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**EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH REVIEWS**

- * Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
- R Recommended.
- Ad Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
- M Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
- NR Not recommended.
- SpC Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
- SpR A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

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Drawings by Debra Bolgla. This publication is printed on acid-free paper.

Cover art: jacket art by Lane Smith; photograph of Woody Guthrie by Al Aumuller, courtesy of the Library of Congress. Used by permission of Viking Children's Books.
Woody Guthrie wandered tirelessly through America and lent his voice and music to the causes of the downtrodden people he met, but he was no angel. In celebrating his legacy, many biographers have chosen to take an adulatory path and ignore Guthrie's darker side. Not so with this volume, which presents an unflinchingly accurate portrait of a rambling and unpredictable man whose amazingly prolific output and true genius for creating memorable songs earned him a place in American music history, despite his tendency to crash on friend's couches until the welcome had long soured.

Partridge's succinct and quick-shifting prose captures the disjointed rhythms of the events in Guthrie's complex life, from his childhood in the depths of the Dust Bowl and the Depression under the dubious protection of a mother who was slowly succumbing to Huntington's disease, to his several failed marriages, which were not helped by his lifelong propensity to disappear for lengthy intervals with no warning. A creative energy propelled him through life, leaving those around him amazed and often baffled by his wandering attention. The author crafts her descriptions to reflect the rapidity and wildness of Guthrie's talent: "He brimmed with brilliant schemes and wild ideas. He drew constantly, put out a newsletter about what he and his friends were doing, and always had stacks of library books around. At any moment he would start talking about his latest interest. Whenever he had a little money he'd buy a notepad and jot down words to a song."

In addition to a panoply of archival photographs, which add realism to this engrossing story of a life, the book includes carefully selected quotes from songs, acquaintances, and documents to punctuate the story with authenticating detail without detracting from the momentum of the narrative. Comments from friends, particularly Guthrie's close friend Pete Seeger, offer interesting insights into the positive and negative effects of Guthrie's restless energy on those around him. After watching Guthrie wander off from his young wife and three children, leaving them no means of support, Seeger asked, "Is that the price of genius? . . . Is it worth paying?" Seeger saw both sides of Guthrie, though, and marveled at his prolific output: "Lord, Lord, he turned out song after song!"

Partridge also sheds light on the vagaries of popularity, showing how close Guthrie came to falling into obscurity, not once but many times throughout his life. His brief commercial successes always crumbled, as did most of his relationships with fellow artists (and all of his romantic relationships). In addition, Guthrie's behavior grew more outrageous as he grew older; he and his friends blamed his consumption of alcohol, until doctors diagnosed him, at age forty-two,
with Huntington's disease, the same degenerative neurological disorder that had sent his own mother to an asylum. Then, in a final twist in a life full of winding roads, while Guthrie was deteriorating dramatically in a hospital room, folk music became the genre of a generation, and Guthrie became known as one of the enduring creators of modern folk music. Long after he had ceased to be able to communicate or move a muscle voluntarily, his son Arlo Guthrie and old friend Pete Seeger would bring their guitars to the hospital to sing duets: "Woody could no longer applaud, but his eyes shone with tears."

This accurate and honest portrait of Woody Guthrie does not soften his edges, but it shows in engrossing details the constant, unstoppable tide of creation that carried him through life, and it offers a sense of the passion that drove this brilliant songwriter to become one of the most important musicians in the history of our nation. To round out the volume, there are general source notes and endnotes, a bibliography, and an index. (Imprint information appears on p. 415.)

Kate McDowell, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ASHLEY, BERNARD  Little Soldier.  Scholastic, 2002  230p
ISBN 0-439-22424-1  $16.95  R  Gr. 8-12

After soldiers of the dominant Yusulu clan massacred his Kibu family, Kaninda joined the rebel forces for the express purpose of killing Yusulus. The atrocities Kaninda witnessed in Lasai, his fictional African homeland, are described in italicized flashbacks sandwiched between accounts of his present life in gritty south London, where he was taken after being "rescued," first by the Red Cross and then by a woman whose Salvation Army-style ministry took responsibility for six young refugees. Thinking of himself as a prisoner of war, Kaninda lives with Captain Betty, her quiet husband, and thirteen-year-old Laura (who provides the novel's other major perspective), waiting for a chance to hop an Africa-bound freighter and get back to the fighting. Soon, however, he gets pulled into a "stupid war" between gangs based in neighboring housing projects, a war "all about risk and the thrill of it, where hatred and violence gave some purpose for their lives. It was for that—and for the pride of the tribe." This is a touch programmatic and slightly sentimental (especially in its treatment of female characters, such as Laura), but it's nonetheless plausibly constructed and approachably written. Because Kaninda uses in London many of the survival skills he developed in war-torn Lasai, the novel effectively emphasizes the similarities between his new and his old environments, making some thought-provoking parallels, and the final message of hope is certainly a welcome one. A note describes the author's inspiration and research.
FK

AUCH, MARY JANE  Ashes of Roses.  Holt, 2002  250p
ISBN 0-8050-6686-1  $16.95  R  Gr. 5-9

America's golden door only admits part of the Nolan family; baby Joseph is diag-
nosed with trachoma by Ellis Island examiners, and Da must take him back to Ireland, leaving his wife and three daughters in the care of his brother. There's only a half-hearted welcome from Uncle Patrick and his cool, thoroughly assimilated wife, and soon Ma and little Bridget catch the first steamer home. Seventeen-year-old Rose and her younger sister Maureen are determined to make it in America, and, after a false start in a sweatshop, Rose finds them both lodgings in the apartment of a Jewish immigrant and his teenage daughter, Gussie, a seamstress and union activist. Gussie helps Rose land a promising position with her own employers, and if adolescent readers don't immediately recognize the significance of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, they soon will. Just as Rose makes friends and draws her first paycheck, she's caught in the infamous fire of 1911 and barely escapes with her life. Scenes at Ellis Island capture the intense pressure and split-second decision of a family torn apart the moment its hopes are highest, and the Triangle workrooms are so carefully described early on that the crush and pandemonium of the laborers' panicked flight is nearly palpable. Auch skillfully condenses sweeping themes of American immigrant experience into Rose's story; readers ready to migrate from series historical fiction should find it riveting. EB


Poor Little Wolf doesn't feel he's up to the standard of his brothers and sisters, so he's hiding behind the oak tree while his sibs are out frolicking. When Big Gray checks on his woebegone pup, he hears a litany of anxiety (“Frankie says that I do not roll in a straight line. . . . Ana says I'm a slowpoke. . . . Will I ever pounce as high as Tyler?”). The wise parent responds to his pup's whines by addressing not only his pup's present capabilities (“Straight lines can be a bother”) and their rightness (“You run like a soft breeze. . . . That is just as it should be”) but also the certainty of greater skills to come (“High pounces come later”). Though the underlying acorn/oak metaphor lacks the bolstering specificity of the rest of the text and leaves the end slightly weak, the text is reassuring and enjoyably humorous, especially in Little Wolf's puppyish demonstrations of his shortcomings (“Before the little wolf had gotten very far, his run had become a galumph. And soon after, it was just a toddle”). Aruego and Dewey's illustrations give Little Wolf his rueful due: the wayward lines have an expressive energy reminiscent of Sandra Boynton, and the comic effects (Little Wolf leaves a cartoonish wake when he runs) and clever compositions (an upside-down little Wolf, just finished with his rolling demonstration, continues his tête-à-tête with Big Gray) don't detract from the sympathy of their portrayal of the put-upon little guy. All youngsters feel outstripped by somebody, so Little Wolf's plight will be widely recognized, and Big Gray's confidence will be welcome everywhere. DS


Young Austin loves life on the road with his mother and father's band (“They called themselves The Swamp Snakes. Dad played the fiddle, Mom sang country-western, and Austin banged the tambourine”). Even though “every week was a different town . . . every night in their trailer was exactly the same”: Austin settles
into bed with his stuffed animals and his dad comes in and tells him a story—just one, no matter how much Austin begs. When the family visits at Uncle Roy's two-story house, Austin successfully negotiates for two stories; when Dad wins a fiddle contest and they check into a fancy eleven-story San Antonio hotel—well, you get the picture. This unusual depiction of family life on the road will have a lot of romantic appeal for young listeners, and the cozy minimalism of the trailer (and the absence of formalized schooling) is sure to give them wanderlust. A strong sense of momentum, built while the family travels from place to place, is anchored by the nightly bedtime ritual. Smith's watercolors are breezy and lighthearted; she comically squeezes the scenes inside the family trailer into appropriately tight frames, while rendering the dance hall and road sequences in more spacious spreads. The warm-toned family has individual personality yet also a broad range of ethnic possibility that will allow many kids to see their own families reflected in the characters. Images from Dad's retold folktales appear in balloons, giving additional clues to the tales' identities, and a good librarian will be able to answer listeners' requests for the stories that Austin's daddy told him. JMD

CAREY, JANET LEE  Wenny Has Wings. Atheneum, 2002  [240p]
ISBN 0-689-84294-5  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-7

When a runaway truck hits eleven-year-old Will and his seven-year-old sister, Wenny, they both die; Will, however, is revived at the hospital, while Wenny is gone forever. After he wakes up, Will begins to write letters to Wenny, chronicling his parents' agony and his own anger and bewilderment, things he's reluctant to utter out loud ("How the air in the house feels like it weighs a thousand pounds, how I'm mad at Mom and Dad for being so sad, how you totally screwed up my life by dying"). Once home, he's taken with the idea of investigating an infamous tunnel in a nearby park, thinking that because his near-death experience took him into a tunnel, he may be able to contact Wenny there. Especially in light of Will's survivor guilt, this is poignant subject matter, and the additional aspect of Will's revival adds an unusual component of spiritual exploration. The family's near-dissolution, with the surviving child virtually ignored in the face of parental grief, is touching and credible, and there's intimacy in the square, diary-esque trim size. This isn't quite up to the standard of recent sibling-death dramas such as Wallace-Brodueur's Blue Eyes Better (BCCB 3/02), however: Will's near-death experience is never really satisfactorily explored (and the notion that his return to life and Wenny's permanent departure were individual choices is a strange but undispelled one), sentimentality occasionally obscures the raw edges of grief, and the book's pacing is often ponderous, slowed by repetition and by reiteration of already-clear messages. There's nonetheless some compelling drama here, and readers will be moved by Will's struggle with survival. DS

CHENEY, LYNNE  America: A Patriotic Primer; illus. by Robin Preiss Glasser. Simon, 2002  40p
ISBN 0-689-85192-8  $16.95  M  5-8 yrs

Here each letter of the alphabet represents a document, statesman, or nebulous concept ("F is for Freedom and the Flag we fly"; "R is for the Rights we are guaranteed") that taps the cathartic pride and spirit usually relegated to the Fourth of July. A marching band (nearly all white) entertains the flag-waving crowd (nearly
all white) beneath a boxed “Patriotism” P (where children sell lemonade for the Red Cross); a bannered quote from John Adams proclaims, “Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.” In this vision, America the Beautiful is a fait accompli rather than a messy, challenging work in progress, and the glorious struggles—for independence, for suffrage, for racial equality—all lie in the past. The celebration is exuberant but shallow: contemporary heroes and heroines are generic or non-controversial (“elected officials,” I. M. Pei, a grandfatherly veteran—white—sharing photos with pajama’d tykes), and biographical detail is consigned to appended notes; the alphabetic format strains to unite the disjointed narrative. Glasser’s cramped line-and-watercolor pastiches depict a nation of smiles (from the satisfied grin of Navajo code talkers, to laughing immigrants approaching Ellis Island), where “Main Street, U.S.A.” is cozily lined with church, temple, mission, and mosque, and everyone snuggles under a common blanket of prosperity. Nonetheless, Cheney’s expressed hope that her opus “will most often be read and discussed by parents and children together” suggests a use that many adults may welcome, and families whose patter is generally limited to homework assignments and practice schedules could find a springboard for more substantive dialogue here. EB


