

1999 CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

# Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

An Interview with  
Rosemary Wells

The True Face  
of War  
By Gary Paulsen

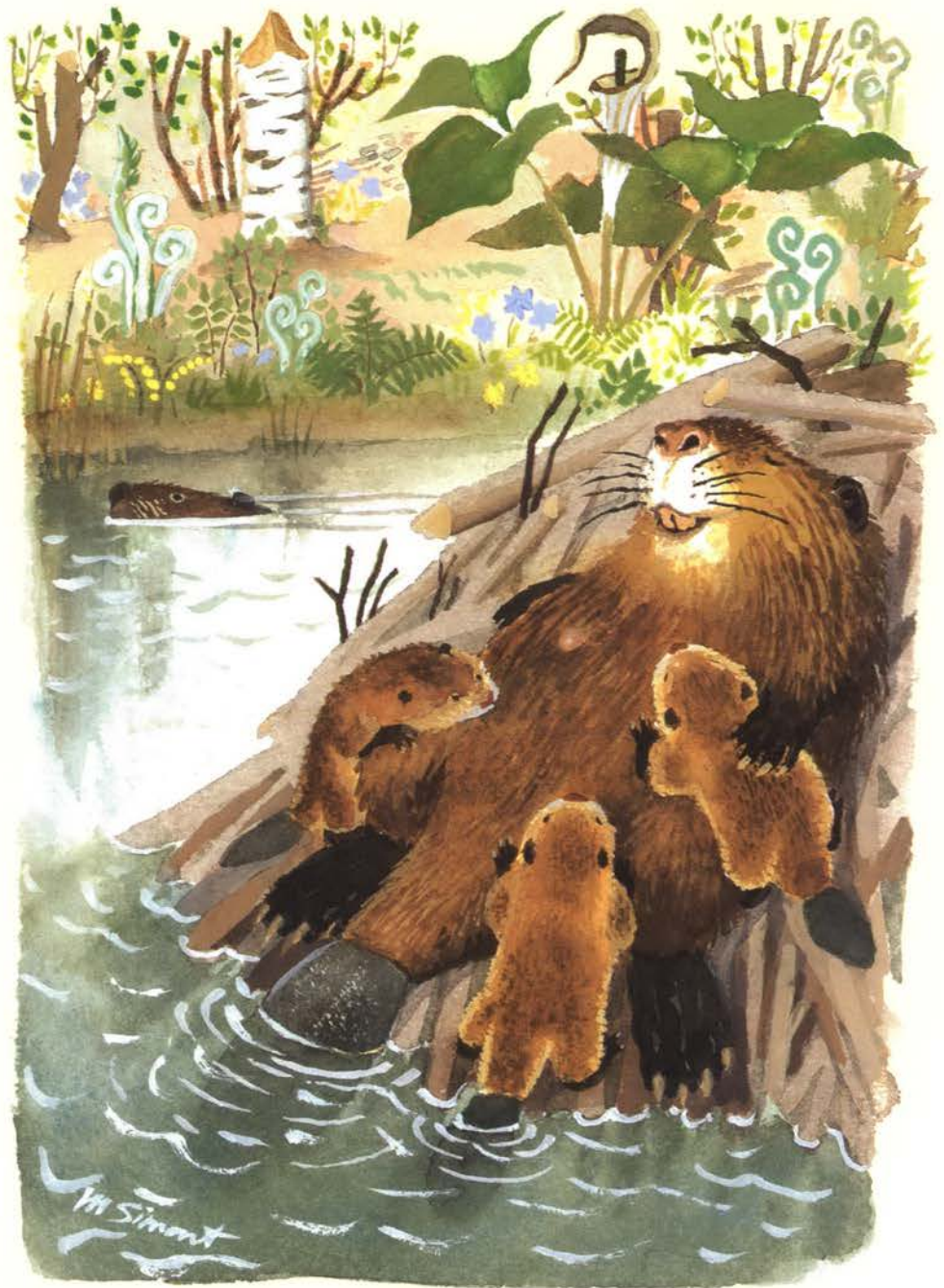
When Books Help

A Profile of  
Rumer Godden

One for the Shelf:  
*The Lion, The Witch  
and the Wardrobe*

PLUS

New Books  
for Spring

