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THE BULLETIN
OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS
April 2005
Vol. 58 No. 8

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

The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books (ISSN 0008-9036) is published monthly except August by the Publications Office of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and distributed by the University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903.

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1 year, institutions, $75.00; multiple institutional subscriptions, $70 for the first and $50 for each additional; individuals, $50.00; students, $15.00. In countries other than the United States, add $7.00 per subscription for postage. Japanese subscription agent: Kinokuniya Company Ltd. Single copy rate: $7.50. Volumes available in microfilm from ProQuest, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Complete volumes available in microfiche from Johnson Associates, P.O. Box 1017, Greenwich, CT 06830. Subscription checks should be made payable to the University of Illinois Press. All notices of change of address should provide both the old and new address.
Postmaster: Send address changes to The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books, University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903.

All inquiries about subscriptions and advertising should go to University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak, Champaign, IL 61820-6903, 217-333-0950; toll free 866-244-0626.

Review copies and all correspondence about reviews should be sent to Deborah Stevenson, The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books, 501 E. Daniel St., Champaign, IL 61820-6601. Email: bccb@alexia.lis.uiuc.edu; phone: 217-244-0324.

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Periodicals postage paid at Champaign, Illinois
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Cover illustration from Photo by Brady: A Picture of the Civil War ©2005. Used by permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
Photo by Brady: A Picture of the Civil War
by Jennifer Armstrong

We all know exactly what the Civil War looked like, don’t we? Thanks to the photographs of Mathew Brady and his one-time partner Alexander Gardner, we know the stoic, staring faces of the soldiers, the high collar and sunken cheeks of Lincoln before his election, the dignity of white-haired Lee with hat in hand after the war, the wounded on stretchers, the “contraband” in flight, the corpses in trenches. But just how candid are these pictures? What images are missing, and why? And if we still feel an emotional jolt across nearly a century and a half, what did these photos mean to the torn country itself? In this thought-provoking work, Armstrong explores the body of photographs that are generally—and often too loosely—attributed to Brady and discusses how they influenced the war and fixed it in popular imagination.

Opening sections introduce Brady, the artist and businessman, and clarify the technical limitations of mid-nineteenth-century photography that directly bear upon the documentation of the war. Already a renowned portrait photographer, Brady worked within a studio tradition that not only allowed but demanded careful staging of the subject, manipulation of light, and addition of appropriate props—a tradition that he would carry onto the battlefield. He would also maintain the distinction between artist and technician, setting up the poses himself and relegating the actual camera work to an operator. Never quite the businessman his partner Alexander Gardner would be, Brady nonetheless recognized that the coming hostilities would promote a steady trade in cartes de visite as soldiers clamored for parting mementos and in battle-scene photos for newspaper lithographs. The crankiness of glass-plate photography, with its requirements of cumbersome equipment, still subjects, ample light, long exposures, and a ready source of fresh water, would, despite Brady’s artistry and commercial acumen, impose serious constraints on which images he and his operators could actually collect in the field.

With this background established, Armstrong turns to a chronological tour of the battlegrounds and, with the aid of a dense gallery of meticulously captioned Brady (and later Gardner) Studio photos, she deftly traces the interplay between the war and its documentation. The Union Army welcomed whatever images they could obtain for reconnaissance purposes, soldiers with access to illustrated papers gained some sense of military developments on other fronts, and civilians were shocked by the reality of the carnage that letters from the combatants could only suggest: “Pictures of this sort—the blood still fresh and the bodies still warm (or so it seemed to the shuddering visitors)—had never been shown to the public.” At least as intriguing as the extant photos are those images conspicuous by their absence. There is no photo from the first battle of Bull Run, Armstrong
points out, because Brady’s wagon was upended by retreating Union soldiers. There is no picture of Lincoln delivering his address at Gettysburg, because his brief speech was over before photographers could set up their cameras. There are no action scenes, no night scenes, no winter scenes, no indoor scenes, and often no scenes from areas with murky water. There are, however, plenty of photos of the dead, the most cooperative of subjects, who docilely pose under the wide blue sky and silently accept whichever label—“Reb” or “Yank”—the photographer assigns.

Armstrong confines her attention to the Civil War, but she leaves readers well prepared to examine critically the still and video images from contemporary conflicts by pursuing those questions already applied to Brady’s work: How candid are these pictures? What images are missing, and why? As her imaginative sidebar scenarios of “The Photograph Not Taken” suggest, the pictorial view of war is always incomplete and subtly fashioned by the photographer’s skill, intent, and luck. This insight should serve young adults well as they aspire to be better historians, better photographers, and better citizens. (Imprint information appears on p. 326.)

Elizabeth Bush, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-073702-6 $16.89
Reviewed from galleys R* Gr. 6-9

Just after her thirteenth birthday, Ingrid gets lost in the bad part of town, where the local crazy, Cracked-Up Katie, offers to call a cab for her. Inside Katie’s house, Ingrid hears footsteps upstairs. The next day, Katie is found strangled, and Ingrid’s relentless curiosity (and her need for her red soccer cleats, which she left in Katie’s house) draws Ingrid deep into a maze of clues and false leads to the identity of the woman’s murderer. The solving of the crime affords the reader a satisfyingly fast-paced mystery of appropriate difficulty, an enjoyably pervasive sense of danger, and several exhilaratingly close brushes with death for the protagonist, but it is the narrative voice, loaded with Ingrid’s acerbic comments and early teen angst, that makes this a standout novel. (When presented with the possibility of a braces adjustment, Ingrid reflects, “Adjustment meant tightening. Tightening didn’t hurt much while it was happening, but every turn of the screw made a squeaky sound that seemed to come from right inside Ingrid’s head, and reminded her of the Shackleton IMAX movie . . . that scene where ice floes slowly crush the ship to death.”) Her involvement in the community production of Alice in Wonderland gives the novel its name and furnishes Ingrid with both scope for emotional development and a forum within which to make the contacts that lead to the clues that help her solve the mystery. The private problems of Ingrid’s family and friends
allow her to demonstrate her powers of analysis (which sometimes lead her astray),
thus fleshing out her character beyond the standard sleuth stereotype into an ap-
pealingly whole person with fears, dreams, and even a romantic interest in the
form of Joey, the son of police chief Strade. The no-nonsense tone of the well-
written prose, the multifaceted characters, the hint of romance, and the subtly
structured mystery open the potential fan base to include just about everyone. TC

ALLAN, NICHOLAS Where Willy Went...; written and illus. by Nicholas
Allan. Knopf, 2005 [32p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-83030-8 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

Willy (apparently named for a nearby feature) is a sperm, dwelling inside one Mr.
Browne (he and the other sperm “all lived in Mr. Browne at the same address”).
Though he’s not much of a mathematician (and he undergoes some taunting for
that in sperm school), he’s quite a talented swimmer, and he practices constantly
in hopes of winning The Great Swimming Race and its prize, the egg inside Mrs.
Browne. Come the day of the race, Willy manages to outswim his neighbors and
makes it first to the egg, and the result is a little embryo who grows into a girl
named Edna, like Willy poor in math but talented at swimming. Allan has never
shrunk from mining humor from attractively taboo subjects (as in his toilet trag-
edy The Thing that Ate Aunt Julia, BCCB 2/91), and the gleeful irreverence of
Willy’s saga will gratify youngsters who are factually familiar with reproductive
details but still keenly aware of their absurdity. Those a little hazy about the pro-
cess, however, are going to be thoroughly confused at various junctures where
reproductive reality takes a back seat to joke execution, and by the failure to men-
tion that all this activity takes place at a microscopic level. The phraseology may
occasionally mislead all audiences (when the fetus “grew bigger than Mrs. Browne’s
tummy,” it sounds like an Alien-esque eruption is occurring), and the dogmatic
will query the occasionally strained logic (the book rhetorically asks where little
Willy has gone, but his swimming competitors disappear without the slightest
acknowledgment; Edna’s comparatively superb swimming ability implies the other
children started out life in some different, non-natatorial process). Aside from a
truly bizarre diagram that seems to suggest Mrs. Browne possesses a peninsula and
estuary, the line-and-watercolor illustrations interpret biology with modest and
obvious helpings of distortion and generous helpings of comedy, though some
images let opportunities slip by (especially in the one foldout spread, which folds
out exactly contrary to expectation). Ultimately, this is really too slight to work as
an independently humorous narrative, but it could provide some tension-relieving
giggles or an amusing “spot the misrepresentation” quiz in a guided discussion of
reproduction. DS

ANDERSON, M. T. Whales on Stilts; illus. by Kurt Cyrus. Harcourt,
2005 [192p]
ISBN 0-15-205340-9 $15.00
Reviewed from galleys

What would you do if you visited your dad’s job and found out that he works for
a mad scientist bent on taking over the world with an army of whales on stilts
wearing laser beams? Ten-year-old Lily is in that precarious position, but luckily,
she has help. Not from her dad, of course; he wholly buys that he works for “a midsize company devoted to expanding cetacean pedestrian opportunities,” overlooking the fact that his boss, Larry, has blue, rubbery hands, wears a bag over his head, and pours brine on himself. No, Lily has two friends who star in their own books—Jasper Dash, in his Boy Technonaut series, and Katie Mulligan, in her Horror Hollow series—and only they have the guts to face off against an invasion of fully armed whales. However, this book seems to belong to Lily alone—is she good enough to be the heroine, even with her friends backing her up? Anderson’s zany new entry has layer upon layer of heroic kids, clueless adults, and thinly disguised villains, topped off with an aggressively chummy narrator whose offhand digressions provide many of the funniest moments (such as the way he survived the Manatee Offensive one terrible summer). Like the narrator, this book has a sense of humor about itself, and it isn’t shy about showing off its conventions: ways to withhold information, build or dissolve tension, annoy the people at Harcourt, and advertise more books are all laid bare for laughter. A sprinkling of full-page sketches throughout the text provides visuals for the mechanics of the whale operation. This will be a favorite of those willing to smirk at series conventions or any reader who’s ready to giggle through a book. KH


See this month’s Big Picture, p. 323, for review.

BAKER, KEITH Lucky Days with Mr. and Mrs. Green; written and illus. by Keith Baker. Harcourt, 2005 72p ISBN 0-15-216500-2 $16.00 R Gr. 1-3

The irrepressible alligator duo from Meet Mr. and Mrs. Green and More Mr. and Mrs. Green (BCCB 3/04) returns in another series of three chapter-length stories, these relating the loss and discovery of Mrs. Green’s pearls, Mr. Green’s successful guessing of the number of gumballs in a jar, and Mrs. Green’s helping Mr. Green to overcome his inability to sing in a talent show. The brief sentences of short phrases, arranged in small chunks with ragged-right edges, shift focus between Mr. and Mrs. Green, giving each protagonist occasion to demonstrate his or her personality. Though the thrust of the opening story gets a bit lost amid Mr. Green’s multiple random searches for the pearls and that narrative excitement is never fully recaptured throughout the book, these mild-mannered stories retain the enthusiastic embracing of all things enjoyable that made the first two Green books engaging. The illustrations follow the style established in the preceding volumes—action-based visual vignettes of vivid acrylics in emerald, ruby, and amethyst interspersed with double-page spreads of the more exciting bits. Fans of the Greens will take pleasure in reading this latest installment. TC


Thirteen-year-old Grace, with her red hair and her quiet ways, has always felt out of sync with the rest of her family. Sullen and grumpy, she resents having to spend
the summer in Trinidad with her grandmother. When her exuberant Aunty Jackie brings over a photograph album of their parents' old friends, Grace's attention is drawn to a picture of a man with a birthmark exactly like her own. Unfortunately, Jackie can't remember who he is, and his face is smudged beyond recognition in the picture. Grace is convinced that he must be her real father, and she sets out on a quest to find him. Help comes from the neighbor boy, Raj, with whom she achieves almost instant intimacy as they discuss the difficulties of families. While the firmness of Grace's conviction that her paternity is suspect has a shaky and under-realized foundation, it turns out that her suspicions are on target; blood and birthmarks will out, and her mother has a lot of explaining to do at the end of the summer. Though the idea is intriguing and there's some satisfaction in Grace's uncovering of family history, Baptiste's pacing is uneven as she spends overmuch time detailing things like the mundane interchange of the children's first meeting with their parents' friends while leaving out whole conversations that must have taken place for Raj to know what he does about Grace's situation. Characters drift in and out of island dialect, making it difficult to consistently imagine their distinct voices. Between the improbable ideas that summer on an island paradise is less appealing than in steamy Brooklyn, that a faded picture immediately triggers suspicions about one's paternity, and that specifically placed birthmarks, a taste for soursop ice cream, and a tendency to doodle in the margins of letters are convincing markers of kinship, only those readers most determined to suspend disbelief and most tolerant of soap-opera contrivance will manage sympathy for Grace's dilemma. KC


Twenty-six acrostics built around an alphabetical list of the names of animals fill the pages of this picture book, in which "zebra" becomes "Zoo is closing./ Everybody come see! Baby is getting/ Ready for bed./ A horse in striped pajamas.” While the poetry itself is unskilled—the images are often strained, the poems apparently written to fit snugly into their animal-name backbones rather than to inspire with their artistic unity—the technique used to create the poems will fire readers' imagination, potentially resulting in much wordplay and literary experimentation on their part. Line-and-watercolor illustrations in muted reds, blues, and yellows depict children of many races enjoying the fantastical adventures with the animals suggested by the corresponding poems. The children's large, trusting eyes and stocky frames and the mellow roundedness of the animals' bodies (achieved through hatched, scribbled, and striated shadowing) conjure an atmosphere of innocence, while the period clothing heightens the air of old-fashioned wholesomeness. Unfortunately, the extremely youthful tone of the illustrations clashes somewhat with the text's creativity-sparking potential, resulting in confusion as to the intended audience; while young viewers may enjoy the affectionate nature of the pictures but miss the cleverness of the writer's technique, readers-alone who may be attracted to the inventiveness displayed in the text may well be put off by the nursery-rhyme tenor of the illustrations. Still, these disparate qualities may be valued by their own corps of appreciative readers and viewers if the book is used to spark original poetic projects based on the poetic premise. TC

Our unfortunate narrator had hoped for a pet for his birthday, but instead of the cuddly or playful mammal-type companion he’d envisioned, he receives Norman the goldfish (“All Norman does is swim around and around and around and around and around and around and around and around”). He takes Norman to school for show and tell, thinking that a good sales pitch will get a classmate interested in Norman or that he can take Norman back to the store after school, but Norman’s quietly staunch companionship throughout an eventful day eventually wins his boy’s heart. The narrator’s plaintive voice (“No one will want a sorry-looking fish in a gunky bowl”) will be a familiar echo of many youngsters’ disappointed responses to unwanted gifts, and there’s enough rueful humor in his response to the predicament to keep it light (though viewers will be glad that loyal Norman receives his due). Jones’ computer-generated illustrations follow the text’s lead in gently enhancing Norman’s expressiveness without expanding beyond the perceptions of an affectionate owner; though perspectives are flat, sharp dark/light contrasts add compositional interest to the smooth planes of color, and Norman’s orange figure inside his bowl of azure water stands out cheerily against the more sober tones of the school. A few viewers may find their own piscine pets sadly deficient by comparison with Norman, but most will warm to the idea of a quiet companion’s subtler advantages. DS


