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PRODUCTION NOTE

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“Brown’s adorable bouncing rhyme about trains [1949] has been inventively re-imagined by [the Caldecott Medalists]. A silver ‘streamlined train’ puffs off to the West, while a tiny toy train is its echo and shadow in a comfortable, warmly kid-inhabited home. . . . The artists have chosen exactly the right expression of pure and simple art to accompany the equally uncomplicated rhyme. Sure to delight yet another generation of children.” —Starred review / Kirkus Reviews

“Brown’s Goodnight Moon and should please the same broad audience. It’s wonderful to have it back in such appropriate, and handsome, new garb.”

—Starred review / The Horn Book

“A handsome reinterpretation [of] Brown’s remarkable text.”

—Starred review / ALA Booklist

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Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart
written and illustrated by Vera B. Williams

It's hard to be a good poem and tell a story. It's hard to balance verbal and visual images so neither overwhelms or limits the other. It's hard to create a memoir that fills the space between picture book and middle-grade reading. It's hard to be sad and happy at the same time.

In Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart, Vera Williams does all of the above with an organic ease that nearly disguises the book's innovative nature—the book seems born to be what it is without self-conscious authorial effort. Her twenty-eight one-page, free-verse poems relate the daily events of two sisters often thrown together on their own as their mother works to keep the family together in their father's absence. We learn quite naturally through the children's arguments that Daddy forged a check and went to jail (“It is too stealing, Essie told Amber,/ and it's very bad”). Their lives are detailed poignantly but without sentimentality. They comfort each other by cuddling into a “Best Sandwich” with Wilson The Bear “right in the middle up against them both,” and they befriend a new neighbor, juggle help from neighbors and extended family, and suffer dramatic ups and downs—literally, at one point, when they break a bed with overexuberant bouncing.

Integrated with the text are graphics as varied as these experiences. The opening full-color portraits and equally bright concluding picture album sandwich the body of the text in a tonal reflection of the girls' own “Best Sandwich.” In both sections, striking colored-pencil lines accent the vertical and play sudden contrasts of hue against subtle blends. The first portraits show the backs of Amber and Essie first and then their faces, an arrangement that signals we will get to know these characters through a back door of action and dialogue that reveals their core of strength and joy. (The fact that their father is much loved despite the girls' inner conflict over what he has done introduces a complexity unusual in this compressed a story.) A heavy multicolored line extends through the text under each italicized poem title, tying together the full-color illustrations in the beginning and end. Facing a number of the poems are full-page, heavily outlined black-and-white drawings that echo the typeface and even seem to form a rhythmic visual extension from the black marks that form letters to the black marks that form pictures. An especially good example is “Sad Lullaby,” in which one of the lines in each of three stanzas features extra space between words in a way that calls attention to the space in and around the picture opposite, which depicts Amber and Essie's mother “just sitting/ On her bed.” Every poem ends with an unobtrusive...
diamond-shaped icon pointing the reader toward another page. The fact that such varied formatting and design does not call attention to itself but rather serves to unify effects for cohesive impact is a tribute to creative bookmaking.

Children's and young adult literature has, of course, been recognized for hosting a renaissance of graphic innovation, but the rise of poetic narrative is more surprising, given the generally conservative nature of juvenile literary forms. Essentially, a poem contracts and a story expands. Satisfying the dynamic of both at the same time involves a technical tug of war. William Merwin does it in his recent adult epic of Hawaiian history, *The Folding Cliffs*, but that's 325 pages long, with space to maneuver. Then there's *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey* and a few others spring to mind, but you notice they're pretty old—the fad for narrative poetry has perhaps faded in the world of adult literature. Books for children and young adults, though, seem to be hosting a revival of the form, with Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* (BCCB 5/01) winning a Newbery Award and Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make Lemonade* (7/93) and *True Believer* (5/01) riveting critical and popular attention.

Perhaps it helps that stories for young people demand the same kind of compression poetry does. What many if not most children want, after all, is to find out what happens next; if it happens with rhythm and brevity, so much the better. Wolff says, in a *Horn Book* interview with Roger Sutton, that "meaning ought to radiate more fiercely in poetry than it does in prose... Poetry should have more ergs per word." With that standard in mind, we can measure Vera Williams' achievement here by its compactness: an artistic mini-epic with two mini-heroes overcoming all odds of the inevitably bewildering, irrepressibly hopeful journey called childhood. (Imprint information appears on p. 41.)

*Betsy Hearne, Consulting Editor*

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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

It is with great pleasure that we finally welcome the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* to its new home in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science building. This long-anticipated move brings the *Bulletin* and the Center into enlarged, specially designed space suitable not just for continued publication of the *Bulletin* and maintenance of its tradition of excellence but also for expansion of the Center for Children's Books into a genuine and vital center for education, outreach, and development.

Such a mission will require much more from the director of the Center, and we are happy to announce that Janice Del Negro, editor of the *Bulletin* since 1996, will be taking on those additional responsibilities. Janice will retain her connection to the *Bulletin* as Contributing Editor, continuing to bring invaluable knowledge and experience to the *Bulletin* with her reviews.

Deborah Stevenson will take over the reins as Editor of the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. A PhD in English from the University of Chicago.
with credits ranging from membership in the Caldecott Committee of 2001 to a senior editorship on the in-progress *Oxford Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature*, Deborah will be most familiar to subscribers from her eleven years of reviewing and nine years’ editorial service at the *Bulletin*.

Our thanks to *Bulletin* subscribers and readers for your support and involvement. We hope you’ll enjoy the new and exciting development of the Center for Children’s Books as you continue to rely on the tradition of excellence at the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*.

Leigh Estabrook, Dean
Marlo Welshons, Director of Publications
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**AHLBERG, ALLAN** *The Adventures of Bert*; illus. by Raymond Briggs. Farrar, 2001 [32p]
ISBN 0-374-30092-5 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys R 2-5 yrs

Bert lives with his wife, Mrs. Bert, and baby, Baby Bert, and his life is crammed with unusual event. He gets stuck in a shirt he’s putting on and ends up in Scotland as a consequence; he’s chased by a large sausage (which proves to be a man in a sausage suit, who gives Bert a free sausage); he dives into the river to rescue a box that’s barking and winds up with a puppy. The lightning-quick “chapters” are quizzically humorous, and they’re well pitched and paced for the attention spans of very small audience members (and they allow for easy pauses and skipping to favorite sections if desired); the tension is genuine (Bert is fleeing from a giant sausage! Bert can’t swim!) but it’s also relieved quickly (the sausage reveals its humanity; Bert realizes that the river’s shallow enough for him to stand up) and padded by the cozily familial touches (the book begins and ends with salutations to the Berts and the unintentional waking of the baby). Briggs makes Bert a rotund, cheery gent with a definitely childlike demeanor; he takes his travails in stride, calmly greeting the kilted shepherd and thumbing a ride home in the rain, restored to peace and joy by his free sausage, and reveling in his newfound puppy. The colored-pencil compositions are airy and uncluttered, but they offer a few details worth lapsitting investigation—the mice fleeing into their hole while the cat’s tail reveals his presence under the bed, the holes in Bert’s socks (in the same places in both the purple and the orange pair), and the spider weaving a web between Bert’s slippers. Bert is an endearing and surprisingly charismatic hero, and his adventures will be just right for kids a little daunted by the stretch to a longer story. DS
ARNOLD, TEDD  
More Parts; written and illus. by Tedd Arnold.  Dial, 2001  32p  
Ad  5-8 yrs

Our young narrator, who in Parts (BCCB 10/97) was convinced that belly-button lint, earwax, and other loose body bits were indication of his corporeal dissolution, here finds new sources of alarm in the words of those around him. His mom suggests that he broke his heart, his dad wants his son to give the old man a hand, his friend’s sister screams her lungs out every night, and all this casual contemplation of physical destruction has him beside himself until his parents explain that these nightmarish notions are merely figures of speech. This verse narrative over-stretches in both scansion and concept to make its point, and it’s not as effective as its predecessor in capitalizing on body anxieties. The protagonist is still eminently sympathetic in his frantic confusion and perturbation, however, as most kids have also been baffled a time or two by arcane adult rhetoric; there is also sufficient dwelling on the physical aspects (“My tongue’s a slimy, jiggly, squishy/ Slippery little squirt”) for emotional and readaloud appeal. Arnold’s line-and-watercolor illustrations offer his usual hugely bug-eyed figures clinging to the edge of hysteria, and scenes of plummeting tongues (dropped after being held), spaghetti-noodle arms and legs (from stretching one’s limbs prior to exercise), and the narrator’s desperate attempts to keep it all, literally, together provide the humorous energy the text doesn’t quite muster on its own. Kids dissolved into laughter by the first title may find that this cracks them up.  DS

BARNER, BOB  
Dinosaur Bones; written and illus. by Bob Barner.  Chronicle, 2001  30p  
ISBN 0-8118-3158-2  $15.95  
R  3-6 yrs

For children newly infected with dino fever, here’s a remedy in kids’-strength dosage. Across the top of each double-page spread snakes a hand-lettered rhyme reminding viewers that those fascinating fossilized bones were shaped to perform a specific function: “They had bones for legs and bones for hips,/ dinosaur bones used on long dinosaur trips.” Admittedly, great poetry it’s not, but the point is made, and the real meat of the matter embedded in pint-sized paragraphs that explain a bit of how scientists interpret the fossil record: “Some dinosaurs had hips like birds. Others had hips like lizards. Many dinosaurs were giants, but some were the size of a chicken.” Cheerily grinning crayon-hued behemoths, owing more to Barney than to Industrial Light & Magic, dominate each scene with their alluring bulk, and consecutive spreads that move from skeleton to “live” figure aptly convey the relationship between bare bones and fleshed beast. A concluding graph of comparative dino heights and a colorful box chart of dino data will not only edify the child audience but delight primary math teachers on the prowl for an enticing hook.  EB

BATEMAN, TERESA  
The Merbaby; illus. by Patience Brewster.  Holiday House, 2001  [32p]  
ISBN 0-8234-1531-7  $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  R  6-9 yrs

While fishing in dangerous waters, Tarron and his ambitious brother, Josh, are lured nearly to their deaths by a mermaid’s song. Although Tarron saves Josh’s ship and their lives, Josh scolds him for not also capturing the mermaid, saying “She would have been both our fortune and our fame.” The next day, when the
brothers find a merbaby in their fishing nets, Josh is delighted, hoping to sell admission tickets and make their fortunes. Tarron, however, is captivated by the affectionate merbaby and, breaking a long tradition of fear and mistrust between humans and mermaids, returns the child to her mermaid family while Josh is sleeping. The merpeople reward him for his kindness in returning the lost child by giving him human treasures that had been lost at sea, and soon the boat is loaded down with gold coins and jewels. Tarron generously shares his reward with his brother and then sells his treasures to fulfill his dream of buying a boat of his own. The text is well honed with a smooth, lyrical storytelling gait that will engage listeners even as Tarron ponders the ethical issues in mermaid-human relationships. Brewster uses lines that flow like water in whirls and swirls reminiscent of Trina Schart Hyman's art, and the pages are washed with the colors of the sea. Although faces are stiffly drawn, Tarron's tenderness is evident in his gestures, and the fluidity of line and detail of the nautical environment more than compensate for this slight flaw. In a maritime storytime or for more intimate sharing, this story will provide smooth sailing. KM


Those seeking to add some sparkle to their easy-science-project collection can pause right here for this simple overview of the wonder that is bubbles. Bradley explains what bubbles are, why they're round (no matter what shape wand is used to blow them), why they pop, and how to make them. Clean, clear color photographs in various configurations (full-page, full-and-half-page, and a variety of inserts) feature a culturally inclusive cast of children gleefully engaged in bubble-blowing activities with plastic wands and straws. Text blocks are set on brightly hued pages (blue, gold, pink, green, violet) that pick up the colors in the accompanying photographs. Bubbles are some of kids' favorite things, and hearing or reading this introduction to the science of the soapy spheres will add to the pleasure of blowing them. A recipe for making bubble solution and instructions for two simple science demonstrations are included. JMD


Sixth-grader Molly is alone for three days before the authorities discover her parents are missing. Children's Services is more than happy to turn Molly over to the creepy great-uncle who suddenly appears to claim her, despite Molly's unwillingness to go with him. Her show-tune-singing sixth-grade teacher, Ms. Shabbas, realizes that something is not right and offers to help, but it is Molly alone who must discover her great-uncle's true identity. Molly is a brave, believable character who remembers her father's stories and heeds her dreams, and the combination of stories, dreams, and determined action enables her both to discover the hideous
truth about her false great-uncle and to rescue her parents. The end is somewhat abrupt, but Molly's first-person narration will quickly draw in readers, and the suspenseful buildup to the foreshadowed conclusion will hold them fast. Bruchac gives full play to his talent for the creepy, and the introduction of bits of American Indian lore and story (the frame for the novel is an American Indian tale, here unsourced, about a powerful, cannibalistic Skeleton Man) are smoothly and capably integrated. Reluctant as well as eager readers, perhaps with their interest awakened by Simms' *The Bone Man* (BCCB 12/97), will relish this fast-paced supernatural chase. JMD

**CABOT, MEG** *Princess in the Spotlight*. HarperCollins, 2001 [240p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029466-3 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029465-5 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-9

In *The Princess Diaries* (BCCB 12/00), Mia adjusted, slowly and reluctantly, to her change from ordinary Manhattan teenager to princess of the small European country of Genovia. That change was easy compared to the new alteration in her life: her mom (never married to Mia's father) is pregnant with Mia's algebra teacher's child, and the happy couple is planning to wed. Mia is embarrassed to the hilt, determined that nobody know—until she accidentally spills the beans on national TV, whereupon her opinionated grandmother (who isn't even the mother of the bride) decides a formal state-occasion wedding complete with celebrities and weird relatives is the appropriate response. While readers are laughing at shallow, breathless Mia as often as laughing with her, Cabot's inspired scenario (now fulfilling its natural destiny by becoming a motion picture) retains its campy charm. The juxtaposition of Mia's education in the ways of princesshood with her gushy, headlong style and everyday travails continues to prove a comic success. Though there's a bit too much extraneous contrivance shoehorned in here (the side plot about Mia's country cousin's development into an underwear model is utterly dispensable), the disastrous wedding brings amusing star-guest turns from real-life celebrities (especially Martha Stewart, who helpfully whips up a Halloween costume for Mia). Fine beach fodder, unburdened by weight or depth, this is as successful a frothy frivolity as the first title. DS