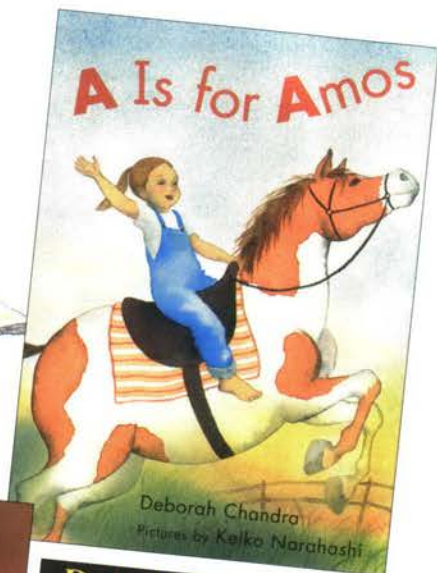


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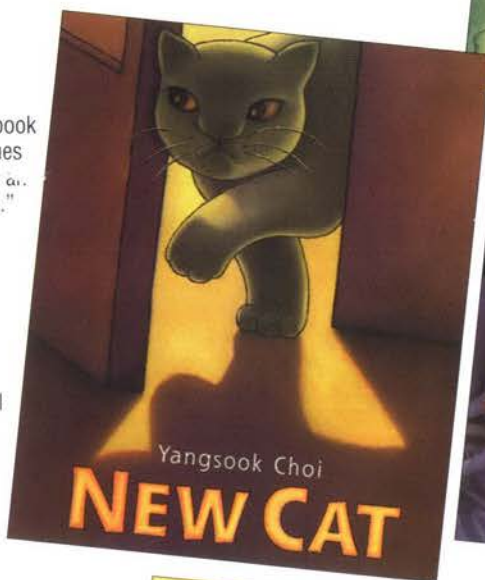


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by Deborah Chandra  
Pictures by Keiko Narahashi

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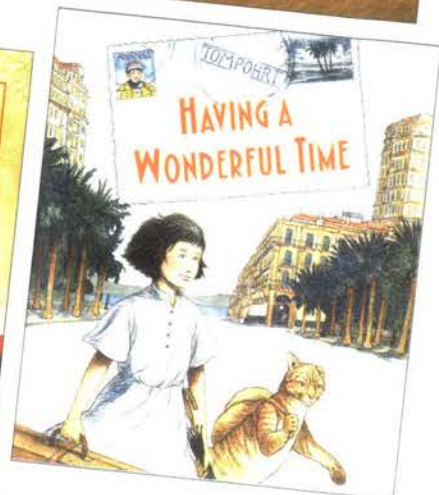
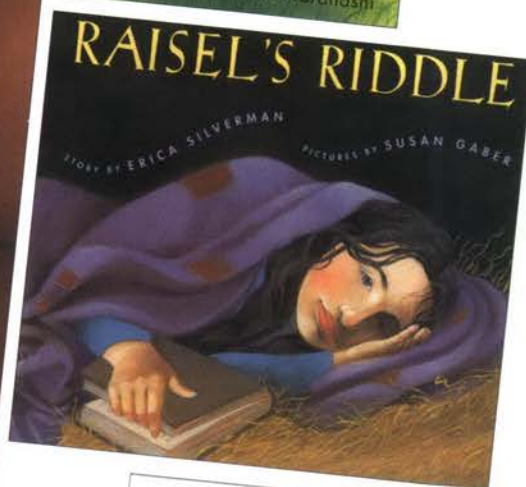
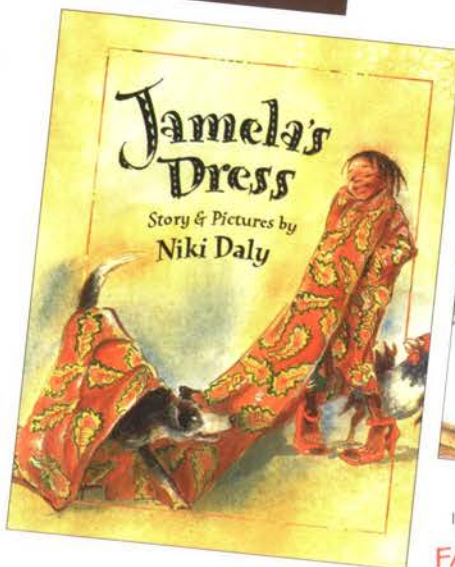


