there's a laudable emphasis on safety gear) that young equiphiles will graze on with relish. The line-and-watercolor art presents Pontus himself as round and perky, with some slightly anthropomorphic expressions (but we're talking a pony who narrates a book, after all) that make him all the more endearing. The eminent browsability is going to be the main draw here, especially for youngsters who are intimidated by the harder edge of the nonfiction treatments and who really just want to gallop along with the ponies. An index is included. DS


Henry and his friend, anthropomorphized bears, make a bet about who can get to the town of Fitchburg first: Henry walking, or his friend working for the money for a train ticket. Alternating pages depict the activities of the two characters:
Henry's friend fills "the woodbox in Mrs. Alcott's kitchen" while Henry hops "from rock to rock across the Sudbury River"; Henry's friend pulls "the weeds in Mr. Hawthorne's garden" while Henry presses ferns and flowers in a book. Eventually, the two reach Fitchburg; Henry's friend is first, because Henry has stopped to fill a pail with blackberries. Johnson has based his first picture book on an excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden*, in which Thoreau discusses wasting a day earning money for train travel vs. walking and having the day be all his own. The narrative is full of little clues as to Henry's identity (the names of his friends, for example: Alcott, Emerson, Hawthorne, etc.) as are the colored pencil and paint illustrations, which set the characters in the bucolic Concord, Massachusetts of Thoreau's day. The cluttered compositions do not always show Johnson's cubist figures to best advantage, however, and the predominantly verdant hues lack variety. It is unlikely that any child is going to understand the literary allusions without the intervention of a motivated adult, and the very subtle humor is sure to go over younger heads. Still, teachers and other adults seeking an entree to Transcendentalist philosophy for primary graders can end their search here. JMD

**JOHNSON, PAUL BRETT**  
*Mr. Persnickety and Cat Lady*; written and illus. by Paul Brett Johnson. Orchard, 2000 32p  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-531-30283-0 $15.95  
R 5-8 yrs  

The titular Mr. Persnickety and Cat Lady are mutually irritating neighbors: Cat Lady has thirty-seven cats, while Mr. Persnickety thinks that even one is too many; his lawn is green and manicured, while hers is full of dandelions (and cats). Mr. Persnickety dislikes cats so much that he plays "a tape recording of a hundred barking dogs" and points the speakers towards Cat Lady's house. Neighborly tensions escalate, with participants using tactics that will be familiar from elementary school clashes, until Cat Lady comes up with an ingenious plan, infesting Mr. Persnickety's house with mice. Eventually, he comes to her house and asks to borrow her cats to get rid of the infestation. The black outlines of the illustrations give the figures a lively solidity while softly mottled textures add depth and visual interest, and both the balding Mr. Persnickety and the plump Cat Lady are depicted as appealingly flawed. The real stars here are the cats, however, who are shown purring, rolling, stretching, and generally lolling about Cat Lady until they are called upon to save Mr. Persnickety from the mice. This hasn't got quite the originality of Lisa Campbell Ernst's *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubb* (BCCB 4/91), but it does have both wit and sympathy. In the end, the two neighbors have learned to get along, "for the most part," and child readers with conflicts of their own will appreciate the honest depiction of an incompletely resolved neighborly tiff. KM

**LAMARCHE, JIM**  
*The Raft*; written and illus. by Jim LaMarche. HarperCollins, 2000 40p  
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-13978-7 $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-13977-9 $15.95  
Ad Gr. 2-4

Nicky is (very unwillingly) spending the summer with his artist grandmother at her cabin in the Wisconsin woods. The boy's discovery of an old raft floating on the river by the dock helps change his attitude; his grandmother makes sure he has a life jacket and a pole to push the raft, and Nicky spends his days (and even some nights) exploring the river and its wildlife. A gift of a sketchpad and drawing utensils gives the boy additional focus, and he sets about recording his summer in...
pictures. By summer’s end Nicky and his grandmother, as well as Nicky and the river, are close friends. LaMarche’s illustrations have the grain of oil pastels on textured paper. His treatment of light—from the view of a smoggy city through a car window to the dappled treatment of the sunlight on the river—is gently alluring and stylistically reminiscent of Barbara Cooney, though with a warmer palette. Woodland vistas stretch across double-page spreads, and the horizontal compositions add to the sense of unrestrained space. The problem here is one of intended audience. LaMarche’s story is lengthy and his point of view adult, and, while the story and the illustrations are lovely and nostalgic, they are distant from the listening or reading child’s point of view. Still, the variety of capably drafted fauna may be enough to keep animal-loving youngsters attentive. JMD

**LAWTON, JANE**  *The Time Bike*; illus. by Erik Blegvad. HarperCollins, 2000 176p

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028438-2  $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028437-4  $15.95  
Ad  Gr. 3-6