ISBN 0-689-83203-6 $18.00 R Gr. 9-12

Joan Bauer's "Extra Virgin," about the choice of sexual abstinence, opens this provocative collection, but abstinence is not necessarily the rule in the remaining nine stories. Themes revolving around the consequences of first love/first lust between various gender combinations predominate: Louise Hawes' teenage heroine questions her abortion ("Fine and Dandy"); Garth Nix's supernatural hero saves the girl he loves from a homicidal rapist ("Lightning Bringer"); Chris Lynch's confused main character has his heterosexuality reconfirmed by his sexually adventurous girlfriend ("The Cure for Curtis"); Michael Lowenthal's young homosexual protagonist suffers through his first crush/sexual encounter ("The Acuteness of Desire"); and Emma Donoghue's lesbian heroine recalls her passionate crush on a transsexual ("The Welcome"). Whether dealing with infatuation, confusion, or personal responsibility, the stories offer an intimate look at the complex balancing act of human involvement. JMD

A lot goes on in a day at this particular animal shelter, as Casey makes clear: people bring their pets to work, owners bring animals to the clinic for veterinary care, workers take care of the cats in the sanctuary, the staff rescue a confused deer, and the shelter deals with various animals dropped off for their permanent care. Though readers may wonder about an animal shelter that doesn’t seem to adopt any critters out and it’s hard to find a connecting thread or person, they’ll enjoy the three-ring-circus aspect of a day with a passel of animals. The visuals capture the pace; combining photographs and watercolor, they run text blocks in squares through the spreads, they pepper scenes with speech balloons, and they convert into captioned panels when it takes their fancy. The loud and jostling effect is occasionally overwhelming, but it usually just smacks of friendly and frenetic disorganization. Though there’s no further information about the animal shelter (it’s never even mentioned that it’s in Britain), a brief index is included. Animal-loving kids will relish this literary menagerie. DS

Catalanotto, Peter  Emily’s Art; written and illus. by Peter Catalanotto. Jackson/Atheneum, 2001 32p ISBN 0-689-83831-X $16.00 R 5-8 yrs

Emily loves to draw and paint, so when her teacher tells her class they will be participating in a painting contest she is pleased. While her best friend, Kelly, paints only butterflies, Emily paints something different every day, each painting reflecting both the real-life images she sees and the emotional life she feels, and her contest entry depicts her beloved dog, Thor. When the art judge arrives (her credentials? “My cousin is married to an artist”), she first mistakes Emily’s dog for a rabbit and then rejects it on subject alone (“I hate dogs!” screeches the judge), giving a blue ribbon to Kelly’s most recent butterfly. Emily takes her painting off the wall and hides it (“I’ll never paint again,” she whispers). Her disheartened state is noticed by her teacher and she’s sent to the nurse’s office, where an encounter with a frazzled Kelly makes her realize the worth of her own work. The tale pushes credibility more than Karas’ similarly themed The Class Artist (reviewed below) or Say’s Emma’s Rug (BCCB 11/96), but Emily’s sensitive recoil will be easily understandable to youngsters. The visuals are appropriately Emily-focused. Her own art features prominently, illustrating some pages as photo-like inserts fill viewers in on classroom activities. After Emily’s art is disparaged by the judge, Catalanotto depicts her as becoming more transparent, almost as if she is a ghost or shadow; Kelly’s encouragement restores her to her solid self. Faces are poorly articulated and their expressions sometimes difficult to interpret, but the emotions will carry audiences past the awkwardness. This title avoids being messagey by its specificity: Emily’s feelings are genuinely hurt, her discovery of a stronger sense of her artistic self will provide a good discussion point. JMD


Larky Mavis is an innocent soul. She comes down the road, “mooning about, and mooning about” in her patched clothes and wooden clogs, and suddenly discovers
something. As she tells the parson, "It's a little baby I found in a peanut. I call him Heart's Delight because he makes me glad." Mavis, despite her somewhat distracted air and apparent homelessness, obviously knows more than the more conventional townsfolk, and she carts Heart's Delight everywhere. When she becomes a nuisance that's bad for business, however, the townsfolk decide to confiscate the child. "No, get your own baby!" cries Mavis, and off she runs. In the course of the chase the blanket wrapped around Heart's Delight begins to come undone, white wings flutter madly, and a golden glow suffuses the pages. The angel that is Heart's Delight rescues Mavis: "Heart's Delight smiled and held her tight, and off they flew, higher and higher." Cole's tale can be read as a gentle fable about homelessness, as a story of faith, as a literal tale of a young girl who finds magic in the middle of the road. The folktale-like structure shapes the momentum of the story and the language is that of a traditional tale honed to smoothness by many tellings. Mavis is a charismatic outcast, and she is so obviously in the right she exerts an odd sense of spiritual authority. The appropriately larky watercolors set Mavis on the outskirts of a prosperous town in a bucolic countryside, depicting the same sort of pseudo-English, turn of the century fairy-and-folktale-land Cole used in Buttons (BCCB 3/00). This is a gentle, sweet tale with echoes of Andersen in its moral conclusion. JMD

**COOPER, ELISHA**  *Dance!*; written and illus. by Elisha Cooper. Greenwillow, 2001 [32p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029419-1  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029418-3  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R* Gr. 3-5

Few illustrators, save perhaps James Stevenson, can coax quite so much expression and animation from a few dashes of fine brushwork and a smear or two of watercolor fill. Here Cooper's agile shapes spring across pristine white space and dart among sinuous lines of text as dancers who bring a show through four grueling weeks of rehearsal to the opening curtain of a debut. There's plenty of information tucked within to illuminate the groans and blisters and duct tape behind the spotlight glamor of a performance, but as in his previous titles (Building, BCCB 4/99, etc.) Cooper offers his audience an experience more visceral than cerebral. All senses are on full alert: for the tang of sweat, the shock of ice on an abused ankle, shadows that "crouch when a dancer crouches and leap when a dancer leaps," the pulse of drumbeats that "run through the floor and up the dancers' legs and into their chests," the directions of the choreographer whose every word "HAS! AN! EXCLAMATION! POINT!" Any reader who would happily trade all the bedroom furniture for a barre will be on Cloud Nine, and listeners whose sophistication has just about outrun picture books will also revel in both the wry humor and the artistry. EB

**CULLEN, CATHERINE ANN**  *The Magical, Mystical, Marvelous Coat*; illus. by David Christiana. Little, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-316-16334-1  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R  5-8 yrs

Leggy but readable rhythms and rhymes propel the reader through a cumulative plot in which a young girl goes out each day "to see what I'd see" and ends up using one of the six magic buttons on her coat to rescue one of a diverse group of
people and fairy folk, starting with a young giant in distress. Each of the grateful recipients then creates an appropriate adjective to describe the coat's magical capabilities: for example, the giant whose head was frying in the sun (until given an icy button to hold) calls it "megacoooliferous." Eclectic watercolor patterns—on everything from the coat to a "snake searching for something for tea"—add another layer of ordered whimsy, while the consistency of David Christiana's soft palette lends coherence to the stylistic diversity of his sophisticated illustrations. This airy-fairy and peaceable walk on the wild side ends in triumph and at home, offering younger audiences a lively and comforting glimpse of a fantasy world outside over there. FK

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029243-1 $16.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029138-9 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 4-6

Bessie Coleman, Beryl Markham, and Amelia Earhart may command name recognition, but lesser-known aviator Blanche Stuart Scott racked up her own series of firsts before her better known colleagues took to the air. During her active career from 1910 to 1916, she became (by closely argued reckoning) the U.S.'s first woman pilot, the first woman test pilot, and the first woman stunt flier. Cummins makes it clear that Scott's daring was not limited to corkscrews and plummets behind the wheel (and directly in front of the open-mounted engine) of a precariously balanced "huge tricycle with transparent wings" but also in defying social standards of the time: "People accused her of blasphemy, saying if God had wanted her to fly, He would have given her wings. Others said it was indecent for a woman even to attempt to fly." Although cumulative injuries forced Scott's early retirement, death threats, attempts on her life, and the morbid curiosity of spectators who "paid money to see me risk my neck, more as a freak—a woman freak pilot—than as a skilled flier" took their toll as well. Cummins offers a brief but well-documented biography, packed with plenty of quotes from Scott, plenty of period photographs, and plenty of action. Buzz it by reluctant report-writers or any middle-grader with a taste for true adventure. EB


Donaldson's rhyming tale features a high-spirited witch and her cat going out for a quick spin on her broomstick. The wind blows the witch's hat off and she descends to retrieve it, but she cannot find it until "out of the bushes/ on thundering paws/ There bounded a dog/ with the hat in his jaws." The dog begs prettily for a ride, and off they go, until the wind blows the bow out of the witch's braid. The bow is retrieved by a bird, who joins the party; the subsequent loss of a wand results in its retrieval by a frog who, in his enthusiasm for his broomstick ride, jumps for joy and snaps the broom in two. All plummet to earth except the witch, whose remaining half-broomstick propels her into a cloud where she has the misfortune to meet a hungry dragon. Faint with fear, the witch is rescued by her animal friends who, disguised as a four-headed beast covered in mud, feathers, and fur, scare off the dragon, after which the witch conjures a deluxe broomstick with room for all. Donaldson's rhyming couplets (as well as her plot) are occasionally
stretched, but the illogical silliness of the tale (how come the witch doesn’t use her magic to escape the dragon?) is unapologetic. Scheffler’s cartoony characters have a pop-eyed exuberance that carries the slight plot quite nicely over the various terrains (from forest to field to mountain) pictured. The text does run on, making this a little too long for the youngest listener, but primary graders will enjoy hearing it—and perhaps even reading it on their own. JMD

DRUCE, ARDEN  
_Halloween Night_; illus. by David W. Wenzel. Rising Moon, 2001  25p  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-87358-797-9  $14.95  
Paper ed. ISBN 0-87358-762-6  $6.95  
Ad  3-6 yrs

The rhythmic text asks simple riddles: “On Halloween Night, when it’s dark and scary, / who can swoop through the air/ with a swish and a flurry?/ ‘I can,’ said the witch.// In a haunted house, / surrounded by mist, / who can spin/ shimmering webs with/ a swirl and a twist?// ‘I can,’ said the spider.” A jack-o’-lantern, ghost, scarecrow, and skeleton, etc. each have their moments, leading up to the concluding riddle: “All in their costumes, / ready for fun, / who can frighten/ everyone?// ‘We can!’ said the children.” The progression is predictable and the verse sometimes lackluster, but Wenzel’s watercolors depict a satisfyingly spooky neighborhood and its various Halloween-relevant denizens (including the merry band of trick-or-treaters that opens and closes the book), just scary enough to satisfy the “I am _so_ old enough!” preschooler. The style evokes Paul Galdone’s rustic vigor, but with cleaner drafting and slightly more detailed compositions. Each spread gives clues to the next riddle’s answer, and a quick storytime read-through will enable attendees to answer all the riddles, making it clear just who’s really in charge on this particular holiday. JMD

DUPRE, KELLY  
The Raven’s Gift: A True Story from Greenland; written and illus. by Kelly Dupre. Houghton, 2001  32p  
ISBN 0-618-01171-4  $15.00  
R  5-8 yrs

On an odyssey of fifteen months and 3,200 miles by kayak and dogsled, Lonnie Dupre fulfills a boyhood dream with an expedition along the Greenland coast. Although he starts out a traveler seasoned by trips to Alaska, Siberia, Canada, and Scandinavia—along with two years preparation and long term study of Inuit life ways—Lonnie and his friend John are almost overwhelmed by hardships along the way. It is an eerie encounter with a Raven, magical in Native American lore, that keeps Lonnie going. As they finish the long journey, he remembers “the one who taught me that strength and spirit is in the land, in the sea, and in all living things. It is within us all, but we must search and find it for ourselves.” This is a moving first-person narrative (scripted by Lonnie’s wife in Lonnie’s voice) that combines information about the Arctic and its inhabitants with an account of modern visitors who are touched by ancient natural elements. Her linoleum block prints, primarily blue and black against a spacious white background, use heavy outlines for rhythmic composition and varied page design, with some images projecting the voyagers’ experiences while other blocks of illustrated text deliver facts about history and wildlife. There’s never a sense of crowding or confusion, and the naïve style of the figures creates as refreshing an effect as the honest textual tone. This is a first-class ticket for adventurous lapsitters. BH

The narrator and his family have been chasing a pumpkin-pie dream for a few autumns now. The first year their pies, made with pumpkins from the grocery store, are pretty good; the second-year pies, made with pumpkin-patch purchases, are also quite acceptable; and the third-year pies, from organic-farm squash, are fairly well received. The fourth year, however, they decide to grow their own pumpkins, and after a lot of labor they’re rewarded with a panoply of pumpkins that prove to make “the greatest, most unbelievably scrumptious” pies ever. The telling is even tastier than the plot, with the narrator both demanding and amusingly imaginative in his taste standards (“How unbelievable are these pumpkins? Are they, ‘Our turtle lived in the vacuum cleaner for an entire month and is still alive,’ unbelievable, or are they, ‘You just won $500 worth of merchandise from the toy store—shop till you drop,’ unbelievable?”). The tumble from prose into rollicking poetry come harvest time seems perfectly sensible, and the family’s annual project is authentic as well as inviting; the pumpkin facts seeded throughout the spreads are often genuinely interesting and informative. The art’s a tad on the glitzy side, but there’s a generous slice of humor in Shea’s interpretation of the narrator’s hyperbolic account (viewers will love the way various animals’ eyeballs float just above their heads), and homey touches (little Sis perches on a phone book at the feast) keep the exaggerated images well grounded. Between the food-related subject and the multi-holiday relevance, this is a solidly useful as well as highly entertaining book. A pie recipe is, of course, included. DS


Jambo and Marva, immigrant pigs from Amiens, France, have established a thriving topiary and salvage trade just outside of Ames, Iowa. With the help of their twelve offspring—skilled topiarists all—the couple has even garnered local acclaim for their annual Thanksgiving offering of turkey-shaped trees. But this year—gasp!—the trees are missing, and suspicion immediately falls on Voler, a “notorious topiary thief.” After fruitless attempts to foil the thief, Marva succeeds in outwitting him by leaving turkey-styled deciduous trees in Voler’s greedy path, which turn golden right on cue and fairly glow in his yard. The crime plot is quite gentle, but the solution is clever and child-accessible; the story’s true charm lies in the spare, wry narration and the wealth of detail Geisert incorporates into his porcine milieu. The pigs make the most of their salvage goods, and their house is wittily constructed of school bus, caboose, church steeple, and miscellaneous architectural jetsam, with enchanting ingress through a pair of pillars and egress down a playground slide. Pumpkins (big enough for little porkers to hide in) glow, turkey trees glow, and the Jambonneau mansion glows invitingly under a cloudless autumn night sky, and as neighborhood pigs assemble for a happy ending replete with cider and cookies, listeners who’ve never heard of Ames, Iowa will regard it as (at least for one magical night a year) the most desirable spot on God’s golden earth. EB
GERAS, Adele  
*Troy.* Harcourt, 2001  340p  
ISBN 0-15-216492-8  $17.00  M Gr. 9-12

