

1998 CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

# Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

**BOOKMARK:**

Ten Great  
Adventure Stories

An Interview with  
Vera B. Williams  
by Debra Frasier

David Small  
on Illustrating  
*The Gardener*

**PROFILE:**

Erik and Lenore  
Blegvad

**ONE FOR THE SHELF:**

Creating a Family  
Library

**PLUS**

New Books  
for Summer

PREMIERE ISSUE  
SUMMER 1998 \$5.00

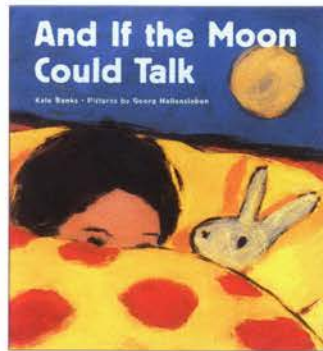


PUBLISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

**AND IF THE MOON  
COULD TALK**

Kate Banks  
Pictures by Georg  
Hallenleben

★ "A classic picture book  
of the highest caliber."  
—Starred, *The Horn Book*  
★ Starred,  
*School Library Journal*  
\$15.00 / 0-374-30299-5  
Ages 3–5  
Frances Foster Books



**The Puddle**



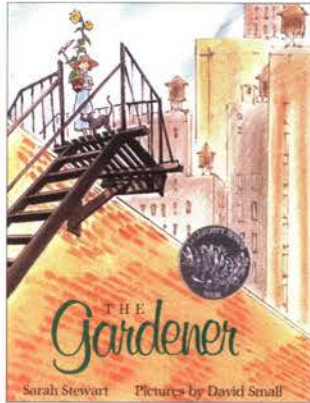
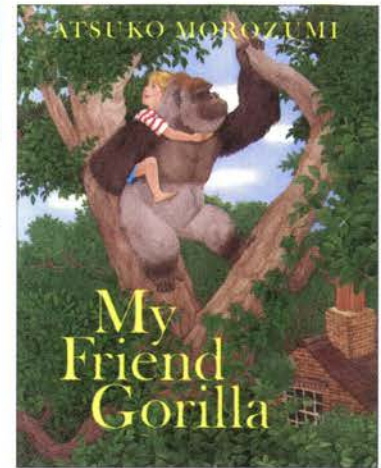
DAVID MCPHAIL

**THE PUDDLE**  
David McPhail

"An especially charming, gently  
funny fantasy." —*Booklist*  
★ Starred, *Publishers Weekly*  
\$15.00 / 0-374-36148-7  
Ages 2–5

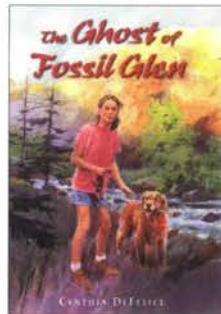
**MY FRIEND GORILLA**

Atsuko Morozumi  
"Genuine child appeal mark[s]  
this delightful friendship story."  
—*School Library Journal*  
\$15.00 / 0-374-35458-8  
Ages 3–5

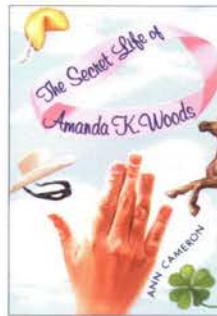


**THE GARDENER**

Sarah Stewart  
Pictures by David Small  
★ "This is a story to share  
one-on-one." —Starred,  
*School Library Journal*  
Caldecott Honor Book  
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All ages



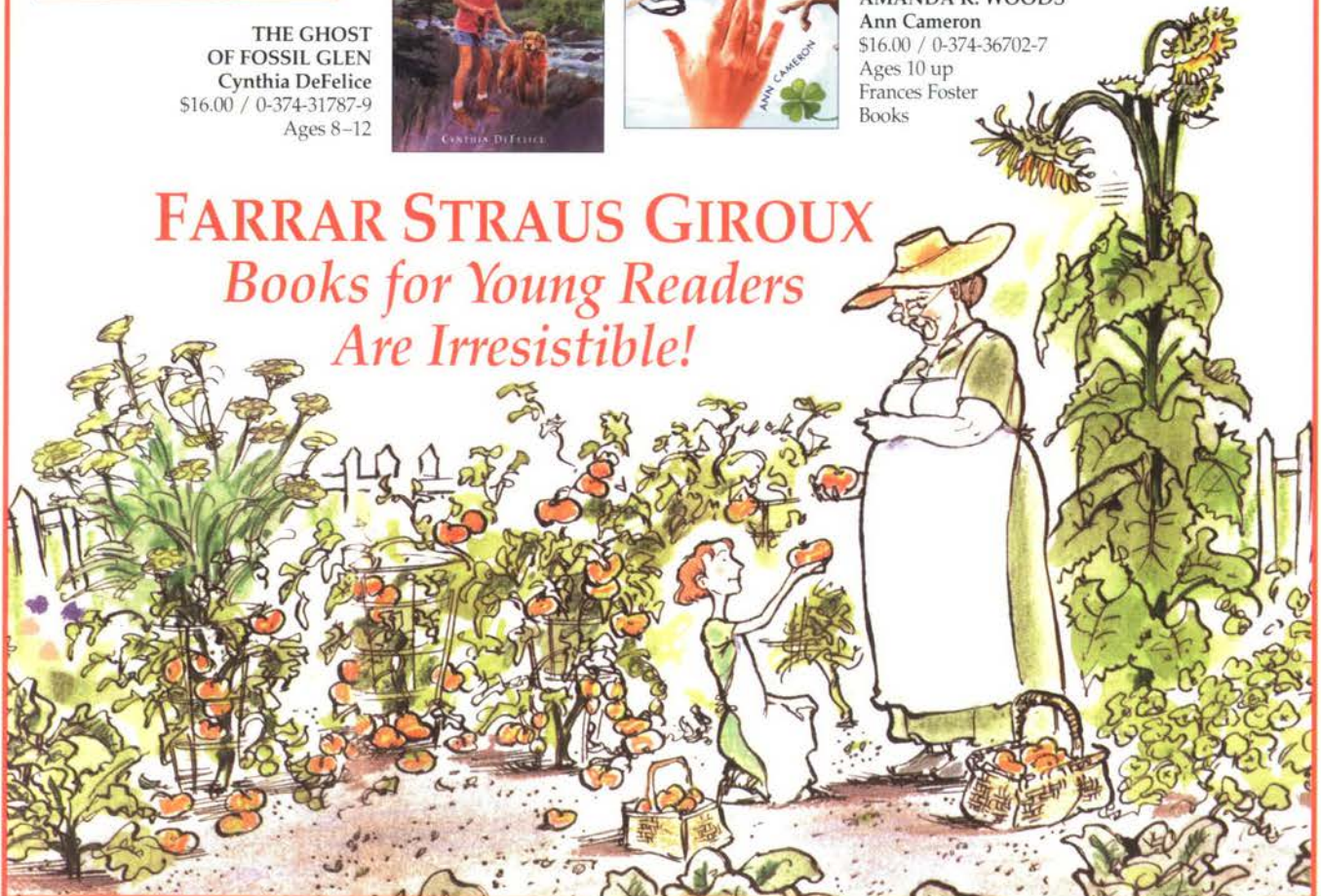
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Cynthia DeFelice  
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Ages 8–12



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Frances Foster  
Books

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*Books for Young Readers  
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## Essays

- David Small on Illustrating *The Gardener* . . . . . 6**
- What Is There to Imagine with a Gun? . . . . . 10**  
*By Mary Lou Burket*
- The Right Size . . . . . 13**  
*By Margaret Willey*

## Reviews

- New Books for Summer . . . . . 24**

## Features

- WRITERS ON THE RIVERBANK **Reflections and Reminiscences by**
- Eve Bunting* . . . . . **8**
- Naomi Shihab Nye* . . . . . **12**
- Peter Sís* . . . . . **15**
- BOOKMARK **Ten Great Adventure Stories . . . . . 9**
- A POEM FOR SUMMER **Green Stems . . . . . 14**  
*By Margaret Wise Brown*
- PROFILE **Erik and Lenore Blegvad . . . . . 16**  
*By Christine Alfano*
- INTERVIEW **Vera B. Williams . . . . . 19**  
*By Debra Frasier*
- 1998 Children's Books of Distinction Awards . . . . . 22**
- ONE FOR THE SHELF **Material World: A Global Family Portrait . . . . . 40**  
*By Peter Menzel*

## MEET THE NEWEST MEMBER OF THE PACK



In *THE DOG WITH GOLDEN EYES* by Frances Wilbur, a lonely young girl's wish for a pet takes an adventurous turn when she learns that the beautiful stray dog she's adopted is a lost Arctic wolf!

Exciting, funny, and finely written, *The Dog with Golden Eyes* is the newest Milkweed for Young Readers, a series of award-winning, high-quality fiction for ages 8–13.

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**GOOD BOOKS  
FOR GROWING MINDS**



## editor's note

I was lucky to be born into a home full of books; lucky to have a mother who taught elementary school, and took our need for *good* books as seriously as our need for new shoes. It was she who hauled us off to the library each week and made sure that *The Snowy Day*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* found their way into the house at the right time. I was lucky to have a father who shared his love of literature without any of the contemporary worry over age-appropriateness; who recited Blake as he tossed me in the air, and years later, in our living room armchair, led me on the adventures of Robert Louis Stevenson. As surely as any of my life's other formative influences—long New York State winters, cool Canadian summers—literature had a role in making me who I am.



*Literature.* The word has an almost old-fashioned sound. Does it refer to a select group of books that have won awards? Texts studied in school, mined with a magnifying glass for meaning? It would be a shame if the word lost its power to describe a broader and more welcoming world; a world into which anyone can step and, through their journeying, come to know themselves more fully.

The *Riverbank Review* is a magazine about books for children and young adults. In my opinion, this literature may never have been as important as it is today, when young people spend so many hours sitting in the glow of a television or computer screen. A good book asks more of a child, but offers more in return. Children who become confident readers take that confidence into all areas of their lives. They develop their imagination and intellect in ways both measurable and unmeasurable. They also come to know their culture and the cultures of others, as literature is a window

into the enormous variety and vitality of human experience.

Most of the books discussed in these pages are written specifically for young readers. Our features include book reviews, essays, interviews, and the annual Children's Books of Distinction Awards. But we'll also give attention to adult literature that a family might share; books like *Material World*, featured in "One for the Shelf." Our primary focus is new books, but we'll also devote space to older work that speaks to a contemporary audience.

The *Riverbank Review* takes its name, in part, from its home: the discussions that shaped it took place around my dining room table, a few blocks from the banks of the Mississippi. "The River Bank" is the first section in *The Wind in the Willows*, and it is an important location

in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. To us, the riverbank also suggests a place of refuge—a vantage point. In these hurried times, such space is often missing, and its lack may be felt most keenly by children. This space is a necessary requirement of a life in which reading—and reflection—play a central part.

I'm grateful to the talented individuals who helped shape the vision for this magazine: Kristi Anderson, our art director; Christine Alfano, Mary Lou Burket, Christine Heppermann, and Susan Marie Swanson, who comprise our editorial committee. I feel privileged to work with each of these people, and fortunate to have them as friends. I'd like to dedicate the premiere issue of the *Riverbank Review* to my parents, who sparked a love of reading in me; also to my children, Max and Joe, whose love, curiosity, and enthusiasm light up my days.

—Martha Davis Beck



# Lucky Song

Vera B. Williams

Creator of the Caldecott Honor-winning books  
"More More More," *Said the Baby* and *A Chair for My Mother*

★ **"Simple and lovely...** This book is as warm as a blanket wrapped around you with a hug, just when you need it."—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

**"A very lucky song for readers....** Lively and spontaneous as a child's perfect day.... Lucky Evie—what she wants, she gets. When she wants to fly a kite, the wind takes it. When she wants supper, her grandma has it ready, and when she wants a song, her father sings it."—*Kirkus Reviews*

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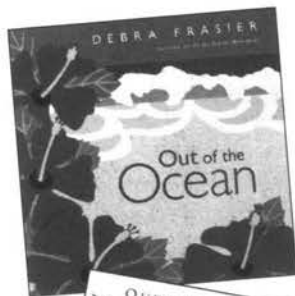
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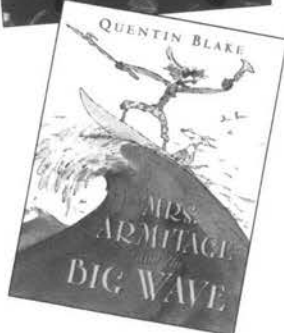
# Summer Reading!



#### Out of the Ocean

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Open this book and walk along the ocean shore. If you look carefully, you might find all kinds of magical things. And soon you'll discover that *looking* for the ocean's treasures can be just as important as finding them.



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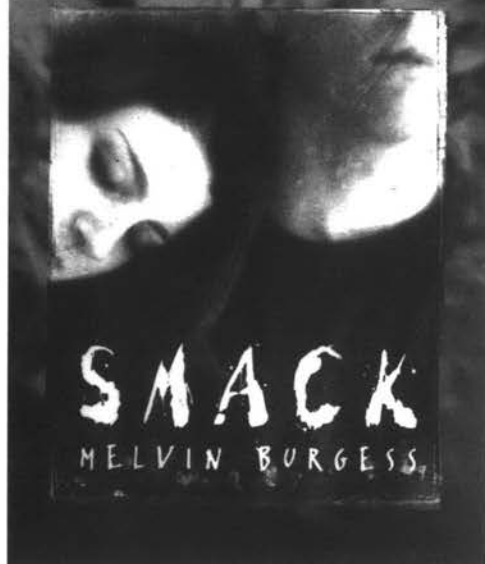
**"THE YOUNG ADULT NOVEL OF THE DECADE."\***

Recipient of England's Carnegie Medal and Winner of The Guardian Prize for Fiction

Winner of the CARNEGIE MEDAL and GUARDIAN PRIZE FOR FICTION

**SMACK**

MELVIN BURGESS



**"SMACK is the perfect young adult novel because it delivers what it advertises. It hits you smack in the face. It not only has sex and drugs and rock 'n roll, but it has elements far more rare. It does exactly what teenagers want a book to do. It tells the truth. It doesn't preach. It makes you think. . . . It has no answers. It offers no vacuous hope that everything will turn out fine.**

**Instead it shows, horrifyingly and heartbreakingly, that if one is swayed by friends or lovers or the need to belong, without cultivating one's inner strength, one is unlikely to make it. And even if one is strong, other forces can be stronger. . . .**

**SMACK is as addictive as the drug it profiles. You will not be able to put it down. You can give it to every single teenager you know, and be certain that not one of them will be able to put it down. . . . It is 60 ASK ALICE for the 90's, TRAINSPOTTING for teens. No adult who works with youth can afford to ignore it. No teenager can afford to be without it. SMACK is the YA novel of the decade."\***

—VOYA

**★"SMACK is not a lecture to be yawned through. It's a slap in the face, and, vicariously, a hard-core dose of the consequences of saying 'yes.'"**

—School Library Journal, starred review

**◆"Burgess chronicles drug addiction's slow, irresistible initial stages, capturing with devastating precision each teenager's combination of innocence, self-deceit, and bravado; the subsequent loss of personality and self-respect; the increasingly unsuccessful efforts to maintain a semblance of control. . . . As compellingly real as it is tragic."**

—Kirkus Reviews, pointer

ISBN 0-8050-5801-X Ages 13-up \$16.95 (Originally published in England as JUNK)

Henry Holt and Company 115 West 18th Street, New York, New York 10011

# Illustrating *The Gardener*

Essay by David Small

Many picture book illustrators (a friend claims), like other artists, are often mistaken for house plants. That is, they are so silent, and their presence so purely organic, you aren't sure whether you should speak to them or water them. One wonders how this can be, given how much picture book illustrators know about such a variety of subjects.

I myself can modestly claim a fair amount of knowledge about Greek Revival architecture, modern military weaponry, Victorian style, eighteenth-century cake decoration, the interior design of the United Nations, spiral staircase construction, origami, and the anatomy of cows. Picture book research has given me the broad education I never got in school. I have had to learn about these things to put them in my books.

Admittedly, this knowledge is purely visual. While I might be able to draw from memory some decent replicas of surveying instruments circa 1740, I cannot tell you how to use them. Mine is erudition of the eye alone.

Though I may appear to many of my glibly fluent acquaintances no smarter than a rhododendron, I know that if we're ever caught in a situation where it is life-threateningly necessary for someone to leap up and diagram those eighteenth-century surveying instruments, I'll be the hero of the day.

The research I do enhances my books, it gives them life. It is, for me, one of the most exciting parts of book illustration, and one of the reasons I love my work. It is in the research stage that you begin to glimpse the future

form of your book; here that you first discover its ambience. This can be a surprise, and it is almost always a challenge.

Sarah Stewart's *The Gardener* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997) posed definite challenges for the illustrator. The manuscript, set in the Great Depression era, had an atmosphere that seemed too desolate for a children's book. It had to be so, because Sarah had written a fictionalized account of a friend's childhood in the 1930s. We knew that by keeping it in that era, our book would have to encompass some of the harsh realities of those hard times, but the last thing we wanted was a depressing book.

When most people of my generation think of the Depression they recall the haunting black-and-white photographs of Dust Bowl desperation by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, or Steinbeck's vision of human misery in *The Grapes of Wrath*. While I did not want to deny the truths told in those works of art, I needed to tell a different kind of Depression story.