Langton continues her saga of the Hall family, last seen in *The Fledgling* (BCCB 7/80). Eddie’s brand-new bike is stolen the day after his birthday, so when a crate arrives containing another bicycle his hopes are high. The present is not the modern bicycle he hoped for, however, but an old-fashioned vehicle that he hides away under the stairs, mentally christening it “the stupid bike.” He quickly discovers that this bicycle has an unusual quality: it’s a time machine, and Eddie conjures great expectations for it, from witnessing Caesar’s triumphal march into Rome to avoiding a week of final exams to discovering who stole his birthday bike. Eddie’s best-laid plans go awry, however: in a confusing development, he rides the bike past final exam week to avoid studying, only to flunk the exams because he didn’t study; his attempt to return to Ancient Rome nearly strands him in prehistoric America; and his discovery of the bicycle thief (bully Hunkey Poole) does him little good. The lack of logic regarding Eddie’s employment of time travel is puzzling (why doesn’t Eddie just ride the bike back before exam week and avoid flunking?); two sources of conflict, a vengeful banker and the bicycle thief, are disappointingly handled, the banker by the highly coincidental recovery of a long-lost deed and the bully by being left to enjoy his spoils. The plot relies largely on coincidence and happenstance, resulting in a lightweight fantasy snack that will only whet fans’ appetites for a more substantial read. JMD

**LAWLOR, LAURIE**  *Wind on the River: A Story of the Civil War*. Jamestown Publishers, 2000 156p  illus. with photographs (Jamestown’s American Portraits)  
Paper ed. ISBN 0-8092-0624-2  $5.95  
Ad  Gr. 4-7

Wisler, G. Clifton  *All for Texas: A Story of Texas Liberation*. Jamestown Publishers, 2000 140p  (Jamestown’s American Portraits)  
Paper ed. ISBN 0-8092-0629-3  $5.95  
Ad  Gr. 4-7

Lest any publisher miss the boat (or wagon train or iron horse) and find itself stranded without an American historical fiction series, Jamestown’s American Portraits now joins the posse. *Texas* gets off to a sluggish start, with teen narrator Jeff’s intimate, down-homey voice pleasantly delivering a thinly disguised spate of background information concerning the tangled politics of American and Mexican
claims on Texas soil leading up to armed confrontations in the 1830s. Once Jeff and a friend join their fathers at Fort Defiance and the bullets begin to fly, though, there's action aplenty—and a balanced examination of the naïve idealism and greedy land-grabbing of various American "liberators," as well as the ruthless offense of Santa Anna and the ambivalent stance of many Tejano ranchers throughout the war-torn area. Lawlor's tale begins better, with a sharply-drawn portrayal of opportunistic Reb Griff, who signs on with the Yankees in order to win release from a prison camp. Stationed in the Dakota Territory to protect American interests from Indian marauders, Griff keeps an eye open for an opportunity to escape to gold fields rumored to be nearly. Lawlor's take on the Native Americans' struggle to retain their land, however, is pure B-Western matinee fare, with the Indians often undifferentiated by tribe and subject to the most shopworn stereotyping ("Lakota women and men in their finery wore fringe, beads, feathers, buffalo robes—anything that hung, shone, and fluttered"; "The ravine swarmed with half-naked, yipping, barking, fantastically painted warriors"). There is little here to lure an audience away from Dear America, and only the most voracious devotees of historical fiction series will be enticed. EB

Reviewed from galleys

Claidi aids the escape of imprisoned handsome stranger Nemian and then journeys with him outside the protected walls of the House, where she is a slave, and into the Waste. Her encounters with a wide variety of cultural groups open her eyes to the limits and lies of the House and to the varied possibilities now available to her, including, she believes, a life with Nemian. Nemian, however, is revealed as a deceiver (he is already married, and he woos Claidi only to gain her confidence, fulfill the Law, and save his own skin), and Claidi finds herself trapped in the Wolf Tower of the title. Lee is a remarkable fantasy writer with a long history of interesting plots and complex female characters; unfortunately, this title has neither. Claidi's story is related through her journal, in which she directly addresses an imaginary reader, and while this adds a certain immediacy to the narrative, the journal entries are clumsily handled. The action takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where slavery is commonplace and blind adherence to law and ritual rule day-to-day activities. The events that make up the plot are individually intriguing, but they never coalesce into a unified whole. Claidi has possibilities for growth, especially in situations where she is endangered, but those possibilities remain unexplored in favor of her being saved by a dashing desert bandit. (These last-minute rescues hearken back to images of helpless maidens that modern fantasy has so long abjured.) The conclusion is simplistic and far-fetched, even given the flexible parameters of fantasy. Lee obviously knows how to put words together, but in this case the elements they depict remain discrete and undeveloped. JMD

LESTER, MIKE A Is for Salad; written and illus. by Mike Lester. Putnam, 2000 32p

The alphabet's been a vehicle for a lot of artistic ventures of late, but Lester manages both to take the alphabet book in a new direction and to keep it well within
the kid-appealing range. The text is simple, if rather perplexing in isolation: "A is for salad. B is for Viking. C is for hot dog." What makes this a rib-tickler, however, is the game played out between the text and the pictures: no, A isn’t for salad, it’s for the Alligator in the picture who’s stuffing the greens into his face; B shows a Beaver looking slightly oppressed by his horned Viking helmet; C offers a striped Cat chowing down on a ball-park special. The absurdity continues with some occasional textual variations ("H is for pizza . . . I think") and one of the most original approaches to X ever seen ("X and Y are not important letters. Never use them"). Lester’s artwork takes the joke and runs: the “examples” are colored linocuts, with black lines that run to the vigor of woodcuts and the delicacy of dry-brush technique, and intense colors leavened by extensive white space and big print in friendly informal type. The subject critters (they’re all critters) have a beady-eyed and offbeat anthropomorphism reminiscent of “The Far Side,” and Lester often gets even more playful with artistic details (the horse that’s really for H is eating the pizza, and its Appaloosa spots appear in the shape of mushroom and pepperoni). The closing endpapers provide a key to the real subjects ("A is also for alligator," it says demurely), but the occasional guessing game just adds additional entertainment. You might want to tip the joke from the start for some audiences if you think the book’s initial poker face will confuse them, but the joys of “I know better than you” correction and of sheer loopiness combine to make this a winning crazy-salad abecedary. DS