Keegan Flannery blames himself for his mother’s emotional breakdown, for the suicide of a classmate (which he witnessed but did not prevent), and most of all for the infant death of his twin brother, Michael. Festering guilt gradually becomes firm conviction that Michael demands atonement, and Keegan believes that taking his own life on his sixteenth birthday is the only way to set his family’s world back in balance. While carefully planning his final release, Keegan accepts a challenge to participate on his high school’s wrestling team, and he welcomes the unrelenting, pounding pain as cleansing penance for his crimes. As the punishing sport strengthens his undersized body, he begins to connect tenuously with boys on the team, to hope for a rapprochement with his distant, silently grieving father, and to discover some compelling reason to ignore Michael’s voice and grasp life again. Tension steadily escalates as chapter headings mark the countdown, Michael’s voice becomes more urgent, and Keegan’s plans for his demise become ever more detailed. Connelly, however, keeps a glimmer of hope alight throughout and delivers a resolution that is not only welcome but credible and humane. EB

COONEY, CAROLINE B. Goddess of Yesterday. Delacorte, 2002 [192p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-72945-6 $15.95 Reviewed from galleys R* Gr. 6-9

Six-year-old Anaxandra doesn’t realize that Nicander, the cheerful king who carries her on his shoulder to his ship, will be holding her as hostage against her chieftain father’s gold while she serves as companion to Callisto, Nicander’s daughter. When Nicander’s island is overrun by pirates in search of riches, all perish but the now twelve-year-old Anaxandra, who is found by Menelaus, king of Sparta. Aware of her precarious status, Anaxandra assumes the identity of the Princess Callisto and journeys to Sparta for a dangerous meeting with Menelaus’ wife, the legendary Helen. There’s plenty of historical adventure here: Anaxandra wit-
nesses the coming of Paris to Sparta, Helen's betrayal of her husband and her people, and the opening battles of the Trojan War. Strong characterizations help make the action plausible and the plot cohesive, with Anaxandra herself intelligent and stubborn, only partially resigned to the fate the gods have ordained for her. The emotional relationships that link the characters—from Helen and Paris to Andromache and Hector—add further momentum. Fast-paced and smoothly written, this is one book to put at the top of your summer reading list. An extensive afterword provides some historical and literary context. JMD

COOPER, SUSAN  
Frog; illus. by Jane Browne. McElderry, 2002  [26p]
ISBN 0-689-84302-X $17.00
Reviewed from galleys  
Unlike the rest of his family, Little Joe can't swim: "His brother and sister swim like fishes. His mom swam like a powerboat. But Little Joe just didn't get it." When a little green frog hops into the pool and causes all sorts of consternation amongst Joe's family members ("They all splashed about like crazy people, trying to catch Frog"), only Little Joe stays quiet, watching. After everyone leaves, a careful Little Joe lifts a very tired, very scared Frog out of the pool, telling him, "Go home, Frog. Go home where it's safe." Frog hops back to his pond, and Little Joe hops into the pool, where, with strong kicks of his legs, he swims across "just like Frog." The writing is bland and the story's message somewhat puzzling, but the low-key suspense is effective. Though the human figures are stiff and literal, the watercolor illustrations offer a splashy mix of blue water and white tile set in a green grassy yard brightened throughout by sunny skies. Listeners anxious over Frog's fate will appreciate both of Joe's unheralded accomplishments. JMD

COULOUNBIS, AUDREY  
Say Yes. Putnam, 2002  200p
ISBN 0-399-23390-3 $16.99 R* Gr. 5-8
Twelve-year-old Casey's life spins out of control the day her stepmother, Sylvia, fails to come home, and Casey realizes that Sylvia, who's been Casey's only parent since the death of her father, has taken off with her boyfriend (no fan of Casey, who dislikes him in return). She's determined to keep Sylvia's absence a secret, carry on daily life in their New York apartment, and retain her belief that her stepmother will return. Fortunately, she's abetted by the superintendent's teen-aged foster son, who at first has his own agenda (he convinces Casey to steal an old lady's money) but who then finds a friend in her and a refuge in her apartment from his foster father's abuse. While there's an obvious survival-story appeal to the plot, more important is the story of family and forgiveness and the finding of both; Casey's narration is tremulous and heartfelt yet realistically understated as she struggles to cope both with her situation and with the tremendous betrayal of her caretaker. There's also life and genuine originality in the rest of the cast: Paulie, the super's foster son, who first seems to be a tough guy but then proves a genuine ally who envies Casey the faith she retains in familial possibilities; Fran, Sylvia's pragmatic mother, a deus ex machina with Lord & Taylor shopping bags who turns up to save Casey from the super and the law; even Sylvia herself, warm-hearted, loving, and deeply regretful of having succumbed out of desperation to weakness. Ultimately, there's something of Hamilton's Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush here in the message of moving past terrible mistakes to find strength in one's family bonds. DS

In this photoessay examining a day in the life of a modern-day Maya village in Belize, the succinct text introduces individuals from the village by first name and describes the task in which each villager is engaged (“Each morning, Dominica and the other women take the family’s laundry to the creek. Dominica gives the hammock a thorough scrub on the flat washing stone”). Each spread features a color snapshot of the villager on the left, paired with a full-page, closeup photo of his or her hands engaged in the mentioned task (such as weaving huipils, cooking tortillas, sowing maize, playing musical instruments, etc.) on the right. There are some evocative concrete details of daily life, and the hands focus is an intriguing and appropriate one for a village still dependent on manual labor. The text is superficial, however, somewhat romanticizing Maya life, and the author underplays the constant, backbreaking work of finding daily sustenance with few modern conveniences. The photographs are sharp and vivid, but there’s a travel-brochure air to some of the pictures of happy villagers and smiling children. The concentration on folk art-related tasks and the importance of family and community instead of on the hardships of daily life is an understandable choice for this audience, however, and this will be a serviceable introduction to a very old culture’s contemporary life. A note from the author describing her experiences with the Maya opens the book; a map and brief glossary are included. JMD


When older couple Sairy and Tiller Morey decide to leave their rural home and go on separate vacations, they seek traveling companions in the form of thirteen-year-old orphan twins Dallas and Florida Carter. Mr. and Mrs. Trepid, the unfit managers of the Boxton Creek Home for Children, are only too glad to get Dallas and Florida (whom they call “trouble twins”) off their hands, and Mr. Trepid sees an opportunity to get rich off the wealthy Moreys, who have piles of money (earned from selling their folk-art woodcarvings) buried on their property. Dreamy Dallas and feisty Florida are initially suspicious of the amiable couple’s warm overtures; eventually, though, they find themselves settling into life in Ruby Holler as they wait for the vacations to begin, while Tiller and Sairy realize how much they’ve missed having children around the place. A near-disastrous trial run for the canoeing and hiking excursions briefly leaves the twins’ future with the Moreys in doubt, but a fairy-tale ending finds greedy Mr. Trepid served his just deserts and Dallas and Florida assured of a happy home with Tiller and Sairy. There’s an appealing folkloric tinge to this novel, from the forest setting, to the characters (kind and wise elders, orphan twins, a greedy villain) to a pair of possibly magical birds (one gold, one silver) who reappear throughout the book. Reluctant readers may also appreciate the very short chapters (some are no more than two pages in length) and the easygoing dialogue. Creech spends a bit too much time describing the thoughts and feelings of the adults, and the setup, the folksy dialogue, and the rustic atmosphere occasionally seem a bit forced, but orphan and folktales fans (and adult readers-aloud) will likely find this just as satisfying as Tiller and Sairy’s “getting-over-being-an-orphan triple-chocolate cookies.” JMH
DARLING, KATHY  *The Elephant Hospital*; illus. with photographs by Tara Darling. Millbrook, 2002 40p
ISBN 0-7613-1723-6 $23.90 R Gr. 2-5

The mother-daughter team from *Chameleons on Location* (BCCB 5/97) and other zoological nonfiction here combines anecdotal text and apt photographs for a visit to a hospital that serves some of the over 4000 domesticated Asian elephants in Thailand. Ten very brief chapters—most just a few pages, including photographs—focus on case studies: two chapters, for example, divide the story of Songkran, a runt (weighing only 100 pounds) whose leg was injured during birth (a series of sharp photographs details the daunting tasks of putting a splint and, later, a cast on the squirmy calf). After a brief introduction and four chapters on mothers and babies, the book devotes three chapters to elephants injured during logging accidents, then moves onto a discussion of the hospital and its efforts, both veterinary and financial. The volume’s usefulness as a reference work is limited by its somewhat random organization, but there’s a multitude of factual pachyderm tidbits (did you know that elephants can kick forward, backward, or sideways?), some insight into an interesting project, and a gallery of irresistible baby elephant photographs. A brief index (and an invitation to join the “Friends of the Asian Elephant”) is appended. FK

DE HAAN, LINDA  *King & King*; written and illus. by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland. Tricycle, 2002 32p
ISBN 1-58246-061-2 $14.95 R 5-8 yrs

A long-term queen thinks it’s time to abdicate in favor of her son, the crown prince, so she’s determined to marry him off (“You’re getting married and that’s all there is to it!”). Though the reluctant crown prince (who’s “never cared much for princesses”) eventually accedes to his mother’s wishes, the parade of hopeful princesses is disappointing until the arrival of Princess Madeleine—accompanied by her handsome brother, Prince Lee. The two princes fall instantly into fairy-tale love and they’re married in a lovely ceremony, resulting in satisfaction for all (“The two princes are known as King and King, the queen finally has some time for herself, and everyone lives happily ever after”). While this Dutch import is pointed, it’s nonetheless high-spirited and light-hearted, with entertaining folkloric details and a satisfying structure. Nijland’s mixed-media art combines painterly brush strokes, texture-heavy collage, and a multitude of figures in quivery childish line; the result is a joyously informal pageantry, occasionally crowded but more often enticingly packed, and eminently suitable to this fanciful kingdom where even the rejected princesses happily attend the royal wedding. This is a sweet and festive tale that will appeal not only to audiences with a thematic interest but also to youngsters fond of romance and celebration. DS

DEMAREST, CHRIS L.  *Smokejumpers One to Ten*; written and illus. by Chris L. Demarest. McElderry, 2002 32p
ISBN 0-689-84120-5 $17.00 Ad 4-7 yrs