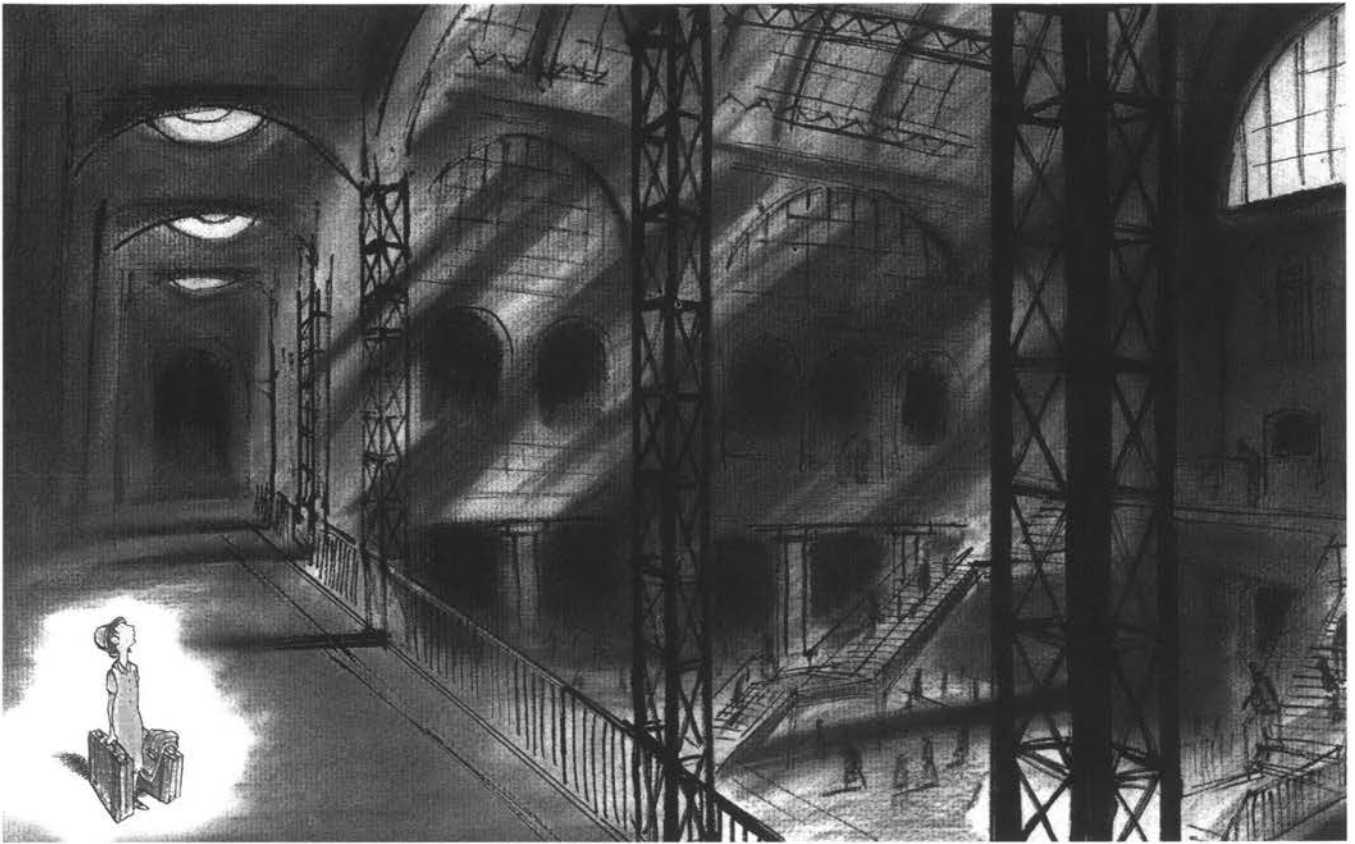
*The Gardener* begins on a traumatic note with a girl being torn away from her home, but the tone soon shifts as the child sets out in her own small way to make the world a better place. Getting this across would require deli-

cacy and equilibrium. To emphasize the darker aspects of the Depression would tip the book too far toward morbidity. On the other hand, to lessen them too much might take it to a worse extreme, toward sentimentality. With my own head full of Evans, Lange, and Steinbeck, I wondered how I would find the right balance.

I began as I generally do when faced with an "impossible" project: I pattered around with other work, did nothing on the book for several weeks, and took a lot of naps.

The first break in my torpor came one Sunday afternoon while having tea with *The Gardener's* real-life inspiration, Lydia Grace Finch Rawson. Now in her late seventies, Mrs. Rawson scolded me for talking about the Depression as a time of constant suffering. She was there. She recalled it as being, in part, great fun. As a girl, Lydia knew nothing about bank foreclosures, crop failures, and the various forms of adult despair. She remembers the hard facts of owning nothing and of having to work hard in a relative's bakery, but also the small pleasures of everyday living, including planting flowers in old lard cans, and playing with the bakery cat.

Laughter and love are not in the domain of those old photographs from the 1930s, but Lydia's firsthand account of the era includes them both. To me, this was a reminder that art is one thing and life another. It also set me on the track toward illustrating Sarah's book.



Shortly after that meeting, I drew a picture of young Lydia's arrival in New York. Since this scene is not described in the text, it was not meant to be published; I drew it for myself. In massive old Penn Station, a girl stands with her luggage, looking up toward a shaft of light that hardly penetrates the immense darkness around her. Once I made this picture, I suddenly understood what the illustrations for *The Gardener* would be about: the strength born of a radiant innocence.

Also, once this picture was made, I knew I wanted it in the book—but how to put it there? Sarah had not written a train station scene, and to have it described in words seemed unnecessary. Then came the idea of interrupting the text rhythmically with wordless illustrations every six spreads. These silent visual passages had the potential to amplify the action in a powerful way. The only

problem in adding them was an economic one: they made the book grow from thirty-two to forty pages. Fortunately, in FS&G we have a publisher whose main concern is always to make the best possible book. I showed them my idea and was immediately given the go-ahead to make the book as long as necessary.

Though most of the traveling I have done for my picture books has been no farther than the five steps it takes to cross the room to my library shelves, the major part of my research for *The Gardener* was done far from our Michigan country home. To draw the city scenes which comprise the larger part of the story, I went to New York. On this trip I had a shopping list of particular things I wanted to find. It read:

- 1) Bakery: Italian? Polish? East or West Village? 1930s-style dough-mixers, display cases, etc.
- 2) Rooftop: Messy & abandoned,

to contrast with final garden. Access for Lydia Grace with pots, plants, building materials, etc.  
3) Tenement apartment interior: mid-1930s.

The old bakery I found in the West Village. The display room came as a shock, it was so small; by stretching out your arms you could nearly touch both walls. Here I found—and not for the first time—how very kind New Yorkers can be if they're not too busy. After I explained my purpose, the bakery people were happy to let me come in and sketch their dough mixers, sinks, ovens, and cooling racks.

The rooftop was harder to locate. I had put out the word among friends that I was seeking an interesting Manhattan rooftop. This request reaped some unusual but mostly useless rewards: on a succession of lovely June days I walked about on rooftops which ranged from elegant Beekman Place

## writers on the riverbank

### Eve Bunting

In Maghera, the little Irish town I lived in as a child, there was a river called the Moyola. The bridge that crossed it was emblazoned with names. I think the name of every person in the town decorated that bridge—mine included.

It was a gigantic river and the bridge was as impressive as the Golden Gate could ever be. Wandering the banks of the Moyola I dreamed my dreams.

As an adult living in a different time and country, I went back. There was the bridge with the names of my friends, forgotten and remembered. Mine, too. The bridge was small, the river little more than a stream. But as I looked down into the brown sparkle of its water, I dreamed my dreams again. Rivers are like that. They hold dreams and keep them safe forever.

*Eve Bunting is the author of over 150 books for children and young adults, including Smoky Night, illustrated by David Diaz (Harcourt, 1994), winner of the 1995 Caldecott Medal. Her most recent book is Your Move, illustrated by James Ransome (Harcourt, 1998), a picture book that explores the pressures on two brothers to join a gang.*

(with voyeuristic peeks into the windows of several stars', billionaires', and diplomats' apartments) to roofs surrounded by midtown corporate blah.

The perfect rooftop, with its fabulous junkscape of cans, boxes, crutch-supported ventilation pipes, and a rusted, overturned bathtub—all of it the ideal setting for Lydia's "secret place"—was a treasure delivered by Kate Kubert, the publicist at FS&G. She had lived two floors down from this mess for over fourteen years and thought herself the only person in the world who found it beautiful. The morning I spent up there, sketching and photographing it from every angle, I was in heaven.

The last item—the 1930s tenement interior—would, I thought, require a large amount of smoke and mirrors to bring off well. I knew no one in New York with access to such a place. The image I had in mind was the set of Ralph Cramden's apartment in "The Honeymooners." I found exactly what I wanted at a place called The Tenement Museum, south of Delancey Street on the edge of the Bowery.

The Tenement Museum gave me many pleasures. I had, first off, the adventure of locating it. As opposed to the reassuringly-geometrical grid of the greater part of Manhattan, the map of the Lower East Side looks like a honeycomb squashed carelessly underfoot. I navigated this warren of streets for the first time on my own on a fine, warm morning and felt a sense of real triumph when I stood at the entrance to 90 Orchard Street.

The tour itself was a revelation. One of my favorite parts of any museum has always been the reconstructions of period rooms where, standing in back of the ropes, you can peer inside and imagine what it must have been like to live in other places, other times. At the Tenement Museum there

are no ropes: you are inside the place where people actually lived, and the reconstruction of the furnishings is so authentic, you feel the owners are due back any minute.

Because of going to the Tenement Museum I have also enjoyed one of the rarest and most satisfying of life's little pleasures: I am now able to recommend something worthwhile in New York to New Yorkers which a.) they have never seen, and which b.) most of them have never heard of. To score even fairly well in this game of one-upmanship you generally have to be born there and be ultra-hip (some New Yorkers might insist that the one is implicit in the other).

After two weeks I returned to southwestern Michigan feeling well-equipped to bring the urban scenes of *The Gardener* to life. As for those country garden vistas which decorate the opening pages of the book, all I had to do was step outside into any one of Sarah's lovely gardens, or drive the four miles down the road to our Amish friends' farms and gaze at some of the marvels that ultra-hip New Yorkers rarely enjoy.

Now, thanks to my research for *The Gardener*, I have added a few more things to my plethora of pointless visual knowledge. Furthermore, since I have plunged ahead into research for new picture books, I now probably know more than you do, gentle reader, on the subjects of crocodiles, the dress style of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and the street dogs of Mexico. None of this, however, will be enough to keep most people from mistaking me for just another potted fern. ~

*David Small is the illustrator of over twenty-five picture books, seven of which he wrote himself. He is the recipient of a 1997 Caldecott Honor for his art for The Gardener, by Sarah Stewart. Mr. Small and Ms. Stewart live and work in a 165-year-old home beside a river in Michigan.*

# Ten Great Adventure Stories

## **The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm**

By Nancy Farmer  
PB PUFFIN/PENGUIN \$3.99  
HC ORCHARD \$18.95

*Three extraordinary detectives set out to find the kidnapped children of General Matsika in this multi-layered saga set in future Zimbabwe.*

## **Hatchet**

By Gary Paulsen  
PB ALADDIN/SIMON \$4.50  
HC SIMON \$16.00

*A single-engine plane crash leaves Brian stranded alone for two months in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet and his wits to help him survive.*

## **Island of the Blue Dolphins**

By Scott O'Dell  
PB YEARLING/BDD \$5.50  
HC HOUGHTON \$16.00

*An Indian girl narrates an eloquent record of her solitary life on an island off the California coast after her tribe sails to a new home without her.*

## **The Minpins**

By Roald Dahl  
Illustrated by Patrick Benson  
PB PUFFIN/PENGUIN \$5.99

*Little Billy ventures into the forbidden woods, where the tiny people who live in the trees tell him how to evade a fire-breathing monster.*

## **My Father's Dragon**

By Ruth Stiles Gannett  
Illustrated by Ruth Chrisman Gannett  
PB KNOPF/RANDOM \$4.99

*This first of three short chapter books follows a boy as he travels to a faraway island to rescue a baby dragon held captive by wild animals.*

## **Ronia, the Robber's Daughter**

By Astrid Lindgren  
PB VIKING/PENGUIN \$3.99

*Growing up in the forest, Ronia swims in icy lakes, captures wild horses, runs from goblinfolk, and forges a secret friendship with the son of her father's archenemy.*

## **Running Out of Time**

By Margaret Peterson Haddix  
PB ALADDIN/SIMON \$3.99  
HC SIMON \$16.00

*Jessie doesn't know if the year is 1840 or 1996 until she escapes from her nineteenth-century hometown to find that it is really a living history experiment controlled by corrupt researchers.*

## **Treasure Island**

By Robert Louis Stevenson  
VARIOUS EDITIONS AND PUBLISHERS

*On a voyage to locate buried pirate treasure, young Jim Hawkins stumbles into a murderous plot masterminded by the nefarious Long John Silver.*

## **The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle**

By Avi  
PB AVON \$4.50, HC ORCHARD \$16.95  
*A thirteen-year-old girl traveling from Great Britain to America in 1832 forsakes her proper upbringing and joins the ship's mutinous crew.*

## **The Village of the Vampire Cat**

By Lensey Namioka  
PB BLUE HERON \$8.95

*Zenta and Matsuzo, a duo of masterless samurai, try to discover the true identity of the supposedly supernatural murderer plaguing an ancient Japanese village.*



# What Is There to Imagine with a Gun?

Essay by Mary Lou Burket

Not long ago in Arkansas, when two boys tripped an alarm at a local school, then fired at unsuspecting classmates, four students and a teacher died. Eleven more were wounded. The *New York Times* observed this was “the third multiple killing in a school by someone younger than sixteen in the past six months.” Why did this shooting happen? Why do shootings ever happen? A diverse group of fictional works for children and young adults offers insight into guns and the place of guns in children’s lives.

One of the best, *The Last Payback* (HarperCollins, 1997, ages 9-12), is a bold, satiric work by James VanOosting, a writer who deserves a wider audience. When it begins, a child has died, but we don’t know how—neither does his twin, the irascible Dimple. Dimple nonetheless believes her brother’s death must be avenged and that she is the person pledged to do it. She gives this book its fierce, driving voice and steers it to the very edge of tragedy.

Why would a child want a gun? To still the pain.

*Scorpions*, by Walter Dean Myers (HarperCollins, 1988, ages 9-12), is another book that brings the flawed thinking of a cornered child to light. In this case, it’s twelve-year-old Jamal, whose besieged Harlem family suffers blows from all around—from poverty, desertion by an alcoholic father, and the complicated burden of having a brother imprisoned for murder. It is

partly because of duty to his brother that Jamal accepts a gun from his brother’s gang. But it is fear that makes him keep it. “Maybe,” Jamal considers, you “messed up easily when you had a gun, but at least you weren’t scared.”



Why would a child carry a gun? To pretend he is safe.

The odds against Jamal are almost too high, making for a story that at times seems contrived. The strongest element in *Scorpions*, aside from its powerful sympathy for the vulnerability of children, is the tender friendship of Jamal and Tito, two boys who, when they find themselves alone in a place they like, dream of owning boats and doing important things (“I could be a

fireman,” Tito says. “I could save people”). Tito’s loyalty is tragic yet transcendent, and because of him, the novel ends on a note of believable hope.

Often it’s a gun that isn’t fired that is most frightening, mainly because of the person who controls it. “Briefcase,” a Myers story included in the gripping, unpredictable collection *Twelve Shots* (Delacorte, 1997, ages 12 and up), is the portrait of an easily affronted young man who sees a shooting on the street and obtains the weapon for himself. The story is all point-of-view and opportunity, a violent end implied. In Chris Lynch’s “Cocked and Locked,” a domineering yet dependent young man who knows his girlfriend will be leaving him for college points a gun at his closest friend, testing its power—testing his friend. The guns in Nancy Werlin’s “War Game” are just toys cruelly used within a group; it’s the code of one intelligent girl, that motivates the cruelty.

The compiler of this collection, Harry Mazer, asked writers he admired to do original work on the subject of teens and guns. He wasn’t interested in politics or theories but in lives, which is probably why they turned out well—as Mazer says, each one unique and fresh, “about more than itself.” Rarely openly violent, they are fast-paced and involving; a few are surprisingly funny. “Shotgun Cheatham’s Last Night Above Ground” is a boisterous yarn by Richard Peck that sati-

rizes turn-of-the-century small-town life: every time a gun is mentioned, there's deception in the air. In Kevin McColley's "Hunting Bear," the humor is dry, a welcome relief from mounting tension.

Harry Mazer's own contribution to the collection is an understated story based on the life of a boy he knew; a ball-turret gunner who flew with Mazer over Europe during World War II. "Until the Day He Died" draws its force in several ways—from sorrow and detail and long perspective. It quietly respects a young man's eagerness to fire a deadly gun.

In Mazer's introduction to *Twelve Shots* he observes that "Guns are. . . made to do one thing, and they do it very well." This hard fact underlies *The Rifle* (Harcourt Brace, 1995, ages 12 and up), Gary Paulsen's historical novel about a centuries-old flintlock. Paulsen likes to tell the whole truth of a thing, so he begins by writing all about the gun, and the way it was made, in complete detail. He ends by writing all about a boy, and the way he is killed when the gun is ignited by a spark.

