PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
Richard Egielski

SLIM and JIM

“...In true Dickensian fashion, orphan Slim, a young rat, is beguiled into a life of crime by a one-eyed cat named Buster. But Slim is not a thief, and is saved by a mouse-boy named Jim, whose family takes Slim in. Slim adjusts well to his new life, and the two share a love of yo-yos. But Slim is abducted by the nefarious Buster... This picture book has a real story, with adventure, friendship, dastardly deeds—and yo-yos!”

—Starred review / ALA Booklist

“...Channeling Aesop through Charles Dickens, Egielski brings together two yo-yo-wielding urban rodents, and pits them against a gloriously piratical feline hoodlum. The Caldecott Medalist has outdone himself in the art (and) a heavily battered typeface adds to the generally raffish air of this droll, action-packed modern fable.”

—Starred review / Kirkus Reviews

Ages 3-7. $15.95 Tr (0-06-028352-1); $15.89 Lb (0-06-028353-X)
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* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
R Recommended.
Ad Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
M Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
NR Not recommended.
SpC Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
SpR A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

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Cover illustration by Chris Raschka from John Coltrane's Giant Steps ©2002. Used by permission of Jackson/Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
John Coltrane's Giant Steps
written and illus. by Chris Raschka

Can a temporal art be captured in a two-dimensional medium? Would elementary-school-age kids remotely care? Raschka's third literary foray into jazz, a whimsical performance of the John Coltrane title piece, answers respectively with an "Amazingly well" and a resounding "Yes." Here he funnels the playful experimentation that marked his earlier efforts (Charlie Parker Played Be Bop, BCCB 12/92, and Mysterious Thelonius, 10/97) into a lively opus that is at once artily provocative and solidly kid-friendly.

"Good evening. And thank you for coming to our book." With a tacit wink, Maestro Raschka invites children to take a giant step out of their traditional picture-book role of viewer/listener and into the role of audience, and he straight away whets their appetites with the promise of a "marvelous and tricky composition." Oddly assorted players—box, raindrop, snowflake, and kitten—take the stage and do a bit of limbering up, and the silent music begins. A tempo-setting raindrop pulses across a double spread, shifting from positive to negative images in cool blues. It's joined by "sound foundation" box, overlaying the raindrop and morphing between peach and yellow. Harmony snowflake ("taking the piano part tonight") tumbles her lavender self into the increasingly complex translucent stratum. And here comes Coltrane's own saxophone kitten ("the melody on top of everything") striding across her colleagues, a pert and confident streak of inky black. Well, perhaps a bit overconfident. Even pros have their off moments, and as kitten lopes along in "BIG, BIG STEPS," the players tangle and collapse in a humiliating heap: "People, people! What happened?... [R]aindrops, you were rushing on page 19. Snowflake.... What I want to see is rich color but not muddy color. Remember. Coltrane's music is dense but transparent." They take it again from page 14, and this effort is flawless: "Sheets of color. Sheets of sound."

Wherever a child is situated along the humor continuum, there's bound to be something here to please. First, there's the perennial allure of seeing the experts—even in improbable guise—get it wrong, and Raschka's diagrammed analysis of the failure, with arrows and circles in fiery editorial red, is a hoot. Those who favor slapstick will, of course, glom onto the grand debacle, with box and raindrop in a discouraged slump, snowflake literally coming to pieces, and droopy-whiskered kitten flat on her back like a dead cockroach. Older members of the audience, savvy to conductors' stereotypical perfectionism and fits of pique, will chuckle knowingly at Raschka's exasperated kvetching.

Churning just beneath this pleasingly goofy, deceptively simple storyline, though, is a dead-on examination of what makes Trane, Trane. Lecturing his errant musicians, Raschka casts Coltrane's performance and compositional benchmarks in child-accessible terms: "No matter how fast he's going, he always sounds relaxed"; "But can you [box] be strong yet light?"; "He blew a fountain of notes, a
shower of notes, but those notes made lines that were dynamic and strong and vivid.” It’s the pictures, though, that make the truly daring media leap from the otic to the optic shore. Watercolor is an ideal vehicle for conveying the complexity of the Coltrane sound, and translucent colors that first slosh together in awkward disarray later meld delicately into the harmony of the final take, tacitly directing novice jazz listeners to “watch” for the logical thread within the dense knot of sound. There’s a powerful, if implicit message here: jazz is no cacophonous free-for-all, but an intricate, disciplined musical form.

The real success of Raschka’s performance will, in the end, be measured by whether kids ask to hear “Giant Steps,” or better still, lots of Coltrane tunes. Fire up the AV equipment and put the Trane’s CDs on red alert, because the smart money says they will be asking. (Imprint information appears on p. 32.)

Elizabeth Bush, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ALDER, ELIZABETH Crossing the Panther’s Path. Farrar, 2002 230p ISBN 0-374-31662-7 $18.00 Ad Gr. 5-9

Billy Calder, son of an Irish-born British officer and his Mohawk wife, finds his loyalties aligning with his maternal relatives as settlers steadily encroach upon Indian lands in the Mississippi Valley, and he welcomes the chance to use his multilingual skills in the service of Shawnee chief Tecumseh, who is determined to unite disparate tribes in defense of their rights. Although this fact-based tale of the westernmost battles in the War of 1812 is the stuff of gripping drama, Alder stolidly wades through the events, encumbering dialogue with historical background (“The Americans are not so stupid. Look how they took Detroit from the British just as the British took it from France. . . . We will not be trapping for long if the American settlers continue to drive their wagons over the Appalachian Mountains”) and breathless exhortation (“But as long as there is breath in my body, I will not give up. . . . We must let our rifles and arrows speak to the Americans”). Nonetheless, moments of genuine excitement—particularly Billy’s rescue of the Kinzie family in the wake of the Fort Dearborn massacre—shore up the sagging action, and Alder’s account of British and Indian defection from Tecumseh’s cause is often heart-wrenching. Readers who have met the romanticized Tecumseh as the “older man” in Ann Rinaldi’s Second Bend in the River (BCCB 3/97) may enjoy this quite different spin on the leader’s doomed crusade. EB


Andersen’s famous tale of the diminutive adventuress is offered here in simplified, accessible language that hews close to the original plot. Montanari’s invitingly
earthy illustrations have an energetic sweep that contrasts playfully with the usual romantic fairy-tale fare. Full and partial-spread paintings feature perspectives that vary dramatically from page to page; the visual characterizations have a homely quality that imbues the players with domestic, believable personalities. This title is the best of a new folk and fairy-tale series from McGraw-Hill that is visually characterized by shiny foil elements embossed on the covers and scattered randomly throughout the illustrations. Andersen's lengthy tales are not always a first choice for reading aloud to younger listeners; here's one adaptation that lends itself not only to reading aloud, but even to reading alone by those young adventurers seeking to meet a small, achievable challenge. JMD

**ANDRYSZEWSKI, TRICIA**  *Terrorism in America.* Millbrook, 2002  64p  illus. with photographs (Headliners)  
ISBN 0-7613-2803-3  $25.90  Ad  Gr. 5-9

In this unfocused entry in the Headliners series, Andryszewski attempts to corral an expansive, unruly topic within sixty-four heavily illustrated pages of text. A recap of the explosive events of September 11, 2001 predictably opens the discussion, which then segues into an attempt to set the attack within a broader context of historical and recent domestic and international episodes of terrorism. A disorganized litany (partly thematic, partly chronological) of tragedy and its perpetrators ensues—e.g., the KKK and FALN, animal-rights and anti-abortion activism, American hostages held in Iran, and Pan Am Flight 103 sabotaged over Lockerbie, Scotland—all pertinent, but all underexamined. Andryszewski does present an adolescent-accessible introduction to "leaderless resistance," the organization of terrorist groups into independently operative cells, articulated in American militia literature of the past decade and now deployed by elusive international terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. Moreover, she concludes with a chapter on America's challenges for homeland security, posing hard-hitting questions about the suspension of legal rights for material witnesses, prosecution of suspected international terrorists by military tribunal, a system of national ID cards, and broad latitude for information gathering: "Security experts can advise us on what the government might do . . . But the . . . responsibility for deciding what's best—not simply what's safest—belongs not to experts or even to the government but to all of us, collectively in how we choose to vote and individually how we choose to live." Potent words, these, and probably well worth investment in this title. EB

**ATINSKY, STEVE**  *Tyler on Prime Time.* Delacorte, 2002  168p  ISBN 0-385-72917-0  $14.95  R  Gr. 4-6

To the naked eye, Tyler's just a twelve-year-old visiting his uncle, but as far as he's concerned, he's a kid on the path to his destiny: stardom. His uncle is a writer for one of the most successful shows on television, *Kids in the House,* and Tyler's determined to land a role on the series despite the reservations and disapproval of his mother and father. That's a fairly standard middle-grades plot, and the style sometimes tips into fairly standard middle-grades glibness, but the book lifts itself above the average with its detailed exploration of television production (Atinsky has written for CBS and Disney). While there are obstacles and unlikable people, Atinsky wisely avoids setting up any cardboard villains, letting the process itself provide sufficient challenge for Tyler. Tyler's a funny and starstruck kid, but he's also credibly smart, able to see beyond his dreams to the reality ("I was beginning to realize that this waiting thing was a big part of what acting was all about") and
thus give his readers a glimpse of it as well. The combination of Hollywood gloss and unusually insidery information is sure to satisfy kids looking for a zippy read that goes beyond the pages of *TV Guide*. DS

Paper ed. ISBN 1-55652-444-7 $14.95 Ad Gr. 3-6

Budding comedians stalking the Great Guffaw will find some tips here for gathering comic material, honing their improvisational skills, and perfecting cooperation within an ensemble. Bany-Winters frequently refers readers to the work of the masters—from Charlie Chaplin to Weird Al Yankovic—highlighting their comedic styles and innovations. The quickest way to annihilate a joke is to explain it, though, and her descriptions of Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?” patter or Fred Astaire’s ceiling dance simply don’t translate well into print. Likewise, her own suggested sample routines often fall flat, and the short one-acts that conclude the presentation hardly scale the heights of hilarity. There is, however, a wealth of promising warm-up games included, of interest not only to comedians but to anyone with dramatic aspirations. Educators and children’s group leaders in search of team-building activities should also consider this a useful sourcebook. A glossary, index, and a scattershot list of “Favorite Comedy Resources” (which only partially coordinates with textual references) are provided for kids who take their comedy seriously. Undistinguished but lively black-and-white drawings appear throughout. EB

**Best, Carl**  *Goose’s Story*; illus. by Holly Meade. Kroupa/Farrar, 2002 32p
ISBN 0-374-32750-5 $16.00 R 6-9 yrs

Based on a real-life incident in the author’s backyard, this picture book tells the story of a girl’s encounters with an injured, one-footed Canada goose. All spring and summer the young narrator observes the ostracized goose as it struggles to eat, walk, and swim, but the big question still remains: will the goose be able to fly south come fall? Despite the somewhat wishful ending (the goose, having successfully migrated, returns with a mate), Best largely manages to avoid sentimentalizing the familiar theme of animals triumphing over adversity. Though the narrator carefully watches over the goose, it never becomes an anthropomorphic pet but remains a realistically untamed bird. Readaloud audiences will appreciate Best’s rhythmic, poetic language (“[The geese] land in couples and stand in threes and band together in bunches like people”) and the simply expressed, genuine emotion (“My heart is thumping so loud I’m sure she can hear it. ‘Oh, goose,’ I say, ‘what happened to you?’”). Meade’s painted and cut-paper collages feature a variety of interesting perspectives, from overhead angles to ground-level closeups. The ginger-haired narrator is appropriately kid-like in her postures and facial expressions, and the goose is strikingly bold from her printed brown feathers, to her elegantly arched neck, to her black-and-white head. Bring this out at storytime and watch the wildlife lovers flock to it. JMH

**Bible**  *Stories from the Bible*; illus. by Lisbeth Zwerger. Neugebauer/North-South, 2002 160p
ISBN 0-7358-1413-9 $19.95 R Gr. 2-6

Excerpts from the King James Bible are subtly but elegantly illustrated in this hand-
some volume. Selections from both the Old and New Testaments include stories of the Creation, Moses, and King David, as well as stories of the birth, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The large-print text is laid out in two uncrammed columns per page, with generous amounts of white space between columns and lines. Zwerger uses a soft, earthy palette of subdued rusts, blues, greens, and grays for a variety of illustrations and decorations. Some pages sport isolated elements from the stories (a single animal, a horn, a berry branch, etc.) set against white pages where they float in snowy serenity; others offer full-size paintings, distinguished by changing perspectives and unusual lighting and featuring effective characterizations of biblical persona reminiscent of Zwerger’s folkloric players in other titles. Those seeking powerful additions to world religion and religious instruction sections should begin here. An index of Biblical chapters, books, and verses is included. JMD