Counting up to ten and down again in rhyme, Demarest traces the activities of parachuting firefighters from the moment One bolt of lightning strikes a tree, through the fire report, the muster and drop of personnel and cargo, fire control, and the jumpers’ return to base with Zero new fires spotted. Gaudy full-page and double-spread paintings are stilted and ungainly, but they do impart the moment-
tum of urgent but orderly activity, and a pair of line-captioned drawings detail the smokejumpers' parachuting and ground regalia. The counting format, however, is often forced: one would hope that an emergency dispatcher would pick up the phone on fewer than Three rings, and enumerating Five prop blades on the airplane adds no pertinent information. Even more problematic is the lack of explanation for the smokejumpers' ground activities: although it should be obvious to most adults that they are clearing a fire break, the strategy is never clarified within the text. A cloud of lurid pink "slurry," dropped from another low-flying aircraft, is also undefined. A dense, three-page author's note has the real scoop, but the presentation will soar over the heads of children drawn to a counting book; parents had better read the afterward first and brace themselves for a slew of questions. EB

**FIERSTEIN, HARVEY** *The Sissy Duckling*; illus. by Henry Cole. Simon, 2002 40p ISBN 0-689-83566-3 $16.00 M 6-9 yrs

Elmer the duckling doesn't enjoy the same pleasures as the other boy ducklings: "They boxed while Elmer baked. When they built forts, Elmer made sand castles. They had a football game, and Elmer put on a puppet show." This doesn't much trouble the happy-go-lucky Elmer, but stern Papa Duck insists that Elmer try to be more like the other boys—with disastrous results. Papa changes his tune, however, when he's injured by a hunter's bullet and survives the winter only because of Elmer's tender care. The text (based on an animated special) is undoubtedly well meant, but it's laden with problems that make it unsuccessful as literature and unlikely to help the kids it's apparently trying to assist. As with many thematically pioneering titles, this is grimly didactic and old-fashioned in every other way, with contrivance abounding (Fierstein has to demonize the other ducks to make Elmer's care of his father uniquely heroic, and every playground veteran will recognize the unlikelihood of the bully's transformation into admiring friend); the obvious artificiality of the construct will quite likely make the story rebound against poor Elmer and perhaps even against his classroom fellows. Cole's acrylic and colored-pencil illustrations are a little slick, but they add a welcome dose of energy, making Elmer a sunnily yellow cousin to Daffy with his comically dramatic expressiveness and tufted head; unfortunately, the sly touches of campy humor (Elmer gleefully cutting a string of pink paper ducks with hearts or pirouetting about the house in his frilly apron as he dusts) are likelier to be appreciated by adults than young audiences. This is a laudable effort, but a sympathetic talk with a supportive adult is more likely to help than this strained fable. DS


Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-81540-6 $15.95

When a tornado hits Bailey Tarbell's farm ("The wind howled like a prom queen steppin' on a cow patty"), the twister twists all the poor livestock around ("The duck chewed its cud. The chickens wallowed in the mud"). Determined to restore the critters to normality, Bailey seeks help from a vet ("It's plumb peculiar!" says the good doctor), attempts to model proper animal behavior, consults a psychologist, and takes a shot at hypnosis. All of her efforts at assistance are in vain until she realizes she needs to undo what's done with a good countertwist, and a trip on the carnival's Twister ride proves just the medicine to right the discom-
bobulated beasts. We’ve heard this story before and a bit more concisely, but Fisher’s creative rurality of phrase (and young Bailey’s inventiveness in the face of the helplessness of her parents) will definitely tickle youngsters’ funnybones. The illustrative compositions are more unfocused than gloriously chaotic, but Fisher’s deliberately flattened figures with thick edging in lively hues evince a designerly absurdity, and the fashionably multitextured backgrounds accentuate the contrasting, slightly retro palette. Between a merry mess-up, a clever young heroine, and a ride on the Twister there’s plenty of entertainment here.

FISHER, VALORIE  

The baby narrator may be extraordinarily precocious to formulate his/her thoughts so eloquently, but the adoring observations of preschooler “big brother” are the perfect foil to Fisher’s lovingly staged photographs. “This is my big brother” accompanies a photo from a rug-crawler’s vantage point: “big brother” is a pair of untied sneakers and slouchy red socks housing a bandage-embellished pair of shins. “My big brother feeds me” renders the open-mouthed brother as a background blur, while the food-laden yellow spoon fairly springs forward in sharp relief. A game of peekaboo is played out in life-size close-ups, and the final spread (“and he loves me”), in which the narrator is revealed as a reflection in a toy mirror, again cleverly employs razor-sharp foreground focus to direct viewers’ attention to the main event. Clearly the siblings’ relationship is a bit idealized, and “big brother” seems to be an ever-available, ever-patient source of entertainment. What little kid wouldn’t want a big guy like this around, though? Family sharing of this title might even nudge siblings in an amicable direction. EB

FOX, MEM  

A magic hat appears (“one fine day, from out of town, and without any warning at all”) and proceeds to wreak happy havoc with the townsfolk: every time it lands on someone’s head, he or she turns into an animal. The chaos is finally curtailed by the appearance of a wizard, who retrieves his hat and turns everyone affected back into themselves: “The toad, the baboon, the bear, and the ’roo./ And of course the giraffe (Oh, what a to-do!)/ Turned back into people, dazed and confused,/ Watched by a crowd that was highly amused!” Tusa’s line-and-watercolor illustrations have a homely appeal: the colors are clean, her white space is skillfully employed, and her characters’ faces and body language have a cheerful eloquence of expression. The story itself does not have quite enough wit to distract from the unfortunate sing-song quality of the rhyming text, nor does the pace ever achieve any noticeable momentum, since this is essentially a catalogue of transformation. Still, there is a chuckle or two in the nonsense magic of Fox’s tale, and a skillful reader-aloud (with, perhaps, hats?) will be able to make this come alive in story-time. JMD

FUQUA, JONATHON SCOTT  

Times are hard in rural South Carolina in 1926. Darby Carmichael’s father is cash poor despite owning a dry goods store and a farm, and the mill workers and the
black tenant farmers face even greater economic hardship. Inspired by her friend Evette’s tales of a journalist aunt, eight-year-old Darby begins to learn—and to tell—the truth about her community by writing stories for the local newspaper. Tensions increase when Darby, already flouting convention by her friendship with African-American Evette, writes a column expressing her growing awareness of race-based inequalities: “It started by saying how surprised I was to hear that black people up North lived in nice neighborhoods and that some owned things like houses and cars. Then I told how I thought it was strange because I’d never seen such a thing. But it was true, and it seemed funny to me that it could be that way somewhere else but not in Marlboro County.” The newspaper editor initially rejects the article as “inflammatory” (since, as Evette says, “It’s mostly a secret that blacks can be that way”), but after a crisis of conscience, he publishes the column and, along with Darby’s family, faces down the local representative of the KKK. While the central plot is purposive (and the focus on the transformation of white characters entirely conventional), the novel is thick with details of everyday life culled, according to the author, from oral history interviews. In this context, Darby’s perspective on her friends, her fears, and her enjoyment offers readers a rich and accessible experience of a minimally reconstructed South in which young white girls are addressed respectfully as “Miss” but African-American adults seemingly have only first names. FK

GEORGE, JEAN CRAIGHEAD CliffHanger; illus. by Wendell Minor. HarperCollins, 2002 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-000261-1 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-000260-3 $15.95

There’s a storm coming in the Tetons, and Axel, whose father runs the rock-climbing school, is distressed to hear that his dog, Grits, is stranded on the mountain. With his father as support, Axel sets out to rescue Grits even as the storm rages; he climbs up a vertical face to rescue the panicky pup, hangs on as the storm passes directly overhead, and then engages in a daring free descent after his rope has been used to lower his canine buddy. George fills her story with kid-alluring aspects—a lost dog, a kid at ease on the rocks, a daring rescue, a supportive but very secondary parent—and there’s more sheer physical action here than in most entry-level narrations. There’s also some contrivance, though (it’s not really clear why Axel wasn’t keeping tighter tabs on his dog, and the storm seems like externally applied suspense), and the text falls oddly silent at the climactic free climb. Minor’s figures (both human and canine) are often strained and awkward, and his textural dabs and strokes make the rock face look strangely furry. He makes ample use of dramatic viewpoints on Axel’s climb, though, allowing the rock and the sky to dwarf the youngster as he dangles in midair or glues himself to the mountain face. There are a lot of adventure-loving kids too young for Hatchet or even Petersen’s White Water (BCCB 6/97); this may be just the rugged outing they’ve been seeking. DS

GILLIES, JUDI The Jumbo Vegetarian Cookbook; by Judi Gillies and Jennifer Glossop; illus. by Louise Phillips. Kids Can, 2002
Paper ed. ISBN 1-55074-977-3 $14.95

Offering a large compendium of vegetarian favorites for kids, this cookbook will be useful for both vegetarians and omnivorous young cooks hoping to explore new
culinary realms. Although plenty of standard fare that would likely be in non-vegetarian cookbooks (salads, bean soups, etc.) is included, the tremendous variety of recipes more than makes up for this potential duplication. Recipes range from simple to complex both in ingredients and process (as with all cookbooks for young people, actual preparation of the recipes may require some adult help). Each recipe is ranked by level of difficulty (from one to three stars), and preparation times and serving sizes are clearly marked; in addition, recipes suitable for vegans (no eggs and no dairy) are indicated with a broccoli sprig. Although this Canadian import displays the metric measurements first, U.S. standard measurements are provided immediately following the metric. Safety tips are included in the introduction, along with brief information about vegetarian nutrition, staples of the vegetarian kitchen, cooking terms, and utensils. Although this is probably more cookbook than all but the most enthusiastic young vegetarian cooks would need to own, libraries will want to have a copy or two of this valuable and well-crafted resource on their shelves; young chefs will eat it up. KM


In this sequel to Witch Twins, identical twins Claire and Luna Bundkin are spending the summer at Camp Bliss, to Claire’s delight and Luna’s regret. To help the reluctant Luna, the girls’ grandmother has provided her with some Marigold Zest, an "adventure enhancement" that should liven up any of Luna’s activities. Before Luna can avail herself of the material’s magical properties, however, the vial goes missing, and strange things begin to happen: a disliked counselor gets a bad case of the clumsies, a campfire singalong gets chummier, even the food gets better. This is basically your standard camp story—quiet camper (Luna) makes good, outgoing camper (Claire) makes friends with rival—with a little spell thrown in here and there. Rogers’ spot art perks up the chapter openings, and Griffin (author of Amandine, BCCB 10/01) slips the magic in with handily understated sleight of plot that never overwhelms the action. The relationship between the sisters is part support, part affection, and part exasperation; those readers in similar throes will settle right in to this comfy bunk. JMD


Never satisfied with the tasty meals his mother serves up (Lamburgers, Sloppy Does, Chocolate Moose), Little Wolf is always complaining: "Why can’t we have Boy tonight? We never have Boy anymore!" After Father Wolf assures him that he can have Boy for dinner if he finds one, Little Wolf then pretends to have seen a boy all ready for the oven ("Boy! Boy! I’ve just seen a boy in the woods! If we hurry, we can catch him!") and rejoices when the ensuing boy hunt spoils dinner (the Wolves break out the snack food, having a quick supper of Chipmunks and Dip). The parents Wolf catch on to Little Wolf’s deception, however, so that when he spots a troop of Boy Scouts ("Enough to fill our freezer and Auntie’s freezer, too!") his now-truthful cries of "Boy!" are, of course, met with stony indifference. This is an amusing twist, and Hartman wisely doesn’t stop there. The
story is further enhanced with comic dialogue (looking at the ruined Granny Smith Pie, Father Wolf disappointedly observes that "Granny's gone all crusty and hard") and details (the particularly mischievous scout who marches right through the Wolves' den under Mother and Father Wolf's oblivious noses will make viewers howl with laughter), and the borrowed structure works to good advantage. Raglin's line-rich art employs hatching and crosshatching so generously and evenly that there's a suggestion of wood engraving, but there's no stiffness, just controlled and comedic polish in the bug-eyed, early American wolves with their traditional down-home values and long, toothy snouts. These wolves will give Aesop a run for his money. DS