The three “chapters” of this picture book, each tackling a different concept, are connected by way of a rather disaffected-looking cat, Nini, who appears in the background of the first story ("All Week Long") and the title story, and is the focus of the middle story ("Nini’s Year"). Cumulatively, these pieces reinforce colors, days of the week, numbers, and seasons with clear, original examples ("Black shoes on Monday. Red shoes on Tuesday. Blue shoes on Wednesday . . . "). Lobel’s watercolor and gouache illustrations have a Van Gogh-ish energy even in the near-monochromatic illustrations of color concepts; each of these striking scenes focuses the viewer’s eye on key items, like the red shoes worn on Tuesday in “All Week Long” or the six pelicans dozing in “One Lighthouse, One Moon.” The combination of visual variety and effective patterns (leavened by some free-associative logic) should make this popular with preschoolers and those who read with them. FK


The year 1896 brings a terrible drought to the Dakota territory, but twelve-year-old Rachel is still reluctant to leave her widowed father and accompany her little brother, John Wesley, on a visit to her aunt in Savannah. Savannah has its revelations, however, including paintings by and letters from Rachel’s late mother, which give Rachel more understanding of her family; a more startling revelation comes when her father arrives to take his children home and announces that he’s getting remarried. Rachel was fond of Miss Burke as a teacher, but she’s adamantly op-
posed to her becoming a part of the family. To ensure that doesn’t happen, Rachel
sets her father’s fiancée to the dirtiest, most dangerous, and hopefully most dis-
couraging farm tasks—until a near-tragedy moves Rachel from self-centeredness
to repentance. The characters here are stock historical fiction denizens (there’s the
kind but feisty schoolmarm, the urbane suffragette aunt, and even the devoted
Irish servants), and the story’s development is predictable. There’s nonetheless a
cozy security in the formula and an easy readability to Love’s style, and the evoca-
tion of Dakota farm life will appeal to would-be sons and daughters of the prairie.

Maitland, Barbara  
*Moo in the Morning;* illus. by Andrew Kulman.  
Farrar, 2000  [26p]  
ISBN 0-374-35038-8  $16.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

Mom has had her fill of “buses going BBLSH! and cars going VROOM!” and all
the “whirring, crunching, screeching” city sounds that assault them early in the
morning, so she and her child narrator are off to visit Uncle Jack out in the coun-
try. There they promptly discover that the cacophony of livestock, rumbling trac-
tors, and the “banging” and “slamming” of these early-rising farmers rivals the
worst noise the city has to offer: out here it’s “tweety, and quacky, and clucky, and
MOOEY early in the morning.” With suitcases piled in the back of the car, they’re
back on the road to home, sweet home in “the big, bright, busy, quiet city.” The
wealth of onomatopoeic delights that fairly command listeners to chirp along lend
fresh charm to this rollicking spin on the Country Mouse, City Mouse dilemma;
Kulman’s sleek country- and cityscapes slyly suggest that the boxy, heavy-bot-
tomed high-rise apartments of the opening and closing spreads are havens of sta-
bility and peace from dizzying undulation of both urban streets and pastoral hills.
Bedtime stories are a dime a dozen—try this as a wake-me-up instead.

Many, Paul  
*My Life, Take Two.*  
Walker, 2000  [192p]  
ISBN 0-8027-8708-8  $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Sixteen-year-old Neal Thackeray is so conditioned to the belief that his future
path includes an MBA and a two-salary marriage with longtime girlfriend Emily
that he can’t even conceive of an alternative. He doesn’t consciously realize he’s
boxed in; all he feels is a vague sense of unease, a dread for his predestined (at least
according to Emily) future. A documentary filmmaking class stirs the embers of
Neal’s grief at his father’s death six years ago, and a serendipitous encounter with a
childhood acquaintance, Claire, and her artist mother brings back forgotten memo-
ries and presents him with an alternative to his foregone future. Narrator Neal is
a classic underachiever: creative, introspective, and sensitive, he blocks out the
world simply by not engaging with it. His policy of non-engagement frustrates his
mother and girlfriend, but his emotional wall is breached by Claire and her mat-
ter-of-fact belief that the artistic life is one worth living. Text from Neal’s story-
boards for his film project is scattered throughout, and the directions provide a
vivid sense of place that pervades the novel. Many’s insights into the creative
process of one lonely, misunderstood teenager are poignant; unfortunately, char-
acterization is flat. Neal is credible as a confused and unencouraged artist in search
of an outlet, but secondary characters—Emily, Claire, Neal’s boss—have little depth,
acting merely as mile-markers on Neal's journey of discovery. His realization that he can pursue a life as an artist/filmmaker is lengthily detailed in the final fourth of the book, and in the final pages it is unfortunately told more than shown. While this title lacks the humor of the author's previous work (*These Are the Rules*, BCCB 4/97), readers will still applaud Neal's taking control of his own future. JMD