Illustration by Tom Pohrt from HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME

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**About the cover artist:** MARC SIMONT was born in Paris, France, in 1915. His work as a children's book illustrator spans six decades and includes such books as Ruth Krauss's *The Happy Day* (1949), a Caldecott Honor book; James Thurber's *The Thirteen Clocks* (1951) and *The Wonderful "O"* (1957); Janice May Udry's *A Tree Is Nice* (1956), for which he won the Caldecott Medal; and Karla Kuskin's *The Philharmonic Gets Dressed* (1982) and *The Dallas Titans Get Ready for Bed* (1986). Simont is also the illustrator of Marjorie Wienman Sharmat's *Nate the Great* series. He lives in West Cornwall, Connecticut.

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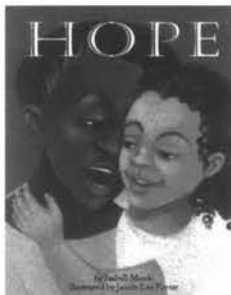
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of books for young readers

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## editor's note

Lately, in different parts of the country, commotion has arisen over the use of certain books in the classroom. Here in Minnesota, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books have been targeted for their portrayal of Native Americans. In the stories, Laura's Ma fears and dislikes Indians, an attitude widespread among white settlers. Though Wilder's own view was more respectful, in places her language and narrative reflect the time in which the books were written. Racial stereotypes become an issue in *Little Town on the Prairie*, when Pa and other men from town dress up in blackface to perform a minstrel show.

In regard to the *Little House* books, the call for censorship relates to historical material—work written decades ago that doesn't pass the test of present-day scrutiny. The recent controversy in a New York City school over *Nappy Hair*, a picture book celebrating a young black girl's identity, had to do with contemporary language—its meaning and the context of its use, including who is speaking to whom. The word “nappy,” which the author had attempted to use in a proud and celebratory way, became the focus of inflamed debate. It is one thing, some would say, for a black writer to use certain words; another for a white teacher to read those words aloud.

One of my favorite novels for ten- to fourteen-year-olds is Mildred Taylor's *The Well*, a novel by one of our great African American writers, about the poisonous effects of prejudice. Reading *The Well*, I've seen its message sink in, profoundly affecting young readers' sense of justice and injustice, awareness of American history, and understanding of racism. Yet, this book has come under attack because of its use of what has come to be referred to as “the N word”—hard to avoid in a realistic novel about racism.

How do we as parents, teachers, librarians, and readers negotiate our way through this minefield? How careful can—or should—we be in our selection of books for children? In his essay in this issue, “Policing the Borders of Innocence,” Perry Nodelman suggests that if we get any more thorough in our “selecting out,” we will leave our literature empty of anything that has substance or interest.

I think what's needed—on all our parts—is a bit of courage and imagination. It takes imagination to understand people of different races and backgrounds, or people who lived in other times and places; to discuss, rather than turn away from, what we feel are their misconceptions, fears, prejudices, or flaws—and this is something that literature can help us do!

It takes courage for publishers to publish worthy books, regardless of pressure to steer clear of this or that subject matter. It takes courage for librarians to resist calls for censorship. It takes courage for teachers to engage with difficult material, and for all of us, from superintendents to principals to parents, to support them.