Lily May wants to "play fairies," but her friends Matt and Martha prefer to play other games of pretend instead. They imagine they are different kinds of trees, cars, cats, and even "wobbly-wobbly Jell-O," until finally Lily May gets her wish and the three friends play her favorite game. This is unfortunately short of tension, reading more like a catalogue of activities than a rollicking playtime story, and there's not enough payoff to compensate for the lengthy build-up to Lily May's desired pastime. Nonetheless, Heap's simple text effectively captures the rhythm of young children's imaginative play. Mixed-media illustrations mimic child-created art, combining paper collage (including shiny paper for fairy wings) with crayon scribbles. Visual compositions are active without being too busy, and the mixed-media effects add significant interest to the simple lines and shapes that depict button-eyed children playing dress-up. Young audiences won't mind the slight plot, particularly if they hear this story as an opener to a program of creative dramatics or artistic activities. KM


Although the jury's still out on free will vs. determinism, Blue Avenger's third adventure (see Blue Avenger Cracks the Code, BCCB 10/00 and The Adventures of Blue Avenger, 3/99) leads him once again down the certain, if circuitous, path to a righteous ending. This outing presents Blue with a challenge close to home and heart: his true love Omaha Nebraska Brown has fallen on financial hard times that could—gasp!—force her to move away. As Fate would have it, however (unless, of course, you believe it wouldn't), the cosmic confluence of events offers Blue an opportunity to earn the requisite few thousand dollars, provided he can withstand the crushing temptation to beneficently affect a broader range of the needy by earning a million instead. Along the way he grapples with a doughnut-shop fancier/media mogul, his brother Josh's quest for a class project that involves cornstarch, a license-plate censor, and his own fully requited (but unfortunately overchaperoned) passion for Omaha. Howe reprises her previous freewheeling performances, slashing with dramatic diversions and asides a host of bugaboos from corporate sponsorships, to Internet naiveté, to Accelerated Reader (barely disguised as fictional KwikyRead). A few thrusts miss their mark: one thinly developed subplot concerning Omaha's third breast (surgically removed long ago)
is suggestive of the pointless titillation Howe can generally be counted on to skewer, and another involving a sham suicide attempt is treated with levity which some readers may find a tad overdone. Still, Howe continues to be an ebullient cheerleader for the thinking teen, and kids who carom nimbly between philosophy and farce will cheer Blue’s return. EB


Hen, Duck, and Goose decide to go on a picnic, filling their basket with berries (for Hen), apples (for Goose), and pears (for Duck). Spontaneous picnics can be hard to pull off, however: there’s something wrong with every site they find, nobody wants to be stuck carrying the heavy basket, and finally they’re surprised to find that they’ve wandered back home and never had their picnic at all. In typical form, Hutchins has let her audience in on another fact that’s going to be a big surprise to the avian trio: a few hungry varmints have taken a shine to the basket en route and one by one relieved it of its goodies. This doesn’t have the taut suspense of the classic Rosie’s Walk, but instead there’s a gleeful collusion between audience and book (and perhaps audience and bright-eyed mouse, squirrel, and rabbit) as the hapless fowl remain oblivious to the depredations on their food supply; in itself, the text is neat and festive, employing lots of enjoyable repetition. Hutchins’ style is its usual blend of simple (in the straightforward outlines of forms and figures) and decoratively complex (in the elaborate stitchery of lines that provide textures of fur and wings, in the close-coupled rhythm of stylized fruit-laden trees), and the contrasting but slightly muted retro palette (with strong emphasis on green, green everywhere) keeps the design from being overwhelming. The art doesn’t overplay the humorous bits, instead trusting its viewers’ ability to get the joke; the real visual humor lies in the disorganized and heedless picnickers, wandering around in circles, missing what’s under their beaks, and finally setting out once again on a picnic clearly as doomed as the first. Kids will appreciate the picnic, the dopey birds, and the chance to be know-it-alls. DS

INGOLD, JEANETTE The Big Burn. Harcourt, 2002 304p ISBN 0-15-216470-7 $17.00 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-9

As cool westerly winds fan the infamous 1910 wildfires into an inferno, homesteader Celia and her niece Lizbeth agonize over whether to abandon their claim, Buffalo Soldier Seth comes under the influence of a felonious comrade-at-arms, and ranger Samuel and his younger brother Jarrett struggle to hold back the blaze with a few hand tools and fierce determination. Ingold weaves the three fictional tales into a carefully researched account of the fire itself as it makes its murderous path through the Northwest, particularly the Coeur d’Alene Forest. The individual dramas are meticulously staged, and their convergence at the fire’s climactic blow up is, if a bit heroicized, nonetheless credible. The conflagration and the often ineffectual measures to combat it are even more exciting, ultimately upstaging the lead characters, and readers will arrive at the final pages with a effortlessly acquired cache of information on how fire travels and the strategies employed to save land and life. Notes on the 1910 fires and modern wildfire-fighting techniques and a bibliography are included. EB
A happy toddler peekabooos a morning away, spying on family ("Peekaboo! I see . . . my daddy"), animals ("I see . . . a bunny"), a toy ("I see . . . my train") and finally the viewer ("I see . . . you!"). The text is inarguably listlike, failing to evince the imagination of Ormerod's *Peek-a-Boo* (BCCB 2/98); it's certainly a toddler-appealing list, however, and the suspenseful "I see . . ." page turns will allow young viewers to guess or, more likely, provide their own alternative answer. While the figures and expressions are sometimes stiffly drafted, there's evident warmth in the extended African-American family, pleasure in the bucolic setting, and useful ambiguity about the gender of the bouncy overalled toddler who could easily be boy or girl. The pastels on dark paper are thick with textures, and there are some entertaining viewpoints and perspectives (toddler peeking out from behind Daddy's legs, Grandpa hiding behind a newspaper) that add extra spice to the peekaboo game. Though it's on the earthbound side, there's enough sturdy connection with genuine toddler experience that this could make for a satisfyingly playful lapsit.

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**JOHNSON, PAUL BRETT, ad.** *Jack Outwits the Giants;* ad. and illus. by Paul Brett Johnson. McElderry, 2002 32p ISBN 0-689-83902-2 $16.00 R 7-10 yrs

Jack, that Everyboy adventurer, is caught in a storm and has the misfortune to end up sheltering in the home of a two-headed giant and his wife. Sure as folktales have villains, Jack’s hosts plan on eating him for breakfast unless Jack can convince them not to cook him. With sharp thinking, Jack wins his freedom by convincing the couple that he can squeeze milk from rocks, divert a stream from its bed, and even save his inhospitable hosts from the threat of the local sheriff. Johnson (reteller of *Fearless Jack*, BCCB 9/01) is a deft storyteller: his plotting is smooth, and his text is peppered with likely turns of phrase that fall trippingly from the readaloud tongue. The acrylic paintings are not quite as skilled, however, lacking the personality of the tale; the drafting is sometimes awkward and the figures are inconsistently sized. The emphatic color contrasts (there's a particular reliance on orange) are nonetheless galvanizing, and the giants are divertingly gruesome. The strength of the text is enough to carry the day, and adults will carry this right into the classroom for reading aloud and storytelling. An author's note gives some cultural background on the Jack Tales, but no specific source citation is included.

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**WHEELER, JILL C.** *September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed America* ABDO, 2002 64p illus. with photographs (War on Terrorism) ISBN 1-57765-656-3 $16.95 Ad Gr. 3-6

With questions still unanswered and issues yet unresolved, these two titles revisit the attacks and try to offer the most accurate background that current intelligence
and speculation allow. 9.11.01 attempts more comprehensive coverage, presenting a briefer description of the four hijacked flights but lengthier exploration of the probable roles of Osama bin Laden and Muslim extremists in the attacks. September 11 leaves much of the contextual detail to other volumes within its War on Terrorism series and concentrates instead on a narrower account of the day’s roiling cascade of events. Wheeler’s effort, with its opening double spreads of fleeing survivors and smoking rubble and its gallery of emotionally charged close-ups, claims stronger visual appeal. Lalley’s readers, on the other hand, are likelier to come away with a better understanding of how ongoing Afghan politics figures into the picture and how the domestic aftermath of the attacks includes not only heroic clean-up efforts, but also the questionable curtailment of certain civil rights. Each volume could use a bit of editorial polish—Wheeler talks about offices at the “sight of impact” and passes on a few questionable tidbits as facts (never clearly supporting her claim for a casualty figure exceeding 5,000, for instance); Lalley’s glossary suggests a mispronunciation for “ref-yuh-GEE” and completely omits all Arabic terms included within the text. Still, both titles can justly claim their place on the shelves as readers observe the first anniversary of our national tragedy. Each title includes an index and a glossary; Lalley also appends a list of countries that lost citizens in the attacks and a bibliography of further references, and Wheeler includes a timeline. EB


This tour of geographical sites and concepts takes readers around the world in poetry, with poems covering a variety of globally scattered topics, from famous explorers (Columbus, Magellan) to geographic names (Sandwich Islands, the Red Sea) to geological features (faults, caves). A few of the poems also teach concepts, such as “Island Hopping,” which defines archipelagoes, or “How to Tell Latitude from Longitude,” which offers a simple device for remembering the difference between these two kinds of lines: “Lines of latitude/ Have a flatitude/ Longitudinal lines/ Rise like porcupines.” The subject matter will attract would-be travelers and even more teachers, and there are some entries aptly tuned to young readers. Most poems, however, assume previous knowledge of geography, using jokes and puns that are likely to go over the heads of young readers without adult assistance. Lewis’ language is cluttered with choppy lines (“The Arctic is water all covered with ice. / Antarctica? Land (frozen paradise)”) and forced rhyme schemes, and the verses are unfortunately afflicted with looming scansion traps that will require careful negotiation during readalouds. Jay uses her signature craquelure textures and sepia-toned palette for the images of travelers and for landscapes that resemble old maps, making them slightly surreal and deftly complementing the poetic theme. Despite its flaws, this collection could be useful as supplemental classroom material for units dealing with geography.  KM


When Bel finds a photograph of her great-grandmother Bea, she’s immediately
intrigued. Her fascination becomes even more intense when she begins to hear Bea in her thoughts, talking and offering opinions on events in Bel’s life (especially Bel’s relationship with Sergio, her “crush”). The addition of a third voice—that of Bel’s own great-granddaughter from the future—compels the plucky Bel to find her own voice and her own way in the day-to-day decisions she must make. First published in Brazil in 1982, this is an airy and humorous story; Bel’s narration has genuine charm, and her delighted and affectionate acceptance of her great-grandmother’s presence makes it easy for readers to go along with the idea. Machado, recent winner of the Hans Christian Andersen award, sets up her premise quickly and easily, plunging right into the happy events of Bel’s life. The contrivance becomes excessive with the addition of the third voice, however, and the conclusion (Bel, her great-grandmother, and her great-granddaughter recognize that they are all part of the braid of past, present, and future) is too heavily purposive for the otherwise breezy story. Middle-graders will still enjoy the setup, and Bel and her relatives are a trio worth knowing. The springy lines of Merola’s ink illustrations evince the same high spirits as the text. JMD