**MARRIN, ALBERT**  *Sitting Bull and His World.* Dutton, 2000  246p  illus. with photographs  ISBN 0-525-45944-8  $27.50  R  Gr. 6 up

Historian Marrin turns his hand to a biography of Sitting Bull, chief and hero of the Hunkpapa. Marrin is careful to explain the difficulties of extracting truth from context, and he gives a sense of the cultural mindset, both of the white man and the Indian, that influenced the decisions and events of Sitting Bull's life. This is not just a thoughtful biography of a legendary warrior, however; this is a record of the genocidal intent of the American government toward the "Indian problem." Sitting Bull's life spans nearly two-thirds of the nineteenth century (1831–1890) and covers a time of enormous conflict and transition in American history. The book does not stint on the details of Indian violence against white settlers and soldiers, but it is evident that broken treaties and other provocations are acts of war that require a response. Descriptions of battles, massacres, and tragedies point out the overwhelming number of government forces and the dwindling might of the Indian nations. The sad inevitability of the Indians' fate is obvious throughout: a people dependent on the promises of an ever-expanding government motivated by land-lust is doomed. Captioned hotos (often sans dates or credits), extensive notes, and a lengthy bibliography are included. JMD


Fans of *Tiny's Bath* (BCCB 4/99), beware... it is time for humongous pooch Tiny to take a trip to the library. After gathering the necessary materials (library card, wagon), Tiny and his owner take off for their destination, only to find that Tiny is not allowed inside. Of what use is Tiny now? Readers find out when Tiny's brute strength is necessary to haul the young narrator's choices back home. Davis' vibrant, clear illustrations complement Meister's short, simple sentences, allowing beginning readers to use picture clues to decode meaning. As with the author's other installments in the Tiny series, this offers new readers an amusing visual joke in Tiny's size and an appealingly close relationship between dog and boy. Though Meister's story misses the opportunity for dramatic tension (just what kind of mischief might Tiny get into unattended outside the library?), fans of the previous books will want to check this one out. EAB

**NIXON, JOAN LOWERY**  *Nobody's There.* Delacorte, 2000  200p  ISBN 0-385-32567-3  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 5-8

In this mystery/problem novel, teen Abbie Thompson acts out her feelings about her father's desertion of the family by throwing a rock through his girlfriend's window and finds herself sentenced by a well-meaning judge to community service in the form of regular after-school visits with a senior citizen. However, in-
stead of the docile granny Abbie assumed she’d be drinking tea with, her Mrs. Merkel turns out to be a stubborn, cynical, intelligent woman who has decided to take a bite out of crime and who treats Abbie as her chauffeur, taking her on outings that turn into stakeouts. Inevitably Abbie ends by trying to figure out which of the shady citizens of Buckler conked old Mrs. Merkel on the head and stole a couple of valuable antiques. Unfortunately, this series-worthy pair of detectives is surrounded by cardboard characters out of an old-style Stratemeyer syndicate mystery, including cops who say things like “We have to catch some mean, no-good crooks who are victimizing people in Buckler.” Attempts to bring the plot up to date (as when Abbie and a friend discuss “an Internet review of a new film they both wanted to see”) are unconvincing; the pop psychologizing is more plausible but too constant. However, fans of series mysteries and the lesser Judy Blumes may appreciate this hybrid; others will join the crooks in asking, “Just who are you supposed to be? Nancy Drew?” FK

OPPEL, KENNETH Peg and the Whale; illus. by Terry Widener. Simon, 2000 [34p]
ISBN 0-689-82423-8 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

By the ripe old age of seven, Peg has so far mastered the art of angling that the only fish left to catch is a whale. Undeterred by her father’s argument that a whale is a mammal (“If it swims and spends more time in the water than out, it’s a fish. And I’m going to catch me one”), she signs onto the whaler Viper and heads off to Labrador with a mean crew under first mate Bart Maxwell, who could “curse and spit better than all the others put together.” Bart’s jealous to boot, and when Peg hooks a whale and ties herself to the mast to reel the big one in, Bart cuts her ropes and sends her off on a Nantucket sleigh ride that lands her in the belly of the beast. Undaunted by a little darkness and slime, Peg complacently makes herself at home, feasting on the whale’s undigested dinner, fashioning a ladder of broken spars and pirate bones to climb out the blowhole, and riding her catch back to her parents. Widener’s acrylics perfectly complement Oppel’s deadpan humor. Round, doll-like Peg is dwarfed by the Viper’s crew with their bulging muscles and evil slit-eyes and reduced to little more than a dot on the whale’s massive ebony bulk, but she nonetheless dominates each spread with her fear-naught expression, resolute stance, and yellow rain slicker as bright as optimism itself. Gather up your tall-tale lovers—this one’s bound to make a splash. EB

