PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
"In the first picture book that the Caldecott Honor artist has both written and illustrated, a witty green narrator describes [his] dramatic transformation from idol in Egypt to a captive curiosity in Napoleon's France. A singular voice and impeccable visual pacing make this character's story one of the most memorable of the year." — Starred review & a Best Book '99 / Publishers Weekly

“A Nile crocodile is suddenly set upon by 'bozos with funny hats,' who at the behest of Napoleon cart him off to a Parisian fountain for public display. Soon he is the 'Toast of the Tuileries,' but [then] he hears that he's slated to become a pie... Crocodile tells his tale in a disingenuous tone; the illustrations [are] grand.”

— Pointer review / Kirkus Reviews

All ages. $15.95Tr (0-06-205168-7); $15.89Lb (0-06-205199-7)
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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.
Before young adult fiction established itself as a genre, gothic romance novels were a reading staple of adolescent girls. The plots were, to put it kindly, predictable: a young woman (preferably an orphan) with no visible means of support arrives to stay in an old mansion (family or otherwise, depending on whether she is a poor relation or governess) far from wherever it is she comes from, hoping that, at last, she has found sanctuary. Ah, but it is not to be, for the elegant/faded/respectable facade of the manor hides a terrible secret/scandal/family curse, and it is only after the beautiful-and-brave heroine hair-raisingly escapes from potentially tragic accidents, develops suspicions about the dark and brooding lord/worthy stableman/bastard son of the manor, witnesses the unexplainable, and discovers the truth that it (the secret/scandal/family curse) is laid to rest. Along the way the heroine finds true love and the promise of a smoldering (and respectable, since she marries immediately) sex life. Which brings us to this month’s Big Picture.

Orphan Judith Sparrow comes to the town of Whispers, South Carolina, knowing little of the uncle who has agreed to give her a home. What she does know is that the color green is strictly prohibited in her uncle’s house, but Judith cannot bear to part with a silk frame in the forbidden color that holds a photograph of her late mother. She smuggles it into her room and hides it in the bottom of her trunk, inside her closet.

Life at her Uncle Geoffrey’s is more than she dared hope—the house is fine, her uncle kind, and the cook, Mrs. Hastings, warm and welcoming. Judith gets a job at a local milliner’s shop trimming hats, and she meets the handsome miller’s son Zeke Carey, who shows a good deal of interest in her. At the milliner’s shop Judith hears about Jade Green, a young woman taken in by Judith’s uncle some years before. Tragically, Jade killed herself under mysterious circumstances (she chopped off her own hand with a meat cleaver and bled to death) and Uncle Geoffrey and Mrs. Hastings still mourn her loss. This lurid tale explains the prohibition of green, Jade’s favorite color, in the Sparrow household. But gnawing guilt (for having secreted the forbidden color in her trunk) and unexplained incidents (noises in the closet, photographs that change images) prey on Judith’s mind, and begin to make her doubt her own sanity.

Welcome to young adult southern gothic, aka “Hush, Hush, Sweet Judith.” Naylor knows her genre and plays it for every histrionic note. Judith’s mother died in a madhouse and Judith fears the same fate; her older, dissipated cousin Charles has “rooms in town” so he can dally with “ladies of the night”; and there is rising tension regarding the disposition of the Sparrow family fortune now that there is another possible heir (Judith). But these comparatively mundane problems pale beside the supernatural goings-on. That green frame Judith brought
into the house has awakened the ghost of Jade, or rather, it has awakened her severed hand: "I gasped in horror, and my breath stopped. For there on my rug lay a hand, a human hand. A girl's right hand, detached from arm and body. . . . I could only stare at the ghastly spectacle—the limp, white fingers, the delicate wrist, and then, the jagged stump on which dried blood was visible, the broken connection of bone and muscle and skin. . . ." Jade's hand skitters around the mansion, playing the piano, juggling cleavers, locking doors, and generally terrorizing Judith until the night of a furious hurricane, when the vengeful hand saves Judith from the lecherous advances of cousin Charles, who, it is revealed, murdered Jade when she refused to submit to his lustful appetites.

Judith tells her own story in the prim-but-passionate style of an old-fashioned romance heroine ("By the time Zeke broke in, would I be ravished, losing not only my honor but possibly my life?"), and there is a subtle tongue-in-cheek flavor to the prose. It is clear Naylor can find her way blindfolded through the turns of this just slightly decadent, barely risqué plot, and she does so with glee and a great deal of authorial control. Her restraint is admirable, for just when you think she's going over the top, she draws back and instead offers a wholesome picnic by the sea and a first kiss "as delicious as any tea cake."

Staying true to gothic form, the small cast of characters are developed just enough to keep them from being flat without slowing down the trajectory of the swiftly building plot. Naylor gets some heart-thumping shock value out of the genuinely creepy appearance of the detached hand, leading up to its debut with scratching sounds in the night, movement caught out of the corner of the eye, something that brushes the face in the dark, and other hints that things aren't quite right. The author uses her late nineteenth-century south-by-the-sea setting to good advantage, combining a foreshadowed hurricane with the final confrontation between murdering cad and (ghost hand of) murdered maiden in a roaring blast of wind, rain, and vengeance that is positively operatic. Judith flees the rising flood with Zeke on "the last wagon to leave Whispers" with one final nightmare image for the road: "I turned in my seat, my eyes riveted upon the hand. Down it came, lower, then lower still, until it reached the swirling water and disappeared. Forever."

No problematic inexplicable adolescent angst here. This is unapologetic, craftily constructed romantic melodrama, complete with hurricanes, stolen kisses, bloodstained steps, and echoes of Mr. Fox. I hope Naylor had as much fun writing it as young adults are going to have reading it. (Imprint information appears on p. 217.)

Janice M. Del Negro, Editor
NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE


Seventeen poems—free verse and shaped—explore and celebrate the sense of touch. Most center on common childhood experiences, from a luxurious soak in a hot bath ("Water Surrounding My Forehead/ Water Making A Liquid Crown/ Water Covering Into My Ears") to the sated discomfort of a post-Thanksgiving feast ("I Always End Up On The Floor: My Belly/ Too Full To Stay In Front Of The Game, My Belly/ Too Full To Turn Onto My Back"). Desimini’s photos and mixed-media collages don’t quite achieve the sparkle and whimsy of Love Letters (BCCB 3/97). Double spreads that take advantage of long horizontal pages to exaggerate the composition are most successful (a girl submerged in bubbles like a foamy mummy in a sarcophagus; a girl supine under the dining table with a steaming pie balanced on her belly), but most are less imaginative than Desimini fans have come to expect. Despite these shortcomings, though, any reprise Adoff-Desimini collaboration is most welcome, and readers should greet the verses with a nod of recognition.  EB


Ellie is adjusting to new life at her grandfather’s after a sequence of family tragedies has left her figuratively—and literally—battered. She wants to make a new start ("Nobody’ll be feeling sorry for me ‘cause my daddy was a mean drunk or ‘cause Mama died of brain cancer"), but her father’s final act of violence can’t be hidden: it resulted in her losing three fingers on her left hand. She thinks she might be settling in nonetheless, finding a friend and acquiring a dog, but it soon looks like her father (running from the law) is seeking to reestablish contact; armed with her grandfather’s gun, Ellie is determined that any contact her father has with her will be his last. Antle sometimes lays things on too thickly (the intervention of Ellie’s mentally unstable grandmother at the last minute is contrived, for instance, and the recalled scenes of Ellie playing cards with her father lose some impact to their gothic tendencies), but this is a dark and intense story. It’s also a change of pace from more psychologically ambivalent treatments of the subject: Ellie’s father is at best despicable and pitiable rather than evil, and readers may, in fact, be a little sorry that Ellie doesn’t actually blow her old man away. The tension mounts effectively as Ellie attempts to ascertain just how close her father is while keeping the information from the adults, and the suspense will involve readers to the end of the concise narrative. The brevity and dramatic subject will commend this to reluctant readers as well as those just looking for the satisfying triumph of a girl who’s had it rough.  DS
The narrator recalls his childhood home, situated in a densely built-up town filled with winding streets. The courtyard of the house proves unsuitable for satisfactory childhood playtimes, so the boy is thrilled with the alteration of his world wrought by the acquisition of a bicycle. On his bike, he explores the town and the surrounding area, eventually finding a garden; this inspires him to revive the garden in his courtyard, which changes its spirit completely. This is a gentle and retrospective narrative that meanders much as the narrator meanders through the streets; it takes awhile to get to the titular garden, and its importance as a connection to the narrator's own son detracts from its importance as a plot element. The reds and greens of Bogacki's village are slightly muted, and the feathery brushstrokes keep the faces indistinct and emphasize tones and patterns instead, lending a dreamy distance to the artwork. There's a Peter Sis-like flavor to the resultant mood, enhanced by some illustrative compositions that contain additional text explaining or narrating the thumbnail images. Most audiences will find more impact in Stewart's _The Gardener_ (BCCB 10/97), but some youngsters may enjoy Bogacki's ethereal and thoughtful approach.


Seven tales from as many American Indian traditions are recast here as simple-to-produce plays: “Gluskabe and Old Man Winter” dramatizes how Gluskabe (culture hero of the Abenaki) brought warm weather back to his people; “The Cannibal Monster” tells of the origin of mosquitoes among the Tlingit peoples; the Snohomish tale of the origin of the stars is related in “Pushing Up the Sky”; the Zuni, Cheyenne, Ojibway, and Cherokee traditions are also represented. Despite a tendency towards monotonous pageant-speak, the plays should lend themselves easily to classroom performances. Bruchac includes suggestions for props, scenery, costumes, and production; stage directions are interspersed throughout the clearly formatted scripts. A brief note on the culture of origin (Abenaki, Zuni, Ojibway, etc.) for each story/play is given at the beginning of each chapter, and permission for performance and photocopying for nonprofit school or home productions is given on the copyright page. Simply composed full-page gouache paintings accompany each play, along with black-and-white pen and ink drawings. The impact of the often bland illustrations is uneven, but they do give some sense of possible staging and costume design. A bibliography is included.