Geras presents the fall of the ancient city of Troy from numerous points of view: orphaned Xanthe and her sister, Marpessa; Helen, whose beauty toppled a kingdom; Theano, Danae, and Halie, kitchen maids in the palace of King Priam, and others. The effort to provide the inside scoop on the epic’s major female characters impedes the development of the minor characters that are supposed to carry the story. The gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon make sporadic appearances to foreshadow coming events, but otherwise their shallow characterizations have little impact. The opening chapters switch from location to location—from Blood Room (where wounded Trojan soldiers are brought to be healed or die) to battlefield to palace to the wall surrounding the city—in order to establish the characters’ history and to provide context for events to come. The constantly shifting point of view makes the progression of the novel choppy and interferes with the building of any sense of momentum. Stilted dialogue and occasional anachronistic language further impede the action of the tale. Although some lip service is given to economic reasons behind the war, lust is the motivating force behind much of the action. In the final third of the novel the momentum of the lost cause that is Troy finally takes hold, and the novel spirals to its inevitable conclusion. This novel is ambitious but nonetheless predictable, and it lacks sufficient pace to support its length. JMD

GERSTEIN, Mordicai  
*Fox Eyes;* written and illus. by Mordicai Gerstein. Golden, 2001  [73p] (Road to Reading)  

Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 2-4

Young Martin is spending the month of August with his great aunt Zavella “in her grand, rickety, old house in the mountains.” He enjoys tramping through the woods, listening to his aunt’s stories from “the Old Country,” and playing his violin, especially when he finds that a local fox is drawn to his melodies. Sharpnose the fox enjoys the woods, too, but he longs to be a human with human hands, to play the violin, and maybe to get his hands on one or two of Aunt Zavella’s chickens. Despite Zavella’s warnings, Martin falls prey to Sharpnose’s foxy tricks, finding himself inside the fox’s body and Sharpnose inside the boy. Boy/fox and fox/boy take advantage of their respective transformations: Martin enjoys the smells, sounds, and speed he can experience as a fox; Sharpnose eats almost more than he can hold of Zavella’s good cooking (two chickens!) and then dashes upstairs to play the violin. Gerstein’s easy chapter book opens with whimsy, but the matter-of-factness of his prose (and the solid character of Aunt Zavella) anchors the fantasy. Full-page black-and-white line drawings featuring a lively Martin and a scruffily attractive fox enhance each chapter. JMD

GILMORE, Rachna  
*A Group of One.* Holt, 2001  [184p]  
ISBN 0-8050-6475-3  $16.95

Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 5-9

Though ostensibly structured around a conventional boyfriend plot, this novel’s centerpiece is the dramatic story told by Tara Mehta’s maternal grandmother (“Naniji”), whose fourteenth birthday party in 1942 was interrupted when British
soldiers searching for seditious pamphlets arrested her brother and mother. When Naniji describes her subsequent participation in the Gandhi-led "Quit India" movement, Tara feels "we're all in the circle, hammering the poster with her." While this connection with their family history is a breakthrough for Tara and her sisters, Naniji is shocked and hurt to realize that her granddaughters had heard only a comparatively "feeble" version of the story from their father, who has been the nervous bridge between his fervently Indian parents and, first, his comparatively westernized wife and, now, the children who are tired of being perceived as an exotic contrast to "plain old regular Canadians." The novel's occasional thematic heavy-handedness is leavened by its refreshing irreverence about things like ethnic accents and parental perfection. A faceted exploration of the way family history complicates present identity, this involving domestic fiction is likely to hit many readers where they live. FK


Upon arriving at school for the first time, Bernard (a short purple elephant wearing a backpack) immediately announces that it's "time to go home." He is not a bit tempted by the delights of school, though they are enthusiastically demonstrated by the regal-looking adult elephants who accompany him: his father gravitates towards the blocks, his mother to the art supplies, and his grandmother to the fireman's helmet in the dress-up box. Deserted by his folks, Bernard tentatively accepts his teacher's invitation to feed the fish and eventually helps a classmate name them. The next time he announces that it is "time to go home," Bernard himself has decided to stay: it's his folks who need to leave, which they do, reluctantly, after noticing "all the other mothers and fathers had gone." While there's clarity and quiet humor here, the story is sedate and predictable. The clean white space surrounding the text makes a contrast with the softly shaded jewel tones of the illustrations (in which we can identify the characters as Indian elephants because the women wear saris), but overall the effect is sweet, gentle, and perhaps overly calming. Though stylistically unadventurous, this empowering approach to first-day jitters is likely to evoke giggles from nervous preschoolers, seasoned young scholars, and their elders. FK

GOODMAN, SUSAN E.  Ultimate Field Trip 5: Blasting Off to Space Academy; illus. with photographs by Michael J. Doolittle. Atheneum, 2001 42p ISBN 0-689-83044-0 $17.00 Ad Gr. 3-5

Goodman offers a breezy, fun-and-games view of a week with Team Europa, a cadre of sixteen kids who attend a session at Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama. The focus here is on the simulation gadgetry they try out (1/6 gravity chairs, multi-axis trainers), the experiments and demonstrations they conduct (cooperation in a "weightless" environment, toy rocket launches), and of course the giggly behind-the-scenes information they cull (zero-gravity bathing, camera-assisted defecation training). Although themed chapters impose some organization, much of the information here seems loosely constructed and glued together with chuckly comments from participants ("Lindsay tried to breaststroke her way back to the wall—it was hopeless. 'Oh, well,' said Charles, 'she's Lost in Space'"). Even more problem-
atic are the myriad unanswered questions that seem relevant for hopeful readers—How were these kids chosen for the camp? How old do you have to be? What are their living quarters like? How exactly do they bond as a team? What happens if the gadgetry makes participants sick? Scrapbook-style photos abound, but they don't necessarily depict participants or activities connected to nearby text. While this is hardly the "ultimate" treatment of the Space Camp experience, space enthusiasts and kids yearning for a week away from home will want to check it out. EB


Kate wakes one summer morning ready to roll, crying, "Let's get a pup!" as she bounces on her parents' bed. Her extremely tolerant parents agree, and "with their breakfast uneaten, they dressed and left immediately" for the animal shelter. At the shelter they find "happy dogs, sad dogs, 'take me' dogs, and dogs who couldn't care less. They saw smelly dogs, fat dogs, lean and mean dogs, chew-it-up-and-spit-it-out-at-you dogs, and dogs like walking nightmares. Then they saw . . . Dave." Boisterous puppy Dave is everything they want so off they go, but on the way out they see Rosy. Rosy is old, but she "radiated 'Good Intention'"; sadly realizing they can't take them all, they leave her and go home. Not surprisingly, the next day they return to the shelter for Rosy, who provides the necessary grounded counterpoint to Dave's wildly energetic puppyness. Graham (who peoples this tale with the same tolerant parents from *Queenie, One of the Family*, BCCB 2/98) is right on the mark with this affectionate look at pet-seeking, from his heart-grabbing opening lines ("The end of Kate's bed was a lonely place. Tiger the cat no longer slept there. Tiger died last winter, so there were only Kate's two feet to keep each other company") to his light-filled line-and-watercolor depictions of Kate's cheerily chaotic household. Both dogs and people have personality plus, and the story itself is an emotional grabber with a conclusion sure to evoke sighs of satisfaction. JMD


Friends Iris and Walter (from, logically enough, *Iris and Walter*, BCCB 12/00) return with a four-chapter tale of problems overcome and fears conquered. First, Iris very much wants to ride Walter's horse, Rain ("Iris dreamed of riding Rain over green meadows, down a path of pines, straight into the sparkling stream"), but her attempts to make friends with the unwilling horse go awry. Walter tells the shouting, cookie-offering Iris that "horses like clucking and carrots and gentle hands," and when the two next go to visit Rain, "they had carrots. They had hope. They had a plan." Day after day Iris clucks, speaks softly, and offers carrots, and, finally, she takes a successful solo ride. Iris may seem fearless in this episode, but in the next she reveals that she is afraid to go to school; fortunately, Walter is there to encourage her ("'Iris, you are very brave,' said Walter. 'I know you are brave enough to go to school'"), and she manages quite well. Walter has a different school problem—when he is called the hated diminutive "Walt" by their otherwise reassuringly friendly teacher Miss Cherry, he is at a loss ("'Why don't you just tell her?' asked Iris. 'I just can't,' said Walter"); this time it's Iris who sparks the solution.
The two friends are a genial pair, whose conversations and concerns will ring true to young readers. Davenier’s soft-hued pen-and-ink illustrations enhance the two-some with a combination of energetic black lines and watery smears of color that infuse the pages with energy. The varied compositions contain just enough detail to catch the viewing eye, and the characterizations, from human to horse, are warm, friendly, and comfortingly familiar. JMD

HADDIX, MARGARET PETERSON  Among the Impostors. Simon, 2001  [176p]
ISBN 0-689-83904-9 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-7

Picking up where Among the Hidden left off, Haddix follows the life of ten-year-old Luke Garner as he enters a school under the alias of Lee Grant, a boy who died on a skiing trip, but whose family donated his identity to allow a forbidden third child to come out of hiding. Though expecting a milieu vastly different from his attic bedroom and rural upbringing, Lee is unprepared for the skewed academic world he encounters at Hendricks School for Boys, filled with strangely unresponsive teachers and students. His only hope lies in a note from Mr. Talbot (a family friend who has taken him to this school), but when Luke finally finds a private space to open it, the contents make him realize he is on his own. In addition to developing a plot that creates a kind of reality quicksand for young Luke, wherein he must constantly reevaluate the trustworthiness of those around him (he discovers his first “friend” is an informer for the population police, for instance), Haddix allows Luke to grow from a participant to a leader in this milieu, surprising himself with his own solutions when confronted by the mysterious Mr. Hendricks and Mr. Talbot. Haddix once again hits the mark with her ability to ask intriguing questions (what would happen if there were only two children allowed per family, and any third child had to die?) and successfully weaves them into a believable plot-driven, edge-of-your-seat tale. Fans of the previous title will not be disappointed, and they’ll clamor for a third book. EAB

Library ed. ISBN 1-58717-059-0 $15.88
Trade ed. ISBN 1-58717-058-2 $15.95  R  Gr. 3-6

Kate Culhane is mourning by her mother’s grave when she realizes that the sun is setting and she must hurry from the graveyard. Too late—she steps on newly turned earth and finds herself held fast. When against her will she follows the instructions of the voice from the grave—“Open this grave for me”—she uncovers a coffin and releases the dead man, who forces Kate to carry him into town for sustenance. They enter a house and Kate finds some oatmeal; the dead man drains blood from the sons of the house to mix with the oatmeal. When the dead man divides the oatmeal into two portions, Kate wisely avoids eating hers, instead dropping the bloody meal into her kerchief and leaving the kerchief on the floor. On the way back to the graveyard the dead man, thinking his secret safe because he plans to have Kate lie with him in his grave, tells her where his gold is buried and how to bring the boys back to life. Slightly adapted from a tale collected by Jeremiah Curtin in nineteenth-century Ireland, this is a bone-chiller of a ghost tale. Some readers may be familiar with this story from Molly Bang’s The Goblins Giggle, where it was retold as “Mary Culhane and the Dead Man,” or from storyteller
Carol Birch's retelling on her recording Nightmares Rising. Hague's watercolors have a brooding darkness that suits this creepy tale and his settings have an occasional Rackham-like air (complete with endpaper silhouettes) in their baroque spookiness. This is a popular tale for storytelling, and listeners, readers, and tellers will appreciate this evocative version. JMD

Hornik, Laurie Miller  The Secret of Ms. Snickle's Class; illus. by Debbie Tilley. Clarion, 2001 [144p]
ISBN 0-618-03435-8 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 3-5

Ms. Snickle is a most unusual teacher, offering spelling whys (you have to explain why you'd want to spell that word) as well as spelling bees, insisting that homework is work that stays at home ("If you were supposed to take it to school, it would be called schoolwork"), and enacting a class rule forbidding the telling of secrets. She has a bit of bias there—she is, most unusually of all, living secretly in the classroom, which turns into a luxurious apartment at the touch of a special magic button. Students have their own secrets, too, some of which they consigned to paper for an assignment the first day: Oliver wets his bed, Nathan loves his little sister, Dennis' mother is the famous Tooth Fairy, and Eva is a swan transformed into a girl. Determined to find out everybody's secrets, Lacey the class snoop delves, spies, and eavesdrops her way to knowledge—and a few surprises. This doesn't have quite the edge of Sachar's Wayside School stories, offering a more meandering, gentle scholastic weirdness, but some young readers (and even younger listeners to a readaloud) will appreciate the dreamy logic. The secrets (and snooping) theme will catch youngsters' attention, and the night life of Ms. Snickle will satisfyingly confirm their long-held suspicions about teachers' post-school lives. Big print, enticingly frenetic spot art by Tilley, and the occasional inclusion of student writing, formal and informal, add accessibility to this eminently approachable title. DS

Horowitz, Anthony  Stormbreaker. Philomel, 2001 192p
ISBN 0-399-23620-1 $16.99 Ad Gr. 6-9

Horowitz, author of The Devil and His Boy (BCCB 3/00) and screenwriter for many British television mysteries, here turns to thrillers with a youthful slant. Alex is only fourteen when his uncle and guardian is killed in a strange car accident; upon investigation, he finds that the "accident" involved a hail of gunfire and that there's a great conspiracy to ensure silence about the matter. His uncle's employers, a division of the hush-hush intelligence agency MI6, consider Alex a useful replacement for his uncle and send him off to investigate Herod Sayle, the Egyptian-born creator of the Stormbreaker (a lightning-fast computer), who's about to give thousands of the machines away free to British schoolchildren. Now trained as an agent and disguised as a young computer-nerd contest-winner, Alex battles danger to discover Sayle's secret agenda. This baby Bond tale lacks the adult spy series' humor, and it's certainly too serious to be entertaining pastiche; as a consequence the clichés (elaborate methods of execution), stock dialogue ("In a way it's appropriate that MI6 should have sent me a real English schoolboy. Because, you see, there's nothing in the world I hate more. ... You bliddy snobs with your stuck-up schools and your stinking English superiority! But I'm going to show you. I'm
going to give you what you deserve!"), and stereotypes (evil German servants, evil disfigured servants, evil ugly foreigners) are merely clichés, stock dialogue, and stereotypes rather than affectionate homage or sendup. On the other hand, this has many of the escapist appeals of 007’s exploits, including techno-gimmicks (Alex saves himself with metal-eating zit cream) and hand-to-hand combat (Alex is a karate expert), and the existence of a fourteen-year-old spy is all the more alluring for its complete impossibility. This improbability recalls old-fashioned adventure stories; Alex has more than a touch of an updated Jim Hawkins, and that may be all that young adventurers need. DS