OUGHTON, JERRIE Perfect Family. Houghton, 2000 199p
ISBN 0-395-98668-0 $15.00

This is a story about coming of age in a small southern town in the 1950s, where, according to Welcome O’Neal, “gossip worked inside us teenagers, making us fear, according to the old adage, but for the grace of God, there we went.” And so she goes, and lives to tell the tale. Welcome’s retrospective narration takes a look back to the prom at the end of her sophomore year, and through the summer that she meets and falls in love with Nicholas Canton, a sweet-talking college boy with a football scholarship. After breaking up with Nicholas and then seeing him again at a game, Welcome becomes pregnant, briefly considers having an abortion, and then moves downstate to stay with relatives until the baby comes. Period atmosphere is created largely through allusions to fads like roller-skating waitresses;
newsmakers like Elvis, James Dean, and Rosa Parks; and the story of a woman who was a POW in the Philippines during World War II. This last woman (who bore twins during her incarceration) is one of an unlikely but inspiring string of female role models—black and white—who support and inspire Welcome, who has vague dreams of following in the footsteps of her own female pediatrician. However, the gap between the end of Part II of the novel (when Welcome decides it would be best for her to go back to school and leave her baby with her childless aunt and uncle) and Part III (which consists of an invitation to Welcome’s graduation from medical school) is hard to bridge given the social attitudes documented by the novel and the financial situation of Welcome’s family. Although this uneven novel’s desire to inspire sometimes overpowers its realism, readers will come away with some sense of how this age-old dilemma played out at a specific point in time.


In this adaptation of a tale from Bierhorst’s The Monkey's Haircut and Other Stories (BCCB 3/86), Chac, “the great lord who made rain,” decides he needs a servant. He dives down to the forest to kidnap one, but “Chac didn’t know that the boy he’d stolen rarely did what he was told.” The boy is more trouble than help: he digs a hole in the sky, cuts down Chac’s prize corn stalk, and mistakenly chases away his master’s dinner guests. When the boy steals the god’s magical tools, the theft results in a terrible storm, and Chac is so irritated that he sends the boy back home. Rockwell’s retelling is wordy and overexplanatory, resulting in a slow pace that doesn’t suit the trickster-like nature of the tale. The line-and-watercolor illustrations feature smooth geometric shapes, candy colors, and stylized figures that bear more resemblance to Tomie dePaola than to Mayan art. The compositions are sometimes cluttered, and the kewpie-doll expressions of the boy and Peter Max-ian demeanor of the rain god are disconcertingly modern. Rockwell’s opening note explains the nature of Mayan “chacs,” her interest in Mayan culture, and her artistic adaptation of Mayan motifs. A short list of references and a source note are included. Despite some drawbacks, this is an accessible portal to Mayan mythology, and a capable reader-aloud should be able to bring it to reasonable life.


Against the backdrop of revolutionary activity near colonial Williamsburg, fourteen-year-old Samantha “Sam” Byrd leads her own revolution against convention with her refusal to enjoy domestic tasks over hunting or navigating and her insistence on wearing breeches instead of dresses. When Samantha’s spirit of adventure inadvertently puts her brother Henry in the hands of the British, she secretly joins a privateering effort to rescue him, under the guise of her identical twin, timid brother James. Despite their characters’ anachronistic sensibilities, the Roops spin a readable series yarn (see also reviews under Lawlor, above) full of historical
detail and moral dilemmas. Readers may, however, be confused at the dissonance between Samantha’s tendency toward pacific thoughts (“If only we could get along, she thought”) and her violent actions (“In her anger she had raised her gun against someone”). Nevertheless, Sam’s fiery temper and passionate loyalty to her family will provoke discussion over anger, justice, and guns. EAB

RUBY, LOIS Soon Be Free. Simon, 2000 [320p]
ISBN 0-689-83266-4 $17.00
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8
Dana Shannon has scarcely recovered from the thrilling shock of finding the bones of runaway slave Lizbet Charles behind the wall of the house her parents renovated for a bed-and-breakfast (Steal Away Home, BCCB 2/95); now she again enlists the help of her junior-high friends—notably her possible love interest, Mike—to help solve a second related mystery concerning the house’s architect, James Baylor Weaver, and his relationship to the runaway. Dana’s narration of her encounters with nefarious guests bent on discovering a secret about Weaver’s life alternates with chapters following Weaver’s experiences as, at thirteen, he ventures into Kentucky to spirit Miz Lizbet’s relatives North to freedom. As the tales converge, it gradually becomes clear that they are linked not only through Miz Lizbet, but also through a lost treaty that returns land to the Delaware Indians. Much of Dana’s adventure relies on the oft-used let’s-not-tell-the-adults-just-yet premise, and the sassy junior-high levity of her contemporary voice occasionally interferes with the more serious historic plot. Weaver’s trek is launched with a lack of planning that defies credibility, and the sudden decision of his friend to accompany him adds little to an already overloaded storyline. Ruby does have a remarkable knack for keeping the two tales in delicate balance, though, and the tension never eases until the slaves get their freedom, the Delaware get their restitution, Weaver gets his career, and Dana gets Mike. Readers who enjoyed Steal Away Home will definitely stick around for this happy ending. EB