**Buchholz, Quint**  _The Collector of Moments_; written and illus. by Quint Buchholz; tr. from the German by Peter F. Neumeyer. Farrar, 1999 48p ISBN 0-374-31520-5 $18.00 Ad Gr. 4-7

The young narrator is affectionately known as “The Professor” by Max the artist, who rents the room upstairs in the summers. The boy is fascinated with Max’s life, studio, and art, reveling in Max’s companionship and wild tales without ever getting a chance to see the pictures Max makes (“He had leaned a long row of pictures, back side facing out, against the walls of the studio”). One day Max departs,
leaving the pictures and accompanying notes for viewing in his absence; the boy finds further inspiration for his beloved violin music in the art but puts his music aside when Max chooses not to return. The text gets in its own way and impedes the lyrical story; though the language possesses a suitable quiet stillness, the text is just too wordy, interfering with the imaginative flow of the concept. The real story unfolds in the illustrations: Buchholz employs constricted sepia-toned images to depict the boy's view of reality, then switches to oversized color artwork for the gallery of Max's paintings. There's a silence and surrealism to those works that evoke Van Allsburg (particularly in the pencilly textures of the flat surfaces) and Magritte (in both the incongruous components and the orthodoxy and seriousness of the execution), and the world of imaginative moments takes flight on its own—until the last picture, where the Professor's real life appears in one of Max's wide-skied illustrations, bringing that world to the boy for life. The plot is less interesting than that world, but kids who've enjoyed Sts' older picture books or Rylant's artistic vignettes may find their aesthetic and speculative impulses gratified here. DS

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Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-6

Swimmin' with the sharks may not be everyone's idea of a good time, but plenty of readers will be intrigued by a story of the woman who has expanded scientific knowledge and popular understanding of this much-maligned fish. The authors trace her life from her earliest interest in fish (spawned during the many hours spent at the public aquarium in lieu of a more formal child-care arrangement) to her many professional endeavors as a diver, researcher, and professor. Readers will appreciate the novelty of a woman pioneering a male-dominated field, but a somewhat rushed text pushes her from one professional undertaking to the next with only the most cursory segues; the ups and downs of her adult personal life are so thinly covered that one chapter finds her surrounded by a close and loving family, while the next inexplicably has her children moving in with their father following a divorce. Information concerning the remarkable strides in diving technology that occurred over the course of Clark's career is left until the final chapter, so readers are not clearly shown how these advances impacted (even enabled) her ichthyological research. Coverage of Clark's work is far more detailed here than in Ann McGovern's easy reader Shark Lady, however, and readers ready to step up to a more involved account might want to take a dip. Photographs, source notes, a glossary, and an index are included. EB

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Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 8-12

Seventeen-year-old Edmund barely escapes the fate of his master the moneyer, whose hand is severed and spiked to his anvil for cheating the king's exchequer. Taken into service as a squire to Sir Nigel, bound for the Holy Land on King Richard's Crusade, Edmund realizes that near-certain death at the hands of the "infidel" is preferable to certain death at the hands of his powerful countrymen. His account of his journey East, filled with marvels unseen by a young man who has heretofore never left his village, is a remarkable traveler's tale replete with con-
vincing details of the sights (beautiful and grim), sounds (clamorous), smells (rank), and feel ( oppressively hot) of the bloody pilgrimage. Although Cadnum never sensationalizes, the carnage intrinsic to any truthful discussion of the “holy” war comes through vividly, and readers expecting an enlightened view of the Muslim cause reflecting a twentieth-century perspective will not find it in Edmund’s devout and obedient loyalty to his master and Richard’s mission. Still, Edmund displays a strong sense of honor, and according to his interpretation of fair play at arms, Saladin’s forces are often the object of his respect, if not his love. A concluding author’s note comments on the Crusaders’ world view and helps put fictionalized events and opinions into historical perspective. EB

CAMERON, ANN Gloria’s Way; illus. by Lis Toft. Foster/Farrar, 2000 [112p] ISBN 0-374-32670-3 $15.00 Reviewed from galleys

Those familiar with Cameron’s chronicles of Huey (The Stories Huey Tells, BCCB 12/95, etc.) and Julian (The Stories Julian Tells, 1/82, etc.) have already met Gloria, Julian’s best friend; here she gets a book all her own. She’s having her ups and downs: trouble befalls the beautiful valentine she lovingly crafts for her mother, she’s working out the kinks in a new friendship with Latisha, she’s dying to know if Julian likes her better than he does Latisha, and she’s grappling with that dread arithmetical monster, fractions. This has the cozy solidity of the other books about these characters, and the picture of the pack of kids roaming the friendly neighborhood together is an appealing one. The depiction of such a pack’s social dynamics is accurate, with both the casual interplay and occasional downside of groupthink (Gloria, Julian, and Huey dump an inedible pie on Latisha’s steps) honestly yet sympathetically represented. Toft’s black and white illustrations portray the kids sweetly but not saccharinely, with suitable warmth and affection. DS


Sarah (of Starting School with an Enemy, BCCB 4/98) is happy to have a new friend in the neighborhood when Olivia moves to Maryland from Trinidad, but she and her other pal Christina are puzzled by the occasional enigma in Olivia’s behavior. Sarah’s own lively behavior is consistent, but her appearance has changed—a bubblegum accident required a hair-shearing—which has led to her being taken for a boy on a local basketball team. Then Christina has her own problem when a teacher with a “great costume she bought in Mexico” wants Salvadorean Christina to represent Mexico in a social-studies pageant about heritage. There’s a didactic wash over the tying together of these threads under the “be true to yourself” banner, as Olivia comes clean about having a prosthetic leg, Sarah owns up to the coach about her gender (staving off a weekend in a bunkhouse with the boys), and Christina works out a way to represent her true origins in the pageant. The liveliness that sparked the earlier book is evident here as well, however, especially in the depiction of Sarah’s high-spirited basketball action and the events related to Olivia’s prosthesis (there’s a funny and iconoclastic scene where the girls search for Olivia’s leg after its unexpected independent departure from an amusement-park ride). The title will inevitably draw kids in, and even though the nakedness is of the philosophical kind they’ll appreciate Carbone’s light touch. DS
CLINE-RANSOME, LESA  *Satchel Paige*; illus. by James Ransome. Simon, 2000  34p
ISBN 0-689-81151-9  $16.00  R  Gr. 2-4

The tone of this picture-book biography of Satchel Paige is set from the opening lines: "Some say Leroy Paige was born six foot three and a half inches tall, 180 pounds, wearing a size fourteen shoe. Not a bit of truth to it. And some argue that when Mrs. Lula Paige first held her precious Leroy in her arms, she noticed his right fist was tightly curled around a baseball. Pure fiction." Cline-Ransome can afford to debunk baseball myth here, because baseball truth is even more impressive. Leroy "Satchel" Paige was a gifted baseball player in the Negro Leagues, and when the color barriers finally came down in 1948, he was the first black pitcher to be drafted into the major leagues. Paige's resentment of not being allowed to play in the majors and his difficulty adjusting when he finally did play in the big league get some attention, but this biography concentrates on Paige's early life, the circumstances that shaped him, the showmanship that psyched him, and the right arm that made him a legend. Ransome's oil paintings have a robust outdoor feel to them that is reinforced by the strong browns, greens, and blues of stands, field, and sky. On nearly every action spread, Satchel Paige is the center of attention, his posture declaring his authority. Baseball fans and beginning readers fond of biographies will cover all the bases with this one. A bibliography is included. JMD

ISBN 0-590-37129-0  $18.95  Ad  Gr. 4-8

In ten heavily illustrated chapters, Colman attempts to encapsulate the experience of girlhood among all North American cultures from Asian emigration across the hypothetical Aleutian land bridge to the present. The result is a textual album of chronologically arranged, highly personal views and events rather than a cohesive essay on their broader meaning. Many voices—notable and obscure—are aired, and Colman occasionally achieves a thought-provoking juxtaposition of testimony. Two women, for example, recall the mixed messages regarding gender roles they received in the 1960s: "My mother wanted me to be an ultra-femme; my father seemed to expect that I would excel at seemingly masculine activities like school and business"; "I understood that for a boy to plead for a baby doll was daring and original, while for a girl to do so would be old-fashioned and unimaginative." Few voices are heard in such detail, however, and concepts worthy of deeper examination (such as the invention of "the idea of being a teenager") are passed over in the rush to reach the next historic epoch. Although some readers will doubtless enjoy meandering along these diverse paths to womanhood, those seriously interested in exploring the topic would do better to start with Catherine Gourley's *Good Girl Work* (BCCB 7/99). An index and bibliography are included. EB

COREY, SHANA  *You Forgot Your Skirt, Amelia Bloomer!: A Very Improper Story*; illus. by Chesley McLaren. Scholastic, 2000  [34p]
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  5-8 yrs

"Amelia Bloomer was NOT a proper lady. In fact, Amelia Bloomer thought proper ladies were silly." With this attention-grabbing but hyperbolized opening, Corey launches into a beginner biography of the woman who briefly rocked the nine-
teenth-century American fashion world with her liberating, eccentric pantaloon-styled garb. Although the text offers the bare facts on Bloomer's magazine, *The Lily*, and on her concern for women's rights issues, the curlicue type and swirling confections of period gowns (each worthy of topping an overdecorated cake) may lead young readers to entirely miss the point that Bloomer considered all this fuss a bad thing. The final spreads attempt to demonstrate the lasting influence of Bloomer's freethinking designs, but the samples of tight, trendy clothing from the 1960s, '80s, and '90s represent only the daring side of fashion, not Bloomer's goals of comfort, convenience, and health. Still, an author's note supplies much of the contextual data missing from the text, and readers just slightly too young for Rhoda Blumberg's picture book biography, *Bloomers!* (BCCB 9/93) might want to try this on for size. EB

Cox, Judy *Mean, Mean Maureen Green*; illus. by Cynthia Fisher. Holiday House, 1999 [80p] ISBN 0-8234-1502-3 $15.95 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 2-4

Lilley is no wimp—the third-grader's family nickname is "Tiger"—but she's having trouble with fears these days nonetheless. Mean Maureen Green, a bullying fourth-grader, rides Lilley's school bus this year, and Lilley's athletic dad is still trying to convince Lilley to get over a past accident and learn to ride a bike. Her new friend Adam stuns Lilley with his cavalier disregard of the threat Maureen represents ("To Lilley's horror, he stood up, holding out his sandwich. 'Hey, Maureen! Chopped beetles! Want a bite?'"), but even his encouragement can't get her rolling on two wheels. This is a chipper middle-grades story with a sympathetic heroine, and Cox doesn't honey up her slightly astringent tone by making Maureen out to be merely misunderstood (Lilley does, however, manage to put her menace into context when she sees Maureen with chicken pox). The friendship with Adam is breezily but accurately depicted (the friends get mad and don't speak for a few days, then pick up where they left off), and Lilley's anxiety about disappointing her dad and becoming a cowardly person is credible and understandable. Cox is carving herself a niche in the step-up-from-beginning-readers genre, and this is a solid and effective entry. Final illustrations not seen. DS


"Jessica was a worrier," beset with worries about everything from the loss of a first tooth to missing the school bus. Her new worry is a school assignment that requires her to bring in a collection of 100 things to commemorate the 100th day of first grade; she dismisses ice cubes as too melty, marshmallows as too sticky, toothpicks as too pointy, and she simply can't figure out what to bring. Finally she brings in an eclectic collection donated by her family at the last minute, which the teacher assesses as "100 bits of love." Though there's more than a touch of schmaltz to the finish (and it's only clear from the students' responses that the assignment is supposed to be 100 of the *same* thing), Cuyler has an unflashily effective style and an ear for easy dialogue that keeps this story smoothly rolling. Howard's art evinces the energetically scrawled lines of Betsy Lewin, and the different perspectives and
compositions (for example, Jessica and the dog peer over the edge of the table Kilroy-style at the assembled objects) ensure that the simple visuals remain interesting. Warm, uncomplicated, and believable, this is a happy school story for young audiences. DS

DUNCAN, LOIS  

A black-and-white cat pads softly through both pages and poetry in this picture book about the nocturnal yearnings of a domesticated feline. Duncan's evocative verse has a rhythmic meter that lends itself to dramatic reading aloud: "I lap from china bowls. // I clean off dishes. // I like the taste of cream. // But while I drink I dream/ Of birds and fishes." The comparison of purring pet with jungle cat is made with subtlety and humor, and it is enhanced by the oil illustrations of Johnson and Fancher. The paintings rely on the contrast between cobalt shadows and subtle light sources for emphasis, and the night-blue palette gives an air of mystery to the wanderings of the midnight cat. Cats often give the impression of having a secret life; Duncan shows us what it is. JMD