Some context should be provided when language or plot or characterization—in books old and new—raises questions. Our children need to know what a minstrel show was, and why such a thing would not be tolerated today. They need to know the history of the use of potent, demeaning words in order to appreciate efforts to avoid such language. Literature, in its rich, provocative, uncensored glory, can open the door to something our children don't get enough of: history lessons.

These days, it is noteworthy for a publisher to publish any book that doesn't have the suggestion for a marketing plan emanating from it. Projects that might need some help finding their audience—or that simply have a small audience—are ever more vulnerable. Those who

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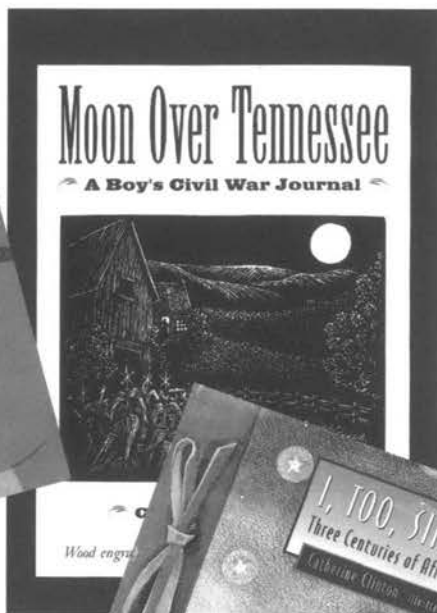
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*The Cooperative Children's Book Center Announces the*  
1999  
CHARLOTTE ZOLOTOW  
AWARD

**Winner**

Uri Shulevitz for *Snow*.  
Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1998

**Honor Books**

Holly Meade for *John Willy and Freddy McGee*.  
Marshall Cavendish, 1998

William Steig for *Pete's a Pizza*.  
Michael di Capua Books/HarperCollins, 1998

**Highly Commended**

Denise Fleming for *Mama Cat Has Three Kittens*.  
Henry Holt, 1998.

Kevin Henkes for *Circle Dogs*.  
Illustrated by Dan Yaccarino. Greenwillow, 1998.

Bill T. Jones and Susan Kuklin for *Dance*.  
Photographs by Susan Kuklin. Hyperion, 1998.

Lynn Reiser for *Little Clam*.  
Greenwillow, 1998.

Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen for *Elizabeth's Doll*.  
Illustrated by Christy Hale. Lee & Low, 1998.



The Charlotte Zolotow Award is given annually to the author of the best picture book text published in the United States in the preceding year. Established in 1997, the award is named to honor the work of Charlotte Zolotow, a distinguished children's book editor and author.

The award is administered by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, a children's literature library of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

For information about the CCBC or this award, contact Kathleen Horning at (608) 263-3930.

continue to bravely bring interesting books into the world deserve our cheers and support.

In this issue of the *Riverbank Review* we present the 1999 Children's Books of Distinction Awards, honoring twelve books published in the past year. These are books that we found to be exceptional in quality, compelling to both children and adults, and valuable as additions to a classroom or home library—books that will invite rereading. Some of them are hard to categorize—like Peter Sis's *Tibet: Through the Red Box*. Some, like Thomas Yezerski's *Together in Pinecone Patch*, lack zippy graphics but have a beautiful story to tell. Others, like Jennifer Armstrong's *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World*, bring pieces of history vividly alive for young readers. One novel—Joan Avelove's *Go and Come Back*—has the audacity to step into the thick of the “cultural stereotypes” issue and make us laugh... at ourselves. These are just a few of the gifts books can offer. As readers, let's appreciate these gifts, and share them.

—Martha Davis Beck



**Acknowledgments**

Publication of the *Riverbank Review* is made possible in part by a gift from Margaret S. Hubbs, and by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission, in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature. The magazine gratefully acknowledges this support, along with the contributions of individual donors.



# Take a Walk, *Bik Bok*

By Mary Lou Burket

**W**hy do we pick up a leaf and twirl it by the stem? Or blow a dandelion's seeds into the air? Or stroke a caterpillar's back? Because we have an urge to touch—a need to know—the world of wind and rock and light and living things.

So take a walk, and take along a child.