MATAS, CAROL  
Sparks Fly Upward. Clarion, 2002 [192p]  
ISBN 0-618-15964-9 $15.00  
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 4-8

Twelve-year-old Rebecca shares a room with four aunts (according to the helpfully included family tree, her mother is the eldest of the thirteen children) and her younger sister—until a fire destroys their Oxbow, Saskatchewan farmhouse and barn, forcing the extended family to move to even more cramped quarters, joining other first-generation immigrants in 1910 Winnipeg. Things get worse: because her father can’t find acceptable work, Rebecca and her siblings are placed in foster care through the Hebrew Sick Benefit Society; while her younger brother and sister are appropriately placed in the home of observant Jews, shy Rebecca goes to live with Ukrainian Christians. There she finds a kindly mother, an anti-Semitic father and brother, and, unexpectedly, a friend in Sophie, the daughter of the house—a seeming good that ultimately forces Rebecca to wrestle with the competing demands of clan loyalty and intercultural friendship. Though a bit flat at times, this is a consistently thoughtful novel, with Rebecca’s dilemma realistically remaining a problem even though almost everyone involved sees the artificiality of the lines that are being drawn in the sand; her growing understanding of individual moral responsibility is credibly depicted. This sophisticated exploration of free will vs. determinism manages to rub the tarnish off the golden rule and make it shine. FK

MCCAUGHREAN, GERALDINE  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-623875-7 $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-623874-9 $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-9

Gou Haoyou’s father has just been ordered to act as “wind tester” by the jealous first mate of his ship, a duty as human kite rider that sends him to his death. Now Gou Haoyou must take up the only trade available to him to support his widowed mother—making kites. The infuriating, constant memory of his father’s demise is compounded by the family patriarch’s insistence that the widow marry her husband’s murderer, and Haoyou is driven in desperation to offer his services to mysterious
circus master, the Great Miao, as a kite rider. Haoyou masters the sky and comes to love the nauseating yet exhilarating experience of flight. His career prospers, but collateral dramas intensify, as Miao proves to be a rebel against the great Kublai Khan, greedy relatives appear to cash in on his fortune, and his mother is far from safe. McCaughrean’s construction of the kite rider is (according to closing notes) more suggested by than based on actual thirteenth-century Chinese “wind testing” practices, and her characters miraculously arrive at their stage marks just in time to impel the plot along. Nonetheless, the solid, old-fashioned melodrama is exquisitely embroidered with exotica, and Haoyou’s aerial skills are positively riveting. Adventure fans are in for a breathtaking ride. EB

McGILL, ALICE  Here We Go Round; illus. by Shane Evans.  Houghton, 2002 115p 0-618-16064-7  $15.00  Ad  Gr. 2-4

Seven-year-old Roberta doesn’t want to leave her mother to go “Down South” to visit her loving grandparents on their farm in North Carolina; she’s particularly resentful that what’s driving her away is her mother’s pregnancy (Mama’s been confined to bed). The visit proves largely enjoyable—Roberta makes some new friends, participates in chores on the farm, and travels into town—but she’s nagged throughout by her anxiety about the coming interloper, an anxiety reflected in her awkward interactions with a friend’s baby brother. Grandpa offers Roberta a more positive way to think about the ways family circles grow and change, but it’s a scare at the Children’s Day picnic (her friend Jimmy falls in a well) that seems finally to do the trick. This is an affectionate historical celebration (the novel’s set in 1946) of a close African-American family and a tight southern community, and there’s a great deal of charm in its richly textured evocation of country life. Unfortunately, there’s period atmosphere rather than structure, so that Roberta’s experiences simply aggregate with little emphasis or shaping, and the overlay of psychology is both didactic and too obliquely handled for its audience (who may share Roberta’s unanswered questions about how the baby will come out of Mama). The book’s solid warmth is emphasized and extended by Evans’ sharp-edged and quirky pencil drawings, which invite readers to meet Roberta’s friends and relations and share their old-fashioned pleasures. Though a bit lacking in impact, this is ultimately a wide-eyed story about a summer visit to the farm, suitable for reading aloud to dreamy listeners and handing to youngsters who may have their own country vacations to relate. FK


Six stories (with McKinley and Dickinson alternating authorial turns) feature various bodies of water, the denizens that dwell within them, and the land-bound folk who deal with both. Dickinson’s tales lean toward fairy-tale anthropology while McKinley’s incline to high fantasy, but all are effectively supernatural, no matter where they’re set. In Dickinson’s opening story, set in a restrained, Calvinist-like community, Pittable Naismith learns a secret “Mermaid’s Song” passed down from her grandmother that helps her save a stranded merchild, along with herself. McKinley’s opening tale is a romance in which a wealthy but sheltered girl, be-
trayed by her unworthy fiancé, finds true love with "The Sea-King's Son." Other tales focus on man-beast opposition (Dickinson's "Sea-Serpent" and "Kraken"), legendary water creatures (McKinley's "Water Horse"), and water's mysterious powers (McKinley's "A Pool in the Desert"). Despite their brevity, the entries manage to establish mood, structure, and logic; each tale has a richly textured sense of place, an environmental backdrop against which characters play out their destinies. The stories rise and fall like waves, first high fantasy, then earthy conflict, but they're always intriguing and ultimately satisfying. The cover, which features an unearthly finned creature holding a ball of air, will draw readers into the collection; once there, they will be immersed in the magic. JMD

**McNamee, Graham**  *Sparks.* Lamb/Random House, 2002  [144p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-72977-4  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  
R Gr. 4-6

"Grow a brain. Fast. That's my Mission Impossible," says Todd, who's valiantly struggling with the regular fifth grade ("the big leagues") after being in Special Needs class the previous year. There he was the smart kid, basking in the admiration of his friend Eva, but now he's the class dummy ("There's a big fat D- beside my name at the top, like that's going to be my grade forever so they might as well just add it onto my name"), subject to ridicule, feeling like a failure, and avoiding Eva because of her membership in the stigmatized special class. Todd's narrative is sturdy and surprisingly humorous, but it's also raw and anguished. McNamee deftly makes it clear just how genuinely difficult the work is for Todd while still keeping him an everyday kind of kid, an "us" rather than a "them." Characterization is economical but effective, especially in the high-spirited and authoritative Eva and Todd's thoughtful teacher, Mr. Blaylock; human dynamics are also perceptively conveyed, particularly in the difficulties and rewards of Todd's friendship with Eva. There's perhaps a bit more optimism than is warranted at the end (Todd's imagination and empathy results in a B+ on an important assignment, but it's not the kind of assignment with which he can count on saving himself every semester), but Todd's misery has been so palpable that readers will rejoice that he's found success. DS

**McPhail, David**  *Piggy's Pancake Parlor;* written and illus. by David McPhail. Dutton, 2002  48p
R Gr. 2-3

Eight short chapters tell the story of Piggy, "the runt of a large litter of pigs," taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Farmer Todd because "he was weak and underfed"; there Piggy learns from Mrs. Farmer Todd how to make fabulous pancakes with a special secret ingredient. When Piggy catches a starving fox stealing eggs (Fox is also the runt of his litter), Piggy invites him home for a good meal, and a true friendship is born. The two critters set up a pancake house in town, business booms, and things happen: they feed a busload of stranded school kids, dissuade a constantly grumbling customer from future grumblings with a display of melodramatic repentance, and fend off an attempt to buy the secret pancake ingredient. Finally, Piggy teaches Fox how to make the pancakes, with a little dash of nutmeg and the secret ingredient—"a little bit of love." Kid-pleasing elements abound here: food, electric trains, food, juggling, food, and friendship carry the day, and aside from
the sentimental and obvious ending, the tale of the pancake-making Piggy works well. Visually, each page benefits from McPhail’s keen drafting and lively sense of line. The line-and-watercolor illustrations are precise and delicate in their details and cozily modulated in their hues, and both humans and animals seem right at home in McPhail’s clean, shiny, and retro restaurant. Hungry early readers will be glad to pull up a chair to Piggy and Fox’s counter. JMD

MURPHY, BARBARA BEASLEY  
Miguel Lost & Found in the Palace; illus. by George Ancona.  
Museum of New Mexico Press, 2002  [136p]  (Museo Kids)  
Reviewed from galleys

Six years old when he and his parents cross the Rio Grande from Mexico, Miguel Rivera is now a third-grader living with his family in El Paso, where his family works long hours and fears the INS and Miguel deals with racist class bully Joey Jeter Cortés, the son of an American border guard. Fear of deportation drives Miguel’s mother to pack up Miguel and his siblings (an adopted sister, and twins born in the United States) and follow her husband to Santa Fe, where he has gone to pursue a new job. Once in Santa Fe, however, the family is unable to find Mr. Rivera, and Miguel’s mother shoulders the responsibility of caring for her children and earning a living alone. Miguel misses his father desperately, battles the bullies in his class (including Joey Jeter, who has moved to Santa Fe), and meets Isabel, a Mexican-American teenager who introduces him to the Palace of the Governors and to the contributions Mexicans have made to New Mexican and American culture. There are some good messages here: illegal immigrants are often motivated by desperate desire for a better life, strong family ties are beneficial, and immigrants legal and otherwise contribute to the cultural fabric of the United States. The family’s struggle in El Paso is depicted with a quiet dignity; Miguel’s relationship with his parents and sisters is treated with respect, and the disappearance of Miguel’s father is heartbreakingly limned. The messages are unsubtle and contrived, however, especially in the Santa Fe portion of the text: Miguel discovers pride in his heritage in the Palace of Governors, his father is miraculously returned to his family, and Joey Jeter’s point of view is changed by a school play about bullying. For less didactic insight into the politics and plight of illegal immigrants, see Buss’ Journey of the Sparrow (BCCB 1/92) or Jiménez’ The Circuit, but those readers able to leap from moment to moment may find themselves involved in Miguel’s life. Ancona’s wiry sketches display a high energy and intensity that adds impact to the narrative. JMD

MYERS, WALTER DEAN  
Handbook for Boys: A Novel; illus. by Matthew Bandsuch.  
Amistad/HarperCollins, 2002 179p  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029147-8  $15.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029146-X  $15.95  

Sixteen-year-old Jimmy is given a choice by the judge: go to juvenile hall or spend six months in a mentoring program. Opting for the second, he finds himself working alongside another juvenile offender, Kevin, in the Harlem barbershop of Mr. Duke Wilson, listening to the wisdom of Duke and his cronies as various customers and neighborhood folk pass under their scrutiny. Jimmy is resistant, disliking the men’s persistent lectures (“They didn’t understand what being young
was all about. Maybe they knew once, but they had definitely forgotten somewhere along the way”), but he sticks it out. Eventually he begins to appreciate Duke’s efforts (“I saw he was just trying to be in my corner and helping me to get my stuff correct. You don’t goof on somebody like that”), even as he realizes that taking the path of adulthood and responsibility isn’t easy. This is a fairly preachy narrative, with page after page repeatedly making the point that people—even young people—must be active participants in their own destiny or have no one to blame but themselves; between the reliance on speeches and the barbershop setting, the proceedings are somewhat static, and the book’s end is equivocal. Myers’ comfortable style makes the lessons go down easily, however, and the message is one that young people may be better able to consider from a favorite author than from a garden-variety parent. The casual camaraderie of the barbershop, where philosophy comes as naturally as a short back and sides, is warmly conveyed, and the diverse array of characters livens up the environment as well as providing teachable moments for Duke. It’s probably too much to hope for that Jimmy’s example of listening to the wisdom of his elders will suffice to convince readers to do the same, but Myers has the ear of a lot of teenagers; maybe they’ll at least listen to him. Bandsuch’s orderly, lightly sketched line drawings enhance the book’s accessibility. DS