Ever since her birth, when he planted a rose in her honor and then named her after it, Rosalie has been the apple—or more accurately the rose—of her grandfather’s eye. Year after year, she’s his faithful partner in gardening, learning from him about planting, reaping, and cycles (“That’s what I like about gardens, Rosalie. Nothing ever really leaves”), but he can’t give her the blue rosebush she asks for (“Roses aren’t blue, Rosalie”). He also can’t ensure the permanence she desires, whether it be in the plants they sow or in his own life: when she’s nine, he dies, leaving Rosalie devastated until his return in a dream and the appearance of blue roses on his grave demonstrate to her that their connection remains. Though the play on the emotions is fairly blatant and the ending is somewhat baffling (since there aren’t blue roses, is this some kind of botanical as well as spiritual miracle?), this nonetheless has a tenderness and spirit that gives it more impact than many stories of bereavement, and the gardening metaphor remains sufficiently well rooted to avoid airy abstractness. The affectionate relationship between grandfather and granddaughter is touchingly depicted, and it’s a refreshingly contemporary portrait of a Native American family. Córdova balances long, lean, accented lines in her figures with tidy precision in her floral and garden details; though the people are somewhat prettified, the earthy richness of the textured acrylics keeps the visuals appropriately grounded. This is a quietly respectful book about loss, survival, and legacy. DS


Though fourteen-year-old Martyn has always loathed his alcoholic father (“I hated every inch of him. From his broken-veined, red-nosed face to his dirty, stinking feet. I hated his beery guts”), he didn’t intend to kill him. Nonetheless, Dad’s dead, having hit his head on the fireplace stone in a fall (he drunkenly lunged for Martyn, who instinctively shoved him away), and Martyn is determined to keep his father’s death a secret and stay in his own house, aided by the large bequest he’s stunned to discover his father had recently received. Fortunately, he’s also aided by Alex, the beautiful older girl down the road (with whom Martyn has longed to be more than just friends), and together they work out a plan to remove Martyn’s father and acquire the money—a plan that goes wrong in ways more horrible than
Martyn could ever have anticipated. The Americanized details of this British import are unconvincing and awkward, but otherwise this is a dark and original psychological drama. The twists of danger and betrayal will be genuinely unexpected to most readers, and they bring a bitterness that many young adults will find grimly satisfying. Martyn’s occasional tendency towards philosophizing (“It’s not as if I broke any commandments or anything. Where does it say, ‘Thou shalt not bury thy father in a gravel pit?’”) adds to the emotional resonance and paves the way for the impact of the final revelations; Brooks’ style, in this first novel, remains effectively straightforward and immediate throughout. The pessimism here is sharper and more personal than Robert Cormier’s and less leavened than Lois Duncan’s, and that will be just bleakly right for many readers. DS


Robin leaves his things all over the house, grows plants in the bathtub, paints pictures on the walls, etc., until his parents provide him not only with his own room but with three carpenters to help him redo it to his own specifications. The new room is a wonder—a cork wall to display his art, a closet “like an easel,” a tree growing in a tub—and “everyone said it was the best room in the house.” The specially equipped room is an appealing idea, but pedestrian descriptions give a first-draft feel to Brown’s posthumously discovered text, and the pace never quite gets up to speed. Paintings by Johnson and Fancher (illustrators of Duncan’s I Walk at Night, BCCB 2/00) feature opaque, stylized forms rendered in a subdued palette with a flat, polished finish; some surreal Egielski-like touches (a huge fish leaning against a door) add interest to the compositions. Unfortunately, the illustrations fail to communicate the wonder of Robin’s new space, and the upturning of the text and images for several spreads is more confusing than imaginative. There is some emotional resonance in the empowering of the overly indulged Robin, however, and youngsters with a yen for a room of their own may find some fantasy fulfillment here. JMD


Pirate Pete (“tall and thin”) and Pirate Joe (“short and round”) are actually pirate-wannabes who dance (Pete does the hornpipe, Joe the limbo), eat seafood, and wash their eyepatches every Sunday night. Three short stories describe the friends and their attempts to make good on their buccaneering aspirations, first by obtaining a “ship” (actually a black van with a bumper that reads “PIRATES ‘R’ US”) and then by shopping for an appropriately piratical parrot. This easy reader’s mini-plots don’t add up to much, but a silly sense of humor (“Something is still missing from our pirate lives” exclaims Pete. “Pirate girls!” blurts out Joe) keeps the text buoyantly afloat, and the sentence structure and patterns provide a helpful lifeline to struggling readers. Smith’s illustrations (mostly half-page with occasional full-page scenes) are executed in muted tones, and his rubbery-lined style brings to mind old Krazy Kat comics; dialogue bubbles, labels, signs (a pair of directional roadside signs point travelers to either “Pirate parrots” or “Pirate grumpy...
bunnies*), and other clever details extend the humor even further. For older primary graders who find reading difficult but who think they are too sophisticated for easy readers, and for pirate fans who enjoyed Laurence’s *Captain and Matey Set Sail* (BCCB 9/01), this title is a treasure. JMH


Viewers tour the avian kingdom, scooping up a single salient fact about each of a dozen birds they encounter along the way. “Why does an eagle plunge from the sky?” asks the verso. Flip over the fold on the right side of the double spread: “To grasp a fat catfish it spies swimming by.” Watt’s acrylic foldout pictures work well with the question/answer format, highlighting each bird in a clear, anatomically detailed closeup set in an attractive and accurately detailed habitat, then revealing its peculiar trait when the spread is fully opened. While Carney sets an overall gentle tone, she doesn’t shy away from the less savory doings in birdland: “Why does a vulture soar high overhead? It’s sniffing the wind for the scent of the dead.” A closing spread of brief descriptions extends the text (“a roadrunner is quick enough to kill a rattlesnake without being bitten”), although specific geographical regions and ranges are not consistently supplied. This could be an excellent choice for reading with preschool siblings: the younger will glide through the pictures and verse, while the elder swoops for the data at the end. EB

CHAIKIN, MIRIAM  *Angels Sweep the Desert Floor: Bible Legends about Moses in the Wilderness*; illus. by Alexander Koshkin. Clarion, 2002 102p ISBN 0-395-97825-4 $19.00 R Gr. 6-9

Chaikin previously ventured into Midrashim with the collection *Clouds of Glory* (BCCB 5/98), which retold numerous Bible stories from creation to Abraham. Here she concentrates on the tale of Moses in the desert, delineating the many ways God and his angels assisted the Israelites on their journey. The language is austere and formal, and the opening chapters (which focus on the hierarchy of angels and their tasks) are a bit slow; the pace picks up quickly, however, and the relationships between God and man, good and evil, take center stage. Overall, the rendering of this Biblical legend is powerful and accessible, and there’s an interesting focus on matters of faith (what it is, how individuals achieve it, what they do once they have it). Koshkin’s full-page paintings (watercolor, gouache, and tempera) are also formal, with stiff and sometimes awkward figures; still, the palette is warmed by earthy tones of gold and green, and the design is drawn into cohesion by thin lines of gold framing each painting. Notes give chapter and verse for the stories Chaikin retells; a list of references is appended. JMD

CHAMBERS, AIDAN  *Postcards from No Man’s Land*. Dutton, 2002 312p ISBN 0-525-46863-3 $19.99 R* Gr. 9 up

Since Jacob’s grandmother, Sarah, is too ill to make a trip to Holland to meet long-ago wartime acquaintances of her late husband, Jacob is sent in her place to attend a ceremony at his grandfather’s grave in Arnhem, honoring him and other fallen soldiers from World War II. When he arrives in Amsterdam, Jacob is hosted by young Daan, who is also the grandson of Geertrui, the woman who nursed Jacob’s grandfather in the war. In fact, this relationship turns out to have been more intimate; Jacob’s grandfather had an affair with Geertrui, and Jacob and
Daan are half-cousins. Throughout most of the book, two narrative threads run concurrently: one tells the story of Jacob's present-day trip while the other tells the story of Geertrui's survival of the war and devoted tending of Jacob's grandfather. Interspersed among the chapters of Geertrui's story are excerpts from real war journals (a note in the acknowledgments credits the authors) that tell more about the grisly battle of Arnhem in which Jacob's grandfather was mortally wounded. Chambers' writing is complex and intense, with equal attention and detail given to characters in both time frames. Both Jacob and Geertrui reach milestones of maturity in their respective stories, and they experience parallel (albeit very different) sexual awakenings: Geertrui in her love for a wounded soldier (Jacob's grandfather), and Jacob in his attraction to two young people, a girl in Arnhem and a boy in Amsterdam. Chambers creates a heady flood of sensory and emotional detail while keeping tight reins on several powerful plots and subplots, crafting an unusually compelling and balanced portrayal of two young people coming of age. Fans of Anne Frank's diary will be particularly drawn to this volume, both because of Jacob's own fascination with Anne Frank and because of its similarly unflinching honesty in depicting both life during war and the process of growing up. KM

CHESTER, JONATHAN  

Himself a Himalayan climber and photographer, Chester here introduces kids to his rarefied stomping grounds. Personal experience gives him plenty of significant and juicy details to share (on frostbite: "As bad as it looks, I ended up losing only the very tip of one finger"), and he's also got a considerable amount of information not usually found in such introductory volumes (there's a Sherpa known as the "icefall doctor" who's been maintaining one route for twenty-five years; 17,600 feet is the upper limit for helicopter evacuation because the air is too thin higher up), so much so that the alphabetical format fortunately recedes behind the material. The visual impact is even more impressive, with each page carefully setting up some perceptive and intriguing photographs (often with some useful overlaid text diagramming important points) against contrasting colors and sometimes a well-chosen quote in addition. Though some images are slightly at odds with the text (if underwear "should be white," why is the pictured climber kitted out in psychedelic longies?), the aggregate view brings the Everest process closer than just about any other book for young people. Suitable for reading aloud to some young explorers, tempting reluctant readers, and pairing with Jenkins' *The Top of the World* (BCCB 4/99), this has a wide range of uses and will please a wide range of kids. A glossary and an extensive list of resources, ranging from organizations to books (unfortunately not all of the titles providing quotes in the text), magazines, and websites, are included. DS

COLLIER, KRISTI  
*Jericho Walls.* Holt, 2002 213p ISBN 0-8050-6521-0 $16.95 R Gr. 5-8

Josephine is a preacher's daughter, accustomed to moving every few years and battling the inevitable stigma of virtue that attaches to preachers' kids. When her family moves from Indiana to the small Southern town where her father was raised, she is unprepared for the 1950s culture of prejudice and segregation, in part because, as Josephine puts it, "I'd never seen a colored person up close before." Mean-
while, her mother shocks the congregation by getting a job and shocks Josephine
by hiring a black housekeeper, Abeline, but Josephine soon finds a friend, despite
local taboos against such relationships, in Abeline's son Lucas. Although the char-
acters are compelling, the pacing occasionally lags, and the climax, in which Lucas,
Josephine, and Lucas's brother perform an act of civil disobedience by demanding
that Lucas be given a library card, isn't as satisfying as the tension-filled buildup.
Nevertheless, this is an involving portrait of a complicated family; Josephine's fa-
ther is so eager to be seen as hometown boy who has made it that he's willing to
overlook injustices that Josephine's mother, herself one-quarter Cherokee and raised
on tales of the Trail of Tears, is actively working to fight. Collier creates a convinc-
ing portrait of the kinds of local and personal battles that eventually culminated
in the larger fights for civil rights. KM

CREW, GARY Mama's Babies. Annick, 2002 160p
Trade ed. ISBN 1-55037-725-6 $18.95
Paper ed. ISBN 1-55037-724-8 $6.95 R Gr. 6-12

"By the time I was nine years old," says narrator Sarah, "I had begun to doubt that
Mama Pratchett, the woman with whom I had lived for as long as I could remem-
ber, was in fact my mother." Sarah's got a point: there's never been any indication
of a Mr. Pratchett, young children turn up in the household at a startling rate, and
the latest baby arrived, unconventionally, off of the train that stops in their little
nineteenth-century Australian town. Bolstered by her new friendship with the
stationmaster's nephew, Sarah begins to see more of the outside world and to
think more critically about her family—and about the sinister tendency for the
children in it to die in circumstances that Mama Pratchett can't convincingly ex-
plain. Crew (author of Strange Objects, BCCB 9/93) has, according to a brief
explanatory note, drawn on three real-life cases where "baby farmers," women who
took in illegitimate babies for pay, turned to murdering their charges; the result is
a darkly realistic tale with a satisfyingly folkloric flavor and morality (including a
fitting fate for Mama Pratchett and a fairy-tale restoration to her birth family for
Sarah). As the unappreciated and put-upon mainstay of the household, Sarah is a
sympathetic figure indeed, and her gradually expanding understanding—of the
world as well as of her situation—is portrayed effectively. The central plot unfolds
with admirable balance: Crew doesn't shrink from the enjoyable sensationalism of
the drama, but Sarah's simply spoken, slightly Victorian narration adds a restraint
that provides intensity and suspense as well as control. The combination of acces-
sible style and absorbing story will make this a creepy winner for a wide range of
readers. DS

CUYLER, MARGERY Skeleton Hiccups; illus. by S. D. Schindler. McElderry,

Skeleton has the hiccups, and they're stubbornly resistant to cure, leaving him
hampered with the incessant "hic, hic, hic." His friend Ghost's suggestions don't
initially help either ("Eat some sugar"); "Press your fingers ... over your eyeballs"),
but the clever shade has one more trick up his ghostly sleeve. The streamlined text
gains a rollickingly poetic feel from its "hic, hic, hic" refrain, and audiences will be
unable to resist joining in. Schindler's gouache, watercolor, and ink illustrations
employ suitably dark background tones, making the bright whiteness of Skeleton
and his pal pop off the pages; details extend the text with laugh-out-loud results, as
when Skeleton attempts to drink water while standing on his head (it comes out of his eye sockets, of course). This is a peppy change of pace from the usual Halloween fare that could make for a bone-rattlingly good storytime. EAB