FARBER, ERICA  
*Circle of Three: Tales of the Nine Charms*; by Erica Farber and John Sansevere. Delacorte, 2000 [224p] ISBN 0-385-32613-0 $15.95 Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-8

Walker Crane is on a field trip with his class when he reaches for what he thinks is a coin in the museum fountain. The coin is actually a magical charm, and it is the mechanism by which Walker is drawn into the parallel kingdom of Sunnebeam. In Sunnebeam, young Niko watches in horror as his foster father and other loved ones are murdered by the dreaded Dragon warriors; Aurora, a young Gypsy girl, becomes tangled in court intrigues when the Empress herself begs her for help. Thus begins the fulfillment of a prophecy predicting a deciding battle between the forces of Dark and Light. Both magic and fate are strong influences on the novel's action, and there is plenty of action: escapes across the desert, flight from a preternaturally gifted human tracker, and numerous close calls with death and destruction. The insertion of modern terminology (the Dragons carry flamethrowers, and a burning Gypsy village smells of napalm) is jarring in what is otherwise a fairly well-realized if somewhat generic fantasy world. Characterization takes second place to plot here, as most of this first volume of a projected trilogy concentrates on introducing the players and getting them into position for the next book. The conclusion to this promising if uneven first episode finds Aurora the psychic Gypsy girl captured by the tracker, and Walker and Niko united in escape to an unknown destination. Fantasy fans will want to keep an eye open for the next installment. JMD

FEARNLEY, JAN  

Mr. Wolf wants to make some pancakes, but being merely an unskilled wolf he's having some trouble, needing help in reading, writing, counting, and even cook-
ing. He seeks assistance from his neighbors (Chicken Little, the Gingerbread Man, Little Red Riding Hood, and so forth) but they're astonishingly rude, completely refusing to comply in any way. He struggles through, however, and manages to make quite a pile of pancakes, whose delicious scent wafts its way through the neighborhood, enticing the unhelpful locals. The audience will expect rapproachment all around and a homily about sharing when Mr. Wolf lets his greedy neighbors in, and they'll be delighted with the unexpected result: pushed beyond endurance, "Mr. Wolf gobbled them up. SNIPPETY! SNAPPETY! That was the end of his unhelpful neighbors!" The surprise turn is riotously enacted, because there's nothing in the text or the illustrations, aside from the notable unpleasantness of the neighbors, to tip off the final conspicuous consumption. Adults startled by the book's failure to reach the expected moral should note that the implications here have definite real-world validity as well. The line-and-watercolor art offers entertaining details (our hero reads from the Wolf It Down Recipe Book, and the village is rife with folkloric jokes such as Simple Simon's Pie & Cake Emporium), and the demeanors of the self-centered neighbors (the resentful Gingerbread Man is particularly droll as he scowls from his candy house) are amusing without giving things away. Pair this with Scieszka's The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf (BCCB 9/89) for a pro-wolf session or with Jolley's Grunter: A Pig with an Attitude (BCCB 6/99) for an improper readaloud, or make "SNIPPETY! SNAPPETY!" into a byword for encouraging help from the assembled, especially at a holiday meal. DS


Although even the driest catalog of events in the life of the intrepid stunt reporter could be intrinsically interesting, Fredeen offers a zesty account of Bly's exploits and a thoughtful evaluation of her restless personality, which impelled her not only to investigative reporting triumphs, but also to brusque job resignations, a hasty marriage, an ill-advised love affair, and bankruptcy. Without belittling her accomplishments, Fredeen sets her subject's journalistic derring-do (bluffing her way into male dominated jobs, checking herself into an insane asylum, breaking the travel records of Verne's fictional Phileas Fogg, etc.) into the context of an age of even less ethical reporting standards and notes observations of her critical contemporaries. (A rival newspaperman remarked of her round-the-world trek, "[The World could] have sent a canvas-covered sugar-cured ham with a tag tied to it spinning around the globe.") Black-and-white period photos, source notes, and an index will serve report writers well, but this will also be a good selection for recreational readers with a taste for biography. EB


William Spencer, son of the town's new Methodist minister, is off to a bad start at his new high school. Class bully Clive Van Dyne has it in for him, and only the intervention of another freshman, Mennonite Jim Reimer, saves him from a serious beating. Jim and William's friendship deepens and they begin to spend much of their free time together until Pearl Harbor intrudes on their lives, dragging the
thorny issues of war and pacifism into the open in their community and driving an ideological wedge between the boys. William throws himself into local war efforts, while Jim and his Mennonite neighbors retreat even further onto the social fringe; a crisis finally erupts when William suspects Jim of vandalizing his model fighter aircraft and joins Clive and his gang in brutalizing his erstwhile friend. Gaeddert raises a host of complicated questions regarding patriotism, civil defense, and conscientious objection and, to her credit, offers no simplistic answers. She does too frequently, however, interject a forced tone into the adolescents' examination of these issues: "'You can't let fighters take over whole countries because no one will oppose them.' 'You're right. But still, I think it may be more courageous not to fight in this case than to fight.'" Still, there's enough dramatic edge here to balance the forays into preachiness, and readers who delight in a good moral dilemma will have a satisfying tussle with this one. EB

GERSTEIN, MORDICAI, ad. Queen Esther, the Morning Star; ad. and illus. by Mordicai Gerstein. Simon, 2000 32p ISBN 0-689-81372-4 $16.00 R 5-8 yrs

The biblical tale of how Esther, Jewish Queen of Persia, saved her people from the genocidal whim of wicked prime minister Haman is the origin of the Jewish holiday celebration of Purim. This dramatic tale has received picture-book treatment before, by Diane Wolkstein (Esther's Story, BCCB 2/92) and by Rita Golden Gelman (Queen Esther Saves Her People, BCCB 3/98) in stately retellings that emphasize the iconization of Esther as heroine. Gerstein's version of Esther's triumph has a celebratory lightness in both words and pictures that begins with the author's opening note explaining his family's Purim traditions: "As children, we went to the temple dressed as characters from the story, and whenever Haman's name was mentioned . . . we booed and whirled our noisemakers. . . . And of course we stuffed ourselves with the pastries called 'hamantashen.' . . . I liked the prune kind best." The gouache illustrations resemble mosaics or stained glass with their simple shapes and window-like frames; the banner-like compositions reflect and enhance the unfolding narrative. Pastel colors in subtle tones of desert sand and sunset skies have a translucent quality that adds to the impression of clarity. The characters are bigger-than-life caricatures: the king is round, fat, and good-naturedly despotic; Esther is fresh-faced and open; and Haman is green-skinned and pointy (like the Oz movie witch). The seriousness of the content is offset by the jocular tone, which seems to anticipate the celebration, and Gerstein's conclusion extends the feeling of being in on the secret: "And all that remains of Haman is his name, as part of the word hamantashen, a delicious pastry shaped like his hat. And for that, we may thank him." And for this retelling, we can thank Mr. Gerstein. JMD


As he did in his picture-book biography of Thomas Jefferson (BCCB 10/94), Giblin strikes a happy balance in covering the personal and public lives of one of our nation's founders. Here readers will find standard information on Franklin the printer/publisher, inventor/experimenter, statesman/diplomat, family man, and probable cad. Emphasizing Franklin's rocky relationship with his son William,
governor of New Jersey and staunch loyalist, Giblin ably demonstrates how messily the political and emotional facets of the subject's life intertwine. Although the narration is not quite as smooth as in the author's previous work, several addenda on Franklin's inventions and adages, surviving historic sites, and notes on research for the text and illustrations expand the scope of the coverage. Dooling has shifted here from the dramatic full-page scenes he employed for Jefferson's milieu to a mixed bag of paintings, sketches, and vignettes of Franklin's life executed with varying degrees of polish. A detailed index will help researchers navigate smoothly through the double-columned text. EB


This is a somewhat rambling but still intriguing autobiography of Savion Glover's discovery of and dedication to his art, tap dancing. Dancer/choreographer Glover is an impressive figure; only twenty-six years old, he has revitalized the art of tap through his own dancing and through his choreography for *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* on Broadway. Glover tells his own story, for the most part, with the occasional editorial comment (presumably by coauthor Weber); quotes from Glover's mentors, mother, and friends are interspersed throughout. The inconsistency in voice is a bit confusing, and that confusion is reinforced by the design of the volume, which uses retro sixties-style collage-o-graphics: different typefaces, photographic cutouts, and a somewhat haphazard layout that impedes continuity. Added to the black-and-white mix is the dominant and sometimes jarring red used for emphasis. Still, this is an autobiographical portrait that depicts an artist with both a deep respect for tradition (Glover gives enormous credit to his tap mentors) and a desire for innovative creativity. Despite the occasional misstep, the dance card of this title is certain to be full. JMD


The team that produced the excellent *It's Perfectly Normal* (BCCB 10/94) has returned with a book for younger kids. Those familiar with the previous title will recognize the brash bird and squeamish bee who comment on proceedings, the comic-strip panels featuring cheerfully personified ova and sperm, the calm and straightforward discussion, and the matter-of-factly frank illustrations. While love (of all kinds), families (of all kinds), and culture (of all kinds) are discussed here, the emphasis is on explaining the physical mysteries of growth and reproduction. The book does a capable job of presenting some really quite complicated facts in ways that offer information suitable for different levels of investigation: the anatomical examination is handily divided into what's inside and what's outside, for instance, and each sex's section finishes with a helpfully basic enumeration: "In all, from front to back, there are three openings between a female's legs . . . In all, from front to back, there are two openings between a male's legs . . . " While the previous book invited browsing this one essentially requires it, as there's too much information for single-sitting absorption here, and kids will need adult assistance and sharing to profit fully from the text (though it might be a good idea to leave
the book around for some at-their-own-pace exploration after the initial introduction). That's a characteristic, however, rather than a flaw: the breezy tone, accessible approach, and breadth of material makes this a useful volume for young questioners, and the book's assistance in exploring important questions by reading and by prompted discussion with an adult will be significant and valuable. DS


Tim is the leader of an alternative rock band called DogBreath. He is in love with Suzie, who makes "barfing motions" in his direction, his band can't get gigs, his father just died, his mother is unemployed, and money is a serious issue. A battle of the grunge bands offers the hope of a $2000 windfall, so Tim's band acquires a girl singer (Phoebe Fortier, a "very geeky blond girl with blue plastic cat glasses") and goes for it, despite daunting odds. The revelation that the members of rival band The Angry Housewives consist of Tim's mother and her friends pushes credibility, but it is still amusing (and their song lyrics are the best in the book). Somewhere in this self-conscious novel there is a funny story trying to get out, but Henry never quite chisels away enough superfluity to get to it. Tim's first-person narration tries too hard for humor, and the strain undercuts any real pathos or wit. While Tim, Ziggy (Tim's friend and DogBreath drummer), and Phoebe show promise as dynamic triad, the characterizations reflect a sniggering slyness (Ziggy takes metal shop because he thinks it's about heavy metal bands), almost as if the author is writing for adults reading about those crazy teens. Tim's mother and Dr. Killboy Powerhead (his Zen guitar instructor) are promising cameos, but other characters are flatly representational. Henry shows the grunge band scene as a collection of freaks and weirdos, which may appeal to the non-grungies but still makes the author a tourist and not a native of this young adult strange land. JMD