Paulsen's project is to dramatize the simple truth that guns kill people, but this theme is less compelling than his evidence that one "sweet" rifle could be treated in such different ways by such dissimilar characters, from a master of a gunsmith ("an artist, pure and simple"), to a marksman ("more than many men John lived because of his rifle"), to a kook ("a kind of underground gypsy," buying and selling guns and knives). There is enough material here for several books.

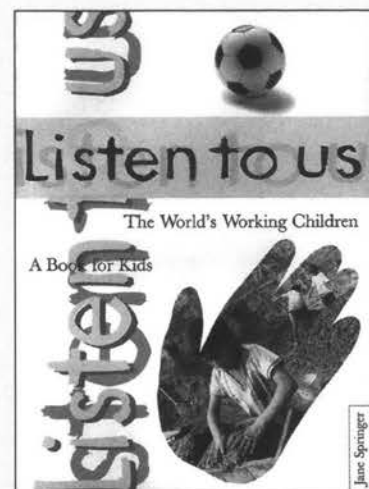
Paulsen's novel illustrates another of Mazer's observations—that American history is "history with a gun." The fact that it's not an entirely tragic history is suggested in *The Sign of the Beaver* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983, ages 8-12), a novel by Elizabeth

George Speare about a pioneer named Matt who learns to survive in the wilds of Maine. When a stranger steals his rifle, Matt is aided by a member of the Beaver clan, a boy his age adept at making snares and catching fish. Speare has said she had to "devise a way" to eliminate the gun so that an Indian could be brought into the story, but as we read the book today it is the boys' fragile trust that is so memorable and touching, not the question of survival in the woods, not the protection represented by Matt's reunion with his folks. And it's the gun that *isn't* there that gives the trust between these very different boys a chance to grow.

"Proper girls did not ever shoot" when Annie Oakley was a child. At least, that's what her mother said, and she was a Quaker, not about to let hunger and poverty change her views. But Annie knew that game for the table would help the family; after her father died, she took his rifle down from the wall and, without any lessons from anyone, brought a rabbit home to eat. Even her mother could see she had "a shooting talent." *A Shooting Star* (Holiday House, 1996, ages 8-12) is the Dickensian tale of Annie Oakley's childhood, told in Annie's words by Sheila Solomon Klass. After a period of living in the poorhouse and slaving for a farmer and his wife, Annie emerges, remarkably whole, to make her own way at the age of twelve—first as a market hunter, winning shooting contests on the side, and then as the world-famous star of Buffalo Bill's spectacular show. "My gun has always been my best friend," Annie confides, but "I would never use a gun against another person—never!"

Why would a child fire a gun? Annie shoots to survive, and to express her exceptional gift.

The matter of conscience is keenly felt in Paula Fox's *One-Eyed Cat*



## Kids Speak Out on Child Labor

*Listen to Us: The World's Working Children* talks about the role that work by children and adolescents plays in both developing and industrialized countries.

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*writers on the riverbank*

**Naomi Shihab Nye**

Growing up in St. Louis, I always felt the Mississippi River was our umbilical cord to “elsewhere”—mysterious, muddy current of hope and motion running through sleep as well as days. Standing on its banks I breathed more deeply. Boards were going by. I could ride them. Huck and Tom might come again. I wondered if my friends felt as I did—that the river was my secret, personal friend, that the river remembered me. But I never asked them. This was precious territory, this river-love, one of the first unspeakables tucked inside.

The notion that St. Louisans were crucially connected to other places and states, to the Gulf of Mexico, by way of this artery that shone silver in certain light, rang much more true to me than St. Louis as the “Gateway to the West.” Being a “gateway” made our city sound as if it were just a door. We rode the Admiral, an old-fashioned double-decker riverboat, up and down the river. We wore frilly frocks and danced the Mexican hat dance. Leaning over the railing, I dropped my Lost Tooth Collection in its red velvet bag into the Mississippi River by mistake and sobbed. My father comforted me, “The river will take care of your teeth.” He thought the collection was macabre, anyway.

I loved a poem by Rabindranath Tagore called “Paper Boats” in which he writes his name on his boats and launches them on a stream, wondering who will find them. I never did this, but sending my poems out to children’s magazines then felt related. Years later I felt spellbound to sit by Tagore’s own river, near Dhaka, Bangladesh, and wonder, “Is this where he did it?”


The river also felt like reading, my favorite activity—it went on and on. No matter what other rivers I have come to know and love—the mighty Columbia up in Oregon, the skinny San Antonio, more like a wide creek, that weaves its indelible spell behind our current house—the Mississippi will always be first in memory, telling me, as it has told generations, there are many more places to go.

*Naomi Shihab Nye is an award-winning poet, writer, and anthologist. Her most recent book for young readers, The Space Between Our Footsteps (Simon & Schuster, 1992) is reviewed in this issue.*

(Macmillan, 1984, ages 10-14), a beautifully crafted book about a careful boy, an only child in a careful house, who slips outside one night and fires a gun in a moment of wild, rebellious joy. Ned’s deception starts to haunt him, becoming like “a splinter in his mind,” and when a feral cat appears without an eye, he fears that he may be to blame.

Neither of Ned’s parents cares for guns. When his father asks rhetorically, “What is there to imagine with a gun?” the answer is final: “Something dead.” Mixed in with Ned’s concerns about the cat, about the gun, is his awareness of his mother’s crippling illness and his father’s patient care. These are complicated currents that resolve into a smooth stream of a book—a thoughtful book about a thoughtless act.

Considering the prevalence of guns in American life, the number of good—and by that I mean fully imagined—children’s books featuring guns is small. Perhaps this is because it is hard to write well for the young about anything blatantly harmful, which a gun, with its immediate and devastating power, surely is.

The books described here do not issue predictable warnings. They are not, in the end, “books about guns,” but books about young lives, complete with worries, hurts, and conflicts. Guns appear in the characters’ lives by quite divergent means, casting light on different aspects of identity, survival, and human connection. Surely this is one of the best reasons for reading stories; to learn about lives and motivations in their full and often unresolved complexity. These books suggest that there is, after all, a great deal to be imagined with a gun—more, perhaps, than we might have thought. 

*Mary Lou Burket is a member of the editorial committee of the Riverbank Review.*

# The Right Size

Essay by Margaret Willey

*“The first thing I’ve got to do,” said Alice as she wandered about in the wood, “is grow to my right size again.”*

—Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865

I grew up a classic child-mother, with seven younger siblings before I was twelve, two more born into my family before I left home at seventeen. Like many an eldest sister I was prematurely comfortable with adult responsibility and routinely carried a baby on one hip. Yet, physically, I took after my father’s

people, and they were small, fair-haired Irishmen. I was a blond elf of a girl, always the smallest child in my class. How did I make sense of such a split reality? I saw my size as something others gave to me or took away, depending on the situation. I learned that size is plastic, for I grew or shrank to fit the expectations of others.

Children who are the smallest learn early on that their size can bring a kind of celebrity, one that will at once distinguish and diminish them. The smallest often becomes a kind of poster child for childhood, a miniature of what is already miniature; a human toy. For a brief time I took on this role at my Catholic elementary school, although I knew very well that this wasn’t the only me. Still, at school I felt fragile and shy. I was easily intimidated by the noise and chaos of the classroom, despite the fact that my home life also involved noise and chaos. In my elementary school portraits I look vulnerable, in need of all the things that a small child needs—a boost, a lift, a cushion on a chair.

But once I had returned home and taken off my uniform; once I was standing at my mother’s side, presiding with her over the chaos of home life, I expanded to fill the role. This required not only physical strength, but also adult common sense in the face of impossible needs. In our family portraits, I radiate authority. I do not look shy, though at school I was painfully shy and easily embarrassed. I do not look confused, yet at school I was sometimes paralyzed with confusion about what I was or was not capable of. I do not look afraid, although a vague pre-adolescent fear of the outer world was taking root in me. I do not even look particularly small—not with so many smaller ones around me. Was I an adult trapped in the body of a tiny girl or a tiny girl posing as an adult? What was my right size?

I suspect these questions led to my lifelong fascination with one of the fundamental dilemmas of adolescence. Body image became the focus of my first novel for teenagers (*The Bigger Book of Lydia*, 1983) and has since fueled other novels, short stories, and essays. I find myself revisiting this theme as one would visit an old friend—or enemy—and mulling over the same questions: If adolescence is the time when children develop an identity that is separate from the expectations of their families, what does it mean when the developing public and private selves are in conflict? What does it feel like, in the body itself, when your size is beyond your control?

As a girl I loved *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, as I loved any story with a brave and sensible heroine, but I was never as engaged by Alice’s later adventures as I was by those wild fluctuations in size in the early chapters. I knew that those deceptively simple instructions in the rabbit hole—*eat me, drink me*—were a challenge to Alice’s very sanity, and I saw the subsequent growing and shrinking as the true test of her



## a poem for summer



### Green Stems

Little things that crawl and creep  
 In the green grass forests,  
 Deep in their long stemmed world  
 Where ferns uncurl  
 To a greener world  
 Beneath the leaves above them;  
 And every flower upon its stem  
 Blows about them there  
 The bottom of a geranium,  
 The back side of a trillium,  
 The belly of a bumble bee  
 Is all they see, these little things  
 Down so low  
 Where no bird sings  
 Where no winds blow,  
 Deep in their long stemmed world.

—Margaret Wise Brown

From *Nibble Nibble* (Harper & Row, 1959). Now available in a newly reissued edition, with original illustrations by Leonard Weisgard (HarperCollins, 1998). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

courage. “One doesn’t like changing so often, you know,” the ever-polite Alice complains after shrinking to a pathetic three inches.

John Tenniel’s illustrations captured perfectly the portentousness of such changes—Alice grotesquely stretched into a serpentine towering female, Alice with her blond head jammed into the ceiling of a too-small room, Alice, mouse-sized, swimming in a pool of her own tears. How these images transfixed me—they transfixed me still. They captured a dark secret about growing up, one that no one in my world was talking about: that puberty meant losing control of your size. As my girlfriends grew—taller, wider, rounder—I stayed small, child-sized, and this felt to me like a kind of shrinking, a disappearing. I was being left behind. How did Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel come to understand so intimately the great unspoken fear of the contemporary teenager—transformation gone awry?

In *Life in the Fat Lane*, Cherie Bennet’s new novel for teenagers (Delacorte, 1998), the author tells the story of a “perfect” teenager who develops something called Axell-Crowne Syndrome, a mysterious disorder whose main symptom is chronic weight gain, regardless of how much the patient eats. In the course of a year, the narrator, Lara—initially slim, blond, and popular—gains almost one hundred pounds. Bennet, a teen advice columnist, clearly understands the fear American girls have of their own appetites. The novel explores both the outer world’s rejection of the obese and one girl’s inner struggle to understand what is happening to her. In a matter of months, food becomes dangerous, friends become enemies, once loving parents withdraw their support. Lara has entered a different world. She has tumbled down the rabbit hole.

In the final chapter, Lara bravely

faces the challenge of learning to love herself despite her disease. The reader is left in an uncertain place—we don’t know what Lara’s future size will be. It’s an edgy resolution, to the author’s credit, but I predict she may receive letters from readers begging her to tell them if Lara ever gets thin again. *Don’t leave her there*, they will plead. *And don’t leave us here, without knowing how things end up.*

What’s missing from this novel, or any novel that attributes weight gain to a medical condition, is the underlying guilt teenage girls feel about their growings and shrinkings. Lara feels briefly guilty, but early on learns that she is not responsible, that her affliction comes from the outside. Most girls don’t have the luxury of this knowledge; they blame themselves for the weight they gain or might gain. Many experience feelings of deficiency, and a lack of self-control that can flare up at any time and ruin their lives. This is why so many already-thin girls are dieting, why starvation begins to appeal to the pre-anorexic, and why bulimia is seen as an option in the struggle to regain control. *Eat me, drink me, purge me*—these are Alice’s updated instructions for the late twentieth century.

Maybe, in their own minds, all girls have a strain of Axell-Crowne. It’s a condition intensified by our culture’s obsession with appearance, by the normal increase in the appetite of growing girls, and by the secret fear of failure and imperfection that too many share. The worst of it is the way girls blame themselves, wasting precious years searching in vain for what Mary Pipher calls a “false body,” a body that comes from deprivation and denial of what is real, rather than from an acceptance of physical diversity.

My teenage daughter and I share a saying, one that first flew out of my mouth during a fruitless dialogue

about her size—a motherly plea: *Could you please just make peace with your body?* We've since abbreviated it to *Make Peace*. Sometimes I say it fondly, remembering how full of herself she used to be at the mirror, how comfortable with her brown, healthy body. Sometimes I say it pleadingly, on mornings when she emerges from the bathroom scowling in aggravation. Sometimes she senses what I am about to say and says it first, mocking my concern. Sometimes we say it in unison, sadly—my sadness comes from my inability to lift this struggle from her shoulders; hers from knowing how unlikely it is to really make peace, to shut out the messages of our culture and just *be* her size.

Perhaps what I am wishing I could give her is something I learned back in the days of my split childhood. Maybe it wasn't so bad to see my size as something that was variable. Long before the tribulations of puberty, I made peace with the fact that my size was not something I could depend on. There was always something slippery about it, something futile about efforts to control or disguise it. My size affected how people treated me—no escaping that. But I learned early that there was something of me quite apart from what others saw; a self that had more to do with my actions and responsibilities, and the ways that I connected with the people I loved. The size of my inner self was both large and small, strong and weak, always in process. It was not about what others saw when they looked at me. It wasn't about perfection or control. It was my right size. The effort to make peace with it goes on. ~

*Margaret Willey writes and lectures frequently on young women's issues. Her most recent young adult novel, Facing the Music (Delacorte, 1996) was an ALA Quick Pick and won the 1997 Paterson Prize for Books for Young People.*

## writers on the riverbank

**Peter Sís**

I grew up on the bank of the River Vltava in the city of Prague. There were many mysterious, dark places in Prague—walls, corners, squares, cellars, palaces, churches, towers—static and motionless. River Vltava was alive and the most mysterious of all. How many battles took place on its banks? How many knights and soldiers (French, Swedish, Russian, German, Catholic, Protestant) are buried under the muddy bottom? How many ancient carp and catfish remember them? And how many human souls of people drowned were captured by the water sprites—mythical water creatures of Czech folklore? One of the most beloved Czech poems by K. J. Erben tells about a water sprite's earthling wife. How she married him, lived under the water with him and had two children, then one day went back home to visit and refused to return. The desperate sprite threatens to kill the children to get her back... It is a gloomy tale with an unfortunate ending.

Vltava in its perpetual motion is crowned by the magnificent Charles Bridge with its spectacular statues of saints. One of the most significant of Prague's saints was John of Nepomuk, the Queen's confessor, who—after refusing to reveal the queen's secrets to the King—was thrown from the bridge with his tongue cut out... Cheerful place indeed.

If I was a leaf in the city of Prague, I could fall into the murky waters of Vltava, flow down the stream to the River Elbe, glide all the way to Hamburg, cross the Atlantic Ocean, travel down and around to New Orleans—then up and up the mighty Mississippi... a long trip. At its end I would rest and dry on the riverbank, until a curious child found me and, intrigued by my exotic shape, placed me between the pages of a book. That way I would find fulfillment as a leaf, a traveler, and a bookmark.

*Born in Czechoslovakia, Peter Sís is an internationally acclaimed author, illustrator, and filmmaker. His books include The Three Golden Keys (Doubleday), Starry Messenger (FS&G), and two picture books forthcoming this fall: Tibet Through the Red Box (FS&G), based on the written account of his father, who disappeared in Tibet for two years during Sís' childhood, and Firetruck (Greenwillow), a story about a boy who loves firetrucks so much—he becomes one.*



profile

# Erik and Lenore Blegvad

By Christine Alfano

I have spent the last couple of months thumbing through all the dog-eared, tattered-cover library copies of Erik and Lenore Blegvad books that I could lay my hands on. In stacks or on their own, these books have visited my bed, my children's beds, the floors nearest to said beds, and all table surfaces available. They have been lost between couch cushions, clamored for when missing, read and re-read by everyone but our poor illiterate cat (which is too bad for her, because cats are important in Blegvad books). And let me tell you, it has been a splendid several weeks. Orders have been made for those titles still in print. The library copies are long overdue, but we are seriously considering renewing them, yet again.

It's not that the Blegvads have produced so many books that we just can't get through them all (although it is true that Mr. Blegvad's next book will be the hundredth he has illustrated); it's that once you get to know these books, they are hard to let go of. The Blegvads' work is quiet and strong—her stories and his artwork illuminate the hearts of observant readers. We feel lucky to have such treasure in our home—it almost makes us prone to hoarding.