Danziger, Paula  
*United Tates of America*; written and illus. by Paula Danziger.  
Scholastic, 2002  
159p illus.  
ISBN 0-590-69221-6  
$15.95  
Ad Gr. 4-6

Eleven-year-old Sarah Kate ("Skate") Tate is moving into middle school, and she's not crazy about the transition, especially with the changes in her cousin and best friend, Susie. Susie wants to spend more time with a new classmate named Kiki than with Skate, and she's even losing interest in scrapbooking with the "Happy Scrappys" (Skate and three other friends). Through a strong relationship with a great uncle (GUM), Skate begins to focus on her own independent interests (a budding artist, she tries out for the school newspaper) and to consider the benefits as well as the drawbacks of change. The text lacks the deft insight of Naylor's Alice books, and GUM's viewpoints are heavy-handedly layered over the text; his death and hefty bequest to the family seem more narratively convenient than likely. Skate's narration has Danziger's typical liveliness, though, and she and her scrapbooking will connect with preteens anticipating the move to middle school or younger kids navigating the realm of girlhood friendships and growing into their own skin. A full-length scrapbook section appended at the end of the book highlights the characters and events in the story, complete with photographs. EAB

Demarest, Chris  
*Here Come Our Firefighters!*; written and illus. by Chris Demarest.  
Little Simon, 2002  
[16p]  
$10.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R 3-6 yrs

Nifty paper engineering heightens the action as a team of firefighters answers a call. "Rrrring! The alarm sounds," and viewers pull the first arrowed tab that rouses the emergency workers from their cozy beds, yanking down one set of blankets and prying a pillow off another weary head. A second tab slides a firefighter down the brass pole: "Grab your gear, and let's go." There are doors and covers to open on the fire truck, boxes to lift as workers proceed from one phase of their job to the next, and a double-page pop-up of a burning house, with axe-wielders scaling the ladder and hose-wielders charging through the front door. Once the fire is out, the scene shifts abruptly to the firehouse kitchen ("Firefighters are the best cooks in town"). Flip the page and they're off on another call—"But duty always comes first." Card stock and pull tabs are not the sturdiest, so this volume's shelf life is bound to be short. Still, there's enough captioning of truck parts and gear to satisfy clamors of "What's this?" and "What's that?", and Demarest's watercolor depictions of a multicultural staff of men and women (and the essential firehouse Dalmatian) assure listeners that these heroes could be right in their own neighborhood, wherever that neighborhood may be. EB

Dewey, Jennifer Owings  
Paisano, the Roadrunner; written and illus. by Jennifer Owings Dewey; illus. with photographs by Wyman Meinzer.  
Millbrook, 2002  
48p  
ISBN 0-7613-1250-1  
$23.90  
R Gr. 3-6

Dewey affectionately recounts her experience with a family of unusual house guests—a mating pair of roadrunners and their brood, one of which literally moved
into her home for several seasons. First introduced to a male she dubbed Hamlet, who appeared in her yard one cold March day, Dewey soon made the acquaintance of "Edith" and was able to observe their nest building, clutch tending, and brood nurturing, tolerated or ignored by birds with more important matters on their minds. Lured by hand-fed treats and a warm fire, the chick Paisano actually left his natural family and took up residence with Dewey, until at maturity he took to the desert again in search of more appropriate companionship. It's clear that Dewey did her homework in gathering information on roadrunner behavior, which she smoothly integrates into her cozily chatty text, and her concluding "Useful Facts" section is largely redundant. Meinzer's photographs, though sharp and well coordinated with the text, seem suspiciously like stock shots since they omit any wished-for views of Paisano and family interacting with Dewey or posing in her home. An index will assist report writers, but Dewey's intimate storytelling will best be appreciated by young naturalists or classes chilling out with an end-of-day readaloud. EB


Writing retrospectively from 1946, Hartley Penrose recalls his emotionally complicated wartime experiences in northwest Australia. Just out of school, Hart and his sister, Alice, have reveled in their days pelting about the port city with Mitsy Sennosuke, the daughter of a diver on one of Mr. Penrose's pearl boats, even though Hart yearns to be more than just friends with Mitsy. Everything soon changes, however: Hart and Alice's mother returns to Britain and dies in a bombing raid, an accident on a Penrose boat cripples Hart and takes the life of Mitsy's father, and wartime suspicions take their toll on nonwhites ranging from Japanese-Australians such as Mitsy and her mother to aboriginal workmen. Hart's love for Mitsy, now a nurse, continues to grow, leaving him anguished at both his competitor for her affections and her treatment at the hands of Australia and Australians—even, sometimes, himself. Disher draws a penetrating picture of the Australian coastal town and the friction behind its diversity, a friction suddenly exacerbated by the war; the antipodean picture of that war experience (between the distant European war that takes Hart's mother, the looming threat of Japanese occupation, and the disappearance of Alice, now a nurse, in a Japanese attack) will be a fresh one to many U.S. readers. Characterization seems much clearer to other characters than it is to the reader, however, and the titular love story is largely a disappointment: Disher repeatedly opts for telling in favor of showing, leaving readers with polished lines and retroactive adult insight instead of emotional impact, and Hart and Mitsy's eventual affair is treated tenderly but talkily. There's more resonance, however, in Hart's inability to separate himself entirely from the bigotry of some of his countrymen, and it's that harder truth that readers will find valuable. DS

EASTON, RICHARD A Real American. Clarion, 2002 155p ISBN 0-618-13339-9 $15.00 R Gr. 5-8

A booming 1890s coal-mining company is taking over the small town of Manorville, Pennsylvania, buying up farms and bringing in recent immigrants to work the mines. For Nathan, this means that all his friends and their families are moving away to other places, while his own father refuses to leave the farm that has been their family's home for as long as he can remember. Prejudice against the immigrant workers runs hot, and initially Nathan shares these biases, hurling rocks and
insults at workers who use the lane on his family's property as a shortcut to the mines. However, he soon meets Arturo, an Italian immigrant boy who is about his age, and the two boys become friends. In the course of the boys' growing friendship, their two families begin to trust each other, and when the mining company hires thugs to beat up striking miners, Nathan and his parents hurry to the shantytown where Arturo's family lives to warn the workers of the impending danger. Effectively capturing the perspective of a boy whose social world is undergoing radical change, the book balances various plot lines with sure pacing to create a compelling glimpse into the history of American industrialization. This is rife with curricular connections (along with, for instance, Freedman's *Kids at Work*, BCCB 10/94), and readers will be drawn into the realistic portrait of Nathan's world and his ability to create understanding and friendship despite the odds. KM

EGIELSKI, RICHARD *Slim and Jim*; written and illus. by Richard EgIELski. Geringer/HarperCollins, 2002 [40p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028353-X $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028352-1 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R 6-9 yrs

Egielski gives new life to the age-old story of friends from opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum by presenting the friends in question as rodents and their setting as an amalgam of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cityscapes. Though nearly lured into a life of crime by wily feline thug Buster, homeless, orphaned rat Slim soon finds that he's not cut out to be a thief. A failed robbery attempt results in a rooftop chase in which Slim meets up with Jim, a well-bred young mouse, whom he saves from drowning when the two plummet into the river. Grateful, Jim brings Slim home with him, and the two discover that they share a mutual aptitude for yo-yo tricks. Despite the naysaying of Jim's grandpa ("Rats are nothing but trouble"), Slim easily settles into Jim's family—until Buster returns and kidnaps Slim. Slim and Jim's alternative historical world (populated by a variety of animal species) is an alluring one, and the quick pace and plentiful action (much of it owing a clear debt to *Oliver Twist*) will hold a restless primary-grade audience. Full- and half-page illustrations (rendered in golden browns, rich reds, and stony grays) capture both the drab seediness and the plusher side of city life; the nocturnal rooftop scenes, set against crimson, moonlit skies, are particularly dramatic. With his eyepatch, earring, and toothy sneer, Buster makes a satisfying villain, while dark-eyed, pink-eared Jim and Slim are as attractive and clean-cut as rodential heroes come. Plenty of kids have a taste for melodrama and for mousy protagonists (think Stuart Little)—satisfy them with this tale of adventure. JM

ELLSWORTH, LORETTA *The Shrouding Woman*. Holt, 2002 151p
ISBN 0-8050-6651-9 $16.95 Ad Gr. 4–7

In post-Civil War America, modern funeral homes and embalming methods were beginning to replace traditional funeral practices and the women—like Evie's German-American Aunt Flo—who presided over them. In rural Minnesota, however, Aunt Flo's abilities are appreciated by everyone except her eleven-year-old niece, whose grief for her recently deceased mother causes her to feel a kind of horror at the woman who consorts with death. Brief chapters headed by old-fashioned titles and attractive ink emblems plot the episodes that lead Evie to trust her aunt, understand the importance of her work, and, eventually, to learn from her. The
tricks of Aunt Flo's trade—concealed for most of the novel in a box of "plain-looking pine with rough edges and an ill-fitting top"—will strike many readers as disappointingly simple: face powder, herbs, pennies (to hold the eyes shut), and forked sticks (to hold the head up and keep the mouth closed). Evie's flat voice further demystifies the process of "laying out" (Aunt Flo "carefully washed the woman's body, mixing the sweet-smelling herbs and spices into the water"), but her factual descriptions lack the minutiae that would evoke the remarkable intimacy of the situation or the practical difficulties of the task. Some superficial characterization further detracts from the novel's emotional impact (Evie's younger sister Mae is particularly functional), but an intriguing topic, responsible period research (detailed in an author's note), and skillful thematic development make this an accessible and unthreatening introduction to a neglected area of women's history. FK

ELYA, SUSAN MIDDLETON  Home at Last; illus. by Felipe Davalos.  Lee & Low, 2002 [32p]
ISBN 1-58430-020-5  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  6-9 yrs

The Patiño family has just arrived in the United States, where Papa takes a factory job with his brother and Ana is promptly packed off to school. The young girl slowly but successfully makes inroads into a new language and culture; Mama, though, is pretty much stranded in their apartment with the twin baby boys, and for her acculturation is a much greater challenge. Nothing at the grocery store is familiar, she's overcharged by the clerk, and she's treated brusquely by neighbors who have no patience with her stumbling attempts at English. Only when one of the babies falls ill and Papa is not around to help is Mama finally convinced that she, too, must learn English, and her diligence at night school finally pays off in a triumph at the grocery store and the promise of their first family feast. Although the tale focuses on Mama, it plays out through Ana's point of view, and the child's frustration with Mama's stubbornness and her own inability to help in any direct way are powerfully conveyed. Davalos captures much of Mama's pain and dignity in her expressive doe eyes, but the figures in his oil scenes are posed in rigid, diorama-style groupings, and even liberal splashes of fuchsia and vibrant cerulean blue never quite relieve the muddiness of his palette. The text, though a trifle long, is smooth and well paced, and listeners who take communication for granted will readily sense the vulnerability of a newcomer who has left her language at home. EB

FEIFFER, JULES  By the Side of the Road; written and illus. by Jules Feiffer.  di Capua/Hyperion, 2002 [50p]
ISBN 0-7868-0908-6  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 3-6

Richard is engaging in the time-honored pastime of hammering on his little brother in the backseat ("If they stick you in the backseat of a car for two hours, what do they expect?") when his fed-up father pulls over to the side of the road and gives him an ultimatum: behave or get out of the car. Richard opts to get out, and as time passes he grows increasingly fond of his ostensible punishment ("An hour later I was kind of used to it. Two hours later it was where I wanted to live"). In fact, he refuses ever to return, and he ends up living in a cozy little tunnel by the
side of the road, becoming a celebrity, and finally meeting a nice girl and raising a family in his tunnel. Though the domesticated ending falls somewhat flat, this is an authentically childish fantasy played out with both sharp intelligence and wide-eyed inventiveness. Feiffer captures the resolute stubbornness of childhood with extraordinary precision (when Richard's father asks his son if he's learned his lesson, "The way he said it made me unlearn the lesson I was right then in the middle of learning"), mapping acute insights about family and relationships onto the deceptively casual narration. The text is housed in white bars that run across page tops and bottoms, making the fluid, often shadowy black-and-white art burrow through the pages and echoing the physically strictured world wherein Richard finds his freedom. Ultimately, this is both a youthful fantasy about tremendous potency, with Richard's will triumphing over that of his parents, and a fable of maturation, with Richard separating from his family, achieving independence, and reuniting with them on an adult footing. The sheer subversive joy of the former will be invigorating, and some readers may even absorb the subtle point of the latter. DS


As the title suggests, this is an alphabetical menagerie, treating the wild kingdom from alligator to zebra. Frampton introduces each creature with a pithy couplet (or, in a few cases, a triplet), often joking about the critter's characteristics ("O is for octopus, a fun guy to meet. You can shake his eight hands, or are they eight feet?"; "V is for vulture. They dine on decay. A truly disgusting and smelly buffet. But better than broccoli any old day!"). The couplets are sometimes rhythmically problematic and a little forced, but the contrivances themselves can be funny and the humor is effectively geared for its audience ("J is for jaguar. Her mom did insist/Go wash again! There's a spot that you missed!"). The palette in the woodcut illustrations sometimes seems a little dusty due to the absence of black, but colors are enjoyably fanciful, emphasizing contrast in each illustration. Each page's design is satisfyingly replete without being overcrowded: thick hatching in lighter colors creates highlights, marrying well with imaginative and elegant stipples, dots, and lines that give this zoo a classy rusticity, whether it be in the flock of scarlet and smoky purple butterflies or the wrinkly, baleful-eyed orange rhino. For kids not ready for Douglas Florian's Mammalabilia (BCCB 3/00), this is an exotic and amusing bestiary. DS


