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PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library Large-scale Digitization Project, 2007.
"In the first of a planned four-book series, Barker imbues the traditional conventions of fantasy with a whimsical Wonderland quality, providing a host of bizarre characters, a fabulous landscape, and a coherent underlying mythology. Teenage Candy [in] Minnesota begins a journey toward her destiny when she dives into a mysterious sea [and] is carried to Abarat, an unusual archipelago of 25 islands. . . . The multilayered adventure story not only embraces the lands of Oz, Wonderland, and Narnia but also offers a wink and a nod to Huxley's *Brave New World*. More than 100 full-color paintings by Barker are appropriately quirky, grotesque, and campy, effectively capturing and expanding on the nuances of the tale."

—Starred review / ALA Booklist

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Under the Moon & over the Sea: A Collection of Caribbean Poems
comp. by John Agard and Grace Nichols; illus. by Christopher Corr, Sara Fanelli, Cathie Felstead, et al.

A good poetry anthology is like a banquet, offering a splendid array of savory delights; the best of them balance familiar tastes with new sensations, exotic ingredients and classic elements. Having already compiled one such lavish buffet in the Caribbean-themed anthology A Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Caribbean Poets (BCCB 12/94), Agard and Nichols now serve up a new repast of over fifty more poems with an enticing Caribbean flavor.

These have a slightly older slant than the entries in the previous title (though many individual poems will delight younger readers and listeners), and they cover a broad and intriguing range in their five thematic sections. The first poems deal with the sea, the defining edge of island life; there are playful lyrics about its denizens, acknowledgments of its force, and ruminations on its place in the changing fortunes of the islands as it brings fateful visitors from across the ocean (“those terrible canoes/ were coming for me”—Pamela C. Mordecai, “Aximu’s Awakening”). The next section treats the supernatural, offering trickster poems, creepy chants, tales of jumbies, duppies, and ghosts, and responses to same (“Then is when/ I does wish I didn’t listen/ to no stupid jumbie story”—Grace Nichols, “I Like to Stay Up”). The land itself serves as the inspiration for the third section, with special attention to what it grows and what it knows (“and all I heard was tongueless whispering/ as if some buried slave wanted to speak again”—Martin Carter, “Listening to the Land”). The penultimate group of poems approaches the poetic feast literally, glorifying in markets and baked goods and consumption (“She warm meh about bellyache;/ but I cahn help it,/ I really love Johnnie bake”—John Lyons, “I Love Johnnie Bake”). The final group explores the bittersweet reality of island residents away from home, living abroad, “bringing your Caribbean eye/ to another horizon” (John Agard, “Windrush Child”).

Even within these themes, there’s plenty of variety. Familiar names such as James Berry, Valerie Bloom, and Faustin Charles (in addition to the compilers, who sprinkle the mixture with their own fine poems) provide contributions, and there are lively traditional entries and lyrics from lesser-known poets. There’s a pleasing diversity of tone and style throughout, with joyous sea shanties (Lynn Joseph’s “Pullin’ Seine”) and dark portents of upheaval (Maggie Harris’ “El Dorado”), shivery ghost poems (Faustin Charles’ “Jumbie Man”) and shivery poems of distant cold climates (Valerie Bloom’s “De”). Some poems push readers towards thoughtful contemplation, and others invite them to roll with the rhythms and rhymes; some poems evoke the islands in their imagery, while others also glory in island intonations and dialect (all quite accessible to readers).
It's therefore unusually effective to have each of the five sections illustrated by a different artist, an arrangement that risks inconsistency but here simply adds to the diversity. While styles differ, there's an embrace of vigorous color and strong shapes throughout that draws the sections together. There's also plenty of character, with Jane Ray expanding from her more designingly pastoral to tackle some very, very creepy haunts (here's your chance to booktalk poetry with the pictures of a bleeding skeleton and a screeching vampirical ghost), Satoshi Kitamura employing sharp edges and quivery black line in his droll portraits, and Sara Fanelli adding cut-paper textures to her unfettered and dancing compositions.

Not only is this a delicious banquet, it's unusually successful at evoking a certain place, a goal many anthologies strive for but few meet. There's a very clever interweaving of the concrete and the emotional throughout the anthology that conveys to readers not just what one would see in the Caribbean but what one would relish, what one would regret, and what one would miss from far away. Both poignant and jubilant, this is a luscious and satisfying collection. A combined index of poets and first lines is appended. (Imprint information appears on p. 225.)

Deborah Stevenson, Editor

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE


Adoff takes cultural diversity to a new level in this dynamic collection of twenty-four free-verse poems about music—every kind of music from gospel to marching band to opera to rap to Mozart. The sweeping lines, bright, crisp colors, and distinct frames of the facing-page illustrations complement the jazzy title font and offer an energetic backbeat to the poems themselves, which are clearly laid out on stark white. Adoff offers metaphors that are playful and original (“I start the day with my music buffet:/ Morning fuel burns—cool jazz jams/ on buttered toast”) and puts a new spin on familiar ideas (as when he explores the “bi-racial melody” of “88 keys”). Poems explore multiple perspectives on the experience of music, including what it’s like to be in the audience, preparing for the “Diva” (“We wait, anticipate. Wonder from this side/ what it would be like to be her. To be up there looking at us”), or listening to gospel (“My hurt runs away/ up to the second tier, the second tear/ streaks down my cheek as her otherworldly voice sings”). Some are funny (“Practice Makes ____?”), others passionate; all are full of energy. “Backnotes” gloss some allusions in the poems and offer annotated listening suggestions, making this a remarkably complete musical package. FK

See this month’s big Picture, p. 223, for review.

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-050917-1 $21.89
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-12

When his household is disrupted by his mother’s cancer, fifteen-year-old Alex Cold is shipped off to the care of his adventurous grandmother, who takes him along on her writing assignment in South America. Their expedition is traveling up the Amazon to find the mysterious Beast, a sasquatch-like creature, and also the elusive local Indians. Along with the guide’s young daughter, Nadia, Alex realizes that there’s another more sinister agenda lurking behind some of the expedition and that the discovery of the Indians will enable the powermongers to exploit and destroy the land. Alex and Nadia pledge to help the Indians, who spirit them away and take them to the land of the Beasts, where they’re aided by their totemic animals in finding their own goals as well as a greater understanding of the importance of the ancient creatures. This is a long and sinuous story that effectively draws readers into its own fantastical world. The evocation of the jungle and its effects recalls Conrad, even down to human figures such as the “beautiful mulatto” expedition doctor and the mystical Indians, and the deliberate pacing becomes part of the story’s drama. Allende’s everyday reality is not as deftly drawn as her magical realism, and the transitions between the two sometimes ripple her fluid vision. There’s both a scope and a significance in Alex and Nadia’s quest, however, that will be appreciated by readers with fantastical tastes but earthbound concerns. DS


Teacher, hatmaker, poet (well, she did—probably—write “Mary Had a Little Lamb”), journalist, and general gadfly, Sarah Buell Hale revived the languishing celebration of Thanksgiving and pressed for its national observation. A persistent letter-writing campaign to a succession of presidents garnered Hale nothing but a reputation for annoyance, but her idea finally found its time and champion in the dark days of the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln evidently agreed that “a holiday couldn’t stop the war, but it could help bring the country together.” Anderson packs a lot of spunk into her folksy account, and Faulkner’s mixed-media scenes fondly caricature the bigwigs of the day and even the earnestness of Hale’s cause (an irate band of women storm the state house—motto: “Go away. We’re busy”—with an oversized quill pen for a battering ram). A plentiful “Feast of Facts” rounds out the presentation with further information on Hale, the Civil War, and tidbits about vintage Thanksgivings past. A list of sources is also included. EB
Susan Callaway, a motherless, overweight sophomore who could model as poster child for low self-esteem, has been sentenced to a term of after-school encounter sessions with five other school miscreants, who must attend or face expulsion. Susan’s been implicated in vandalizing the class bully’s truck, and although she did not do the deed, she wishes she had and gladly takes the fall. Predictably, the weekly meetings help Susan make at least one true friend and come to terms with classmates she has heretofore resented, and all the participants come away, if not totally redeemed, at least self aware. Atkins spins the standard hit parade of high-school stereotypes—the slut, socialite, and fatso girls; the bully, queer, and too-normal-to-be-here guys—and they all go programatically through their paces, constructively releasing their hostilities and cashing out with pizza, letters of affirmation, and more promising futures. Nonetheless, the gradual revelation of the misdeeds that landed them in Alt Ed is cagily handled, and Susan’s newfound strength to confront her brother’s nastiness and her father’s emotional neglect is deeply satisfying. Readers who enjoy watching their peers cat-scratch from the safe distance of fiction will want to pull up a chair. EB

ISBN 1-58234-799-9 $15.95 Ad Gr. 5-8

Princess Emeralda is not the stuff of which fairy-tale heroines are made: she’s clumsy, her spells never come out right, and she has a laugh like a braying donkey. That doesn’t knock her out of the frog-kissing business, however, because despite her faults she’s a real princess. Her kiss should therefore change an enchanted frog right back into the prince he once was—except, thanks to a magical charm-reversal bracelet (a gift from her aunt, the witch), the spell bounces back and turns Emeralda into a frog, too. So she and Prince Eadric (the still-enchanted frog) set out through the woods to find the witch who cursed Eadric in the first place, to plead for her to undo the spell. The two talking froggies are captured by wannabe witch Vannabe, who plans on using their tongues and toes in an everlasting beauty spell. Baker’s fairy-tale fantasy is a lot like one of Princess Emeralda’s early spells: she almost makes it work. While the characterizations have their charms, the conflict just isn’t complex enough to carry the lengthy text, and there is little suspense. The labored bluffness of the novel makes it clear up front that there will be a happy ending, and while this can be said of many fairy-tale explorations, the successful ones make the journey itself worthwhile. Still, the story has its humorous moments, the froggy cover will makes this title an easy sell, and fans of such fantasies may be willing to give it a whirl before settling down with Napoli’s *Prince of the Pond* (BCCB 1/93) or Ferris’ *Once upon a Marigold*, reviewed below. JMD

Broadley, Leo  *Pedro the Brave*; illus. by Holly Swain. Tiger Tales, 2002 26p
Trade ed. ISBN 1-58925-024-9 $14.95
Paper ed. ISBN 1-58925-375-2 $5.95

Propped-up wooden cactuses, stuffed animals, western gear, and a wolf mask set the scene for the telling of a tale “that will make all your whiskers go curly:/ It’s about using your wits to keep wolves from the door,/ and why you should go to
bed early." The increasingly vibrant southwestern-style illustrations of the tale proper show the solid, uncomplicated figures of Pedro and his upright sidekicks (Dusty, a dog, and Ronnie the horse) threatened by a yellow-eyed, pointy-toothed timber wolf with a "tongue that was dripping and red"; clever Pedro, however, makes him a deal: "I'll jump in this pan with no fuss at all, if you'll just let me cook my own sauce." After he tricks the wolf into tasting the sauce (which includes ingredients from Tabasco and dynamite dust to vindaloo paste), the wolf decides to wander off in search of ice cream while Pedro and the gang suggest a pre-bedtime singalong. Caregivers may be disappointed that the tale does not follow through on its promise to make a case for prompt goodnights, but the audience will giggle at the spicy dénouement of this mild folkloric adventure. FK


Bryan tells the story of Blackbird, who, "a long, long time ago," was voted the most beautiful of all the birds in Africa. The pallid Ringdove takes Blackbird aside and asks, "Oh, Blackbird, Blackbird, coo-coo-roo, coo-ca-roo, would you color me black so that I'll be black like you?" Blackbird explains that "color on the outside is not what's on the inside," but he promises to brew some blackening in his medicine gourd to "swing a ring" around Ringdove's neck to go along with his name. Not surprisingly, when Ringdove is thus decorated the other birds want decorations, too, and Blackbird uses his blackening potion to make them all happy. The plot is somewhat slight and the momentum sometimes falters, but Bryan's adaptation of this African tale (from the Ila people of Zambia, according to a source note) makes good use of syncopated language that suffuses the proceedings with joie de vivre. Cut-paper collage birds of many colors flutter through the pages against white and colored backgrounds; on some pages the hues seem washed out, and even when the defining black is added the compositions are scattered, lacking the driving rhythm of the text. The contrast between the black decorations and the colored paper lends emphasis to the visuals and to the message, however, and the new-construction-paper freshness of the medium will invite appreciation from skillful young scissors-wielders. A clear message, replicable art techniques, and storytelling possibilities make this a title rife with potential curricular connections. JMD