Mitzi the young witch longs to join the ranks of pet owners ("Uncle Churly had piranhas. Aunt Malice had a crocodile. Even Madam Vex had a pet, though no one was quite sure what it was"), but the initially attractive "toad that was covered in slime," bullfrog, and matched pair of bats prove to be disappointing and end up returned to the store. She decides to hold off for a bit, but serendipity strikes and an "adorable" kitten arrives at her door. While Mitzi is initially put off by her pet’s distressing absence of creepiness, she eventually capitulates to the kitten’s charms, wisely conceding that "looks aren’t everything." This is a well-tuned read for storytime, balancing the right amount of text with the right amount of illustration. Howard has a knack for poetic pacing, drawing out the first sentence for three or so pages ("Mitzi liked creepy things. Creepy bedroom slippers. Creepy breakfast cereal. Creepy relatives. So, naturally, when she decided to get a pet, she wanted the creepiest pet possible") to build the tension and enhance the comic flavor. His expressive charcoal drawings enhanced with watercolor underline the subtle humor infusing the story. Grab this one to entertain ghouls and goblins for some Halloween fun. EAB


Exuberance abounds in this board book that follows a group of cats who have donned pajamas only to participate in an active night life before settling down for bed ("Cat’s pajamas/ Doodley-doo/ Kitties on the prowl/ Two by two"). The frolicking felines search for food ("Cool cats, hip cats, kitty cats/ MEOW!/ Bopping down the dark streets/ Looking for CHOW!?\)) and make music ("Cats on the garbage cans/ BUM BUM BA-DUM!\) until they finally slow down ("Put away the kittyhorn/ Put down the drums/ Off to Pajamas Land/ rum tum tum/ SWEET DREAMS/ PAJAMAS CATS/ yum yum yum"). There’s a speed and vivacity here unusual in toddler board books, and though the cats’ jazzy retro hipness may elude youngsters, viewers will certainly thrill to the notion of enjoying nocturnal adventures while still in your pajamas. Hurd’s illustrations echo the frenzy of the story, with expressive line and paint cutouts of the frenetic felines spread across photographic backdrops allowing the energized figures of the kittens to gleam amid the nighttime cityscapes. This will be music to the audience’s ears at a toddler storytime or a pre-bedtime romp. EAB
IBBOTSON, Eva  Dial-a-Ghost; illus. by Kevin Hawkes.  Dutton, 2001  192p
ISBN 0-525-46693-2  $15.99  R  Gr. 4-6

The Wilkinson family—Mr. and Mrs., son Eric, and Grandma—is preparing to take shelter when a German bomb hits their home in the English countryside. In that fateful instant they are turned into ghosts, and their wandering begins. Since the bomb destroyed their home they have no place to haunt, and they wander post-World War II London, along with other displaced ghosts, seeking a proper ghostly domicile. Luckily, two doughty Englishwomen recognize a need (even a spectral one) when they see it, and set up an agency (Dial-A-Ghost) to match homeless ghosts with ghostless houses. Enter the Snodde-Brittles, Fulton and Frieda, unscrupulous heirs to Helton Hall—at least, they’ll be the heirs if current heir Oliver Smith, age ten, can be scared to death. To that end the Snodde-Brittles employ the Screamers, horrible ghosts who hate children. A color-blind clerk mixes up some folders, and presto! The Screamers go to a quiet convent in the country and the kindly Wilkinsons go to Helton Hall, where they become the friends and protectors of the lonely Oliver. Ibbotson’s friendly ghosties have such a homely air they seem most desirable, while the Screamers are truly frightening. The predictable but enjoyable plot moves quickly, the text has wit, and the characterizations are specific and funny. The bereft Oliver, removed from his happy orphanage and thrown to the mercy of his unmerciful relations, will elicit a great deal of sympathy when he wanders around the gloomy, empty mansion and a great deal of admiration when he stands up for himself—and for his ghosts. Use this for an offbeat classroom readaloud, but do show your audience Hawkes’ hatching-heavy line art, which captures the novel’s domesticated spookiness. JMD

JANE, Pamela  Monster Mischief; illus. by Vera Rosenberry.  Atheneum, 2001  32p
ISBN 0-689-80471-7  $16.00  R  3-6 yrs

Two monsters prepare a monster stew, complete with spotted frog and hairy spider, for Halloween, and their concoction is made richer by additional ingredients (a lizard, a bat) added by additional monsters. When Little Moe arrives (“The fifth was Moe, the little one./ He only tagged along for fun/ to feast on monster stew”), he stands on a chair to take a look at the brew and “he toppled over with a shout...// and all the monster stew spilled OUT.” The monsters are chagrined when their ingredients (spider, lizard, frog, bat) scuttle out the door, but all ends happily with the arrival of a sixth monster bearing a sackful of trick-or-treat candy. Jane’s text is composed of rhythmic rhyming couplets with a repetitive refrain (various adjectives paired with “monster stew”) that little listeners will shout with glee. Rosenberry’s watercolors (large enough for group viewing) depict bumbling monsters, smirking jack-o’-lanterns, and seriously displeased stew ingredients that are more funny than frightening. While the compositions are sometimes crowded and a touch run-of-the-mill, thoughtful design—objects occasionally spill over their frames or stand freely next to text blocks, and white borders set off the single and full-spread paintings—adds punch. This is a solid addition to Halloween storytimes that ought to hit the spot with preschoolers. JMD

JEMISON, Mae  Find Where the Wind Goes: Moments from My Life.  Scholastic, 2001  196p  illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-439-13195-2  $16.95  R  Gr. 5-8

Mae Jemison, doctor, scientist, astronaut, and professor, here tells of the formative
incidents of her life. In a bracing, conversational tone, the author discusses her youth—her days in the South, her family’s move to Chicago’s South Side, school experiences, and growing up—as well as her later life and her place in the space program. Through it all Jemison emphasizes her love, respect, and gratitude for her parents, her siblings, and the teachers and mentors who encouraged and supported her. She also stresses that, through conscious and deliberate choices, she was then and is now in total control of the direction of her life. Jemison’s tone is like that of a favorite aunt or big sister; her comments on her own behavior, on politics, and on the crucial events through which she lived and in which she participated have a confident edge. This is a remarkable autobiography of a remarkable woman, and she invites readers along for the ride in a voice that encourages them to aim high, work hard, and have fun. An insert of black-and-white photos is included. JMD


Jack’s ma sends him off to get “a job of work” before they both starve, and, being a dutiful son, off he goes, sorghum biscuit in hand. A bunch of yellow jackets try and join Jack for lunch, and “Jack got mad. Real mad. He took off his bill cap and brung it down with a mighty WHACK!” He kills a half-score of the “pesky bees” and commemorates the deed on the bill of his cap: “FEARLESS JACK KILLED TEN AT A WHACK.” The feckless Jack arrives in a town troubled by varmints—a wild hog, a grizzly bear, a bad-breathed unicorn—which the sheriff, piqued by the claim on Jack’s cap, challenges him to best; he eliminates them with great dispatch in a variety of ways, collecting a monetary reward each time. Audiences familiar with folktales will recognize this story as a Jack tale, an Appalachian version of the English “Jack the Giant-Killer.” Johnson’s retelling has the easy inflection of a told tale; his affection for both his story and his hero is apparent in his tone as he lets the listener in on the joke. The acrylic paintings bear a passing resemblance to Andrew Glass’ style, although not as exuberant or precisely drafted; the compositions are flat and not particularly inspired. Facial expression of characters (both human and animal) reflect the story’s sly humor, however, and fluid storytelling makes this a winner for reading or telling aloud. A note on Appalachian Jack tales is included. JMD


Arturo’s gently courageous Mexican immigrant father spells out the lesson of this slim volume about the ups and downs of life in a Los Angeles barrio: “In life there is bueno [good] and there is malo [bad]. If you do not find enough of the good, you must yourself create it.” The first chapters of the novel offer example after example of the “bueno”: positive role models include an African-American jazz musician who sacrifices her own career to teach piano to kids in the barrio, a self-effacing professional basketball player who serves as a volunteer coach, the old gringo who rescues the family cat in spite of his allergies, and a “book warrior” librarian. After a drive-by shooting shatters the family’s peace—and his six-year-old sister’s prized pink lunchbox—Arturo has to find a way to fight the feeling that
it is no use starting anything because “lowlifes just come and turn it ugly.” In a resolution that temporarily misleads the reader into thinking that Arturo’s desire for vengeance has drawn him into the cycle of gang violence, Arturo reinvents the “gang” (defined in a chapter epigram as “A bunch of armed lowlifes hanging out with intent”): his Green Needle Gang anonymously leaves Christmas trees and presents for needy families. Like a Mexican-American *Father Knows Best*, Johnston’s first novel, written in a dynamic mix of English syntax and Mexican Spanish terminology, plays too insistently on the same positive note throughout. Still, its earnest hopefulness—appropriately played out in a Christmas finale—will reward readers hungry for depictions of an L.A. whose “humor and humanity” is as real as the “freeway chases and drive-bys and death.” FK

Karas, G. Brian *The Class Artist*; written and illus. by G. Brian Karas. Greenwillow, 2001 [32p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-17815-4 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-17814-6 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R 5-8 yrs

Young Fred yearns to be an artist, but so far the best he’s managed, with the aid of his older sister, is a nice line in drawing Pilgrims. He sees his chance for real artistry when a class assignment gives students a week to complete an art project. Fred runs into some difficulties in executing his dream project (a tipi covered with art), though, and his determination to make the tipi a surprise keeps him from asking for help even when it’s clear he badly needs it. Finally, time runs out (“It was sharing time, and Fred had nothing to share”); when Fred’s teacher, puzzled by Fred’s unhappy nonperformance, wisely suggests he draw how he feels, Fred uses that instruction as a starting place for a thrilling pictorial saga featuring his classmates, thus establishing his artistic reputation. A jacket note states that the plot is rooted in Karas’ own experiences, and the story certainly has the ring of authenticity. Most readers will feel an empathetic lurch in their own innards as Fred’s time ticks by, and they’ll know how frustrating it can be when one’s ideas are more advanced than one’s production skills. The art uses color to great emotional effect, often restricting the palette for emphasis: on project day, the rest of the classroom is washed in neutralizing gray while Fred is enveloped in raw and painful red, and he’s sunk into black with only a dim yellow glow to illuminate him when he despairs of ever being an artist. There’s plenty of cheer here as well, though, so never fear; while in real life mean classmate Frances might not turn so easily to admiration, Fred’s triumph will be a relief to young viewers as well as a reminder that setbacks aren’t the end of possibility, just part of the process. DS

King-Smith, Dick *Lady Lollipop*; illus. by Jill Barton. Candlewick, 2001 125p

Princess Penelope is a spoiled brat, and she wants a pig for her eighth birthday. Her overly indulgent royal father has promised her anything she wants, and a call goes out for all the pig-keepers in the land to show up at the proper time (with their pigs) so the princess can pick the one she wants for her own. She picks an intelligent little piglet named Lollipop, who responds to the commands of her keeper, Johnny. The pig will not, however, respond to the commands of the impatient princess, so Johnny is kept on, presumably to train the pig to answer to the princess, but in reality to train the princess to be a little more patient and a
little less selfish. King-Smith's tale of a spoiled princess and the swineherd who teaches her about friendship (and pigs) has moments of offhand humor that lighten the somewhat purposive narrative. Characterizations of king, queen, princess, and swineherd are folktale-shallow but effective, and the relationship between Penelope and Johnny is an amiable one. The novel's tone contains more than a whiff of the preachy-teachy (similar to Farjeon's literary fairy tale, "The Little Darner"), but that drawback is somewhat offset by the occasionally tongue-in-cheek text and the comfortable exuberance of the art. Barton's black-and-white pencil illustrations makes Lollipop a most attractive pet (her plump roundness and endearing expressions make her nearly irresistible), and Johnny has some of the same qualities. The short, balding king and his tall, willowy wife are a visual chuckle, and the princess is the picture of cuteness run amok with her solid stance and stubborn scowl. This might also make a popular readaloud with kids too young to read it on their own, since kids of many ages may enjoy a royal family run by a royal pain-in-the-neck. JMD

Kirk, Daniel  
*Bus Stop, Bus Go*; written and illus. by Daniel Kirk. Putnam, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-399-23333-4  $15.99 R 5-7 yrs

Kirk combines narrative text and dialogue into a rhyming tale of a hamster (Hammy) escaped from his cage on a school bus. The format is pure Sunday funnies: comic-style frames contain the action, and the speech-balloon commentary of the bus riders provides the humor. The story is tight and the rhyming flow hits only an occasional arrhythmic bump. The chattering kids on the bus are focused on recapturing the elusive hamster—except for those who aren't—and the counterpoint of voices combined with the repeating "Bus stop. Bus go!" refrain results in a merry mayhem that rings (unfortunately for the bus driver) true. Kirk's flat graphics (oil painting on gesso) give the impression of precise computer images, and they work well in these controlled compositions. By the end of the bus ride, Hammy is back in his cage, but the concluding painting indicates (to the certain delight of the audience) that the adventurous hamster is about to take off for parts unknown once again. JMD

Kittredge, Frances  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-88240-545-4  $18.95 Ad Gr. 3-6

These fictional accounts of a late-nineteenth-century Inupiat village attempt to capture a way of life already past when Kittredge, an Anglo-American temporary resident in the Alaskan community, recorded them in the 1930s. The dozen brief stories—one for each month from July (when the relentless sun throws off the children's sleep cycle) to June (when the trading ships arrive with coveted manufactured goods)—revolve around Neeluk, a seven-year-old who divides his time between play, mischief, and a fierce desire to join his elders as a hunter. Kittredge employs the choppy, pedagogical prose that has mercifully fallen by the wayside over the decades ("What would we do without seals?" asked Neeluk. "We eat their meat, and we eat the oil from their fat with meat and with dried fish." 'And we make boots and trousers and belts from their skins,' added Konok, 'and nets to catch fish'), and her observations are obviously filtered through the experience of
an outside observer. Nonetheless, she manages to convey the Inupiat people’s growing dependence on the outside world through such telling details as Neeluk’s mother’s frantic search for a missing metal needle, the hunters’ use of a forged adz for chopping ice, and the caps and fabrics that are valued for both their novelty and utility. While these tales are not as inherently gripping as Jacqueline Briggs Martin’s *The Lamp, the Ice, and the Boat Called Fish* (BCCB 2/01), their simplicity, together with Inupiat painter Rock’s expressionistic oils, provide a child-accessible window into this indigenous culture. EB