Frank delivers on his titular promise, offering a genuine effort at understanding the attack and its probable genesis and, most importantly, attempting to view the United States through the eyes of its enemies ("Some have felt that by trying to understand their motives, we are excusing what they did . . . But you can change only what you understand"). A reporter for Time magazine who has covered the
terrorist attack, Frank exhibits well-tested skill in analyzing a complex event and organizes his material into a navigable question-and-answer format with clear chapter and intra-chapter headings, detailed index, comprehensive glossary, and a timeline of the thirteen critical hours of September 11 running unobtrusively along the bottom of each page. The real selling point, though, is his cool-headed approach to inflammatory subject matter, from the broad continuum of women’s rights in different Islamic countries, to the history of holy war (“Knights of Europe traveled to Palestine in the first of eight vain attempts to drive all Muslims from the Holy Land. Those who went were promised eternal bliss in Heaven. Sound familiar?”), to candid critique of America’s foreign policy (“As the most powerful nation on earth, America can go wherever its wants to but doesn’t always think about what is best for the locals. Because we don’t want Middle Eastern countries to collapse in a revolution and be taken over by rulers less friendly to us, our leaders have meddled in the nations’ affairs”). Like Andrzejewski (above), Frank cautions against erosion of civil liberties in the aftermath of last year’s attack: “Every individual has the right to question, to speak out, to make sure their rights are safe. Democracy is about participation.” Readers who join Frank in asking “Why?” will be better able to debate “What comes next?” EB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029217-2 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-0688-17864-2 $15.95 R Gr. 5-8

In a notable departure from her contemporary school and family tales, Gilson turns to the early seventeenth-century English Separatists who sojourned in Holland prior to their ultimate settlement at Plymouth Colony. Twelve-year-old Lizzie, whose parents died soon after their arrival in Leiden, has been taken into the home of congregation leader William Brewster. Determined not to be a burden, Lizzie finds day work as a kitchen maid with a well-to-do local family and strikes up a stormy friendship with their sassy eight-year-old son. The little boy’s mischievous meddling stirs trouble between Lizzie and the straightlaced Brewsters but also alerts the community to a very real threat from English spies, who have come to round up their illegal emigrant countrymen and bring them home for prosecution. Gilson spins this underexamined chapter in the “Pilgrim” story into an engaging piece of historical fiction, evoking with particular skill the Separatist elders’ well-founded fear that their children were being seduced by the permissive ways of their Dutch hosts. Her revelation that Lizzie’s young friend is actually Rembrandt van Rijn (his sketch of Lizzie squatting behind an occupied outhouse is quite a local hit) is an extraneous bit of fluff that taxes credibility. However, Gilson’s foray into the past is, overall, a successful venture, and her knack for dialogue, honed on kidspeak in the here-and-now, transports readers smoothly to the way-back-when. EB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029410-8 $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029409-4 $15.95 M Gr. 4-6

Sixth-grader Jerry Flack (last seen in Dork in Disguise, BCCB 9/99) has—he thinks—successfully left his dork persona behind him at his old school. Conviced to run for class president by his best friend/girlfriend, Brenda, Jerry finds himself in competition with cool and popular Gabe Marshall. Gabe is also something of a bullying jerk, and the contest quickly turns nasty: Gabe takes unflatter-
ing photos of the unathletic Jerry slipping all over the ice at the local rink and passes them around; Jerry responds by pouring green goo all over Gabe and putting the photos up on his campaign website. Gabe retaliates with increasingly dangerous pranks, including holding Jerry by his legs out a second floor window (while a cohort takes photos of the terrified, screaming Jerry with a telephoto lens) and ambushing him in the bathroom and cutting off hunks of his hair just before his public campaign speech. There are some serious issues here, but the book fails to deal with them effectively, whitewashing the effect of Gabe’s harassment in order to get Jerry onto the high road (he remains nobly silent about Gabe’s actions). Conversations are stilted, and the adult point of view is clumsily inserted (Jerry muses on Gabe as class president: “It was unthinkable that he might win the presidency and use his position for nothing more than helping out the students who disrupt everyone else. The sixth grade at Hawthorne Middle School deserved better than that”). Though there’s some leavening humor, this unrealistic look at bullying in middle school is ultimately full of adult wishful thinking; kids know better. JMD

HAAS, JESSIE Shaper. Greenwillow, 2002 186p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-000170-4 $16.95 Ad Gr. 5-8

Fourteen-year-old Chad is still bitter about the death of his beloved dog, Shep (shot by his grandfather after being irreparably injured in a road accident), and he refuses to care for the family’s goofy new dog, Queenie. His interest is nonetheless piqued by his new neighbor, animal trainer David Burton (and his gorgeous fifteen-year-old daughter, Louise), and by David’s proposal that he use Chad in his work. After working with David, Chad is surprised to realize that heedless Queenie can actually be intelligent and responsive, but he’s still wary of connecting with her or doing anything else that suggests forgiveness for Shep’s terrible end. There are some compelling plotlines—Chad’s grief, his yearning for Louise, his rejection of his grandfather—and the book perceptively treats the human difficulties involved in seeing new ways of relating to and training animals. The writing is sometimes skittery, however, shooting off confusingly in different directions within a paragraph or even a sentence, and the plot elements sometimes lack sufficient individual exploration or connection with each other; the discussions of training philosophy (shaping an animal’s behavior using a clicker) are also sometimes more evangelistic than clear or fairly assessed. Haas is still better than most authors at writing about the human-animal relationship, however, and readers looking for something more than a simple dog story may find this absorbing. DS

HAWES, LOUISE Waiting for Christopher. Candlewick, 2002 224p
ISBN 0-7636-1371-1 $15.99 Ad Gr. 7-10

Fourteen-year-old Feena, recently moved to her small Florida town with her divorced mother, has no friends and a barren life. When she witnesses toddler Christopher being spanked repeatedly by his mother and sees how his mother leaves him alone, threatening not to come back, she whisks him away on an impulse. After her secret is discovered by Raylene Watson, a popular classmate, the two girls decide to save Christopher from his abusive mother and team up to take care of him—but Feena can’t quite forget Christopher’s now-childless mother. The plot is such a complicated house of cards that the smallest puff of logic blows it right down. Despite farfetched motivations, and outrageous coincidences, however,
there are psychological layers here that remain compelling. The characterizations of the two girls are solid even when the plot is not, and Christopher's winning personality will draw readers. Hawes capably captures the blank despair of Feena's life, her grief over a baby brother dead of SIDS, the hope kindled by her friendship with the indomitable Raylene. While readers may hoot at the contrivance of the plot, the emotional drama will hold until the last page has been turned. JMD


Who does most of the work? Female bees, that's who, as readers learn in this attractive introduction to the honeybees' life cycle. With a brief nod to the queen and her male drones, Heiligman focuses on metamorphosis and the roster of sequential duties that a worker bee experiences in her six-week life—cleaning her cell, nursing larva, tending the honeycomb, grooming the queen, guarding the hive, foraging for nectar and pollen. This title is more simplified than Gail Gibbons' *The Honeymakers* (BCCB 4/97), omitting information about beekeeping and honey processing as well as Gibbons' more thorough detail of insect anatomy. With Golembe's vividly colored gouache scenes magnifying the bees' activities, however, this is a more accessible introduction for group sharing. EB


Lu is floating through her senior year, staying stoned most of the time and trying to keep out of trouble long enough to graduate and get out of town. She's not exactly tied down: her widowed father has basically written her off as a pothead and juvenile delinquent, barely speaking to her except to offer the occasional criticism of her clothes, behavior, or attitude. Things change, however, when Jay, a friend of Lu's older brother, moves back to town, overwhelming Lu with memories of her childhood years and with attraction to Jay. Soon Jay and Lu are embarked on a torrid relationship that occupies most of Lu's attention, even though her troubled (and unexpectedly pregnant) friend Gin needs Lu's support. Although there's a lot of action packed into these pages, Henson's deft pacing sustains the tension of events throughout the text, allowing narrative segments to overlap like a series of waves, with one receding just as another splashes to the foreground. Scenes with the sexually manipulative drug dealer (from whom Lu buys marijuana) are appropriately creepy, but her drug use is portrayed as a deliberate means of tuning out a world that's simply delivering more action than Lu knows how to handle. Although this story isn't comfortable, it is real; teen readers will appreciate the lack of condescension in this book that tells it like it is for many young people. KM


In a time of knights and battles, princesses and magic, Ulf is the "wizard's boy," an outlander captured in a raid and forced to serve in the household of the king. One day a mist fills the woods and ravine near the castle; in the mist Ulf sees a dog,
golden and wolf-like. A whistle calls the dog across the ravine—and across time, since the dog, Duchess, belongs to present-day-dweller Jeremy. Unfortunately, all the adventure is on Ulf's side of the ravine (kidnapping, magic, danger, rescue, etc.), and the everyday drama of Jeremy's modern life pales in comparison. The connections between the two worlds are tenuous and sometimes forced, and the conveniences of plot and magical capabilities occasionally give pause. Still, Ulf's story (based on the German hero saga of Gudrun the Fair) is compelling, and even though the bridge between the worlds is an insubstantial one, readers may still be willing to chance their way across. JMD

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029544-9 $14.89  R Gr. 4-7

Jiang (author of the autobiographical *Red Scarf Girl*, BCCB 2/98) tells eighteen brief stories of the Magnificent Monkey King, from his birth as Stone Monkey on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits to his reign as Magnificent Monkey King, from his sojourn in heaven as impudent servant to the Jade Emperor to his imprisonment inside a mountain by the great Buddha. Stories of the Chinese mythic hero are tricky to translate for younger audiences, but these adaptations employ vigorous language that easily communicates the life force of the merry and mischievous Monkey. This legendary trickster is both foolish and clever, irritating and ingratiating; in many ways he is like a rambunctious, self-absorbed adolescent, whose boorish tendencies are as repellent as his confident panache is irresistible. Jiang's concise, funny introduction to this contradictory character is suitable for storytelling and reading aloud, as well as being a smooth text for reading alone. Black-and-white illustrations by Su-Kennedy, done in the style of Chinese block prints, are interspersed throughout, and while they sometimes make this mischievous Monkey look a touch too innocent, they do capture his insouciant flair. JMD

ISBN 0-689-83253-2 $15.95  R Gr. 7-12

Mike (Michaela) provides the hauntingly disembodied voice of this compelling novel that chronicles family life after "my brother, Red, just disappeared from us forever." However, the anticlimactic story behind Red's drowning (revealed within the last five pages) is not the focus; indeed, facts are supplied sparingly and off-handedly by a narrator who finds her own age, race, and gender (though not her location) irrelevant in the context of her loss of the one person who until three months previously "was always there, and we were always us." A family history does emerge, however—Mike's father grew up in project housing but her mother is a native of Cape Cod (where the story is set), descended from 120 years of "dark, long-ago faces"—and Mike's extended family (especially eccentric Aunt Caroline and Jo, a freethinking neighbor) provide understanding and support. The novel is broken up into three sections—missing, looking, moving on—composed of brief vignettes that chart these stages of grieving and introduce the sporadic appearances of Red as a ghost. In the end, a ghostly ancestor (first seen by Mike years earlier when she and Red had run away from home) joins Red and they disappear, just after Mike begins to feel for the first time since his death "like I'm not being led by a remote control." Emotional intensity casts a New England fog over many of the
usual narrative guideposts, but the novel’s strong sense of place and familial relationships provides readers with some solid ground from which to make connections or gain insights. FK


The narrator recalls the summer that his young brother, Joey, “took sick” with what at first appears to be a standard stomachache but proves to be something more serious: “Joey was dying.” As Joey’s decline continues, his family and friends deal as best as they can with the difficult present and the looming future, while Joey pieces a quilt depicting the things he’s loved. Johnston’s free-verse lyric is concise and eloquent, and she provides some telling touches (“I learned a lot that summer.... How to make a bed with your brother in it”); the understatement realistically conveys the family’s stunned silence about their loss. Unfortunately, it also means that children will be left with many questions (they’ll wonder, for instance, why no doctor is mentioned, what makes Joey’s hair fall out, and whether their own simple tummyaches are also lethal), and the retrospective adult tone (the events seem to take place in some unspecified past) and tendency toward overartful simile and metaphor (“hope/ fluttered inside us, like a little green/ bird”) further pull the story away from the concrete and into a polished, sentimental bedside vigil. Moser’s grayscale portraits of the family in photographic borders effectively suggest the haze of memory over these pre-sadness scenes, contrasting with the occasional full-color image of Joey’s friends, his quilt, and finally the surviving narrator clutching Joey’s beloved dog; though the faces are sometimes awkward, the images are a sophisticated evocation of the change between then and now. Ultimately this is more effective artistically than emotionally, but the underlying story of loss may still touch audiences. DS