There is difficulty in writing about both artists in one small space, because each of their work is extraordinary in its own ways. But, as they have been married for nearly fifty years,

*"To have learned  
to observe at such  
an early age, to have  
stumbled into such a  
varied life, to have  
spent it with such  
extraordinary people—  
there's luck for you."*

—Erik Blegvad, from  
Self-Portrait: Erik Blegvad

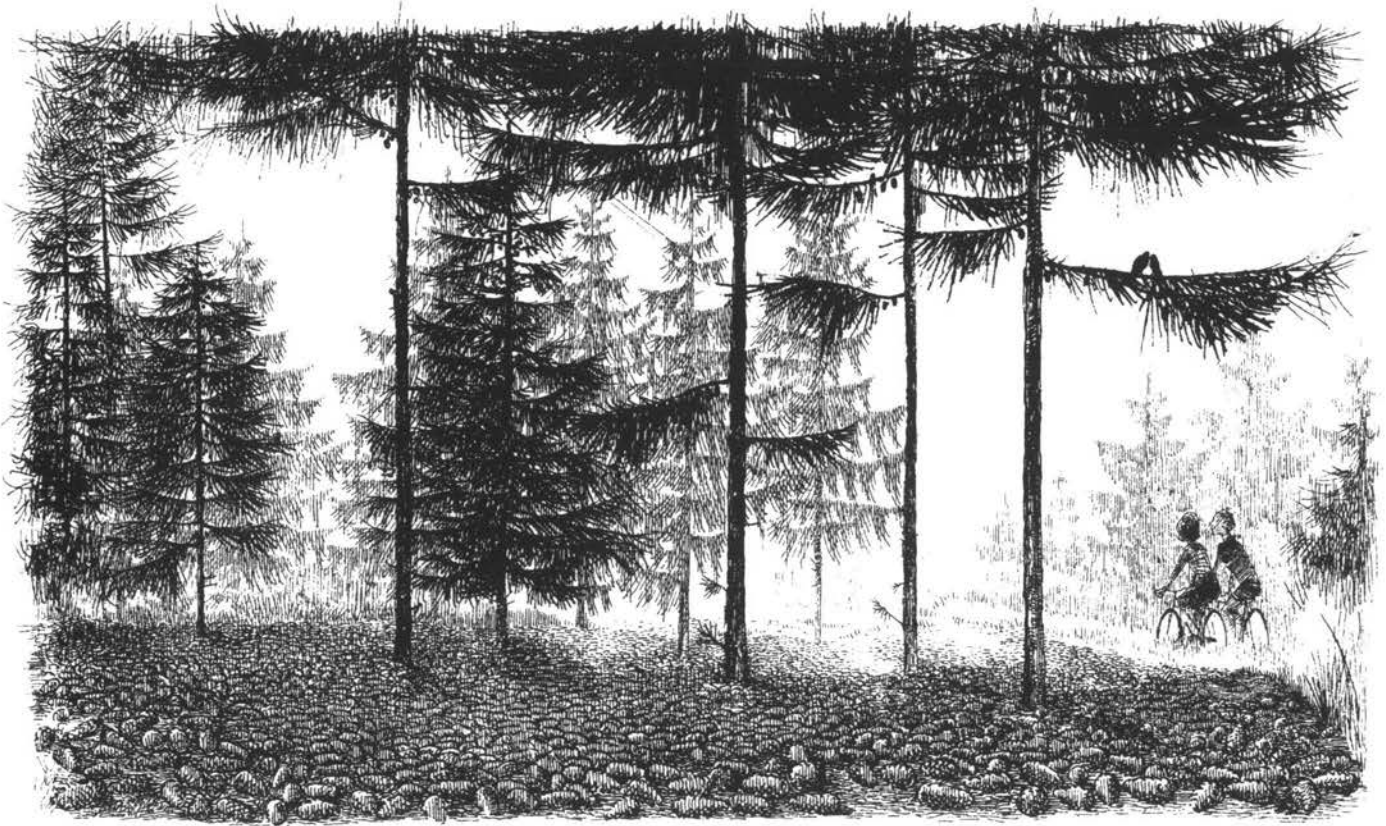
raised two sons together, and managed to create a lovely profusion of books, perhaps the close quarters and intertwining of these words will not feel too cramped. A few factual particulars about the couple are culled (mostly) from the utterly charming autobiographical scrapbook called *Self-Portrait: Erik Blegvad* (Addison Wesley, 1979).

Mr. Blegvad was born in 1923 in Copenhagen, a city he learned to love as a boy through long, rambling walks with his dear grandfather. See his birth-

place, and the former stomping ground of Hans Christian Andersen, rendered with beautiful architectural detail in the Blegvads' first book together, *Mr. Jensen and Cat* (Harcourt Brace, 1965). Erik's artistic mother had a "sure and non-conformist eye" and encouraged him in all his drawing endeavors. Summer excursions with his marine biologist father transferred an abiding love of the sea. He was an avid reader and drawer, but one of his first passions was flight. Had Germany not occupied Denmark during World War II, Mr. Blegvad might have followed his initial ambition and become a pilot. Instead he pursued art more seriously than aviation, studying at the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen.

Some years after the war, Erik providentially set off for Paris with a little bit of money and, believe it or not, ten pounds of butter that his mother had given him to bring along—"as good as gold," she claimed. It melted. He gratefully obtained his first assignment to illustrate the cover of the magazine *Réalités*.

Lenore Hochman, meanwhile, was born in 1926 across an ocean, in New York City. (Can we presume that her evocative illustrations for *Once Upon a Time* and *Grandma* are based on childhood memories of that city?) She attended Vassar College where she studied art history, and after receiving



Five million is for pine cones,  
Brown and brittle, rough and dry.

her B.A., she traveled to France to study painting with Fernand Leger.

By 1950, both living in Paris, Erik Blegvad and Lenore Hochman met. They fell in love, traveled through Europe together, ultimately hitchhiking to Copenhagen to get married. (There is a marvelous photograph in *Self-Portrait* that shows the young couple standing next to one another, looking into a shop window. He sports a pipe and one of those startling, handsome, turned-up mustaches. She positively glows.) In 1951, they came back to New York City and to the beginnings of their work as parents and as writers and illustrators of children's books.

There is a remarkable range to Erik Blegvad's creations: he works most often in pen and ink, in a traditional, realistic style, and is an enormously skilled artist—his delicate

drawings capture the minutiae of natural scenarios and the atmosphere of ordered interiors with equal artistry. He is also a master of mood, utilizing accomplished line and careful palette to imply the carefree lilt of a returning soldier's step, the quiet hesitation of a small child, or the assured confidence of a pig who has smartly built his house with bricks. Add watercolor and pencil to his list of preferred media and you have the basis for an abundance of gorgeously detailed illustrations for novels, fairy tales, poems, picture books, magazines, and even one of his father's books on fishing. He originated the diminutive world of Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* and gave wondrous flight to the airborne adventures in her *Bed-Knob and Broom Stick*. The emotional expressiveness of his artwork has proved the perfect match

for many of Charlotte Zolotow's soft, introspective stories, and the books that he has done with Lenore have the feel of charmed collaboration.

Look for little black cats in much of his work—he includes them, it seems, wherever he can and they lend a magic presence. In *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*, Judith Viorst's story of a little boy coping with his cat's death (Atheneum, 1976), Blegvad somehow infuses catless pictures with spirit of cat! It is my opinion that he is at his best depicting windows and winter landscapes, but one must also note the stunning success of his selection, translation, and illustration of *Twelve Tales* by Hans Christian Andersen (McElderry, 1994). This was work near to his heart, and it shows in its outcome.

Lenore Blegvad has cast her talents

high and wide, with work touching many realms of children's literature. She compiled (and Erik illustrated) a neat quartet of books with whimsical rhymes about pigs, dogs, cats, and dwellings. Her poetic sensibility shines in an astonishing little counting book called *One is for the Sun* (Harcourt Brace, 1968), in which she makes the daring and impeccable leap from a perfunctory listing of numbers to those grandiose calculations particular to childhood: "Three million is for fish, Darting minnows, flicking tails. Four million is for berries, Crowding bushes, filling pails." She's written several picture books, including her sublime ode to the strange power of friend-



ship, *Anna Banana and Me* (McElderry, 1986), and *Once Upon a Time and Grandma* (McElderry, 1993), an exquisite, playful story of two children's dawning understanding that their grandmother, who "has always been Grandma," was once a child too.

Never heavy-handed or pedantic, Lenore Blegvad explores serious issues in children's lives in her thoughtful novels for younger readers. Both *Moon-Watch Summer* (Harcourt Brace, 1972) and *A Sound of Leaves* (McElderry, 1996) achieve a depth not often found in books written for seven to ten-year-olds. Her young protagonists actually change and grow within the stories; we know them as fully-drawn people, not quick-sketch characters.

The Blegvads' subject matter often reveals a domestic truth—intimate scenes of family life are depicted: a father, at his easel, turns his head to speak with his son, who lies on the grass behind him; the close confusion of a family searching frantically for a small, lost pet is embraced as delightful cacophony; a tired, slightly wary vacationing family sits down to eat dinner and notices, suddenly, the overwhelming silence of the night outside.

Both of the Blegvads' work is imbued with an appreciation for the beauty and complexity of life. We see it in his keen observations of nature, in the skilled delineations of city rooftops, in a painted gesture. We hear it in her dialogue, her characters' articulations. In *Moon-Watch Summer*, an impatient boy demands to know from his grandmother what could possibly be more important than the first moonwalk: "Grammie thought for a moment. Then she said, 'The earth, I think. Just that. And the people on it. How they live and how they die. And the things that grow.'"

After I read Lenore Blegvad's stories or look carefully at Erik Blegvad's pictures, I feel more attentive, less rushed, apt to watch a bug as it makes its way across a leaf, or to take note of the subtle shift in the color of a winter sky; I am more likely to allow a conversation with my child to wander of its own delightful accord. A kind of osmosis happens and the values expressed in their work, the underlying wit and intelligence and kindness seep in. I learned a couple of Danish phrases from their book, *Mr. Jensen and Cat*—one of them might be appropriate here: *tusind tak*. It means a thousand thanks. ~

*Christine Alfano experienced a literary epiphany when she opened the Blegvad boxes at the Kerlan Collection in Minneapolis.*

**THE SPACE BETWEEN OUR FOOTSTEPS:**  
 Poems and Paintings from the Middle East  
 Edited by Naomi Shihab Nye

◆ "A feast" \*

"The diversity of viewpoint and universality of feeling will open the eyes of readers."  
 —Pointered Review, Kirkus Reviews

★ "Nye's focus is on the Middle East, more than 100 poets and artists from 19 countries. With the poetry, she includes full-page gloriously colored paintings."  
 —Starred Review, Booklist

THE SPACE BETWEEN OUR FOOTSTEPS  
 Poems and Paintings from the Middle East  
 Edited by NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

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Debra Frasier talks with

# Vera B. Williams

Children's book author Debra Frasier spoke with Vera B. Williams about her work at an event sponsored by the Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library during Children's Book Week in November, 1997. The following is excerpted from their conversation.

**DF:** *In your career you've mainly worked with the same editor and publisher. How did you come to work at Greenwillow?*

**VW:** Well, I had been sending things out. I'd done two books, but I hadn't written either of them, and I wanted to write as well as make pictures. Then I did write this story—*It's a Gingerbread House*—about how a grandfather had sent this gingerbread house to the children and they had nibbled at it until it looked quite sad and then they said "Oh, let's eat it, he'll surely send us another one." But after they ate the roof, inside was a little chest made of gingerbread, and inside the chest were directions for making another one. And it told you how to make it. I had not really thought of publishing this, I had done it to comfort myself now that all the children were grown up and there was nobody to make gingerbread houses for anymore.

So, I was standing in line waiting to go to the movies with a friend, and a friend of hers who was very active in publishing. And my friend said "Ask Janet if it's all right for them to keep manuscripts so long," because I had

sent out one manuscript and a publisher had kept it for a year. So I asked her, and she said "No, that's outrageous. You need an agent. Would you like me to be your agent?" I said "Sure." This was still standing in line at the movie theater! So, this experienced person, who had been an editor, became my agent. She said "Bring me everything you have." So I brought her all the writings that I thought could be published, including *Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe*. But she was most interested in *It's a Gingerbread House*. So she took it to Greenwillow. They really impressed me because they said "We can give you a contract for this if we can bake it from your directions." I thought "Gee, that's great." Because you know how awful it is to get a "how to" book that you can't do. So they labored over it, they annotated everything, they cooked it with a child and they kept correcting it. I got very discouraged, but finally I took their suggestions for making the process better



and I incorporated them using my own language. And that was the first book that I both wrote and illustrated.

**DF:** *Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe follows a trip on a river with two women and two children. I wonder if you could tell a little about how this book came into being. You've said it came out of a trip that you made.*

**VW:** Yes, it came out of several years of trips, which I compressed into a three-day adventure. I was sure I'd get a letter from someone saying "It's not possible to have this much adventure in three days." But I never did. I had done a lot of canoeing in Ontario and then a three-week, five-hundred-mile trip in the Yukon, and I loved it. I'm not a daredevil, actually, I'm not a big white-water person, but I learned to do a certain amount of that and I had wonderful adventures.

We were on our way back from the Yukon trip, going toward Vancouver, and we stopped for some time in the Canadian Rockies. One day there were plans to go hiking and I said, "No, I'm not going, I want to fuss around with the stuff." You know your stuff gets very dear to you when you're camping. But that's not really what I wanted; what I really wanted was to start to write, because even though I loved



Illustration by Vera B. Williams, from *A Chair for My Mother*

canoeing, I could see that it was not my fate exactly, to spend the rest of my life going around the world canoeing marvelous rivers, but rather to write and picture it. And I started making little pictures right then, particularly of the equipment, which grew into this book. I had done most of my canoeing in groups that were mostly men, but when I created the adventure in the book I decided to give it over to these two women and their two kids, one of whom was me, the “I.”

**DF:** *A theme that runs through all your books is the capability of women. And the “I” who is telling the story, who is usually female, is extremely confident. This book begins so strongly in that way: “I was the one who first noticed the red canoe for sale in the yard on the way home from school.” Who is this “I”? Is she you?*

**VW:** In this case, she’s very close to me. When the book came out, there

was a review of it which said “Two women take their sons canoeing.” I said “What? Two sons?” And I wrote off an angry letter. Luckily I didn’t mail it, because something popped into my head and I started to look through the book and I realized you couldn’t tell whether the main character was a boy or girl. I had simply made her in her camping clothes and had had no occasion to use a pronoun.

**DF:** *That’s the beauty of this stack of books here. Nowhere do I feel that you’re running around with a sign saying “Women are great,” but the forcefulness that the female characters deliver, through their story and their actions, has such a profound beauty to me, without any attempt to be political, that I find them to be some of the most political books that I’ve run into.*

*This is also true in A Chair for My Mother, a story about a family in need of a piece of beauty in their lives, and a place for the mother to rest. One thing that you*

*are able to do so well is give us a sense of work, and where work fits in our life. You once said in an interview “Our family, like thousands of others at this time, had a hard time making a living, staying together, paying the rent, and resisting despair.” To me, this book is really about resisting despair, and in it you make work something very honorable. Where did you get this view of work?*

**VW:** Well, I was brought up as a socialist/communist/anarchist daughter. I don’t know the exact organizational affiliations of my parents, but that’s where their opinions were, and not only their opinions, but that’s what they did. Whatever was going on, they were always working to make sure people who worked for a living, or who temporarily couldn’t work for a living because there were no jobs, had respect and believed in themselves and in what they could do. One of my earliest memories, when I was just a little kid, was going with my mother to help in the office of the strike of the Vermont marble workers, where I helped paste stamps on envelopes. This is a little bit hard for me to talk about, because of course I was exposed to a great deal of ideology as a child, some which I’ve come to reject, but not this basic identity with people—and my parents *were* those people—who struggled not only to make a living, but to have good things in their lives.... My parents were believers in what is wonderfully titled in that song, “Bread and Roses.” It’s a song that was written during a strike in the textile mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the refrain of each verse is “We work not just for bread but for roses too.” And that’s what this book is about; it’s about bread and roses—and it has roses all over it!

**DF:** *Along with work, there’s the idea of money, and the desiring of an object. I feel that this is the dark side of the American*



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*A single-engine plane crash leaves Brian stranded alone for two months in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet and his wits to help him survive.*

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by Avi

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*A thirteen-year-old girl traveling from Great Britain to America in 1832 forsakes her proper upbringing and joins the ship's mutinous crew.*



**My Father's Dragon**

by Ruth Stiles Gannett, illustrated  
by Ruth Chrisman Gannett

PB KNOFF/RANDOM \$4.99

*This first of three short chapter books follows a boy as he travels to a faraway island to rescue a baby dragon held captive by wild animals.*

**The Minpins**

by Roald Dahl,  
illustrated by Patrick Benson

PB PUFFIN/PENGUIN \$5.99

*Little Billy ventures into the forbidden woods, where the tiny people who live in the trees tell him how to evade a fire-breathing monster.*

**Ronia, the Robber's Daughter**

by Astrid Lindgren

PB VIKING/PENGUIN \$3.99

*Growing up in the forest, Ronia swims in icy lakes, captures wild horses, runs from goblinfolk, and forges a secret friendship with the son of her father's archenemy.*

**The Village of the Vampire Cat**

by Lensey Namioka

PB BLUE HERON \$8.95

*Zenta and Matsuzo, a duo of masterless samurai, try to discover the true identity of the supposedly supernatural murderer plaguing an ancient Japanese village.*

**Running Out of Time**

by Margaret Peterson Haddix

PB ALADDIN/SIMON \$3.99

HC SIMON \$16.00

*Jessie doesn't know if the year is 1840 or 1996 until she escapes from her nineteenth-century hometown to find that it is really a living history experiment controlled by corrupt researchers.*

heart—the desire for objects. But somehow in this book you have elevated the desire for an object to something beautiful and honorable.