**Laurence, Daniel** *Captain and Matey Set Sail*; illus. by Claudio Muñoz. HarperCollins, 2001 [64p] (I Can Read Books)
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028956-2 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys

In a quartet of easy-reader adventures, pint-sized, pigtailed Captain and lanky, sun-broiled Matey do just what all self-respecting fictional pirates do—adopt a parrot, sing shanties, pick up shipwrecked seafarers, and dig up treasure. The Captain’s petulance and Matey’s fastidiousness, however, ensure that they conduct their missions with enough comic flair to delight read-aloners. They acquire their parrot, Squawk, in a department-store raid, tempers flare over the appropriate tune for deck-swabbing (“First,’ said Matey, “‘yo-ho-ho’ means nothing, and you do not even like rum. I saw you drink rum one time and it made you sick’”), a human behemoth with full body tattoos can’t get the hang of dancing like a “real” pirate, and Captain and Matey achieve complete satisfaction with a meager treasure that demands no change in their piratical ways. Muñoz’s watercolor pictures are a hoot, with exuberant lines and swabs of color energizing everything from the tried-and-true portrayal of the physically and temperamentally mismatched mariners to backdrops that slyly set them in the here and now. This is just the ticket for a maiden voyage under the black flag. EB

**LAWLOR, LAURIE** *Helen Keller: Rebellious Spirit*. Holiday House, 2001 168p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-8234-1588-0 $22.95

The much-celebrated blind and deaf woman is now fairly well locked into legend, but Lawlor does a fine job of peeling back layers of her achievements to reveal their cost and assess the extent to which Keller fulfilled her own dream of mainstreaming with the sighted, hearing world. All the standard biographical data are covered in smooth, seamlessly organized text, but there is additional spark from Lawlor’s sharp insights into the irony of the vulnerable, dependent girl’s gradually (and probably reluctantly) becoming the mainstay of women like teacher Anne Sullivan and secretary Polly Thomson, who depended on her for their livelihood. Although Sullivan necessarily has a prominent place in this account, the focus never strays from Keller herself, her status as a media darling, her determination to claim a position as a social reformer, and her ultimate frustration with a public that passed over her Socialist message and clamored for stories of cunning triumph over disability. A gallery of photographic portraits (carefully posed, as Lawlor notes) conveys as clearly as the text just how attractive a public persona Keller could be. A chronology, index, and a comprehensive themes list for further reading are included. EB
LEE, MILLY *Earthquake*; illus. by Yangsook Choi. Foster/Farrar, 2001 32p ISBN 0-374-39964-6 $16.00 Ad 5-8 yrs

A young girl from Chinatown narrates the events of April 18, 1906, when "the earth shook and threw us from our beds" and turned San Francisco into pandemonium. Dodging collapsing buildings and outrunning sweeping flames, the child and her family join the confused throng of evacuees herded toward temporary shelter in Golden Gate Park, burdened by all the clothing they could wear and all the possessions they could push, pull, or carry. The intensity of the disaster is not matched by the tone of the narrator, which is matter-of-fact nearly to the point of dispassion: "In the early morning rush to leave, we had not eaten anything. PoPo gave us crackers and dried fruit." Choi's paintings, however, make the extent of the devastation perfectly clear, as power lines dangle overhead, chunks of masonry topple among the fleeing crowds, stray animals prowl the streets, and tongues of yellow-orange flame backlight the crumbling city. The girl's day ends in a make-shift tent camp: "We were safe for now while the city burned and the earth still shook." Although a concluding note assures readers that the family reestablished their life in a rebuilt San Francisco (the tale is, in fact, based on the experiences of Lee's relatives), the child audience will almost certainly question how they survived until then, and adults may wonder how the Chinese fared in relation to other citizens. EB


We've had various hair picture books of late (Stewart's *Harriet's Horrible Hair Day*, BCCB 2/00, for instance), but this one has a twist: others may think Franny's wild waves of red hair are a pain, but Franny adores her wayward mop ("She could brush it down in front of her face and pretend she was in a cave. . . . She loved to press her hair flat against her head and watch it *boing* out again"). She's therefore resistant to the topknot into which the hairdresser reshapes her carroty mane—until, much to her delight, a bird chooses it for its nest, which makes Franny quite the celebrity. The finale is a touch on the weak side (the notion that Franny donates her hair to the nest is plausible, but the text may slide over its audience's heads), but Franny is magnetic in her self-willed self-adoration, and the bird development is a delicious absurdity that's beautifully suited to Franny's character. Oxenbury fires up her often soft palette with the sharp scarlet beacon that is Franny's hair, and she's got a distinct line that gives real bite to the figures and surroundings (and that helps delineate the bird blissfully ensconced in Franny's tresses). Family scenes, especially the family reunion where Franny makes a hit with her new accessory, are engagingly specific: Mom and Dad are a fetching couple, and Franny is a star from her crown of hair to her toes and whether dressed or undressed. Here's an amusing demonstration that good hair is in the eye(s) of the beholder. DS

LINDENBAUM, PIJA *Bridget and the Gray Wolves*; written and illus. by Pija Lindenbaum; tr. by Kjersti Board. R&S, 2001 33p ISBN 91-29-65395-9 $14.00 R 5-8 yrs

Though Bridget is hardly the kind of child to stray from the path, she nonetheless loses the rest of her day-care group on an outing. When she encounters a pack of
wolves in the forest, she first demands her rights ("I am a child who has lost her day care!") and then attempts to engage the wolves as playfellows. The wolves are plaintive and uncooperative ("When gray wolves don't understand something, they just fall over and play dead"), but Bridget chivvies them into compliance through romps and bedtime ritual, finally slipping off to return to day care on her own. Those familiar with Lindenbaum's gaily skewed reality in *Boodil My Dog* (BCCB 12/92) and *Else-Marie and Her Seven Little Daddies* (2/92) will recognize the winning blend of sweetness and weirdness here. The end is abrupt and Bridget's transformation from scaredy-cat to bossiest wild thing has no particular logic, but there's entertainment aplenty in her sojourn with the wolves, especially the components of the bedtime ritual ("The wolves obediently go to their pee trees. And soon it sounds as if it's raining in the forest") finishing with a mournful lullaby ("The wolves . . . love sad things"). Watercolors show Bridget as a wiry-haired young miss with watchful eyes (and a red sweatshirt with hood in place of the traditional cape); her composure in the face of the disorderly lot of wolves is admirable, while the scrawny, sharp-toothed wolves, all geared up for mayhem, make comically cowed followers. This doesn't shed much light on Red Riding Hood, but as a charmingly peculiar tale in its own right it will find its aficionados. DS

**Loewen, Nancy**  *Four to the Pole: The American Women's Expedition to Antarctica, 1992-93*; by Nancy Loewen and Ann Bancroft. Linnet, 2001 96p illus. with photographs Library ed. ISBN 0-208-02518-9 $25.00 R Gr. 5-9

Coauthor Ann Bancroft, first woman to cross the ice to the North Pole, became the first woman to cross to both poles when she headed an all-female Antarctic expedition. Diaries and viewpoints of all four participants and a few outsiders illuminate the experience of preparing for such a trip (including the crucial component of fundraising) as well as the grueling journey itself. Bancroft's trip is particularly interesting for its aura of uncertainty: traveling in debt, she could only afford to traverse the continent, her initial goal, if travel speed was great enough; a pragmatic leader, she chose to terminate her trip at the South Pole with her original team. Some of the supporting material could be better clarified (the supply list doesn't indicate how many pounds each woman would be hauling, for instance), but there's information enough in addition to the very personal reflections to make this account enlightening as well as provocative in comparison with older Antarctic narratives. Photographs are small and limited in number, but the pages are pretty airy nonetheless; entry headings make clear which woman is the source and provide temperature and map coordinates for each day, enhancing the sense of time and distance passing. The epilogue makes it clear that the tripmates have continued their involvement with the Antarctic, and the overall sense is one of a continuing story in which readers may someday take their part. A resources list of books and URLs includes Bancroft's website documenting her own recent Antarctic crossing; an index is also provided. DS

**Lyons, Mary E.**  *Knockabeg: A Famine Tale.* Houghton, 2001 [128p] ISBN 0-618-09283-8 $15.00 Reviewed from galleys M Gr. 4-6

The town of Knockabeg is hard hit by the potato famine, and none but the faeries know that the blight is the work of the Nuckelavees, wicked sprites determined to
drive out the humans and take over the land. The faery queen calls for war and demands that Sticky, member of the faery high council, turn over her human boy Eamon since the faeries need a mortal to fight with them if they are to have a winning chance. Sticky flees the faery host with Eamon, as her plans for him do not include fighting in a faery war; she is pursued by two friends seeking to return her and her boy to the faery host. Most of the action takes place among the faeries, who train for war, battle their enemies, and observe various human happenings; the fantasy plot sits uneasily against the backdrop of the real historical horror that was the potato blight and ensuing famine. The author's depiction of the contrast between rich English and poor Irish, the descriptions of starving children, and the literal transformation of a spoiled boy into a vegetable (he becomes "an idjit" with cabbage growing out of his ears) jar against the lighter fantasy elements. While Lyons' faeries are trooping about, her human characters are starving to death, and the contrast is simply too great to be reconcilable. The precious tone conflicts with the human tragedy, making this uneasy combination of fairy tale and historical fiction an unsuccessful one. JMD

McCULLY, EMILY ARNOLD  *Grandmas Trick-or-Treat*; written and illus. by Emily Arnold McCully. HarperCollins, 2001 [48p] (I Can Read Books)
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028730-6 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 1-3

The grandmas who have been at the lake (BCCB 5/90) and at bat are now celebrating Halloween with their beloved granddaughter, Pip. Grandma Nan wants to keep trick-or-treating orderly while Grandma Sal is out for serious fun ("'Is everyone ready to play some tricks?' asked Grandma Sal. 'The children will not play tricks,' said Grandma Nan. 'They will have good manners'"), and between them Pip and her friends are going crazy. They finally ditch their minders ("We've lost the grandmas"), but when they run into bullying Big Bertha they begin to regret their unsupervised state. Young Pip gets plenty of limelight (and youngsters will be sympathetic to her desire for escape), but the polarized grandmas as usual galvanize the story; it's entertaining to see Grandma Sal, the mummy, scaring the bejeebers out of would-be treat-givers, and it's heartening to know that the grandmas are just around the corner (and are capable of overlooking their differences to defend their granddaughter) when Big Bertha threatens. The illustrations are as rich as the text is pared down: McCully's watercolors bleed freely to page edges and across the gutter, enveloping the spreads in a glimmering Halloween world of rattling leaves and darkening gloom through which the grandmas and their charge boldly stride. Old friends of the grandmas and eager new readers will consider this neatly spooky and easily manageable early reader a definite treat. DS

MCDONOUGH, ALISON  *Do the Hokey Pokey*; illus. by Jackie Urbanovic. Front Street/Cricket, 2001 112p
ISBN 0-8126-2699-0 $14.95 Ad Gr. 3-5

"Never act strange. That was Brendan's philosophy." This precept hasn't yet garnered Brendan, a new fifth-grader, any real friends (though he thinks they might come in time), but he has at least escaped being thought weird. He's therefore mortified to discover that his mother has taken up work as a party DJ, providing music and leading dances for groups; he feels his doom is sealed when those groups
prove to include his own class. The book’s plot is fairly predictable new-kid stuff (Brendan eventually makes a friend, loosens up, and follows a subplot to its logical conclusion), and the dense and stodgy format makes the text look more demanding than it really is. Style and detail put McDonough’s text above many of its kin, however, with familial and classroom dynamics particularly well evoked, so there’ll be plenty of reader sympathy for Brendan. The line-drawn illustrations have a commercial glibness not well suited to the story, but they do at least capture the humor of the events. Younger middle-graders with some reading stamina and older middle-graders looking for a break will both get a kick out of Brendan’s inexorable progress towards a public Hokey Pokey. DS


"Tricia Ann—an African-American preteen—feels she’s ready to go across town all by herself, but Mama Frances knows that her granddaughter’s journey through 1950s Nashville is likely to challenge "Tricia Ann’s moral compass as much as her navigational ability. However, she lets the girl go with one last reminder—"hold yo’ head up and act like you b’long to somebody"—and with that "Tricia Ann skips out of the idealized verdure of Jerry Pinkney’s impressionistic landscape into the sober reality of back-of-the-bus seating and whites-only park benches. The reader follows her turquoise yellow-flowered dress all the way to the mysterious "Someplace Special," the increasing drabness of the people and surroundings thrown into relief by "Tricia Ann’s vitality. The expressive narration and soft-focus illustrations of this forthrightly purposive picture book sometimes become oversweet, but there is a solid core of experiential detail in both the pencil sketches that underpin Pinkney’s watercolors and the social (and personal) history that undergirds McKissack’s story. And you’ll be especially glad to know that "Tricia Ann’s “favorite spot in the world” turns out to be . . . the public library, which a brief afterword by McKissack says "was one of the few places where there were no Jim Crow signs and blacks were treated with some respect.” While a little lengthy for the youngest listeners, this shows the pervasiveness of segregation and celebrates the strength of mind of those who said to African-American children, “Don’t let those signs steal yo’ happiness.” FK

Montresor, Beni, ad. *Hansel and Gretel*; ad. and illus. by Beni Montresor. Atheneum, 2001 27p ISBN 0-689-84144-2 $17.00 Ad 4-6 yrs

Gone are the wicked and/or weak (step)parents, gone the pebbles and breadcrumbs, gone the gingerbread house and clever Gretel’s tricking of the witch into the oven. In this stripped-down version, Hansel and Gretel’s mother sends them out to gather strawberries and worries when they don’t return—with good reason, since “in the woods there was sometimes an evil monster, not to mention terrifying devils and witches.” After dreaming that angels come down from heaven to protect them, the children enter a castle with very good cooking smells and a very bad child-eating witch who puts Hansel in a cage. Gretel seizes the witch’s magic wand, frees her brother, and they both push the witch into the fire for a joyful ending. Although seemingly adapted for younger listeners, this is actually scarier than more detailed traditional versions such as Lesser and Zelinsky’s *Hansel and Gretel* (BCCB
Silhouetted pictures feature angular shapes, flat perspectives, and contrasting collage overlays of intense hues: red, blue, green, yellow, black, and white (for the children). The dramatic full-page illustrations would make an effective Halloween display, but the often-flat text lacks the depth and imagery that have sustained the Grimm Brothers’ version for nearly two centuries. BH