Howard is one of the originators of the family story as picture book, and here she bases her tale on a slender thread of her family's history. In the post-Civil War South, young Virgie wants desperately to go to school with her older brothers. Big brother C.C., who narrates the story, starts to come around ("They opened a school for black people after Mr. Lincoln declared us free like we ought to be. And I was beginning to wonder, What about Virgie? She was free too. Couldn't she go to school with us boys?" and finally, Mama and Papa give their permission and Virgie goes to school. Howard avoids preachiness by wisely sticking with the family action: the brothers' voiced reluctance to their younger sister accompanying them, the long walk to school, Virgie's mishaps (she almost steps in poison ivy, and she does fall in the creek) and victories (she starts them singing in the dark woods, and their fear of "Raw Head and Bloody Bones" fades away). Virgie's joy in being able to go to school is cleanly and simply depicted: "So many books!' she said. She touched one softly with her hand. 'Someday I'll read all these books!' Already Virgie was seeming bigger." Lewis' watercolor landscapes are a combination of red clay and greenery, his indoor settings plain-furnished and lit with natural light. The book itself is a journey, the images moving from the front yard of the family
home, across the stream, through the woods, to the front yard of the school: "Big. Red brick. Long high windows and a wide-open door. Our very own school." Howard includes a note on her research into her family and history, along with a photograph of the historical Virgie's brothers. JMD


Readers who enjoy wincing over bygone miseries from the darker ages of medicine will want to take a peek at the many dental oddities covered in this volume. From toothache prevention ("pick your teeth with the nail of the middle toe of an owl") to mouthwash ("The first urine of the morning was used ... from ancient times through the eighteenth century"), from the earliest toothbrushes and dental flosses to the perfection of false teeth, Ichord's array of trivia is compendious indeed. Unfortunately, the prose is a trifle clunky ("Here are some commonly known tooth facts that the ancients didn't know about"), and the organization of material within chapters is often little more than lists of miscellanea. An addendum in paragraph form directs the way to some of her more enticing information, but sources of specific superstitions and tooth lore are uncredited. An index and helpful glossary of dental terms are provided, though, and a number of well-selected (but sometimes grainy) photos and period illustrations are included. EB


As soon as it becomes clear that Josephine is unlikely to grow past her twenty-seven inches, her parents feel that all she will be good for is to make money as a curiosity, and when her shine wears off as a local novelty, they sell her into service at a girls' academy. Several years of hardship take their toll, and at the advice of a single kindly student, Josephine sets off on her own in New York City, where she is lured into Mr. R. J. Walters' Museum of Earthly Astonishments, one of the many "freak shows" competing with P. T. Barnum's landmark establishment. Little Jo-Jo, as she is renamed, at first thrives on the attention of an adoring public and basks in the familial warmth of her new friends, albino Charley and his mother. She soon learns, though, that everyone who has a monetary stake in her fame will stop at nothing to secure her labors, and she must reexamine what her future will hold if public display becomes her entire career. Jocelyn has neatly styled a moving tale, made of equal parts historical fiction, social commentary, and old-fashioned orphan melodrama. Little Jo-Jo and Charley accept their states with both dignity and humor but blankly refuse to accept actual mistreatment of any sort at the hands of their employer. The novel's conclusion, in which they sail off toward a presumably better (though ill-defined) life in Europe seems clumsily tacked on, and readers who have cheered Little Jo-Jo's strength and determination may feel that they too have been left at sea. An author's note on Little Jo-Jo's late-nineteenth-century milieu is included. EB


Jodie is appalled to discover that she and her mother are moving to Sierra Leone so
that her mother can do research. The country itself is not initially reassuring; the teenager is overwhelmed by the heat, language, absence of technology, and sheer difference in the small village where she lives (the same village where her mother had performed her Peace Corps service years ago). Eventually Jodie begins to find a place for herself, becoming close friends with a local girl her age, Khadi, but their closeness means that Jodie is hurt as well as curious when Khadi excludes her from a secret ritual. It turns out the ritual involves female circumcision, which Jodie’s mother had come to help stamp out; Jodie cannot muster up the restraint of her mother, however, and breaks all the cultural rules by attempting to interfere with Khadi’s undergoing of the rite of passage. Jodie’s narration of life in a very foreign situation paints an evocative picture of her village world, and the fish-out-of-water story retains its usual charm. The circumcision topic is an unusual one, and the book brings the issue home effectively (though it sends out some conflicting messages about its view of the village and intercultural judgments and relations). Though this doesn’t have the freshness or smooth writing of Abelove’s Go and Come Back (BCCB 4/98), it’s an effective account of a teen grappling with difference and maturation, and the prices that both may exact. Though most of the Krio words and phrases sprinkled throughout the text are clear from context, a glossary is included. DS


Kurtz draws from her own experience in the 1997 flood of Grand Forks, North Dakota for these free-verse poems portraying a family’s travails as the Red River overflows its banks. A girl narrator describes the peaceful river in and around which she and her friends play (“loving the wet, muddy smell of the summer river”), the blizzard and subsequent melt-off which lead to the flooding, and the frantic community efforts to sandbag the banks (“One, lift, two, swing, three, catch, four, toss”). Although other picture books have dealt with the mechanics and inconveniences of flooding, Kurtz accurately captures the spirit of denial that permeates a community on the brink of disaster (“‘Let’s pack one bag,’ Mom says finally./ ‘Just one bag./ Just in case’”) and the filth and danger that follow in its wake (“The newspaper says:/ Beware the river water./ It’s contaminated with chemicals,/ And be careful going back into your house./ The steps could be crumbled./ The floors could be buckled”). Though formally composed, Brennan’s oil glazed scenes are less a literal rendering of the devastated area than a hazy, dreamlike snapshot of a memory. This will make a powerful readaloud accompaniment to Mary Calhoun’s Flood (BCCB 4/97) or simply an evocative look at recovery from personal loss. EB

LEMIEUX, ANNE C.  All the Answers. Avon Camelot, 2000 [160p] ISBN 0-380-97771-0 $15.00 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

All of a sudden, Jason’s got problems. He’s aware that the answer he came up with for dealing with those he faces in Algebra—using his lunch money to buy homework from a classmate—is unlikely to ease tensions either at home, where Dad is venting his frustration with his fat-free diet and his new boss, or at school, where Jason’s peace of mind is disturbed both by the glamorous female half of a set of
fraternal twins (the boss's kids) and the domineering male half. The ethical questions posed by this thoughtful and carefully plotted novel are spelled out too thoroughly and answered too explicitly throughout (the novel ends with a letter from Jason to his math teacher in which he thanks her for "teaching me something even more important than algebra"). These precociously articulate young characters do offer useful analyses of the junior-high social scene (one describes the twins as tropical fish competing for aquarium territory), and Jason's narration is full of smart-aleck humor, on-target introspection ("I steam myself good for a half hour, wishing shame, pain, humiliating degradation were water-soluble"), and descriptions ("My dresser's overflowing, as if my clothes tried to make a break from the drawers but were slain during the escape attempt") that are bound to engage the sympathies of readers with similarly untidy lives. FK


Meghan's a daughter of the heartland, growing up in Abraham Lincoln's home town of Springfield, Illinois, but it's hardly an idyllic middle-America existence: her brother has returned from his Vietnam tour haunted and changed, she's been kicked out of her private boarding school, and she's just lost a leg to cancer. Distant from her banker father after her mother's death, she can't bring herself to share her feelings with him or even with her best friend in Colorado, who still thinks of Meghan as the athletic and triumphant runner she was. Absent the help of living people, Meghan turns to the figure of Lincoln, to whom she writes postcards detailing her struggle and grief and with whom she feels a connection that she refuses the rest of the world. The multitude of plot threads heighten the drama but detract from the focus, with Meghan's life so eventful that the independent pains become difficult to absorb; the Lincoln device never really integrates into the rest of the book. Lewis writes with bold risky strokes that sometimes have great style and impact, however; Meghan's long-simmering bitterness is palpable, and her cutting anger (and tendency to offer physical violence to the inanimate and emotional violence to humans) pulses through the novel. The author also gives a provocative picture of a homefronter's awakening to the realities of Vietnam (though some of the period references will be obscure to young readers) as Meghan sees the war through the eyes—and the fate—of her brother. Though the book is overloaded, it's an emotionally charged picture of an era and a situation, and teens will empathize with Meghan's pain. DS


The clean, bright acrylics of the eye-opening sculptural illustrations in this collection of short poems celebrate the cheery white-picket-fence world to which this house wakes up. Individual poems—from one to three per page—accompany textured three-dimensional representations of each room, reminding readers that "a cool floor/ waits to greet/ two sleepy feet" in the bathroom and describing stairs as the "spiny back/ of a stegosaur,/ stretching itself/ from floor to floor." While
not all poems are equally lucid, the casual rhyme schemes of these brief poetic flights keep them sufficiently grounded. Readers will appreciate the unusual perspectives of the illustrations and of poems that suggest corners "are the reason/walls meet, / and rooms consider themselves/ complete," and they might easily be inspired to fill another room—the library or a classroom—with their poetic insights into its motives. FK


McClaren retells the story of Odysseus’ wanderings through the eyes of the women who love him: his wife, Penelope; the sorceress Circe; the goddess Athena; and his old nurse, Eurycleia. Divided into four parts, the novel opens with Penelope’s description of her first meeting with Odysseus, when he comes to court her beautiful cousin Helen (soon to be of Troy); their physical attraction and eventual marriage; the birth of their son; and the departure of Odysseus for the Trojan War. Circe picks up the narrative, using Odysseus’ stay on her island as an excuse for his telling her of his adventures in the war; Athena then explains her machinations to bring Odysseus safely home. Eurycleia brings the tale to an end with her description of Odysseus’ return to Penelope and his vengeance on the suitors who have harassed her. This is certainly an interesting take on classic mythology, and there is little doubt that some (read: female) readers will find this approach more appealing than the blood-and-thunder approach of other retellings. There is an odd dissonance here, though: the women to whom McClaren gives voice are totally focused on Odysseus, who is the center of their universe and this book. Awkward construction and jarring anachronisms (Eurycleia telling other servants to “snap to it” and “look alive,” Circe describing Odysseus as being “driven by a male ego even more monumental than most”) mar an already contrived text. Characterizations are one-dimensional and lack humor; there is a deadly earnestness of tone that makes this difficult to read, and the narrators’ voices are indistinct—they exist simply to relate Odysseus’ travails. Still, this is romantic in a reductive sort of way, and the hints of sexual combustibility will be enough to draw in readers. JMD


Libby gets caught in a lie (“She was surprised at how easy the lie slid out of her mouth, like it was greased with warm butter”) by her mother and decides “from now on, only the truth.” Libby finds, however, that people don’t always appreciate the truth, especially when it hurts their feelings, embarrasses them, or gets them in trouble. By the time Libby’s finished telling the truth to all her classmates, she’s walking home alone. She just can’t figure it out, until Virginia Washington insults Ol’ Boss, Libby’s horse, and “now Libby thought back on her own truth-telling, and Mama’s words suddenly became crystal clear.” McKissack has composed a story-lesson that is absolutely painless, and listeners will easily discern the clues about “honest-to-goodness” truth the hapless Libby doesn’t begin to see. Potter’s mixed-media illustrations are rendered in a palette that combines spring greenery and yellow light, giving a sense of airiness to this otherwise very grounded
reflection of McKissack’s text. White borders further leaven the depictions of the gardens, classrooms, and schoolyards in which the characters interact. The crisp ease of Potter’s style complements McKissack’s equally fresh text, resulting in an examination of truth-telling that is truly cogent. Honest-to-goodness. JMD