**VW:** I'm very touched that you say that. Well, an object is different when you don't have anything. When you need a chair. When you want someplace to sit down. I half remember—I'm not sure this is a real story—we had very little furniture, because we moved all the time, and finally my mother got a job and she bought a chair. She bought it on time, which she had always felt was a very bad betrayal of working people, that they got taken advantage of—she had organized a credit union partly to prevent this, so that people would have a little money to buy a chair. But she bought this chair on time, and then when my sister and I would ask for a nickel or a penny she'd say "I have to save the money to pay for the chair." I remember a depression in her voice and in our life, from there not being enough money, and once I remember saying "Why did you buy the chair if you didn't have enough money?" And she said "I don't intend to work hard all my life and have nowhere to sit down."

In a sense the book was a gift to my mother. I wrote it after she had died, and I wrote it to thank her. She did a great deal for my sister and myself, as did my father, but she was actually the person that mostly supported us. I hadn't really appreciated this in her lifetime, and that's partly why I made the book. The chair and the mother and the jar in that series all are symbols of love, and I felt when I was creating them a certain roundness in them. I think one of the reasons the book is loved is because children long in their hearts to give their mother a gift.

**DF:** Well, here we come to one of the great books of my lifetime. (More More More,

Said the Baby). I was glad I was on the planet when this book came out.

**VW:** This book has a very simple explanation: I fell in love. I had a grandchild. It was my first grandchild, and it was pretty special. You're not prepared for how remarkable it's going to be. I was just crazy about this kid. It had been a long time since I'd had toddlers around, and it brought back my own toddlers, and when I was a toddler—it was just delicious. The book was going to be all about *my* grandchild, who was pink and white with blond hair, and then when I made up the dummy I decided, well, this is the story of grandparents and mothers and fathers and their first physical love for their very active, physical, sensual little children, and they come in all colors. So, though I didn't have pages to show all colors, I took some of Hudson's love names—Little Pumpkin and Little Bird—and made new characters to go with them. I did that partly for reasons of belief, but it made a much more interesting book, graphically, because I got to put in those in-between title pages for each chapter. And because I was so nuts about Hudson, I decided to hand-letter the whole book, and paint all the lettering in. Then of course I had to paint around all the lettering, because you can't paint those light colors on dark colors. So it was a true labor of love.

**DF:** Which brings us to your newest book, *Lucky Song*. How did this book come about?

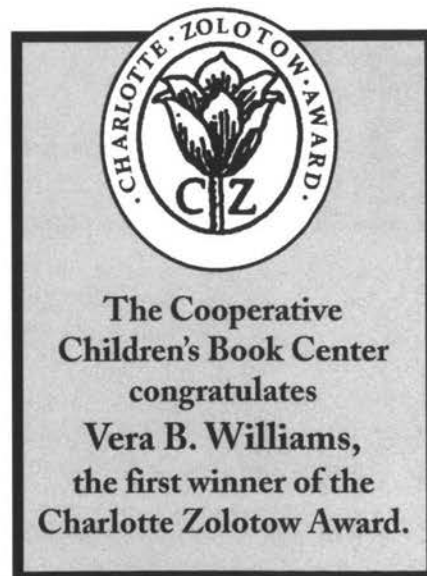
**VW:** Well, you really have to hear the text, and then you'll understand the book, and why it's called *Lucky Song*. (Reads it.) I made this book because I want to hear that song again. It's a song we all want to hear again and again—that we are in some very beautiful way, when we're little, the center of the uni-

verse. Not because we should have all the lollipops we want, or all the Power Rangers, or exactly what we want for dinner, but because our deepest needs as human beings and desires should be met. You can't call a book "Birthright," but that's what I meant, and I made this book out of that feeling. Books you write for this age, you really write for two people, the person who reads it and the hearer, and I wrote it for both of those. But I knew I had to call it *Lucky Song*, because we don't necessarily get this to happen to us. ~

*Debra Frasier is an author and illustrator who lives and works in Minneapolis. Her picture books include On the Day You Were Born and, most recently, Out of the Ocean (both Harcourt Brace).*

**Vera B. Williams: Selected Bibliography**

*It's a Gingerbread House: Bake It, Build It, Eat It!* (1978)  
*Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe* (1981)  
*A Chair for My Mother* (1982)  
*Something Special for Me* (1983)  
*Music, Music for Everyone* (1984)  
*Cherries and Cherry Pits* (1986)  
*Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea* (1988)  
*More More More, Said the Baby:*  
*3 Love Stories* (1990)  
*Scooter* (1993)  
*Lucky Song* (1997)



# 1998 Children's Books

## Picture Books

### **The Beggar's Magic**

By Margaret and Raymond Chang

Illustrated by David Johnson

MCELDERRY

A beggar priest who takes up temporary residence in an abandoned cottage captivates Fu Nan and the other village children by performing small, selfless magical feats. First recorded in a seventeenth-century collection of Chinese folktales, this gentle story, with its soft, expressively-lined illustrations, demonstrates that kindness often produces wondrous results.

### **Clouds for Dinner**

Written and illustrated by Lynne Rae Perkins

GREENWILLOW

The grass-is-always-greener syndrome hits Janet hard during a visit to her aunt and uncle's comfortably conventional home, worlds away from the hilltop house she shares with her dreamy, artistic parents. But a frustrating experience trying to describe an extraordinary sunrise to her practical-minded aunt gives Janet a new appreciation for her parents' eccentricities.

### **Marven of the Great North Woods**

By Kathryn Lasky

Illustrated by Kevin Hawkes

HARCOURT BRACE

Captivating paintings recreate the northern Minnesota landscape Marven discovers when his parents send him to a logging camp to escape the flu epidemic that strikes Duluth in 1918. An episode from Lasky's father's childhood provides the inspiration for this evocative story, which follows Marven as he gradually adjusts to his strange, new life.

## Poetry

### **The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom**

Selected by Jack Prelutsky

Illustrated Meilo So

KNOFF

A generously stocked menagerie of animal poems by a diverse range of poets vividly imagines everything from the small but mighty ant to the majestic whale. Equally deserving of attention are the exquisite watercolor paintings that soar, slither, and swim across every page.

### **Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho**

By Dawnine Spivak

Illustrated by Demi

ATHENEUM

Poetry suffused the everyday life of Basho, who wandered Japan three hundred years ago, living simply and composing haiku inspired by his experiences. Impeccably illustrated with colored ink on textured sand-colored paper, Basho's journey presents common objects in new and exciting ways, and allows children to appreciate haiku for more than just its syllable count.

### **Love Letters**

By Arnold Adoff

Illustrated by Lisa Desimini

BLUE SKY/SCHOLASTIC

Innovative mixed-media collages accompany valentines from the kid in the front row, who yearns for a smile from "Ms. Back Row," and others perhaps too bashful to speak their feelings out loud. Readers will connect with the genuine emotions in these quirky poems, filled with kid-friendly images such as "I love you more than peanut butter cookies/crumble."

# of Distinction Awards

## Fiction

### **Children of Summer: Henri Fabre's Insects**

By Margaret J. Anderson

Illustrated by Marie Le Glatin Keis

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

French entomologist Jean Henri Fabre often allowed his children to assist him when he "played tricks" on insects to learn more about their behavior. Narrated by Fabre's ten-year-old son Paul, this unique blend of fact and fiction offers an enchanting portrait of a close-knit family and of a dedicated scientist at work.

### **Leaving Home**

Edited by Hazel Rochman and

Darlene Z. McCampbell

HARPERCOLLINS

This thoughtfully compiled anthology gathers together stories, excerpts, and poems that speak to those inevitable moments of stepping away from what one has always known, to embark on something new. Authors such as Toni Morrison, Amy Tan, and Tim Wynn-Jones show that the transition is never easy or complete, but vital to growing up.

### **The Tulip Touch**

By Anne Fine

LITTLE, BROWN

Natalie's exhilarating, unpredictable friendship with a manipulative girl named Tulip pushes her to perform increasingly destructive pranks until she finally decides enough is enough. Tulip herself emerges as a victim in this mesmerizing profile of an abused child failed by the adults who made no serious attempt to rescue her.

## Nonfiction

### **Leon's Story**

By Leon Walter Tillage

Illustrations by Susan L. Roth

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

Born in 1936, the son of a North Carolina sharecropper, Leon Tillage talks matter-of-factly about the brutality and indignity he and his family endured under segregation in this brief yet resonant autobiography, handsomely illustrated with abstract cut-paper collages. His is the story of a courageous life that is both unique and, regrettably, all too common.

### **Red Scarf Girl:**

#### **A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution**

By Ji Li Jiang

HARPERCOLLINS

A chapter of world history that most American young people know little about becomes chillingly real through the words of Ji Li Jiang, who was twelve years old when the Cultural Revolution began. Her naive enthusiasm for helping Chairman Mao rid China of the "Four Olds" wavers as she realizes that no one, not even herself, is above persecution.

### **Rome Antics**

Written and illustrated by David Macaulay

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

A looping red line traces a homing pigeon's path as she conducts a flying tour through Rome's bustling piazzas, narrow alleys, and ancient edifices. Macaulay's intricate architectural sketches leave room for mischievous details such as a gladiator mingling with outdoor cafe guests on the Piazza Navona.





## Picture Books

### And If the Moon Could Talk

By Kate Banks

Illustrated by Georg Hallensleben

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 3-5, \$15.00

Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* took bedtime readers on a lilting tour of a child's room, using small words and details to evoke a safe and cozy universe. *And If the Moon Could Talk*, Kate Banks' gentle new picture book, uses a methodical rhythm and bedtime inventory that references its classic predecessor, but engages a much bigger world. Like Banks' previous books, *And If the Moon Could Talk* uses simple narrative repetition to focus on a single idea. Here the device is shifting vantage points: that of a child preparing for bed, and that of the moon (if it had eyes and a voice). It is a simple yet sophisticated way of offering a global perspective to small lives.

Each two-page spread, illustrated with splendid paintings by Georg Hallensleben, focuses on a particular moment and place, alternating between a child's world and the big beyond. First, the child's home: "Someone hums quietly. A clock ticks. A light flicks on." Then, the big world, with the repeated phrase "And if the moon could talk." The moon tells of "stars flaring up one by one, and a small fire burning by a tree... sands blowing across the desert and

nomads crouching by the dune... waves washing onto the beach, shells, and a crab resting."

Fans of earlier collaborations between Banks and Hallensleben will find this a more serious affair, offering neither the magical playfulness of *Spider Spider* nor the sweet intimacy of *Baboon*. It shares with those books a generous heart and beautiful illustrations (though Hallensleben's confident brushwork seems more at home in the big darkening world than the outlined confines of the small room). Banks' narrative device occasionally plods, robbing the book of the immediate, rhythmic *click* of its *Moon* inspiration. Still, with its literate imagery and soaring possibilities, *And If the Moon Could Talk* wears well—richer for parents, perhaps, than the singsong simplicity of its inspiration.

—Diane Hellekson

### I Lost My Bear

By Jules Feiffer

WILLIAM MORROW

40 pages, Ages 3-8, \$16.00

Any parent who, at three in the morning, has sifted desperately through under-the-crib dustbunnies for a beloved pacifier, or backtracked madly over a day's motions to recall the whereabouts of a threadbare baby blanket, knows the obsessive nature of children when it comes to objects of affection. There are times when life simply cannot go on without blanky or dolly or nook-nook. Lucky parents have chil-

dren who fall in love with their un-detachable thumbs. The rest of us live on the edge of imminent disaster.

Just such a disaster strikes in Jules Feiffer's *I Lost My Bear*, and you get a fair idea of the climate of his story by looking at its cover: a shade of cool blue heats into electric green and the words of the title, scrawled large with bold black outlines, jump from the page with a frantic energy. The sight of a wide-eyed, gape-mouthed little girl peering out of the O in "Lost" makes it clear that the intensity of the tale is cut with humor.

Feiffer doesn't bother with the mundane "let's hunt for the bear on each page" approach. He delves instead into the convoluted thoughts of a girl who has lost the thing she loves the most. Unable to find her "Bearsy," she moves from worried irritation, to asking for help from completely useless parents (Mom's too busy; Dad only lectures), to a full-fledged panic. Her big sister comes through with a magical solution: "If you close your eyes and throw one of your other stuffed animals, sometimes it lands in the same place." But which to throw? Another favorite and lose it too? One you don't care about? Then it will know! Feiffer's heroine is delightfully comic and complex. Easily distracted, she interrupts her desperate search for Bearsy when she happens across other, more interesting toys.

Feiffer's agile line displays his usual wit and his artwork couldn't be more expressive: hand-lettered text

screams with outrage or whimpers in fear; every ink and watercolor spread declares the emotion of the moment.

Reading *I Lost My Bear* with young ones is hugely satisfying—chances are they've been through similar ordeals, and will enjoy following this one through to its conclusion. Going on a bear hunt with such an intriguing little girl adds a strong element of pleasure to the detective work.

—Christine Alfano

### Lottie's New Beach Towel

By Petra Mathers

ATHENEUM

32 pages, Ages 3-8, \$15.00

With the possible exception of the Little Red Hen, chickens don't have much of a reputation for common sense. Fruit falls on their heads and they think the whole world is coming to an end. But Lottie is a different sort

of fowl: refined, levelheaded, definitely a problem solver. Walking across the dunes to meet her friend Herbie for a boat ride and picnic, her gnarled orange feet get scorched by the sand. What does she do? Does she run squawking back to the cool tile floor of her beachfront cottage? No, she very practically hops onto her cooler full of picnic food, then throws down the lovely red towel with white polka dots she received in the mail from her aunt. "Put the towel in front, hop off the cooler onto the towel. Put the cooler in front. Hop off the cooler onto the towel. Towel, cooler, off, on..." And so it goes until Lottie, in the first of several creative uses for her towel that day, reaches the ocean.

Unfolding in an orderly frame-by-frame fashion, Mathers' crisp watercolor illustrations keenly reflect Lottie's personality. The matronly hen wears an apron when preparing lunch,

keeps her yard and flower beds neat, and chides Herbie (a rather sloppy but lovable duck) for dribbling "jelly on [his] belly." But a streak of mischief lurks in the paintbrush of her creator. One wonderful aside shows Lottie, momentarily disoriented after tumbling in the frothy waves, mistaking a nearby starfish for her foot. Pudding Rock, Herbie and Lottie's destination, has a distinct upside-down pudding cup shape. And in addition to performing more mundane functions—acting as a picnic blanket or a sail for Herbie's stalled motorboat—the towel becomes a makeshift veil when a mouse bride loses hers to the wind.

This day at the beach passes, as all good days at the beach should, with cloudless skies, turquoise water, friendship, and surprises which, thanks to some ingenuity and preparation, turn out for the best. As night falls, Lottie sits down at her desk, her towel neatly draped across the clothesline outside, and writes her aunt a thank-you note. Common sense *and* manners—what a chicken!

—Christine Heppermann

### Scarecrow

By Cynthia Rylant

Illustrated by Lauren Stringer

HARCOURT BRACE

40 pages, Ages 6-12, \$16.00

Cynthia Rylant and Lauren Stringer take the scare out of scarecrow in this restful picture book. In doing so, however, they deprive the title character of his *raison d'être*. "It takes a certain peace, hanging around a garden all day," Rylant writes. The accompanying spreads, which span the seasons from planting to harvest, picture a straw-stuffed figure amid furrows of red-orange soil. His brick-colored jacket recalls an old barn, and his motley pants resemble a patchwork of fields seen from the sky. A girl tends the



Illustration by Petra Mathers, from *Lottie's New Beach Towel*



Illustration by Jan Ormerod,  
from *Who's Whose?*

scarecrow's turf, digging the soil with a shovel and, later, placing fresh corn in a wheelbarrow.

The lyrical narration and rich acrylic paintings convey a profound sense of calm. Stringer, winner of a Minnesota Book Award for her illustrations in *Mud*, signals the scarecrow's placidity by the stitched smile on his cloth face and the blue morning glories tangled around his secondhand shoes. The scarecrow's button eyes look into the distance, and when the gardener holds a dandelion to his nose, he gazes benignly over her head.

Yet Newbery Medalist Rylant (*Missing May*) contends that the scarecrow requires "a friendliness toward birds....They line up on his arms and can chat all day." She neglects to mention that a scarecrow is not just for decoration: protecting seeds is in his job description. Rylant adds, "He knows he isn't real. A scarecrow understands right away that he is just borrowed parts made to look like somebody." The author's reassurances limit the imagination; the insistence on serenity diminishes the hero's spirit.

Nevertheless, Rylant convincingly establishes "the scarecrow's best gift: his gentleness," and warmth suffuses both the soothing narrative voice

and Stringer's tranquil images. The collaborators show that there is nothing to fear from an oversize doll "thinking his long slow thoughts." Their scarecrow begs comparison to the hero of *The Wizard of OZ*, who wishes he could frighten birds, and expresses frustration at his own harmlessness; *Wizard* offers a conflicted and sympathetic character, while *Scarecrow* nervously denies the possibility of tension.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

### Who's Whose?

By Jan Ormerod

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD

32 pages, Ages 4 and up, \$16.00

Who else is tired of the pathos of Rodney King's plaint, "Can't we all just get along?" and tired, too, of the "joke" his question has become? And yet—his query lies at the core of the racial matter, the religious matter, the ethnic matter, the national boundaries matter, the human problem.

Who would have expected to find a deeply truthful rendering of people "just getting along" in a children's book with line drawings and nary a word about race, politics, power, cultural appropriation, or the plethora of ravings we indulge in whenever we try to "settle our differences" or "be heard" as our very own unique and culturally specific selves?