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029524-4  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029523-6  $15.95 R Gr. 6-10

Walter Dean Myers grew up in 1940s Harlem, his days full of school, family, and neighborhood. The author rather ruefully recalls his troublemaking in school and his various teachers—and his mother’s—reaction to that troublemaking. His memories are a riot of color, filled with sensual impressions of his neighborhood and his neighbors, the sights and sounds of his community. The events of Myers’ school days will be heartening to less-than-perfect kids, who will be relieved to see that here is someone who, though resolved to be responsible and good, did not always live up to his own expectations. Though his reminiscences are laced with the humor and insight of hard-gained maturity, Myers’ sense of himself as he once was—wide-eyed child, confused adolescent—keeps this memoir on its revelatory track. Myers traces his loss of innocence to his growing awareness of race and racism and to his dawning realization that he could not depend on that in which he had placed his faith and trust—the inherent fairness of the world. The author’s recollections of his young life are both poignant and funny, and his determination to honestly evoke his environment and his own developing character is apparent. This memoir joins the ranks of stellar literary autobiographies, such as Fleischman’s Abracadabra Kid (BCCB 9/96) and Zindel’s Pigman and Me (BCCB 12/92). Myers’ particular slice of life concludes with his joining the army at age seventeen, and inquiring minds will want to know: what happened next? JMD

NACE, DON  Bowling for Beginners: Simple Steps to Strikes & Spares; illus. with photographs by Bruce Curtis. Sterling, 2001 96p
ISBN 0-8069-4968-6  $19.95 R Gr. 4-12

Writing with authority, Nace provides information with information from equipment and warm-up exercises, to scoring and the four-step delivery sequence, to get young bowlers started. Later chapters cover more advanced technical information and strategy, troubleshooting and bowling-ball anatomy (e.g. “coverstock,” “axis of rotation,” and “radius of gyration”). Coverage of “The Mental Game” winds up the instruction. Sharp and vibrant photographs and instructive diagrams, featuring carefully placed boys and girls and offering some unusual and helpful perspectives (the game from behind the player), assist in relaying the information; special attention is given to both right and left-handed techniques. Particularly clear is the two-part section on scoring, first leading the reader through “What Happened” in an imaginary game, then describing exactly how the scoresheet is calculated. Though pictures and the two-column format will attract browsers, the technical style means that few will choose to read Nace’s book cover to cover. However, kids and teens looking for introductory pointers for getting started or new strategies for their game will find a plethora of information and then some in a package that vastly updates the titles of this genre from twenty years ago. A
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detailed table of contents in addition to an index will help youngsters to get to the information they need. EAB

NAIDOO, BEVERLEY  *The Other Side of Truth.*  HarperCollins, 2001  [272p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029629-1  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029628-3  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R*  Gr. 7-12

Sade's mother is the first casualty of the truth in this event-filled novel. Her shooting death—political vengeance for her husband's journalistic integrity—precipitates twelve-year-old Sade's and her younger brother's departure on a hastily arranged flight from Lagos to London, where, reeling from shock and deserted by their paid escort, they are scooped up by the British child welfare system "like two parcels with no address." This thought-provoking novel offers readers a gripping, open-eyed exploration of what happens when principles meet practical reality in hand-to-hand combat. Naidoo skillfully takes readers through unfamiliar territory (Nigerian politics, immigration bureaucracy) and also meets them on common ground (school), laying out the basic similarity between political and schoolyard bullying. When Sade's father tells her "We have to stand up to bullies . . . otherwise they get inside your head," she believes him, but she has also learned that telling the truth can be lethal, and she wonders, "What could you do when you were up against people who told powerful lies?" Seamlessly integrated information and even more telling details introduce readers to the ethical complexities of global politics and well-intentioned but rule-bound bureaucracies while giving equal attention to family dynamics and individual psychologies. A brief endnote and glossary sort fiction from fact and define Nigerian terms (most clear in their original context). Winner of the 2000 Smarties silver medal in Great Britain, this story about the power of the stories we tell—and don't tell—deserves an international readership. FK

NELSON, MARILYN  *Carver: A Life in Poems.*  Front Street, 2001  103p  illus.
with photographs
ISBN 1-886910-53-7  $16.95  R*  Gr. 7 up

While one wouldn't really term George Washington Carver forgotten, one might consider him too often reduced, historically speaking, to a caption-sized contribution involving peanuts and just maybe the Tuskegee Institute. A sequence of poems (most initially published elsewhere, appearing here in chronological sequence so as to suggest biography) occasionally punctuated with historical photographs would seem an odd counteractant to that sad fate, but it's startlingly effective. In her free-verse lyrics, Nelson (herself the daughter of a Tuskegee Airman) employs a variety of perspectives: an astonished teacher, a grateful student, an envious colleague, the regretful subject of his broken-off courtship, and, obliquely, Carver himself. Together, these voices evoke a man of genius, whose gift for understanding and intellectual curiosity were profound and enduring; a man of faith, who considered the botanical intricacies he uncovered to be proof of the Creator; a man of commitment, who consciously chose to turn his brilliance to agriculture in order to best help his struggling people trying to eke out a post-slavery life in southern fields amid lynchings and grinding poverty. The poems are rich with people, with academic politics, even with economics, giving an unmatchable picture not only of Carver's life but also of his impact within his time as well as in

Philip weaves a number of Romanian folktales together in this story about the biblical Noah and his ark. The titular episode occurs when all the creatures have boarded and Noah is waiting for his wife to join them. When she refuses, Noah curses his stubborn wife, saying "Oh, you devil, come in!" and inadvertently inviting the devil onto the ark in the form of a little mouse. Philip’s tone is breezy and direct, presenting Noah as a simple man who addresses God quite colloquially when God announces the flood that will drown all the humans: "'All?' said Noah. 'All except you,' said God." Episodes within this larger tale present smaller *pourquoi* tales, offering explanations for the napping habits of cats and the origin of fleas, and Philip includes a thorough concluding source note which helps situate these variations in Eastern European culture. The pages are framed top and bottom with borders that reflect elements of the story, such as the waves and fishes that run along the bottom of a spread show the ark on the open ocean. Brent’s watercolor illustrations depict characters in a folk-art style, making frequent use of further borders and frames to inset the images on the page, and both borders and images are highlighted with gilt lines and shapes that catch the light. Young listeners will enjoy the new twists in this familiar tale. KM


Prelutsky, poetic tackler of the terrible in *Monday’s Troll* (BCCB 3/96) and other titles, here focuses on the existence of a single hideous creature, the awful ogre. The A.O. leads a quiet life, sending admiring letters to his beloved (“I long for the sight/ Of your craggy gray face”), puttering in the garden (“I'm growing carnivorous roses/ And oceans of overblown mold”), enjoying a quiet repast (“It's ideal to be an ogre/ When it comes to dining out”), and finally settling down for bedtime (“Good night to furtive spiders/ That lurk in murky wells./ Good night to loathsome vermin/ With nauseating smells”). Prelutsky’s monstrous poetry does the ogre proud in a variety of verse forms, lengths, and even moods—"Awful Ogre and the Storm," for instance, introduces a note of genuine and atmospheric foreboding amid the clever and comedic exploration. Zelinsky’s line-and-watercolor art is cheerfully robust where Sib’s illustrations were sinuous and delicate; the result is an ogre of fascinatingly repellent habits but rather an endearing aspect with his peach-fuzzy hair, twinkling blue eye (just the one in the middle of his forehead), and chubby cheeks. The ogreish scenes play both on scale (Awful Ogre towers over the populace) and elements (the pages are charmingly vermin-ridden), and
there's a deliciously wicked satire in the spread for "Awful Ogre's Awful Dream," where A.O. suffers through a nightmare about cavorting in a sun-dappled meadow with big-eyed, long-lashed kittens. Even non-reading youngsters will relish an ogreish readaloud, and readers will find this a giggle-worthy entry into the daily life of the gruesome. DS


The traditional tale of the fancily shod cat gets a little gussying up in this retelling based on a play Pullman wrote for the Polka Dot Theater. The adaptation takes some folkloric license with the more familiar version, adding a kidnapping and some ghouls to the hero's usual litany of troubles. The result is rollicking, with swift action and humorous dialogue. Beck's illustrations add to the slightly breathless tone: full-page and framed pictures, insets and spot art keep the (mostly) primary-colored spreads lively; characters are expressively drawn, and the apparently casual but intense crosshatching makes each picture especially energetic. Puss isn't one of the more popular tales for picture-book retellings, and this galloping version makes an intriguing contrast with Lincoln Kirstein's (BCCB 4/92). JMD


This semi-autobiographical collection of short stories is a winning combination of sturdy sentiment, comedy, and pathos. All the entries revolve around relationships and change: a boy develops a loving relationship with his maternal grandfather ("Papa Lalo"), a young woman takes the educational opportunity offered by an elderly aunt ("She Flies"), and assimilated family members learn about the dangerous combination of firecrackers and outhouses ("The California Cousins"). The narratives are told in the first and the third person, with a comforting sense of intimacy that makes the voices personal and familiar. Although not all of these tales are funny, they all contain a good-natured humor that acts as ballast to the undercurrent of tension created by living astride two cultures, Anglo and Latino. A strong sense of class and economic reality underlies the tales, and the universality of the immigrant struggle—adults working hard labor for long hours to provide a better future for their children—is present on nearly every page. Rice's easy style is straightforward and involving, and his points of view are always true to his characters' ages and predicaments; a joyous sense of ethnic pride and strong family ties prevails throughout. Spanish words and phrases are undefined but understandable in context. JMD


Robertson recounts the life of Confederate general "Stonewall" Jackson with a reverence that falls just short of hagiography. From his orphaned childhood (which Robertson portrays as more unloved than Jackson himself did), to his single-minded academic struggle through West Point, to his teaching career at Virginia Military Institute, to his undeniably cunning troop deployment and valor in battle, Jackson is cast larger than life. To say that coverage is comprehensive (right down to the
myriad character testimonials) is a wild understatement, and many prospective readers will find the double-columned text daunting indeed. However, Robertson's prose is accessible, occasionally to the point of simplistic choppiness ("A local resident named Holt had owed ten dollars to a widow for a long time. She appealed to the court for help. Constable Jackson was assigned to collect the money"). He also does a creditable job of explaining how a staunchly religious nineteenth-century Southerner reconciled slavery with his spiritual beliefs and viewed the righteousness of the Southern cause: "The Southern Confederacy existed because the Heavenly Father deemed it so. Jackson was a soldier of the South; hence, he would be a soldier of the cross." This isn't the smoothest of chronicles, but those who count Jackson among their military heroes will appreciate seeing his legend polished to a brilliant shine. Period illustrations, battle maps, notes, bibliography, and index are included. EB

ROGASKY, BARBARA, comp.  *Leaf by Leaf: Autumn Poems;* illus. with photographs by Marc Tauss.  Scholastic, 2001  [40p]
ISBN 0-590-25347-6  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 5-8

Accomplished anthologist Rogasky (compiler of *Winter Poems,* BCCB 1/93) pulls together twenty-five seasonal poems in honor of the autumn. She's clearly scuffing through leaves on the path less traveled; her imaginative selections draw from poets historic and contemporary, writing for old and young, in entries ranging from "The Frost," by fourth-century Chinese poet Tzu Yeh, to a selection from Edgar Allan Poe's "Ulalume," to Shirley Hughes' "Wild Weather." The book is particularly strong on contemporarily less-feted poets of the late nineteenth century (W. E. Henley, famous as the model for Long John Silver) and shortly thereafter (Edwin Arlington Robinson will be new to many kids); this makes for occasionally sophisticated vocabulary and style, but the lyrics are so brief and so evocative in imagery that readers may be seduced into stretching. While there are plenty of readaloud possibilities here, the art has its own impact: Tauss uses different cameras and color approaches in a range of photographic effects, and vivid and dramatic visuals fill the oversized pages to the edges. Though a few images are a bit brassy and showoffy, those in subtler shades (blues and browns, sometimes in monotone prints, predominate) accentuate form, movement, and chiaroscuro and set off the verses especially well, and the print (sometimes white, sometimes black, and most often autumnal gold) returns the favor. This is a collection of polished elegance that makes a cool counterpoint to Rogasky's previous seasonal volume.