A king, convinced he is in danger of being poisoned, seeks to capture a unicorn in order to make a talismanic goblet, fork, knife, and spoon from its horn. The kingorders Zoe, the beggar girl (“she was nobody’s child”), into the woods to sing softly and sweetly as bait for the unicorn. When the unicorn comes to Zoe, he is captured by the king’s soldiers. “Now Zoe was very angry, for she had been used to trick the unicorn and make him a prisoner. And she knew that was wrong.” The clever girl frees the unicorn, but her actions are discovered and she is banished from the kingdom. Her wanderings lead her to the secret valley of the unicorns, where her search for a place to belong finally ends. Mitchell’s tale is sweetly told, and Lambert’s graceful pastel illustrations bestow an otherworldly glamor on the text. Subtle touches of modernity (a car on a distant highway, the exhaust from an airplane in the sky) place this kingdom in the present more than the past, while touches of whimsy (roaming peacocks, garden mazes, topiary animals) make the magical appearance of the unicorn solidly believable. The unicorns themselves, shimmering gently against their dark valley, will leave readers and viewers with an image both dreamlike and comforting. JMD

MORRISON, TONI  *The Big Box*; by Toni Morrison with Slade Morrison; illus. by Giselle Potter. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 1999  42p  Library ed. ISBN 0-7868-2364-X  $20.49 Ad 6-9 yrs

In this rhyming tale, Patty, Mickey, and Liza Sue are a trial to their elders because “they just can’t handle their freedom” and as a result they are shut up inside a big box that has a door with “three big locks” that “only opens one way.” The children defend their actions (“Even sparrows scream/ And rabbits hop/ And beavers chew trees when they need ’em”) claiming they are only the natural activities of active children, but into the box (sort of a designer prison) they go. Slade Morrison, son of Pulitzer prize winner Toni Morrison, “devised” this lengthy story when he was nine years old and let his mother “impose” the rhyme. While the story shows some imagination and philosophical precociousness, it has little internal logic, pace, or closure, and the rhyme scheme is labored. This title achieves grace through the watercolor illustrations of Giselle Potter, whose light-handed visual interpretation offsets the heavy contrivance of the text. Patty, Mickey, and Liza Sue are depicted as spirited children surrounded by adults with pinched sour faces (the kind that would give the class clown Ritalin instead of an opportunity to shine). Clean, unmuddy colors give a sense of walls infused with light, and off-kilter perspectives and askew horizons reflect the innocent energy of the well-meaning if messagey text. This is an interesting product that will have definite appeal for adults but an uncertain appeal for children. JMD
MYERS, WALTER DEAN  The Blues of Flats Brown; illus. by Nina Laden. Holiday House, 2000  [30p]
ISBN 0-8234-1480-9  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 3-5

"This here's the story of Flats Brown, the blues playingest dog you ever heard of. If
you ain't never heard of Flats, that's okay, because he probably never heard of you,
neither." Thus opens Myers' tale of Flats Brown, a junkyard dog with the blues in
his bones. When junkyard owner (and dog owner) A. J. Grubbs sets Flats and his
friend Caleb to fighting for sport, the two dogs decide to hit the highway. Flats'
journey to musical stardom is interrupted more than once by the persistent A. J.
Grubbs, who is determined to get his dog back. The final confrontation comes in
a New York City blues club, where Flats wins his freedom by playing "The Gritty
Grubbs Blues" and, improbably, moving his former owner to tears. The chases
and escapes have some suspense, but the sequence of events is lengthy and repeti-
tive, losing most of its momentum along the way. Laden's pastel compositions
have a precise line and a dark palette that contributes to a sense of depth. Canine
characters are expressively anthropomorphized (including the occasional effective
cower), but the human characters are awkwardly drafted and imaginatively pro-
portioned. Lyrics and musical notation for "The New York City Blues" are in-
cluded for budding blues guitar players. JMD

ISBN 0-689-82005-4  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-10

See this month's Big Picture, p. 199, for review.

NEWSOME, EFFIE LEE  Wonders: The Best Children's Poems of Effie Lee Newsome;
comp. by Rudine Sims Bishop; illus. by Lois Mailou Jones. Wordsong/Boyds Mills, 1999  40p
Trade ed. ISBN 1-56397-788-5  $14.95
Paper ed. ISBN 1-56397-825-3  $8.95  R  3-6 yrs

Twenty-four poems by Mary Effie Lee Newsome, a pioneering African-American
poet and columnist for the Brownies' Book, are included in this collection. Origin-
ally published in Newsome's Gladiola Garden and The Crisis, the poems cover
common childhood experiences and fit into four categories: "Wondering," "Two
Legs, Four Legs, Six Legs, Eight," "Flowers and Trees," and "Weather and Sky." Most of the poems are brief, one-stanza, rhymed verses, some of which deserve
rebirth as storytime fingerplays: "The firefly/ Goes flashing by,/ A lemon-golden
spark,/ A dancing Rhinestone in the sky,/ A jewel in the dark." The selection
reflects a Victorian gentility, but the humor, the simplicity, and the occasional
allusions to traditional nursery rhymes will catch the ear of today's children: "Old
Commodore Quiver/ Went down to the river,/ Old Commodore Quiver of Gaul./
He sailed from the shore,/ But what he went for/ He hadn't a notion at all,/ No, he
hadn't one notion at all." Black-and-white illustrations from Gladiola Garden by Lois Mailou Jones and one by Effie Lee Newsome are interspersed throughout the
book; most are visual vignettes highlighting the poems. Two small eye-catching
pictures portraying a spider's web and a tangled, wooded landscape especially show-
case Jones' art with sharp contrasts, rich patterning, and flowing lines. As a con-
temporary title, this book has its flaws (the quality of the poems and illustrations is sometimes uneven), but Bishop makes the historical significance of both artists’ work quite clear in an excellent introduction. Well-proportioned expanses of negative and positive space, sharp contrasts, and balanced compositions combine with the poetry to make this volume a satisfying example of early African-American children’s literature. JNH

Reviewed from galleys

In this gift-shoppe historical fiction, the first of a series, four visitors to Colonial Williamsburg, the living history museum, are introduced to Ann McKenzie, a “headstrong” pre-Revolutionary gal with the self-consciously anachronistic dream of becoming a doctor like her father or, failing that, a midwife like the widow Mrs. Blaikley. This introduction is made through the good offices of Mrs. Otts, a historical interpreter/vendor who sells eighteenth-century hats and caps to four representative modern children—Lori, Keisha, Chip, and Stewart—before telling them about the scrapes Ann is led into by her “high-spirited Scottish blood,” starting with the day she snuck out in her shift to watch the fire at the Capitol building. Unfortunately, Mrs. Otts is not the only character whose dialogue sounds scripted, and the plot of the story she tells is thickened by details of colonial dress and customs that are not smoothly incorporated into the story. Kids who are studying colonial times may appreciate the lack of ambiguity about what is “historical” here and what is “fiction” (though not all will have the stamina to make it through all five forewords and afterwords) and will benefit from the book’s inclusivity, but even diehard history fans nurtured by the American Girls will perceive that this is essentially an extended advertisement for a visit to Colonial Williamsburg. The virtual tour includes a stop for souvenirs and a map with ticket booths, restaurants, and other conveniences clearly marked. FK

O’BRIEN, MARY BARMEYER  Toward the Setting Sun: Pioneer Girls Traveling the Overland Trails. TwoDot, 1999 94p illus. with photographs
Paper ed. ISBN 1-56044-841-5 $8.95

O’Brien recasts testimonies from diaries, letters, and memoirs of child pioneers into nine true adventure tales that cover a variety of experiences—from being left orphaned to being taken captive—along the trail. The stories of Virginia Reed, of Donner Party fame, and Laura Ingalls can easily be found in more complete detail elsewhere, but the experiences of less renowned travelers are equally noteworthy. Lucy Ann Henderson loses a beloved little sister to an accidental overdose of laudanum; Mary Perry marries at thirteen, most probably to escape from her abusive stepfather; Catherine Sager, orphaned along the trail, witnesses the massacre of siblings and her new guardians by a Cayuse band. O’Brien interjects a fair amount of supposition into her tellings, and her frequent references to probable campfires and baby-tending and wildflower gathering along the way (not to mention the flowery tributes to the pioneer spirit that wrap up each account) lend an air of sameness to the accounts. Still, the tales are both sufficiently brief and compelling for good readalouds, and history teachers might consider including one or two in a Western migration unit. EB
OKIMOTO, JEAN DAVIES *To JayKae: Life Stinx.* Tor, 1999 186p ISBN 0-312-86732-8 $18.95 R Gr. 6-9

Jason (of *Jason's Women*) is already shaken by the death of a beloved elderly friend and the departure of the girl of his dreams. His father's sudden remarriage means a new stepmother and a handsome sports-star stepbrother sharing Jason's home, and his father's pressure on Jason to get a job, rearrange his life to suit his new family, and emulate his popular stepbrother is more than the teen can handle. His search for a confidante leads him to the Internet, where he connects with a girl named Allison; when Allison requests he send a picture of himself, Jason panics and provides an image of his gorgeous stepbrother. This is a clever balance of thoughtful and lighthearted: Jason's misery is quite genuine and his father authentically over-demanding, but Okimoto steers clear of any pity party by keeping the writing lively and Jason's character suffused with sufficient goodness to guarantee hope. She also avoids predictable outcomes, leaving Jason dumped by his cybergal when he comes clean (the book's depiction of chatroom chat is absolutely on target) and making his stepbrother a genuinely good guy who proves to be a useful ally. There's also a gentle exploration of spirituality in Jason's connection to the late Bertha Jane and his new employment at a church, which leads him to consider more abstract aspects of his existence. Altogether, it's a diverting account of a teen pulling out of grief and learning to succeed on his own terms. DS


Fire, Wind, and Rain argue over who is greatest and a contest ensues. Wind's wild gusts show he is indeed powerful, but Fire rages out of control, devouring everything; "Wind blew, fuuu fuuu, trying to snuff out Fire. But that made Fire bigger and stronger!" Then Rain steps in ("Rain! Rain! Rain! Singing Rain, wini-wini, wini-wini, everywhere!"), and her gentle drops smother Fire and defeat him. This Nigerian folktale (identified as such in the jacket copy; no specific sources are given) has a spirited rhythm that suits the force of the three elemental characters. Olaleye's text is a vibrant combination of action and dialogue that guarantees this story will get a lot of play as a classroom or library readaloud. Grifalconi's collage illustrations combine cutout photographic images with swirling patterns of paint to create that long ago Rainfield in chaotic compositions seething with color and motion. Fire, Rain, and Wind are giants powerfully envisioned: Rain rests upon the back of a leopard, Wind ransacks the sky, Fire exults in destruction. The double-page illustration of the violet-hued Rain smilingly bestowing her cooling bounty onto the fire-ravaged field is a compelling one. The vitality of the retelling itself coupled with the remarkably fluid mixed-media illustrations results in an intriguing pairing of story and art. JMD


Since her father's death, Hannah has been the adult in the family, taking care of her fragile agoraphobic mother. When Hannah discovers she's pregnant, her mother draws away ("She doesn't ask, What can I do? . . . She says she can't remember..."
how to fix breakfast or anything else for that matter. The implication is clear: she can't take care of me either"), and the boyfriend in whom Hannah had placed her trust hits her, dumps her, and denies paternity. This pushes Hannah over the edge and sends her into the psychiatric ward, where she, her friends and family, and the family of her unborn child come to terms with the situation. Plummer gives pieces of the narration to Hannah's friend Trilby and to Roman, brother of Hannah's boyfriend, Milo; while Trilby's brief viewpoint doesn't add much to the story, Roman's insight into his family's workings (and his regret, unique in his family, that they're separating themselves forever from this baby when Hannah puts it up for adoption) enriches the picture of Milo but also emphasizes the point that this kind of decision affects many people. While there's a programmatic touch to Hannah's work with her therapist, there are some frustrating and absorbing family dynamics laid bare and some intriguing new developments in relationships (the old lady who's been Hannah's neighborhood nemesis proves to be a staunch friend). While somewhat more overdetermined than Doherty's Dear Nobody (BCCB 1/93), this is similarly a sensitive look at a girl grappling with a still-common dilemma.