Jan Ormerod's *Who's Whose?* moved me. This is a book about the ways people belong to each other. Charming designed for very young readers, the text is sparse and the drawings are chock-full of the details of everyday life. An adult could read this book over and over with a child and recognize a new familiar activity every time. I began examining the illustrations, like the snoop I am, interested in what notes and lists people leave on their refrigerators, what their daily cal-

endars look like, why they painted the kitchen blue instead of yellow. I was quickly drawn into the family mixtures, trying to match the bunch of kids with their lists of names, gradually making sense of the families depicted, the colors and allegiances of the characters. I found a single mother and her teenage son (the redheads), a black couple with three children and one on the way, a black grandmother, a divorced white mother and her three children, plus assorted pets and toys, kitchens and living rooms, beach vacations, television partners, baby-sitters and other people who loved each other in the course of their ordinary days. All as matter-of-fact as the daily round. No theorizing. Just a picture of the way it can work and often *does work* in our very real lives where we intertwine, love, and miss each other, where we don't constantly worry about looking different, or coming from different places, or grinding specific racial axes. Enjoy.

—Mary Moore Easter

### Beautiful Warrior:

#### The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu

By Emily Arnold McCully

SCHOLASTIC

40 pages, Ages 7-10, \$16.95

In *Mirette on the High Wire* and many other picture books, Emily Arnold McCully's daring girls win our hearts by working hard for their desires—often with the help of an older mentor. Now McCully has found a fresh historical setting in which to explore her favorite theme. If this sounds like nothing more than different scenery, think again. *Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu* is set in seventeenth-century China, far from the Western winds that typically blow at the backs of McCully's daughters.

The story begins in the closed Forbidden City, where ladies-in-wait-

ing spend their days in idle languor. One lucky girl is taught the martial arts, one of “the five pillars of learning,” because her father wants to raise her like a son. On the day invaders overrun the city, she is riding in the hills, far from harm.

Buddhist monks take in this remarkable child who fights so well, calling her Wu Mei, or beautiful warrior. In time, Wu Mei becomes an honored nun, fighting “only to save lives.” She decides to teach kung fu to a girl, Mingyi, who must defeat a male opponent in a contest or be blackmailed into marriage.

In an unusual series of lessons, the serene Wu Mei instructs her restless pupil in the ways of overcoming brute strength with “yielding force.” Gradually, Mingyi learns how to clear her mind and use her natural strengths. Strange as it is for its time and place—whoever heard of a female master teaching a woman how to fight?—this tutorial is strange in a different way for the modern reader. Does softness truly win over hardness, just as water “wears away the hardest rock”? Can an opponent’s own

strength be used against him? What makes this book so fresh is the ancient wisdom of kung fu.

McCully’s pictures are as pretty and filled with incident as ever, shown in a horizontal format that allows for panoramic views as well as narrow “shots” on a single page. Whether her frame is large or small, McCully focuses attention on essential figures and gestures.

This is, above all, a human story, sparkling with comic expression and physical feats. Boys and girls alike will love the scene in which Wu Mei dispatches a trio of thugs with kicks and slicing hands.

—Mary Lou Burket

### Together in Pinecone Patch

By Thomas F. Yezerski

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 5-8, \$16.00

A girl from Ireland and a boy from Poland come to America with their families in search of a better life. Thomas Yezerski’s graceful narrative alternates between the experience of each, highlighting what is distinct and

what is shared. In Ireland, red-headed Keara Buckley’s songs could be heard “note for note, from Kilkenny to Cork and back again.” In Poland, Stefan Pazik sat up nights listening to his aunts and uncles share “the strange old stories of Poland—some true and some not so much so.” Though each family loves its country, lives of poverty and hardship lead them away from the green hills and golden meadows of home.

Pinecone Patch, Pennsylvania is a coal-mining town, its air filled with noise and black dust. In a striking spread depicting the Buckleys’ and Paziks’ first encounter with their new home, the families stand at opposite ends of the main street, facing (and dwarfed by) the enormous coal breaker that sends plumes of smoke skyward. It’s a grim introduction to the New World.

Within the town, the Irish and Polish communities keep apart, preserving their traditions and warning their children about each other: to the Poles, the Irish are “crazy rascals;” the Polish people, in the eyes of the Irish, are “a bunch of foolish good-for-nothings.” Inevitably, sparks fly between Keara and Stefan: at first, they are sparks of conflict, but as time passes the two fall in love.

The theme of differences that are, in fact, parallel and complementary, is expressed through their courtship and marriage. Finally suspicion breaks down, Keara’s mother teaches Stefan’s father to dance the jig, he teaches her how to polka, and everyone enjoys a feast of pancakes and dumplings (both made from potatoes, after all). At the story’s end, there is a nice acknowledgment of roots preserved: After the wedding, Keara’s songs can be heard “from Pinecone Patch to Pottstown and back again.” As a married man with children, Stefan becomes a teller of tales—“some true and some not so much so.”

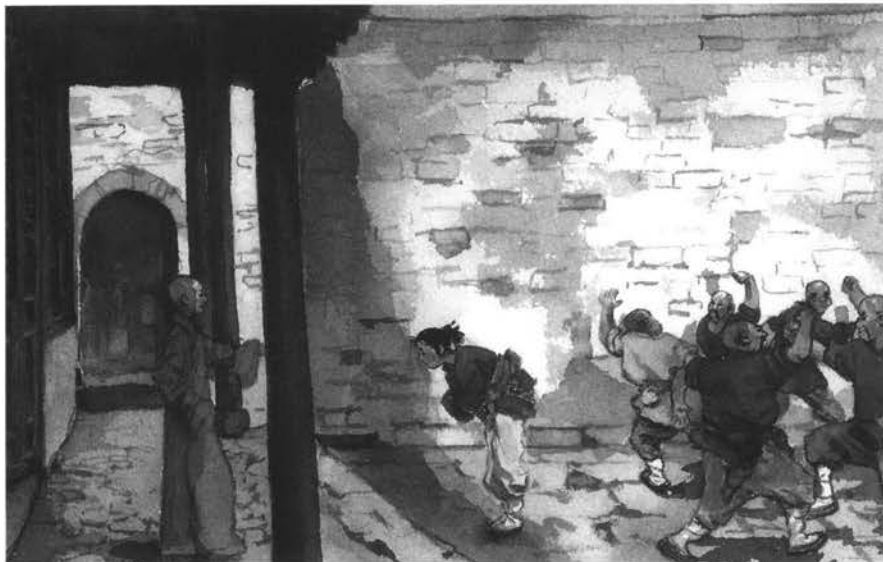


Illustration by Emily Arnold McCully, from *Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun’s Kung Fu*.



Illustration by Thomas Yezerski, from  
Together in Pinecone Patch

Yezerski's illustrations are darkened by crosshatching and dominated by browns and grays, appropriate to the setting—yet, they convey the humanity and humor of the characters as well as the hardship in their lives: the outlining of figures and faces is expressive. In the book's final spread we smile to see Keara and Stefan, with a red-haired son and dark-haired daughter, seated together on a couch. The coal breaker of Pinecone Patch is visible through a window above them, a picture of each parent's homeland balancing it on each side.

—Martha Davis Beck

## Fiction

### Stephen Fair

By Tim Wynne-Jones

DK INK

256 pages, Ages 11 and up, 15.95

Hearing the phrase "I had the most interesting dream last night" usually sends one scrambling for the nearest exit. Resist that impulse as you read the opening of Tim Wynne-Jones' novel *Stephen Fair*. He weaves a series of Stephen's recurring nightmares

throughout the narrative, using fragments of memory and imagination to propel the mystery that lies at the heart of this story. However, these dreams never become tedious; they slowly and compellingly divulge the cause of Stephen's torment.

Stephen is not all tortured angst. He is, like many of Wynne-Jones' young characters, wonderfully complex: smart and funny, sometimes troubled or edgy, always acutely alive to the weirdly magic age of adolescence.

As Stephen Fair stumbles through the wreckage of his parents' hippie past, the novel sets its foundation on the crumbled idealism of that bygone time. Kids have names like Destiny. Parents sport pony-tails and ride Harleys, they're into "alternative dwellings," aura-balancing, and crystal therapy. The residue of their experimental youth clings to their adulthood, and is, alas, rubbing off on their children. Wynne-Jones' goal though, is not to lazily trash the '70s. Instead, he unflinchingly explores the repercussions that occur when not-quite-grown-up people become not-quite-grown-up parents.

Wynne-Jones possesses a sure talent for metaphor; every dwelling in this tale is emblematic of the people who reside within. Stephen lives in a strange, flamboyant house with his mother Brenda and little sister Toni (brother Marcus ran away, dad Doug needed space). The Ark, as they call it, is a conglomeration of rooms and wrecking-yard doors tacked onto the body of a dilapidated schooner, supported at its center by a rotting piece of mast. Stephen, of course, is out to sea, searching hard for dry land, haunted by dreams that force him to revisit the strange scaffolding of the starting place of his family—a rickety village built in the canopy of a forest, a tree-house community called Tinkerpaw.

All of Wynne-Jones' characters are so intriguing and singular, we wish

that they inhabited novels of their own. Who wouldn't want to know more about Hessketh "the witch," dispenser of wisdom and potions, Lehmann Skye, master of high drama, or even Ms. Kettle, the English teacher who so tersely sums up Stephen's poem with the comment, "the assonance is compelling."

By the time Stephen's dreams have unraveled and the dreadful secret fueling his nightmares is finally revealed, we are fully involved in his world. The mystery is solved, but we long to linger awhile with Stephen Fair.

—Christine Alfano

### Love from Your Friend, Hannah

By Mindy Warshaw Skolsky

DK INK

256 pages, Ages 8-12, \$16.95

The children's novel written in the form of letters or a diary has natural appeal—but it's not so easy to pull off. When the book is set in another period, contemporary language tends to seep in, interfering with the reality of time and place. Or, more often, an adult level of awareness mars the believability of a young person's self-expression. What a pleasure to finish *Love from Your Friend...* and to be able to say: "Yes, this was Hannah!"

Set in the Great Depression, a period the author has clearly researched, the novel is comprised of the correspondence of young Hannah Diamond, who lives in Grand View, New York, "between a river and a mountain." Her parents run the Grand View restaurant, famous for the square hamburgers her father makes—twelve at a time—with a device he invented, offering customers "four extra bites: a square deal." Like communities across America, Grand View's residents struggle to make ends meet, and the town is visited by people in search of work or a hot meal. (One such wanderer, an

artist who eventually gets a job with the WPA, enters into the correspondence in the novel.)

Like many (but not all) of their neighbors, the Diamonds greatly admire President Roosevelt. They believe times will improve, and that their president cares about them. This personal connection felt between common people and their government finds a parallel in the intimacy Hannah establishes in her letters to friends and strangers. Young readers in this high-tech, interactive age may be surprised to discover how effectively radio and handwritten letters (sent through the slow, old-fashioned mail) link Hannah and her family to the larger world.

Hannah writes loyally to her best friend who has moved away, though these letters go unanswered. She writes, reluctantly at first, to Edward Winchley of Kansas, a pen pal whose name she drew out of a box in school. Her disappointment at drawing a boy is compounded when her initial letter, a rich overview of her life and concerns, draws a brief, barely literate reply. She writes dutifully to her Aunt Becky, the source of innumerable knitted gifts, and lovingly to her grandmother in New York City.

She also writes boldly to President Roosevelt, returning the intimacy of his fireside chats; surprisingly, these letters elicit a response, and soon Hannah is engaged in a regular correspondence with the president and his secretary. Eleanor Roosevelt also joins in, sharing her love of Emily Dickinson and her general observations on life with Grand View's young writer. Inspired, Hannah tries her own hand at poetry, and at her own version of Eleanor Roosevelt's syndicated column, "My Day." Though invented, this correspondence is thoroughly believable and engaging.

The novel includes one actual letter written to Roosevelt by Ernestine Guerrero, a girl whose father was helped by the government's relief program. In appreciation, she made an elaborate clock case for the president,

built from the crates that brought groceries to her family in a time of need. (Eleanor sends a copy of Ernestine's letter to Hannah.)

*Love from Your Friend, Hannah* is above all a novel about friendship.

## Do the math:

In-depth reviews of the best new books for children and young adults

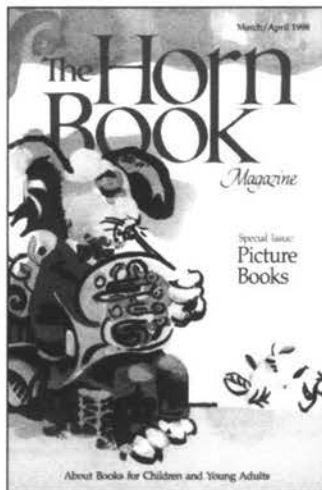


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Through letters, this optimistic and creative girl shares herself with others, drawing the interest of those seemingly out of reach, and gradually befriending a boy in Kansas with whom she thought she had nothing in common. I not only believed in Hannah, I loved her. Others will, too.

—Martha Davis Beck

### Rules of the Road

By Joan Bauer

PUTNAM

201 pages, Ages 10 and up, \$15.99

The world of shoe-selling may not seem likely ground for a tale of adventure and heroism, but Joan Bauer delivers just that in *Rules of the Road*. Bauer writes with humor and energy. *Rules of the Road* reminded me of Chris Crutcher at his best: while his focus is the struggles of young men to become themselves, often combatting masculine cultural pressures, Bauer shows us a teenage girl whose identity emerges strong and clear, at variance from feminine stereotypes.

The novel's main character, Jenna Boller, faces the challenges of many teenagers: she is self-conscious about her height and emotionally affected by family difficulties—her father is an alcoholic whose absence is less painful than his intermittent, embarrassing appearances in her life. But Jenna has the inner resources of a survivor—humor, compassion, and grit. And in what most teenagers would consider a routine job, she has found a calling. She takes pride in giving the customers at Gladstone Shoes a proper fit, paying careful attention to the feet and the feelings of each person who enters the store. It's an old-fashioned way of doing business, and one that is threatened by the company's looming sellout to Shoe Warehouse.

When Madeline Gladstone, the

sharp, elderly owner of the company, appoints Jenna to be her chauffeur on a cross-country trip to assess the state of business at Gladstone's branch stores, Jenna's eyes are opened to the politics of the bottom line. It soon becomes clear that Madeline, on the verge of retirement, is being betrayed by her opportunistic son. Jenna's sense of her calling expands from selling people shoes that will serve them well to defending, at a decisive stockholder's meeting, an entire business philosophy.

With the news on the business pages featuring new corporate mergers each day, this story of a small shoe store chain that fights to keep itself intact is timely enough (though I was also reminded of *The Pushcart War*—and even Mike Mulligan). The fact that the outcome for Gladstone Shoes is mixed—a compromise that accommodates change but holds some hope of traditions preserved—feels right. Jenna emerges as a young woman of power and purpose, in large part because she has learned to fight for what she believes in. This is a lesson that can be learned anywhere—even a shoe store.

—Martha Davis Beck

### Bat 6

By Virginia Euwer Wolff

SCHOLASTIC PRESS

226 pages, Ages 10-13, \$16.95

"Now that it's over, we are telling," says Tootie, a sixth grader at Bear Creek Ridge Grade School in rural Oregon. May 1949 will bring the 50th annual Bat 6, a softball game played by the sixth-grade girls of the Bear Creek and Barlow Road schools. The traditional game is eagerly anticipated as a highlight in the lives of the girls in both schools.

When Tootie says "we are telling," she means we. Novelist Virginia

Euwer Wolff gives all twenty-one girls on the combined team roster a say, and the voices of their coaches and parents appear frequently in the girls' accounts as well. Each of these many narrators is struggling to understand things that resist understanding. They are struggling to understand what happened on the day of the game, when Shazam, a Barlow Road base runner, threw up her elbow and felled Aki, the Bear Creek first baseman, injuring her so seriously that the girls at first feared that she might even be dead. They are struggling to understand what it means to live in the shadow of World War II. They are struggling to understand racism and class differences. Some struggle with self-reproach, others with the meaning of their Christian identity, others with cultural values like politeness, sportsmanship, and competitiveness. All of this is to say that *Bat 6* is a complex and ambitious novel.

There are engaging set pieces, like Kate's account of the Christmas her family got their first electric refrigerator and her mom made "the prettiest orange layered fruit cocktail Jell-O salad I ever saw to take to the church potluck and pageant." The varied accounts of how girls obtain their baseball gloves for the big game outline the rich life of the community. More central to the plot is Aki's story of her Japanese American family's return to the house and orchard they left behind when they were forced to enter a relocation camp during the war; and Shazam's story of her father's death in the bombing at Pearl Harbor and how her mother taught her to hate "the Japs." Midway through the novel, during the softball game and in its painful aftermath, the intercutting of voices accelerates.

With its many characters and voices, its historical setting, and its interwoven subject matter, *Bat 6* is an

uncompromising book, meant to raise more questions than it answers. What healing occurs by the conclusion, in the summer of 1949, is the healing that comes when people are drawn together by their questions.

—Susan Marie Swanson

### Riding Freedom

By Pam Muñoz Ryan

Illustrated by Brian Selznick

SCHOLASTIC

144 pages, Ages 8-12, \$15.95

Using elements of known history, Pam Muñoz Ryan recounts the notable life of Charley (née Charlotte) Parkhurst (1812-1879). An afterword delivers the scant facts: Parkhurst spent her youth as a stableboy in New England. Later, disguised as a man, she became a stagecoach driver and moved to California. In 1868—still presumed

male—she defied the law by becoming the first woman to vote. Parkhurst's secret was discovered only upon her death.