ISBN 0-8234-1492-2 $18.95 Ad Gr. 7-10
Adaptation of construction materials, innovations in access to building services, and stylistic swings are explored in this survey of nineteenth and twentieth-century highrise architecture. Severance narrows his focus to a few of Chicago and New York’s most prestigious innovators and architectural firms, stressing that the developments that made modern skyscrapers possible involved teams of inventors, engineers, financiers, material handlers, and laborers, not just the visionary at the drawing board. As in any survey, many “favorites” are overlooked; in this case, so are virtually all buildings beyond Severance’s designated urban hot spots, until a few international buildings are examined in the last chapter. Also missing is discussion of economic pressures to build “up” rather than “out.” (Architect Philip Johnson’s provocative quote, “There is no economic need to build skyscrapers anywhere” opens the book but never receives serious support or challenge.) Crisp black-and-white photos of the giants, often captured at gloriously dizzying angles, are well selected, but they too frequently appear on pages removed from textual discussion. Despite these drawbacks, readers who train their eyes on the sidewalks rather than the skies may well be induced to look up and ponder the complexity of
Jenna dreams about jingle dancing at the upcoming pow-wow, but she doesn’t have enough jingles (tin cones that “sing” with each bounce-step) for her dress. Visits to her female friends and relations solve her problem, as the women lend Jenna the necessary jingles from their own regalia. Unable to dance at the pow-wow, each woman requests that Jenna dance for her, and Jenna does: “for Great-aunt Sis, whose legs ached, . . . for Mrs. Scott, who sold fry bread, . . . for Elizabeth, who worked on her big case, . . . and for Grandma Wolfe, who warmed like Sun.”

This gently messagey family story is structured along the lines of a traditional tale, with Jenna as hero traveling to the four directions to gain her prize. The language, however, is stilted and somewhat formal, slowing the already deliberate pace. Watercolor illustrations show a modern Jenna and her loving circle of women in typical middle-class American housing, occasionally accented with a variety of American Indian art, such as baskets, moccasins, and the dance regalia itself. The human figures are disproportional (which is especially disappointing in the concluding images of Jenna dancing) and the compositions are somewhat static; still, the faces of the characters are often expressive and Jenna herself is a winning personality. Smith explains the importance of traditional dance regalia in an extensive author’s note. A short glossary is included. JMD

Henry begins his usual nighttime readaloud to his Uncle Richard, but he finds that the book, The Story of the Search for the Story, is largely blank. The next day, Henry goes in search of the book, finding first an ad for a main character (whom he seems to become) and then various authors (and one character) who waylay him on his trip to the library; once at the library (supervised by Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Cervantes), Henry discovers that the story (and his world) have gone blank because the censors are trying to end it. With the help of Franz Kafka and Salman Rushdie, Henry finds his way back and prepares to give his story life by telling it to his uncle. This is more a lengthy adult fable than a children’s story: the hero and narration are too youthful for young readers familiar with the writers in question, and the plot doesn’t offer much to those that aren’t; the inclusion of the character of Pippi Longstocking among the authors seems a bit odd as well. Though it’s purposive, the censorship plot thread is more effective, giving the story drama and a point that readers will understand. There’s a dark smokiness and an expressionistic flavor to the artwork, with its velvet-textured dabs of paint, that renders the scenery otherworldly while giving a certain sharp-edged caricature to the figures (Isak Dinesen, clearly represented in her skeletal final years, is downright spooky). Possessed of little audience appeal despite an abundance of good intentions, this could nonetheless be employed to useful effect in a larger curricular context. Biographies of the authors appearing in the story are appended. DS

Splear, who grew up in a tenant farming family in the early 1900s, recalls the cycle of activities and responsibilities that marked the seasons of the agricultural year. Each double spread focuses on a particular task, item, or event—potato planting, the kitchen stove, threshing day—that is depicted in an impressionistic casein painting and described in a few brief paragraphs on the facing page. The prose is quiet and informal (“My sisters and I were unhappy when butchering time came around in the late fall. We hated to think of the pigs and chickens being killed, even though we knew all along that they were being raised for food”), but somewhat slow-moving. Stark’s handsome illustrations and spot art are as sun-dappled (and probably romanticized) as a happy memory, but they nonetheless provide as much information as the accompanying text. Readers with a keenly developed interest in the “good old days” may enjoy meandering through Splear’s account in a single sitting; more casual browsers will prefer to select favorite scenes and learn the family history behind them. EB


See this month’s Big Picture, p. 387, for review.


Hold on to your umbrellas as you prepare for a downpour with Stojic’s sensory tribute to the arrival of rain in an arid climate. The text begins with the earth’s cry for rain (“It was hot. Everything was hot and dry. The red soil was hot and dry and cracked”) and moves onto the animals’ anticipation of its arrival (“A porcupine sniffed around. ‘It’s time,’ she whispered. ‘The rain is coming! I can smell it. I must tell the zebras’”). As clues to the coming storm (lightning, thunder, raindrops) accumulate, each animal uses a different sense—sight, sound, touch, or taste—to detect the coming water. Hot reds and yellows dominate the pages until the dark storm clouds fill the clear sky; the rhythmic blue strokes are most effective as the storm reaches its height (“It rained and it rained and it rained. It rained until every river gushed and gurgled. It rained until every water hole was full”) with the text placement conveying the strength of the storm. Broad swaths of color bleed off the paper, adding to the drama. Though Stojic’s lack of attention to fine detail occasionally detracts from the overall dramatic effect of the book, with animals sometimes appearing two-dimensional and awkward, the broad sweeping style supports the tenor of her story. This evocation of precipitation will elicit creative responses and rambunctious antics from the storytime crowd. EAB