Look. Listen. Smell. Touch. Don't ride your bike or skate, just use your feet.

From the opening image in *Nature Spy* (Macmillan, 1992) of a youngster bounding down the steps, we're happy to have a guide who likes "to go outside—to look around." This bright and open book by Shelley Rotner and Ken Kreisler is a vivid guide to looking, "up, down or all around," from the perspective of a child.

The closer you look with her, the more you see. A leaf is more than color, shape, and size—it is a map of branching lines. Distance from a leaf, or any object, alters scope and, thus, detail. In one set of Rotner's photographs, the camera shows a frog atop a lily in a pond, then just the frog—and then a close-up of the frog's "golden eye."

As in many of the best basic science books for children, this one marvels at the ordinary things within a child's easy reach. It isn't just a pod of seeds we see, but the hands of a young, curious child breaking open the pod; not just the bark of a tree, but the child's slender arm around its trunk. Throughout the book, her eagerness to touch helps us to see.

Not a word is spoken when a father and his daughter go for a walk with their

dog in *The Listening Walk* (new edition, HarperCollins, 1991). "My father puts his hands in his pockets and thinks," explains the daughter. "I keep still and listen." Keeping still is key to hearing the sounds of town and park on a listening walk. Major, the dog, is old and slow: his toenails make a *twik twik twik twik* sound that only a quiet child can hear.

The text by Paul Showers is a medley of such sounds, near and far—easy to identify and fun to read out loud. The soft percussion of sprinklers may be rhythmic—*whithhh whithhh whithhh whithhh*—or constant, but in either case its music makes us smile. Other noises tell a story: a lady's heels (*bik bok bik bok*) tap faster as her bus approaches, stop abruptly as she waits for the opening door (*pfsssss*), and fade from consciousness as the bus roars off.

Aliki's illustrations work best when they expand on the text, suggesting sounds the text doesn't name; or when they capture the expression of the daughter as she listens in the park, eyes closed, wind blowing through her hair. She's listening

with her heart and mind as well as with her ears—it's bliss!

Two of the most common features on the modern American landscape are the ditches by the highways, filled with cattails, and the mounds of dirt at construction sites where blowing seeds make accidental homes. These in-between places aren't considered either beautiful or sad enough to be the subject of environmentally minded children's books—books that either celebrate the earth or make a plea for its protection. David Bellamy's *The Roadside* (Clarkson Potter, 1988) is a different kind of project. Bellamy objectively describes the transformation that occurs when an abandoned country track, home to foxes, raptors, dragon-

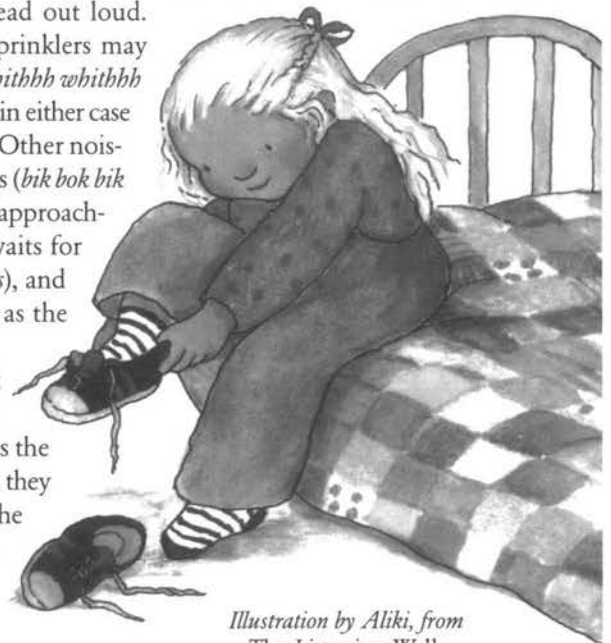


Illustration by Aliki, from  
*The Listening Walk*

flies, and mice, is paved and straightened. In this book, nature makes accommodations.