Teenage Donata, the daughter of a noble in seventeenth-century Venice, wants more than an arranged marriage or a sheltered convent life, so she dresses as a boy to roam the alleys and canals in search of adventures she can use as fodder for stories to tell her dutiful but bored sisters. An unlikely turn of events finds Donata and her twin sister Laura taking lessons with their brothers; after proving to be a gifted scholar, Donata denounces herself to Venice’s ruling court, gets out of her planned marriage (twin sister Laura is to become the willing bride), and acquires her father’s permission to study at the university and become a tutor. Venice is a romantic setting for historical drama, and this has both intriguing historical tidbits and a sympathetic heroine in Donata. Unfortunately, the historical facts aren’t blended well into the story, and good intentions tend to run roughshod over historical fidelity in both Donata’s behavior and in the male characters’ response to her; nor does the stately pace help pull things together. Still, those readers with a taste for costume drama and tradition-buckling heroines may find their hunger appeased here. An appended author’s note discusses the first Venetian woman scholar ever to be awarded a doctoral degree from the University of Padua. JMD


In 1974, two farmers in China’s Lintong County made a sensational historical find when their digging turned up the head of a “pottery man”; subsequent archaeological exploration, still continuing, has revealed an elaborate army of over 7,500 terracotta men, installed in pits by the first emperor of China over two millennia ago. This is the kind of discovery of which budding (and other) archaeologists dream, and the still, watchful visages of the unearthed soldiers (there are
some judiciously chosen close-up portraits) add a slightly creepy and fantastical touch that spices up the account. O'Connor capably touches on early Chinese history, describing the reign and beliefs of Emperor Qin Shihuang that may have prompted his creation of this army, but she never allows the Emperor to overshadow his surprise legacy. Discussion of the terracotta army itself includes analysis of its making ("Hundreds of craftsmen from all over the empire spent more than ten years in workshops set up near the pits creating the warriors") and the theories about its arrangement ("Archeologists think that Pit 3 represents army headquarters"), as well as dashes of military history ("By the time of the first emperor, soldiers on horseback were replacing war chariots"). Diagrams and computer-assisted images help convey the configuration and original appearance of the underground warriors, since excavation unfortunately tends to result in the removal of their paint. The gloss of mystery is finish enough, however ("What is the terracotta army guarding so steadfastly? . . . The answer is that nobody knows"), and this will catch the imagination of a wide range of readers. The appended author's note describes the contradictions and uncertainties in the historical record; a bibliography and index are included. DS

O'HALLORAN, BARBARA COLLOPY Creature Comforts: People and Their Security Objects; illus. with photographs by Betty Udesen. Houghton, 2002 64p ISBN 0-618-11864-0 $17.00 R Gr. 4 up

The bonds that are forged between people and their childhood security objects are often emotional and enduring, as this unique photoessay clearly demonstrates. Each spread features a large black-and-white photograph of a person with his or her comfort object along with the object's name and the name and age of its owner. Also included is anecdotal information (often humorous or poignant) about the object from the owner's perspective: "I like the fuzzy threads to snuggle with, and the stringy ones are good for chewing," says one girl of her blanket. Udesen's highly expressive photographs are richly varied in terms of lighting, contrast, and composition (one full-page close-up shows two little hands rubbing a comforter; another is shot at floor level as an adult subject and his teddy bear stand on their heads). There's a pleasantly diverse range of subjects, too, in terms of age (eighteen months to fifty years old), gender (men as well as young girls are shown with dolls and stuffed animals), and situation (an adopted child, a seriously ill child, a college student, a journalist). Though this may draw adults more readily than children, readers with strong attachments to their own comfort objects will likely find these personal images and stories both reassuring (maybe they don't have to give up their "blankies" after all) and entertaining. This unusual title could serve as a springboard for similar projects in classrooms or for parent-child reminiscing; it would also be a natural partner to Margery Williams' The Velveteen Rabbit or Kevin Henkes' Owen (BCCB 10/93). JMH


In this hyperactive take on Henny Penny's falling sky, little Chucky Ducky has just finished his morning laps when "he heard the ground grumble. He felt the ground rumble. And then, with a stumble, Chucky Ducky went down in a tumble!" The little duck thinks it's an earthquake and rushes off to warn his friends, spreading the alarm from Lucy Goosey to Vickie, Rickie, and Nickie Chickie, from
Brewster Rooster to Sue Ewe. The commotion attracts a hungry weasel who disguises himself in his white winter coat as "Herman Ermine" and promises the frightened farm animals safety, all the while plotting to fill his pantry, but a rumble at the right moment causes "Herman Ermine" to stumble out of his winter coat, exposing him for the weasel he is. The cause of the earthly disturbances proves to be the ground-breaking of Joel and Lowell Mole, who are looking for their cousin, Garret Ferret ("Does anyone know the way to San Jose? We think we took a wrong turn at the Lincoln Tunnel"). The repartee of Palatini's text sometimes tips into excess, but it's still funny and exuberant. Moser's watercolor-and-graphite personifications of the dizzy farmyard denizens are a little lighter than his usual fare, with a broad comic touch to the animals' expressions, but they retain his signature power. The full-page compositions playfully juxtapose light, dark, and shadow, and the images have a sinewy energy that helps propel the text. In the hands of the right storyteller or reader-aloud, this will make for one rumbling, tumbling storytime. JMD


See this month's Big Picture, p. 393, for review.

PINKWATER, DANIEL  Fat Camp Commandos Go West; illus. by Andy Rash. Scholastic, 2002 89p ISBN 0-439-29772-9 $14.95 Ad Gr. 3-6

Brother and sister Ralph and Sylvia Nebula and their best friend, Mavis Goldfarb, are facing another summer without their parents: Ralph and Sylvia will be attending Deepdip Cha Cha’s Fun Ashram for Kids, and Mavis is residing at a dude ranch called Rough-Ridin' Rudy's Rootin’-Tootin' Rancho. Ralph and Sylvia are unpleasantly surprised to discover that their parents, whom they thought had gotten the message last summer (see Fat Camp Commandos, BCCB 6/01), have actually sent them not to meditation camp but to yet another fat farm, so it’s Mavis to the rescue. Soon the plump but perky trio are attempting to unite rival groups of dude-ranch cowboys and health-farm joggers with the promise of a visit from interplanetary aliens. The aliens—Fat Men from Space, who else?—do arrive, a blissful musical time is had by all, and Mavis even gets to go on a little interplanetary sightseeing junket. This does not have nearly the bite of the trio’s first outing: the skewering of the health industry and the media fascination with body image is disappointingly absent, replaced by a rather lightweight plot and low-cal humor. Still, Pinkwater does know how to move a plot along, and readers who drop in for a quick bite won’t be sorry, even if they’re hungry again an hour later. The multifont format and the solid black-and-white illustrations (featuring contentedly globose characters) will invite literary nibblers. JMD

POWELL, RANDY  Three Clams and an Oyster. Farrar, 2002 216p ISBN 0-374-37526-7 $16.00 Ad Gr. 7-10

The title refers to a four-man flag football team—McCallister, Beatterson, Deshutsis, and Savage—now in their junior year in high school. Flint McCallister, captain of the team, is wrestling with a dilemma: Cade Savage has devoted himself to partying after the tragic death of one of their friends, and he is now a serious detriment
to the team. Should Flint let him go, and, if so, whom to replace him with? The action takes place over a weekend, spent mostly in Beaterson's car, as the teammates (sans Cade) debate the issue. Two possible replacements don't pan out; the remaining possibility, Summerfield, is not only a girl, she's a girl who doesn't shave her legs, a detail that seems insurmountable to Beaterson and Deshutsis, despite the fact that she's the best choice. This is a perceptive picture of guyhood, with authentic banter, hanging out, and even angst, and teens will relate to the exploration of the ethics of friendship. This isn't up to some of Powell's previous novels (such as Tribute to Another Dead Rock Star, BCCB 4/99), however: the plot meanders and the pace is slow, and despite McCallister's constant agonizing, his sudden dumping of Savage is unforeshadowed and abrupt. Nonetheless, readers may enjoy the male camaraderie and consider the underlying moral questions.

JMD


McKay has just been handed an ultimatum—the algebra grade goes up or baseball is out. A term's worth of inattention has rendered equations inscrutable ("Not only had x shown up again for today's assignment, but he'd brought y along with him too. They were both in disguise, and I was supposed to figure out which numbers they really were"), and McKay's friend Tony recommends that McKay sweettalk the lovely Serena Kimball into tutoring him. If Tony just happens to catch the eye of one of Serena's girlfriends, so much the better. It doesn't take long before they're both swept into the vortex of eighth-grade romantic intrigue, risking lunchroom embarrassment, carelessly wounding hearts, and passing enough notes to deforest some significant acreage. McKay's travails are all the more convincing for his background struggles—a campaign for a bedroom apart from his kindergarten brother and anxiety over the household income. Rallison treats the guys' fumbling dating debuts with humor and a good measure of compassion, playing Tony's cockiness and maddening success against McKay's utter perplexity, and leaving their friendship mercifully intact. Serena proves to be a good tutor and an even better friend, the baseball season is saved, and McKay's mystifying variables—mathematical and romantic—begin to make sense. EB


In a land populated by humans and Half-Creatures (mer-beings, centaurs, etc.), the Singers live on an island of amplifying blue stone and maintain order through special songs that psychically effect behavior; one of their sacred duties is to keep the Half-Creatures from being abused by decadent or stupid humans. In Song Quest (first published in Britain in 1999), the merlees (merpeople) are being slaughtered by Frazhin, a Khizpriest determined to use the destructive powers of black Khiz crystal to kill his lord, defeat the Singers, and rule the world. Only Rialle and Kherron, two young Singers from the enclave of the Echorium, stand between the Khizpriest and the end of the world's balance. In Crystal Mask, Renn, the son of Rialle, and the centaur-raised Shaiala are unwillingly drawn into the machinations of Frazhin, who has regained his power in the intervening twenty years and has
returned to achieve his goal of domination of the Echorium. The slightly balky beginning of *Song Quest* is quickly overcome by the increasing action; *Crystal Mask* avoids that mistake with a Spielberg-like opening sequence that will draw in readers. Characterizations are sharply drawn (though the language patterns of Shaiala and the Half-Creatures are awkward), and the children remain the focus, with the grownups figuring in but never dominating the action. Young readers will also warm to the concrete nature of the protagonists’ quests to save family and friends, and Roberts (author of *Spellfall*, BCCB 2/02) offers plenty of grand sweep in the traditional heroic-journey plots. Combine a quick booktalk with a flash of this sharp cover art, and you have a new fantasy series to put right up front. Each book includes a map. JMD