David is "four foot nothing and twelve years old"; uninterested in the good kids and taunted by the bad, he basically relishes fighting and mischief. When he's suspended from school and stuck at home, he decides to explore his apartment building through the now-unused air ducts that connect the units, and that exploration gets considerably more interesting in the vent of elderly Mr. Alveston's apartment, where he meets a ghost. The ghost proves a powerful attractant, drawing David back into the ducts and even Mr. Alveston's apartment, but David begins to be afraid when the ghost's ferocious rage causes damage even beyond the malicious vandalism David enjoys. After justice catches up with David, he and Mr. Alveston begin to form a bond, both of them determined to discover the identity of the
ghost. Readers may guess fairly early on that the ghost is actually Mr. Alveston himself, or at least the spirit of his youthful memories, but that doesn't detract from the suspense of the main dilemma: how can David lay this troubling and dangerous ghost to rest? Burgess puts an impressively hard edge on David, whose destruction is itself pretty nasty; that edge, however, makes David's growing friendship with Mr. Alveston and his reaction to the ghost's excesses all the more dramatic. Between the creepy setting, the mysterious ghost, and the offbeat comradeship between David and Mr. Alveston, there's a lot of appeal in this accessibly spooky story. DS

Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 6-12

Cabot's Mediator series moves from her Jenny Carroll pseudonym and paperback status to her more famous name and hardback life with this fifth entry. In it, sixteen-year-old Suze Simon (who has the gift of mediating between the troubled dead and the living) is stunned to discover that the sexy new boy at school is none other than Paul Slater, another young mediator who almost caused her death in the otherworld; despite her understandable aversion, she finds herself physically drawn to Paul and deeply curious about the information he claims to have about her powers. Her increasing attraction to Paul complicates her already difficult relationship with Jesse, who may view her only as a friend—and who is a ghost. This doesn't have sufficient momentum to succeed as an independent title—the Paul plot moves particularly slowly, his nastiness is so clear throughout that Suze's attraction to him isn't particularly convincing, and her realization that he's trouble is anticlimactic—and readers should start at the beginning of the series rather than turning up here first because of the Cabot name. The mediator premise remains engaging, however, adding a Buffyesque turn to the established pleasures of ghost stories; Cabot's flip and fluffy tone adds enjoyment and keeps the scary side of the supernatural largely at bay, so that readers can enjoy the seriously sexy overtones and the supernatural power without worrying too much about nightmares. It's an installment more than a drama in its own right, but fans won't want to miss the developments therein. DS

CARTER, DON  Heaven's All-Star Jazz Band; written and illus. by Don Carter. Knopf, 2002  34p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-81571-6  $15.95  R  5-8 yrs

The narrator describes his grandfather, who has gone to that heavenly Cotton Club in the sky. In the Cotton Club of the hereafter, the angel-winged musicians are such jazz luminaries as Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane, among others. Grandpa ("He's got all their records./ Played 'em loud/ When Grandma wasn't looking,/ Windows open,/ spaghetti cooking") initially hangs back, listening, but he finally he joins the band, unable to resist the music he loves: "Grandpa Jack sings./ Grandpa Jack swings./ Bravo! Now he has wings." The sometimes-forced rhymes lean a bit toward the catalogue-ish (each musician is introduced with a line or two that barely evokes his or her musical styling), and the cast of
luminaries will be unfamiliar to many in the audience, but Carter's upbeat tone combines with his mixed-media illustrations to lift this title above musical grief therapy. Thickly textured elements are three-dimensionally assembled in dramatic tableaux, enriched by ripply backgrounds and gleeful scatterings of beads. Bewinged musicians stand in front of silver microphones holding golden trumpets and other shiny brass instruments; dancers, Grandpa Jack, and music makers float on clouds solidly stuck to a blue plaster-like sky. The text is unsentimental and hopeful; the narrator is a boy who uses memories and music to retain his connection to his deceased and obviously loved grandfather, with nary a funereal thought, word, or deed in sight. A concluding page provides brief biographical information about each member of Heaven's All-Star Jazz Band. JMD

Reviewed from galleys

He's first in war, first in peace, but dead last in oral hygiene. As General Washington's military and political star rises, his teeth drop, and Chandra is right there to mark each milestone in his career with the current count of his dwindling dentition: "George crossed the icy Delaware/ With nine teeth in his mouth./ In that cold and pitchy dark,/ Two more teeth came out!" When the penultimate tooth falls, George resorts to his first set of dentures, embarking on what readers of the end materials will recognize as a long and painful relationship with false teeth of every ilk. Chandra's quirky take on the revered Founder's embarrassing medical dilemma is appealing in itself, but it's questionable whether young listeners will understand the historical backdrop or catch the humor in Cole's gentle but deft line-and-watercolor parodies of Washington's famed poses. An appended four-page timeline of Washington's dental woes, which is geared to a much older audience, is easily as intriguing and entertaining as the main text, with ample quotes from letters and diaries and with portrait reproductions that trace his progressive facial disfigurement. A closing photo of Washington's last set of dentures—a cumbersome and painful-looking affair in gold and hippopotamus ivory—fairly ensures that viewers will brush and floss before bedtime tonight. EB

Reviewed from galleys

Annabel desperately misses her father, Jack, who lives with his wife in Australia while Annabel dwells in New York, and she's intent that her trip to Australia will give her a chance to retrieve him from his new family and take him back with her. She's therefore immune to the eagerness of her new stepsiblings (especially same-age Lucy) and the cuteness of her baby half-sister, and she does her best to make that clear at every opportunity. Finally she's fed up with the whole situation, especially when her mother calls to announce her impending marriage (which will bring Annabel another set of steps and, in a few months, another half-sibling), and she and Lucy (also fed up with being jerked around by grownups) take off for a journey to Melbourne, Lucy's old home, where Annabel gets a bit of perspective on her stepsister and the situation (as well as meeting Lucy's gorgeous ex-stepbrother, Ben). While this doesn't have the polished impact of Cohn's Gingerbread (BCCB
Annabel is believable as a bossy and oversophisticated seventh-grade New Yorker who nonetheless desperately wants her daddy (“And I know we always have to do activities because you don’t want me to have Jack all to myself and steal him back,” she thinks fiercely at her stepmother). It’s also realistic that Annabel remains ready to slam Lucy even as she becomes grudgingly accustomed to and even protective of her stepsister. Those looking for more atmospheric appeals will appreciate Annabel’s careless, breathy, but intense voice and her swoony (if relatively demure) connection with “Ben, love god.” This is at heart an old-fashioned “adjustment to” story, but it’s an easygoing and effective one, truthfully demonstrating that such adjustments are harder and more complicated than adults may acknowledge. DS

Compestine, Ying Chang  The Story of Noodles; illus. by YongSheng Xuan. Holiday House, 2002 32p ISBN 0-8234-1600-3 $16.95  R 5-9 yrs

The three young Kang brothers (first met in Compestine’s The Story of Chopsticks) are cleaning up after a food fight (“‘Ho, Pan,’ Ting said. ‘You have rice in your hair.’ ‘Oh ho, Ting,’ Pan answered. ‘You have rice in your ears.’ ‘Oh ho ho, Ting and Pan.’ Khai laughed. ‘You have rice in your toes’”) when their mother enlists their help making her prize-winning dumplings for the annual cooking contest. Mama is distracted when the family pig escapes, and she leaves the boys to roll dumplings. The ensuing action results in a broken table, fallen filling, and three brothers looking for an idea to keep them out of trouble. Their idea is noodles made from dumpling dough, along with special ways to eat them: rolled around chopsticks is called “eating a drumstick,” slurped up from the bowl is called “sucking a worm,” and biting the strips off with front teeth is called “cutting the grass.” With little time and no alternative, Mama takes the noodles to the cooking contest and (after the boys demonstrate eating techniques) wins the emperor’s best cooking table. Cut-paper collage illustrations on white backgrounds with textured paper borders are cleanly and elegantly displayed. Elements of traditional Chinese cut-paper art are evident on background screens, textile decorations, and facial details. The compositions vary from close-up interior settings during the cooking scenes to broader, more open outdoor settings during the judging scenes. The black outlines give a feeling of dimensionality similar to that evinced in stained glass or papel picado. Compestine’s almost tongue-in-cheek tale is a nearly unbeatable combination of slapstick humor, fast pace, and food. A simple noodle recipe and an author’s note about the historical origin of noodles is included. JMD


Cooper gives young readers a different slant on the Camelot president by focusing on his youth, and it’s certainly not a picture that bespeaks a presidential future. A boy plagued by ill health in a family that prided itself on physical prowess, a second son in a family that placed its considerable hopes on the first, an academic scapegrace in a family that demanded scholarly achievement, young Jack carved himself out a role as the jokester, whose biggest joke, especially eventually on himself, was to lobby himself into the “Most Likely to Succeed” award in his senior high-school class. This is therefore a biography largely driven by irony of various
kinds, and effectively so; Cooper goes beyond the facile "presidents were kids just like you" anecdotes to make a revealing picture of a young person with tremendous gifts and advantages and a real difficulty in harnessing them for fruitful ends, a kid who could easily have starred in a YA novel. Though there's some narrative and chronological jumping around, young Kennedy's growth is clear if not always certain, and there's plenty of support from words of friends, relatives, and Kennedy's own retrospective insight (there's also some authorial speculation, which is clearly identified as such). Black-and-white photographs are scattered throughout, as are reproductions of various youthful Kennedy missives (and school reports). Source notes provide chapter-by-chapter sources (and an acknowledgment of the divergent viewpoints prevalent in Kennedy biographies) but no page citations; a further list of print, video, and internet resources is included, as is an index. DS

Cox, Judy Cool Cat, School Cat; illus. by Blanche Sims. Holiday House, 2002 84p ISBN 0-8234-1714-X $15.95 R Gr. 2-4

Gus is trying to be a good sport about his move to a new neighborhood and start at a new school, but he's lonely for his friends and he misses his dog, Oscar (forbidden in the new apartment). His interest is therefore piqued when he encounters a stray cat on the way to his first day at school, and, with the help of classmate and building-mate Pamela, he eventually manages to capture the homeless kitty and hide it—in the school itself. Gus' partnership and increasing comradeship with strict and orderly Pamela ("She took a long time to make up her mind, but when she did, she was sure bossy. But it was a good kind of bossy") isn't surprising, but he himself is a believable kid, eternally disorganized but enterprising and well-meaning. Cox is deft, as usual, in her depiction of the kid-animal connection, and she's got some matter-of-fact honesty about Gus' errors of judgment, some of which genuinely endanger the cat Gus is trying hard to help. Sims' wiry and energetic line drawings add character (their Lucy Van Pelt air for Pamela is particularly appropriate) as well as comedy and accessibility. Gus' report on taking care of stray cats, which contains some good advice in a digestible format, is appended. DS


In the year 1200, Arthur di Caldicot, bastard son of Sir William de Gortanore, squire to Lord Stephen de Holt, and soon-to-be crusader for the Holy Land, lives in two worlds. One is the real world of squires and knights wherein he struggles to discover his origin and place, and the other is within a magical obsidian seeing stone that allows him to observe the adventures of another Arthur, the legendary king, and his Knights of the Round Table. This sequel picks up where the previous title in this planned trilogy (Arthur: The Seeing Stone, BCCB 2/02) left off: young Arthur has assumed his place as Lord Stephen's squire and moved to the castle at Holt. In addition to his everyday duties, he is coping with his attraction to two young women, the knowledge that being his father's son means his future may not be his to decide, and his longing to find his real mother. In the midst of his personal joys and confusions, Arthur is drawn into the dramatic lives of the denizens of Camelot through his observations in the seeing stone. In the first
novel Arthur saw his life as paralleling that of the royal Arthur; in this sequel his life still resembles that of the legendary king, but he begins to learn from the other Arthur how to make decisions on his own. The scenes of Arthur the squire and Arthur the king are smoothly interwoven, and the occasional longer chapter (there are 101 very short chapters, mostly one to three pages) allows for a bit more exposition as well as more satisfactory development of plot and character. Crossley-Holland strikes an elegant balance between internal and external action; while Arthur grows in moral character there is plenty of action to keep the pages turning, from fires to murders to possible knighthood. At the beginning of the novel is a key to characters both in and out of the seeing stone; a glossary is appended. JMD