Pullman, Philip I Was a Rat; illus. by Kevin Hawkes. Knopf, 2000 [192p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-80176-6 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 4-7

Roger, an eight-year-old boy, shows up at the door of Joan (a laundress) and Bob (a cobbler) and, despite his claim to once have been a rat, is taken in by the childless couple. A visit from the Royal Philosopher sets off a chain reaction that leads Roger to a brief freak show career as "Rat Boy," near-arrest with a band of young thieves, a return to the sewer (where he unsuccessfully tries to turn back into a rat), imprisonment by royal scientists, and a sentence of death for being a monstrous rodent pest, despite the best efforts of Bob and Joan to save him. Last minute intercession by the new Princess Aurelia (who used to be Mary Jane, who fed Roger scraps of cheese when he was Rattie the rat, and who is now stuck being a princess just as Roger is stuck being a boy due to a fairy godmother and an irreversible wish) saves Roger and returns him to the loving arms of Bob and Joan. Pullman pulls off a funny and touching tale of an unwanted child (formerly rodent) buffeted by the fates and coming home to safe harbor; along the way he takes some scathingly funny pot shots at the royal family, the media (the text is interrupted by pages from The Scourge, the local rag cum newspaper), and opportunists of every stripe. This is a Dickensian plot distilled to a Babbittish pace; characters are well-drawn (the freak show owners are particularly unsavory), and the fairy-tale setting has a pungent reality that gives it more grit than gauze. The closing sentence ("The world outside was a difficult place, but toasted cheese and love and craftsmanship would do to keep them safe") brings satisfactory closure to an imaginative and original fractured fairy tale. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. JMD

Ad 6-9 yrs

It's 1946, and returning veterans have not yet fully reclaimed professional baseball
as a male domain. The women’s baseball league that flourished during wartime is wrapping up the season with the playoff between the Racine Belles and the Rockford Peaches. In the stands Margaret and her family cheer for the home team, the Belles, and hope that Sophie Kurys, “The Flint Flash,” will help break the 0-0 tie in overtime. Although Rappaport ostensibly replays the game through the eyes of fictional young fan Margaret (who proudly compares her own scraped and scabby knees to those of her idols), the text amounts to little more than a sports-page recap of the plays, peppered with fan dialogue. Lewis’ watercolor paintings add some dimension, offering viewers a glimpse into a time when spectators wore coats and ties, dresses and heels to the dusty ballparks, and the muscular athletes in their flapping skirts slid painfully into home on exposed knees and thighs. Dyed-in-the-wool sports fans will appreciate the appended stats page, and history buffs the concluding note on how World War II influenced the development (and the demise) of the women’s league. Endpapers feature photos of the Belles and Peaches in their heyday. EB


Kaci’s mom has been crusading for a bigger house in a safer neighborhood—preferably in the upscale Lofty Cedars subdivision—and after the house across the street is burglarized, she gets her way. Furniture moving, appliance deliveries, and myriad relocation concerns proceed apace, and in the middle of the hubbub Kaci dashes home (with proper permission) from school at lunch hour to retrieve her allergy medicine. Assuming nobody is home, she is startled to hear voices and realizes that her new “safe” house is being burglarized; the thieves discover her and take her hostage, along with an elderly neighbor who has heretofore been an inquisitive nuisance to the newcomers. There’s a long stretch between Roberts’ set-up and the real action, and although Kaci’s situation plays out with considerable tension, her past-tense narration leaves no doubt that she will get out of this alive. Kaci’s partner in peril moves briskly from one stereotype to another, first as nosy neighbor, then as feisty-but-cute little old lady. There are enough thrills here to justify a quick read, but for hostage terror it can’t match classics such as Robert Cormier’s After the First Death or Lois Duncan’s Ransom. EB


Adolescence hits Amanda Bates all of a sudden when she enters seventh grade (“She felt like she’d taken a leap off of the high diving board . . . But the water kept moving farther and farther away from her as she flew—arms flailing, legs kicking out of control—downward through the cold air”), and she doesn’t feel like the diligent student and devoted daughter she used to be. Hair dye, black clothes, and new cigarette-smoking friends give her a different persona (she considers changing her name to “Cheetah”), and she’s on the verge of joining the Club headed by the knowledgeable and sophisticated Fern. One of the things Fern seems to know about is Slade, the boy with a bad reputation who’s starting to show Amanda some not unwelcome attention—but is Fern’s information really knowledge or just fic-
tion born of jealousy? There's a slightly patronizing aspect to the picture of Amanda's rebellion that's unusual for Shreve, and the return to the old Amanda is conveniently swift. Amanda's feeling of placelessness is artfully explored, however, and Fern is a classic bad-influence friend. The book also makes clever use of Slade, whose bad-boy image isn't a reflection of the glamorous rebellion Fern and her friends aspire to but rather an offshoot of unhappy family times that he'd like to leave behind; in Amanda's warm family and inherently straitlaced nature under the tentatively applied veneer, he sees a stability to which he warms. Youngsters on the verge of rebellion may find this illuminating, and kids grown past the adventures of Joshua T. Bates (Joshua T. Bates in Trouble Again, BCCB 2/98, etc.) will want to see how his sister fares here. DS


One day, Peter carts his stuffed animals over to Daisy's house only to find that she has chicken pox and can't come out to play. Over the course of the next five days, Peter sends her first (by means of a full-sized version of his toy elephant) one get-well card, followed by two bunches of flowers (each carried by a zebra), three coloring books (via three hippos), etc. The strong patterning of this understated toy fantasy's text complements its lessons about sequencing and counting. The watercolor illustrations, however, are undistinguished and disappointingly bland; the sweet rainbow of colors and the idyllic emphasis on cute flowers, birds, and butterflies are even more idealized than the model boy-girl friendship. Young viewers may nonetheless find plenty to engage their minds and eyes, and adults can, like Daisy's mother, stay in the background in case they're needed. FK


Gib Rides Home (BCCB 2/98) ended with Gib, an orphan in 1909 Nebraska, returning to the orphanage from his "farmout" family; in this book he's back with the Thorntons after Mr. Thornton, who insisted on Gib's return to the orphanage, has died. Gib's happy to be back on the ranch, working with the horses (and especially the Thoroughbred Black Silk), and he's glad to get a chance to go to a real school, but he's still beset by doubts and problems: is he a family member or a farmout orphan to be kicked loose at eighteen? Will he ever learn how to get around his two bullying classmates? What's to become of the gray horse who turns up in the blizzard, a victim of abuse, that Gib gentles? Snyder seems torn between the exigencies of real life (this story is based on her father's upbringing) and the romance of horse and orphan stories, and the two approaches don't always mesh smoothly; the characterization is often cursory, relying on the first book, and the drama tends to be episodic, undercutting the impact of any one plot thread by veering between them. The book has the solid old-fashioned appeal of the first title, however, with Gib a likable orphan deserving of the home for which he yearns. The picture of early twentieth-century ranch life, with telephones and cars intermingling with carts and old frontier dynasties, is vividly conveyed and infi-
**SPINNER, STEPHANIE**  *Be First in the Universe;* by Stephanie Spinner and Terry Bisson. Delacorte, 2000  [144p]
ISBN 0-385-32687-4  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 5-7

Twins Tessa and Tod are staying with their grandparents Lou and Lulu ("the world's oldest living hippies") while their own parents are on an extended business trip. On a visit to the new Middle Valley mall, the twins find Gemini Jack's U Rent All and discover nonstick baking pans ("one hundred percent friction free") and an electronic pet (FM, short for Fib-Muncher) that eats fibs. Jack is from the planet Gemini, where everyone is a twin, and he needs DNA samples from evil twins to bunch up the genetic code on his planet before it succumbs to galactic interlopers; while Tessa and Tod don't fit the bill, the Gneiss twins (brother and sister, christened Never and Notso by Tessa) do. The premise is wild, but the execution is slick: Tessa and Tod engage in some hijinks (tiny time travels, invisibility, and end-runs around the nasty Gneisses) that make the pace of this sci-fi froth bubble right along. Humor is the point, and the team of Spinner (familiar from her equally appealing collaborations with Jonathan Etra, *Aliens for Breakfast*, BCCB 12/88, and *Aliens for Dinner*, 3/91) and Bisson make that point with likable characters, a modicum of suspense, and a link between the Gneiss twins and Vlad the Impaler that will make readers snort in disbelieving delight. In short, this is savvy (if simple) sci-fi that will cross gender lines, especially as a readaloud.