In this fourth and final installment in the Rowan of Rin series (*Rowan and the Keeper of the Crystal*, BCCB 4/02, etc.), Rowan resolves to rescue his younger sister Annad after she is kidnapped by Rin’s sworn enemies, the Zebak. His quest requires a fellowship of four unlikely companions: Rowan, the uneasy hero; Zeel, a Zebak adopted by the Travelers, allies of Rin; Allun, part Rin, part Traveler; and Perlain, a marine-being who cannot live without water. Sheba, the wise but despised witch of Rin, leads the journey, appearing to the four misfits in the flames of the twigs Rowan burns on their way. On their travels, the companions encounter a multitude of perils, overcoming them with the aid of their special talents—but will they be able to rout the Zebak and rescue Annad? The happy ending is foreshadowed from the beginning, and the plot pieces fall into place a tad too smoothly (the vengeful dragon chasing the trespassing Zebak from Rin’s sky is just too convenient), making this ultimately formulaic and predictable. Readers will still appreciate the action of the chase-and-escapes, and there are not a few chills to be had from Rodda’s creepy atmospherics. JMD

SACHS, MARILYN  *The Four Ugly Cats in Apartment 3D*; illus. by Rosanne Litzinger.  Jackson/Atheneum, 2002  72p  ISBN 0-689-84581-2  $15.00  R  Gr. 3-5

Mr. Freeman in apartment 3D was, by and large, a “mean, unfriendly, nasty” neighbor, but he was once kind to eleven-year-old Lily, and she was touched by his devotion to a quartet of loud, stray cats. When he dies, no one in the building seems willing to take in the perpetually yowling feline foursome, until Lily staunchly undertakes the job of finding homes for them in just four days, which is all the time the landlord will allow her before he calls the SPCA. Wisely realizing that “if you don’t have a name, it’s hard to get somebody to like you,” Lily names each of the cats, including an uncompromisingly wild, one-eyed black cat (“Leonardo, after the actor”) that seems destined to remain homeless. She manages to find places for all of the cats except Leonardo, but she eventually comes up with a solution that satisfies her, the landlord, and Leonardo himself: the one-eyed cat remains outdoors, showing up as he pleases and allowing Lily to feed and pet him out on the fire escape. Despite the brevity of the book, Sachs manages unobtrusively to describe her characters and her setting with enough specificity to make them credible and absorbing, and her storytelling is clear and tidy. Lily’s youthful
voice is natural and unaffected, and kids will sympathize with her situation while admiring her problem-solving abilities. Sketchy, energetic pencil and charcoal drawings of the apartment dwellers and scruffy cats are interwoven with minimal text (in a large font) per page against a creamy background, making this a fine choice for young chapter-book readers; animal-loving youngsters will simply purr with pleasure. JMH

SINGER, MARILYN  *Footprints on the Roof: Poems about the Earth*; illus. by Meilo So. Knopf, 2002 41p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-81094-3  $14.95  R  Gr. 5-9

Singer has examined the natural world before, but where Turtle in July (BCCB 9/89) featured animals, this collection of nineteen poems generally focuses on inanimate phenomena such as geology, weather, and seasons. The free-verse lyrics are delicately spun, offering quiet reflection on caves ("The thing about caves/ is you go so deep/ inside the earth/ you think that you have left it" — "Caves"), the prioritization of the prehistoric ("Dinosaurs get all the press... / But before/ way before reptiles ruled/ other creatures were here" — "Prehistoric Praise"), and slippery conditions ("Out on the street/ Dad windmilled like a slapstick dancer/ Mom crept like a mincing crab" — "Ice"). Some of the poems offer more elegant beauty than impact, but there's plenty of reward here for readers of evocative verse (and for younger listeners, since many of these entries will be splendidly sonorous when read aloud). The book's format is polished and attractive, with its narrow creamy pages and artistic but readable font (it's a shame that flimsy paper allows for disruptive bleed-through of the images); So's ink illustrations show an astonishing variety of textures, from precise tracery to glimmering gray washes, throughout evincing a dash and naturalness that usefully complement the poetry. DS

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-000719-2  $11.99  Ad  Gr. 5-7

As gimmicky as this title is, it will certainly be welcomed by at least some of the fans of the author's Victorian spoof series, "A Series of Unfortunate Events." An obituary for Lemony Snicket (said series' author) is the catalyst for this autobiography, written in the vein of "the reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated." Bits of photographs, letters, snatches of song lyrics, and seemingly connected but ultimately random events purport to be the life story of the elusive and verbose Mr. Snicket. Contradictory declarations and melodramatic language present plots and counter-plots, conspiracy theories, and secret societies in this mock chronicle of the supposed author's supposed life. Readers will need to start with the Snicket novels to appreciate this work, but there's plenty of satiric humor here (including a parody book jacket for a less traumatic volume), and the cornucopia of elements will lure Snicket fans. Unfortunately, the cohesive if repetitive plots that drive the Baudelaire saga are missing here, and while the included bits and pieces of metaparaphernalia are cleverly disposed, they are ultimately just too disjointed. Those who follow the series already know who Snicket really is; it will be a tribute to the author if his readers are willing to follow the joke this far. JMD
STEWIG, JOHN WARREN  *Making Plum Jam*; illus. by Kevin O’Malley. Hyperion, 2002 [32p]
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  6-9 yrs

A little boy narrates the activities of a summer week spent with “the aunts,” three loving (and apparently fairly eccentric) women who live on a farm. His chores (which he likes more than the ones at home) include gathering eggs, slopping the pig, and watering the runner beans, but “that only takes part of the morning. What shall we do next?” The aunts decide to make jam, since they’re almost out, but there isn’t any suitable fruit available, at least not on their farm. A trip to the plum tree on the farm down the road (which has a new “bachelor farmer”) results in a wild escape from the farmer, who feels a bit possessive of his ripening plums. The aunts’ matter-of-fact approach to plum-poaching is pretty funny, and the deliberately understated description of the aunts’ escapade will elicit amused giggles; the pace is slow, however, and the nostalgic adult approach interferes with the story’s momentum. Though the bucolic vistas are enticing, O’Malley’s figures are surprisingly staid, and the palette is subdued where some lively color could provide a welcome boost. Nonetheless, patient listeners will appreciate the boy’s solution to his aunts’ petty larceny (he takes jars of the finished jam and leaves them on the injured farmer’s porch), and they might even be inspired to ask grownup readers about their own summer memories. JMD

STUTSON, CAROLINE  *Night Train*; illus. by Katherine Tillotson. Roaring Brook, 2002  32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-7613-2662-6  $22.90
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1598-5  $15.95  Ad  3-7 yrs

“Thunder/ Lightning/ On the tracks. . . Here comes the train!/ Watch out. Stand back.” The diesel charges up to the station, where a boy and his dad climb aboard and zoom through the countryside. Past grazing cattle and sheep, over arched bridges, through sleeping towns and buzzing highways the train sweeps, while father and son feast in the dining car, wash up in the silver sink, drink from paper cups, and catch an uneasy catnap. Grandma waves them welcome in the busy station, then “There it goes/ Our train moves on.” Stutson’s rhymed text offers no real plot, just impressions of a nocturnal journey, never lingering long enough to savor any single experience. Tillotson’s hazy, gray-cast illustrations are infused with nostalgic atmosphere that creates a distance between rider and viewer, and the misproportioned livestock, fuzzy fields, and toylike buildings suggest a model-train setup rather than a true adventure. Still, kids lucky enough to have ridden the rails may enjoy comparing notes, and those who only catch a flash of passing cars can ponder the wonders behind the windows. EB

TELANGER, RICK  *String Music*. Marcato/ Cricket, 2002  138p
ISBN 0-8126-2657-5  $15.95  R  Gr. 4-6

Eleven-year-old Robbie Denwood dodges the pain in his life by focusing on “string music,” that resonance between player and net when the basketball takes a perfect plunge. There’s not much harmony of any kind in Robbie’s life at present, though, as his divorced mother fights incessantly with his older sister and his basketball
coach abusively brands the awkward boy “Dimwit,” consigning him to racking balls and partaking in the occasional scrimmage. Badly in need of a hero, Robbie sets his sights on Jasper Jasmine, undeniably the greatest basketball player of all time, and his life takes a fairy-tale turn when the great man himself finds Robbie—runaway, stranded, and forlorn—after a game and reluctantly but kindly takes the boy under his wing. Telander transparently models Jasmine on a media-idealized Michael Jordan, from his tailored suit and gentlemanly demeanor to his devotion to his own young son, and M. J.’s near-mythical aura transmutes a fairly ordinary basketball dream into the sort of wishful fantasy for guys that A Little Princess has long been to girls. The tale’s patent hokeyness is mitigated by Robbie’s dignified, understated narration, in which self-pity never rears its whining head, and gangly ’tweenagers in need of some adult sympathy will readily embrace Jasmine as a secret guardian angel. EB

WALLACE, IAN  The True Story of Trapper Jack’s Left Big Toe; written and illus. by Ian Wallace. Roaring Brook, 2002  34p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1493-8 $17.95  Ad Gr. 3-5
Narrator Josh is a new kid in Dawson, Alaska, but he’s already made a friend, Gabe, who’s eager to fill him in on the local legend: “The old guy living there is Trapper Jack. He’s only got nine toes. The tenth, his left big one, is inside an empty tobacco tin behind the bar at the Sourdough Saloon.” Josh wants to see the evidence, but getting into the barroom is a problem. Trapper Jack himself offers to do the honors, but just as Josh gets a chance to hold that “something black and shriveled,” a three-legged dog runs off with the goods. Half the legend remains unproved, but Trapper demonstrates beyond doubt that he has a full complement of toes—four on one foot and six on the other. Wallace bases his tall tale on a Yukon barroom prank that involves tossing back a drink with the amputated toe afloat and “kissing” the toe, as it were. The note explaining this delightfully gruesome ritual is probably more fascinating than Wallace’s concoction, which sends the toe off to neverland and obviates any tantalizing residual truth. Moreover, the illustrations’ stilted figure drawing makes the boys’ changeable features (rubber-lipped, glassy-eyed, and awash in jaundice yellow) often eerier than the toe tale itself, though the broad Yukon vistas are satisfyingly bleak against the textured sweeps of muted color. Tall-tale collections often beg for fresh titles, though, and errant body parts have their literary following; kids who got a giggle from DeFelice’s Cold Feet (BCCB 11/00) could take a peek. EB

WELLS, ROSEMARY  The Germ Busters; illus. by Jody Wheeler. Volo/Hyperion, 2002  32p
Singing the “clean hands” song and vigilant hand washing haven’t been enough to keep Mrs. Jenkins’ class healthy; there’s a bug going ’round, kids are out with fevers, and Mrs. Jenkins suspects someone isn’t practicing proper hygiene. It’s obvious to listeners that the culprits are the bulldog Frank Brothers, who proudly claim (when out of the teacher’s earshot) that they never wash up after using the bathroom and they never use tissues (“’That’s for wussies!’ said the Franks”). Class-
mates construct a bogus Germmostat that flashes lights and convinces the Franks that their unwashed hands really are too gross to live with. Forget for a moment that the clean hands song is sung to a tune all kids and many teachers are too young to remember ("My Boyfriend’s Back"), or that the words don't scan, or that the construction and operation of the Germmostat is confusing at best. Forget also that anyone who's ever spent time in a classroom knows that airborne germs are unavoidable, that no one can realistically hope to dodge most common contagions, and that the eradication of all germs is genuinely undesirable as well as impossible. No matter how important personal hygiene may be, it would be pretty difficult to point a squeaky-clean finger at a particular individual responsible for a class malady. Certainly Wells' bouncy text and the kissin'-cute cast of critters can sell just about any message, but this unrealistic tale isn't the ideal vehicle to deliver the goods. EB


When his parents tell him about the big business trip, Corey is understandably put out: "Ten days! . . . She can't go to Bangkok for ten days." When his father points out that "people do," he replies "People do, . . . but not Mommy. Mommy can't go." Corey is worried about a lot of things (who will make his lunch, tie his shoes, fix his bear), but his father feels that things are under control: some things Dad can do ("just like always") and others Corey can even do himself. This is a purpose-built story with few frills and no surprises, but it offers a respectful and well-paced treatment of separation anxiety, and it's nice to see Mommy and not just Daddy getting some executive travel now and then. Appealingly off-kilter watercolor and cut-paper illustrations face each text page; a few black-and-white vignettes under the text bounce the reader from pink-cheeked Corey to his angular, cubist father. This simple tale could provide those holding the fort back home with a positive mantra. FK

See review under Lalley, p. 407.