Curlee, Lynn  *Capital;* written and illus. by Lynn Curlee. Atheneum, 2003 48p ISBN 0-689-84947-8 $17.95  R  Gr. 4-8

The five federal structures that define the heart of Washington, D.C.—the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln Memorials, the White House and the Capitol—are examined here for their architectural, historical, and symbolic significance. Though the human portraits are stiff, Curlee explicates the structure of each edifice with his customary aplomb and distills the essence of civic grandeur into streamlined acrylic scenes that juxtapose solemn grays and icy whites against twilight and steel blues. Welcome visual aids include maps, a cross-section of the Capitol dome that exposes its framework and labels its parts, original proposals for the buildings, and human figures that underscore the grandiose scales under consideration. The book ventures beyond straight architecture, though, to set each structure into the larger civic plan and to demonstrate how urban growth (a railroad crossed the Mall for some years) altered L'Enfant’s original vision of the city, and personal whims (Thomas Jefferson, whose anonymous plan for the presidential mansion lost in competition, couldn’t wait to do some remodeling once he took occupancy) confounded architects’ visions. While steering clear of political and aesthetic controversy, this brings current Mall development up to date with the inclusion of the World War II Memorial site. Readers who have only seen snapshots of the main D.C. landmarks now have the opportunity to examine the x-rays. EB

Danticat, Edwidge  *Behind the Mountains.* Orchard, 2003 166p (First Person Fiction) ISBN 0-439-37299-2 $16.95  Ad  Gr. 5-8

In the notebook given to her by her teacher, Celine Esperançe begins by recording daily life in her mountain village in Haiti, then going on to describe a disastrous visit to Port-au-Prince (where Celine and her mother are injured in a bombing associated with the 2000 elections). In the second half of this novel, her existence has changed: she’s now writing about life in Brooklyn, where she, her mother, and nineteen-year-old brother have joined her father (whose immigration status has finally become regularized). More timely if not quite as engaging as Veciana-Suarez’s *Flight to Freedom* (the other inaugural volume of the First Person Fiction series, reviewed below), this immigration diary has a flat tone despite Celine’s colorful phrasing, and the characters don’t really come to life until they hit New York (where Celine observes, “I kept thinking the same thing I did the first time I went to Port-au-Prince . . . How can some people live in a small village . . . with only lamps for illumination . . . and others live . . . where every street corner
has its own giant lamp? It made the world seem unbalanced somehow). The
drama picks up with an understandable conflict between Celiane's father and the
grown son he still treats as a boy. Readers will also understand Celiane's difficul-
ties talking to her father ("I plan for so long about what to say to Papa, but put him
on the phone and what comes out, anyen, nothing"); by finding her voice, Celiane
helps effect a reconciliation between this long-estranged father and his son. The
authorial afterword ("My Personal Exodus") points out personal experiences on
which the novelist was able to draw in writing this accessible story that gives equal
time to "two kinds of migration": from the country to the city, and from there to
America. FK

DOOLING, MICHAEL  The Great Horse-less Carriage Race; written and illus. by
Michael Dooling. Holiday House, 2002  32p
ISBN 0-8234-1640-2 $16.95  Ad  5-8 yrs
As the starry-eyed dreamers and hard-nosed entrepreneurs of 1895 predicted and
promoted the ascent of the hand-built automobile, a heck of a lot of skepticism
needed to be overcome. A fifty-two-mile auto race across Chicago, sponsored by
the Chicago Herald Times, aimed to prove not only the machines' capabilities but
also the superior manufacturer: "Each man in the race knew that the winner had
a chance of mass-producing and selling his horse-less carriage to the public."
Dooling follows the competition, segueing from an introduction, portrayed in
monochromatic gray oils, into the color-tinged race itself; the frosty atmosphere
and participants' exertion are adroitly evoked in his portraits and landscapes. He
never lingers long enough over the breakdowns and baling-wire-and-a-prayer re-
pairs, though, to generate any genuine excitement over the freezing cold, ten-hour
ordeal, and it's sometimes difficult to differentiate the participants or discern a
hero. Still, the old-time vehicles have enough intrinsic interest to involve a sub-
stantial audience, and kids can always marvel at the days when motorists slogged
across Chicago at seven m.p.h.—and it wasn't even rush hour. EB

DORROS, ARTHUR  City Chicken; illus. by Henry Cole. HarperCollins,
2003  [34p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  4-7 yrs
Henry, short for Henrietta, lives snugly in a backyard coop in an urban area, where
she's the only chicken she knows. After hearing tales of the country from the cat
next door, Henry determines to visit this wondrous locale, taking a bus and then a
garbage truck after her flying skills fall short of the required standard. There the
ill-informed Henry mistakes a horse for a cow and a pig for a horse and encounters
a shedful of battery chickens, which convinces the peripatetic hen that her city
home is the place for her. While the text doesn't have the solid consistency of
Stoeke's similarly silly Minerva Louise stories, there's plenty of loopy humor, espe-
ically in Henry's unintentionally snappy comebacks ("'Don't mention it,' said the
pigeon. 'I already did,' said Henry") and general gift for misunderstanding. Cole's
cartoony illustrations are facile but funny, and they effectively play up the confu-
sion. Henry's imaginings of the countryside are comically chicken-centered (her
pictured cow is actually a huge chicken with milk squirting out of its head), and
size contrasts and technology (especially the egg conveyor belt, which winds through
the spread like a Seussian nightmare) are exaggerated for maximum silliness. It’s one of life’s mysteries why confused chickens are so funny, but they undeniably are, and Henry is an amusing addition to the gallery of foolish fowl. DS

**FERRIS, JEAN** *Once upon a Marigold.* Harcourt, 2002 266p ISBN 0-15-216791-9 $17.00 R Gr. 6-10

Take one happily solitary troll with two affectionate dogs and a satisfying forest salvage business. Combine with one runaway six-year-old boy, who’s clad in a velvet suit and who refuses to say where he lives. Add eleven years, a telescope, carrier pigeons (for p-mail), and an unhappy princess and the result is Ferris’ blithe takeoff on fairy-tale traditions. When Ed (the troll) finds Christian (the boy), the foundling makes one thing perfectly clear: “You can throw that stupid velvet suit away. I’m never wearing it again.” Christian grows up into a handsome, smart, inventive guy, who falls for the sensitive and lonely Princess Marigold after they become p-mail pen-pals. When Ed decides Christian needs to see more of the world than the home-cave and forest, Christian crosses the river and secretly joins the palace staff. It isn’t long before the perceptive princess realizes who he is, and the two fall deeply in love, interfering with Marigold’s mother’s plan to get her daughter out of the way and seize power. The love story is sweetly realized, and the palace intrigue is crossword-puzzle neat. Ferris successfully achieves the frothy practicality necessary to make such takeoffs work. Her characters are archetypal yet surprising, her plot underpins its decorative fairy-tale trappings with pie-in-the-face humor, and her obvious spins on traditional action take last-minute hairpin turns into something else altogether. Just when the conclusion threatens to disintegrate into treacle, she pops an unexpected ingredient into the mix. Give this to fans of Gerald Morris’ Arthurian takeoffs or even Pratchett lovers, along with Ferris’ concluding advice: “Carpe diem ever after.” JMD


There should be plenty of nail-biting drama in a story of fifty-six men who, with a pen stroke, signed themselves onto the Crown’s Most Wanted list. Unfortunately, apart from the standard quotes about hanging together or hanging separately, or dancing at the end of a rope, there’s not much drama here at all. Individual sketches are organized by colony, with a bit of background on each colony’s pre-Revolutionary history, a map (actually, the same map in each entry, with the focus colony highlighted), and a boxed inset of ready-reference data on each signer’s date of birth, age at signing and at death, and bare-bones domestic information. Each brief entry reads like an encyclopedia article, with a slim amount of biographical material and an examination of the signer’s relative ardor (yes, there were some wafflers) for backing a document that would surely lead to war. Human-interest trivia to enliven the accounts ranges from the morbidly fascinating (George Wythe was murdered by his great-nephew) to the hopelessly arcane (Ann Gerry was the “last surviving wife of a signer to die”). Woodcut cameos and larger vignettes are often awkward and distorted, but they provide needed breaks for readers consuming the work whole. Keep this on hand as an aid to report writers, but don’t count on it to ignite enthusiasm for these provocateurs of Revolution. EB
GREENFIELD, ELOISE  *How They Got Over: African Americans and the Call of the Sea*; illus. by Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Amistad/HarperCollins, 2003 104p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028992-9 $17.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028991-0 $16.99  R  Gr. 4-6

Seven brief but insightful portraits feature African Americans, from colonial times to present, who not only succumbed to the lure of the sea but turned it into a vehicle for personal and/or racial advancement. Revolutionary Patriot, abolitionist, and entrepreneur James Forten and Arctic explorer Matthew Henson may already be familiar, but the stories of fleet owner and Colonization Society proponent Paul Cuffe, scuba diver Shirley Lee, and Rear Admiral Evelyn Fields of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are equally compelling. "Snapshots" that follow the body of the text draw some surprising connections between well-known African Americans and the sea (Langston Hughes and Alex Haley both held early jobs as ship "mess boys"), and a closing "Montage" lists important contributions by African-American seafarers. Although Greenfield focuses exclusively on African-American figures, the theme of seamanship and the range of specialized pursuits it can offer—from exploration, to sport, to military defense—should have broad appeal among middle-grades readers. Black-and-white portraits head each chapter; an index and extensive bibliography are included.

GRIFFIN, ADELE  *Overnight.* Putnam, 2003  [160p]
ISBN 0-399-23782-8 $15.99  Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-7

Eleven-year-old Gray is aware that she's only just barely a member of the cool group, the Lucky Seven, and since her mother became ill with cancer she's been more vulnerable than ever to the cruelties of Martha, the group's Machiavelli. On a birthday sleepover, a lonely and excluded Gray wanders off alone to the kitchen, where she encounters a strange woman; thinking the woman is a volunteer helping her mother, Gray leaves with her, too late realizing that the interloper is a disturbed individual who has no intention of taking Gray home. Meanwhile, the sleepover scene is in an uproar, with Leticia, the challenger for Martha's leadership, using the occasion to employ Martha's missteps against her and shore up her own power base in the clique. Political jockeying in the classroom ranks isn't a new topic, and characterizations here are somewhat programmatic; Gray's adventure is more effective as a catalyst than as a narrative strand, and the ending leaves readers hanging on all fronts. Griffin (author of *Amandine*, BCCB 10/01) vividly depicts the intensity of the power struggle, however. No holds are barred in examining the stakes, the methodologies, and the pleasures of control ("Martha enjoyed the game of digging to the secret fears inside of people"), and the changing viewpoints of the third-person narration (which moves between four different girls—Gray, Martha, Leticia, and Leticia's soon-to-be loyal lieutenant) enhance the tension as well as the insight. This doesn't have the nuance of Koss' *The Girls* (BCCB 5/00), but there's enough edge to the infighting to keep readers absorbed.

HARNESS, CHERYL  *Rabble Rousers: 20 Women Who Made a Difference*; written and illus. by Cheryl Harness. Dutton, 2003  64p
ISBN 0-525-47035-2 $17.99  Ad  Gr. 3-6

A score of winners, losers, and current contenders who've duked it out in political and social arenas are introduced here in two-page spreads, beginning with a perti-
nent quotation and illustrated with a watercolor cameo and bit of spot art. Each entry has space only for a general outline and a few words of breathy adulation (Ida Wells-Barnett “devoted the last thirty years of her life to making a dream come true: the dream of Americans working side by side in equality and justice”).