“I hate Mad Dog McGraw!” exclaims the young narrator about the scourge of the neighborhood, and he’s got good reason: “He barks like crazy, and he chases...
me. . . . He is one mean dog.” Our protagonist tries to avoid trouble, but walking on stilts only works till he falls (“Mad Dog McGraw chases me home. I think I hear him laughing in between his barks”), the umbrella-powered flight fails when the wind quits (“Mad Dog McGraw chases me home. I’m pretty sure he’s laughing again”), and the hastily acquired cat, named Bait, has the temerity to make friends with Mad Dog (“This time I know he’s laughing”). While it’s no surprise that all Mad Dog really wants is a little affection and he turns into the narrator’s friend, Uhlberg’s text hits just the right notes: it’s fanciful enough to be funny but also rueful enough to be recognizable as a perennial kid dilemma. The careful structure, with repetition and variation in the plainspoken sentences, will pull listeners right into the story. The mixed-media illustrations are sharp-edged and hip while remaining upbeat and viewer-friendly: tropical-hued backgrounds provide color while the cloth and paper collage that compose the figures offer contrasting textures and lively patterns. The protagonist is an offbeat cutie, with airplane-wing ears and a bristly red crewcut represented by a few strands sticking straight up; McGraw is a gimlet-eyed mutt bristling with spiky hair and teeth who turns it all into a rough-and-tumble charm when rapprochement is achieved. Real-life canine threats may not be so easily tamed, but this fictional resolution is as satisfying as a good belly rub. DS


Frances’ businesslike mother has little time for the past and other idle fancies, focusing her energies instead on the concrete gains of the future. This means that when Frances finds her great-great-grandmother’s diary, written in Icelandic, she knows better than to turn to her mother; when her grandmother admits defeat as well, Frances turns to the home for the aged in their small Icelandic-Canadian community, where she finds a longtime resident, Mr. Johansson, who’s prepared to translate. As Frances gets further into the diary, she’s more aware of some mysteries about her own past—what really did happen to her father, who supposedly disappeared on a camping trip before she was born?—and also more aware of the lingering of some ghosts and spirits from her own and Iceland’s history. This gently unfolds in a pace that’s a bit slow but appropriate to the lakefront summer languor, and Valgardson evocatively depicts the small Manitoba town where everybody knows everybody’s history. The conclusion is a little uneven, with the revelation about Frances’ father somewhat obvious (her mother lied to cover up her out-of-wedlock pregnancy) and her ancestor’s life slightly confusing. The allure of Frances’ search for secreted bits of the diary is undeniable, however, and Valgardson subtly but effectively weaves in the supernatural element, with ídons of Icelandic legend playing a significant part in the story. DS


Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

Orphaned Jenny Graymark Bekins travels all the way from China to “the eastern shore of America” to Graymark House, home of the grandfather she’s never met. Her Uncle Winston doesn’t believe her claim to be a Graymark, however, and instead of being welcomed like the long-lost relative she is, she is relegated to a
cellar room and life as an unpaid drudge. Jenny weeps over her lot, makes a friend
in Jingle (wicked Uncle Winston's "valley"), and manages to meet her invalid
grandfather. All ends well with the villains revealed and Jenny restored to her
proper place as a Graymark granddaughter. Wallace has a flair for physical detail
that places the reader squarely in the midst of the nineteenth-century action, whether
describing a crowded coach ride, a shadowy hall, or a manor-house kitchen. Char-
acters are somewhat stock, but even so they are capably drawn. Jenny's plight is a
compelling one; unfortunately she is a character more acted upon than acting, and
this makes her a rather uninteresting and passive heroine. The standard gothic
plot involves greed, deception, and attempted murder, and it should lend itself to
an exciting climax; instead, wicked Uncle Winston (who is not so wicked, and
who has discovered the plot against both his niece and his father) explains all in the
last two chapters, à la Hercule Poirot, robbing the dénouement of any tension.
Still, fans of the genre will happily follow Jenny's travails. JMD

WAUGH, SYLVIA  
*Space Race.* Delacorte, 2000  [224p]
ISBN 0-385-32766-8 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

To his neighbor and schoolmates in his British village of Belthrop, Thomas Derwent
is a normal eleven-year-old boy who lives with his normal father, Patrick. Secretly,
however, Thomas and Patrick are on an information-gathering mission from the
planet Ormingat, but when the news comes that it's time to return to Ormingat
and leave the home he's known for five years (and forgo his part of the youngest
shepherd in the Christmas play), Thomas is sad and angry. Things go downhill
from there: an accident separates Thomas and Patrick, sending Thomas into a
hospital with his bridges burned in Belthrop, no idea of Patrick's whereabouts,
and the knowledge that the spaceship is getting ready to leave shortly with or
without his presence; all he can do is utter the few Ormingat words he knows in
the hopes that they will bring the attention of someone who can put the situation
right. The book starts off promisingly, with Waugh reprising the resonant "strangers
among us" theme she employed in *The Mennyms* (BCCB 5/94) but with a differ-
ent approach; the suspense is effective and the general absence of villainy warming.
The plot does too much veering for too little reason, however. Patrick's reduction
to spaceship-tiny size at the accident seems to happen only to separate him from
his son (and there's even less explanation for his return to normal size), and the
narrative can't seem to decide if it truly wants Thomas to stay or to go (his father's
thought that "this was not a world he wished his son to grow up in. Ormingat
was, in every meaning of the world, a much, much fairer place" is a particular
surprise, especially in light of the book's silence about life on Ormingat). None-
theless, the premise is unusual enough to attract those with a taste for softer-edged
sci-fi. DS