**STEWART, DAWN LESLEY**  *Harriet's Horrible Hair Day;* illus. by Michael P. White. Peachtree, 2000  [34p]
ISBN 1-56145-165-7  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Poor Harriet's carefully contained curls are revolting—that is, revolting against their restraints: "Sproing! A curl popped out of Harriet's nice, neat braid." Her brother and sister come to the rescue with inventive solutions (yanking on the curls with fishing line, weighting the curls down with rocks and water balloons, putting a colander on her head and tying kitchen implements to the curls), but each remedy only leads to still more curls popping out. Finally Harriet retires to bed in defeat, only to wake up in the morning with a startling success: a head full of "nice, neat curls." Though the story doesn't bear overmuch scrutiny (the curls shouldn't be surprising unless Harriet had had her braid since birth), the elaborate, messy, and absurd attempts at repair are entertaining, as is the dialogue of the sibs (who are clearly enjoying their experimentation) as they put Harriet through their tender ministrations. White's art has an evenness of shading that suggests computer involvement, and there's an exaggerated line and busy overpopulation that suggest non-narrative graphic art; the result is a little on the glitzy side, but the videogame palette (Harriet's crimson corkscrews pop off the page next to her lilac shirt and the sherbet-green lawn) has an electric energy that will appeal to viewers. The anthropomorphized dog and cat cavort divertingly through the proceedings; though the siblings appear not to notice them, kids in the audience will get a kick...
out of their antics. If you’re looking to take the knots out of a bad hair day, try this. DS


In a fractured version of this culinary tale, a never-flustered little Red Hen takes things in stride when dog, cat, and duck refuse to help her make pizza. Her repeated shopping trips are an opportunity to buy more stuff: “So the Little Red Hen went to the delicatessen. She bought some mozzarella, pepperoni, and olives; some mushrooms, onions, and garlic; a can of eight small anchovies; and . . . some other stuff. But no pickled eggplant.” Of course, the oven-baked pizza is rather large, so when Little Red asks her friends who will help her eat it, they all respond, “I will!” In appreciation, dog, cat, and duck clean up the kitchen while Little Red enjoys a good book about dream vacations. The writing doesn’t always have the easy rhythms of traditional versions, but the conversational tone makes this suitable for a readaloud. Multitextured cut-paper illustrations in muted colors contain kid-appealing details—the can of worms in Little Red’s pantry, the dollar bill marked “moo-la”—that highlight the story’s offbeat humor, evincing a loopy contemporary flair that makes this book a show-and-tell delight. While the lesson of the original tale is lost, modern readers will appreciate Little Red taking responsibility for her own meal-planning and the understated message that it’s okay not to help cook as long as you help clean up. JNH


There’s been a tragic self-inflicted shooting, and Jerome is dead; Marco, his best friend, writes to Katie, Jerome’s girlfriend, trying to get a handle on the situation. What unfolds through letters, faxes, emails, and chat sessions is the story of important, long-kept secrets and the toll of casual prejudice. Marco is shocked to learn that Katie is a lesbian who had never been Jerome’s sexual partner but was instead his close friend, and that Jerome was one of the few who knew of Katie’s sexual orientation until she left New Zealand for the United States (she’s a foreign exchange student) and came out. It’s obvious from the beginning that the other big secret is that Jerome was gay as well and that he and Katie kept each other’s trust because he never dared share the truth with Marco; what’s neither predictable nor credible is Marco’s own switch from homophobe to acknowledged homosexual when he realizes the import of his love for Jerome. New Zealander Taylor (author of works as diverse as *The Blue Lawn* and *Agnes the Sheep*, BCCB 3/91) writes a fairly didactic story throughout, and there’s a revamped Tennessee Williams flavor to the plot that’s both old-fashioned and contrived. The emotions run strong and intense, however, and that’s where the book’s at its best. The story effectively makes the point that the thoughtless jeers of schoolmates are vicious and often wrong; it also emphasizes the more original fact that such prejudice has unrealized collateral damage, since the lines between “them” and “us” are not just imaginary but hastily and illogically drawn. Readers drawn by the angst of Nancy Garden’s *The Year They Burned the Books* (BCCB 9/99) may find similar reward here. DS
Hearing a loud roar on his night watch, the ever-vigilant Good Knight mounts his steed and rushes off ("Clippety-clop. Clippety-clop") to investigate. A dragon in jammies is in distress—can't sleep without a drink of water. Too kind-hearted to refuse, Good Knight complies, tucks him in, and returns to the castle. A roar from another dragon summons him for a bedtime story ("I don't believe this"); a third for a beddy-bye song. The fourth roar nearly depletes his patience when the monster trio collectively demands a kiss ("This is going too far"). "But he was a good knight. So he bent and kissed each scaly little cheek." As soon as dragon roars have been lulled into dragon snores, he's back to the castle ("Clippety-clop. Clippety-clop") for his own well-earned snooze. Our hero's hearty "Away"s and exasperated asides provide plenty of opportunity for novice readers to try out their most expressive voices, while Plecas' sweetly ugly, bug-eyed little monsters and gallant but drooping knight supply visual drollery to match the text. Plenty of repetition reinforces the easy-reader vocabulary, so youngsters who have just begun tilting with the printed word can charge right through this tale. EB

Drawing from all four Evangelists, Thompson retells events from the life of Jesus from his public role as preacher and teacher through the aftermath of his death and the continuing mission of his disciples. Paraphrasing is simple and reverent, and although episodes are somewhat blended, it is generally easy to trace each to its original Gospel source. Thompson deftly nudges the disciples into the forefront of the action, moving beyond Mark's bare-bones account of their retreat following the Crucifixion to supply a motivation for their distress: "They were deep in mourning, weeping with grief and remorse. For they knew they had deserted Jesus, and then he had died." Uyehara's oil paintings shift subtly from the blues and purples of the Passion to the fiery golds and reds of Pentecost; broad, muscular forms outlined in black ably suggest the bedrock strength the disciples muster to "joyously . . . set out to bring Jesus' teachings to everyone." EB

Lefty's "fit" is actually an epileptic seizure, which means that his fairly normal fifteen-year-old existence undergoes some serious changes. Mostly everybody's afraid: he's afraid of seizures and afraid his almost-girlfriend is afraid to be alone with him, his mother is afraid something terrible will happen to him, and his friend Rueben is afraid that Lefty's reassessment of his activities means their friendship is at an end. It's no surprise that these fears are laid to rest in the course of the novel, and Lefty's narration is so talky that the novel's pacing is slow despite its nervous energy. What's bracing about the book, however, is Trembath's quirky portrayal of Lefty ("I'm the first right-handed person named Lefty in the world")
and his close-knit hardscrabble neighborhood wherein Lefty is unusual for having a dad who’s stuck around and where terrible troubles survived make for terrific and hilarious storytelling. Lefty’s negotiation through the adjustment process is realistic too, with his initial overcaution giving way to carelessness with his medication; there is also some believable meanness from his classmates about his disease. While this doesn’t have quite the zip of Trembath’s *A Fly Named Alfred* (BCCB 10/97), it’s got a zest unusual for problem novels that should appeal to fans of Trembath and Brian Doyle. DS

VENOKUR, ROSS  *The Cookie Company*. Delacorte, 2000  [144p]  
ISBN 0-385-32680-7  $14.95  
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 3-7  

Alex Grindlay is thirteen years old, and he’s the unluckiest kid in the world. He has an acute case of “hoodooitis” and, convinced it’s incurable, he has resigned himself to his fate and takes no action to effect his own life. Enter Sal, the strange little messenger from The Cookie Company (fortune cookie, that is) with a present for Alex: his immediate future, cookie by cookie. Cracking open the fortune cookies sends Alex on a journey to parallel worlds, wherein it becomes necessary for Alex to reassess his passivity, take (vigorous) action more than once, and, just incidentally, save his father and the earth from being taken over by the megalomaniac talk show host, Cypress Vine. The action veers into the clumsily farcical here and there, and the overall plot requires a suspension of disbelief that it doesn’t quite merit; still, Alex is an engaging character. His deep sadness over his father’s neglect and his recognition of the emptiness left by the death of his mother makes Alex sympathetic, while his sense of the ridiculous and his crush on classmate Sarah Sachs (“No one had ever made braided pigtails look so good”) makes him genuinely likable. The message is a tad obvious and the vanquishing of Cypress Vine too easy, but the final image of Alex opening his last fortune cookie is an encouraging one: “He pulled out the fortune cookie to see what it had to say. But there was nothing written on it. He flipped it over. There was nothing there, either. It was blank, completely blank. He smiled and reached for a pen.” JMD

WERLIN, NANCY  *Locked Inside*. Delacorte, 2000  [240p]  
ISBN 0-385-32700-5  $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 7-10  

Marnie Skyedottir is the daughter of Skye, worldwide celebrity whose death left Marnie wealthy and alone. Enrolled at a rigorous boarding school, Marnie is unfriendly both to academics and classmates, preferring to spend her time online gaming with her friendly nemesis, the Elf. School troubles are abruptly put in the background when a teacher’s special interest takes a sinister turn: Ms. Slaight, under the delusion that she too is a daughter of Skye, kidnaps Marnie and holds her prisoner in an effort at getting their sisterhood recognized; the Elf comes to the rescue and ends up imprisoned with Marnie, and the two must come to real-life terms with each other as well as attempting escape. This doesn’t have the coiled intensity of Werlin’s *The Killer’s Cousin* (BCCB 9/98), where readers first saw the Elf, real name Frank; Marnie’s saga is more glossy melodrama than either effective thriller or psychological exploration (Marnie is “locked inside” spiritually as well as literally), and the revelations about her mother’s past add distraction rather than intensity. There’s entertaining adventure aplenty, however, and Elf is a stellar if
unlikely knight in shining armor, whose technologically assisted devotion to Marnie is postmodern romance at its finest. Caroline Cooney fans will find this a diverting escapade. DS

WHITCHER, SUSAN  The Fool Reversed.  Farrar, 2000  [192p]
ISBN 0-374-32446-8  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 9-12

Anna is fifteen, drifting through adolescence in the shadow of her friend Pauline until she meets Thorn, a thirty-year-old poet who sees her as the magnetic one. She and Thorn begin a clandestine romance, wherein she is deeply flattered by the older man's attention to her artistry (she's a budding poet) and herself, but she begins to be disturbed by Thorn's hunger to find newness through her own first experiences ("He would never be satisfied by what she freely gave. He would seek for yet one more layer of reticence in her that he could rip away. So she was always freshly exposed and raw. She was always new for him"). These experiences include not only her literary and sexual explorations with Thorn, but also, at Thorn's instigation, sex with his editor; if Thorn has his way, as he generally does, they will include sex with Pauline as well. Anna is bolstered by her friendship with Dylan, a boy she meets in the park, but she's blind to the fact that Dylan's professed crush on another girl is really a yearning for Anna herself; Dylan seeks to protect Anna from Thorn but has his own secrets to defend. Possessing all the fervid postmodern romance of Francesca Lia Block though with a more accessible style, the book is dead-on in its depiction of Anna's troubled relationship with Thorn and his complicated need for and use of her. It's also superb at portraying Anna's crystalline but detached view of her interaction with her mother and the distance between them; not only does Anna's mother see just the tip of Anna's iceberg, she doesn't even realize that there's an underwater component. The relationship with Dylan doesn't have quite the same creepy resonance, but it's fraught with its own interesting twists and turns; even the most jaded of readers will find their final pairing a relief. DS

WITTLINGER, ELLEN  What's in a Name.  Simon, 2000  [160p]
ISBN 0-689-82551-X  $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 7-10

Some people—mostly rich Johnny-come-latelies concerned about image—in the town of Scrub Harbor want to change its name to Folly Bay, and some people—mostly the blue-collar families that have lived there for generations—don't. This division spills into the high school, where the daughter of the strongest proponent of the name change gets her fellow students involved in the issue, though not always in ways she'd anticipated. Wittlinger follows the high school students on the day of the vote, allowing ten teens each to narrate in turn; we hear from in kids, out kids (literally, in the case of one boy who chooses this moment to come out of the closet via a poem in the literary magazine), kids of various races and origins (Brazilian Ricardo embarks on a romance with the prickly best friend of his host family's daughter; African-American Folly-ite Nelson seeks love with Shaquanda, who is bussed in from Boston and highly amused by the whole tempest in a suburban teapot). What's particularly effective here is Wittlinger's balance between external and internal views of her characters; she doesn't fall into the trap of treating one assessment as right and another as wrong but rather enriches the character-
ization by making officious Gretchen tired of being her mother’s puppet, mousy Nadia annoyed enough to ride roughshod over new boy Adam, and unsubtle jock Quincy a supporter of his brother, O’Neill, after the revelation that O’Neill is gay. The mosaic of voices and viewpoints is noteworthy for its quiet emphasis on the interaction of individuals and the importance and dynamism of the resultant gestalt. This one will make readers think differently about their own classmates, and it could, under a daring teacher, provide an inspiration for some similar writing with a local perspective. DS