A very ordinary earth-tunneling mole diligently pursues his daily work and returns home to bask in the love of his wife and Babymole, and the single cloud over his domestic bliss drizzles a few drops of jealousy over the Smartmoles, Bigmoles, and Starmoles in the glittery world outside his experience. All that changes on the day when two airborne dragons attack and destroy two “mountains” the moles have labored so hard to build. Overcoming his initial paralyzing fear, Mole joins a host of other “moles who were nobody special” to dig through the wreckage and rescue trapped survivors, earning the title of Bravemole. Jonell’s fable, transparently based on the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, is rife with reverent intention, illustrated with an endearing cast of soulful, rosy-proboscised moles, and delivered with flashes of graceful storytelling: “He would see Smartmoles whisking by, looking very crisp as to whiskers and very bright as to teeth, and he wondered what it would be like to be one of them.” However, the tale narrowly misses two potential audiences: it is too text-intensive to hold little listeners, and it’s too heavy-handed to pass muster with older readers. Adults commemorating the events of September 11th with their children may appreciate the emotional cushioning of this fantasy, but many will find Mole’s comforting words to Babymole, “You will not have
to fight these dragons. We grown-ups will fight them for you,” a promise they cannot make with confidence. EB


When Mommy bangs the pans around in the kitchen and “forgets” to kiss Daddy goodbye, her sons worry that they’ve done something to provoke her (“Did you color on the walls again?” demands the older Christopher of younger brother Robbie), but then Christopher realizes that “maybe it’s Daddy she’s mad at. Maybe it isn’t us at all.” “It feels like us,” Robbie responds, as he alternately tries to cheer and distract his mother to no avail; as a result, Robbie’s own anger grows until he reaches the boiling point and begins “borking” (bumping) his mother while shegardens: “I am a borkupine and I am borking you with my prickles.” Luckily, Robbie’s mom understands what is going on, lets go of her anger, and joins her sons in a gentle game of pretend until Daddy returns home and all is made right. Jonell uses realistic dialogue and a touch of humor to bring this all-too-common scenario to credible life; Mommy’s black mood, Christopher’s worry, and Robbie’s puzzlement and anger are believably communicated in a way that will resonate with many families. Mathers’ childlike colored-pencil art, in which human beings are reduced nearly to stick figures, is sometimes so naïve and flat as to be rather awkward. Still, the simplified faces and bodies are surprisingly emotive, and the pages in which Robbie’s angry actions take up the entire spread (rather than staying neatly contained within frames, as do the illustrations on the other pages) are particularly effective. It’s not unusual to see kids dealing with their own anger in picture books, but it’s somewhat rare to see children dealing with adult anger; while the resolution may come a bit easily here, kids will find relief in the reassuring ending and satisfaction in seeing a child, rather than an adult, as the agent of peacemaking. JMH


The nameless African-American narrator lives with his mother and brother in a dangerous neighborhood in an anonymous city. At night they look out the window and squeeze their eyes, pretending that they “live on the moon,” far away from the dangers outside their windows (“If there’s shots fired, we say it’s the light of the stars crackin’ the darkness”). When the narrator’s brother, Richard, starts hanging around with “gang bangers,” the narrator and his mother work together to begin to organize their neighborhood against the influence of gangs. In the end, the neighborhood is successfully organized, and now the stars in the darkness are the flashlights of neighbors who have joined the nightly Peace Walks. This is undeniably programmatic, but Joosse’s narrator has a sure voice that young children will recognize; when his brother denies his gang involvement, the narrator says, “Richard thinks I’m a little kid, but I’m not as little as he thinks. I know what I know.” Christie’s signature style uses thick brushstrokes to depict people with exaggerated facial features and enlarged heads, accurately capturing the tension and fear of people living in a war zone. Although some may find that the purpose overrides the story, this will nevertheless appeal to young listeners who crave order.
in their lives and the triumph of good neighbors over the evil of the streets. A list of gang-prevention resources is included. KM


When Jude, son of a swineherd in fourteenth-century England, attends a fair, he meets Jing-Wei, a young Chinese noblewoman exhibited as a freak because of her slanted eyes, brown skin, and bound feet. After a fire-breathing dragon annihilates Jude’s family and home village, the boy joins the circus and becomes keeper to Jing-Wei; soon the two flee the circus together, finding shelter in the home of Lan, an old Chinese wise woman who lives in the woods. Lan has a plan to kill the marauding dragon with dynamite and kites, the knowledge of which she brought with her from China, and a determined Jing-Wei and a reluctant Jude travel to the dragon’s lair to carry out the plan. The setup is awkward and the openings and closings of the chapters are repetitive (Jude is telling his story to a monk, who’s transcribing it, and each chapter opens with Jude saluting the monk and commenting on their progress; each chapter closes with Jude’s promise to continue the following day). There is little momentum and no suspense (the reader knows from the start that Jude and Jing-Wei are safe at the monastery), and the storytelling is marred by anachronistic characterizations, artificial dialogue, and unlikely plotting. The author’s note discusses the nature of scriptoria in fourteenth-century England, the scientific advances of Chinese civilization, and other “based in historical fact” elements of the text, in addition to explaining the authorial whimsy of treating fire-breathing dragons as history. JMD

KEEHN, SALLY M. *Anna Sunday.* Philomel, 2002 266p ISBN 0-399-23875-1 $18.99  Ad  Gr. 5-8

When a letter arrives informing thirteen-year-old Anna and her brother Jed that their father has been wounded and is not expected to survive, Anna dons overalls, chops off her hair, and with Jed and their cousin’s “Bible horse” crosses the Confederate line into Virginia, where their father is being tended by rebel “she-devil” Mrs. McDowell. This grandmotherly widow, the children discover, is a staunch advocate of states’ rights but adamantly anti-slavery, and she’s taken better care of their beloved Pa than the Union private who’s ostensibly in charge. Pa rallies, but just when it seems that they’ll be able to smuggle him back to Pennsylvania, Lee’s troops retake the Union-controlled fort near the McDowell farm and the family is separated once again. Keehn conjures up an intriguing cast of players: simple-minded, God-praising Cousin Ezekiel and his sturdy plow horse that only responds to shouted Scripture passages; profiteering sutler Mr. Eli, who drugs the children to steal their horse; Mrs. McDowell and her grandson Joshua, who may or may not have been responsible for Pa’s injury and who may or may not be Confederate spies. Unfortunately, Keehn expends more energy setting up than following up promising characters and storylines, and the rushed happy ending (the family is reunited and Mrs. McDowell is now disguised as a man as well) leaves too many subplots dangling. The payoff may be small, but Anna is a likable narrator with a strong, distinctive voice, and Samson the “Bible horse” is worth the price of admission. EB
As the opening text states, "Somewhere, right now, someone is drinking water." This exceptionally handsome photoessay explores the many ways people obtain this fundamental element—drawing it from a community spigot or a murky river, hefting it on a shoulder yoke or stacking it in flats of gallon bottles, collecting it from a dripping rooftop or lapping it straight from a spurting fountain. Photographs have been selected not only for content but also for artistry of composition, and they've been juxtaposed to evoke cultural contrasts. A man from Oman stands before towering stacks of clay pots, holding a luminous jug in his broad hands; opposite, a graceful glass pitcher of ice water stands beside plates of fruit, suggesting not only the universality of the bulb shape, but also the hedonistic Western pleasure of chilled water on a hot day. A denim-clad hiker pauses in a niche of flame-colored, eroded rock, squeezing his "designer" water from a plastic bottle, while the Australian cowboy on the facing page tips a burlap bag to his lips—his bag, hat, and leathery skin a harmony of browns against a deep blue sky. Two final spreads offer brief notes on the geographical location and context of each photo and comment on the dwindling supply of potable water. The pictures alone, though, speak eloquently of how this precious commodity is variously treasured or taken for granted throughout the world, and reflective viewers will discern that a region's affluence can be measured not only in terms of money but also in terms of its vital resources. EB

Eerie cover art—paper and fiber collage of bin Laden's head framed by money bag, bomb, crossed bones, and a flame-dotted title cursively rendered in fuse-like string—offers an accurate indication of the vitriolic contents ahead. With the title's text largely prepared before the attack of past September and with the subject currently (ahem) unavailable for interview, Landau cobbles together a biography from a narrow selection of secondary sources, adding opening chapters on 9/11 and pushing all the necessary buttons to set the Stars and Stripes a-wavin': "[The WTC] was a towering landmark that reflected the United States at its best"; "It's nothing short of state-sponsored terrorism." Unnamed "scholars," "officials," and "experts" offer an indiscriminate melange of fact and opinion, and Landau is well past the halfway mark in her discussion before she begins to incorporate supporting evidence and connect the dots between terrorist activities and the fruits of U.S. and international investigation into them. Adolescents who wade through the verbiage (ineffectively assisted by a glossary that defines "famine" but not "sanctions") will probably derive as fair an outline of bin Laden's life—from overlooked young sibling, to playboy, to freedom fighter, to financier and coordinator for radical Islamist warriors—as it's currently possible to learn. However, outdated material (the Taliban-backed Afghanistan government is apparently still in power), undersourced allegations (whatever their inherent truth), and breathless prose do little to aid American readers in understanding why they've come under attack.
LOURIE, PETER  On the Trail of Lewis and Clark: A Journey Up the Missouri River; written and illus. with photographs by Peter Lourie. Boyds Mills, 2002 48p ISBN 1-56397-936-5 $19.95  Ad Gr. 4-8

Having tailed the historical Sacagawea on one part of the Corps of Discovery's journey, Lourie now navigates the Missouri in the wake of Lewis and Clark's keelboat with several friends, a fiberglass twenty-two-footer, a motorized canoe, and a Ford Bronco trailing along as backup. Even with comforts and securities that the Corps could never imagine, the trip is an arduous one, with floodwaters, blind channels, spent fuel, and nasty weather, and even as Lourie observes the changes that development and hydrological technologies have brought to the Missouri, he catches a glimpse of stretches of wilderness that the nineteenth-century mission would have experienced as well. In a departure from his more tightly focused traveler's tales (notably, Rio Grande, BCCB 4/99, and The Lost Treasure of the Incas, 11/99), Lourie never quite defines just whose story he's telling here, the Corps' or his own, and the text meanders uneasily among descriptions of the regions, quotes from the explorers' journals, and snippets of his team's immediate adventures. With the Expedition's bicentennial just around the corner, librarians readying their collections may nonetheless want to include this title as a useful update on the route. EB


Pasty-faced Quentin III ("seldom seen and never heard") is just too good to be true, while his untidy doppelganger, Quentin 3, is just the opposite ("Quentin's shadow answered back/ and always took the last at snack"), until III finally breaks out and gives in to the urge to "be bad—a bit./ To throw a little tiny fit," leaving 3 to fill—temporarily—the role of good boy. The contrast between these delicate-featured upper-crust oddities (portrayed in old-fashioned short pants) is apparent as soon as Quentin 3 enters the picture, since his elongated form repeatedly refuses to be restrained by the roughly square confines of the art, instead poking out beyond the borders. The bouncy rhythms and playful vocabulary of the dynamic text provide an appropriate sense of barely maintained order that complements the exaggerations and quirky details in the clean, clearly focused illustrations. Though the story is finally more remarkable for its symmetry than its insights, youngsters receptive to the charms of the polysyllabic and mannered will enjoy this light-hearted exploration of the two faces of childhood. FK


Compressing even just one period of art history into a small volume is a daunting challenge, but these entries in the Art around the World series provide a tasty
buffet of art in small bites. Each volume treats significant movements concisely in a spread or two, explaining the movement's philosophy, mentioning its main artists, and offering several representative images; the range is impressive, with *Modern Art* including lesser-discussed directions such as Die Brücke and Social Realism, and *Contemporary Art* helping readers understand confusing movements such as Minimalism and Land Art. While the focus is largely Euro- and USA-centric, there is some genuine "around the world" exploration in sidebars about art in specific countries and regions, from France and the Soviet Union to the South Sea Islands and India, which provide some eyeopening insights into surprising artistic connections and influences. These don't have the depth of Greenberg and Jordan's works (*The American Eye*, BCCB 12/95, etc.), but they're imaginative and compact treatments, and they'll be mighty useful for quick explorations or pre-museum-visit overviews. Each volume includes a chronology of its period, a brief history of art, a rather scanty glossary (which would have been a great place to provide pronunciation guides for many difficult terms), and an index. DS

**MASON, SIMON  The Quigleys; illus. by Helen Stephens.** Fickling, 2002 148p ISBN 0-385-75006-4  $14.95  R  Gr. 2-4

The Quigleys are an amiable family of four (Mum, Dad, Will, and Lucy, frequently known as Poodle), struggling with the obstacles of daily life. Each family member, small or large, gets a chapter in the spotlight (which isn't always entirely flattering). In general, the kids get the best of things: while babysitting for the neighbors' children, Dad manages to misplace one of his charges until Lucy saves the day, and Mum's birthday goes from bad to worse until the kids provide a proper celebration. In her own chapter, clever little Lucy manages to march down the aisle as a bridesmaid clad in the bee costume of her dreams, and rounding out the book is the saga of Will's carefully laid plans for an avian Christmas present. While the book sometimes laughs at the kids rather than with them, everybody else gets laughed at as well, and the humor is warm and perceptive, rooted in daily realities ("The house seemed very quiet without Mum. It was incredible to think how much noise she must make when she was there") and vivid turns of phrase ("Lucy hated Dad's cauliflower cheese. She stared at it angrily, as if trying to frighten it away"). The milieu is British from start to finish, and there's the same affectionate haphazardness as in Ahlberg's *The Woman Who Won Things* (BCCB 6/02; there's also some of the accessibility of Judith Caseley's *Hurricane Harry* (BCCB 11/91), making this an eminently suitable readaloud for younger kids as well. Line drawings in a fierce scribble have an energetic childlike minimalism. DS