WELLS, ROSEMARY  
*Emily's First 100 Days of School,* written and illus. by Rose-
mary Wells. Hyperion, 2000  [56p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-7868-2443-3 $17.49
Reviewed from galleys

Emily Bunny relates details about her first one hundred days at school, including
learning new "number friends" every day, meeting new people, and participating
in a multitude of activities. The title is a tad misleading, as much of what Emily relates has to do with events outside of school, but no matter—her play-by-play commentary is amusing and child-centered. The brief text for each day is a mini-story, often containing both humor and pathos, and, while not equally successful in communicating the numeric concept, they all have a ring of childlike truth to them. Ink and watercolor illustrations evince Wells' signature style: a bright palette, expressive, anthropomorphized characters, and a cleanly designed but varied layout that keeps the eye from boredom. Rectangular boxes in various sizes and colors against white pages contain assorted images of Emily, her school, home, family, friends, etc. along with Emily's running commentary. Full-page bleeds and compositions with thematically related borders (e.g., day 52 features Emily and Granny playing Hearts, with a border of fifty-two playing cards) add versatility to the layout and keep each spread unique. Nearly every number, most of which are set in a different colored box than the background, is presented in two ways: as the numeral itself (23) and as words (twenty-three). A stunning array of animal personalities, saturated colors, and just plain nifty stuff fills the pages with the sorts of particulars that youngsters will pore over with delight. This is not a counting book, exactly, but more of a fun-with-numbers book that should attract even math-phobic children. The story of Emily's one hundred days is wholesome and heartening, and a strong sense of family and community is indicated unobtrusively but effectively. JMD

Wisler, G. Clifton All for Texas: A Story of Texas Liberation.

See Lawlor, p. 408, for review.


In this reimagining of the familiar nursery rhyme, Winter uses her ability for creating and combining winning visual elements to excellent effect. The text (with rebus illustrations taking the place of important nouns) is on the verso page while Jack's house is on the recto; cutaway views of the house allow the viewer to see inside and to keep track of the ongoing action. While the familiar text is repetitive and has distinct dullness possibilities, Winters' acrylic interpretation adds new life to this old rhyme with a refreshing palette and a jolly tone. Her expressive characters act out the plot for the benefit of the viewer and give a sense of theater to the compositions (Jack looks over his shoulder at the viewer from the very first page, thus drawing the viewer effortlessly into the mise en scène). Storytimes and beginning readers will benefit from Winter's slightly askew view of this old tale. JMD


A little boy comments on the busy morning minutes when he and his parents are getting ready for their day. The boy is the first one awake, and he notes that outside his window "a bee eats breakfast in a big red flower," while his parents' alarm clock ("BUZZZZbuzzzBUZZZZbuzzz Mommy and Daddy snore") announces
that it’s morning. From the buzzing of “Daddy’s silver razor” to the buzzing of the gardener, who “mows grass across the street,” to the buzz of the blender as it whips up a banana shake, the little boy contentedly organizes his day around familiar morning sounds. The end circles back to the beginning as the boy kisses Grandma hello and Mommy goodbye “so she can fly BUZZ outside like a busy bee.” Chodos-Irvine’s use of various print-making techniques results in illustrations that are strongly geometric and graphically clean, in springtime colors that suit the cheerful tone of the text. The humor in both text and pictures contributes to the light-hearted atmosphere, and the gentle predictability of the chronology of events is reassuring. Participatory buzzing is optional. JMD

YOLEN, JANE  Queen’s Own Fool: A Novel of Mary Queen of Scots; by Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris.  Philomel, 2000  390p
ISBN 0-399-23380-6  $19.99  Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-12

Nicola is traveling with her uncle’s troupe of entertainers when she comes to the attention of the young queen of France (known to history as Mary, Queen of Scots), who takes the girl into her service as a jester. Though enchanted by the queen and royal life, Nicola struggles with the onerous demands of court etiquette and the politics that drive the French court (and the religious civil war that leaves Huguenots dead in the castle courtyard). Upon the early death of King Francis, Nicola accompanies Mary to Scotland and assists her through her queenly travails there—the struggle to survive John Knox’s disapproval, the terrible marriage with Darnley, the murder of Mary’s secretary David Riccio (a favored friend of Nicola), the alliance with Bothwell, abdication, imprisonment and escape, ending when Mary sends Nicola back to France as she herself travels to England. Nicola is a serviceable character and a useful storytelling device, since her distance and unfamiliarity with custom allow for plausible explanation and outsider perspective. The real heroine here, however, is Mary: Yolen and Harris paint a full-blooded and admiring portrait of a high-spirited and charismatic woman; their decision to treat her as largely innocent of the plots that involved her gives her character moral rectitude but at the expense of statesmanship and perspicacity, which makes her a bit on the lightweight side as a queen but a compelling and romantic figure. Sixteenth-century court and political life is well evoked without losing the story in the framework (readers familiar with the background will have an easier time, but there’s also drama enough to keep novices involved), and the events will provide all the pageantry and emotion that royal-watchers require. Brief authors’ notes testify to Nicola’s reality and provide a précis of Mary’s imprisonment and execution in England, but readers looking to discover the fates of the other characters will have to search on their own. DS
SUBJECT AND USE INDEX

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

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