Five giant sisters open a quarry on Umbagog Lake in New Hampshire, where one of the sisters, to show her skill, carves “a real live baby” out of pink granite. True to tall-tale form, the sisters perform all kinds of over-the-top feats to quiet the now-screaming baby. Finally, a pint-sized backwoods girl with plenty of little siblings takes the child in her arms, feeds him a bottle, and cuddles him to sleep. Realizing their mistakes, the sisters are able to care for their baby when he wakes at sundown, using their extraordinary strength and their skills with river water, wood, string, and stone to fill the child’s small-scale needs. Folksy prose gives the tale an air of homegrown authenticity, and local details tossed into the narration boost that sense of legitimacy: “Folks in Vermont were starting to investigate whether they could move their whole state over to the other side of Maine just to get some quiet, not to mention some desirable Atlantic coastline in the bargain.” In Hawkes’ luxuriant painted landscapes, the huge sisters and tiny everypeople appear equally at home on green rolling hills, clear blue rivers, and craggy gray outcroppings. Exaggerated grins and frowns on the sisters and images of children and animals in mid-leap give an impression of movement and increase the forward push of the story. Beguilingly, the narration pauses for a two-page spread of pastoral serenity while the baby sleeps. A refreshingly original tale, this yarn will enthral storytime audiences as well as youngsters wanting one more book before bed. Endpapers provide maps of the New Hampshire area. TC
BOWER, TAMARA  How the Amazon Queen Fought the Prince of Egypt; written and illus. by Tamara Bower.  Atheneum, 2005  40p
ISBN 0-689-84434-4  $16.95  R  Gr. 3-6

Serpot, queen of the “Land of Women” near present-day Syria, is challenged to battle by Egyptian prince Pedikhons, backed by his Assyrian allies. Her Amazons fight their attackers to a draw, and when Serpot and Pedikhons meet the next day to settle matters once and for all, each confesses admiration for the other’s valor. Bonded by “the great love that entered” into them, they joined forces to conquer India. The brief story, seamlessly refashioned from a fragmented papyrus scroll, is at once stately and energetic. Although the clipped narration rings with ancient formality, the warriors’ trash talk ages remarkably well: “You will be to me as an insect in the mouth of a bird. I will smash your face into your neck.” According to closing notes, the tale itself derives from the Greco-Roman Story-Cycle of King Petubast, probably compiled for Ptolemy II, and comprises both history (Pedikhons was a kinsman of the Egyptian Petubast) and mythology (Amazons, at least as described by the ancient Greeks, cannot be verified). Bower’s pastiche of Egyptian and Assyrian iconography pays apt tribute to these tangled roots. Although the stiffly posed figures will be instantly recognizable to viewers as a familiar style from “over there, back then,” an explanation of symbols with specific page references sifts Egyptian from Assyrian motifs and presents some key pictorial elements that the audience can later apply to other ancient artifacts from the region. Indeed, Bower’s entire five-page addendum, with explanations of hieratic and demotic scripts and of the highlighted text lines that are translated into hieroglyphs and back into original syntax, will for many readers be even more engrossing than the battle.  EB

BRYAN, SEAN  A Boy and His Bunny; illus. by Tom Murphy.  Arcade, 2005  32p

Morning brings a surprise to a towheaded boy who wakes up with an unusual piece of headgear: a rabbit. Once you’ve got a bunny on your head, it pretty much dominates your day, and in the protagonist’s case it does so in gentle rhyme, as he names the bunny Fred and gets out of bed. When his mother expresses concern, he points out that the rabbit-topped life allows for plenty of latitude, since French can be said, armies can be led, and you could drive a moped (which is actually drawn as a motorscooter, but never mind) with a bunny on your head. His mother eventually takes the point but finds a new challenge when the boy’s sister turns up sporting an alligator. The idea is uncomplicated to the point of being elemental, but the polished craft of the benign rhyming epidemic makes this an inviting tale of innocent silliness. Murphy’s illustrations similarly eschew complexity: strong black lines evince a controlled ebullience and gaiety, anchoring a palette essentially limited to robin’s-egg blue and butter yellow. Much is made out of little visually as well, though, with variations in perspective and shifts from reality (well, osten- sible reality) to hypothetical activities adding variety to the strange yet strangely mundane situation of the hare-brained boy. Early fans of Seuss will find similar if quieter pleasures in this book’s close-coupled rhyme and happy-go-lucky surrealism.  DS
Every Holy Week in Antigua, Guatemala, throngs of devotees carry life-sized statues through the streets of the city, telling the story of Christ’s death and resurrection. The people of Antigua welcome them by creating elaborately designed colored sawdust carpets that lie in the paths of the procession. Based on the author’s own experiences growing up in a Chinese household in Guatemala, this story is told from the point of view of a young Chinese girl observing the ritual for the first time. The night before the procession, Don Ortiz teaches the girl how the designs are created in the dusty streets on Thursday in preparation for the next day’s event. Despite his efforts to prepare her, she is horrified to see the designs actually destroyed under the footsteps of the cucuruchos (procession participants) until Don Ortiz takes her aside and explains that the impermanence of the carpets mimics the cycle of life and death. This little-known ritual of sawdust-carpet-making provides an intriguing topic for a picture book; telling the tale from a Chinese perspective and including occasional comparisons between Christian and Chinese ritual practices furthers the multicultural interest of the story. Unfortunately, the art doesn’t really convey the allure of the colorful carpets: the washed-out watercolor, pastel, and colored pencil illustrations lack the visual authority to fully round out the tale, and the drafting of figures is, for the most part, stiff and lifeless. Still, young listeners are likely to enjoy the concept, and they may even want to try their hands at creating sawdust carpets after the first read.

A prologue, describing the events of Holy Week and the author’s own experiences in Guatemala, and a glossary of religious and Spanish terms are included. HM

ISBN 0-8050-7616-6 $14.95
Reviewed from galleys Gr. 7 up

It’s been ten years since the publication of Carlson’s landmark Cool Salsa (BCCB 9/94), and now she returns to the bilingual and multicultural world for more rich poetic material. Nearly forty poems, some first published here, are divided into five sections—“Language, Identity,” “Neighborhoods,” “Amor,” “Family Moments, Memories,” and “Victory”; with one (unexplained) exception, the English version of a poem precedes the Spanish, regardless of which is the original, while a few Spanglish poems particularly dependent on the interplay of languages appear only in their original form. Authors vary in prominence but the standard of poetry generally remains high, with standouts such as José Antonio Burciaga’s cunningly executed “Bilingual Love Poem,” which draws simultaneously on the meanings of key words in Spanish and in English, and Carlos Aguasaco’s “New in New York,” a robust celebration of his grandmother’s embrace of her new urban home. Relevant themes and an attractive variety of tones, which provides something for fans of the funny as well as aficionados of the pensive, provide additional appeal to a collection ripe for sharing in various curricular and dramatic ways or simply reading privately. A glossary and biographical notes on the poets are included. DS

Cork, a muskrat, meets Fuzz, an opossum (though he is always a "possum" in the text), and the two try to establish a friendship in spite of their differences. Everything Cork wants to do seems strange to Fuzz, and vice versa, until they discover their common interest in collecting rocks. Secure in the knowledge of their shared hobby, the pair sets out for Cork's pond to check out his stash of stones. The line-and-watercolor illustrations head straight for soft and cuddly, giving the animals heavily textured fur, shy smiles, and wide eyes; even their wormlike tails seem almost touchable as the duo plays in the sunshine. For the most part, the story is told in very short sentences that rarely break across a line. While this brevity will appeal to many beginning readers, the splitting reflects the choppiness of the narrative style—scenes often lack continuity as dialogue and action jump from one topic to another. Still, readers may find that the invitingly cozy illustrations provide enough connection to make the story clear and enjoyable.  

**CHENG, ANDREA**  *The Lace Dowry*. Front Street, 2005  [120p]  ISBN 1-932425-20-9  $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-7  

Juli is surprised and angry to learn that her domineering mother has been saving for years to purchase a lace tablecloth for her dowry; no one in Budapest has dowries in 1933, and marriage is far from the mind of twelve-year-old Juli. Nonetheless, she and her mother travel to Halas, renowned for its lace, to commission the elaborate piece, returning every two months to make a payment and check in on the progress. Over the course of the months, Juli befriends the lacemaker's daughter, a girl her age named Roza, and she is subsequently made aware of the physical detriment caused the lacemakers by their prolonged close work in dim lighting. The central conflict here is that of the relationship of Juli and her mother; their mutual stubbornness precludes their seeing each other's point of view, with Juli perceiving her mother as demanding and uppity, and her mother perceiving her as thankless and unaware. Juli's insistence that the dowry tablecloth is causing Roza's mother to go blind (and her subsequent stealing from her mother to purchase a jeweler's glass for Roza's family) elevates the tension to a new if quickly resolved level. A somewhat overly tidy ending erases all personality conflicts as Juli's mother's obstinacy is excused as wanting what is best for Juli and all past transgressions are forgiven. The story of Juli and Roza is more effectively developed, with themes of country girl/city girl guiding their queries and interests. Stories of overbearing mothers and determined teens are resolutely present, regardless of time and place, and young readers willing to forgive the convenient conclusion will enjoy the universality of the theme. An author's note, linking the story to the author's own Hungarian heritage, is included.  

Reviewed from galleys  R*  Gr. 7-10  

Peculiar Ms. Dallimore has asked her 7B students to write an essay responding to the question "Who Am I?"; the assignment functions to reveal a wealth of unobvious
connections to the reader as the teens learn about themselves and, unknowingly, one another. As Neema struggles to begin the essay, her great-grandmother Kalpana arrives from India, determined in her old age to become better acquainted with her twelve-year-old great-granddaughter in Australia. Kalpana has recurring dreams of flying; she's therefore intrigued with eighth-grader Gull Oliver, who flies down the street on his skateboard every night while Kalpana watches, smiling from the window. Neema is also fascinated with Gull: she can't remember how she knows the dark-eyed boy on the skateboard, nor can she stop thinking of him (when what she, along with her classmates, really needs to be doing is writing that essay). Guided by the framework of the assignment and the carefully crafted development of each character, the multiple plot threads and points of view encased in this penetrating tale of self-awakening come together to great effect. A dash of magical realism gently supports the cadre of voices and imbues the tale with a thoughtful humor. This quietly powerful tale explores the individual significance of each personal narrative and the many unforeseen ways in which lives touch one another; it is the kind of story that leaves the reader silently begging for it not to grow predictable, and it doesn't. Clarke effectively gets in to the heads of an ensemble of characters, some repeatedly, others for a sole section, and gently weaves their lives together into a cohesive tale of dreams realized and self-understanding achieved.


Though the Boy longs to learn magic, his master, the Magician, always refuses. It seems all the Boy is good for is bathing the Magician's six white rabbits (for the rabbit-out-of-a-hat trick), weeding the garden, and washing the dishes. On performance days, the Magician allows the Boy to work the puppets for the “Saint George and the Dragon” show—until the day the Saint George puppet goes missing and the Magician (magically, of course) sends the Boy deep into the Land of Story to find the fabled knight. After plunging through the events of folktale after folktale, the Boy discovers that the secret to finding Saint George is also the key to his own acceptance for tutelage by his master. The Boy’s diffident everyman temperament and the Sunday-saunter tempo of the narrative may leave some readers unmoved. Nevertheless, Cooper’s playful prose amuses, and the Boy’s eventual victory over his own fear ensures a comfortable ending. Black-and-white illustrations (originally executed in line, watercolor, and colored pencil) demonstrate a remarkable level of kinetic energy, placing some dynamic image in the foreground and using sinuous trails of diagonally arranged objects to pull the viewer’s gaze backward into the drawing. With chapters short enough to tempt hesitant independent readers, a nonthreatening large-print format, and tongue-in-cheek textual references to many a familiar folktale, this personable offering could serve as a sheltered stepping-stone between the more challenging picture books and longer works. TC


The Blue Ribbon-winning duo of Cowley and Bishop (see Red-Eyed Tree Frog,
returns to their format of gleaming photographs and brief lines of text to chronicle the slow progress of a chameleon from one tree to another in search of food. The sentences are vigorous phrases ("What's this?/ A scorpion!/ Watch out, chameleon!/ The scorpion's stinger/ is poisonous") presented in large font for easy reading; they occasionally trail across multiple pages, matching the action of the photographs and forming a narrative that develops the primary chameleon into a sympathetic character. In luminous stills that capture the journey moment by moment, two startlingly hideous geckos, a garish tree frog, a tiny chameleon, and a hostile scorpion disturb the main character's equanimity as his telescopic eyes swivel to evaluate all potential threats. The reptilian traveler is shown in postures that point up the drama of his expedition (his refined tiptoeing past a scorpion is choice), creating by their visual continuity a sense of movement usually found in film. An impressive series of photos show the chameleon using its powerful tongue to snatch a caterpillar off a distant branch, then chewing and gulping its prey before being menaced by a defensive female chameleon. Youthful nature buffs will be entranced by the vivid photography, enticed into reading by the attractive brevity of the energetic text, and intrigued by the surprising facts about chameleons and the photographer's methodology related in the informational pages at the end of the book. TC

Reviewed from galleys M 5-8 yrs

A stuffed bear has weighed in with his survivor's tale (Spedden's Polar, the Titanic Bear, BCCB 12/94), so who's to deny a mechanical pig equal access to the Titanic spotlight? Passenger Edith Rosenbaum brought along her porcine music box on the doomed voyage, and when she was reluctantly evacuated to a lifeboat, she called upon "Maxixe" to lighten frightened children's spirits with a singalong: "Maxixe, you are so brave,' my mistress said as she sat on the safe, dry deck [of the rescue vessel]. 'Yes! Yes! the children cried. 'Maxixe, you are a hero!'" Unfortunately, while Polar proved an engaging focal point for a dramatic account, the story here is thin indeed, and Rosenbaum's background is never sufficiently explored to generate much interest on its own. Whatley's waxy cast moves stiffly through the evacuation, and the melodramatic expressions and footlight-like illumination feel more like tableaux than epic disaster. Even with the author's note to flesh out a few details, this is an addition to the Titanic chronicles that depends on the appetite for such stories but never really satisfies it. EB