ZEMAN, LUDMILA, ad. Sindbad: From the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights; adapted and illus. by Ludmila Zeman. Tundra, 1999 32p ISBN 0-88776-460-6 $17.95 R Gr. 3-6

An opening vignette introduces clever queen Shahrazad and the 1,001 nights, paving the way for this lively abbreviation of the adventurous story of Sindbad the sailor (“This is one of the tales that enchanted the king as it may enchant you”). An older, wiser, and richer Sindbad tells his story of voyages, shipwrecks, and encounters with mythical beasts to a poor porter. Zeman’s retelling concentrates on action, and her effective storytelling is enriched by her ornately detailed paintings. The compositions incorporate stylistic elements from Persian carpets and miniatures; full-page illustrations with elaborate borders have rich, beaten-gold backgrounds, sparked with turquoise blue and ruby red for details and highlights. The fantastical city and seascapes are delicately and gracefully rendered, in a style reminiscent of Dulac, though more robust and energetic. Meticulous drafting and expressive characterization add vigor to the controlled compositions. Zeman’s Sindbad ends his tale a bit abruptly, long before his seventh voyage, but his final words to the listening porter—“But I must rest, now, my friend. Come back tomorrow and I will tell you what I endured on my next voyage”—proffer an invitation not to be refused. Dust off those copies of The Arabian Nights; this’ll make you need them. A concluding author’s note gives some background on the origin of the tale, and the concluding illustration, that of a wise Shahrazad on the back of a magical horse, brings the book full circle. JMD

Creeden pairs thirty folktales featuring female protagonists (and catalysts) with thirty anecdotes about famous American women. This combination of folktale and history is a dynamic one (Creeden previously used this format in her *Fair Is Fair: World Folktales of Justice*). The approach lends a convincing authority to the author's contention that folktales, spoken and written, still have relevance for modern listeners and readers. The thirty tales are evenly divided between "Roses" ("traditional women") and "Not Roses" ("untraditional women"); individual tales are introduced under thematic headings ("Healing Our Sick," "Giving Birth in Old Age," "Seeking Justice," "Seeking Revenge," "Leaving Abuse Behind," "Savoring Life," etc.) and accompanied by a proverb or quotation. Each folktale is followed by a brief biography of a woman such as Wilma Pearl Mankiller, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Mary McLeod Bethune, Mae West, Tina Turner, Alice B. Toklas, Marie Laveau, Sadie and Bessie Delany, and others. Creeden's retellings of the traditional tales are spare and crisp, and the biographical vignettes, while somewhat dry, are solidly serviceable. The notes are extensive, and include background information, sources, and references. Teachers and librarians looking for substantial stories about compassionate, wise, and daring women to use with middle graders and young adults will want to plant this one where they can reach it. JMD


The 1990 edition of this title was a boon to literature-based programming; this updated and expanded edition is additional evidence of the author's professional experience and expertise. The purpose of this new edition is clearly stated: "The *Storytime Sourcebook* is designed to help librarians, teachers, parents and other caregivers locate the appropriate idea (craft, fingerplay, story, song, etc.) for programs or lessons from the vast number of wonderful books usually available in libraries." The sample programs (aimed at children from three to seven years old) cover 146 themes and 2,200 picture books. Themes encompass anything from animals to gender roles, dinosaurs to pirates, holidays to self-reliance. The first edition's filmstrip and 16mm film selections have been replaced with videotape recommendations; sources for cassettes and/or CDs for suggested songs are also provided. Some of the picture-book suggestions would result in tediously long storytimes, but the lists for each theme contain enough titles to allow flexibility. Crafts and physical activities are briefly but clearly explained and their sources given. Text and instructions for the fingerplays are, unfortunately, not included; only titles and sources are provided. Themes are linked to a "Topical Calendar"
placed at the beginning of the book; appendices include guides to book publishers, video distributors, videocassettes (with running times), and music cassette and CD distributors. An extensive bibliography (useful for collection development as well as program planning) and indices to picture-book titles, authors, activities, and song titles close this (nearly) comprehensive storytime resource. JMD


Hamilton and Weiss have been teaching children (and adults) to tell stories for over twenty years. Their previous titles (*Children Tell Stories* and *Stories in My Pocket*) have proven to be practical resources for teaching the rudiments of story structure, storytelling techniques, and story research. Their latest effort is more loosely structured but just as effective. Twenty-five *pourquoi* tales ("stories that explain why an animal, plant, or natural object looks or acts the way it does") from a variety of cultures are retold in friendly, conversational language. Each story is followed by two sections: "About the Story," which gives the scientific explanation for the phenomena featured in the tale, and "Tips for Telling," which gives suggestions for gestures, voice changes, and body language. The authors' informal approach results in a down-to-earth collection of stories that can easily be used with younger listeners or by younger readers. This sensible resource closes with "General Tips for Telling Stories," suggestions for "Activities" (making up original *pourquoi* tales, searching out local how and why stories, learning the scientific explanations for how and why stories through an accompanying bibliography), and "Story Sources," (notes on the origin and variants of included tales). Black-and-white line drawings appear throughout. JMD


MacDonald has gathered an assortment of forty-one folktales and poems clustered around the central theme of caring for the Earth; the stories and poems are divided into thirteen categories ("Caring for Our Land," "All Things Are Connected," "The Folly of Human Greed," "Pollution Returns to the Polluter," etc.) that branch off from the central theme. The majority of the tales have been retold and formatted by MacDonald for easier storytelling, and her ability to distill a story to its essence is in strong evidence here. Spare but not stilted language typifies the compiler's retellings as well as those tales reprinted from other sources. Included works range from poem to anecdote to fable (MacDonald even includes thematically related proverbs), which adds flexibility, and the broad theme can easily be extended across curriculum lines. The collection features stories from a wide range of cultures (England, Liberia, Brazil, Thailand, China, Portugal, Iran, etc.) and detailed source notes are appended. MacDonald includes several useful addenda: "Tale Collections with Ecological Themes: A Short Bibliography," an annotated list of "More Ecological Tales to Tell or Read Aloud," and "Proverb Sources." The final note gives permission for the oral retelling of these stories to live audiences. JMD
Subject and Use Index

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

Adoption—fiction: Plummer
ADVENTURE STORIES: Pullman; Zeman
Africa—fiction: Kessler
Africa—folklore: Olaleye
African Americans: Cline-Ransome; Glover
African Americans—fiction: Cameron; Howard
African Americans—poetry: Newsome
American Indians—folklore: Bruchac
American Indians—plays: Bruchac
Art: Adoff
Art and artists—fiction: Buchholz
Baseball: Cline-Ransome
Baseball—stories: Rappaport
Basketball—fiction: Carbone
BEDTIME STORIES: Thomas
BIBLE STORIES: Gerstein; Thompson
BIOGRAPHIES: Butts; Cline-Ransome; Corey; Fredeen; Giblin; Glover; Harris
Brothers and sisters—fiction: Howard; Lewis; Spinner
Brothers and sisters—stories: Stewart
Bullies—fiction: Cox; Gaeddert
Cats—poetry: Duncan
Child abuse—fiction: Antle; Jocelyn
Child labor—fiction: Jocelyn
Children’s literature: Newsome
CONCEPT BOOKS: Smith
COUNTING BOOKS: Smith
Crime and criminals—fiction: Naylor; Roberts; Werlin
Crusades—fiction: Cadnum
Dancers and dancing: Glover
Death and dying—fiction: Okimoto
Dentistry: Ichord
Disabilities—fiction: Carbone; Jocelyn; Lewis; Trembath
Disasters—poetry: Kurtz
 Discipline—stories: Morrison
Dogs—fiction: Myers
Dragons—fiction: Thomas
Ethics and values: Gaeddert; Kessler; Lemieux; McKissack; Morrison; Shreve; Wittlinger
Families—fiction: Howard
Families—stories: Cuyler
FANTASY: Farber; Pullman; Venokur
Fashion: Corey
Fathers and daughters—fiction: Antle
Fathers and sons—fiction: Okimoto; Venokur
Fears—fiction: Cox
Fears—stories: Cuyler
Floods—poetry: Kurtz
FOLKTALES AND FAIRYTALES: Fearnley; Olaleye; Sturges
Food and eating—stories: Fearnley; Sturges
Friendship—fiction: Cameron; Carbone; Gaeddert; Henry; Shreve; Taylor
FUNNY STORIES: Fearnley; Lemieux; Stewart
Gardens—fiction: Bogacki
GHOST STORIES: Naylor
Grandparents—fiction: Antle
Gypsies—fiction: Farber
Hair-stories: Stewart
Health: Harris; Ichord
HISTORICAL FICTION:
   Cadnum; Gaeddert; Howard;
   Jocelyn; Lewis; Nixon; Snyder
History, U.S.: Colman; Giblin;
   Nixon; O’Brien
History, world: Ichord
Holidays: Thompson
Homosexuality-fiction: Taylor
Horses-fiction: Snyder
Human sexuality: Harris
Illness-fiction: Lewis
Journalism: Fredeen
Kidnapping-fiction: Roberts;
   Werlin
Knights-fiction: Thomas
Labor: Colman
LOVE STORIES: Werlin
Marine life: Butts
Medieval life-fiction: Cadnum
Mental illness-fiction: Plummer
Mothers and daughters-fiction:
   Kessler; Plummer; Whitcher
Mothers and daughters-stories:
   McKissack
Mothers and sons-fiction: Henry;
   Trembath
Music and musicians-fiction:
   Henry; Myers
MYSTERIES: Werlin
MYTHS AND LEGENDS:
   McClaren
Nigeria-folklore: Olaleye
Orphans-fiction: Naylor; Pullman;
   Snyder
Parents-stories: Morrison
Philosophy-fiction: Venokur
Physical education: Harris
PLAYS: Bruchac
POETRY: Adoff; Duncan; Kurtz;
   Lillegard; Newsome
Pregnancy-fiction: Plummer
Reading aloud: Kurtz; Lillegard;
   O’Brien; Pullman; Thomas
Reading, beginning: Thomas
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Reading, reluctant: Adoff; Antle;
   Cline-Ransome; Glover; Roberts;
   Spinner

Religious education: Gerstein;
   Thompson
School-fiction: Carbone; Howard;
   Lemieux; Shreve; Wittlinger
School-stories: Cuyler; McKissack
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Sex education: Harris
Sexual abuse-fiction: Whitcher
Sexuality-fiction: Whitcher
SHORT STORIES: O’Brien
South, the-fiction: Naylor
SPORTS STORIES: Rappaport
Stepbrothers-fiction: Okimoto
Storytelling: Gerstein; Olaleye
Storytelling-fiction: Zeman
Storytime: Duncan; Fearnley;
   Lillegard; Mitchell; Newsome;
   Sturges
Suicide-fiction: Taylor
Twins-fiction: Lemieux; Spinner
Uncles-fiction: Naylor
Unicorns-stories: Mitchell
Vietnam War-fiction: Lewis
Voyages and travel-fiction:
   Cadnum; Farber; McClaren;
   Zeman
War-fiction: Cadnum
West, the: O’Brien
West, the-fiction: Snyder
Wolves-stories: Fearney
Women’s studies: Butts; Colman;
   Corey; Fredeen; Gerstein;
   O’Brien; Rappaport
World War II-fiction: Gaeddert
World War II-stories: Rappaport
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