A bit evasive about the sexual abstinence of Ann Lee and the Shakers (“They would live in ‘virgin purity,’ doing nothing that might make babies”), Harness seems even more constrained on the topic of Margaret Sanger’s birth-control crusade, leaving the youngest readers to ponder what this fuss is about and the older, better informed readers to speculate on what kind of information or aid could have been available in the early years of Sanger’s clinic. Other problems in coverage also appear. The statement that alcohol manufacture and transportation was criminalized in 1930 is either in error or in need of explanation, since the 18th Amendment passed in 1919. And why was Dr. Mary Walker’s Congressional Medal of Honor revoked, and what happened when she refused to give it back? Sketchy as the overview is, however, Harness does catapult some less widely lauded names—populist orator Mary E. Lease, migrant-worker advocate Dolores Huerta, and campaign-funding reformer Doris Haddock—into the ranks of customary collective-biography figures such as Jane Addams, Sojourner Truth, and Eleanor Roosevelt. That alone should give fans of the mouthy and uppity some fresh faces to meet and causes to ponder. Thematic timelines, an index, and a woefully inadequate list for further reading are included. EB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-001222-6 $16.89
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-12

Russel doesn’t dare tell anyone else he’s gay, and he’s been doing a good job of passing for a tolerably macho sophomore (he and his friends are “occasional visitors to the border region of high school respectability”) until he arranges a face-to-face meeting with a gay chatroom partner and finds out it’s his jock classmate, Kevin Land. Driven more by a desire to share that gossip than by the confessional impulse, Russel outs Kevin (and himself) to his best friend, Min, who confounds him by confessing in turn that she’s bisexual (“Was the whole school secretly gay or what?”). The group of teens (which expands to include Min’s girlfriend and a friend of Kevin’s) plans to meet as a support group, but one with a cunning disguise, a disguise so boring that no one will ever want to join the group: the Geography Club. While the plot is sometimes bundled together rather than carefully woven, this is a lively and compelling story. There’s heart-palpitating romance in Russel’s reciprocated attraction to Kevin and their budding relationship, and there’s plenty of humor in the witty writing and unexpected events (a bubbly junior into geography blunders into the group, almost destroying it with her interest in its ostensible purpose, but she ends up getting assimilated as the “token straight”). Hartinger is particularly strong in his insightful but funny depictions of Russel’s dilemma as double dates leave him saddled with a more-than-willing girl from whom he must politely extricate himself. There’s also a more serious side: the group is haunted by the vision of the school outcast, who is, inevitably, rumored to be gay, and when Min suggests the group invite him to join, the resultant fear of outcast contagion calls into question the group’s solidarity and supportiveness.

That makes the book less self-sparing and therefore somewhat more challenging
than many other stories of outsiders, straight or gay, and readers who like their humor with some thoughtful underpinnings will want to join the club. DS


The epic story of the “Indian Summer” of a New Jersey teenager begins on the last day of her junior year. Seventeen-year-old Dimple Lala, whose clever, self-deprecating narration pulls the reader through an almost day-by-day accounting of this eventful period, is one of two Indian-American students in her high school; she sees herself as a “too curvy, clumsy, camera-clacking wallflower with nothing but questions,” in contrast to her confident, free-spirited best friend, Gwyn. Like Dimple, the novel starts out all-American and becomes increasingly comfortable with its Indian side, which Dimple eventually reclaims from Gwyn, whose single-minded colonization of Dimple’s ethnicity (and the suitable Indian boy meant for Dimple) rocks Dimple’s world. Her horizons expand as she discovers a lively community of young people inventing what it means to be Indian and American here and now (“These people were not my relatives and the chicas wore cool shoes. I couldn’t believe I’d thought the place would be full of aunties”) and rejects—and then falls for (and wins)—the suitable Indian boy. Finally, she comes to a more clear-sighted appreciation of her friends and relations, understanding that “everyone had a story. Everyone was making a story, all the time. And this was only the beginning of mine.” In between, Dimple and the reader meet enough memorable characters to stock a volume of Dickens and misunderstandings enough to propel a Jane Austen plot. Not every reader will be prepared to go the distance, but those who get caught up in Dimple’s story will be reflecting on hot thematic issues while basking in the warmth of a love story generous enough to include the reader in its glow. FK


Ivy Cordelia is the daughter of a photographer who’s making his living on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, where Depression-era America forgets its troubles by enjoying a panoply of circus acts and exhibits. To Ivy, the most fascinating performance is the high-diving horses, ridden by daring young women as they leap from the tall wooden tower into the tank below, and throughout the summer she makes friends with the horses and their riders, hoping someday to ride a thrilling dive herself. High, who interviewed one of the real-life horse divers for the book, gives the boardwalk and the daring act their glamorous due. Even audiences afraid of heights will thrill to the sheer privilege of Ivy’s final dive off the tower, but Ivy’s equine adoration is believable at the mundane level (“I kiss the big horse on his velvet-soft nose”) as well. Though some of the portraits are a bit stiff, aficionados will note approvingly Lewin’s photograph-informed fidelity to the real horses in the troupe, and he effectively captures the stunning drama of their downward glides (though he’s tastefully streamlined the undersides of the male horses). In order to convey the flavor of the era, his note explains, he has opted to color-tint black-and-white art in order to give the feel of linen postcards; unfortunately, the result is less period than muddy and sour, diminishing the magic of the carnival atmosphere. Despite the mixed effectiveness of the visuals, this is an enticing
introduction to a rare equestrian dream, and kids hooked by this will enjoy mov-
ing on to the film *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken* or, later on and better yet, Sonora Carver's book *A Girl and Five Brave Horses*. DS

Hoffman, Mary  
*Stravaganza: City of Masks.* Bloomsbury, 2002 345p  
ISBN 1-58234-791-3 $17.95  
R Gr. 6-9

In contemporary London, sixteen-year-old Lucien is dying of cancer. His father's gift of a found notebook turns the ailing Lucien into a Stravagante, a navigator between worlds; the notebook acts as a talisman that transports the teenager to Bellezza, an almost-twin city to Venice in a parallel world. In Bellezza, Lucien becomes Luciano, and he is taken under the wing of Signor Rodolfo, leader of the Stravaganti and a prominent natural philosopher (combination scientist/magician). Lucien/Luciano's cancer is left behind in London, and he becomes a willing and integral part of the intrigue surrounding the mysterious masked Duchessa, the ruler of the city-state of Bellezza, which is under siege by the powerful Chimici family. Hoffman (author of *Amazing Grace*, BCCB 9/92) has created a viable alternative world with a Venice that is not quite Venice but that still retains all the romance associated with exquisite masquerades and court politics. Nearly all the character's motivations are deftly delineated, from the longings of a wishful Lucien/Luciano to the ambitions of a petty assassin; from the barracuda-like machinations of the Duchessa to the comparable (but not nearly so successful) machinations of her arch-rival, Rinaldo di Chimici. Though the climax is somewhat forced and a few key characters are underdefined, Lucien/Luciano's dilemma is wholly convincing (the author bolsters the premise of her novel with appended notes on her fictional creations), and the atmosphere of the decadent, elegant city that worships (among more mundane divinities) the sea is deftly evoked. Don't just give this to fantasy fans; give it to fans of Tracy Barrett's *Anna of Byzantium* (BCCB 7/99), and watch the eyes of would-be Machiavellis shine. JMD

Hooks, Bell  
Reviewed from galleys  
R 3-6 yrs

In this picture-book love story, a little girl describes the "homemade love" that is evident in her parents' pet names for her: "My mama/ calls me/ girlpie./ Her/ sweet/ sweet./ Daddy's/ honey bun/ chocolate/ dew drop." Since no one can be perfect all the time ("'Cause there is no/ all/ the/ time/ right"), she also describes those times when she does something wrong and falls out of favor, quickly asserting, "But all the time/ any hurt can be healed./ All wrongs forgiven./ And all the/ world made/ Peace again." Each spread shows a bright-eyed little girl moving through her day, affectionately hugging her mother and father, turning cartwheels in the flower garden, cuddling in bed with a row of stuffed animals. When the day is over and bedtime comes, she goes to bed without any fears, with "memories/ of arms/ that/ hold me// holding me still./ No need/ to fear the/ dark place./ 'Cause/ everywhere/ is// Home." hooks' affectionate ode to girlpies everywhere combines a soft, reassuring cadence with snuggly language to make this an effortless readaloud. Evans' heavily brush-stroked paintings offer striking graphics softened by blue-black hairdos, fringes of eyelash, and swirls of patterns, braids, and smiles. The little girl's dress pattern is thematically linked to the action and changes from
page to page, from hearts to stars to airplanes, from frowny faces on one page to smiley faces on another. Fuchsia text rolls across painted and unpainted backgrounds, the compositions balanced between solid geometric shapes and deliberately empty space, the palette balanced between warm and cool colors. This is a cheery, comforting book about an affectionate child, her loving parents, and the safety net they provide. JMD

HOPKINSON, DEBORAH  
*Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings*; illus. by Terry Widener. Schwartz/Atheneum, 2003 [34p]  
ISBN 0-689-83300-8 $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  5-8 yrs

"Go home, missy," says the coach of the semipro Independents. "You’re a girl—and this is baseball." No way, though, is Alta Weiss going to be brushed off the field that easily. This is the girl who, at the age of two, whacked a cat with a corncob from clear across the barnyard, who could pitch to a hay bale for hours by age six, and who, at seventeen, had "struck out every boy in town." Alta convinces the Independents’ manager that people will come see her just for the novelty of it and, smelling money, he strikes the deal. And so, by 1907, Alta is the Girl Wonder, “The girl who can throw. The girl who can play baseball.” Hopkinson relates this true story through a folksy, fictionalized narrative delivered by Alta herself. Each segment, or inning, of her tale is introduced by a numbered baseball over a pair of crossed bats, an unnecessary affectation given the brevity of each chapter, but the pauses provide natural “breathers” for novice readers who’d like to take a swing at the text by themselves. Viewers who have delighted in Widener’s portrayals of sports greats Lou Gehrig and Gertrude Ederle (*Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man*, BCCB 4/97; *America’s Champion Swimmer*, 4/00) will recognize his signature artwork: rounded, sculptural figures with powerful, supple limbs and whimsically exaggerated expressions. Hopkinson pitches to a slightly younger audience than Jean L. S. Patrick in *The Girl Who Struck Out Babe Ruth* (BCCB 6/00), and this title should be a great warm-up. A source note is included, and a photograph of Weiss graces the jacket back. EB

JANISCH, HEINZ, ad.  
*The Fire: An Ethiopian Folk Tale*; tr. by Shelley Tanaka; illus. by Fabricio VandenBroeck. Groundwood, 2002 [24p]  
ISBN 0-88899-450-8 $15.95  
Reviewed from galleys  
R  6-9 yrs

A slave longing to be free goes to his master, saying, “I have been your slave for such a long time. You have often promised me freedom. Tell me, what can I do to be free at last?” Having no intention of freeing the slave, the master tells him to spend the night on a snowy mountain: “If you can survive all night without clothes or shelter, as naked as the rocks around you, then I will free you.” Desperate for freedom, the slave agrees; that night as he stands in freezing desolation, his friend climbs a distant peak and there builds a fire. Throughout the night, the friend tends the fire, and the slave watches from far away: “All night long he watched the fire and felt its warmth, and the cold did not harm him.” In the morning the master unwillingly frees the slave: “‘Go,’ he said. The man who had survived the long cold night was no longer a slave. He was now a free man. And so he went.” Austrian author Janisch has taken this well-known folktale and reduced it to its simplest elements, and the result is tightly constructed and masterfully paced. The
emotional resonance of the story is given added weight by the powerful acrylic paintings on textured paper, which offer images of depth and authority. The elongated figure of the protagonist, from the arch of his spine to the curl of his fingers, evinces strength despite its attenuation, and the deft contrasts of light and dark are arresting, especially in the final illustration of the freed protagonist walking toward an aurora of rising sun. This collaborative effort will make a dramatic readaloud, and it can also be used with independent readers as a thoughtful discussion-starter, especially paired with other versions such as Harold Courlander’s in his collection *The Fire on the Mountain* or Jane Kurtz’s picture book *Fire on the Mountain* (10/94). JMD