DS

RUBIN, SUSAN GOLDMAN  *There Goes the Neighborhood: Ten Buildings People Loved to Hate.*  Holiday House, 2001  96p  illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-8234-1435-3  $18.95  R*  Gr. 5-9

There's nothing like hot controversy to capture adolescent attention, and Rubin draws readers right into the vortex of debates that raged when (now) respected architects foisted their dream children onto a (then) unappreciative, even hostile public. The Washington Monument was likened to an asparagus spear and the Eiffel Tower to a giraffe; Phillip Johnson's glass house was a local embarrassment, and Frank O. Gehry's an unfinished junk heap; the Pompidou Center was designed by foreigners, and McDonald's renowned motif represented the worst of
American culture imposed on the cultural purity of other lands. While never quite dismissing vitriolic criticism as devoid of merit, Rubin brings a keen sense of humor to bear on the fact that all these edifices eventually worked their way into public affection. Even the picture composites that open each chapter seem to poke equal fun at design and critique—a giraffe’s head tops off the Eiffel Tower; the back of a refrigerator is set against the Pompidou Center. Monochrome photos and typeface in deep indigo cleverly evoke architectural blueprints, but readers will probably regret the absence of a complete palette when considering indictments of garishness against the Pompidou Center’s color-coded piping and McDonald’s neon arches. Any chapter could make a spirited, offbeat readaloud and springboard for discussion. Readers/listeners should look at their own neighborhood monstrosities with fresh vision and decide which are worthy of affection or execration. EB


Away for the summer at a program for gifted youth in order to study archaeology, Nicole—Nic—is surprised and pleased to find herself a member of a small band of friends. Funny, self-deprecating Isaac would be the obvious choice for her special interest, but instead Nic falls head over heels for Battle, a beautiful Southern girl with family issues. Love initially runs fairly smoothly, but soon Nic is frustrated by Battle’s withdrawal in the face of Nic’s continued habit of scrutiny, and she’s devastated to find Battle in the arms of a boy in the program. Ryan writes perceptively about (and sometimes with) the gawky uncertainty of young love, with Nic’s desire and doubt warring with each other. The romance itself is sweet, more emotionally than physically intense; while there is some questioning of the import of this new turn in Nic’s life, there’s angst for all the group of friends, and the focus here is on Nic’s love for Battle, not on lesbianism. The book also perceptively evokes the hothouse atmosphere of the residential program and the intensity of friendships there; that atmosphere is bolstered by witty conversations and by strong characterizations of the other kids in Nic’s group, especially the hyperdramatic Weetzie Bat wannabe Katrina, a loyal friend who gets her own reward in the form of a relationship with Isaac. No problem novel but a good, solid, and in some ways nice and old-fashioned romance, this is a tender tale of first love. DS


A Mexican-American kid growing up in Texas in a close-knit family with strong ties to both Mexico and the United States, Rey lives in two worlds: the tight insular one of his cultural community and the larger, more demanding one that encompasses it. He is both participant and observer, and his voice is solidly grounded in the day-to-day realities of his life. In incident after incident the author shows him making choices about what it means to be a man: when he admires his father for not drinking despite the teasing of his uncle; when he refuses to go into the forbidden pool hall even though his best friend calls him a sissy; when he won’t speak to the border guard in English because he’s angry at the necessity of proving himself an American. This first-person novel has the flavor of a personal reminiscence, a life seen through the eyes of the adult who lived it. Saldaña depicts Rey’s
struggle to define his manhood and his cultural identity with autobiographical precision, and that may act as bridge between the somewhat distanced, adult point of view and the young adult reader. JMD

SCHMIDT, GARY D.  *Straw into Gold.* Clarion, 2001  172p
ISBN 0-618-05601-7 $15.00  R*  Gr. 6-9

“Rumpelstiltskin” has recently received attention from Vivian Vande Velde in *The Rumpelstiltskin Problem* (BCCB 2/01) and Donna Jo Napoli in *Spinners* (9/99). Schmidt (author of *Anson’s Way*, 5/99) puts his considerable imagination to the construction of a lengthier, more intricate tale of greed, betrayal, and the redemptive power of love in this spin on the old tale. Tousle is thrilled to be going to Wolverham with his Da to see a royal procession, but he never anticipates the outcome of his very first trip to town. A hundred rebels against the evil Lord Beryn are condemned to the gallows by the king; Tousle finds himself standing before sovereign and Great Lords, pleading for their lives. He is supported by the Queen, and her intercession gives him—and the rebels—one chance for life: he must answer a riddle within seven days, or all will perish. Tousle is given a blinded boy rebel, Innes, as a guide, and the two of them set off to find the Queen in her exile at St. Eynsham Abbey, for only she knows the answer to the riddle. They are pursued by Lord Beryn’s men, and by the King’s Grip; Beryn wishes them dead, for they hold a secret even they do not know that threatens his power, and the King’s Grip has been sent to protect them. The King’s Grip has his own motives for saving Tousle, however, and they have nothing to do with queens, lost princes, or the might of kings—he is interested only in finding Tousle’s Da, a little man with spindly fingers who has the gift of turning straw into gold. Richly drawn characters and evocative language enhance a novel that’s tightly constructed and emotionally resonant. Fantasy and adventure lovers will appreciate the thrills of the chase-and-escape plot, and they will most certainly come looking for other novelizations of traditional tales. JMD

SMITH, CYNTHIA LEITICH  *Rain Is Not My Indian Name.* HarperCollins, 2001  135p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029504-X $15.89  Ad  Gr. 6-10
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-17397-7 $15.95

Journal entries providing snapshots of the past supplement the narration of fourteen-year-old photographer Rain Berghoff, a devotee of sci-fi fanzines and Chinese takeout who describes herself as “Creek-Cherokee and Scots-Irish on Mom’s side, Irish-German-Ojibway on Dad’s.” Rain is one of just a few “Indian” kids in Hannensburg, Kansas, where “the subject of Native Americans pretty much comes up just around Turkey Day . . . and the so-called Indians always look like boogey men on the prairie, windblown cover boys . . . or baby-faced refugees from the world of Precious Moments.” This summer, she’s being pressured by her family to participate in a summer camp for Native American youth run by her Aunt Georgia. Rain stops short of joining, but she gets drawn in when she is asked to photograph the camp for the local newspaper and eventually starts to believe that “it might not be too late for me to connect with the Ojibway part of my heritage.” Unfortunately, Rain’s story does not come into focus quickly or clearly enough. Two short chapters introduce and then kill off Rain’s best friend/boyfriend; after that, the complexities of the local backstory make it difficult for the reader to put
together the big picture, in which issues of friendship and family are explored through fragmented views of interrelated plots. Still, Rain’s observations are appealingly wry, and readers who stay with her until these themes are fully developed will find food for thought in this exploration of cultural identity. FK


A spunky narrator receives, among other toys, a yellow shirt for his birthday. Ignoring his friend Sam’s reaction (“That’s no fun!”), the young narrator goes on to share how wearing his yellow shirt allows him to pretend he’s something else: “In my new yellow shirt... I am a duck quacking, splashing/ through a big puddle of sun.” He goes on to imagine himself as other animals and various inanimate objects (trumpet, taxi, yellow submarine), and he ends his day safely, because his “new yellow shirt is a smile of moon/ in my very own room.” Spinelli’s text flows well and makes effective use of repetition, but young viewers aren’t likely to share the narrator’s unrealistically sustained enthusiasm for an article of clothing. Acrylics in clear, strong colors radiate the energy of the yellow-clad child, but at least one spread seems to miss the point by failing to include the all-important shirt. Still, preschoolers may enjoy imagining what they can be when they’re similarly colorfully garbed. EAB


Spinelli’s young narrator braves numerous scary situations on his way home from school: “When the stray dog barks,/ When the lightning sparks,/ when a storm cloud follows me, / when the big kids shout/ as they race about / home is the place to be.” After passing sirens, deep puddles, restless animals, and windswept objects, he finally ends up safely in the arms of his parents: “Home is the place all safe and snug/ when I’m scared as I can be,/ with Mommy’s smile and Daddy’s hug/ home is the place for me/ for sure./ Home is the place for me.” Christy Hale’s mixed-media illustrations, in dark hues with orange and yellow highlights combining with sweeping lines for eerie effect, contribute some dramatic tension to this mild adventure. The narrator’s expressions are occasionally awkward, however, and the mid-book brightening of weather and mood breaks the tension and makes the narrator’s fears incongruous. Nonetheless, in an age when Halloween storytimes may make some adults uncomfortable, Spinelli’s book fills a niche, providing a spooky alternative grounded in the everyday experience of children and sprinkled with the occasional jack-o’-lantern, scarecrow, and black cat. EAB


After the murder of her woodwitch mother, thirteen-year-old Rosemary cuts off her hair, renames herself Rowan, and sets off to search for her father, the famed outlaw Robin Hood. She journeys to Sherwood Forest, and along the way she acquires three companions: Tykull, an arrow-catching wolf-dog; simple Lionel, a
gifted singer with the strength of ten men; and brave princess Ettarde, escapee from an arranged marriage. Encounters with Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborn, and the Sheriff of Nottingham make for a pretty rousing tale, and Rowan, plucky victim of tragedy that she is, is a most sympathetic character. The contrivance of the tale is undeniable, and there are quite a few awkward moments (most caused by anachronistic language) where even the most willing suspension of disbelief may waver. Springer, however, knows her adolescent angst: Rowan mourns her mother, searches for her father, and tries to reconcile herself to her mixed heritage (human and aelfe, the fairy folk) with all the emotional turmoil of any modern young-adult protagonist. The added frisson of dangerous adventures, daring escapes, and poignant reunions will keep young fantasy/adventure lovers turning the pages. JMD

TOWNLEY, RODERICK  
_The Great Good Thing._  Jackson/Atheneum, 2001  [232p]  
ISBN 0-689-84324-0  $17.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

Princess Sylvie is the protagonist of a book in a world where Readers prompt characters to stage their story anew each time the book is reopened. No one has read Sylvie's book in a long time, and she and the other characters are taken by surprise one day when a little girl opens the book. This new Reader is enchanted with the story, reading it over and over again, and Sylvie discovers a way to travel out of the land of her tale and into the dreams of this Reader. This ability comes in handy when their book is destroyed by fire, and Sylvie rescues as many of the characters as she can by transporting them into the Reader's mind. For a time, characters from the story are summoned to appear in dreams, but eventually they are no longer called, and Princess Sylvie moves with the royal family and their entourage into a little-used part of the Reader's mind while the Reader grows older. Finally, as the Reader is dying, Sylvie finds a way (with help from the Reader's own grandmother who still lives inside her mind) to encourage the Reader's now-grown daughter to write the story of The Great Good Thing down again, thereby renewing the lives of the characters and the story. Although this self-conscious tale has the attraction of a complicated puzzle, the logic doesn't always work, and there are sections in which this artificial story-of-a-story drags with lack of tension. However, it's a change from more conventional folktale novelizations, and readers who have already been delighted by fairy stories might be interested in this fantasy about the lives of characters when the book is closed. KM

TUNNELL, MICHAEL O.  
_Brothers in Valor: A Story of Resistance._  Holiday House, 2001  260p  
ISBN 0-8234-1541-4  $16.95  

Tunnell bases this fictionalized account on the true-life experiences of Helmuth Hübener and two teenaged friends who were tried and convicted by the People's Court for distributing anti-Nazi handbills. Rudi, the youngest of the trio, tells how the boys moved from a crisis of conscience over their Mormon congregation's tacit cooperation with Nazi policy to putting their convictions into action by gathering war information from Allied radio broadcasts and disseminating it throughout their neighborhoods. This is definitely the stuff of high drama, all the more powerful for its basis in reality, but a tonal shift in the prose makes it difficult to pinpoint a receptive audience. Throughout the first half, Tunnell flits among

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episodes of escalating anti-Jewish discrimination and turbulence at home, church, and school without lingering to examine harbingers of the coming maelstrom in any depth. When the boys are finally apprehended, the text fairly explodes with harsh, explicit detail of brutal interrogations, terrifying incarceration, a sham trial, and ultimately Helmuth’s beheading and the others’ imprisonment. It’s problematic, though, whether readers with the sophistication to handle the grim aftermath of the boys’ resistance work will have followed the tale through its choppier, more child-oriented preliminaries. A final note offers background regarding the boys on whom the characters were modeled, and a timeline of World War II sets events into broader context. EB

VAN LAAN, NANCY  Teeny Tiny Tingly Tales; illus. by Victoria Chess. Schwartz/Atheneum, 2001 32p ISBN 0-689-81875-0 $16.00 R 4-7 yrs

Van Laan uses elements from traditional folklore to create three rhyming tales that have just enough creepiness to please horror-seeking preschoolers and primary graders. "Old Doctor Wango Tango" rides his poor horse to the top of a windy hill and is blown away; "It" pulls itself together from a variety of parts and takes a stroll through town; and an old woman out picking peas finds "The Hairy Toe" and later meets its owner. The tales themselves are brisk, rhythmic, and eminently tellable. Chess’s mixed-media (acrylics, watercolor, pastels, colored pencil, and pencil) illustrations are a stylistic match to Van Laan’s tiny terrors; the pop-eyed, long-nosed doctor, maniacally expressioned It, and long-nailed hairy toe just look like creepy trouble waiting to happen. The little girl on the cover (walking alongside a cemetery wall with spooky fingers reaching over the top) is an inside joke: she reappears on the title pages of the stories, dressed in pajamas and bunny slippers, reading this very book and becoming progressively more horrified. This semi-send up of baby horror tales will evoke just the right mixture of shivers and giggles. JMD


Brothers Ebenezer and Obadiah get along just fine on their “poor farm with more rocks than good soil, more winter than sun.” They divide the chores during the day and play music on the porch every evening, and they seem content to go on doing so—until the day Obadiah insults Ebenezer’s oatmeal (“‘Lumps,’ said Obadiah. ‘Lumps?’ said Ebenezer. ‘Not in my oatmeal’”) and Ebenezer dumps the bowl of cereal on Obadiah’s head. Neither brother will apologize to the other, and things go from bad to worse, driving Obadiah to cut the house in two and haul his half over to the next hilltop. Walls of stone and silence keep the two separated as over the years the brothers marry, have children, and perpetuate their feud, until finally their great-grandsons meet and manage not to repeat the mistakes of their ornery great-grandfathers. The energy and humor of Van Leeuwen’s rueful fable about foolish stubbornness and the power of apology are matched by Sneed’s powerful watercolors. The illustrations are set in panel, full-page, and double-page layouts, and the compositions are balanced and absorbing but not crowded. The figures are elongated and monumental, and the fluid lines give an elastic, expressive emotionality to the images of man and beast. The subtle tragedy of the brothers’ estrangement is given humor by the larger-than-life illustrations,
but it remains to be seen which listeners remember more, the humor or the lesson.