Because he writes in the present tense, Bellamy makes us feel that we are on the track itself before construction crews arrive, winding in and out of woods and past a pond. He identifies each plant by name (ox-eye daisy, chicory, vetch) and notices when animals appear and disappear or leave their signs. The track is a delightful, curving, lively place to walk—a place of interest and, as time goes by, great change.

More than the text, Jill Dow's pictures show the harm that construction causes living things. When the pond is moved by human hands, the toads that used to spawn in it must spawn wherever they can—perhaps in dirty puddles; sparrows peck at lunches left by careless workers; flowers grow amid the trash. Illustrated endpapers show before-and-after views of the track and nearby land, as seen from the air. The reader is left to weigh the gains and losses.



Illustration by Jim Arnosky, from *Secrets of a Wildlife Watcher*

Could a road be built that wouldn't harm the land?

"The road builders have done a good job," Bellamy comments, somewhat generously. "They have laid a pipe under the road to carry the stream to a big new pond on the other side... The banks of the pond still look a bit bare, but reeds and water plants are beginning to grow at the edges and a pair of ducks is rearing its first batch of ducklings. The road doesn't seem to bother them... In time, perhaps all kinds of plants and wildlife will be flourishing here again."

While many books on wildlife can be used to enhance the joy of walking

down a track or trail, in *Secrets of a Wildlife Watcher* (Beech Tree, 1991) Jim Arnosky is especially good at showing how to find the most familiar kinds of animals—the red-tailed hawk or woodchuck you might actually see on a walk in a temperate climate. Mixing anecdote, advice, and information, he proceeds from the assumption that the more you know about the wild, the more you're apt to find. Learning that animals tend to return to sources of food will help you spot them more than once. Noticing whatever moves helps, too. "Look for the stomping leg or swiveling ear of an anxious deer," Arnosky writes. "Search for the twitching nose of a nervous rabbit."

Amosky's confident sketches of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, and insects frame the text in a style that draws us into nature's little dramas, shows us what we need to know about a nibbled bud or a posturing goose, and keeps us turning pages. His drawings show, among other things, why crouching makes you disappear from an animal's view, what "downwind" means, and how to craft a simple, portable blind.

Amosky's keen attention and affection warm each page. With its flexible, durable cover, this trusty guide belongs in backpacks and on shelves. Above all, it belongs with those who walk because they have an urge to touch, a need to know. ~

*Mary Lou Burket likes meandering in places old and new.*

## 1999 KERLAN AWARD

Eve Bunting and Lois Lenski to be honored



Eve Bunting and Lois Lenski (deceased) have been selected as the twenty-ninth and thirtieth recipients of the Kerlan Award. The award is presented annually "in recognition of singular attainments in the creation of children's literature and in appreciation for generous donation of unique resources to the Kerlan Collection for the study of children's literature."

The Kerlan Award luncheon, at which Eve Bunting will be the keynote speaker, will be held on Saturday, April 10, 1999, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The cost is \$18 per person.

The Kerlan Collection is located at the University of Minnesota. For reservation information call (612) 624-4576.



# Rumer Godden

*This well-loved writer understood children, and the importance of imaginative play in their lives.*

By Krystyna Poray Goddu

“**T**o me and my kind life itself is a story, and we have to tell it in stories—that is the way it falls. I have told the truth and nothing but the truth, yet not the whole truth, because that would be impossible,” wrote Rumer Godden. When this prolific writer died on November 8, 1998, she had spent

more than sixty of her almost ninety-one years telling her stories. In those sixty years she wrote as many books, nearly half of them for children. Her own life’s story was rich in details and atmosphere. She told it in three volumes of memoirs, beginning with *Two Under the Indian Sun* (1966), which she wrote with her older sister, Jon.

Rumer was the second of four sisters. Born in England in 1907, she was taken as a baby to India, where her father worked as a steamship agent. The Goddens’ life in India was, as the older sisters wrote, “English streaked with Indian or Indian streaked with English. It might have been an uneasy hybrid, but we were completely and happily at home.” With her first trip back to England at the age of six, followed by a return to India a year later, Rumer began her life’s pattern of traveling back and forth between the two countries.