Beany (of Beany and the Dreaded Wedding, BCCB 12/00, etc.) doesn't actually want to go to camp for a week, but once her bossy friend Carol Ann put the idea into Beany's parents' head, Beany was pretty much doomed. Once there, she's intimidated by Carol Ann and by the strange and somewhat rustic surroundings; gradually, though, she makes friends with her equally uncertain cabinmate, Skye, and finds her own camp pleasures. Wojciechowski carefully crafts her simple story, overplaying neither Beany's discomfort nor her eventual enjoyment, and there's reassurance both in the small but frightening obstacles survived (Beany turns up late to the first breakfast) and in the challenges mastered (with the help of her counselor, Beany eventually learns to dive). There are also a multitude of warm
touches—young readers will particularly envy Beany’s growing closeness with Daisy, her counselor—and Beany’s interspersed letters home are authentically plaintive and incomprehensible. Beany is currently one of the most reliable and sympathetically depicted of early grades heroines, and her fans will want to join her as she surprises herself by not only surviving but enjoying this adventure. Natti’s lavish line drawings are, like Beany, friendly and appealing. DS


When Grandfather Winter retires to his cave, it’s time for the Root Children to awaken: “Mother Earth lights a fire in the hearth, sweeps away the cobwebs, then throws open the shutters. Young Robin Redbreast lands at the window. ‘Root Children! Root Children!’ Young Robin calls. ‘Wake up! It’s time for the masquerade!’” The children wake up, make their blossom costumes, paint bugs bright colors, and “rush out into the world.” They find “kind Aunt Spring,” who tells them, “You are so beautiful. May love and happiness follow wherever you may bloom.” Visits from “jolly Cousin Summer” and “studious Uncle Fall” follow, until finally Mother Earth calls the children home for their “long winter’s nap.” This retelling of Sybille von Olfer’s 1906 story is sentimental through and through, and there are better treatments of the cycle of the seasons than this oversweet allegory. Oil paintings similar in style to Don Woods’ in *Heckedy Peg* (BCCB 12/87) appear in panels and double-page spreads decorated with the appropriate seasonal flora and fauna; the drafting of the human figures that dominate the scenes is disproportionate and the palette is often muddy. A pointedly multicultural cast of root children frolic in a glamorized bucolic setting; there’s a Caucasian predominance, however, in the seasons and Mother Earth. Song lyrics for the winter lullaby are included. JMD


Leah Jean Hopper receives the titular box for her tenth birthday; a gift from her mother’s estranged sister, Olivia, the present reconnects the sisters, resulting in a trip for Leah, her sister, Ruthie, and her mother to visit Olivia in Los Angeles. There Leah discovers a whole new world—accustomed to her 1950s small-town life under Jim Crow in Sulphur, Louisiana, she’s stunned by the liberty of life in California (“All I could wonder was why any colored man or woman would ever go back to the South, below the Mason-Dixon line, after knowing what freedom felt like”). A second adventure, a trip to New York with Olivia and her husband opens Leah’s and Ruthie’s eyes further—and means they’re safe when a hurricane hits Sulphur, killing their parents and many of their friends, and cutting them off from their old life forever. The novel is shaped by little other than chronology, and Leah’s grief for her parents never really translates to the reader. As a slice of history and a young girl’s reaction to same, however, this is delicately and richly drawn. There’s realism in Leah’s largely contented but shadowed and restricted life in the South and in the details of the wider world she’d never imagined (“Uncle Bill told me he knowed a colored lady lawyer once”) as well as in the tensions between them; there’s also nuance and affection in characterization of major and even minor characters, such as Olivia’s smart and kind husband Bill (a Morehouse
graduate and the owner of a successful real estate business) and young Gilbert Martinez next door (on whom Leah has a crush). This provides more insight into the forces behind (and the state of the country before) the civil rights movement than many novels dealing more directly with the subject, and it's also a quietly touching story of a girl's survival in the face of family tragedy. DS

**WYSS, THELMA HATCH** *Ten Miles from Winnemucca*. HarperCollins, 2002 129p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029784-0 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029783-2 $15.95
R Gr. 6-10

Martin's unhappy to be uprooted to Seattle from his home in Winnemucca when his mother remarries, but he's even less pleased when his new stepbrother, taking advantage of the adults' absence on their honeymoon, kicks Martin out of the house. "Hungry, homeless, and sweating at age sixteen," Martin heads in his beloved Jeep for the place that used to be home but runs out of money and stops in little Red Rock, Idaho. There he moves rapidly and surprisingly from survival mode to genuine comfort, acquiring a job, lying his way into a place in school, sleeping in his Jeep in a wilderness camp, and finding romance with his exotic and charismatic new classmate Diantha Dragon. This is a difficult book to slot but an easy one to enjoy: while thematically there's survival story, adjustment to familial change, and a generous helping of coming into one's own, there's pleasure merely in getting to know Martin through his rueful, deadpan narrative ("I also wondered if lack of food was affecting my mind, or if it had worked this way before"). The understated style is both literarily and emotionally accessible, dealing sympathetically with a boy in genuine and understandable distress ("I was feeling darn good for Martin J. Miller, which is usually the time someone takes a potshot at me") while inviting readers put off by more flowery prose and emotion. This is a quirky, easygoing, and uplifting tale, likely to suit reluctant and other readers who'll appreciate Martin's directness and quiet triumph. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028539-7 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028538-9 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Yolen's retelling of this Russian folktale opens promisingly: "In a certain land, in a certain kingdom—as they say in old Russia—on the far side of a certain tangled wood, a garden shimmered like a green jewel. The garden belonged to the wizard Kotschei the Deathless—so called, it was said, because he could not be killed." Within the garden is a princess and her nine handmaidens; they are surrounded by statues of handsome princes, turned to stone in attempts to rescue the women from the wicked wizard. Prince Ivan, lost in the woods, captures the Firebird, which gives Ivan a magical feather in exchange for its life. When Ivan stumbles on the wizard's garden, he engages in battle to save the princess and her maidens; after he waves the magic feather, the Firebird appears with a golden sword, with which Ivan kills Kotschei the Deathless and releases the captives. This retelling, based both on the Russian folktale and Balanchine's version of the popular ballet, is clumsily wordy, and sections of the tale are unfortunately static. Though the colors have a bright joie de vivre, the visuals are problematic as well: the story of the
folk tale dominates the spreads, but a running border on the bottom of the pages illustrates the plot of the ballet, and the result is crowded and confusing; the awkwardness of the human figures is particularly inappropriate for a depiction of dancers. This title has some built-in appeal for balletomanes and folktale enthusiasts, but a trip to the ballet will likely prove more rewarding. A note on the folktale and the ballet is appended. JMD


When a boy seeks knowledge from a teacher, the Grand Master sends the boy off to bring him a small carpet for his work. The boy travels to a carpet maker, who demands thread; to a spinner who demands goat hair; to a goatkeeper who demands goats; to a goat-seller who needs a goat pen; to a carpenter who wants a wife; to a matchmaker who wants knowledge, but not badly enough. The frustrated boy then discovers a merchant’s daughter in love with the wife-seeking carpenter, whereupon he takes the maiden to the carpenter, who gives him wood for a goat pen. The goat seller, pleased with the pen, gives the boy the required goats, which allows the boy to acquire goat hair for the spinner, and so on. Young’s retelling of this Sufi teaching story reads like a standard cumulative tale; in form, it is similar to traditional tales such as the “The Old Woman and Her Pig.” Unfortunately, the retelling here is a bit choppy, lacking the humor and pointed zest of many other Sufi tales, and the concluding morals (“Some of the most precious gifts we receive are those we receive when we are giving” and “Often, knowledge comes to us when we least expect it”), while not obscure, do not resonate clearly with the plot. Still, this is an enjoyably structured tale, and the ambivalence of the morals may provide useful grist for discussion. The collage and watercolor illustrations fall somewhat short as well: although the characters themselves (formed from textured paper and textiles, free-floating against speckled paper backgrounds) are cleverly rendered, overall the images are repetitive and the compositions static. A cultural note on the origins of the tale is included, but no specific citation is given. JMD

YUMOTO, KAZUMI *The Letters*; tr. from the Japanese by Cathy Hirano. Farrar, 2002 165p ISBN 0-374-34383-7 $16.00 Ad Gr. 7 up

When six-year-old Chiaki’s father dies, she and her mother move from the family home in the city to an apartment in Poplar House, a small building presided over by the initially frightening landlady, Mrs. Yanagi. Chiaki’s anxiety begins to make her ill, and her mother, unable to take more time off from her new job, leaves her in the care of Mrs. Yanagi. The two form an unlikely friendship, based on Mrs. Yanagi’s sharing a secret with the little girl: when she, Mrs. Yanagi, dies and goes to heaven, she will take with her letters (kept in a special drawer) from the living to the deceased. Encouraged by Mrs. Yanagi, Chiaki begins to write to her dead father, at first with no more than a brief line or two, but later in letters more detailed, more urgent, filled with a child’s sense of loss and her aching efforts to understand her grief. The entire story is told in a flashback framed by the now-grown Chiaki’s disappointment with her remarried mother, disillusion with her chosen career, and heartache over a miscarriage, the result of her first serious love
affair. Since the narrator is an adult looking back on her childhood from an adult perspective, the overall tone is that of an adult memoir, and there's a shortage of direct empathy with youthful experience. The scenes between the young Chiaki and the residents and visitors of Poplar House have a lively charm, however, and there's a touching exploration of the effects of early bereavement. Yumoto (author of *The Friends*, BCCB 2/97) has written a novel that, in the right hands, may be a catalyst for revelatory discussions of the nature of grief, loss, and regret. JMD

Elisha Cooper's *Ice Cream*, published by HarperCollins and reviewed in the *Bulletin*’s June issue, is listed as appearing in a paper edition in addition to the library edition; the second edition is in fact a hardback trade edition. The *Bulletin* regrets the error.
Subject and Use Index

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

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