**JOHNSON, LINDSAY LEE  Soul Moon Soup.** Front Street, 2002  134p
ISBN 1-886910-87-1  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 4-7

This series of free-verse poems describes the life of Phoebe Rose, who has struggled alongside her mother on the street and in shelters since the departure of her affectionate but unreliable father. When Phoebe is eleven, her mother finally sends her off to live with Gram at Full Moon Lake, where Phoebe’s own mother was raised. There the girl begins to grow roots, make friends, and learn a little about her own family history; she still yearns for her mother, however, and expects her to return for Phoebe’s twelfth birthday. Phoebe’s story is a poignant one, especially when she’s traveling with her mother, desperate for maternal affection, and worn down by the life they lead. Johnson is also wise in the ways of family sagas and their unfolding, so that Phoebe keeps thinking she knows the full story before she really does, and she’s never sure who to blame or whose side she’s on. The story sacrifices credibility for wishfulness, however, and the metaphors and symbolism become too frequent and far too sentimental; the final resolution (Phoebe’s growth allows her to return to the city with her mother) is artistically convenient rather than emotionally believable. Katherine Paterson’s *The Same Stuff as Stars* (BCCB 10/02) is a more absorbing and authentic treatment of a similar dilemma, but readers will be glad to see this put-upon heroine finding her own strength. DS

**KOSS, AMY GOLDMAN  The Cheat.** Dial, 2003  [144p]
ISBN 0-8037-2794-1  $16.99  Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 5-8

When nerdy Jake attempts to impress glamorous and popular Sarah by giving her the answers to a geography exam, he doesn’t realize that he’s setting in motion a chain of events that’s going to transform the entire eighth grade. Sarah gives the answers to her friends Rob, Dan, and Katie (who can’t bring herself to use them); Sarah and the boys get caught, and though the boys immediately point the finger at Sarah, she refuses to reveal her own source. The book isn’t as crisp as Koss’ *The Ashwater Experiment* (BCCB 6/99); it’s not clear what the moral upshot is, especially after Katie organizes a boycott to ensure Sarah’s release from her dilemma (which convinces Jake to come forward anyway). It raises some provocative questions, however, and it does so in an involving manner, with the multivocal narrative (Katie, the four culprits, and Dan’s quondam girlfriend, Ruby, all contribute) giving the situation some interesting facets: Dan shifts the blame and shrugs off the event, Rob is petrified of his abusive father’s reaction, Sarah is trying to search beyond her mother’s projection and her father’s detached amusement for her own decision. The style is also effective, especially Sarah’s willfully facile wordplay and
sometimes desperate flippancy ("It's amazing, really, how quickly I got used to being the girl who gets called down by the principal"). This would certainly stimulate some lively discussion, and readers will enjoy the chance to hone their own ethics. DS


Young readers may already have encountered the name of Phillis Wheatley, probably the first African-American poet, and here they can learn a bit more about her historic life and writing. Stolen from Africa as a slave and sold in Boston at about seven years old, in 1761, Phillis was bought by Bostonians John and Susannah Wheatley. Intrigued by the girl's quick mind, Mrs. Wheatley had her educated (well beyond the standard of many women, enslaved or no, as Lasky aptly points out), whereupon talented Phillis blossomed and began writing poetry. Publishing her first poem when she was only fourteen, she continued to write, often in response to the unfolding events of the Revolution (and its ironic implications for the enslaved). The absence of source notes and the novelistic tone lend a fictionalized air to the proceedings, and some authorial comment might have been useful in complicated situations (young readers may question how Susannah Wheatley could consider Phillis to be her own daughter while owning her as property); the narrative also raises interest in some matters without satisfying it (how did Wheatley's first poem get published? What was her status in the Wheatley household after she was given her freedom?). This is still a thoughtful overview of Wheatley's life and significance, however, and Lasky is particularly good at drawing out the importance of the events of the Revolution, both thematically and actually (a significant print run of the poet's book, published in Britain because American publishers refused it, arrived only weeks before the blockade of Boston Harbor made such importation impossible). Lee's earthened acrylics are somewhat flat, but they portray their subject as dignified and composed, a sober figure even amid lively company; cream-washed paper and subdued colors add to the period flavor, and the drabness of Boston contrasts with the intense and fluid life of the African scenes. This could add depth to shelves of literary biographies or give a personal slant to exploration of the Revolution. DS

**Lawlor, Laurie**  *Magnificent Voyage: An American Adventurer on Captain James Cook's Final Expedition.* Holiday House, 2002 236p illus. with photographs ISBN 0-8234-1575-9 $22.95 R Gr. 5-10

When Captain James Cook embarked in 1776 on his third and final voyage, he carried secret orders to search for the elusive Northwest Passage. He was also truly, if less obviously, encumbered with "cargo" from his previous voyages: a probable case of roundworms that left him suffering from "fatigue, depression, loss of concentration and memory, and personality changes," and a reputation among the Sandwich Islanders as a godlike being, "possibly the reincarnation of . . . Orono Makua." On board the Resolution was American-born Royal Marine John Ledyard, more a casual adventurer than committed military man, from whose perspective (Ledyard scooped the official ship's history by publishing illegally abroad) Lawlor largely devises her account of the ill-fated expedition and Cook's slaughter on
Kealakekua. Lawlor keeps an objective eye on Ledyard, readily acknowledging the biases in his view of the journey and frequently supplementing his observations with those of Cook and other crew. The result is a gripping, deftly blended biography of two intersecting lives and the impact the Resolution’s mission had on the indigenous peoples they encountered. There’s as much sympathy here for the ailing captain as censure of the havoc his expeditions wrought in terms of loss of crew and venereal disease spread among the, ahem, hospitable islanders, and readers who view the proceedings through Ledyard’s eyes can reconstruct the paternalistic attitudes the Europeans (and even islander Omai, returning after a sophisticating sojourn in Europe) toward the “savages.” Maps and period illustration, many by crew members, illuminate the text; substantial end materials include index, bibliography, ships’ companies, glossary, ship cross-section, timeline, and source notes.


A small clockface ticks off the hours in this parental plea to an irrepressible toddler to, well, stop acting like a toddler. The opening spread sets the tone: an exhausted mother is flat on the floor, her baby girl bouncing on her tummy, the television on but unwatched, a half-empty baby bottle on the floor. A fat plastic ring is held in the gleeful toddler’s hand, and another is hooked on the collapsed mother’s big toe. The clock says 3 A.M., and the text reads “Go back to bed,/ baby, please, baby, please.” The hours pass from spread to spread but the tone is the same, as mother pleads while her toddler dumps cereal on her head, scribbles on the walls, eats sand in the park, throws a temper tantrum, splashes in the tub, and generally indulges in developmentally appropriate (or at least predictable) behavior. The chant-like text, unified by variations on the “please, baby, please” refrain, is effective and deceptively simple; the inexorable movement of the clock from early (very early) morning to bedtime will move viewers from spread to spread, hour to hour. The oil paintings depict a mischievously grinning, coyly flirty African-American little girl with big, long-lashed brown eyes that flash constantly at the viewer. This is not the same detailed drafting Nelson used in Nolen’s Big Jabe (BCCB 9/00), but a larger, more graphically aggressive style. The toddler’s proportions have a disconcerting way of changing from image to image, but the up-front perspective and enamel-bright primary colors are attention-grabbing, even from far away. In the end, the intensity of the palette (and the pleading) devolves into a softly lit, loving bedtime moment. Parents will empathize with this toddler’s tired folks; kids just out of the toddler stage (or those with toddler sibs) will enjoy a slice of life and humor at parental expense. JMD

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-000497-5 $16.89 R Gr. 6-10
Reviewed from galleys

At twenty years old, boxer Sonny Bear has hit the acme of his trade, and he is positioned to continually defend his title of world heavyweight champ. He’s fed up and burned out, and, having snubbed most of the people who got him to the top, he’s now surrounded by money-grubbing managers, trainers, and hangers-on
(even a pseudo-shaman from his own Moscondaga people wants a piece of the act). Help comes from an unlikely source—schizophrenic teenager Starkey, who dubs himself “Warrior Angel” and responds to voices that urge him to drag Sonny’s career back from the brink. Lipsyte cannily teases the action along, taking his time to reveal the nature of Starkey’s mission, drawing the two together via separate clandestine road trips and instilling in Sonny a combination of gratitude and dread toward Starkey that keeps their relationship in constant tension. Starkey’s psycho/physical torment is nearly palpable as his supply of meds runs out and he’s increasingly vulnerable to his inner voices, fits of paranoia, and violent outbursts. Although the conclusion, in which the young men turn out to be mutual saviors, is a bit schmaltzy, Starkey teeters on the edge to the closing pages, and readers will be rapt at ringside ’til the decision is called. EB

MARTIN, ANN M. *A Corner of the Universe.* Scholastic, 2002 189p ISBN 0-439-38880-5 $15.95 R Gr. 4-7

Eleven-year-old Hattie enjoys her secure life in her parents’ boarding house with boarders exotic (the beauteous Angel Valentine) and familiar (the elderly Miss Hagerty), so it’s a real shock to her circumscribed life when her parents inform her about the existence of an uncle she’s never known. Adam is in his early twenties, afflicted with psychological and behavioral problems that have led Hattie’s grandparents to place him in a special school, which is now closing. Despite (or perhaps because of) his frenetic outbursts and lack of self-control, Hattie becomes friends with her outcast uncle and widens her world still further by befriending a girl working at the summer carnival in town. Hattie’s voice is preternaturally adult at times, and the proceedings are sometimes too obviously stage-managed (the opening post-event flashback, which foreshadows the eventual tragedy, is particularly superfluous), but this is nonetheless a tender and sympathetic story. Martin effectively captures small-town life in 1960 and the dynamics of those operating within it, especially Hattie’s patrician grandparents, steeped in awareness of their societal position and conflicted about their bewildering youngest son, and their daughter, Hattie’s mother, torn between submission to her parents and the desire to live her own unconventional life. Hattie herself grows beyond her shy complacency, convincingly finding in Adam a motivation for some preteen rebellion (“I want Adam to have one wild, thrilling evening with no one around to tell him to use his party manners”) and learning to challenge some of the family ways she’d taken for granted. This is a quiet and focused story of individual growth and family change in the face of strain and loss. DS

MARTIN, RAFE *The World before This One: A Novel Told in Legend;* illus. by Calvin Nicholls. Levine/Scholastic, 2002 196p ISBN 0-590-37976-3 $16.95 Ad Gr. 5-9

Crow and his grandmother have lived in relative exile from the rest of their tribe ever since the deaths of Crow’s family from fever and mishap have made the two survivors anathema to most of the People. After surviving a harsh winter, Crow is finally old enough to hunt. His hunting leads him deep into the forest, where he finds a “great, round, gray, moss-covered stone”; the stone startles Crow by speaking to him in “a deep, calm, patient, old voice,” telling Crow “Long-Ago Time” stories, “tellings of things that happened long, long ago . . . in the world before this one.” Crow becomes so enthralled by the stories that he returns the next day, and
the next; he neglects his hunting, returning to his grandmother with ever-dwindling numbers of birds. Eventually the members of the tribe come, hear the stories, and recognize their value. The Stone names Crow as the first storyteller, after which he is given a place of honor in the tribe. The text is slow-moving, with the repetitive nature of Crow’s trips into the forest causing the pace to flag. That slow pace and the absolute surety that all will be won over by the power of story undermine any suspense. The stories themselves, however (based on traditional stories of the Seneca nation), are succinctly and cleanly retold. Paper sculptures cut and combined in intricate layers and graceful lines emerge dramatically from constructed frames in powerful, compressed compositions; though they sometimes lack energy, they add an air of solemnity. An author’s note gives some historical background on the Seneca and the Iroquois Confederacy; written sources and a description of the author’s process are also included. JMD