Most of her childhood was spent by the river in the small town of Narayangunj in India, among servants and townspeople who represented the country’s many religions and castes. The Godden family lived by Indian rhythms



*Rumer Godden at ninety*

and customs, celebrating their own Christian holidays along with those observed by their diverse neighbors. The hot, dusty landscape and slow-paced life proved to be rich ground for creative spirits: both Rumer and Jon became writers.

Rumer Godden filled her books with the things she loved best. This included India, dance (as a young woman she ran a dancing school for children in Calcutta), and animals—especially dogs, and most especially Pekingese, which were her beloved pets. Many of her stories also feature toys—in particular, dolls. Godden’s writing is imbued with a unique understanding of the essence of toys and play in children’s lives. The roots of that understanding are revealed in *Two Under the Indian Sun*, in which the Godden sisters describe their childhood play:

All the time we were in India we were fanatics for play, and the early mornings were a halcyon time for it because no authoritative grown-up was about... Yet if we had told what we were playing no one would have been much the wiser, because our plays were like icebergs, only three-tenths seen, the rest hidden, inside ourselves. It was what we thought into our play that made its spell.

Their play involved “turning things into something else all the time.” Daisy-heads and grass became poached eggs on spinach; a croquet set became a family of thin grown-ups and fat, round children. This transformative power of play is expressed in many of Godden’s novels and stories. In *The Fairy Doll* (1956),

a bicycle basket becomes a fairy doll's cave, a crocus becomes her hat, and little Elizabeth is slowly transformed from a clumsy, dull child into an imaginative, clever one through the power of tender, sustained make-believe play: she serves the doll rose-petal ham and daisy poached eggs. In *Great Grandfather's House* (1992), set in Japan, seven-year-old Keiko, who is quick and careless in the way of many contemporary children, learns from her great-grandmother to create a pretend Japanese picnic. She cuts pine needles for chopsticks, chops up grass for seaweed, and mixes chalk with water to mold into rice cakes.



Illustration by Barbara Cooney, from *The Story of Holly and Ivy*

inct exploration of a young child's struggles to cope with new circumstances and expectations. An independent, overly confident city girl, Keiko is left by her parents with her great-grandparents for three months. From her younger, less sophisticated, but infinitely more creative cousin, Yôji, Keiko slowly learns to be still, to listen, to love nature, and to respect traditions. She also learns to play in truly interactive ways: Yôji and Keiko create walnut boats with sails fashioned from postage stamps on matchsticks, and reenact favorite stories, assembling costumes and props from objects at hand.

Like many of Godden's girl charac-

ters, Keiko matures without losing her independent streak. Godden's brave and naughty girls do not come to wisdom and understanding by becoming good little girls. They master their fear, swallow their pride, or reach out in compassion—often still breaking rules, but in pursuit of a higher good. In *Premlata and the Festival of Lights* (1997), a girl and her siblings live in poverty with their young widowed mother. When a wealthy neighbor gives her money to buy Diwali lights for the upcoming holiday, Premlata determines to buy them herself at the bazaar. In order to do this good deed she lies, secretly dons her mother's precious clothing, runs away, and succumbs to many temptations, spending all the money on gifts and treats. Premlata's mistakes are many, her fears are great, but in the end her foolish bravery, outspokenness, and generosity

*Great Grandfather's House* is a suc-

### An excerpt from *Impunity Jane* by Rumer Godden

Gideon stopped and looked at Impunity Jane; then he looked round at Ellen. Ellen was eating cherries from a plate her mother had brought in; she ought really to have shared them with Gideon, but she had gobbled most of them up; now she was counting the stones. "Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor," counted Ellen.

"Gideon, Gideon," wished Impunity Jane.

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man"—and just as Ellen said, "Thief," Gideon, his cheeks red, slid his hand into the dolls' house, picked up Impunity Jane, and put her into his pocket.