**MATTHEWS, JOHN  The Barefoot Book of Knights; illus. by Giovanni Manna.** Barefoot, 2002 80p ISBN 1-84148-064-9  $19.99  R  Gr. 4-6

Tom of Warwick is sent to the castle to be a page and to learn the ways of knights and chivalry. While there, the young boy hears seven stories of knights from around the world from Master William, the Armorer. The frame for the knights' tales—Master William tells them to the pages and scribes to illustrate some pointed message about knighthood and the chivalric code—is a bit purposive, but it doesn't detract from the tales themselves. Matthews' retellings, from the tale of King Arthur's Kitchen Knight to the story of a Japanese samurai, employ vivid images
that will capture readers and listeners. Line-and-watercolor illustrations feature fairly jolly characters (considering their sometimes dangerous circumstances) engaged in traditional knightly pastimes (riding horses, rescuing damsels, conquering evil, etc.). Stylistically the paintings are reminiscent of but more playful than Zwerger’s watercolors, with a lighter palette and more cartoonish characterizations; even the page numbers have humor, reflecting as they do the themes of the stories. A page of sources has suggestions for further reading. JMD


“Ten little lambs who won’t go to sleep. What will they do all night?” Any parent or child with sleepover experience knows that these “lams” will surely cavort into the wee hours, and, sure enough, the unruly sheep “tackle and tumble, wrestle and rumble,” slide down piles of bedding, and tell stories, as one by one they drop off to sleep in this rhyming bedtime countdown that puts a new twist on “counting sheep.” This entertaining look at overnight antics handily balances the freewheeling fun with the inevitable sleepiness, while the rhythmic text manages to be rollicking in its rhyme and content (“they’ll plow winding freeways through piles of pj’s”) yet soothing in its pattern and repetition of phrases (“___little lambs who won’t go to sleep. What will they do all night?”). Sweet’s cotton-candy-hued watercolor and colored-pencil illustrations set the stage by making it clear that the frolicking “lams” are actually human children, shown arriving for the sleepover and then settling down to sleep before the more literal lamb counterparts take over the action. Each spread also shows which lamb will be the next to succumb to slumber (the one who yawns), while an increasing number of small insets keep track of those who have already fallen asleep. The pajama-clad lambs themselves are amusingly exuberant in their activity (wide eyes, open mouths, and flailing limbs predominate) and endearingly cuddly when asleep. Bring this title out for a lively bedtime readaloud or as the perfect ending to a pajama storytime; then watch your listeners drift off to sheep, uh, sleep. JMH

MELTZER, MILTON *Ten Kings and the Worlds They Ruled*; illus. by Bethanne Andersen. Orchard, 2002 132p ISBN 0-439-31293-0 $21.95 R Gr. 5-10

Following his *Ten Queens* (BCCB 7/98), Meltzer now chronicles a half-score of male rulers, from Hammurabi to Peter the Great; stops in between include fairly traditional choices (Alexander the Great, Charlemagne) as well as potentates of less biographical popularity (Mansa Musa, Atahualpa). As with the previous title, the writing is choppy and occasionally confusing (some entries’ final summary lines seem not to be summarizing but making new claims), and while there’s plenty of comparison to contemporary life and practice, there’s little placement of these kings into context with one another. Nonetheless, there’s a wealth of significant information here: Meltzer is particularly interested in the impact of rulers upon their subjects, which leads to some unusual discussions of the reasons some empires succeeded (“One thing that helped Alexander win people to his side was the fact that he banned ravaging and looting”) as well as the reasons for their demise (“After Attila’s death his three sons quarreled over the distribution of power”). Between this approach and the multinational coverage, this therefore has more global depth than many kingly collective biographies. Andersen’s illustrations have
some of the decorative quality of Jane Ray’s, but the sweeping brushstrokes give them an organic grain in the full-page portraits as well as the smaller insets; some of the kings have rather feminine faces, but they’re vividly depicted and dramatically posed. Maps appear in each chapter; a bibliography and an index are included. DS


Shawn Fanning, who founded Napster and turned the music industry upside down, is now only in his early 20s, and he’s therefore an unusual subject for a biography. Mitten presents him as a young genius who had a remarkable idea about file sharing at a remarkably opportune moment in the history of the Internet, creating the program Napster which allowed people across the country to swap musical recordings. Although the several lawsuits, court dramas, and corresponding arguments about musical property rights are given significant air time, Mitten’s bias is clearly towards Fanning’s position, and as a result descriptions of legal events seem slanted to support Fanning’s heroic status; the choppy writing also becomes wearing. Nevertheless, Mitten offers concise and accurate explanations of crucial aspects of the Napster phenomenon, such as file compression, MP3 (the format which made music swapping possible), and bandwidth, the limited availability of which caused many major universities to ban access to the Napster website. Although Fanning is the central player, this is really a chronicle of the dramatic events surrounding the creation, implementation, and eventual outlawing of Napster. Despite the book’s flaws, many libraries will want to purchase a copy because of the dearth of material on topics such as this, where advances in technology make things possible long before courts have decided whether they are legal; Napster is unlikely to be the last such event in the burgeoning history of technological innovation. A bibliography and index are included. KM

Montgomery, Sy Encantado: Pink Dolphin of the Amazon; illus. with photographs by Dianne Taylor-Snow. Houghton, 2002 73p ISBN 0-618-13103-5 $18.00 Ad Gr. 4-8

This title returns to the same subject as Montgomery’s adult book, Journey of the Pink Dolphin: An Amazon Quest, describing her experiences in the Amazon Basin as she tried to understand more about the pink freshwater dolphin. Montgomery uses a second-person narration to put the reader mid-canoe (“You’re over the log, but you’re not out of trouble”), and the adventures include seeing a wide array of wildlife and meeting various people (from biologists to locals) as well as engaging in elaborate attempts to see as much of the dolphins as possible. This isn’t as successful as Montgomery’s The Snake Scientist (BCCB 4/99): the second-person narration seems merely an evasion of the autobiographical nature of the experience, the poetic emphasis on the mysteriousness of the dolphin sometimes becomes overly sentimental and romantic, and the organization inclines towards the haphazard, especially since the book out of necessity spends most of its time on matters other than the dolphin itself. The pink creatures are indeed fascinating, however, and the larger picture of the Amazon is a vivid and compelling one with a useful ecological emphasis. The actual pictures are somewhat of a mixed bag,
since not all of them manage to surmount the difficulty of the circumstances and instead appear fuzzy or dark, but there are evocative views of the scenery and the flora and fauna. Readers will be disappointed at the paucity of information about the magnetic dolphin, but there's useful information here to pique the interest of budding environmentalists or to enhance a unit on the rainforest. The final few pages include a hodgepodge of additional information such as Amazon-expedition agencies, "Weird Whale Facts," and a collection of Amazon statistics in addition to a rather eclectic list of books for further reading; an index is also included. DS

MOON, RUSSELL  
Witch Boy.  
HarperTempest, 2002  
203p  
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-440795-0  
$6.95  
R Gr. 7-12

Marcus has been undergoing some strange changes since he turned seventeen, such as acquiring the ability to move things with only his mind ("I've thrown a lot of crap now, in the last six months"), but he's more concerned about a conventional change: he and his mother are moving away. He's particularly distressed at leaving behind Jules, the girl who's his best friend; when they attempt to say goodbye by becoming more than just friends, however, something goes terribly, tragically wrong. The problem is that Marcus isn't sure exactly what—is Jules dead? did he kill her?—and the situation is further worsened when he finds at his new school a girl who's a dead ringer for Jules, a girl who seems to know about his powers and who has knowledge Marcus doesn't about both his past and his destiny. The story has a stark and impressive setup, effectively counterpointed by Marcus' wry and bemused narrative, and the central mystery and agony of Jules' fate are compelling indeed. The story loses some impact when it gets into the Wiccan details of An Obair ("It's Gaelic, and it means 'The Business'. It is our business, it is the stuff of our life") and Marcus' new and uninvited colleagues in same, but the underlying enigmas are enough to keep reader interest high. Unanswered questions and a foreshadowed but effective cliffhanger (Marcus meets his supposedly long-dead father, who it is Marcus' destiny to kill) will tempt readers to the forthcoming two volumes in this planned trilogy. DS

NIXON, JOAN LOWERY  
The Making of a Writer.  
Delacorte, 2002  
97p  
illus.  
with photographs  
$16.99  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-73000-4  
$14.95  
R Gr. 5-9

It's hard to imagine there was a time when Joan Lowery Nixon wasn't an established writer, but this cheerful and pithy memoir proves that such an era indeed existed. The author starts with her early youth, where her love of dramatic narrative addicted her to radio programs such as The Lone Ranger and I Love a Mystery ("It was exactly what caring parents like mine would never, ever allow their children to listen to") and led to elaborate dollhouse dramas for public consumption as well as family puppet shows. Her determination to be a writer (obligingly approved of by her late great-aunt, Gussie, at a seance) led her to develop her skills in interesting ways, ranging from attempting to invent new slang to composing poems for her classmates to send off to lonely GIs off fighting World War II; finally, she went after her destiny wholeheartedly, becoming a journalism major at college. This youthful autobiography doesn't have the same sparkle as Betsy Byars' The Moon and I (BCCB 3/92), and the chronicle sometimes veers towards material more familially than generally interesting, but there are plenty of high points to
absorb fans of writers in general and Nixon in particular. The picture of mid-
twentieth-century Los Angeles (“Los Angeles had a big backyard, and it was mine”) adds piquancy, and there’s some low-key but intriguing tension added by Nixon’s modest rebellion against her parents, especially her mother, in opting for a career as a writer; budding authors will empathize as well as emulate. A list of ten writing tips is appended, and inserts offer a panoply of black-and-white photographs of Nixon from beaming baby to young California beauty. DS

NOVAK, MATT  
No Zombies Allowed; written and illus. by Matt Novak.  
Jackson/Atheneum, 2002  
32p  
ISBN 0-689-84130-2  $16.95  
R 4-7 yrs

As Witches Wizzle and Woddle prepare for their annual monster bash, they uncover photographs from last year’s festivities. The photograph of the zombies reminds the pair that said zombies were not ideal guests (“Those zombies kept dropping their eyes in the punch bowl”), so the witches ban them from this year’s party, erecting a “No Zombies Allowed” sign in their front yard. Further cleaning leads to the systematic discovery of other photographs of last year’s awkward guests, the banning of other wild and gruesome creatures (werewolves, swamp creatures, etc.), and larger and larger signs in their yard (“No Ghosts, Skeletons, or Vampires Allowed”). A final sweep of their home, however, reveals photos that cast aspersions on the behavior of witches themselves (“Remember how their brooms knocked everything over?”), leading Wizzle and Woddle to reconsider (“Now that I think about it . . . that wasn’t such a bad party”) and consequently to take down all of the exclusionary signs. Novak’s zingily hued watercolors in stippled textures and characteristic cartoon-like figures with big, bulgy eyes perfectly partner this humorous story, excellent for Halloween and beyond. Aside from its sheer enjoyability, this lively title might be just the thing to spark a spirited discussion on exclusion v. inclusion, even if the zombies do drop their eyes in the punch bowl. EAB

OSBORNE, MARY POPE  
New York’s Bravest; illus. by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher.  
Knopf, 2002  
32p  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-82196-1  $15.95  
Ad 4-7 yrs

Joining the many tributes to New York’s rescue workers on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks is this original tall tale based on legendary nineteenth-century firefighter Mose Humphreys. With hands “as big as Virginia hams” and arms that could “swim the Hudson River in two strokes,” Mose thinks nothing of lifting a trolley car out of the way of his volunteer company and leaping from a burning building with a rescued baby tucked into his top hat, exiting the scene with a modest “Just doing my duty.” His last “documented” call was to a burning hotel, after which he was never seen again (although unconfirmed sightings put him in the California gold mines and in Washington working for Lincoln). Years later an old-time firefighter settles the matter: “Whenever we save folks, he saves them, too . . . he’ll never leave us. He’s the very spirit of New York City.” Johnson and Fancher’s burly artwork captures the muscular feats of the larger-than-life hero and the wry humor endemic to the tall-tale genre. Viewers catch the hoisted trolley car from below, the frantic work of the pumpers from above, Mose’s domestic quarters, crammed with comestible gifts from grateful rescuees, from dead center. The powerful draw of the illustrations, however, cannot fully compensate for a storyline that’s disappointingly light on exploits and that fails, in the end, to
squarely consider that Mose may have actually lost his life in the call of duty. And for a September 11th tribute, that's a grave omission indeed. EB


The nameless narrator of this pithy board book lives in a residence absolutely infested with ghosts, and he enumerates their in-house hangouts as he counts down in rhyme (“There are ten ghosts in the pantry,/ There are nine upon the stairs/ There are eight ghosts in the attic,/ There are seven on the chairs”). Prelutsky's verse, first published in 1977, converts well to board-book use, with its precise rhythm suitable for both a speedy chant and a slow, sonorous intonation; there's clever use made of the naturally suspenseful structure when the quiet “one ghost right behind me” lets go with a climactic “Boo!” Yaccarino’s sturdily drafted illustrations tame the proceedings suitably for the younger audience, emphasizing the domestic rather than the otherworldly: the roundheaded, flickery-tailed ghosts look like microscopic pond creatures turned humongous rather than shades from beyond the grave, and they’re clearly more of a vexation than a terror to the put-upon young lad sharing space with them. Occasionally the artwork is less than rigorously accurate in its interpretation of the text (only six of the seven ghosts are actually “on the chairs,” for instance), but the final page-turn-reveal of the ghostly closeup on “Boo!” will provide just the right amount of shivers for little Halloween novices. DS