CRUMPACKER, BUNNY Alexander's Pretending Day; illus. by Dan Andreasen. Dutton, 2005 32p
ISBN 0-525-46936-2 $15.99 Ad 3-5 yrs

In the tradition of The Runaway Bunny and Mama, Do You Love Me?, a son engages his mother in a game of imaginary challenges to test the limits of her responses. What if he became a mouse, for instance, or a monster, or a dinosaur? In each case, the mother deflects the aggressive potential of his advances with offers of food, love, or understanding. If he roared like an angry lion, for instance, she wouldn't roar back, but instead would ask "very politely if you'd like to have your
ears scratched or your tummy tickled." She'd invite the monster in and serve it its favorite sandwich, or, upon finding out that the dinosaur was the grouchy rather than the friendly sort, simply wait for it to leave. Rather than rising to meet his challenge, then, her mild-mannered responses tend to drain the energy from her son's imaginative power plays; her features have a wan, yellowed blandness that supports this aspect of her character while contrasting sharply with the squatty assertiveness of her son. His Campbell-soup-kid cuteness undermines his ability to be as scary as he wants to be, though, so the result is a steady saccharine drip rather than the dynamic give and take of similar offerings. However, Alexander's imagination is impressively fertile and inspiring, and the assurances of maternal consistency will no doubt be comforting for the very young. KC


These compact board books feature perpetually moving Bing, a black bunny with enormous eyes and dapper checked overalls, and his faithful sidekick, Flop, a caramel-colored rag doll who may also be a bunny of some sort, interacting with a number of themed and labeled objects as they prepare their play for the day, whether it be going on a picnic or making music. Besides the name-the-object format, each book introduces the youngest listeners to the elements of story structure by featuring a lengthy dose of cumulative rising action, some foreshadowing, and a simple conflict with a quick resolution. The picnic, for instance, is rained out, and Bing breaks "poor music box" with a too-enthusiastic bash on its head, but a change of venue and some felicitously applied tape quickly restore joy. The retro styling of the art is attractive, featuring a sophisticated palette of olive, brick, and pumpkin as the characters do their Bing Thing on black backgrounds or stylized puddles of color with swooshy shapes reminiscent of 1960s light shows. Unfortunately, the compositions are often frenetic and overbusy, scattering the visual focus and drowning out the simple text. Still, the small format and engaging stories make these just right for slip-in-the-purse-and-go-anywhere diversions. KC


With a bully named Slug demanding a five-dollar donation each week and his own widowed father struggling to resuscitate the family business—a substandard museum of freakish curiosities—twelve-year-old Alex has enough to worry him. When his father's most recent purchase, a 2,000-year-old corpse, revivifies in his basement and chases Alex and his cousin Freddie all over town, mumbling, "Se parakalo"—Greek for "please"—their troubles multiply exponentially. Soon the two boys are stumbling through the Underworld of the ancient Greeks, where they learn that the basement corpse needs their help to win a second chance at eternal bliss. Amid much arguing and panicking, the duo avoids mythical monsters, triumphs over the malevolent tricks of Charon and Hades, then emerges in Greece during the corpse's lifetime to foil the plot of a secret society of assassins. The rollicking pace of the plot pulls the reader right into the thick of the story, while the informal tone of Alex's self-deprecating narrative voice makes his ordeals credible. The complicated plot is deftly handled, dollops of exposition and brief other-
worldly encounters laying the groundwork for every story twist without diminishing the effect of the ending. Even minor characters receive an adroitly applied dose of personality—snarkily deceitful Hades particularly shines. Graduates from the easy reader adventures of the Time Warp Trio will greet Alex as an everykid after their own hearts. TC

Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-12

Frightened but determined, seventeen-year-old Gwen returns from San Francisco to Mirage Point, the beach where she became the focus of town gossip when she was ten. That’s when a sleepwalking incident at the water’s edge ended in a mystical encounter with a naked young man and brought Gwen under the searching gaze of the police and the local psychologist. Now Gwen’s grandmother has broken her leg, so she’s asked that Gwen help out at her inn on the Point. Thus commences again the ancient courtship cycle of selkie man and human woman as the beautiful youth from Gwen’s past returns to woo her as his mate. Set in a northern California town whose social traditions revolve around New Age philosophy, the story of Gwen’s modern experience with a creature of legend seems utterly natural, her own urban training in self-protection and skepticism providing a balance that encourages the reader’s own suspension of disbelief. Alluring descriptions of seaside beauties further entrance the reader, while Gwen’s own fascination with Jesse, the handsome and dangerously passionate man from the deep, heightens the intensity of the reader’s investment. The recurring theme of Gwen’s desire to achieve a perfect dive into a hazardous sea unifies the story and foreshadows Gwen’s evolution into a self-determined young adult. Readers who grew up with Mollie Hunter’s *A Stranger Came Ashore* (BCCB 1/76) or Berlie Doherty’s *Daughter of the Sea* (BCCB 12/97) will welcome an outing with destiny-touched Gwen and her ocean-going boyfriend. TC

Reviewed from galleys R* Gr. 7-12

In this companion to her excellent *Invisible Enemies* (BCCB 6/98), Farrell provides a counterpoint to the horror stories of microbial destruction with this discussion of the necessity and even enjoyable benefits of microbial activity. The first half of the book addresses the culinary contribution of microbes, offering chapters on cheese, bread, and chocolate as tasty testimony to the utility of various microscopic critters. The book then goes on to discuss the human body’s resident microbes (“90 percent of the cells in and on our body,” the book notes, “belong to microbes,” making us a minority in our own skins) and their role in human existence, and the crucial work of microbes in breaking down organic substances, particularly human waste. This doesn’t have the same automatic disaster appeal as a book about diseases, but there’s certainly enough grossness to capture any plague-lover’s interest, and it’s part and parcel of a valuable point often lost in our “ew, germs” world: we can’t beat all the microbes, and we’re often better off for joining them. Farrell brings an engaged and thoughtful approach to her subject, supporting her broad exploration with specific examples (her own tour through a sewage
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plant, where she is "somewhat distracted by an irrational fear of falling in," is a highlight), setting the details of food and internal fauna against a context of history and larger biological understanding. Though a few readers may swear off bread, yogurt, and chocolate for life, most will find the food examples irresistibly convincing in supporting the book's overall message that microbes aren't all the foes they're sometimes made out to be. For those who wish to make this point at home, instructions for making yogurt and growing your own sourdough starter appear in the relevant sections. While the subject matter will particularly draw the scientific or green-minded, there's enough sheer fascination in Farrell's account of the teeming microscopic world to attract general-interest gawkers, who may find more interest in science than they had expected. Black-and-white photographs and reproductions of historical images give visibility, sometimes dramatic, to the invisible forces; a glossary, endnotes and a bibliography are appended, and the bound book will include an index. DS

Gillet, Marie-Anne Standing Up; illus. by Isabelle Gilboux. Kane/Miller, 2005 32p ISBN 1-929132-71-9 $14.95 R 2-4 yrs

This Belgian import's young narrator is initially contented to use his potty from a conservative seated position, but then one day he sees the famous Manneke Pis fountain in Brussels and conceives an ambition to "pee like a big boy." Easier said than done, however, and our boy struggles to develop some aim, in the process dampening clothes, shoes, bathroom neighbors; there's also the matter of appropriateness, as our boy lets fly in public and on a poor unsuspecting snail. Finally, though, he masters the skill and stands proudly beside his father. Though young viewers may not immediately get the concluding connection between standing urination and the ability to avoid lines (and most American kids won't have heard of the Manneke Pis), the general notion of increasing urinary independence is sure to attract toilet tyros and the humor makes this welcome accessible. Illustrations sport suitably fluid lines, though they rely on colored pencil rather than watercolor for touches of vivid pigment. The spare layouts pose text and narrator against airy white backgrounds, the better to focus on the actions; the cartoony approximation, the emphasis on profile and rear views, and the penis' realistic tendency to peep modestly out from our hero's hands make the views more suggestive than implicit for viewers not already in the anatomical know, but those possessed of the equipment will fully understand the proceedings and the dilemma. Kids will sympathize with the narrator's wayward waterworks even as they giggle, and the book's general lack of self-consciousness may help ease adults as well as kids into discussions of bathroom practice. DS

Gonzalez, Julie Wings. Delacorte, 2005 [176p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-73227-9 $15.95 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-12

Two brothers, Ian and Ben, take turns narrating brief chapters chronicling Ben's birth and growth up to age seventeen, when he sprouts dragon wings and flies away to an unknown utopia. The change itself is occasionally foreshadowed throughout the book, as Ben's constant efforts to fly (in spite of his lack of wings) endanger his life and strain his relationships. Though the brothers' alternating
voices are identical, their perspectives effectively reflect the tension between Ben’s inner certainty that he will someday have wings and the widely held opinion of those who love him that he is delusional. These friends and family reveal their own desires and fears throughout the book, illustrating the conflict Ben sees between the corrupt world of ground-dwellers in which he lives and the airborne utopia to which he instinctively knows he belongs. Their artist mother’s loss and reclamation of the delight she feels when painting underscores the cost Ben feels when threatened with losing his ambition for flight. In spite of a rushed climax and syrupy (but also brief) dénouement, Ben’s battle to claim his rightful destiny will send readers’ imaginations soaring.


“The day Nora and Sophie’s ballet teacher, Mrs. Ogilvy, told their mother after the recital that Nora should continue her lessons, but ‘I wouldn’t waste any more money on Sophie,’ was not a good day in the Hartley household.” Now Sophie can add ballet to the list of things she’s bad at—cursive, toothbrushing, and horseback riding—that’s tucked in the back of her underwear drawer. When she confesses to her mother that there is simply nothing she is good at, her mother responds that she is good at being kind; Sophie takes this to heart and soon finds that being kind is not always the easiest thing to be, especially when she has to garden for the curmudgeonly Dr. Holt and eat lunch with snobby vegetarian Heather. The delightfully messy family dynamic and tightly composed subplots of the story are perfectly matched by the characterization of Sophie, an alternately self-assured/despairing nine-year-old who secretly longs for a tiara and tires of being picked on by her family (when that happens, she starts to cry—she is good at crying, and also good at stopping crying, as noted on the flip side of her list). Greene, author of the Owen Foote books (Owen Foote, Mighty Scientist, BCCB 10/04, and others), has successfully introduced her newest protagonist to young readers—here’s hoping there is more of Queen Sophie to come. HM


As an infant, Lump is left in the woods to be raised by the forest’s resident wise woman. Though she takes in the hideously ugly little boy and arranges for his care (nursing from a she-bear, tutelage from a captive demon), the woman knows little of mothering. As a result of her well-meaning ineptitude, Lump grows into a selfish, careless young man who cooperates with friends and family when it pleases him and, when it doesn’t, thoughtlessly betrays his nearest and dearest to their enemies. When he is finally brought to face the harsh reality of his own character, his penitence is rewarded with a chance to redress some of his wrongs and find happiness in the companionship of those who love him. The tale of Lump’s many grievous errors is told in an artistic and stately style, with an objective yet compassionate tone that creates a weight of sympathetic regret within the reader. As Lump begins to build his life anew, the tranquil narrative style allows the reader’s regret to transmute into relief and gladness without descending into excess senti-
mentality. Within the story, traditional fairy tales are told as both history and local folktale, with a revisionist version always receiving the most credible treatment—a practice which both prepares the reader for Lump's starring role in the Rumpelstiltskin story three-fourths of the way through the book and also encourages the reader to look beyond that superficial connection to see the deeper significance of the journey as a whole. Readers turned on to the possibilities of folktale revision by contact with Vande Velde's *The Rumpelstiltskin Problem* (BCCB 2/01) or Schmidt's *Straw into Gold* (BCCB 9/01) will appreciate Lump's eventual victory over the deficiencies of his upbringing and character. TC

**HARPER, JAMIE**  

Little sibs can be a pain, especially when they insist on copying everything their older sibs do. Grace can't stand the way her little sister, Lucy, shadows her, even though her parents insist it is because Lucy admires Grace and wants to be just like her. Cut to swim class, where Grace begins to realize that as Lucy is to her, she is to her swim coach. When Grace further realizes that her swim coach handles her pupil's emulation much more gracefully than Grace has been handling Lucy's, Grace changes her approach to her little sister. The shift between Lucy's pestering and Grace's eye-opening swim class causes an abrupt and unmarked break in the narrative that will leave some listeners foundering in their understanding of the story's trajectory, so Harper's wispy and insubstantial watercolors play an essential role in making sense of the story by filling in the gaps in narration. Sometimes, though, the illustrations are as apt to confuse as they are to clarify—the figures are undifferentiated and the main characters undistinguished, making it difficult to pick the important players and actions out of the cluttered compositions; they also bury the offending titular refrain in a whisper-thin inked font that significantly damps down its potential for annoyance as it just doesn't seem loud or whiny enough. Dogged listeners will figure it out, however, and they may even get the message that we all look up to somebody, and that one way to deal with abject admiration is to gently honor its good intentions. KC

**HICKS, BARBARA JEAN**  
*Jitterbug Jam*; illus. by Alexis Deacon. Farrar, 2005 32p ISBN 0-374-33685-7 $16.00 R* 4-8 yrs

Bobo is a monster with a problem. Curled up in his red jammies, snuggling his Godzilla doll, he can't sleep because there's a nasty old boy under his bed. His mom doesn't believe him and his big brother, Buster, calls him a fraidy-cat, but Boo-Dad, his monster grampa, knows just what he's talking about. Boo-Dad tells his own story of being frightened by a human and gives Bobo the secret to getting rid of them. When Bobo tries it, however, he discovers that the boy is playing hide and seek with his own big brother. This adds another layer to Bobo's sorrow, since Buster never plays with him like that. In a move reminiscent of other classic monster-under-the-bed stories (Koller's *No Such Thing*, BCCB 3/97), Bobo makes a bold decision to try to befriend the boy in hopes of finding a playmate. Deacon is a dab hand at crafting appealing monsters and moving them through an emotional repertoire from scared to curious to sneaky to sad to hopeful. His illustrations combine with Hicks' mild yet distinct monster dialect to create a fully realized world where everything is opposite expectations yet utterly familiar. Monsters sleep in the daytime, for instance, yet there are the typical bedtime fears and hassles,
and when they get scared, their blood runs hot instead of cold. The intertext of a hundred years of picture-book illustration—from Tenniel and Rackham through rich doses of Sendak to contemporary graphic novels—positively haunts this offering; the art follows a different yet interconnected logic on each page, and each spread has a richness that invites lingering and alternately elicits gentle giggles, the occasional "eeuw," some wistful nostalgia, or openhearted empathy. With plenty of scope for the storyteller's vocal talent and with illustrations to savor, this is a book to fall into over and over again. KC