JMD

VANDE VELDE, VIVIAN  
Being Dead. Harcourt, 2001  [240p]
ISBN 0-15-236320-4  $17.00
Reviewed from galleys  
R  Gr. 6-10

Each story in this collection of seven short tales has an unusual take on ghostly happenings, from the tricky “Drop by Drop” (about a teenager haunted by the young victim of a hit-and-run accident) to the cleverly pithy “The Ghost” (about college students moving into a haunted house) to the romantic “October Chill” (in which a teenage girl with an inoperable brain tumor finds true love with the ghost of a young man from the eighteenth century). Whether the narrative is first or third person, whether the protagonist is living or ghostly, the main characters have engaging voices. Vande Velde is handy with the unexpected plot twist, the turnaround that both shocks and delights, and her writing style is precise and entertaining. Even in short stories her characters have emotional depth; she’s careful to give them contextual life before introducing elements of the supernatural, a choice which makes the stories even more effective. There’s something here for everyone, from adults seeking a read aloud for Halloween to young adults looking for a more sophisticated-than-Stine thrill. JMD

VENOKUR, ROSS  
ISBN 0-385-32798-6  $14.95  Ad  Gr. 3-5

Lifelong vegetarian Meatball is revolted when bully Rufus forces him to eat his namesake, but the effects are even stranger than he imagined: he discovers he can change into anything he thinks about (animal, vegetable, mineral) for two minutes and thirty-nine seconds. Fortunately, he has developed this superpower just in time to avert the dastardly plan of an organized cell of kid-hating principals and save the family business from a consuming conglomerate. Venokur (author of The Amazing Frecktacle, BCCB 9/98 and The Cookie Company, 2/00) tosses logic to the winds in this farfetched tale, and he won’t be winning any prizes for plotting, but Meatball has such a comfortable, confident voice that readers can’t help but root for him. While the adults are strictly straight men to the kids (the principals’ villainous personalities are right out of central casting), the characterizations of Meatball’s friend Max and Max’s girlfriend Jessica are solidly appealing, and even bully Rufus and Meatball’s precious sister Precious come around in the end. JMD

WARD, HELEN  
The Tin Forest; illus. by Wayne Anderson. Dutton, 2001  32p
ISBN 0-525-46787-4  $15.99  R  5-8 yrs

“There was once a wide, windswept place near nowhere and close to forgotten, that was filled with all the things that no one wanted. Right in the middle was a small house, with small windows, that looked out on other people’s garbage and bad weather.” The old man who lives there does his best to cope with the rising tide of trash, but he has no success until he decides to work with it instead of against it. By creating a forest from this detritus, the old man attracts a real bird, which returns with his mate and some seeds and thereby helps the old man realize his dreams of living among “tropical trees, exotic flowers, toucans, tree frogs, and
tigers." Reminiscent of both Cherry's *The Great Kapok Tree* and Yorinks' *Hey, Al*, this is less coherent philosophically but nonetheless interesting visually: the tin forest is intricately detailed, its metallic monochrome relieved by the more organic warmth of the old man's pastoral vision. While the book's lush resolution may strike environmentally minded readers as delusional, this dreamy volume would make a poetic addition to discussions of recycling and found-object art. FK

**WATKINS, RICHARD** *Slavery: Bondage throughout History*; written and illus. by Richard Watkins. Houghton, 2001 136p
ISBN 0-395-92289-5  $18.00  Ad  Gr. 6-9

In this ambitious overview, Watkins argues that human chattel bondage is an institution whose past reaches to the earliest historical records and has been supported at some point by every race. Chapters are thematically organized to promote cross-cultural comparisons—Reasons for Slavery, Buying a Slave, Types of Slave Labor, Rebellion, etc. Slavery in the Americas receives particular attention in chapters on the "triangle trade" and abolition, but the larger world view is never far from sight. The title suffers somewhat from compression of so massive a topic into a limited format, and although Watkins leads off with a concise working definition of slavery ("A slave is a person owned by another as a piece of property. . . . [S]imply put, a slave belonged to a master who could make the slave do anything he wanted"), he doesn't always have the luxury of space to justify his inclusion of systems that vary from this definition. Nonetheless, the text makes a laudable and reasonably successful attempt to offer American readers perspective from which to view their country's more shameful historical roots. Black-and-white illustrations range from blandly diagrammatic to emotional and oddly sensual; a glossary, timeline, bibliography, and index are included. EB

**WILD, MARGARET** *Nighty Night!*, illus. by Kerry Argent. Peachtree, 2001 [34p]
ISBN 1-56145-246-7  $15.95  Reviewed from galleys  R  3-6 yrs

The barnyard animals are trying to get their babies to sleep, but the kids just won't stop playing: when Mother Sheep goes to tuck the lambs in, she discovers the chicks have snuck in instead; Father Duck is startled to find himself tucking in piglets; Mother Hen encounters mischievous lambs in place of her chicks; and Father Pig, of course, ends up with Father Duck's ducklings. The scamps of various species are sorted and returned and, in the face of protests (the lambs want another story, ducklings want more kisses, the chicks want a drink of water, and the piglets "have to wee, wee, wee!"), gradually put to bed for the night. The text is a bit long and formless for its appeal level, but there is a lot of charm in that appeal; good readers-aloud will make hay out of the multitude of barnyard noises required, and the audience will relish the silly animal mismatchings and the jocular imprecations upon their discovery ("You sassy scalawags! You're not my darling ducklings!"). Argent's smooth watercolors make the most out of rural earthtones and mauve-touched twilight, and the bright-eyed animals are plump and endearing and almost (oh, well) mouthwatering; touches of humor, as in the crowd scene of crestfallen babies and the anxious, leg-crossed pigs, are homely as well as amusing. Parents with noted gifts for mimicry and youngsters just getting ready for Dick King-Smith's animal-lovers' oeuvre will find this just right to end the day. DS
WILES, DEBORAH  *Love, Ruby Lavender.* Gulliver/Harcourt, 2001 188p
ISBN 0-15-202314-3 $16.00  R  Gr. 4-6

Poor Ruby Lavender: her beloved grandfather died last year, her grandmother, Miss Eula, is off to Hawaii for an extended visit with a new grandchild, and her nemesis Melba Jane (of the tippy-tappy patent leather shoes) is making her life a trial. Ruby is trying to concentrate on taking care of her chickens and writing letters to her absent grandmother, but she seems to have a talent for trouble; the trouble usually revolves around Melba Jane, who holds Ruby responsible for the car accident that killed Ruby’s grandfather and Melba Jane’s father. In spite of her tough talk Ruby secretly agrees with Melba Jane, and it’s only when she confesses to new friend Dove that she learns the truth and finds release from her unnecessary guilt. The journey to that absolution, however, is littered with egg-sitting chickens, escaping chickens, and greedy chickens, Miss Eula’s pink house, Melba Jane’s blue hair, and the letters that fly back and forth between Ruby and her grandmother. The pace is quick and the tone is companionable, and if the final resolution between Ruby and Melba Jane is sentimental and sweet, well, as Ruby would say, sweet garden of peas! It couldn’t end any other way. JMD

WILLIAMS, VERA B.  *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart;* written and illus. by Vera B. Williams. Greenwillow, 2001 72p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029461-2  $15.89  R*  Gr. 3-5
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029460-4  $15.95

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

WRIGHT, CATHERINE  *Steamboat Annie and the Thousand-Pound Catfish;* illus. by Howard Fine. Philomel, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-399-23331-8  R  5-9 yrs

Folks in the river town of Pleasant are “uncommonly musical,” but their singing doesn’t suit Ernie, the local thousand-pound catfish, so he takes to eating their boats, their rafts, and finally their church. Steamboat Annie, as the town’s mayor as well as its tallest person, rushes to the rescue, but her arch-nemesis Jefferson Jackson (“who has that wonderful, wormy fishing smell”) tells her she’s not up to the task of ousting the omnivorous Ernie and slinks off “thinking sinister, cheating thoughts.” Despite Jefferson’s attempted underhanded dealings with the ornery fish, Annie does oust the rapacious Ernie (“slimy chicken-belly-ugly fish of a fish,” as she calls him), whirling him by the end of her fishing line and sending him flying out of the Midwest and towards California. As with some tall tales, this is light on plot, but it’s nevertheless delightful in the exaggerated specifics and the swinging storytelling style of Wright’s text. Fine’s bright acrylic colors depict an enthusiastic cast of expressive townspeople in a small-town setting shaded in tones that tend toward Mississippi-mud brown, and his use of perspective to magnify details such as Annie’s foot playing the calliope as Ernie tugs the boat down the river mesh well with Wright’s text. Steamboat Annie is a tall-tale heroine of gigantic proportions with an oversized smile to match; your storytime audience will fall for her hook, line, and sinker. KM

One hundred sixteen fairy tales drawn from Italian, French, and German sources comprise this formidable volume. While a number of the tales will be familiar to the well-read fairy tale fan, many of the stories are more obscure, or they're offered here in their first English translation. Stories by Straparola, the Brothers Grimm, d'Aulnoy, Basile, Leprince de Beaumont, Perrault, and others are arranged in thirty-eight thematic divisions such as Clever Thieves, Dangerous Sirens, Triumphant Apprentices, Faithful Sisters, Abandoned Children, and Bloodthirsty Husbands. Each theme is introduced by Zipes, who briefly comments on the place of particular tales in literary history. Concise author biographies are appended, along with source notes and an extensive bibliography. Seven critical essays (by Jack Zipes, W. G. Waters, Benedetto Croce, Lewis Seifert, Patricia Hannon, Harry Velten, and Siegfried Neumann) on the nature of fairy tales and Italian, German, and French fairy tale traditions are also included, and twenty illustrations from pertinent volumes accompany the texts. This is a boon to the serious student of fairy tales, to storytellers, and to comprehensive folk and fairy tale collections. JMD


In addition to the obvious—criteria for the Newbery and Caldecott awards, chronologically arranged annotated lists of honor and medal winners, author/illustrator and title indices—this revised edition of the Association for Library Services to Children's guide to the honor and medal books includes “Reflections and Thoughts of the 2000 Newbery Award Selection Committee” by chair Carolyn S. Brodie and Christine Behrmann’s article on “The Media Used in Caldecott Picture Books: Notes Toward a Definitive List” with accompanying definitions and suggestions for further reading. Betty Peltola's opening piece, “Newbery and Caldecott Awards: Authorization and Terms,” gives a brief history of the awards, addresses changes in the awards’ requirements, and then clearly states the current terms, definitions and criteria for the Newbery and Caldecott awards. A brief history and physical description of the actual medals are also included, as is information on the appointment and election of the award committees. The annotations are concise and informative, and this will prove handy for quick referral and reader advisory. JMD
Keyed to *The Bulletin*'s alphabetical arrangement by author, this index, which appears in each issue, can be used in three ways. Entries in regular type refer to subjects; entries in bold type refer to curricular or other uses; entries in ALL-CAPS refer to genres and appeals. In the case of subject headings, the subhead "stories" refers to books for the readaloud audience; "fiction," to those books intended for independent reading.

**ADVENTURE STORIES:** Haddix; Horowitz
Aeronautics: Goodman, S.
African Americans: Jemison; Myers; Nelson
African Americans—stories: McKissack
Agriculture: Nelson
American Indians—fiction: Smith
American Indians—folklore: Dupre
Angels—stories: Cole
Animals: Casey; Wild
Antarctic: Loewen
Archaeology: Barner
Architecture: Rubin
Arctic, the: Dupre
Art: Rogasky; Rubin
Art and artists—stories: Catalanotto; Karas
Asian Americans—stories: Lee
Astronauts: Goodman, S.; Jemison
Aviation: Cummins
Babies—stories: Cole
**BEDTIME STORIES:** Hurd; Wild
Bible: Philip
**BIOGRAPHIES:** Cummins; Jemison; Lawlor; Myers; Nelson; Robertson
Birds—stories: Lerner
Books and reading—fiction: Townley
Bowling: Nace
Brothers—stories: Van Leeuwen
Bubbles: Bradley
Bullies—fiction: Venokur
Careers: Goodman, S.
Cats—stories: Hurd; Pullman
Chickens—fiction: Wiles
Christmas—fiction: Johnston
Civil War: Robertson
Clothing—stories: Spinelli *In My New*
Contests—stories: Catalanotto
Creativity—stories: Catalanotto; Karas
Crime and criminals—fiction:
Horowitz; Williams
Crime and criminals—stories: Geisert
Current events: Naidoo
Dancing and dancers: Cooper
Death and dying—fiction: Wiles
Dinosaurs: Barner
Disabilities: Lawlor
Disasters—stories: Lee
Dogs—stories: Graham
Earthquakes—stories: Lee
Ecology: Ward
Ethics and values: King-Smith; Naidoo; Smith; Tunnell; Van Leeuwen; Watkins
Explorers and exploring: Loewen
Families—fiction: Rice
Famine—fiction: Lyons
FANTASY: Bruchac; Gerstein; Lyons; Schmidt; Springer; Townley; Venokur; Ward
Fathers and daughters—fiction: Springer; Williams
Fathers and sons—fiction: Schmidt
Fear—stories: Spinelli *A Safe Place*
Fish—stories: Wright
**FOLK AND FAIRYTALES:**
Bateman; Cole; Hague; Johnson; Montresor; Philip; Pullman; Schmidt; Van Laan
Food and eating-stories: Evangelista; Jane; Wright
Friendship-fiction: Guest; King-Smith
FUNNY STORIES: Arnold; Laurence
Gangs-fiction: Johnston
Gardens and gardening-stories: Evangelista
Gays and lesbians-fiction: Ryan
GHOST STORIES: Hague; Ibbotson; Van de Velde
Grandfathers-fiction: Gilmore
Grandmothers-fiction: McCully; Wiles
Growing up-fiction: Saldaña
Hair-stories: Lerner
Halloween: Donaldson; Druce; Howard; Jane
Halloween-fiction: McCully
Halloween-stories: Spinelli *A Safe Place*
Hamsters-stories: Kirk
HISTORICAL FICTION: Lyons; Tunnell
History, classical: Geras
History, U.S.: Kittredge; Robertson
History, world: Watkins
Homosexuality-fiction: Ryan
Immigration-fiction: Naidoo
Inupiat-fiction: Kittredge
Ireland-fiction: Lyons
Language arts: Arnold
Latino-stories: Johnston; Rice; Saldaña
Libraries and librarians-stories: McKissack
Literature, children's: Myers
LOVE STORIES: Cart; Ryan
Magic-fiction: Gerstein
Magic-stories: Cullen
Mermaids-stories: Bateman
Monsters-poetry: Prelutsky
Monsters-stories: Jane
Mothers and sons-fiction: McDonough
Pets-stories: Howard
Photography-fiction: Smith
Physical education: Cooper; Nace
Pigs-fiction: King-Smith
Pigs-stories: Geisert
Pirates-fiction: Laurence
POETRY: Nelson; Prelutsky; Rogasky; Williams
Postcolonialism-fiction: Gilmore
Princesses-fiction: Cabot; King-Smith
Racism-fiction: McCully
Reading aloud: Hornik; Ibbotson; Prelutsky
Reading, beginning: Laurence; McCully
Reading, easy: Gerstein; Guest; Hornik; McDonough
Reading, reluctant: Bruchac; Prelutsky
Religious instruction: Philip
RIDDLES: Druce
SCARY STORIES: Hague; Van Laan
School-fiction: Guest; Haddix; Hornik; McDonough
School-stories: Goodman, J.; Karas
Science: Bradley
SCIENCE FICTION: Haddix
Seasons: Rogasky
Sex-fiction: Cart
SHORT STORIES: Cart; Kittredge; Rice; Van Laan; Van de Velde
Sisters-fiction: Williams
Slavery-fiction: Watkins
Spies and espionage-fiction: Horowitz
Stepparents-fiction: Cabot
Storytelling: Hague
Storytime: Ahlberg; Howard; Hurd; Jane
TALL TALES: Wright
Transportation: Cummins
Voyages and travel: Dupre; Loewen
Voyages and travel-fiction: Springer
Voyages and travel-stories: McKissack
War-fiction: Geras
Witches-stories: Donaldson; Howard
Wolves-stories: Lindenbaum
Women's studies: Cummins; Geras; Jemison; Lawlor; Loewen
World War II-fiction: Tunnell
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