In Ryan's novel, one-year-old Charlotte survives a wagon crash that kills her parents. Thereafter, she works in an orphanage's kitchen among "a pack of ruffian boys....[She] never had a doll or a tea party." Bullied by her overseers, the tomboy finds solace only with the horses of a nearby stable; her favorite is a mare, tellingly named Freedom. When Freedom sickens and dies, teenage Charlotte has nothing to lose. Aware that "a young girl couldn't travel without a chaperon," she lops off her braids, dons overalls, and renames herself "Charley." Brian Selznick (*The Houdini Box*) provides charcoal illustrations of the post-transformation Charley, a slim stagecoach driver with

an ironic half-smile and casual cowboy attire.

Ryan (*A Pinky Is a Baby Mouse*) has an exhilarating subject in Charley Parkhurst. The author explains Parkhurst's masquerade as brought on by necessity and by a job out of bounds for nineteenth-century women. The issue of Parkhurst's unstated sexuality doesn't come into play. Charley is effectively presented as a loner, wary of friendship; she has one platonic male confidant whom she corresponds long distance.

Although the story powerfully conveys Parkhurst's brave and lonesome lifestyle, readers drawn to the book for its frontier setting will be disappointed. Ryan focuses on Charley's unique situation rather than on horses or hand-tools; the author never describes Freedom's appearance except to say that Charley rides at a

## MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

A SELECTED LISTING OF BOOKS BY AND ABOUT  
PEOPLE OF COLOR, VOLUME TWO, 1991-1996

GINNY MOORE KRUSE • KATHLEEN T. HORNING • MEGAN SCHLIESMAN

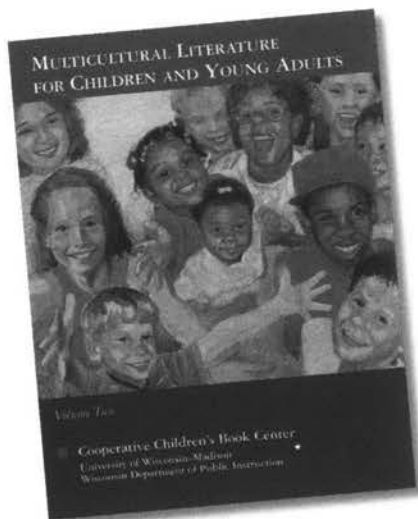
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“blinding gallop.” When Charley is instructed to prepare a stagecoach, she “brought the horses around, one at a time, to hitch them. When each horse was secured to the traces...[she] climbed into the wagon.” Too much is left to the imagination: Ryan offers lit-

tle account of physical sensations, and Selznick sketches close-up humans rather than landscapes. This tale raises more questions about its heroine than anyone can answer, and its historical context is equally shadowy.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

**Smack**

By Melvin Burgess  
HENRY HOLT

326 pages, Ages 14-18, \$16.95

Gaunt, bruised, and glassy-eyed is not a popular look these days. Even Calvin Klein, noting the public outcry against fashion designers promoting “heroin chic,” has recently opted for ads showing models frolicking athletically rather than slumped on a public restroom floor. This fear of anything seeming to encourage drug use might explain why British author Melvin Burgess’ exceptional young adult novel, winner of both the 1997 Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize, had such trouble finding a publisher in the United States (ten rejected it, according to Publishers Weekly, before Henry Holt acquired the rights). Titled *Junk* in Great Britain, *Smack* follows two fourteen-year-olds in the 1980s as they run away to Bristol, where squatters inhabit abandoned buildings without fear of eviction and heroin users believe they’re protected by magic. It would be a mistake, however, to think that because Gemma, Tar, and their friends initially claim to be stronger than the drugs they ingest, readers will take them at their word. As the novel progresses, and promises that they can quit whenever they want go unfulfilled, the truth becomes starkly clear: no one is stronger than heroin. Any kind of magic it works is black magic, leading to pathetic dependency, prostitution, and death.

One of the book’s most affecting scenes comes when the group drives to spend a week at a mountain cottage, resolving to get clean because seventeen-year-old Lily has a baby on the way. Brash, enthusiastic Gemma envisions the utopian life they will lead once the baby arrives. “Lily’ll be its

*The HATMAKER'S SIGN*  
A STORY BY BENJAMIN FRANKLIN  
Retold by CANDACE FLEMING Illustrated by ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

**“A fine piece of historical fiction for younger readers.”**  
—*The Horn Book*

★ “A piquant retelling of a story that master raconteur Benjamin Franklin relayed ‘to heal the hurt pride’ of Thomas Jefferson, whose draft of the Declaration of Independence was being picked apart by the quibbling Continental Congress.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“A vivid read-aloud or read-alone choice for middle-grade children studying the Declaration of Independence.”  
—*Booklist*, boxed review

“Adding considerably to the charm of the book are Parker’s ink-and-watercolor illustrations, with a sketched, fleeting quality that seems to summon the events from history and renders them with immediacy.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

Ages 5-9 \$15.95 TR 0-531-30075-7 \$16.99 RLB 0-531-33075-3

**Orchard Books**  
A Grolier Company

mother, of course, no one can be its mother and father except her and Rob, but the baby will belong to all of us. Rob and Tar are going to build a swing in the garden... And Sally and me are going to knit—imagine! Me knitting!" But it soon becomes obvious that their little retreat won't work, that they can't spend more than a day heroin-free, let alone a whole week. Months later, Lily is sticking a needle between her breasts while breast feeding, trying to find a vein.

The gripping first-person narration, alternating between the voices of Gemma, Tar, and a handful of others, broadcasts the teenagers' naiveté and self-deception. It also allows for some subtle role reversals. Gemma, the rebellious bad girl who seems destined for a tragic end, ultimately focuses her headstrong will on turning her life around. But the formerly sweet, sensitive Tar winds up jaded and with a much more tenuous victory over his addiction. "If you don't mind not reaching twenty," he says at one point, "there's no argument against heroin, is there?" Melvin Burgess is to be commended for so vividly depicting the ramifications of this terrible, powerful logic.

—Christine Heppermann

## Nonfiction



### **Black Whiteness:**

#### **Admiral Byrd Alone in the Antarctic**

By Robert Burleigh

Illustrated by Walter Lyon Krudop

SIMON & SCHUSTER

40 pages, Ages 7-12, \$16.00

What could compel a man to bury himself in snow and darkness for six months? In 1934, scientist and explorer Robert Byrd chose to live by himself at an Antarctic base camp that amounted to not much more than a

small underground shack. He stayed during the fiercely cold, continuous night of the polar winter, and hoped to contribute to the knowledge of the Earth's climate by maintaining weather instruments and recording daily observations. He nearly died doing it.

*Black Whiteness* provides a powerfully evocative account of Byrd's lonely, often harrowing six-month stay. Author Robert Burleigh and illustrator Walter Krudop transport readers down through the ice-coated hatch of Byrd's frigid campsite, into his difficult day-to-day existence, and out onto the icy Antarctic expanses. More importantly, they let us understand a little better who Byrd was.

Burleigh uses parallel texts in *Black Whiteness*, allowing two ways of seeing one event. His spare prose conjures the details of Byrd's experience, and staccato phrasing accentuates the story's bleak drama:

"He strikes a match and touches it to the lantern's wick.

The flame catches and goes out, catches and goes out.

Then it wavers, steadies, thickens: ah, light!"

On the same page, presented in a font that suggests handwriting, we read what we take to be Byrd's own reflections (I wish Burleigh had made it clear whether or not these first-person observations were taken from Byrd's journals): "It is a gloomy light perhaps; things on the opposite wall are scarcely touched by it. But to me the feeble burning is a daily miracle."

Both interior and exterior perspectives are presented, and a scenario that might seem otherworldly or remote becomes tangible. The tale is offered in precise, poetic snippets, as if told by a man too cold to waste energy with excessive talk.

Krudop's palette is dominated by deep, dark blues that express the

polar night. He effectively defines the cramped spaces of Byrd's shack and the wide frozen expanses of wind-torn snowscapes. Rare and welcome red-oranges of lantern light thaw pages that seem to have frozen. It's not until the last page that we are blinded by the bright blue sky and dazzling white ice of the Antarctic summer. By this time Byrd had nearly died of carbon monoxide poisoning, nearly let his enormous will and courage slide into hopelessness. But his rescuers finally arrived, and Byrd lived to tell of all that he learned during this adventure. He wrote about "the sheer beauty and miracle of being alive." We close the book knowing better why he pitted himself against nature's most brutal extremes. Not so much to test the weather as to test himself.

—Christine Alfano

### **In the Forest with the Elephants**

By Roland Smith and

Michael J. Schmidt

HARCOURT BRACE

56 pages, Ages 7-12, \$18.00

Of all endangered species, only one works in partnership with humans. In the forests of Myanmar (formerly Burma), Asian elephants harvest teak with men who train, ride, and tend them all their lives. According to Roland Smith, former zoo biologist, and Michael J. Schmidt, veterinarian and elephant researcher, in the long run this cooperative relationship may save the Asian elephant from extinction. It may also save the vast remaining forests of Myanmar.

*In the Forest with the Elephants* smoothly alternates between two types of writing—exposition telling how the timber workers (known as oozies) and their elephant partners live, and fictional narrative that brings their bond to life. Thus, while learning about the elephants and oozies as a group, read-



*Photograph by Roland Smith and Michael J. Schmidt, from  
In the Forest with the Elephants*

ers enjoy the illusion of witnessing events in the life of one particular pair.

Timber elephants are noble creatures, gentle yet astonishingly strong. They are also quite intelligent. They lift, drag, push, roll, and carry heavy logs of up to four thousand pounds in response to a long list of commands. Not all elephants do the most exacting work—oozies match their expectations to the elephants' abilities—but a well-trained elephant sometimes knows what it should do before being told.

It's disconcerting to see photographs of elephants straining underneath their gear, chains across their naked backs, but the work is done on such a non-intensive scale, and the elephants seem so fairly treated, that it's hard to believe the old ways could be flawed. For their part, the authors are convinced the elephants' welfare is protected. They take pains to show that oozies and their families have a hard life, too—the work is shared.

In *Sea Otter Rescue*, Smith report-

ed on the efforts he and others made to save Alaskan wildlife from an oil spill. Like that book, this one takes a constructive look at the troubled earth. I wish the authors had said more about their research in the forest, or at least supplied a picture of themselves among the many they include, but the knowledge they impart is creatively shaped and engagingly thorough. It opens up a world.

—Mary Lou Burket

**The Hatmaker's Sign:  
A Story by Benjamin Franklin**

Retold by Candace Fleming  
Illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker

ORCHARD

40 pages, Ages 5-9, \$15.95

Who could blame Thomas Jefferson for chafing when the Continental Congress chipped away at his Declaration of Independence? "Every word rang," Jefferson thought. "Every paragraph flowed with truth." But Jefferson was forced to sit and listen while his fellow

delegates tampered with his work.

In *The Hatmaker's Sign*, Benjamin Franklin tries to soothe his bristling colleague with a tale about a man, John Thompson, who is planning a sign to display in his place of business. After writing a draft that pleases him ("John Thompson, Hatmaker. Fashionable Hats Sold Inside for Ready Money."), Thompson shows his draft to everyone he meets. Everyone thinks a word, or more than one, should be removed. Thompson agrees, but by the time he arrives at the shop where signs are made, he sees that all the words are gone. Nothing remains but a blank sheet of parchment.

Franklin's moral? "No matter what you write, or how well you write it, if the public is going to read it, you can be sure they will want to change it." Robert Andrew Parker's illustrations suggest the identities of Jefferson and Franklin with a few deft strokes. It isn't Parker's style to complete a face, but he has outlined Jefferson's profile unmistakably, and the glasses underneath the balding pate could only be Franklin's.

The fictional characters—John Thompson, and the locals whom he meets—reveal their stations in various ways. Thompson's handshake and his gait have a forward tilt bespeaking colonial hopes and dreams, but the red-coated magistrate who glares down at Thompson is chillingly British.

As in *Gabriella's Song*, Candace Fleming makes a walk-about-the-town the bones of a satisfying story. Every person Thompson meets has a distinctive way of talking—whether tactful, frank, or rude. It's unfortunate that Fleming's brief descriptions of the signs were left in place when art was added to the text—pictures make the words redundant—but in every other way the writing is trim. Thanks to patterns in the narrative, the book reads well aloud.

An author's note adds just the

right amount of historical context. Jefferson, it seems, never believed the Declaration was improved by the revisions the delegates made. According to Fleming, "For the rest of his life he stewed over the changes," sending copies of his draft to people he hoped would deem the original version best. Jefferson wasn't as lucky as Thompson. In the story, Thompson restores the humble wording of his sign. Presumably it is hanging in his shop.

—*Mary Lou Burket*

### From Slave Ship to Freedom Road

By Julius Lester

Paintings by Rod Brown

DIAL

40 pages, Ages 10 and up, \$17.99

*From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* does not mince words or soften its ugly subject. It pays the reader the respect of confronting the slave past head-on in its first sentence:

"They took the sick and the dead and dropped them into the sea like empty wine barrels."

From Middle Passage to plantation to escape and emancipation, Rod Brown's paintings are vivid with flesh and blood browns, black chains, and the towering sculptural figures of captured Africans, scowling with the rage of their capture, and later, with scorn for their subjugation.

This book aims to change people through the power of their own imaginations. It asks us to *feel* in order to understand the other. The searing paintings and a text that reads like whispers from the slaves themselves are powerful allies toward this goal. However, it is Julius Lester's Imagination Exercises (labeled as such) that break new ground. One asks white people to imagine themselves in these unbearable conditions, to ponder the idea that slave memories

belong to them as well as to the descendants of slaves. Another asks African Americans to examine any shame they feel as they look at the subservience of slaves in the paintings and to consider the true nature of heroism. Lester is at his most daring and, I think, courageous, when he asks both groups to unmask their own "capacity for evil." This exercise is accompanied by two paintings, one of a man hanging by his hands, whipped until his "flesh cried blood." The other shows the shadow of a hanged man. No matter how beautifully presented, this is tough medicine, as challenging for adults as for the children who may read it.

When I remember my own daughter shredding the pages of a book on Harriet Tubman as a response to our efforts to introduce needed information about our black heritage, I have sympathy for the parents who will use this book. But given the ugly side of human institutions across time and the urgency with which we must invent or renew our capacity to feel for each other instead of *against* each other, I can only commend the two artists of this book. They have created a powerful way for black and white



Illustration by Rod Brown, from the book *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*

Americans to confront our shared history. If we manage this confrontation, we may indeed save ourselves and our children from the past.

—*Mary Moore Easter*

### Martha Graham: A Dancer's Life

By Russell Freedman

CLARION

176 pages, Ages 10 and up, \$18.00

When I was a tall, Negro twelve-year-old living in a divided black/white Virginia, I saw Martha Graham's film *A Dancer's World*. I emerged from that half hour with a different walk and a soul full of the metaphysics of art dance. I didn't just want to contract my torso the way her dancers had demonstrated—to walk, run, and leap with their elegance; to spiral to the floor. Graham and her company's dedication to dancing above all else changed me on the inside. And there was a Negro dancer, Mary Hinkson, in her company! At the film's end, Martha, back in practice clothes, reminds us that after performance, the dancer returns to the studio "to prepare again." It was a cycle my soul longed for while my body spent its Saturdays at a local community center studying ballet, tap, "toe," and even "toe-tap."

Russell Freedman takes on a huge task when he tries to convey the breadth, depth, and passionate concerns of an artist like Martha Graham to younger readers. His well-documented book is a straightforward record of her remarkable life and the almost genealogical legacy it spawned in the dancers and choreographers who followed her. Compared to the way *A Dancer's World* imprinted me forty years ago, it seems workmanlike, with little poetry about it: dances and collaborators, dance descriptions and critical comment; love affairs and



*Martha Graham, photographed by Barbara Morgan,  
from Martha Graham: A Dancer's Life*

artistic liaisons; quotations from Graham herself, the near and dear, and those destined for later fame. His careful phrasing of intense passions for the younger reader, and an overall calmness of tone, smooth over what I recall as a time of heated discussion, public interest, and gossipy speculation about nearly anything Graham touched. The poetry of her dance titles, and her examination (through dramatic movement) of human psychology and of a vast literature—from Oedipus to Emily Dickinson—make her a hard act to follow, not just on stage but in print. I asked myself on completing the book: how can it contain all this and feel so tame? Graham's mystery, eccentric force, and brilliance are reported on but rarely evoked in this work.

Fortunately, the well-chosen photographs speak volumes. Barbara Morgan's famous images retain their thrilling immediacy. As the photogra-

pher known for her extraordinary capturing of the essence of Graham's movement, design, and drama, her inclusion brings special depth to the book. Snapshots give us another side: little-seen pictures of Graham in Mexico climbing the Pyramid of the Sun, Graham as a child, her casual lunch with Hawkins, Humphrey, Weidman, and Horst at Bennington. (Such a concentration of genius, eating together like normal people!) The image of Graham's face on Erick Hawkins' chest (another Morgan photograph) records an artistic and personal combustion not easily conveyed in the chapter "Martha Elopes."