Soon after the fourteenth birthday of Princess Thirrin Freer Strong-in-the-Arm Lindenshield, heir to the throne of the Icemark, the immense forces of the vassal-hungry Polypontus Empire march on Thirrin's tiny northern country. Through expert strategy, Thirrin's father manages to slow the invasion long enough for his daughter to accompany the common people of the Icemark to safe haven with their allies—but only by forfeiting the lives of the best warriors in the army and the king himself. Thirrin herself is no shrinking violet: accompanied by a fifteen-year-old warlock, she recruits allies from among her nation's former enemies to fight the nearly unstoppable tide of southern soldiers; together, humans, werewolves, vampires, and giant, sentient snow leopards battle the invaders to win freedom for their individual peoples. Thirrin is an abrasive yet magnetic heroine; raised to lead a kingdom, she bullies and orders about even her friends and family, all the while hiding her fears of her own inadequacy so that her people will not lose confidence in her leadership. Others besides Thirrin grow to meet the challenges confronting them; the adventures of the young warlock, as well as those of a scientifically minded scholar, a henpecked but devoted husband and warrior, and the leader of the snow leopards provide readers with multiple perspectives on the courage and resilience needed in times of war. Laden with vigorous battle scenes, mystical encounters, and humorous domestic exchanges, Thirrin's vibrant story will be pounced upon and eagerly consumed by readers enthralled with Collins' Gregor the Overlander (BCCB 1/04) or even Corder's Lionboy (BCCB 4/04). TC


Hopkins lends his talents as a compiler to this calendar-themed collection of poems, quotes, trivia, and date tidbits. Each month's section opens with a month-at-a-glance spread studded with notations of notable birthdays and other notable—or strange—occurrences: roving occasions, such as holidays dependent on days of the week rather than dates, are explained outside the calendar grid; information about the month's name and associated elements (flower, birthstone, zodiac sign) appear in a separate box, and a quote from a birthday boy or girl and a weather record set in that month fill in the bottom margins. Eight subsequent pages feature an array of month-relevant selections: poems from authors born in that month...
(and brief biographies of same), and verses appropriate for relevant holidays or
celebrants. With twelve months' worth of this kind of material, there's a wealth of
curricular possibilities available for various occasions, some reliable stalwarts (Halloween) and others less often celebrated (the anniversary of the first patent of a pencil with attached eraser, not heretofore treated as a barn-burner of a holiday). The poetry itself runs the gamut from sophisticated lyrics by major figures of the past to cheerful kid-aimed contemporary verse; it's rather a motley crew qualitatively, with quite a few entries running toward the jingly or earnestly heavy-handed. Alcorn's line-and-watercolor art is strongly graphic, with regularized hatching providing texture and combining with the evenly pigmented planes of translucent color to suggest block prints. The result is a collection of visuals that resemble, appropriately enough, the graphics of calendar art, though they're sometimes cool and detached instead of pulling viewers into the poetry. While this isn't likely to invite a full readthrough, there are plenty of browsing and unit-enhancing possibilities that should give fresh methods of and sometimes even causes for celebration. Indices of poetic titles, first lines, and authors are included. DS


Starting with a shot from a flask in his last class of the day, Bret follows his fraternity's twenty-first birthday tradition by consuming twenty-one units of alcohol over the course of the evening. As the night wears on, Bret's alcohol haze intensifies, and he reflects on the twenty-one years that turned him from his high-powered mommy's "little focus group," to impossibly intelligent but geeky bully-target, to gel-haired Undercover Spring Break star, to Fraternity Man of the Year. The random cuts are facilitated by transitions where the last line of one scene is picked up by the first line in the flashback and vice versa; the technique works only intermittently, however, as some connections are picked up successfully through the use of repeated phrases, while some are obscurely stretched into reflected actions accessible only by considerable readerly labor. Bits of Bret's humanity break through, but they are quickly repressed as he falls into effortless line with his fraternity-boy persona—pressing the most grammatically flexible four-letter word in the English language into the service of perpetuating the sexually violent vocabulary of the John-Belushi-inspired fraternity mook, supporting the traditions of the fraternity even when they turn violent and stupid, and covering his existential angst with one more shot. The ending leaves the readers as hopelessly fuzzed as Bret himself: Did the fraternity president slip something into his twenty-first shot? Did he simply pass out from alcohol poisoning? Will he survive and take the fall for the ugly incident that threatens the fraternity's charter? Will he survive at all? Unfortunately, the extent of the sympathy generated by Bret's character will ultimately boil down to this: like Bret, readers will most likely want the time they spent at this fraternity party back again. KC

IVES, DAVID Scrib. HarperCollins, 2005 188p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-059842-5 $16.89 R Gr. 6-9

Mild-mannered William Stanley Christmas flees the lavender and picket fences of his mother's St. Louis home and sets off to seek his fortune in the Wild West of the 1860s. The fourteen-year-old sets up as an itinerant letter-writer, adopting the name Scrib and riding a circuit that takes him from farm to homestead to "wickiup,"
passing letters between lovers, separated family members, and even between Pierre Trakki, a "Paiute Injun," and Abraham Lincoln. Scrib’s "imaginative spelling and grammar" and his consistently mispronounced words and malapropisms don’t stop him from having a successfully career, until he is savagely beaten by someone who warns him to change his profession. Mystified but convinced by his broken ribs, Scrib decides to take up a life of "Senshal Intoxication" by engaging the services of one Suzi Generous, "the town’s quick answer to the long question of love," but that too goes sour for the young man. He knows he must face his enemy, and he does, despite running afoul of a corrupt judicial system supporting a town bent on entertainment at any cost (after insulting the local tabloid reporter who visits him in prison with "a leopard-skin notebook complete with claws," for instance, Scrib worries that his trial might not get a good review, but that his hanging will get an A++). The plot moves along at a good clip throughout, accelerating through a seemingly desperate climax to a satisfying conclusion as the villain comes to a bad end. Ives’ great gift for linguistic twisting, the odd detail, and comic characterization sparkles as Scrib ponders where life is taking him; Scrib’s laconic drawl relates the "melodrama" of his predicament with a deft Mark-Twain-like understatement, and the secondary characters are as divertingly “various” as Scrib feels people to be in general. Scrib’s own unprejudiced heart makes him a hero worth cheering for; give this to readers who like their adventures salted through with quirky wit, subtle ironies, and canny homespun wisdom. KC


The title and format are a clear echo of the author and illustrator’s *A Poke in the I* (BCCB 6/01), but this is a slightly different venture; instead of exploring one genre of poetry, like the previous volume, this one provides a guide to nearly thirty aspects or kinds of poetic form. Each poetic term is illustrated by a poem or two; small spidery print explains the term directly, and Raschka often provides subtle visual hints in his decorations (which sometimes mirror the syllabic pattern of the featured form); a closing section explains each form more fully. Spacious balanced layouts show the poems and Raschka’s mixed-media art to good advantage, the latter often adding a sense of eccentric personification to poet and/or subject. The explanations occasionally fall short or go astray (the caption description of the aubade misleadingly says, under a strictly formed and rhymed example, that it’s a poem “without formal structure or rhyme,” and the fuller explanation of the ballad incorrectly states that the rhyming lines have only two beats); a few of the sample poems lack polish and one (“The Paper Trail”) isn’t actually the kind of poem it’s meant to exemplify, as Janeczko himself acknowledges. Otherwise, though, this is an attractively packaged entry bubbling with usefulness; budding young poets will enjoy experimenting with the possibilities offered, and it could bring much-needed liveliness to poetry curricula. DS


In the fourth and final novel of the Pagan series, Pagan Kidrouk, once the irrepressible squire to Lord Roland Roucy de Bram, is now a priest well into his thirties. The Pope has ordered that the nest of heretics flourishing in the Languedoc
region be cleared out, and Archdeacon Pagan summons all his theological background and oratorical skill (as demonstrated in *Pagan's Vows*, BCCB 11/04) to avert a crusade that must inevitably turn into a bloodbath. He fails, and retreating to the last best hope of refuge at Carcassonne, he directs the defense of the castle. Roland, still dedicated to peaceful monastic life, aids the wounded while Roland's elder brother and Pagan's nemesis, Raymond, proves to be a snarly but loyal source of support. Jinks devotees, particularly those who devoured the first three volumes in rapid succession, will be startled to find that Pagan's customary role of narrator has been usurped by a newcomer, his own secretary Isadore, a hyper-devout teenager who vacillates between outrage at Pagan's worldliness and gratitude for his kindness. Fortunately, Isadore’s voice is strong enough to carry the series to conclusion, and his feelings toward Pagan—exasperation, admiration, devotion—fittingly mirror Pagan’s regard for his former master, Roland. Amid the wisecracking and head-cracking that richly satisfy action/adventure fans is another fully credible portrait of brutal medieval spiritual and secular turf wars, and the rare opportunity to witness a beloved character grow into adulthood is a privilege indeed. EB


Farmer Skint, Mrs. Skint, and their two children have horrible luck, so horrible that they’ve had to sell most of their livestock and consider selling the farm. All they have left are their two geese, Misery and Sorrow, and Sorrow’s latest clutch of eggs. When one of the eggs turns gold and hatches a golden gosling, the Skints’ luck changes—not only does Farmer Skint win the lottery and a long-shot bet on a horse race, but his farm-management skills suddenly improve to the point where he is able to manage the family’s newfound wealth. Best of all, whenever he pets little Joy, who has become a house-trained pet goose, he feels like singing. The potentially unwelcome attention of a neighboring world-class naturalist (Sir David Otterbury) provides a dash of tension, since the Skints don’t want to become famous for their goose, but in the end Sir David’s interest proves benign. This hopeful story, in which nearly all the characters display unswerving loyalty to each other and all turns out best for everyone, is told in an intimate style, full of little details that bring the Skints’ farming experience to life—Joy’s poop, for example, preserved in her indoor litter box, is just as golden as she is. The black-and-white illustrations reflect the benevolent bent of the story—the characters’ open, honest faces are lit by quiet smiles (even the pigs), their physical stances both unassuming and trusting. As in the majority of King-Smith’s lively animal books, the warm tone of the prose and the overall optimism of the tale make this an easily accessible book for readers not yet ready for longer or more complicated stories. TC


A flashy impresario with an imposing handlebar mustache leans into the title page and tips his hat in greeting: “Welcome! Enter! Prepare to be dazzled!” The curtain parts for the opening spread, in which “The Milk Can Escape” of 1908
unfolds in four panels ("Just over two minutes. Behold our Houdini, wet, breathless—but alive!"). Then Krull's narrative voice takes over, leading readers through the biographical particulars of Erik Weiss' rise from son of Hungarian Jewish immigrants, through poverty and self-education in the illusionary arts, to the household name for life-imperiling entertainment. The master of ceremonies breaks in from time to time, introducing Houdini's favorite stunts with showmanlike verve and hype. Between text and concluding notes, Krull presents a well-balanced look at the master's life, touching on his sadly childless marriage, his obsession with researching and improving his craft, and some of the tricks (those that are known, at least) he used to make his escapes. Velasquez's scenes, though cleverly staged, aren't quite as crisply delineated as one might like, and an actual photo would have been welcome. An appended bibliography, which includes several children's and child-friendly sources, can easily bridge those gaps for interested readers. Definitely encourage kids to try this (book) at home. EB

LAWRENCE, IAIN  The Convicts. Delacorte, 2005  [224p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-73087-X  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 5-8

With his father cast into debtor's prison by a menacing blackmailer, his mother deranged since the drowning death of his sister, and himself fallen into the company of a resurrection man (a dealer in corpses) and a gang of juvenile pickpockets, leading to his arrest for a theft he did not commit, Tom Tin has suffered just about as much woe as any young hero can undergo in the opening seventy-five pages of a novel. Worse, however, is to come: Tom's death sentence is commuted to transportation, and he's consigned to a convict hulk rotting at the dock until a load of prisoners has been mustered for the journey Down Under. He and pathetic but loyal little Midgely laboriously scrape their way through the worm-eaten hull, dodging all the while the sadistic attentions of a fellow prisoner, only to be captured and returned to the ship upon their escape. Midgely's eyes are gouged out with a sewing needle, Tom's in despair, and when the pair is finally transferred onto the vessel that will take them south, their persecutors are shipped out with them. Fairer skies lie ahead: the captain is none other than Tom's father (not in jail) who thought his son was dead (obviously not), and adventure waits over the horizon. At least we hope it does, because if there's no sequel coming to tie up loose ends and justify the fairy-tale ending, this heap of literary tribulations would seem pretty pointless. Nonetheless, Lawrence once again proves an able guide through the darkest corners of historical England (The Wreckers, BCCB 6/98, The Smugglers, BCCB 7/99, etc.), and such delightfully grim particulars as the gravedigger's three-legged horse (he ate the fourth leg), the crucifix nail Tom uses to make his escape, and the gnomish miscreants who make the hulk a living hell should keep readers in thrall—and fully expecting another installment. EB

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028596-6  $15.99  Ad  5-8 yrs

Lester's warm, avuncular voice and Barbour's stylishly sleek, tropical-hued, mask-like cast lead listeners through a discussion of racial identity, encouraging children to view race as one of many elements in their larger personal stories. The audience
is urged to imagine how the world would look going about its business without skin (a concept bound to elicit some tension-breaking chuckles), and then returns to his "story" theme: "I am so, so, so many things besides my race. To know my story, you have to put together everything I am. . . . Beneath the skin we all look alike." Right there is some fudging of facts, since we don't all look alike under the skin, and in his effort to demonstrate that race should not become anyone's dominant point of reference, Lester never confronts the fact that, all too often, it is—an unavoidable reality with which children regularly grapple. While acknowledging incidents of empty boasting and verbal harassment, he offers only a simplified motivation: "Why would some people say their race is better than another? Because they feel bad about themselves. Because they are afraid." The line between hurtful bullying and ethnic pride is one worth exploring in greater depth, though, and sidestepping the nuance is a notable omission, especially in an educational milieu that promotes multicultural celebration. This may not be the ultimate weapon in the war against racism, but it may nevertheless deliver a potent opening salvo. EB

LEVIN, VADIM

Silly Horse; tr. from the Russian by Tanya Wolfson and Tatiana Zunshine; illus. by Evgeny Antonenkov. Pumpkin House, 2005 32p ISBN 0-9646010-1-X $15.95 Ad Gr. 2-4