Pringle, Laurence Strange Animals, New to Science. Cavendish, 2002 64p illus. with photographs ISBN 0-7614-5083-1 $15.95 R Gr. 4-6

Just when you think all the truly exciting faunal discoveries have been made, along comes the Amazonian electric fish that feasts on the tails of its kin, or the Cuban frog that can squat comfortably on a dime, or the Brazilian graveteiro, nicknamed the “acrobat bird” for its ability to swing on the underside of branches. Pringle investigates some of the more startling discoveries of the past decade, many of which have been well known to people indigenous to their region but are newcomers to the scientific community. Each find receives a two- or three-page description and, usually, an illustration (a fuzzy field photo, a clear studio-style portrait, or a full-color scientific drawing), with just enough data to pinpoint the importance of the discovery and whet the appetite for more information. This is an inviting title for kids on a casual stroll through the Animal Kingdom, as well as those readers permanently camped out in the 590s. An index and a list of organizations supporting animal conservation are appended. EB


Young fans of The Sound of Music musical or movie may well be curious about what happened to Maria von Trapp and her family after they escaped from Austria, or even what Maria was like as a child. In this biography of von Trapp, Ransom fills in those gaps of Maria’s story as she briefly describes Maria’s childhood and rebellious teen years and her family’s experiences in America during and
after World War II, in addition to the more familiar part of her life covered by the
stage play and film. Ransom's writing is serviceable, the life story she tells is defi-
nitely absorbing, and she manages to avoid being adulatory (for example, she makes
it fairly clear that von Trapp's impulsive nature and high standards sometimes
worked to the detriment of herself and her family). However, she sometimes fails
to fully explain particular incidents or glosses over them so quickly that they lose
some of their inherent drama. The passage of time from one incident to the next
is also occasionally confusing, particularly since the order of some events is quite
different from their cinematic and theatrical portrayals; thankfully, a chronology
at the end helps straighten out what happened when. Gray-bordered black-and-
white photos of the traditionally dressed von Trapps and their milieu help to en-
liven the otherwise bare-bones layout. Older readers may want to check out von
Trapp's autobiographies instead, but there aren't many biographies for youngsters
about von Trapp, and, despite the book's flaws, most report writers and Sound of
Music fans are likely to find this title adequate for their needs. Source notes, unfor-
tunately confusingly formatted, are included, along with an index, family tree, and
bibliography. JMH

RASCHKA, CHRIS John Coltrane's Giant Steps; written and illus. by Chris
Raschka. Jackson/Atheneum, 2002 34p
ISBN 0-689-84598-7 $17.00  R* 6-10 yrs
See this month's Big Picture, p. 3, for review.

RECTOR, REBECCA KRAFT Tria and the Great Star Rescue. Delacorte,
2002 184p
ISBN 0-385-72941-3 $14.95  R Gr. 4-7
Tria has lived all her life inside the shelter of her futuristic home, along with her
holographic friend Star and her holographic tutor Mr. Willoughby, and occasion-
ally with her archaeologist mother, who is often away on interplanetary travels.
This cosseted existence comes to an end when Tria gets a frantic call from her
mother, who orders her daughter to attend Back to Basics school—on the Out-
side, where Tria has never been. Before Tria even has time to be frightened, mov-
ers arrive to pack up all her things. Tria manages to hide Star's disk in her shoe and
barely escapes a kidnapping attempt by a fake moving company on the way to the
transport. Rector's narrative is full of intrigue, as Tria tries to rescue her mother,
who has been kidnapped by criminals in search of a device she unearthed on her
latest dig, and to search for the device herself. The thrills and spills are kept lighter
than the plot elements might suggest, avoiding terror in favor of a rollercoaster
reading experience. Rector balances the action-driven plot with her warm portrait
of Tria, a young girl who is adjusting as quickly as she can to a world full of real
people (and germs) instead of holograms. Eventually, the mystery is solved, and
attentive readers will relish the accomplishment of figuring out what the criminals
are looking for just before Tria does. Young science-fiction fans are sure to enjoy
this futuristic romp. KM

REISS, KATHRYN Paint by Magic. Harcourt, 2002 271p (Time Travel Mys-
teries)
ISBN 0-15-216361-1 $17.00  Ad Gr. 5-7
Eleven-year-old Connor is stunned by the sudden change in his mother: the high-
powered lawyer in technological reach of every colleague and client is suddenly Suzy Homemaker, smothering Connor and his sister with attention, insisting on more family time, and—much to the horror of the rest of the family—throwing out the televisions; even more alarming are the sudden and apparently painful trances to which she's now subject. Connor begins to realize that these phenomena are related to a book of paintings, some of which, inexplicably, seem to feature his mother despite being painted fifty years before her birth. When he investigates, he finds himself sucked back to 1926 and the house of painter Fitzgerald Cotton; the artist is obsessed with his lost muse, the woman who stayed for a year, who posed for his pictures, and who disappeared—and who's known to Connor as his mother. Reiss employs some pleasingly unsettling elements: there's appeal in the notion of magic paints that can draw people through time and that force their users to act out dramas of preceding generations (Cotton is the descendent of an evil Renaissance artist, and Connor's mother is related to that artist's captive model), and there's something refreshingly old-fashioned about a son's braving danger to save his mother. The writing often gets in the way of the story, however, with too much discussion and complication (the flashback scenes to Renaissance Italy are distracting) and not enough atmosphere; there's also a lack of credibility in Connor's mother's difficult readjustment to the contemporary era and in the contrived romanticizations, both of the tortured artist and of the simple joys of an earlier era. Still, this may satisfy hungry fans of supernatural intrigue looking for a diverting read. DS

**ROTH, CAROL** *The Little School Bus*; illus. by Pamela Paparone. Cheshire Studio/North-South, 2002 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-7358-1647-6 $15.50
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7358-1646-8 $14.95 Ad 2-5 yrs

A yellow school bus, complete with a driver who looks suspiciously like a salamander, goes on its morning rounds, picking up students from out in the suburbs to the city proper. Each new passenger's ascension onto the bus is heralded by a new rhyme to add to the cumulative chant: "The third one on is a sly, sly fox./ He has no shoes, but he's wearing socks./ A fox with socks,/ a pig in a wig,/ a goat in his coat,/ riding the bus to school, to school, riding the bus to school." The verse is somewhat stilted, with the rhymes driven by necessity rather than cleverness, but audiences will enjoy the energetic cumulation and the chance to practice their ordinal numbers. The loud hues of the illustrations sometimes jostle uneasily for attention, and there's an occasionally muddy tone to the colors. There's plenty of playfulness to the schoolbound critters and the landscape through which they pass, however, and kids will be diverted by the anthropomorphic turn on the familiar experience. Despite the book's drawbacks, audiences will enjoy the mayhem as they enthusiastically chant along. EAB

**SANGER, AMY WILSON** *¡Hola! Jalapeño*; written and illus. by Amy Wilson Sanger. Tricycle, 2002 18p
ISBN 1-58246-072-8 $6.95 R 3-6 yrs

This second entry in the World Snack series takes a simple list of popular TexMex cuisine and turns it into a gleeful gustatory exaltation: "Dance, frijoles negros, with rice we call arroz./ Roll on, enchiladas in your bed of cheese and sauce!" Each entree (and dessert—don't forget the flan) is realized in an inventive collage of cut
paper and fabric. Handmade papers cannily emulate coarse-grained corn tortillas, crinkled bits of green and white tissue spill from taco shells as shredded lettuce and onion, running-stitched brown fabric suggests a mole-drenched chicken leg cozied up beside a plate of flan on a lace tabletop. Sanger supplies no explanation of the dishes, only the occasional translation of a term if it fits neatly into the rhyme: “Here’s la cocina en mi casa/ (that’s the kitchen in my house),/ where I eat a big burrito/ almost wider than my mouth.” She does, however, append a pronunciation guide to help non-Spanish speaking readers make the most of the musical text. With its exuberant verse and sophisticated artwork, this title should have the board-book set pushing away the mashed bananas in favor of spicier fare. EB


After a gradual downslide, twelve-year-old Suzie is finally stuck, locked into fetal position (in what she considers to be a nice safe box that protects her from the world) and unable to speak or swallow, when her uncle finally overrules her parents and takes her to the hospital. From there she’s transferred to a mental hospital for treatment, where very, very slowly she begins to loosen her death grip on her defenses, even letting go a word to those at the hospital with whom she’s connected. It’s only when her beloved older sister, Deanna, visits after being injured by their mother, however, that Suzie is driven to tell the secret she hides: her alcoholic, constantly abusive mother burned Suzie as she later did Deanna, driving Suzie into her imaginary box of safety. This is fairly programmatic right from the start, when it’s clear that Suzie’s psycho mother has spent years destroying her daughter (there are some definite similarities to *Sybil* here), so the focus on a single incident seems rather misplaced (and the prospects for resolution at the end rather overoptimistic). There’s always considerable emotional appeal in a story of a distressed child’s recovery, however, and Suzie’s narration is affecting if sometimes unsubtle. The story also adds touches of realism in the depiction of the larger family dynamic (Dad unwilling to rock the boat, Deanna protective of her sister but more protective of the family, and everybody intent that nobody get Mom in trouble) and in the acknowledged unlikelihood that the girls will ever live with their parents again. While this doesn’t have the impact of Magorian’s *Good Night, Mr. Tom*, it’s a similarly affecting tale of suffering and rescue that may grab both would-be nurturers and those in distress themselves.  DS


Ah, the vigor of toddlers: there’s Lulu, “twirling in her tutu”; Andrew, “acting like a choo choo”; and Zuzu, skipping in “Mama’s muumuu.” While these are rewarding and satisfyingly bouncy activities, they sometimes come at a price, as the three kiddies discover when they each crash to the ground and find themselves slightly the worse for wear (“Oh, no! Boo hoo! Lulu’s got a boo-boo!”). Fortunately, distress is soon eased by a bit of first aid and a lot more caretaker cuddling and soothing, and everybody’s rarin’ to go again. This is brief but all the better for it with this audience, as the focus remains tight and immediate. Singer’s chipper and shareable rhyme gleefully oozes “oo”s, and it offers both sympathy and brisk reassurance that will bolster dent-prone toddlers. Savadier’s art deftly employs
subtle texture in paints and paper to add depth and richness to the images; her zesty lines have a flair reminiscent of Christine Davenier's work, but her cozy multicultural and multigenerational cast have a homey solidity all their own. This inescapable part of kid life doesn't get much attention in literature; fresh and enjoyable as well as welcome, this exception offers what's likely to become a common—and usefully diverting—family or day-care refrain. DS


Ray Halfmoon lives with his grandfather in Chicago, and they're by and large a comfortable and loving family sticking with each other through thick and thin in six easygoing and self-contained chapters. In the first chapter, when Grampa becomes lonesome for his Oklahoma home and his Cherokee-Seminole roots, Ray performs some clever shoe trading in order to acquire a pair of Seminole moccasins that put Grampa "in mind of bein' back home." As the year goes by, the two guys find their sad Christmas away from Oklahoma brightened by their pet-sitting chores, they survive Grampa's disastrous attempt to cut Ray's hair (turning the fiasco into a great opportunity for some display of school spirit and grandfather-son bonding), and they finally make it back to Oklahoma for a family visit. The events are modest, but the charm here lies in the deeply understated text, the sly humor (Ray the ringbearer "couldn't understand why he'd need a pillow to carry a ring. He'd been carrying things his whole life without a pillow"), and the quiet radiance of the relationship between Ray and Grampa. It's certainly valuable to have a genuinely up-to-date look at a Native American family (Ray swaps a nice librarian his high-tops, guaranteed "Indian worn," for the moccasins he gives to Grampa; Ray's uncle reads the Cherokee Advocate on his laptop), but this is a book so permeated with affection that many readers will just bask in the warmth and envy Ray his cool Grampa. The black-and-white illustrations are somewhat literal, but they evince a certain quiet amusement well suited to the text. DS


Without betraying a hint of overt didacticism, Smith imaginatively reduces Earth to a population of a mere hundred persons and provocatively demonstrates through carefully chosen statistics the often-chilling disparities among the world's haves and have-nots: "If all the food were divided equally, everyone would have enough to eat. But the food isn't divided equally. . . . 60 people are always hungry, and 26 of these are severely undernourished. . . . Only 24 people always have enough to eat"; "In the village there are: 42 radios/ 24 televisions/ 14 telephones/ 7 computers." Smith lists, but does not specifically correlate, sources for his statistics, noting areas of disagreement among experts on such volatile topics as population growth and environmental issues. In a closing address to adults using the title with children, he offers activities to promote "world-mindedness." Armstrong's deep jewel-toned, chalky-looking acrylic "village" scenes and Smith's powerful, thematically arranged observations stand confidently on their own. EB