Bill gets tired of hearing his father grouse that “children these days don’t know the value of money,” and in a pique he says, “I bet I could fill the barn for one penny!” Pa, of course, is quick to take him up on it, figuring to get out of giving Bill, his brother, Bob, and their sister, Penny, any pocket money at all. The old farmer challenges them: “If one of you can fill the barn for a penny, I’ll give you the farm and go live in the chicken coop, and that’s a promise!” Bill and Bob fill the barn with feathers and light respectively, but there is always some space left; Penny, however, gets holds of a banjo, fills the barn with music, and thus wins the bet. The retelling is somewhat self-consciously folksy, but it’s got rustic vigor, and kids will relish the young’un’s outsmarting of the old’un. Howard’s illustrations are also a little kitchily countrified—lots of denim overalls, straw hats, and barn animals alongside the big-eyed, barefoot kids—and his pictured penny also unfortunately bears all the characteristics of a dime, but the art has a downhome comfortableness that emphasizes plain old imagination as much as trickery. Story and illustrations rely heavily on the adult desire for that wholesome, good-old-days feeling, but even the golden light of nostalgia can’t keep a good story down, and it’s nice to have a version of this popular tale that’s accessible to younger listeners. No notes or sources are given. JMD


Lottie Cook and her best friend, Lewis Weaver, are eleven years old when Lottie’s father gives her the StoryBox, a place for Lottie to store the sweet details of her life. The StoryBox is also the portal into LightLand, a magical place where the inhabitants are under siege by the wicked NightKing, who gains his power by stealing people’s memories with the terrible Veil of Oblivion. Lottie and Lewis are the destined saviors of LightLand, and through their bravery and willing efforts they defeat the villain and restore peace. The premise—that individuals live in memory and story—is an obvious one, and the theme evolves predictably; the mechanics of the parallel world won’t stand up to close scrutiny, and the adult characters suffer overexplanation toward the end. The protagonists’ characterizations carry the novel, however, with Lottie a forceful personality (she stays mad at her father—and wears
pajamas to class—for five years after he makes her go to school) and Lewis a quiet but sharp individual who speaks only to Lottie (he finds that “nodding and shaking your head can take you a long way in this life”). Descriptions are poetic, and the pace steadily rises toward the revelatory confrontation between Lewis and the NightKing, then rises again for the deciding climactic battle between Lottie and that same villain. The lapses undercut the overall effect, but there is enough action and emotion here to engage many fantasy readers. JMD


McDonough smoothly covers the essential points in the anti-apartheid crusader’s life, from childhood as son of a Thembu chief, through early manhood as partner in the nation’s first black law firm and outspoken protester against discriminatory racial practices, to his imprisonment, freedom, rise to South Africa’s presidency, and Nobel Peace Prize honor. Details of his early life emphasize his growing awareness of discrimination as he moved beyond his rural roots, into the school system, and on to “rough, confusing” life in Johannesburg. Although coverage of his domestic life includes his father’s plural marriages and Mandela’s divorce from his first wife, it curiously fails to mention his separation and divorce from his second wife, Winnie, her political prominence and fall, or his third marriage. Zeldis’ signature artwork—highly stylized figures deployed in scenes with naïve folk-art perspective—is, perhaps, even better suited to Mandela’s biography than to her previous subjects such as Abraham Lincoln and Anne Frank, reflecting in its strong palette the bold colors of the South African flag (although only the African National Congress flag is represented within this title). A chronology, bibliography, and pronunciation guide are included; a somewhat freeform endpaper map (which misleadingly depicts the territory north of South Africa as ocean) helps readers retrace his steps to national leadership. EB


While the rest of Mrs. O’Connor’s class prepares for Valentine’s Day with glee, Neil views the holiday with aesthetic horror: “Valentines are frilly! Valentines are pink!” Come the day itself, Neil gets what he thought he wanted—no valentines—and finds it disappointing indeed (“On the playground, all the children looked at their valentines. Neil looked at the swings”). Fortunately, his wise teacher ensures that Neil gets an unfrilly, unpink Valentine from the class so he won’t be left out, and everyone is happy in their own Valentine’s way. The text in this title, one of the first in this new series about the Robin Hill School, is streamlined but evocative, and it hits squarely at an issue that every youngster will recognize: being left out. The anxiety is cushioned by the dilemma’s being a consequence of respect for Neil’s own wishes, and Neil’s ambivalence will be understandable to youngsters as well. Cheerfully slapdash watercolors gain energy from squirrelly lines and wiggly, high-voltage scrawls; the multicultural cast bounds through the paper-littered classroom with barely controlled chaos in scenes that readers will
recognize as authentic. Add this pithily satisfying entry to the growing genre of entertaining Valentine-skeptic literature. DS


It's 1972, and being Japanese American seems very un-hip to sixteen-year-old Dan Inagaki: "It wasn't like us Asian guys made the cool music. We couldn't dance; we didn't set the trends with threads. We couldn't say anything loud like 'I'm black and I'm proud.'" Trying to please his parents by living up to the standard for social assimilation and academic success set by his good-looking, athletic, pre-med brother seems pretty hopeless, and at his school (one-third white, one-third African American, one-third Asian), only the African Americans seem to have political clout. Searching for a stronger sense of identity, Dan takes an interest in his family history, but he doesn't get much from his parents, who fear that he will use their difficulties as an excuse to fail. He has slightly better luck at school, where—in the minority-history class he agitated for—he learns for the first time about the World War II internment of Japanese Americans; later, a sympathetic neighbor tells him about his father's heroic (but still classified) war work. Mochizuki's first novel has an obtrusive purposiveness absent from his picture books (Baseball Saved Us, BCCB 5/93, and Passage to Freedom, BCCB 9/97), making this largely an animated history lesson; the dialogue is sometimes unconvincing and Dan's narration is often unsubtle. It's nonetheless an unusual look at changing historical viewpoints, and fans of '70s culture will enjoy the groovy atmosphere provided by a background of period tunes (discography included), the whiffs of marijuana, and the painfully accurate phraseology of the young math teacher who encourages Dan: "What you're doing is really right on, and I want to rap with you." Subplots involving Dan's love life (which is looking up) and the difficult home lives of his friends add interest and breadth to this exploration of the cultural moment when American "Orientals" became "Asian." FK


From the chilling dénouement of the first story (set in 1948), in which a white child is unable to sustain her sympathy for a black child, to the tentatively hopeful conclusion of the last one (set in 2000), in which physical and social boundaries are breached, these historicized vignettes (one per decade) delineate some of the "many different tests for the human spirit" South African children have passed through. The practical and psychological consequences of apartheid are played out from a variety of first and third-person perspectives, spanning racial classifications, gender, and age (from grade school to teenage): one white eleven-year-old girl with politically active parents remembers, "When I was six, policemen snatched Daddy away in the middle of the night"; a "colored" boy whose father has been reclassified as "African" makes a tenth birthday wish as the family faces the possibility that they will be forced apart. The writing is stark and clear; readers will, as intended, find the minimally but effectively detailed situations and the ethical dilemmas they pose more memorable than the characters. Naidoo, South African-
born author of *The Other Side of Truth* (BCCB 9/01), provides a brief historical introduction and ends with a timeline providing supplementary historical context for each story; Bishop Desmond Tutu adds an engaging foreword to this lucid and involving history lesson. FK

**PAULSEN, GARY** *How Angel Peterson Got His Name and Other Outrageous Tales of Extreme Sports.* Lamb, 2003 [160p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-72949-9 $12.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 6-9

Paulsen again mines his memory lode and extracts five hilarious tales from his adolescence, revolving around ideas that seemed brilliant in conception but proved seriously flawed in execution. At the time it certainly seemed reasonable that skiing while tethered to the bumper of the town hot-rodder's muscle car could break the world speed record, or that flying a World War II surplus target kite need not require going personally airborne. Why shouldn't "one-speed fat-tired bikes with a crowned-up, castrating brace bar" make the classic daredevil barrel jump? And how could girls fail to be impressed with the machismo of a teenage boy who can last sixty seconds in a pit with a wrestling sideshow bear? One strongly suspects that the stories have gained considerable momentum, embellishment, and polish in the retelling, but the swapping of strict veracity for topnotch yarn is a bargain of a trade-off: "At the height of his arc the rope snapped tight at eighty miles an hour and snaked him back under the snow, where for two heartbeats he looked for all the world like a high-speed gopher." Every kid who's been the butt of parental exasperation—"Where were you when they handed out the brains?"—will find kindred spirits here. EB

**ROOT, PHYLLIS** *Big Momma Makes the World;* illus. by Helen Oxenbury. Candlewick, 2003 40p

Root tells how Big Momma made the world in an original creation story with distinct and obvious echoes of James Weldon Johnson's famous sermon, "The Creation." Big Momma takes a look at the water that is everywhere, and she "saw what needed to be done all right. So she rolled up her sleeves and went to it." The creation of light and dark, the sky, the sun, moon and stars, the earth, etc., follows day by day, and at the end of each of seven days Big Momma says, "That's good. That's real good." Unlike Johnson's divine father figure, Big Momma is not alone; she starts and ends with a baby on her hip, distracted from world-making by diapering, burping, and cookie-making. Her speech is colloquial, and her needs are simple and straightforward: she needs some grass to wriggle her toes in, so soon there's "grass and trees and fruit all over the place, like somebody tipped over a fruit stand." The text is derivative but still inviting, with a jolly profundity and easygoing faith. Oxenbury's Big Momma is a queen of domestic creativity, a pony-tailed peasant goddess with huge hands and feet; her monumental form is matronly, rounded, and powerful. At first goddess and baby float in a light-permeated universe with unlimited horizons, the compositions spacious and absorbing. There's a somewhat harsh gloss to the acrylics that makes these images less homey than the artist's more familiar watercolors, and the addition of flora, fauna, and humankind sometimes crowds the pages, but the compositions remain imaginative. There is a
cheery autocracy to both the textual and visual representations of Big Momma that will draw viewers into this fanciful offering. JMD


Teenage poet Stephanie is coping with her own self-doubt, with her manic-depressive mother, and with her burgeoning love affair with class golden boy, Denny Pistil. Denny is coping with a few of his own problems, including confusion about his sexual orientation and an alcoholic father. The overly passive Stephanie spirals into a sexual relationship with Denny, into anorexic behavior, and into the same sort of manic-depressive state that plagues her mother. The novel's autobiographical tone is mitigated by the use of a third-person present-tense narration, which serves to distance the author from the protagonist. Unfortunately, that point of view also distances the reader from the action, most of which is internal. Stephanie herself seems so detached from her own emotions that it's difficult for the reader to connect with her, and her slow shift from girlfriend of indecisive golden boy to possible new girlfriend of sensitive school jock isn't much of a move. Still, the poetic style of the text does capture the depressive anxiety intrinsic to the protagonist's character. Those readers struggling with their own emotional changes may find Stephanie's descent into—and subsequent ascent from—her own personal abyss compelling. JMD


Simplify the text, magnify the images, and presto! . . . Rylant's popular Henry and Mudge readers turn into pre-readers. The wordplay still manages to be funny, repetitive, and sonorous: "This is Henry's puppy Mudge. Mudge loves mud. Mud makes Mudge roll. And roll. And roll. Mudge is muddy. Mudge needs a bath. There is the tub. Where is Mudge? Mudge is hiding. Mudge does not love tubs." You get the picture, especially since this is a third of the text already (thirty-eight out of 102 words). Meanwhile, Isidre Mones' illustrations "in the style of Susie Stevenson" are just that: buoyant cartoons with the familiar black-ink-outlined figures of an exuberant dog and boy tumbling across double-page spreads that are inscribed with a line or two of prominent, easily decoded text. It would be nice to see this economically packaged as four story/chapters to a book, but maybe preschoolers will thrill to the idea of finishing an entire diminutive volume on their own. Another option would be reading it aloud to a two- or three-year-old moving from board books to the realm of brief but active story. Youngsters will certainly sympathize with Henry and perhaps even more with Mudge, since young canines and young humans often share an affinity for mud, along with an aversion to baths. BH