These fourteen silly poems were first published in Russian in 1969, in a style, according to flap copy, that was meant to evoke British humorous poetry. The English translations certainly display some traditional elements of light verse for young people: quick-moving rhythms, formal rhyme schemes, a number of animal characters, and a plentiful helping of absurd happenings. Such characteristics are appealing, and in a few of the verses they combine to make a satisfying poetic whole, as in "A Sad Song about a Sweet Baby Elephant I Don't Have," which engagingly plays its mournful theme against a background of diverting folly. More often, though, the rhythms bobble somewhat or the ideas lack the pithy delivery that light verse requires, resulting in a collection that fails to rise to the standard of readily available material from Prelutsky or Florian. The illustrations offer pleasing absurdity in their characterization of the events, with cozy round curves softening the eeriness of the distortion; the pencil-stroke texturings, however, tend to overwhelm the art, muddying the palette and reducing images to smudgy indistinctness. This might be most intriguingly employed as a cross-cultural look at silliness in combination with the British nonsense it echoes and the historical nonsense of Christian Morgenstern (as in the Lisbeth Zwerger-illustrated Lullabies, Lyrics and Gallows Songs, BCCB 9/95). DS

LICHTENHELD, TOM


Tom Lichtenheld knows as little about cars as he does about pirates and monsters (Everything I Know about Pirates, BCCB 4/00, Everything I Know about Monsters, BCCB 10/02), but, happily, he doesn't let that stop him from exploring the mechanical marvels. Attributing the desire to invent the car to the fact that "since the beginning of time, people have liked the idea of going fast while sitting on their butts," he cites failed attempts by cavemen, ancient Egyptians, and Vikings to get
rolling. The car was actually invented, then, by two horses with obvious self-serving motivations. Lichtenheld follows his fanciful history with a look at modern cars inside and out, an outline of the duties of a backseat passenger (which include testing the power windows and devising various ways to help brothers and sisters stay alert), and an exploration of the strange and wonderful relationship between dogs and cars. He also looks at fast cars, earthmovers, and kid-friendly concept cars, spinning out all the puns and jokes necessary to spark kids into designing their own wheels. Though utterly fanciful, his musings are not without insight; he’s obviously taken more than his share of road trips, in both the front and back seats, and he cannily observes that “hot rods make your hair big!” and that no actual soup is involved in the making of a souped-up car. His zany, text-rich illustrations will be familiar to his fans, who know to look carefully for silly little details that add to the hilarity. Once again, Lichtenheld has created a nutty, good-humored text with no educational or socially redeeming value—may his tribe increase. KC


In this newly translated version of Lindgren’s Sunnanång (a story first written in 1959, this format published in 2003 in Sweden), brother Matthew and sister Anna are taken in by a cruel farmer, with whom they endure a drab and joyless existence. On the way home from school one day, Matthew and Anna are led by a red bird to Sunnymead, a warm, sunny meadow where children eternally play. There, the Mother of all children feeds them tasty food and bids them to “come again soon!” on their departure. The children return each day after school; on the last day of lessons, faced with the prospect of spending an entire summer in the farmer’s barn, Matthew and Anna deliberately close the door that “can never be opened again” in the stone wall between Sunnymead and their old home. Oil illustrations in cold and gray-touched earth tones underscore the dreariness of the children’s life with the farmer, making a vivid contrast with the light-filled paintings of Sunnymead, drenched in green and gold and touched with scarlet. Blustery strokes of thin eggshell and blue fill the wintertime pages with wind and snow, and the sticklike legs and arms of the children point up their vulnerability in such weather. While the children’s plight inspires sympathy, this has the distance of a fable without the impact or brevity. The text makes no attempt to give Matthew and Anna any personality, and Anna’s repeated refrains of complaint add a touch of annoyance as well as structure. The old-fashioned style (terms such as “shan’t,” “hither and thither,” and “paupers” pepper the translation) and the unevenful sentimentality of the story may draw some lovers of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s old-fashioned warmth, but this will mainly find its welcome among Lindgren’s many serious admirers. TC


From early morning until late at night, a younger brother and older sister hear the clicking of mahjong tiles as their mother, father, aunt, and uncle face off at a card
table. Told in compact sentences set against deep red pages, this biographically inspired tale (the author and illustrator are sisters) whimsically reflects the way kids perceive grownup activities. The illustrations, rendered in line and watercolor and contained in elliptical frames opposite the text, tell the true story: the children run about on the periphery of the mahjong game, playing games of their own and occasionally intruding on the mahjong space for a quick lesson or a cup of tea. By story's end, the brother and sister of the earlier pages have children of their own, and the grandfather takes the youngest on his knee to teach him the game of mahjong. A sprinkling of Chinese calligraphy is included on each page of text; while the earliest characters are transliterated for English-speaking audiences (so that young audiences can try out the Chinese expressions), the majority are simply translated, leaving the pronunciation shrouded in mystery. The same characters are often echoed in the illustrations as word bubbles, so the given expressions match the approximate moment of the story (e.g., "Tasty!" is offered when the family nibbles on watermelon seeds, "Shake" is used for the dice-rolling illustration). While there is not much of a plot to guide this tale, every kid that has been subjected to the kiddie table while the adults do their thing will understand the circumstances of the story's protagonists. A note about mahjong and a bibliography of instructional books are included.


At Papa Brown Bear's suggestion, Little Brown Bear's day of play in the meadow becomes a lesson in learning the alphabet. Not surprisingly, the little bear first finds an apple and a ball, but as the day progresses, a mix of actions and objects makes the game a tad less predictable. He and his dad have a grass fight for 'g', for instance, and plunge their paws and toes into an icy stream when they get to 'i', though the cliches return with a xylophone (oddly, the only toy in Little Brown Bear's room). The progress through the entire alphabet, with embellishments, makes for an exhausting day and a rather attenuated story, complete with convenient weather changes (one minute they are swimming, and two letters later huddled under an umbrella in a sudden downpour), so that readers-aloud will likely be in sympathy with Papa when he hurries Little Brown Bear to bed with an admonishment to "Zip it!" The sweet watercolor bears seem to owe their trapezoidal heads and chunky angular shapes to Rosemary Wells and their fuzzy graphite textures to Jane Dyer as they frolic their way through compositions clean enough to draw attention to the one or two objects on each page that correspond with the letter but aren't included in the text. Though the book isn't terribly original, the playful relationship between father and son is cozily realized, and the format will encourage those new to the alphabet to seek out their own ways to play the game.  KC


Gooney Bird (of Gooney Bird Greene, BCCB 10/02) is back, and she's as fashionably outfitted, full of big words, and determined to be at the center of everything as ever. A month has passed since her previous appearance, and her second-grade
class is now all aflutter with preparations for the Thanksgiving performance. There is a problem, however; not one parent has come forward to volunteer as room mother, and with no room mother, there will be no cupcakes for the Thanksgiving party. Good thing Gooney Bird is around to set things right: after slipping off to the school office to make a mysterious phone call, she reports back that someone has agreed to be room mother on the condition that she remain “incognito” (“With the identity disguised or hidden,” a classmate helpfully reads aloud from her dictionary after Gooney Bird’s report). Gooney Bird’s confidence and gregarious nature give the story loads of appeal; what is perhaps even more endearing is the way that Gooney Bird’s teacher and classmates embrace her irrepressible nature and, in fact, encourage her wild stories and extroverted ways. The short chapters are tightly written, with plenty of big words defined throughout as the second graders pull out their dictionaries to interpret Gooney Bird’s expansive vocabulary, and, as in the first book, the stories that Gooney Bird narrates for her classmates are captured in a larger font. Lowry’s latest entry celebrates the enthusiasm and vitality of an exceptional kid, and readers and listeners alike will clamor for more. Final illustrations not seen. HM


Late one night at their parents’ inn, Mariano and his friends Leo, Elisa, and Tere come face to face with a ghost. The spirit is one Rosario, a young girl who died in that very building, immolated with the rest of the ranchowner’s slaves when the master torched the building in fury over the abolition of slavery. Her tale prompts the friends to record her history (hence Mariano’s authoring of this story) and research the fate of her brother, who was sent on an errand just before the tragedy and so survived it. In this import by Brazilian author Machado, winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, Mariano’s narration reads credibly as a twelve-year-old’s writing, especially since he second-guesses himself in print and refers to the help he’s receiving from bookish Elisa (the fact that Mariano himself doesn’t like to read may endear him to some extent to unenthusiastic readers). A series of deftly drawn spooky encounters between the children and Rosario’s spirit world helps build narrative tension, while the tragic details of Rosario’s short life prompt reader sympathy and indignation, encouraged by the shocked reactions of Mariano and his friends. Thick brushstrokes and heavy outlines highlight the organic curves and emphatic angles of the textured illustrations, keeping the book’s look sophisticated but accessible. Though it’s sometimes a little talky, this is a finely written mystery/ghost story that’s also an unusual exploration of the aftereffects of slavery within a multiethnic society, readable on its own merits but also ripe for use within classrooms and reading clubs. An author’s note gives the history of slavery and its abolition in Brazil. TC


Ivan Korske is the senior star wrestler on an underfunded team of losers, coached by a teacher who values sportsmanship over individual prowess; Bobby Zane is the
senior star in a school wild for wrestling, coached by an ex-champion. Ivan's road to New Jersey finals is potholed with pressure from his immigrant father to attend college close to home, with grief for his recently deceased mother, and with his own hot-headedness, which gets him temporarily thrown off the team. Bobby nearly derails his own dreams of state glory by letting his concentration falter, by starving himself to the point of illness to make weight, and by fretting over his relationship with his girlfriend, Carmelina, who fears she's pregnant. As these alternating stories unfold it is crystal clear that Ivan and Bobby will face off for the championship, but here the journey is far more riveting than the destination, and the meaty page count underscores the punishing grind of their preparation. Readers troubled by open-ended novels will find Martino's closing line—"And the state championship match at 129 pounds began . . ."—positively torturous, and some may even suspect that the author himself couldn't quite live with the consequences of choosing the winner—or, more to the point, the loser. But here, as in life, someone's going to find himself flat on the mat, and the chill of the repercussions should keep teens shivering long after the back cover slaps shut.

McNISH, CLIFF

_The Silver Child._ Carolrhoda, 2005 186p
ISBN 1-57505-825-1 $15.95 R Gr. 5-8

No child would go to Coldharbour by choice; the wasteland of fallen-down shacks and garbage heaps is home only to those who have no place else to go. Rich boy Thomas, however, has been living there for a month without knowing why. Then he meets Emily and Freda, identical twins who move like insects; Walter, whose giant proportions give him superhuman strength; and Helen, who can read minds. As he hears about their recent transformations, he discovers his own strangeness—his beauty, the ability to sustain and heal others. Together, they know that their gifts are for fighting an enemy they can only hear, as a distant, hungry roar, but not see. Then they meet Milo, whose painful and disfiguring alterations shock them all, especially when they discover Thomas' beauty is the only thing keeping Milo alive until his new body is complete. As Milo’s parasitic relationship with Thomas takes its toll, the ever-weakening Thomas must decide what he believes about Milo’s metamorphosis—and whether it’s worth his life. McNish takes the familiar story of children versus evil into new territory, creating a set of characters who are undergoing transformations that are as arresting as they are uncomfortable to witness. Milo’s agonizing evolution is especially vivid, creating tension so thick that readers will hurry to find out what he becomes, and why. Thomas' reactions to Milo—disgust, fear, anger, hatred—are all credible, as is Helen’s flight and eventual reconciliation. Overall, though, the characters’ narrations are too adult and too melodramatic, with an overabundance of exclamation points and overdone descriptions; the first-person chapters alternating between Thomas and Helen are distinguished by circumstance, not voice. However, the intriguing premise, the dramatic sense of horror, and the unanswered questions will nonetheless ensure that readers return for the next in the series.

MEAD, ALICE

_Swimming to America._ Farrar, 2005 [160p]
ISBN 0-374-38047-3 $16.00 M Gr. 6-8

Reviewed from galleys

Eighth grader Linda Berati doesn’t know how she got to the United States from her birth country of Albania when she was small, but she’s sure it was done ille-
gally. Her mother’s wariness of the police, as well as the dark memories of terror and escape that occasionally surface in her own dreams, tell Linda both more and less than she wants to know. Her friend Ramón, a legal immigrant from Cuba, has troubles of his own: his older brother, Miguel, is a drug dealer whose thefts from and trespasses upon other dealers have drawn two armed thugs to deal with him. Linda’s disjointed story switches unexpectedly between the two plot threads, which reluctantly merge to force the action ahead at points of climax. Some interesting exploration of thirteen-year-old angst is diluted with much superficial dialogue and a couple of conversations with Linda’s mother, who is unexpectedly ready to tell Linda the whole story of her immigration—in large paragraphs of dialogue, full of descriptive passages, which slow the book’s progress toward the climax. The climax itself so easily resolves all three primary conflicts (the climax crisis itself, Miguel’s drug dealing, and Linda’s inner conflict over her nationality) that it cannot be believed. Of all the characters, Linda’s shallow used-to-be girlfriends—occasional visitors in Linda’s new world of teen torment—are the most clearly drawn; everyone else is painted with a muddy brush that leaves the reader squinting to see who these people are intended to be. Better treatments of the immigration theme include Cofer’s *Call Me Maria* (BCCB 11/04) and Son’s *Finding My Hat* (BCCB 3/04). TC

**MELLING, O. R. The Hunter’s Moon. Amulet, 2005** [260p]
ISBN 0-8109-5857-0 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 7-12

Sixteen-year-old cousins and best friends Gwen (Canadian) and Findabhair (Irish) set off to jaunt around Ireland together, but a series of accidents and whimsical choices leads them straight into a trap laid for them by Finvarra, the King of Faerie. Findabhair is abducted by Finvarra, who intends her for the ritual sacrifice to the Great Worm, “Crom Cruac, the Hunter,” who otherwise will consume the land of Faerie. Gwen is left to race all over the green isle, hoping to ambush the fairies and liberate her cousin. Luckily, she is aided at every hand by fairy folk and trustworthy mortal redheads (who have a natural affinity for the fairies). With the help of her friends, Gwen organizes a Company of Seven to rescue Findabhair and challenge the right of the Great Worm to receive a sacrifice. Descriptions of lush scenery, intriguing customs, and mouthwatering local eats entice the reader to participate fully in Gwen’s adventure, in spite of the author’s often trite phrasing (“Her soul fluttered like a bird in its cage, yearning to be free”). This quest story takes place amid a haphazard mixture of Christian and Celtic myth, freely stretched to fit the needs of the plot; the book climaxes in overblown prose and a disappointingly tidy ending, in which everybody gets her or his heart’s desire with minimal actual sacrifice. Nevertheless, the opportunity to immerse oneself in a sensation-loaded celebration of Ireland and Faerie will be a powerful draw for many readers. A glossary of Irish words, an author’s note on the Irish language, and a map are included. TC