Perrier is, as his name suggests, a pig of privilege, a “pedigreed miniature potbelly pig” owned by the glamorous screen idol Marbella. Despite his pampered and cosseted existence, Perrier sometimes feels “a deep longing, a hankering in his hide, an emptiness in the pit of his little potbelly”; this yearning remains formless until on a country vacation he’s shoved into a mud puddle and the light dawns (“He felt . . . that’s it . . . sensational!”). Scrubbed clean and returned to his posh lifestyle, Perrier begins to pine away from mud deprivation, until one night he sees Marbella in her chic beauty mudpack . . . . The story curves occasionally into archness, but there’s a high and entertaining gloss to the writing (“Try as he might, he could not purge his urge to sludge”), and young audiences will relish the book’s evident approval of the sheer subversive pleasure of wallowing. Matje’s art is très, très fashionable with its trim and elongated figures and its tasteful emphasis on muted apricot and gray tones; the Deco-esque details don’t, however, overpower the slightly overwhelmed little piglet who peeks out at the viewers. There’s always room for another pig in picture-book land, and Perrier will make viewers as happy as a pig in—well, you know. DS


Pete’s a junior surfer who lives for the waves, often holding his own with the older surfers despite being only eleven and looking only eight. He’s struggling for his niche on a new beach when he runs into Blackie, a stray Labrador and a surfer extraordinaire. After initial reluctance, his parents take Blackie to their hearts, but they don’t do the same with Pete’s surfing passion; much to his horror, they ground him for slipping grades just as he needs to prepare for a surfing competition. He’s even more devastated, however, when the competition reveals Blackie’s real owner (a big-time surfer himself), leaving Pete bereft both of his beloved dog and his confidence in his surfing ability. This is a fairly stock sports story, complete with clichés (“But Mom, I’ve gotta surf”; “Before you’re ready to win, pal, you gotta learn how to lose”), and there’s little character to Pete; non-surfers may find the surfing lingo a bit much to wade through (despite the glossary at the end). Surfers, on the other hand, will revel in the detailed descriptions of their beloved pastime, which will also convey some of the allure to noninitiates, and everybody will become attached to Blackie, the gentlemanly companion and gifted surfer, who’s an original as well as an appealing conception. Despite the Disneyesque inevitability of the events, readers may enjoy getting their feet wet here. DS


Sammy (from *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief*; BCCB 7/98, etc.) doesn’t like the mall or its video arcade, but she’s hanging out there because she’s so tired of hearing Marissa talk about softball that she’s willing to try anything. That’s her first mistake; her second mistake is taking the heavy shopping bag from the desperate teenager she meets in the arcade. The girl makes Sammy swear to meet her at the
mall later that evening so she can retrieve the contents—one beautiful baby boy—but she never returns, and Sammy is left, literally, holding the bag. Sammy has no illusions about her ability to take care of a baby, so she reluctantly turns him over to her friend on the police force, Officer Borsch, but she can't keep herself from meddling, even when her meddling puts her in progressively more danger. The entry in the popular series has an inexorable momentum; gangs, oaths, loyalty, a girl trying to break free, whiffs of real violence and real redemption keep the story galloping along. Subplots—Sammy is discovered living illegally with her grandmother by a new neighbor; Heather, Sammy's arch-nemesis at school, gets Sammy and her friends suspended from the softball team—also proceed with a consistent liveliness that keeps the pages turning. Holding it all together is the affection between Sammy and her grandmother, a growing fondness between Sammy and Officer Borsch, the solid friendship between Sammy and Marissa, and the possible attraction between Sammy and Casey (brother to, of all people, the horrible Heather). Fast, suspenseful, and just a tad scary, this is just right for those readers looking for some mystery-lite. JMD


Johnson and his older sister Beebee are used to taking care of themselves, but when their mother is gone for longer than usual, social worker Miss Roy intervenes. She places the siblings with their mother's estranged sister, their aunt Gracie, or "Gracie aunt," as Johnson soon calls her; there Gracie and the children adjust to living with each other, talking, cooking, playing, and, sometimes, crying together. After a sad but loving visit with their mother makes it clear that she will not be home any time soon, the children return to their aunt, who promises, "I don't have to go anywhere but here for now." There's a wishful adult sensibility here, and this is an overly idealized picture of the experience of foster care. Nonetheless, the details are uncomplicated yet subtle, the writing is understated, and the emotional relationships that form the core of the story are richly drawn. The lack of specificity—we don't know how long the mother has been gone, exactly why she goes away, what the children's daily life is like, where they live—gives the story a powerful universality. Muth's watercolors treat their subjects tenderly, using soft washes of color and smoky shadows for emotional atmosphere, the siblings' constant togetherness and their articulate faces (and even feet, as Beebee idly toys with her shoes while waiting for Mama). Though somewhat sentimental, this is an effective evocation of an extremely difficult situation with which many children are familiar. JMD

YOUNG, KAREN ROMANO Outside In. Greenwillow, 2002 201p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029368-3  $16.89 Ad Gr. 6-9

Twelve in the spring of 1968, Chérie Witkowski finds her sheltered suburban world is expanding thanks to her newly won paper route; while she folds her papers, she reads the headlines, and none of them are good. The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy stun the neighborhood, and the kidnapping and murder of a thirteen-year-old girl from a nearby town brings Chérie an awareness of her own fragility. Outside of the news, friendships ebb and flow,
and change is inevitable: a new baby is on the way, beloved longtime neighbors are moving, and even Aimée, Chérie’s younger sister, learns how to ride a two-wheeler. This novel resembles a memoir as narrator Chérie bears witness to the events of a turbulent summer in the life of a soon-to-be teenager and in the life of a nation. Individual incidents—a friend teased at summer camp, a fight between a husband and wife—are seen in high relief, set against Chérie’s preconceptions and lit by volatile emotions. Chérie has a believable voice, and, despite the retrospective flavor, there’s little imposition of adult viewpoint. Unfortunately, her testimony to this time of change is left unformed and uninformed, with her point of view at the beginning that of a child waiting for things to be explained, changing little from start to finish. The pace of the novel is also overly measured; any forward momentum is tempered by the narrator’s internalization of her own responses to a relatively random sequence of events. Still, those young readers who see their parents and grandparents’ youth as something long ago and far away may appreciate this bridge to a seemingly distant era. JMD


Young et al. take readers on a chronological tour of twentieth-century Vietnam history, from French colonialism through the aftermath of U.S. troop withdrawal in the 1970s. Each chapter is fashioned from standard textbook-style introductory material and an eye-opening range of primary sources—from U.S. antiwar posters and transcripts of Lyndon Johnson’s White House tapes, to North Vietnamese political cartoons and South Vietnamese certificates of safe passage. Telltale signs of authorship by committee rear up occasionally in the form of topics (e.g., the Christmas bombing of Hanoi) taken up briefly, dropped, and resurrected again pages later. Pertinent material is buried in sidebars (“The promised elections of 1956 were not to be”), and some themes are jarringly underreported—the fall of Saigon merits but a clause, women in Vietnam get only a paragraph of a nurse’s testimony, and the plight of returning veterans receives virtually no attention. Moreover, although documents have been selected to articulate a range of viewpoints, no official or unofficial French voices speak to colonialism in Indochina. Still, entries presented are compelling and often provocative, and teens who reconstruct this bit of “ancient” history from disparate images of Woodstock, immolated monks, and M-16s will unquestionably gain much needed perspective. A timeline, glossary, index, and document sources are appended. EB


Little Gator’s big brother opts to nap on the bank rather than go exploring, so Little Gator wanders away. When he runs into several groups of people and a group of herons on their nests, they’re horrified, Responding (for the most part) by shouting “EGAD ALLIGATOR!” and running away. Finally, Little Gator takes a nap on a “log” that turns out to be a python, and then it’s his turn to respond by yelling “EGAD PYTHON!” Despite its slightness, the text offers the kind of action and response that preschoolers find engaging. Unfortunately, it doesn’t
provide a consistent pattern with the exclamations (sometimes the people yell "EGAD ALLIGATOR!" and sometimes they just attack him with arrows or baseball bats without saying anything), so audiences may have a tough time joining in on the fun. McKie's thick acrylic paints render his alligators and people with a childlike simplicity, the blocks of color creating unadorned Matisian shapes with slightly wobbly outlines. With some energetic reading aloud, there may be enough dramatic engagement in this romp to attract preschool group audiences, for whom Little Gator will be a sympathetic hero. KM

Putnam informs us that Gary Soto's new book, reviewed in the June Bulletin as Body Parts in Rebellion: Hanging Out with Fernie and Me, has been retitled Fearless Fernie: Hanging Out with Fernie and Me in the bound book.

In the July/August issue, the review of Sue Heap's What Shall We Play? omitted the recommendation code; the book is rated Ad.

Also in the July/August issue, Emily Rodda's Rowan and the Zebak is incorrectly categorized as the final title in the series; in fact, the series still continues.

The Bulletin regrets the errors.
Blakemore, Catherine  *Faraway Places: Your Source for Picture Books that Fly Children to 82 Countries.*  Adams-Pomery Press, 2002  468p

Blakemore opens this ambitious and eminently useful bibliography with a discussion of the “benefits of picture book travel,” that is, the benefits of exposing American children to stories set in countries other than the United States. She specifies the intended audience for the books she recommends (ages 3-8) and suggests ways for adult caregivers to present these titles to children. The bibliography is divided by region: Africa, Asia, Australia and Oceania, Europe, North America (sans the United States), and South America. Each region is divided alphabetically by country; each country is divided (as applicable) into Specific Locations (such as cities), General (fables, fairy tales, folktales, legends, etc.), Historical Figures, Nonfiction, Stories, Poetry and Songs, and Books. Succinct summaries of more than 900 recommended titles are offered in a narrative format under each section, followed by an alphabetical-by-author title list in the Books section. A location, author, and title index is included, as is an extensive list of resources. Blakemore (an experienced preschool teacher) has pulled together an impressive guide that will not only aid collection development but serve as a useful reference tool as well. JMD

Darby, Mary Ann  *Hearing All the Voices: Multicultural Books for Adolescents;* by Mary Ann Darby and Miki Pryne.  Scarecrow, 2002  264p
ISBN 0-8108-4058-8  $29.50

The title opens with a chapter explaining the authors' experience and their goals; subsequent chapters contain suggestions for using recommended titles in language arts and other classrooms, including directions for literary circles and other concrete, literature-related projects. The definition of multicultural here goes beyond multiethnic, with the authors including books about children living in nontraditional families, coping with major illnesses or other physical challenges, and dealing with such issues as homosexuality, alcoholism, mental illness, racism, and abuse. The booklist itself is an alphabetical list of titles, most of them published in the 1990s, aimed at adolescents between eleven and fifteen years old; each entry contains bibliographic information, a suggested reading and interest level, and an identifier or identifiers (multiethnic, nontraditional family, grief/loss, etc.). The brief annotations are often flawed, sometimes awkwardly written or overly effusive or just plain inaccurate. Still, this is a useful compendium, made more so by the additional information the authors provide. Appendices provide sample literary circles and various subject and use booklists; there are also indices by author and culture. JMD
**SUBJECT AND USE INDEX**

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

Abuse—fiction: Hawes; Shaw
Actors and acting—fiction: Atinsky
ADVENTURE: Chester; Rector
African Americans—fiction: Collier; Johnson
African Americans—stories: Joosse; Woodson
Alligators—stories: Ziefert
ALPHABET BOOKS: Frampton
American Indians—fiction: Alder; Boyden; Smith, C.
Anger—stories: Jonell *When*
Animals: Montgomery; Pringle
Animals—fiction: Haas
Animals—poetry: Frampton
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BIBLE STORIES: Bible; Chaikin
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BIOGRAPHIES: Landau; Meltzer; Mitten; Nixon; Ransom
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Brothers—stories: Joosse
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Brothers and sisters—stories: Woodson
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Civil War—fiction: Keehn

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COUNTING BOOKS: McGinty
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Crime and criminals—stories: Egielski
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Death and dying—fiction: Boyden; Brooks; Ellsworth; Henson; Johnson
Death and dying—poetry: Johnston
Dogs—fiction: Haas; Hickman; Spurr *Surfer*
Dolphins: Montgomery
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Ecology: Montgomery; Pringle
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Friendship—fiction: Collier; Danziger; Easton; Henson
Friendship—stories: Egielski
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Growing up—fiction: Young, K.
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Skeletons—stories: Cuyler
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Technology: Mitten
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Terrorism: Andryszewski; Frank; Landau
Theater: Bany-Winters
Time travel—fiction: Hickman; Reiss
Toddlers—stories: Singer
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Voyages and travel: Lourie
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War—fiction: Alder; Chambers; Disher
Water: Kerley
Witches—fiction: Moon
Witches—stories: Novak
World War II—fiction: Chambers; Disher
Writers and writing: Nixon
The Broken Cat
by Lynne Rae Perkins

“...may be broken, but the picture book itself is indisputably a whole, imaginatively conceived and emotionally satisfying. As Andy and his mother sit tensely in the vet’s waiting room with their injured cat, Andy asks his mom to tell him [about the time she broke her arm]. Perkins gets the telling of an oft-told family story just right... [in her] unpretentious paean to the ability of stories to comfort and connect.” —Starred review / The Horn Book

“The soft watercolors strike just the right note of gentleness in this tender story of a broken cat, a broken arm, and the healing power of love.” —Kirkus Reviews

“While this charming book can be read as a reassuring look at coping... it also works as a captivating family story.” —School Library Journal

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