The Dragon King, who rules under the sea, is something of a hypochondriac; when the court magician tells him that eating the heart of a rabbit will cure all his
ills, His Highness sends a turtle off to bring back a bunny. The turtle finds a bored rabbit and lures her below with an offer to show her the wonders under the sea. Once she's underwater, the Dragon King offers her a string of pearls in exchange for her heart, which she is to retrieve and give to the turtle. She gives the turtle a persimmon instead, which he gives to the Dragon King, who eats it and has a miraculous recovery. San Souci's retelling has a rolling momentum and an innate humor that will catch readers and listeners from the very first page. Unfortunately, there's some tonal uncertainty that confuses the issue and undermines the ending; the book deemphasizes the trickster nature of the rabbit and the folly of the Dragon King and thereby robs the story of its folkloric tension. Though the page layouts are often staid and the palette of the illustrations garish, the drafting is effective, and Neilan takes full advantage of the large compositions to swirl her Dragon King dramatically across the pages. The pictures are large enough to be viewed from a distance, which makes this useful for reading aloud in primary-grade classrooms. San Souci includes a cultural note, but no specific sources are given. JMD


Schwartz, known for his adaptations of Jewish folktales and lore (Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales, BCCB 10/83, etc.), here offers nine tales of angels, spirits and demons. The introduction gives a succinct definition of the unearthly beings represented, as well as an accessible explanation of their role in Jewish cultural and religious traditions. The book is divided into three sections—"The Kingdom of Angels," "The Kingdom of Spirits," and "The Kingdom of Demons"—and each section contains three traditional stories from a variety of historical periods and geographic areas. Schwartz opens with a tale showing the importance of storytelling, even to the angelic host, followed by the tale of a clever rabbi who tames the angel of death. Ghost tales, quest tales, and stories of lucky escapes from the coils of evil follow, each with a full-page color illustration by Fieser. The portrait-like images are deep hued with a fluidity of shape that adds grace to the stately compositions. Overall, the stories maintain both a sense of humor and a strong forward momentum, making them useful for reading aloud and storytelling. Each story closes with a mention of its place and/or period of origin; appended notes give specific written sources for each tale. JMD


It's been less than a year since Barney saved the planet by outwitting aliens at a game of Interstellar Pig (BCCB 7/84), and now he's drawn into the contest once again—abducted, actually, to planet 'koot along with coworker and possible love interest Katie, who has been taken as leverage to force Barney into cooperating with players bent on capturing The Piggy. Barney's challenge in this round is self-preservation, and although he now understands the game, his wits are dimmed by one Madame Gondii, a parasite who's nesting in a cyst within his brain and pumping him full of hormones to make him compliant. Madame cares nothing for the game, but she needs Barney to be cooked and devoured by the J'koot crabs so that
she can lay her eggs within a proper crustacean host. While Sleator keeps readers up to speed on the aliens' strategies and Barney's perils, Barney himself is generally a step or two behind, and his continual now-I-get-what's-happening explanations become tiresome indeed. Moreover, fans of the first title are already onto the game, and with Barney's fate never seriously in question, there's little real tension. Madame Gondii, on her single-minded mission to reproduce, and the J'koot crabs, polite to a fault as they fatten their captives for the kill, are deftly drawn, though, and if this outing lacks the novelty of the first, readers may still find the game is worth the candle. EB


When Cassie's grandfather, fantastical-landscape painter Daniel Brittman, goes into the hospital, seventeen-year-old Cassie gives up her prom and her first violin recital to accompany her mother, Anne (and Anne's new boyfriend, Gunnar), on the trip home to care for him. Cassie and her mother are shocked by the physical condition of the reclusive artist and the shambles that has been made of his farmhouse and his wife's garden. Suddenly, Anne is acting more secretive than usual and making noises about selling the farm, Gunnar is being protective and practical, and Cassie is seeing things that can't be real but are there anyway. It doesn't take long for the canny teenager to discover the truth: the farm is the hotly contested property in a battle between clans of fairy folk, the Green Clan, who hold the land through negotiated bond and the Red Clan, who hold the land through sacrificial blood. From a musical session in an Irish pub to a wild jamboree under the moon, Snyder creates an utterly believable space between the human and fairy worlds for her characters to inhabit. Vivid language solidly sculpts characters both human and fey, and sensual descriptions of natural phenomena provide atmospheric settings for the players. Musical motifs run throughout the novel, linking the chapters together; the music that saves Cassie is the music that brought the fairy folk to her attention in the first place and that finally, decisively, links her to the land. This is a concrete evocation of a hybrid world composed of nature and magic; Snyder's accomplishment lies in her ability to make readers believe they live in that same world. JMD


Eleven-year-old Matt is adjusting to life in Timber City, a town rebuilt in its present location after burning down in a terrible fire some generations ago. His explorations (triggered by a community picnic and local gossip about eerie doings) bring him to the ruins of an old church, where he meets Amelia Rathburn, an oddly secretive girl dressed in old-fashioned clothes. Amelia has an uncanny knowledge of the ins and outs of the local terrain, from booby traps in the church ruins to secret ways into the Palace, the old Rathburn Mansion that is all that remains of the pre-fire community. Matt visits Amelia when he can, copes with being the youngest kid in his family, and tries to stay out of trouble. His small adventures are sometimes aided by a mysterious white dog, a dog that may well be a ghost. Snyder can't seem to settle on a primary plot—is the novel about Amelia and Matt and their explorations in the wood? Or about the family tensions and problems
resulting from Matt's rebellious teenage brother and dramatic older sister? Or is it a gentle ghost story about a devoted dog? Overall, the novel's pace suffers from the lack of focus, but eerie settings and promising characters will keep pages turning, and the occasional bit of melodrama spices up the action. The conclusion, in which Matt gets a friend and a dog (that just might be a descendant of the ghost dog), will satisfy readers looking for happy endings. JMD

SPINNER, STEPHANIE Quiver. Knopf, 2002 177p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-81489-2 $15.95 R Gr. 7-10

The story of Atalanta has been interpreted in picture-book format (Climo's Atalanta's Race, BCCB 6/95) and in numerous collections of myths retold for youth; Spinner (author of Be First in the Universe, BCCB 2/00, etc.) now offers a novel-length interpretation of the legendary runner's story. After being exposed on a hillside by her father as an infant, Atalanta is saved by a she-bear sent by the goddess Artemis, to whom the girl eventually dedicates her life, using her prowess as a huntress and her own physical strength to defend her chastity. Atalanta's estranged father, King Iasus, now needs Atalanta to continue his royal line, and to that end he brings her back to the palace with the express purpose of marrying her off to get a grandchild. In an effort to save herself for the goddess, Atalanta swears to marry only the man who beats her in a footrace; defeated challengers will pay with their lives. Spinner has the protagonist tell her own story, giving first-person insight into the character's feelings and motivations. Occasionally the divine asides are a bit too self-conscious, but the gods' busybody interventions are mythologically authentic, and all in all the retelling is cogent and quick. The action is fast and furious, from the opening hunt of the Calydonian boar to the concluding transformation of Atalanta and her destined groom. Readers who enjoy an expanded mythological tapestry will appreciate Spinner's rich embroidery. An author's note about the historical basis for the novel and a brief background section about the gods are included. JMD

SPRINGER, NANCY Lionclaw: A Tale of Rowan Hood. Philomel, 2002 122p
ISBN 0-399-23716-X $16.99 Ad Gr. 4-8

Subtitle notwithstanding, this sequel to Rowan Hood: Outlaw Girl of Sherwood Forest (BCCB 9/01) is more the tale of Lionel, gifted minstrel, disowned son of a powerful lord, and member of the band led by Rowan Hood (Robin's daughter). Sherwood Forest is overrun with bounty hunters when Lionel's father puts a price on his wayward son's head, and even Robin and his Merry Men go into hiding. Rowan won't leave the wood, however, and the smitten Lionel, in an effort to draw danger away from her, sneaks off into the night. Following him, Rowan is caught in a man-trap (a bear trap with nasty iron teeth), and self-proclaimed coward Lionel must come out of hiding to save his badly injured friend. Springer relies too much on coincidence and convenience to fuel her plot, and the conclusion is rather precious (Lionel plays the harp to draw the fairy folk so he can request that they heal Rowan; she gets well, not because of the fairies' intercession, but because her own will to live returns when she hears Lionel's music). Characterizations are slight and motivations slighter (lack of appropriately nurturing father figures takes much of the blame for the adolescent protagonists' angst), and the reduction of the hearty Rowan to a damsel in distress is irritating. Still, there's
a sheer action-packed ease to this adventure that will sweep some readers away. Give this to fans of the first book and to readers who need a hi-lo boost into fantasy. JMD

STANLEY, SANNA  
_Monkey for Sale_; written and illus. by Sanna Stanley. Foster/Farrar, 2002 32p ISBN 0-374-35017-5 $17.00  R 5-8 yrs

Luzolo and her friend Kiese are enjoying the bargaining and treasures of market day when suddenly, over the market hubbub, they hear, “Monkey for sale!” Sure enough, Mama Lusufu (a woman who “would sell anything she could get her hands on, even a jungle animal”) has a monkey; the two girls plead for the animal, but Mama Lusufu won’t give him up unless she gets a new water pot. Kiese’s mother makes water pots, and she wants an embroidery from Luzolo’s mother; Luzolo’s mother wants some new tin cups from the cup salesman, who wants a woven basket from the weaver, who wants some beans and rice. The two girls engage in a chain of trades, bartering with all the relevant parties until finally they manage to acquire a water pot and trade it for the monkey; they then release the animal back into the jungle with the warning, “Next time, stay away from Mama Lusufu!” The cumulative effect of the two girls’ series of barters gives the story an involving, escalating pace. The unusual techniques of etching and hand-painted _Chine collé_ (a collage technique used in intaglio printing) result in black line illustrations on textured paper, richly colored, detailed, and surprisingly graceful; dense colored paper adds depth to the images, while splashes of blues and purples enliven what could have been a dull palette. The folkloric structure of this tale makes it especially suited for reading aloud, while the clearly evoked images of everyday village life (based on the author’s childhood in the Democratic Republic of Congo) make it particularly useful for culturally inclusive collections and curricula. JMD

STRASSER, TODD  

At lunch every day, Lauren sits with her sarcastic friend, Tara, but yearns to join the table of the cool, popular girls—the “Don’t-You-Wish-You-Were-Me” girls, headed by her old friend, Krista Rice. New girl Celeste Van Warner somehow manages to bridge that gap, becoming a fixture at the popular table but also a friend of Lauren’s; through her friendship with Celeste, Lauren finds her stock and her confidence rising, especially when the two girls become elected as co-treasurers for the class. Also rising, however, is her uneasiness when Celeste’s stories begin not to add up and when some serious issues arise with the class bank account. This is a familiar plot (Peck’s _Princess Ashley_ is probably one of the better-known non-murderous incarnations), and its scripting is fairly obvious—readers who aren’t alerted by Celeste’s perpetual failure to find her wallet whenever something needs to be paid for will see the oncoming wreck when she playfully practices writing Lauren’s signature. The tale retains some power despite its predictability, however, and Strasser’s exploration of the terminally uncertain Lauren is thoughtful. There’s also sympathy in the realistic treatment of Lauren’s own social unkindnesses (her missteps in her relationship with Tara are particularly credible); the banishment of parents to passing references and italicized chapter-openers is an effective technique in conveying the peer-centeredness of kids. This isn’t the most subtle book about the intricacies of school social structures, but it’s an easily digestible read that gains resonance from its recognition of youthful insecurity. DS

With some aid from hired contractors and their helpful pooch, a husband and wife build their own cozy home. Rhymed text explains the proceedings: "Make a plan" (e.g. blueprints on a drawing board) and "Count the feet" (hire surveyors) and "Clear the land on this street" (call in the bulldozer). Then the serious grunt work begins: piping, foundation laying, framing, roofing, pipe threading, window installation, plastering and plumbing and painting. Throughout the venture, the handy hound pitches right in to drive the concrete truck, balance the plaster on his head, paint the wall the wrong color, and clean up with a shower under the sprinkler. Everyone's pleased with the final product—so pleased, in fact, that the dog puts a "For Rent" sign on his dog house and bunks down at the foot of his contented owners' bed. Viewers who haven't had the pleasure of seeing their own domicile under construction will get a peek at the mysteries behind the walls, cobbled together by the wiry-limbed, sausage-nosed proprietors rendered in retro-styled cartoons. If home repair or remodeling is in the family's future, this should rally everyone's energy and optimism. EB