**MORGAN, NICOLA Chicken Friend. Candlewick, 2005** 148p
ISBN 0-7636-2735-6 $15.99
Ad Gr. 4-8

Becca’s nutty parents have finally snapped: they have taken the children out of school in London and moved to a big house in the country where Mom can pursue her inventions and Dad his writing while they homeschool Becca and her twin
brothers. Eleven-year-old Becca misses her old chums, but when some seriously cool-looking girls pass by her house, she decides to make friends with them. Trouble is, they are a little on the wildish, proto-Goth side, and boring Becca has to decide how much she is willing to change herself in order to be sufficiently cool to warrant their attention. The prospect of a parent-free birthday party seems to be the perfect way to prove her commitment to cool, but things quickly get out of hand. Becca's voice is authentic, especially in its painful self-consciousness, and the book generates some effective suspense about the secrets Becca's keeping from the reader until the very end. Unfortunately, the first-person narration is often repetitive, and the tension created is let down by the unimpressive payoff. The portrayal of Becca's mother as a loony, distracted inventor is sufficiently over the top to suggest some generic confusion on Morgan's part: readers may wonder whether to take this as a rather serious problem novel about cliques and consequences or a zany family comedy. Though it doesn't fully succeed in either vein, there is a redemptive moment when one of the ultra-cool girls apologizes for her part in the party disaster and seems to genuinely like the unpretentious Becca, proving once again that being oneself is always the best policy, even when you believe that that self lacks distinction. KC


Using a first-person narration in Southern black dialect, Moses gives voice to a man who, having never learned to read or write, left no record of his own regarding the nation-altering legislation that bears his name. Born into slavery under a kind yet financially unsuccessful master, Peter Blow, thirty-two-year-old Scott was sold to pay off Blow's debt. As the personal attendant of his new master, John Emerson, Scott traveled to Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory. Because these were free states, Scott's residence there meant that he was by law a free man, but neither was he aware of his rights nor was Emerson's widow willing to concede them without the lengthy court battle that ended in the Dred Scott decision. When Emerson's wife remarried, her abolitionist husband was embarrassed by his wife's "property" and returned Scott to the Blow family, who granted him and his family their freedom. Scott's description of his daily life will be a bit too sketchy for readers who like more everyday details in their historical fiction; while Scott tells how he feels about the big things, like being bought, sold, and hired out, he is less forthcoming about the kinds of work he actually does, and the settings are nothing but names of places, rather than atmospheric descriptions. This account of the complicated ups and downs of the ten-year court case becomes a bit dry and hard to sort out; Moses does, however, manage to preserve the emotionally intimate perspective she has established earlier in the book. Because it is told through Scott's limited understanding, though, readers will need to go elsewhere to find the full text of the Scott v. Sanford decision; an explanatory note, a chronology, and a bibliography are included to assist further research. What Moses does manages to do is to effectively portray the human face that mattered most in this affair, and her account will offer a lively accompaniment to the official textbook versions of the events. Dramatic black-and-white illustrations introduce each chapter. KC
Addy, Michael, and Karl meet Stillwater the giant panda when he enters their yard to retrieve his breeze-blown umbrella. In their subsequent one-on-one visits to Stillwater’s house, the siblings enjoy short stories from the Zen and Taoist practices told by Stillwater. Though the children’s interaction with Stillwater instigates the telling of each story, these tales connect only tenuously with the frame narrative, and their primary purpose seems more to provide food for thought than to offer resolution to the problems presented in the frame story. Indeed, as explained in an author’s note, these shorts are traditionally used to guide meditation rather than to entertain. In keeping with the intention of the text, the line-and-watercolor illustrations display a meditative balance of color and smoothness of movement—figures in motion appear to float in the lemon and azure air, even as their bodies retain a decided weight. Images of climbing and bouncing figures emphasize that ethereality, which, when combined with the delicately expressive human and panda forms, positions the visual effect of the illustrations halfway between realism and surrealism. The art for the internal short stories is given in dramatic black ink sketches, the strikingly energetic elements silhouetted against white or white and a single pastel. In spite of the quality of the illustrations, peaceful reflection is not an easy sell to picture-book aficionados, so the contemplative text limits the youthful audience to those who have strong interests in this aspect of Asian culture or those with impressive powers of concentration. A note explains more about Zen and Muth’s specific inspirations. TC

2005 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Emmett Till, the young African-American teenager lynched in Mississippi for supposedly whistling at a white woman. Nelson offers here a poetic memorial in the form of a heroic crown of sonnets, an elaborate interlinked series of fifteen poems. It’s a fantastic technical feat, but it’s also a moving elegy indeed, and Nelson’s introductory note in fact explains that she found the intricacies of the form a useful way of dealing with the pain of the event (“You were a wormhole history passed through,/ transformed by the memory of your victimhood”). Individual poems, interlaced by first and last lines, treat the event, Emmett himself, his mother, his murderers, the racism of the nation, and the legacy of the crime, adding resonance to the sonnets with allusions to literature ranging from Shakespeare to Whitman to Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Nelson’s penetrating eloquence ensures that the lyricism marries and draws strength from the structure rather than simply serving it, and the dramatic directness of the address would make these poems powerful indeed for recitation or readers’ theater. The use of such strong and co-dominant art is a questionable move, since it tends to dampen the mental echoes of the verse, but Lardy has carefully tuned his visuals to the rhythm of the sonnet sequence, intertwined his vision with the text’s elaborate structure (as he explains in a note), and generally emphasized graphic
and mood rather than narrative in his paintings, making them effective companions if not enhancements. There will doubtless be many observances of this sad anniversary, and Nelson’s sonnet sequence could play a compelling and artistic part in memorials and discussions of aftermath. End matter includes a note on Emmett Till’s story, notes on the individual sonnets, a note on the art, and a list of references. DS

O’DELL, KATHLEEN  

Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 4-7

Four glorious summer weeks away at science camp with your best friend. What could go wrong? For going-into-seventh-grader Agnes Parker (Agnes Parker Girl in Progress, BCCB 4/03), just about everything. First, her dearest pal Prejean meets an old friend, Natalie, and she is assigned to the Fawns cabin with Natalie, not Agnes. Agnes, banished to the Mallards cabin where ritual quacking is the order of the day, bunks up with Nyssa, a prickly soul who is determined not to make friends: “I am extremely, extremely honest . . . You will probably end up hating me.” Moreover, Prejean’s recent growth spurt has turned her into a junior-high Jamaican goddess, leaving Agnes to rue her own pale, flat-chested state and obsess over reliable rumors that Prejean has been engaging in midnight revels with the boys’ camp. As icercabin rivalries escalate and bad blood boils between Agnes and Prejean, Nyssa turns out to be an okay kind of gal, who helps Agnes shake off a bit of her crippling niceness. The rumors about Prejean are, happily, only half true, and when Agnes learns that an ugly incident of racism prompted Prejean to put an unusual spin on spin the bottle, she realizes that, although their hometown community values Prejean, not everyone in the ruder outside world treats her so respectfully. Middle graders who have breezed through Rachel Vail’s Friendship Ring series but aren’t quite ready to try on Ann Brashares’ Traveling Pants should find the Agnes Parker books a perfect fit. EB

O’MALLEY, KEVIN  

Captain Raptor and the Moon Mystery; illus. by Patrick O’Brien. Walker, 2005 [32p]  
Library ed. ISBN 0-8027-8936-6 $17.85  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8935-8 $16.95  
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 3-5

The evolved dinosaurs populating the planet Jurassica witness a mysterious light streak through the sky and land on Eon, one of their moons. The President sends Captain Raptor and his crew to check it out, but they must face several obstacles before the source of the unidentified flying object can be found: an alien crew (gasp—humans!) with a damaged ship. Will Captain Raptor help the aliens or destroy them? O’Malley’s old-time space opera has commonalities with classics like Star Trek and Buck Rogers: the daring captain, the interstellar travel, the interspecies conflict, and the bold rescue are all there. The characteristically cheesy dialogue and melodramatic scenarios are gleefully embraced (the refrain “Could this be the end of Captain Raptor?” echoes throughout many scenes), and even youngsters who aren’t decided B-movie fans will likely recognize the affectionate parody. The turnabout, with dinosaurs as protagonists and humans as aliens, adds
novelty to the classic elements. O'Brien's stylized realism makes for some pretty convincing dinosaurs in space gear, and the comic-book-style paneling is easy to follow, with text that shows up nicely against the cool shades of steel blue, hazy orange, rich brown, and smoky purple that make up the backgrounds. Dinosaurs in space will lead to giggles for young readers, and the message about interspecies cooperation is one that young adventurers headed for unexplored territory would do well to take to heart. KH


Fourteen-year-old Max and her makeshift family—Fang, Iggy, Nudge, the Gasman, and Angel—are no ordinary children; they're only 98% human. The other 2% is the result of experiments at the School, where they were genetically altered to have wings capable of flight, as well as other physical and mental abilities. After escaping four years ago with the help of a repentant scientist, Jeb, whom they considered their "father" before he disappeared, the six children live safely in the mountains—or so they think. Then Angel is kidnapped, and Max and the others fly out on a rescue mission only to find that there's more going on than some pointlessly evil experiments. Jeb is alive and working with their enemies, but he claims that everything has been a harmless test, designed to prepare Max for her destiny of saving the world. Though they escape with Angel to New York, Max soon finds out that the test—if it is a test—isn't over. Is Jeb telling the truth, or is this just another experiment? Patterson's first offering for young adults has plenty for adventure fans; between the teeth-grinding suspense, energetic fight scenes, and chilling genetic experiments, readers will develop an attachment to Max's group as they struggle to find their identity outside the dehumanizing atmosphere of the School. The bond among the characters is based on love, respect, and a shared sense of protectiveness; Max is a tough-talking, capable leader, but her vulnerability is what makes her real. Though the kids' new powers seem awfully narratively convenient and the language is sometimes hackneyed, the novelty of kids with wings never wears thin. The immediacy of Max's voice and the intriguing nature of her predicament will ensure that readers will swoop in for the sequel. KH


The Journey of Oliver K. Woodman (BCCB 6/03) focused on the travels of the eponymous figure (a jointed and carved wooden man) from Raymond Johnson in South Carolina to his niece, Tameka Schwartz, in California. Now Oliver has gone missing, and Tameka seeks the help of Paige Hall, a reporter at Uncle Raymond's local newspaper, in finding him. Paige writes an article requesting help and, with Uncle Raymond's assistance, sends another wooden figure, Ms. Imogene Poplar, P.I., after Oliver. Reports of Oliver sightings and Imogene's travels pour in from across the country, until finally Woodman and Poplar meet in Alaska and a new friend in Barrow assures that they make it to Tameka's house in California—for the wedding of Paige the reporter and Uncle Raymond. There's
charm (if not a great deal of surprise) in the romance subplot, which unfolds in small hints and details in the illustrations and Paige’s letters, and the notion of the wandering woodfolk has an appeal similar to tales of roaming gnomes. This isn’t as successful as Mr. Woodman’s first outing, however: while the complications add elements beyond a simple redo, they also scatter the focus, and the adventures have gotten more contrived, losing the could-really-happen allure of the last trip. Cepeda’s oil-over-acrylic illustrations sport a luscious palette of glowingly intense hues, lavenders nudging oranges and aquas flirting with rusts. There’s a quiet dignity in the firm solidity of Oliver and Imogene, while the human characters have a wide-eyed and animated enthusiasm for just about everything they encounter. While this doesn’t really stand on its own, fans of Oliver’s first peregrination will probably wish to join Ms. Imogene in chasing after him. The closing endpaper maps Oliver’s and Imogene’s route. DS


When fourteen-year-old Phoebe, slave of the powerful and kind Master Philipse, gets entangled in rumors of a Negro plot to burn down New York City, she finds her loyalties split more ways than she can handle. Most of all she is concerned for the safety and well-being of her friend and fellow house slave, Cuffee, who is a key suspect in a string of recent arson attacks. Devotions are called into question as suspects are freed for listing names of others involved; those unwilling to confess or condemn others are burned at the stake. Ultimately, Phoebe must face the difficult question of how far she is willing to go to protect a friend and, in the end, herself. Like many of Rinaldi’s books, the story is based on a little-known historical moment; while Phoebe’s character is fictional, a similar incident in 1741 New York City serves as the basis of the novel’s plotline. Unfortunately, the story reads very much like an overdressed singular moment; the patchy plot sketches out the details of the incident without offering much information, and a weak ending wherein Phoebe accidentally rats out the teacher she worked the entire novel to protect does little to save the story. A few intriguing side characters (including a gentle witch doctor from the islands), the occasional plot twist, and a touch of magic do help carry the tale, and Phoebe’s voice will likely appeal to fans of first-person historical fiction such as the Dear America books. An author’s note and bibliography are included. HM


Too much has changed too fast for Fran Cullers. Following her mother’s death, she and her despondent father have moved in with Aunt Beth, and the baseball team in her new town is disgusted with the idea of a girl for a teammate. The boys, with full approval of the coach, try to drive Fran away by enforcing a mandatory-jock-strap rule, and Fran fires back by complying (she ties her ponytail with it), but now she’s out to get even. Her plan for revenge—to purposely drop plays and cost her team a string of wins—is misguided to say the least; not only does she lose the friendship of one longtime pal, but she also incurs the censure of a dear family friend, a minor-league coach who has always been her booster: “There’s nothing wrong with your game. But I was wrong about your heart—you’re no champion.”
Although Fran’s predicament will resonate with young girls for whom Title IX has yet to work trickle-down miracles, Roberts veers unsteadily between authentic tension and baseball cliché. A showdown between Fran and the coach, in which he angrily strafes her with a string of punishing pitches, is truly harrowing, but the bases-loaded-underdog-make-good, Dad’s-gonna-be-all-right ending is too facile to be truly satisfying. Still, this clips along with a tight plot and plenty of dialogue, and readers should easily squeeze it in between homework and batting practice.

ROSEN, MICHAEL  
Michael Rosen’s Sad Book; illus. by Quentin Blake.  Candlewick, 2005  [32p]  
Reviewed from galleys  

In this unusual book, well-known author Rosen speaks directly to a child audience about the emotion of sadness. He talks about the emotion’s inevitability, how sometimes specific things make him sad (thinking about his dead son) and sometimes there’s no particular cause (“Sometimes I’m sad and I don’t know why”). He then discusses some things that he does as a consequence of his sadness (“Sometimes because I’m sad I do bad things. I can’t tell you what they are”) and some of his ways of dealing with sadness, such as finding a way to have a good time or writing about being sad. Though the end trails off somewhat and there’s the occasional lag in pacing, this addresses a significant emotional phenomenon with a moving combination of sincerity and simplicity, and it is a reassuring change to see an adult inviting readers into his own experience rather than focusing solely on children’s emotions. Rosen writes of his personal griefs without condescension, but his phraseology is generally accessible to young readers; his acknowledgment that sadness is not always avoidable or reasonable is a welcome one, making this book a useful complement to works that address specific griefs, and his discussion of getting through the blues is pragmatic without being disruptively perky. Blake’s familiar line-and-watercolor style displays its usual scrappy informality, but here it conveys rumpled bleakness, and some of the images are genuinely melancholy in their somber gray tones; in the final spread, however, the warm light from the glowing candle actually ends up contrasting harshly with the leaden shadows, turning what seems to be intended as a balanced view suggestive of hope out of darkness into a cruelly desolate image. That finish may unsettle adults hoping for a more obviously upbeat conclusion, but the authentic and respectful treatment of sadness may well reassure youngsters looking for a little help in dealing with the blues.