If you know a teenager with art dance fever or Martha Graham fever, buy this book. It's got encyclopedic information and great pictures. If you want to tempt a young reader into new artistic territory, it's chancy. Maybe the photos will do it.

—Mary Moore Easter

## **Gone A-Whaling: The Lure of the Sea and the Hunt for the Great Whale**

By Jim Murphy

CLARION

208 pages, Ages 9 and up, \$18.00

*Gone A-Whaling* could simply have been a juicy adventure, and kids would have snapped it up. As it is, Jim Murphy has linked vivid nineteenth-century whaling tales—culled from the journals of boys on the ships—to modern perspectives on whale conservation and science. The result is a first-rate history that will please both young readers and their parents.

Murphy, a much-honored writer of children's nonfiction, uses the first-hand accounts as a narrative thread, beginning with the boys' initial wide-eyed wonder at the sea and their queasy early days on the whaling ships. We feel the terror of watching for whales from a hundred-foot mast as it is whipped about by wind, the horrible drama of the kill, the grisly butchering process, and the long return home, sometimes after three or more years at sea.

Throughout, Murphy weaves in details that provide currency and context. For instance, the spectre of extinction emerges early on, when Murphy recounts the reason for the ships' distant voyages: By 1761, over-hunting had already wiped out North Atlantic coastline stocks of right and bowhead whales.

While Murphy remains in the moment, he finds small ways to connect to contemporary kids. When describing the boys' boredom between whale-spottings, Murphy reminds the reader: "This was before the invention of radio, television, or portable disc and cassette players." He offers enough science to please budding cetologists, and enough gripping drama (not to mention gore) to hook thrill-hungry Nintendoheads.

Readers can't fail to be touched by Murphy's wrenching accounts of whale killing. "It was the most terrible sight I ever witnessed," writes young Enoch Cloud. "I never knew before what it is to sail through a sea of blood! ... It is painful to witness the death of the smallest of God's created beings, much more, one in which life is so vigorously maintained as the Whale!"

Although Murphy never descends into whale worship, he conveys his respect for the huge creatures. In the quiet last chapter, the author becomes an awed participant in the narrative, at sea with a boatload of "the new whale hunters," armed with binoculars instead of harpoons.

—Diane Hellekson

### Chuck Close, Up Close

By Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan  
DK INK

48 pages, Ages 8-12, \$18.95

Chuck Close makes a great subject for a young people's book on art, partly because of the nature of his work—big and realistic, accessible yet multilayered—and also because of his life. Close, who as a kid was learning-disabled and physically clumsy, is a role model for nerds and outcasts everywhere, as well as a fascinating case study in creative problem-solving.

In *Chuck Close, Up Close*, authors Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan use Close's childhood as a hook, then delve into the how and why of his art, effectively simplifying without dumbing anything down. As in previous books, including *The Painter's Eye* and *The Sculptor's Eye*, they present facts and analysis, while encouraging young readers to develop their own skills in critical thinking.

In discussing the genesis of his famous monster-size portraits, Close recalls the frustration of making a twenty-two foot figure painting that

still wasn't big enough: "I wanted the viewer to get lost in the painting." His solution was to make large-scale works focusing on just the face. The authors explain the significance of these portraits: "The large scale, the unsparing detail... forces the viewer to see the subject matter in a new way. The painting becomes a topographical map of a face with each freckle charted. The familiarity of two eyes, a nose, a mouth, a chin is magnified into a question. Is this what we look like?"

Greenberg and Jordan focus on the artist's process, from Close's first big portraits in the 1960s to the recent challenges of painting, partially paralyzed, from a wheelchair. Admirably, they don't allow this potentially distracting fact (the result of a collapsed spinal artery in 1988) to surface until the last chapter, when it segues nicely into a discussion of

Close's recent paintings.

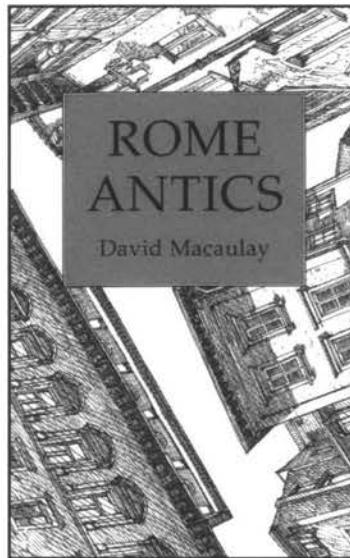
The book employs plenty of well-selected quotes from the artist, including this account of how Close used to study in a hot bathtub, using a flashlight to keep his focus on his schoolbooks: "Sitting in the hot water, I would read each page of the book five times out loud so I could hear it. If I stayed up half the night in the tub till my skin was wrinkled as a raisin, I could learn it." As Greenberg and Jordan skillfully imply, it's not so far from that perseverance in the tub to methodically gridding out ten-foot portraits.

The only annoyance in the book's clean, vivid prose is the repeated use of adjective lists. The first time, describing Close's 1968 "Self-Portrait," it's artful and effective: "Gigantic. Smooth surface. Cool. Gray. Precise. Deadpan. Dazed. Quiet.

## Riverbank Review 1998 Book of Distinction

# ROME ANTICS

written and illustrated by David Macaulay



A Walter Lorraine Book  
Houghton Mifflin • 222 Berkeley Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

■ "Macaulay's latest celebration of architecture delights in showing how past and present coexist in this ancient city. . . . A visual love letter to the city of Rome. A natural choice for classroom use." —*Booklist*, boxed review

★ "Macaulay's trademark bird's-eye view of famous works of architecture become in this book the literal substance of the text." —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ "Even Italophiles may feel as if this clever paean to one of the world's great cities has shown them the real Rome for the first time." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

0-395-82279-3 \$18.00 • All ages

Wordless. Every inch of the face is revealed. You can count the eyelashes. The pupils are larger than Ping-Pong balls." But, repeated (and prefaced with "Some descriptive words are...") the device seems clumsy. It may, however, be an effective way to suggest how kids might start thinking about art on their own.

—Diane Hellekson

## Poetry

### The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East

Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

SIMON & SCHUSTER

144 pages, Ages 12 and up, \$19.95

In the introduction to Naomi Shihab Nye's first anthology of poetry for young people, *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World* (1992), she mentions that during the Gulf War she made a point to take poems by Iraqi poets with her when she worked as a visiting writer in schools. She wanted students to get a sense of "the real people behind those headlines." Her latest anthology also strives to impart "deeper-than-headline news" about a portion of the world very close to her heart. An Arab-American who grew up in Missouri, Jerusalem, and Texas, Nye is acutely aware that most Americans see the Middle East as a region of incessant violence, or as a romanticized *Lawrence of Arabia* Hollywood set. To combat these stereotypes, she has assembled poems and paintings by writers and artists from twenty Middle Eastern countries in a book that, like the juicy red pomegranate in the poem by Tahar Ben Jelloun, is "swollen with seeds and memories."

Those who picture the Middle East as an ancient place, fixed in its

ways, will be surprised by the poems' many provocative contemporary images. Maimoon the Bedouin, in Khaled Mattawa's "Watermelon Tales," drives a pick-up and hunts gazelle by ramming them with his truck. "Sumi's Infinity" by Mansour Ajami begins with the poet's young son boasting about his score in a computer game. To be sure, both poets and painters also hearken back to the past, to lost homelands and long dead relations, but more often than not their work represents a graceful interweaving of the old ways with the new. Probably the most playful example of this—and playfulness is by no means scarce in this complex, richly diverse volume—comes from the painting "Impossible Dream" by Leila Shawa, which shows a group of veiled women holding triple and quadruple-dip ice cream cones in front of their covered mouths.

Even if readers know little about Middle Eastern history and culture and can't quite puzzle through all the references, the poems will unquestionably speak to them at that "deeper-than-headline" level. One doesn't need to completely understand the politics behind the wrenching scenario of "From the Diary of an Almost-Four-

Year-Old" by Hanan Mikha'il 'Ashrawi, in which a child shot by a soldier laments a nine-month-old's similar injury because "I'm old enough, almost four, / I've seen enough of life, / but she's just a baby / who didn't know any better." One doesn't need a history lesson to identify with the hopefulness of Joseph Abi Daher in "Memoirs in Exile" when he says, "Tomorrow looms in sight. / The homeland will return. / We will throw our wanderings and our suitcases / into the sea."

—Christine Heppermann

### Earth-Shattering Poems

Edited by Liz Rosenberg

HENRY HOLT

126 pages, Ages 12 and up, \$15.95

This compelling anthology includes love poems, elegies, poems of protest and of loss, and poems about the bonds between parents and children. Comprised of about fifty poems by forty-some poets, many of them in translation, the collection is arranged chronologically by the author's birthdate. In her introduction, Liz Rosenberg says, "I've deliberately chosen poems that speak most powerfully to our most intense experiences and emotions—hence the title, *Earth-Shattering Poems*.... These are all poems that shook me, and the aftershocks continue for a lifetime."

A sampling of first lines suggests the range of theme, tone, and authorship: "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep!" (Rumi); "I went out to the hazel wood / Because a fire was in my head" (William Butler Yeats); "There I learned how faces fall apart, / How fear looks out from under the eyelids" (Anna Akhmatova); "There are blows in life so violent—I can't answer!" (César Vallejo); "What happens to a dream deferred?" (Langston Hughes); "You cry, waking from a nightmare." (Galway

### News from the Riverbank

The *Riverbank Review* is pleased to announce the spring 1998 publication of *Letter to the Lake*, by editorial committee member Susan Marie Swanson. Illustrated by Peter Catalanotto, and published by DK Ink, this picture book explores a girl's connection to her summer world on a cold winter morning.

Kinnell); "How the days went / while you were blooming within me" (Audre Lorde). These are vigorous and intense poems, each with its own vivid consciousness. They engage strong emotions, and they possess urgent clarity. *Earth-Shattering Poems* captures literature in its essence—printed and spoken words set down in an attempt to encompass what it means to be human.

Most anthologies for young people are organized around themes or according to authors' racial, ethnic, or national identities. Rosenberg's selection is more idiosyncratic, and as such it describes the activity of a passionate and mature reader. This book invites young readers to look for the poems that most move them and encourages them to make their own way in the world of poetry.

Some twenty-five pages at the back of the book are devoted to exemplary biographical notes on the poets, including apt suggestions for further reading, and an annotated bibliography of related books on poetry. *Earth-Shattering Poems* is a fine companion to Rosenberg's standout anthology of contemporary American poetry, *The Invisible Ladder*.

—Susan Marie Swanson

### The Llama Who Had No Pajama

By Mary Ann Hoberman  
Illustrated by Betty Fraser  
68 pages, Ages 4-8, \$20.00

In an interview published in 1993, Mary Ann Hoberman said, "Because so many of my poems have gone out of print, I'd like to put together a big collection of them to restore them to life." *The Llama Who Had No Pajama* is that collection, and big and full of life it is. Several of the 100 poems in this inviting volume appeared in Hoberman's first book, *All My Shoes Come in Twos*, published in 1957. Most of the others were first published in collections that

have appeared in the years since, including *Hello and Goodbye* (1959), *Nuts to You and Nuts to Me* (1974), and *Yellow Butter Purple Jelly Red Jam Black Bread* (1981). In literary parlance, this is Hoberman's "selected poems," and as such it is an event to celebrate.

Illustrator for the collection is Betty Fraser, who also illustrated Hoberman's well-known picture book, *A House Is a House for Me*. Fraser's art for *Llama* is just the ticket. Her visual patterns and simple geometric forms are a fine match for Hoberman's sound patterns and simple verse forms.

The collection includes satisfying poems on family life, on growing up, on animals—but the real subject of Hoberman's poetry is the joy of playing with words. Her poems are rich in sound effects, rhythm and repetition. "Click beetle / Clack beetle / Snapjack black beetle / Glint glitter glare beetle" begins one poem; and the title poem of her 1981 collection starts out: "Yellow butter purple jelly red jam black bread / Spread it thick / Say it quick." The poems have a timeless quality, with just a few exceptions: the dress-up box in one poem has hats with veils in it, and there are three poems on girls at play pushing baby carriages.

It often happens that readers know a poem for children without knowing the author, perhaps because the poetry is discovered in anthologies. Hoberman's poetry is frequently anthologized: the classic *Sing a Song of Popcorn* has four of her poems, for example, as does last year's landmark collection of animal poems, *The Beauty of the Beast*. Many readers who don't know Hoberman's name recognize "I had a little brother / And I brought him to my mother" or "The folk who live in Backward Town / Are inside out and upside down." Witty and compassionate, she is a poet for young readers (and listeners) to call by name.

—Susan Marie Swanson

## Reviewers in this Issue

**Christine Alfano** lives with her family in Minneapolis. She writes about children's books for the *Wild Rumpus* newsletter, and has published book reviews and essays in the *Hungry Mind Review* and other publications.

**Martha Davis Beck** is the editor of the *Riverbank Review*. She lives with her family in Minneapolis, where she is an active organizer of reading and creative writing programs at her children's school.

**Mary Lou Burket** is a longtime reader of children's literature whose reviews have appeared in many publications, including *Publishers Weekly*, *The Five Owls*, and major newspapers.

**Mary Moore Easter** is a poet/writer, a dancer/choreographer, and professor of dance at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Her writing has appeared in the *Hungry Mind Review*, *Sing Heavenly Muse!*, and other magazines and journals, as well as in her live performances.

**Diane Hellekson** is a student in the Master of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Minnesota, and the mother of a four-year-old boy. She writes about art, literature, and other subjects for a variety of publications.

**Christine Heppermann** is a freelance writer and reviewer living in Minneapolis. A former bookseller, she writes a column on paperback series fiction for the *Horn Book Magazine*.

**Nathalie op de Beeck**, a doctoral candidate in cultural and critical studies at the University of Pittsburgh, writes about children's literature for *Publishers Weekly* and other publications.

**Susan Marie Swanson** is the author of two books for children, *Letter to the Lake* and *Getting Used to the Dark: 26 Night Poems (DK Ink)*. She reads and writes poems with children in her work as a visiting poet in schools.



one for the shelf

Many of us who grew up in the 1960s learned about children of the world from books and posters that depicted smiling figures in traditional dress: the German boy in lederhosen; the Japanese girl in a kimono; the Mexican boy under his sombrero. Kids in the United States wore “regular clothes,” the images suggested, while children everywhere else wore costumes. We were the generation that saw the first photographs of Earth taken from outer space. There it was, our blue planet floating in space, a thing of beauty to gaze on, like a jewel.

A great storehouse of photographs of families around the world, *Material World* has the beauty and emotional force of the pictures of Earth seen for the first time. The book grew out of the vision of photojournalist Peter Menzel, who asked “What better way to begin to understand [the lives of other people] than to show average family life around the world and to base that examination around a unique photograph of a family with all its possessions outside its dwelling?” Thirty statistically average families from countries around the globe are depicted in photographs of their daily life, accompanied by short essay-captions, related statistics, and notes. But the “Big Picture” of each family is what makes the book truly captivating.

The Icelandic family stands in the snow with their cellos and their ponies, in an early twilight, the welcoming lights of their house shining in the windows. In a village in India, a family gathers around one of their two beds, next to the cooking equipment, bags of rice, and treasured pictures of Hindu gods that constitute most of their belongings. The family in Tel Aviv is pictured with their possessions, from sneakers to automobile, on a platform suspended by a crane outside their apartment building. In country after country—Bosnia, South Africa, China, Guatemala, others—this project was undertaken. Like pictures of our planet taken from space, Menzel’s collection of “Big Pictures” speaks of nurture,

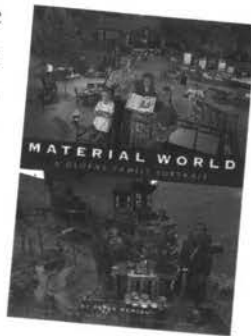
**Material World:  
A Global Family Portrait**

By Peter Menzel

SIERRA CLUB BOOKS, 1994

255 pages, \$25.00 (paperback)

\$35.00 (hardcover)



vulnerability, and beauty. Thought-provoking, yet instantly appealing, *Material World* is a natural choice for family sharing.

Two of *Material World*’s older cousins also beckon to us. The first of H el ene Tremblay’s extraordinary *Families of the World* books appeared in 1988, subtitled *Family Life at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Volume 1, “The Americas and the Caribbean,” was followed in 1990 by Volume 2, “East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.” Tremblay herself traveled to every country in the regions covered in the two volumes, spending days with each family she presents, writing, conducting interviews, and taking photos.

*Material World* is a grand gesture which required no small amount of personnel and resources, not to mention heavy lifting. Notably, among the eighteen photojournalists who contributed, only two were women. *The Families of the World* books are simpler. Photographs are fewer and not so dramatic. But Tremblay’s writing, describing a day in the life of each family, from before dawn until the quiet finish of the day, is attentive to emotions, sounds, and much else that cannot be captured in photographs. For example, 8:45 p.m. on the island of Java, Indonesia: “With no electricity—just two small oil lamps to light the entire house—and with the morning prayers coming so soon, everybody goes to sleep as the battery-operated radio plays. An oil lamp stays lit in one corner to keep the ghosts away.”

Another good book of this type is *Children Just Like Me* (DK, 1995), produced in association with UNICEF. For this project, Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley photographed and interviewed children in 31 countries. Part of the fun of looking at the book is comparing like items in each entry; for example, children’s signatures, toys and notebooks. The real magic is in the vibrant images of children that appear in each two-page spread—at the center, where they belong. ~

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