For readers with neither the time nor inclination for the total-immersion experience of Christopher Bing's acclaimed tribute to the Mudville Nine (BCCB 1/01), Payne steps up to the plate with a straightforward winner of a rendition. Here the mixed-media paintings capture the exaggerated verve of a tall tale, set within the friendly confines of a nineteenth-century ballpark in Anywhere, America. Endpaper closeups of green-painted stadium seats invite viewers to settle in, and the opening scenes, reminiscent of a punchy Norman Rockwell, set the mood of the crowd and players—somber but not yet hopeless. Our first glimpse of Casey, jaw locked and massive shoulders barely squeezed into the far corner of the dugout, is an apt introduction to the arrogant contender. The full view comes as a comic surprise; Casey balances his musclebound torso on narrow hips and spindly little legs, and it's pictorially clear that his reputation has given him a swollen head. Swagger turns to fury at the final, fatal swing, and a full-page headshot has the squint-eyed Casey clenching his teeth and blowing steam out his ears: "Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again." Of course, he does, and the denouement is a rainy, potholed Mudville street with an abandoned baseball soaking forlornly in a puddle. The closing note discloses the early disputes over authorship and Thayer's magnanimous gift of royalty-free rights to the comedian who launched Casey to fame. Play ball! EB

VECIANA-SUAREZ, ANA  *Flight to Freedom*. Orchard, 2002  213p  (First Person Fiction)  ISBN 0-439-38199-1  $16.95  R  Gr. 6-10

One of the first novels in the multicultural First Person Fiction series about coming to America, this thoughtfully detailed fictional diary follows the 1967 journey of a thirteen-year-old girl, Yara Garcia, from Havana, Cuba to Miami, USA, where
her family plans to stay only until Castro is deposed. By quoting her elders and capturing her own responses to them and to her situation, Yara believably documents the family's gradual psychological evolution from middle-class respectability to counterrevolutionary "worms" (gusana) in Cuba, and from exiled expatriates to more settled immigrants in America. Carefully selected incidents illuminate life under communist rule (rationing, retributive political correctness, and forced labor in agricultural "camps") and in their new world, where each wages his or her own "war of independence": Mami gets a job and learns to drive, middle-aged Papi weekends with a makeshift militia with revolutionary aims, sixteen-year-old Ileana sneaks off to see a boy, and Yara stretches cultural boundaries by pushing to go on a trip with a friend. As she adjusts to her new home, Yara also begins to face the paradox of bilingualism: "If I know both languages equally, in what language will I think? How will I dream? How will I pray? Already I know the names for certain things in English but not in Spanish. I've learned them in school and have to ask Papi or Mami to translate the word into Spanish." The novel ends on the fourth of July, but without fireworks: Papi is still saying, "Next year we'll be in Cuba," but the trajectory of the book makes that doubtful even to readers unfamiliar with the historical reality. An authorial afterword ("My Personal Exodus") adds further historical context and some personal history to this accessible but richly textured fictional memoir.

WABER, BERNARD  
*Courage,* written and illus. by Bernard Waber. Lorraine/Houghton, 2002 32p ISBN 0-618-23855-7 $12.00  Ad 4-8 yrs

Waber explores the title virtue through pithy, generally kid-accessible definitions and freewheeling line and watercolor scenes of everyday trials, triumphantly overcome. For "Courage is going to bed without a nightlight," a pair of anxious eyes stare out from inky darkness. For "Courage is tasting the vegetable before making a face," a round-headed, spiky-haired boy boldly shovels the greens into his gaping maw. For "Courage is explaining the rip in your brand-new pants," two pairs of legs pose side by side, one with the offending rent in its trousers, the other obviously maternal and topped by an accusatory finger. Several definitions are less clear, though, and while some may merely require explanation (how acts of self control such as "trying to cover up your mean, jealous side" or "suddenly remembering a silly joke and trying not to giggle when everyone else is being especially serious" are also forms of courage), some are overstretching the concept to cover other virtues ("Courage is a scenic car trip and being stuck in the middle during the best part") and to offer some misleading projections ("Courage is a blade of grass breaking through the icy snow"). Most pictures concretely and directly underscore the textual sense (a sandcastle wipe-out in one frame is followed by a rebuilt structure in the next for "Courage is starting over"), but others may be elusive to young viewers (how does the girl with the saxophone relate to "Courage is holding on to your dream"). Despite the variability of the entries, this title may prove a valuable discussion starter, heavier on charm than on didacticism.

WADDELL, MARTIN  

When the three baby bears find themselves frosted with snow in their wintry playtime, their mother dubs them "snow bears," and thus the game begins.
fronted with these strange snow bears, Mummy Bear pretends to seek her own babies as the kids gigglingly engage in some amusingly transparent deception: "I haven't seen us," says one, and "We aren't here, Mummy Bear," another cunningly prevaricates. Mummy enjoys a romp with the snow bears, and then when they retire to the cabin for hot toast, they conveniently melt down into Mummy's own baby bears. Waddell's affectionate text offers an idyllic frosty gambol, and youngsters will appreciate the lulling repetition, the gentle trickery, and the smallest baby bear's struggles to keep up with her elder siblings ("The smallest snow bear couldn't throw very well. Her paws were as cold as her nose"). Fox-Davies' carefully textured illustrations are a little sweet and staid, but they don't overcute their slightly anthropomorphized bears; the snowy landscapes are full of blue, wintry shadows that sharpen the contrast with the snug cabin's yellow hearthlight, and the big fuzzy bruins are inherently cozy, like big downy coats, even when they're covered in snow. If you're looking for a fireplace-side read after a day of sledding and snow-angels, this is just your cup of hot cocoa. DS

WARD, HELEN, ad. The Rooster and the Fox; ad. and illus. by Helen Ward. Millbrook, 2002 40p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7613-1846-1 $16.95 R 5-8 yrs

Chanticleer the rooster, "herald of the morning, pride of the farmyard," is a boastful sort, and why not? He is "so handsome, so proud, so loved by all." The proud cock is especially admired by Mr. Fox, "reddish, doggish, and hungry for his supper." Mr. Fox flatters Chanticleer into dropping his guard and baring his throat, which the fox quickly seizes in his jaws. Despite the farmyard alarm, the fox succeeds in fleeing with the rooster to the woods. The chase, however, gives Chanticleer time to plan, and he turns the tables on the fox, who also proves susceptible to appeals to vanity. Ward (reteller of The Hare and the Tortoise, 6/99) here takes a crack at Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale." While Cooney's classic Chanticleer and the Fox retells more of Chaucer, Ward's rendition benefits from a more succinct plot, clean prose, crisp pace, and pictures large enough to be seen by group. The line-and-watercolor illustrations are notable for their vibrant color and vigorous compositions; sweeping spreads show a rather neat barnyard populated by sumptuously feathered fowl and assorted domesticated beasts. Compare this new version with Cooney's for some interesting discussion of changes in printing technology as well as graphic design. A note discusses various sources for this tale, and keys to the included fowl, swine, cattle, etc. are appended. JMD

YOLEN, JANE Girl in a Cage; by Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris. Philomel, 2002 234p
ISBN 0-399-23627-9 $18.99 R Gr. 7-10

Yolen and Harris previously dipped into historical Scotland in The Queen's Own Fool (BCCB 7/00), a tale of Mary, Queen of Scots; now they turn to an even more turbulent time in Scottish history. Marjorie is the twelve-year-old daughter of Robert the Bruce, thrilled at her beloved father's coronation as King of Scotland and ignorant of its real implications. Soon she learns: she and her family must flee the armies of Edward Longshanks, King of England, who claims Scotland as his, and to this end they roam the countryside in search of allies and succor while attempting to evade not only the English but also Scots with divergent loyalties.
Finally, however, their flight ends in capture, and Marjorie becomes the prisoner of King Edward, who isolates her in a cage for public viewing and abuse; it's from there that she tells her story. It's a compelling one, with the realities of the exhausting evasion of pursuit particularly well conveyed, and Marjorie's imprisonment (a historical fact) is a situation that commands attention. The book heightens the tension with repeated faceoffs between the captured Marjorie and the ill but determined King of England, and it adds both warmth and pathos with her occasional forbidden contact with some local village children and with the monk who brings her food and water. There's also interest in Marjorie's evolution from a rather spoiled and willful little miss to a young woman of dignity and responsibility in a terrible situation, who along the way has learned to appreciate the virtues of her cool but steely and protective stepmother. This has rousing adventure and tense psychological drama, all wrapped in rich tartan atmosphere. DS


There's a whole lotta knick knack going on, as not one but ten old men do their traditional paddywhacking thing on thumb and shoe and spine in this elaborate pop-up confection. Zelinsky gets the official credit, supplying watercolor scenes of a curly-headed kid who seems mildly startled by the antics of the tiny men who flutter around him throughout his ordinary round of activities, “rolling home” via various transports from roller skates to a wheelchair. The real “Wow!” though goes to paper engineer Andrew Baron, credited in fine print on the back cover, who devised the book's nifty moves. Flaps and tabs and wheels propel the action, driving a bone rather alarmingly into the dog's mouth while simultaneously rushing an old man along on his bicycle, or launching another geezer in diminishing frames across the sky. Unfortunately, the initial pleasure gives way to disappointment: the manipulatives are often awkwardly positioned and, in the copy inspected for review, quite resistant to movement (if you're going to sing along, sing very slowly), so it's adult reader rather than child who necessarily gets all the fun of making the book go. Zelinsky's pictures provide plenty of opportunity to show off the paper pyrotechnics, but considered for composition alone, they're overcrowded and jarring, making it difficult for the littlest viewers to readily pick out the play underway. Still, the fun is in watching the familiar tune (melody and chords on back cover) spring to life, so laissez this old man rouler. EB
PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS


Virginia Lee Burton (1909-1968) was a gifted illustrator, writer, and graphic artist whose limited body of work (a total of sixteen titles) includes several twentieth century classics—Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel (1939), The Little House (1942), and Katy and the Big Snow (1943)—and who is well worth this kind of focused attention. The text, however, is somewhat disappointing; it would be nice if the book didn’t just tell readers that Burton possessed a lively wit, a love of life, and “an effervescence that enlivened all she touched” but instead provided examples of that wit, love and effervescence. Happily, the text is overshadowed by the attractiveness of the book itself. From the page layout to the typography to the endpapers, this visually rich volume exemplifies fine book design. The plentiful illustrations depict the broad scope of Burton’s talent, which included book illustration, wood-carving, and fabric design. Photos of Burton include informal snapshots alone and with family as well as the more formal poses of Burton at her desk or in her studio that accompanied the inevitable human interest news stories about Burton as a woman who successfully combined her personal and professional work as wife, mother, and professional artist/illustrator during the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s. While this doesn’t provide much fresh insight into Burton’s work, it does offer a compact and attractive overview of her impressive contribution to children’s literature. CJ


Wanda Gág (1893-1946) is chiefly renowned for her path-breaking children’s picture books, notably Millions of Cats (1928). However, her extensive body of work also included prints, drawings, and paintings, as well as cover art and illustrations in New Masses, The Liberator, and other politically progressive and avant-garde magazines. Although Gág has been the focus of other books, The Gdg Family is the first to combine plentiful illustrations with a biographical study of Wanda and her father and her sister, both artists in their own right. This attractive volume includes many examples of the three artists’ work, plus archival photos, letters, and excerpts from Wanda Gág’s voluminous diaries, which provide a detailed portrait of her as an artist, book designer, and feminist in New York City during the 1920s. L’Enfant has ably utilized primary sources to create a detailed and well-documented picture of the Gág family in the context of their times and German-Bohemian aesthetic traditions. Eighteen pages of detailed source notes, bibliography, and index accompany the text. The Gdg Family is an important addition to research collections of children’s literature, and admirers of Wanda Gág’s work will find it an accessible and visually engaging source of information. CJ
Subject and Use Index

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

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_The Horn Book Magazine_, starred review*

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_Booklist_, starred review

"The lives of a well-to-do turn-of-the-century family are limned with attention to daily activities and daily joys and sorrows in a prose that ripples with clarity and sweetness and an underlying evolution of spirit."

_Kirkus Reviews_

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