DS

ROTH, MATTHUE  Never Mind the Goldbergs.  Push/Scholastic, 2005  [240p]  
Reviewed from galleys  

Hava Aaronson, a seventeen-year-old punk Orthodox Jew living in New York, lands a primo summer job when she’s invited to Hollywood to act in the first season of comedy series The Goldbergs. Set up to be like “The Cosby Show, only with Jewish people instead of Negroes,” the show provides Hava with a chance to get away from the judging eyes of her friends and family in the Orthodox community and find out who she is when she’s on her own. However, with days full of filming banal TV comedy amid navigating behind-the-scenes drama, and nights
full of loneliness and longing for community, Hava finds Hollywood more of a wakeup call than a call to party. Realizing that being on her own means that she can do whatever she wants, even ignore the restrictions of her Orthodox life, she finds she is even more determined to stay true to her beliefs. Roth's rambling, episodic plotting and self-absorbed exposition extends into the usual Hollywood drama, creating a long, distracted journey to what could have been a more meaningful destination. Nonetheless, wannabe stars will hang on the details of Hava's induction into TV life, while realists will appreciate that Hollywood's grittiness is never fully hidden by its glamour. Hava's rebellious, doubting, and disaffected voice lends itself well to her hard-fought spiritual journey, transforming detailed information on Jewish Orthodoxy into a story appealing to any teenager struggling with faith. KH


The story of Nazi concentration camp Mauthausen is recalled here through an aggregate of historical data, personal recollections, and full-page paintings. Built to house the slave labor that would mine granite in the nearby Austrian quarries, Mauthausen held more than two hundred thousand prisoners (only half of whom survived) before its liberation by an American-led platoon in May of 1945. In the days leading up to the liberation, a group of brave prisoners, excitedly awaiting the approaching Allied troops, pieced together an American flag that, instead of the forty-eight stars customary of the time, had fifty-six—one row too many. The jubilation of the prisoners welcoming their liberators is poignantly remembered in the many firsthand accounts collected by the author in her extensive research, which included both published memoirs and interviews. There is, however, more information presented than even a longer picture book can handle, resulting in a convoluted, overly detailed mix of uninspired narrative ("With one bowl of watery soup to eat each day, it would not be easy") and listings of names and dates. While little-known stories can work effectively to teach about larger historical events, as in the story of the Torah scroll in Lehman-Wilzig’s Keeping the Promise (BCCB 4/04), Rubin’s text lacks the focused emphasis on the flag that might have served to effectively anchor the tale. Farnsworth’s grimly shadowed oil paintings and haunting portraits of the hollow-eyed prisoners speak more clearly than the text to the insufferable and demeaning existence of Mauthausen’s prisoners. Though students may struggle to follow the details on their own, this could, in the context of a study of the Holocaust, provide some new information on this infamous camp. The story of the liberation itself is undeniably moving, and even readers somewhat lost amid the details will be touched by the personal stories. An afterword, references, and an index are included. HM


At first glance, this is a collection of poetry told from the point of view of a thoughtful, somewhat lonely woman and addressed to a recently adopted stray cat called Boris. In fact, this is a meaningful exploration of how one woman, in speculating
on how her cat might see the world, comes to understand it, and the feline, on a new level. The poems each focus on a small event or observation—wanting to be home during inclement weather, contemplating a move from house-with-yard to condominium, spinning Boris around on the hardwood floor—and they are consistently successful in introducing and completing each focal concept. Rylant has effectively told the reader everything and nothing about the narrator: very little background information or personal description is given, and yet, in reading the nineteen poems in this finely tuned collection, the reader comes away with a sense of understanding of the woman's personal struggles with isolation and her personal joys in her chosen companions (three dogs and two cats) and in the greater world around her. There is a sense of growth implicit in the narrator's journal-like expositions (“And do you think, Boris,/ how terribly beautiful/ it all is,/ this world that/ lives in a frenzy all day/ then drops/ limp/ like a new baby/ into the deep sleep of night?”), as well as a parental affection demonstrated toward the kitty's antics (“Boris, you weren’t supposed to/ beat up an old cat”). This isn’t about being a pet owner so much as it is about one individual exploring life, relationships, and the passing of years, and adults are likely to get as much, if not more, out of the reflections than teenaged readers. HM

SACHS, MARILYN  *Lost in America.* Brodie/Roaring Brook, 2005  [160p]
ISBN 1-59643-040-0  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 6-9

Fourteen-year-old Nicole was sleeping over at a friend's home that evening in 1943 when the Gestapo abducted her parents and younger sister. For three years she waits for them to return, holding on to hope as other concentration-camp survivors return to her French village and speak of the atrocities they experienced. When, finally, word comes that her entire family died in the camps, Nicole sets off for America, leaving behind the France of her memory. Based largely on the life of a longtime friend of the author (and begun in Sachs' earlier novel *A Pocket Full of Seeds*, BCCB 3/74), the story bridges two worlds: the war-torn French countryside, where Jews live in silent fear, and the glowing lights of New York City in the late 1940s, where Nicole, then a young woman, learns about such delights as banana splits and double dates, gets a job working for Air France, and eventually moves out of her harsh relatives' apartment and into a shared basement studio with a friend. The story is effective in both contexts; Nicole is a quiet, affable girl who experiences both pain and joy deeply, and her emotional and actual encounters move the story along at a steady pace. There is an innocence in the story's tone, reminiscent of teen novels of a different era, that works to great effect in capturing the excitement of being a young adult in post-World War II America. An author's note, detailing Sachs' relationship to the inspiration for the story, is included. HM

SCHACHNER, JUDY  *Skippyjon Jones in the Doghouse;* written and illus. by Judy Schachner. Dutton, 2005  [32p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Mischievous Siamese kitten Skippyjon Jones returns, still convinced that he is a Chihuahua in disguise. After his identity crisis is expressed in his own elaborate crayon drawings “up and down and all around the newly painted hallway,” Mama
Junebug Jones sends him to his room for a time-out, recommending that he “think Siamese!” Instead, the kitten enters into an elaborate make-believe adventure in which he saves a tribe of Chihuahuas, including “his old amigos, Los Chimichangos,” from an evil gobbling head known as a Bobble-ito who has taken over “la casa perrito” (the doghouse). Though it’s somewhat lengthy and organizationally random, the story is highly charged and swiftly paced, told in rhythmic prose crammed with internal and end rhymes that shift from a narrative to a sing-song to a chanting beat, incorporating several small poems and some captivating songs full of nonsense and Spanish words that beg to be chanted aloud (or sung) by a group. In the illustrations, the fuzzy feline with the outsized round head, enormous pointed ears, and wide blue eyes romps over spreads in acrylics and ink, slipping through swirls and cascades of shadowed aqua and teal. Reminders of Skippyjon’s Chihuahua fixation dog his progress through the book—from a note to Mama on the title page verso (“‘der Mama/ i am a chiwawa/ i am a chiwawa/ yo soy chiwawa/ te kiero”) to the piles of stuffed doggy dolls in his closet. Charismatic, melodramatic, and acrobatic, Skippyjon Jones will bounce right off the page and into the listener’s imagination. TC


A transplanted Jersey girl determined to make a go of it in her new Florida high school, Annisa immediately runs afoul of a number of the school’s cheerleaders. When two spots open on the squad, she tries out anyway, and she becomes the only brunette on the highly competitive team. Though the girls work hard, they lack solidarity until Annisa suggests a revival of the dormant tradition of the prank war with their rivals. As the pranks escalate, so does the general craziness of Annisa’s life; on top of practice, studying, and negotiating several sticky relationships, she is still the goat of the predictably predatory insiders on the squad. As she did in The VClub (written pseudonymously as Kate Brian, BCCB 6/05), Scott creates a fully realized high-school setting in which to place her ensemble cast. Though Annisa remains firmly at the center of the narrative, the other characters develop beyond easy stereotypes into people with backstories and complex emotional repertoires. Sure, most of the cheerleaders are vicious and proprietary, but they have turf to protect, and Annisa is resolutely unwilling to remain an outsider if straight talk and honest confrontation will give her a way in. Most importantly, though, Scott succeeds in taking cheerleading seriously as a sport that requires athletic excellence and intense teamwork. As these athletes realize that spirit and cooperation isn’t something that can be faked as easily as blonde hair, they allow breaches in their emotional defenses that simultaneously make them vulnerable to each other and unbeatable as a squad. The plot is dense and satisfying, and Annisa emerges as an all-around winner—she manages to keep her anti-cheerleading friend, get those pesky vandalism charges dropped, attract a dreamy guy, pass math, and go to nationals—what more could a girl want? KC

Shearer, Alex  Sea Legs. Simon, 2005  [320p] ISBN 0-689-87143-0  $15.95 Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-6

Narrator Eric and his twin brother, Clive (younger by five minutes, he’ll have you
know), miss their father so desperately when he's off on his job as steward aboard a luxury liner that they decide this cruise they will stow away and discover for themselves the attraction of the sea. It's surprisingly easy: setting up the excuse with Grandma, slipping aboard on the coattails of a distracted family, finding accommodation in the bowels of the vessel, gorging on the food and fun, and observing Dad while avoiding his notice. Things get a bit more complicated when the social-climbing mother of a schoolmate imposes on them for an introduction to their "captain" father, but that's nothing the devious pair can't handle. Just as Dad does discover them and hits the cabin roof, they become embroiled in foiling a pirates' raid, which turns them from miscreants into heroes. This sounds like the itinerary for a lively cruise, but Eric's babbling account overloads the ship with repetitions and meandering asides, and what should be a breezy sail even for reluctant readers sometimes languishes in the doldrums. Nonetheless, readers who can abide their mightily garrulous host may want to sign up for activities on the promenade deck. EB


Poor *bubbe*. Her own children have grown up and moved far away, and there is no one to share her Passover meal with her ("Not that she was complaining, but she couldn't help feeling a little lonely"). She makes a boy out of matzo ball dough to keep her company—but when she lifts the lid off her soup, the matzo ball boy ("Boy-shmoy. I'm the matzo ball man, *bubbe*, and I'm off to see the world") takes off running down the village road. This "Gingerbread Boy" variant features an abundance of Yiddish phrases, a real sense of community chaos, and, as in its parallel tale, a sassy protagonist with a permanent grin. The expected ending (a poor man and his wife invite the little matzo ball boy into their home, and "All we know is that the poor man and his hungry wife had a delicious meal of matzo ball soup that night") provides a wholly satisfying conclusion to this slyly humorous tale of outrunning and outwitting. Visually, the matzo ball boy isn't more than two balls of dough stuck one on top of the other with a face painted onto the smaller; still, there is a remarkable range of expression in his blue-line mouth and dot eyes. The thick folk-art paintings fill out this wholesome tale, and the stylized geometry of the shapes used throughout (the matzo ball boy's body, the villagers' triangular faces) adds further visual interest. The echoing refrain of the matzo ball boy screams storytime appeal, and the potential for repeated holiday reading is similarly promising. The author's note, which details the significance and menu of the Passover celebration, cites no source for the folktale variant; a glossary of Yiddish phraseology is included. HM


Singer, a master of temporal and spatial perspectives (*On the Same Day in March*, BCCB 3/00), conducts her audience on a lyrical week-long journey down the Mississippi River. She tarries here and there to point out historical landmarks and natural curiosities: Hannibal, MO, where "ten boys from every state along the Mississippi/ race to paint Tom Sawyer's fence and win a prize"; Reelfoot Lake, KY,
where an earthquake once reversed the course of the river for three days; Memphi,
TN, where girls perch along the bank “listening for Martin Luther, B. B., Elvis . . ./
They want to sit and hear the river that rings/ with the voices of Kings.” Lessac
captures the changing riverscape in a naive folk-art style that speaks of days past
and a zippy palette that’s decidedly today. Barges, tugs, and sternwheelers seem to
tumble rather than glide downstream in defiance of gravity, creating a visually
vigorous counterpoint to the more leisurely text. A concluding note expands in-
formation on several of Singer’s ports of call, but it’s relaxed sightseeing rather
than report-writing that’s on the agenda for this particular week. Readers who
enjoy dipping their toes in Big Muddy may want to tag along next with Peter
Lourie in his Mississippi River (BCCB 10/00).

SLEATOR, WILLIAM  The Last Universe. Amulet, 2005  [176p]
ISBN 0-8109-5858-9  $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

Fourteen-year-old Susan wheels her older brother Gary into the family’s wild,
sprawling garden every day, even though she hates it, because otherwise she feels
guilty about her own health. Oddly, the garden is changing: paths don’t lead
where they’re supposed to, and strange tropical plants appear. To Susan’s dismay,
Gary is fascinated with the garden’s unpredictability, especially when they find the
hedge maze at the heart of the garden that, after their first hesitant steps inside,
seems to make Gary better. At the same time, however, other things change with
each trip—their parents, their friends, their home—and not always positively.
Knowing the garden’s history (it was created by a quantum physicist, their great-
uncle), Gary pins down the changes they witness to quantum mechanics—the
unpredictable behavior of the tiniest level of matter being acted out on a larger
scale. In the maze, every action causes bifurcations in the universe, creating infi-
nite parallel worlds, and in some of these worlds, Gary is healthy. Though Susan
is afraid that they’ll irreversibly change things for the worse, how can she deny the
chance to save her brother’s life? Sleator’s science-fiction story is both gripping
and thought-provoking, and the ending (fittingly unpredictable) is masterfully
disquieting. Though Gary and the other characters seem to exist merely as means
to an end, Susan is realistic as the passive-aggressive sister who both loves and hates
her brother for his illness. How such a tricky science like quantum mechanics
plays out in the garden remains unclear despite being overexplained in passages of
textbookish dialogue; a better solution would have been to let the action reveal the
meaningful facets naturally. Still, readers drawn in by the science or the sibling
drama will be intrigued by the possibilities of this other secret garden. KH

SPINNER, STEPHANIE  Quicksilver. Knopf, 2005  [240p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-82638-6  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys

As one of thousands of Zeus’ illegitimate children, Hermes knows he is lucky to be
included in the heavenly host residing on Olympus, and he attributes his favorable
position to his quick wit and his ability to jolly his immortal father out of a blue
funk or a red rage. However, the gods’ continual disregard for the well-being of
the mortals whose lives they manipulate begins to irk this easygoing celestial cou-
rier, and as the Trojan War increases his responsibilities as Head Psychopomp
(guide for the dead), his disillusionment grows. Hermes gradually distances himself from the political machinations of the gods, finding peace and happiness with his pet, Pegasus, and his new girlfriend, the nymph Calypso. Spinner, author of the stately Quiver (BCCB 2/03)—a reworking of the Atalanta legend—structures this novel in episodes following the narrative outlines given in Greek myth. Told in first person, Hermes' story is saturated with a supercool, looking-out-for-Numero-One attitude that cloaks an incessant seeking for approval from Zeus. Off-hand comments and the occasional outright resolution mark his progress from a popularity hound to a thoughtful, emotionally independent young man—a transition that will garner approval and recognition from many teenaged readers. The hip but not hypertrendy tone of the narration as well as the bite-sized stories afforded by the episodic structure will further entice junior-high and high-school aged readers to try Hermes' winged sandals on for size.

Reviewed from galleys R 4-8 yrs

When Gennady's young son, Ilya, and wife, Raya, bring home an injured crow, all three family members do their best to help the animal mend. The vet tells them, "Put it to sleep. A crow with a broken wing cannot live long in the wild. And if you keep it, you will have it a lifetime!" Little Ilya therefore won't allow the vet near the crow that he believes "will get better and then fly." The three Spirins head for home with their patient, hereafter known as Martha, tucked into a basket, where they feed and care for her until she is able to soar back to her life in the wild. The distinct characters of Ilya, Raya, and Gennady develop as the humans protect and care for the bird—Ilya by verbally defending Martha's right to live, Raya by feeding her and tending her wounds, and Gennady by patiently allowing the recovering Martha to invade his work space. As Martha takes her first hesitant hops toward health, she grows from a stricken, terrified animal to a self-sufficient, cheerful comrade ready to face the world on her own. In the watercolors, deep blues, warm ochres, and cream tones tint the pages, the lush palette creating islands of dynamic warmth against a white backdrop. Delight, fear, curiosity, bravery, and elation shape the facial expressions and physical stances of the characters; Martha is a touching image of tentative, trusting companionship. The poignant illustrations, paired with the gentle, conversational tone of the text, create a multilayered viewing and reading experience that can be enjoyed time after time. Pair this book with Schaefer's Arrowhawk (BCCB 7/04) for a tender storytime on animal rescue.

STINE, CATHERINE Refugees. Delacorte, 2005 277p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-73179-5 $15.95 M Gr. 7-10

Resentful of her foster mother Louise's lack of affection, sixteen-year-old Dawn takes off for New York City with a friend and arrives just in time for the World Trade Center attack. In Afghanistan, fifteen-year-old Johar loses every older relative directly or indirectly through military conflicts, and he flees with his young cousin from the Taliban across the border to a refugee camp in Pakistan. While Dawn moves from one romantically-seedy-but-safe haven to another and purges...
her angst by playing the flute for relatives of the Twin Towers victims, Johar ends up working as a translator for Dawn’s stepmother (a Red Cross doctor, who isn’t such a bad sort after all) and forming an email friendship with Dawn, as she works up the nerve to admit her whereabouts to Louise. Stine supplies political background through occasional bursts of intense conversation, and she creakily nudges her players into position for the big finish in which Louise divorces her husband (the real family bad guy), Johar wins a standoff with his drug-addicted, Taliban-loyal brother, Dawn inspires her current journalist roommate to take her along overseas on an assignment to interview Louise, mother and daughter reunite with newfound sensitivity to each other’s needs, and 2001 closes in a veritable love fest. According to the emails which open the novel, Dawn will be joining Johar in 2005 to teach music at the school he has opened in Afghanistan, and given the host of improbabilities that have already transpired, why not? This feels more like a multicultural soap opera than an exploration of international affairs, but the September 11th focus is likely to draw a readership nonetheless. EB


bell hooks offers airy verse (Skin Again, BCCB 12/04) and Julius Lester delivers a friendly monologue (Let’s Talk about Race, reviewed above), and now Tyler joins in with a perky jingle on the same themes—self-esteem and racial tolerance. He exhorts listeners to appreciate the virtues of “the skin you’re all day in;/ the skin that you play in;/ the skin that you snuggle up,/ cuddle up,/ lay in . . .” Yes, Tyler stands accused of sacrificing grammar for the sake of a rhyme, and he certainly rambles on long after the point has been made, with his pounding rhythm threatening to drown out his message: “It’s not dumb skin or smart skin,/ or keep us apart skin;/ or weak skin or strong skin,/ I’m right and you’re wrong skin.” However, the discussion of skin’s varied hues is one luscious metaphor—“Your pumpkin pie slice skin,/ your caramel corn nice skin;/ your toffee wrapped,/ ginger snapped,/ cinnamon spice skin!”—and Csicsko’s flat, matte geometric figures sport every nuance of shading from palest peach to richest cocoa and beam with confidence from their Marimekko-styled cartoon world. Easy vocabulary and bouncy rhythm may encourage independent readers to have a go at the text on their own. EB


Before there was Anne Frank, international diarist, there was simply Anne, a lively teenaged girl who thought every boy was in love with her and who was devoted most of all to her best friend, Jacqueline. When the Frank family goes into hiding in the summer of 1942, a neighbor tells Jacqueline they escaped to Switzerland; it isn’t until Anne’s father knocks on the Van Maarsen’s door three years later that she learns of the family’s two years in hiding and her beloved friend’s death in Bergen-Belsen. Author of several works on Anne Frank, Carol Ann Lee draws her
adaptation from Van Maarsen's adult memoir; Lee also interviewed Van Maarsen to record her memories and impressions of the volatile years of German occupation in the Netherlands and, especially, of her friendship with Anne. Jacqueline's perspective provides a fresh angle for further acquaintance with a historical figure known by schoolchildren worldwide; her fond memories of ping-pong and ice-cream parlors work to great effect in establishing the happy and normal existence of Anne's life in Amsterdam. The same solid contextualization that works in the opening chapters to situate the girls' existence in the Nazi-occupied city continues through the recalling of the publishing of Anne's diary, the eventual acclaim it was to receive, and Van Maarsen's present-day role as a speaker on the Holocaust. While the book's overall impact is more served by its factual grounding than by the somewhat detached narrative voice, young readers interested in learning more about Anne Frank and in gaining an alternative teenage perspective on the Holocaust will definitely want to get to know Jacqueline through the supplementary accounts recorded here. HM

WOOLFE, ANGELA  Avril Crump and Her Amazing Clones. Orchard, 2005 [224p]
ISBN 0-439-65130-1 $9.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-7

Fifteen years ago, Dr. Blut shocked the world with his unauthorized foray into human cloning at Leviticus Laboratories and his mysterious disappearance from the authorities. Now Leviticus is about to open its doors to the public again, but Dr. Blut is still out there somewhere, waiting for a new opportunity. Enter Avril Crump, a tubby, bald, ineffective but well-meaning scientist at Leviticus. When she accidentally stumbles upon Blut's old Replication Chamber, she lets loose three clones—an almost normal human girl, a talking dog, and a unusual-looking man in an eighteenth-century uniform—who are quickly kidnapped by Blut. To him, they are reminders of his early, failed attempts to create a race of super beings, but to Avril, they could become the only friends she's ever had—if she can stop Blut from destroying them. Science lovers will be disappointed by the book's failure to explore the details of Blut's experiments, and the story oversimplifies its ethical discussion, boiling complicated notions down to a simple treatment on the evils of playing God and the responsibility of scientists to use their power for good. Avril and the clones' imperfections are more comic than tragic, leading to some funny scenes in their interactions with others, but ultimately, this is a book about a lonely, frequently bullied woman finding the strength to stand up for herself and her friends. As such it may appeal to young readers who know what it's like to be picked on and who will be glad to see Avril triumph in the end. KH
PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS


This highly navigable bibliography offers nearly eight hundred titles of historical fiction and folklore organized topically by region and era. Entries range in publication date from the earliest decades of the twentieth century to the present. To be included, the books “must have won awards or been highly recommended by professional journals”; an annotated guide to the awards cited is included in an appendix. Within the first two sections of the text (American History and World History), titles are subdivided chronologically (e.g., American Revolution: 1775 to 1783) while in the myths and folktales section, citations are organized by country/region of origin. All three sections are further divided by grade level, making this a fast and easy reference to use for correlating fiction with state learning standards and district curriculums. The citations themselves include publication information (current as of 2003), a brief summary based upon published reviews, and any awards/honors the book has received. The citations also note when audiobooks or movie versions are available. Anyone interested in using fiction and folklore to broaden student understanding of history and culture will find this an extremely useful and user-friendly guide. An author/title and subject index are included. HM

BLOWING OUR OWN HORN DEPARTMENT:

Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children’s Literature (University of Iowa Press), by Bulletin reviewer and Illinois State University professor Karen Coats, has been honored as an Outstanding Academic Title by the American Library Association’s Choice magazine.
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.

Actors and acting-fiction: Roth
ADVENTURE: Abrahams;
   Anderson; Bower; Falcone; Hill;
   Jinks; Lawrence; McNish;
   Patterson; Shearer
African Americans-fiction: Moses;
   Rinaldi
African Americans-poetry: Nelson
Alcohol abuse-fiction: Iversen
ALPHABET BOOKS: London
Animals: Belle; Cowley
Animals-fiction: Baker; Chaconas
Art and artists-stories: Carling
Babies-stories: Bertrand
Baseball-fiction: Roberts
BEDTIME STORIES: Hicks
BIOGRAPHIES: Krull; Van Maarsen
Biology: Farrell
Birds-fiction: King-Smith
Birds-stories: Spirin
BOARD BOOKS: Dewan
Brazil-fiction: Machado
Brothers and sisters-fiction:
   Lindgren; Sleator
Brothers-fiction: Gonzalez; Shearer
Campers and camping-fiction:
   O'Dell
Cars: Lichtenheld
Cats-poetry: Rylant
Cats-stories: Schachner
Cheerleading-fiction: Scott
Civil War: Armstrong
Cloning-fiction: Woolfe
College-fiction: Iversen
Counseling: Rosen
Cousins-fiction: Melling

Crime and criminals-fiction:
   Abrahams; Mead
Current events-fiction: Stine
Dinosaurs-fiction: O'Malley
Disaster-fiction: Stine
Disasters-stories: Crew
Emotions: Rosen
EPISTOLARY FICTION: Pattison
Ethics and values: Cheng; Greene;
   Gruber; Lester; Martino;
   McNish; Morgan; Muth; Roth;
   Tyler; Woolfe
Faith-fiction: Roth
Families-fiction: Baptiste; Clarke;
   Greene
Families-stories: Lo
FANTASY: Anderson; Farley;
   Gonzalez; Gruber; Hill; Melling
Farm life-fiction: King-Smith
Fathers-fiction: Baptiste; Shearer;
   Spinner
Fathers-stories: London
Flying-fiction: Gonzalez
FOLKTALES AND FAIRY TALES:
   Cooper; Gruber; Shulman
Food and eating-stories: Dewan;
   Shulman
Friendship-fiction: Chaconas; Mead;
   Morgan; O'Dell; Patterson; Van Maarsen
Games-stories: Lo
Gardens-fiction: Sleator
Geography: Singer
GHOST STORIES: Machado
Giants-stories: Bertrand
Gifts-stories: Bennett
Grandfathers-stories: Hicks
Grandmothers-fiction: Clarke
Grief: Rosen
Growing up-fiction: Iversen
Health: Allan; Farrell
HISTORICAL FICTION: Cheng;
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Rinaldi; Sachs
History, U.S.: Armstrong; Nelson
History, world: Bower; Rubin
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Holidays-stories: Carling
Holocaust: Rubin
Holocaust-fiction: Sachs
HUMOR: Abrahams; Allan;
Anderson; Baker; Bryan; Falcone;
Gillet; Ives; Levin; Lichtenheld;
Lowry; O'Malley; Schachner
Identity: Lester; Tyler
Identity-fiction: Clarke; Mead
Identity-stories: Schachner
Imagination-stories: Crumpacker
Immigrants-fiction: Mead; Sachs
Ireland-fiction: Melling
Jews: Rubin; Van Maarsen
Jews-fiction: Roth; Sachs
Kidnapping-fiction: Melling
Kindness-stories: Harper
Language arts: Belle; Janeczko
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Letter writing-stories: Pattison
Literature, world: Levin
Magic and magicians: Krull
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Monsters-stories: Hicks
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Mothers-stories: Crumpacker
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MYSTERIES: Abrahams
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Falcone; Spinner
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Parents-fiction: Morgan
Passover: Shulman
Patience-stories: Harper
Pets-stories: Bennett
Photography: Armstrong; Cowley
Physical education: Armstrong; Cowley;
Roberts; Scott
Physics: Sleator
Play-stories: London
POETRY: Belle; Carlson; Hopkins;
Janeczko; Levin; Rylant
Rabbits-stories: Bryan
Race: Lester; Tyler
Readers' theater: Nelson
Reading aloud: Anderson; Carlson;
Greene; Lowry; Nelson
Reading, easy: Baker; Chaconas;
Cooper; Cowley; King-Smith;
Lowry; Tyler
Reading, reluctant: Anderson;
Lichtenheld; O'Malley; Scott
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ROMANCE: Farley
Runaways-fiction: Stine
School-fiction: Clarke; Lowry;
Scott
SCIENCE FICTION: McNish;
Patterson; Sleator; Woolfe
Science: Farrell
Seals-fiction: Farley
Secrets-fiction: Baptiste
Sex education: Allan
Sexism-fiction: Roberts
Ships and sailing-fiction: Shearer
Sisters-stories: Harper
Slavery-fiction: Machado; Moses;
Rinaldi
Space travel-fiction: O'Malley
SPORTS STORIES: O'Malley
SPORTS STORIES: Martino;
Roberts
Stepparents-fiction: Stine
Storytelling-stories: Muth
Storytime: Bertrand; Bryan;
Crumpacker; Shulman
Television-fiction: Roth
TODDLER BOOKS: Bryan;
Dewan
Toddlers-stories: Gillet
Toilet training-stories: Gillet
Toys-stories: Crew
Trials-fiction: Moses
Voyages and travel-fiction: Cooper;
Lawrence; Shearer
Voyages and travel-poetry: Singer
Voyages and travel-stories: Pattison
War-fiction: Bower; Hill
West, the-fiction: Ives
Work-fiction: Cheng
World War II: Van Maarsen
World War II-fiction: Sachs
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—Publishers Weekly

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—Booklist

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—Kirkus Reviews

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