Ages and ages ago Impunity Jane had been in Grandma's pocket, but Grandma's pocket was nothing to Gideon's. To begin with, Gideon's pockets often had real holes in them, and Impunity Jane could put her head right through them into the world. Sometimes she had to hold onto the edges to avoid falling out altogether, but she was not afraid.

"I'm Imp-imp-impunity," she sang.

Grandma had not run, and oh! the feeling of running, spinning through the air! Grandma had not skated nor ridden on a scooter. "I can skate and I can scoot," said Impunity Jane.

Grandma had not swung; Gideon went on the swings in the park, and Impunity Jane went too, higher and higher, high in the air.

Grandma had not climbed trees; Gideon climbed, to the very top, and there he took Impunity Jane out of his pocket and sat her on one of the boughs; she could see far over houses and steeples and trees, and feel the bough moving in the wind.

"I feel the wind. I feel the wind!" cried Impunity Jane.

*From Impunity Jane (1955), reprinted with The Fairy Doll, The Story of Holly and Ivy, and Candy Floss in Four Dolls, by Rumer Godden, illustrated by Pauline Baynes (Greenwillow, 1983).*

help lift her family out of their poverty.

There is a universal appeal to Godden's stories. While many might seem like girls' stories, there are wonderful boys in her books, and much in them for boy readers. The main character in *Impunity Jane* (1955) is seven-year-old Gideon, who is all boy, but who quickly grasps the possibilities of play in every toy—even a four-inch china doll. With this story, Godden proved herself a pioneer: a story about a doll who longs for adventure, as Impunity Jane does, is not in itself unusual, but to have her rescued from her dollhouse bead cushion by an energetic boy is Godden's unique stroke.

Yet, at the heart of *Impunity Jane* is not the issue of gender but the bond between a child and a toy. This theme, which Godden addressed in many of her stories, was articulated in her very first book for children. In chapter three of *The Doll's House* (1947), Godden writes: "Dolls cannot tell anything, but often their wish is as strong as telling. Have you ever felt a doll's wish?" The magic between Gideon and Impunity Jane is that he is the first child to feel her wish. In Godden's books, a child who feels a doll's wish grows in courage and confidence, becoming able to fulfill not only the doll's wishes but his own, too.

While they often deal with potentially sentimental subjects, Godden's books are kept from sentimentality by the rich, contradictory natures of the children and adults who inhabit them. Though Godden had no brothers or sons, she created complex, compassionate boys in her fiction. Her girls are often impetuous, yet stalwart. Her



Illustration by Ian Andrew, from *Premlata and the Festival of Lights*

adults can be at once dangerous and protective. Godden also lets her readers know that grown-ups have not necessarily finished growing. They sometimes need to reach greater understanding and maturity, like gruff, misanthropic Mr. McFadden in *Mr. McFadden's Hallo'we'en* (1975), who comes to share in the life of his Scottish village and to adopt an orphaned boy, thanks to the persistent attention of a clumsy, well-meaning eight-year-old girl.

Godden explored the vagaries of adult nature in more than thirty books for adult readers, including several that fall somewhere between children's and adult literature. Among her most powerful are *The Greengage Summer* (1958) and *The River* (1946), each of which depicts the coming-of-age of a young teenage girl. Both books, she admitted

in her memoirs, are strongly autobiographical. "*The River*," she wrote, "was one of these rare books that are given to you." In this poetic novel, Godden renders the aching inner life of Harriet, a sensitive English girl growing up alongside a river in India. Watching her beautiful older sister blossom into young womanhood, Harriet is caught between the desire to emulate her and the pleasures of childhood enjoyed by her younger brother, Bogey. In *The River*, Godden vividly recalled and expressed the acute mystery, pain, and joy of her own life as a girl in India. In *The Greengage Summer*, the fictional retelling of a summer the Godden sisters spent with their mother in Château-Thierry in France, thirteen-year-old Cecil also struggles with her envy of a beautiful older sister, and with a growing understanding of the murkiness of life.

Another great children's writer of this century, Madeleine L'Engle, preached in a December 1996 sermon at New York City's Cathedral of St. John the Divine: "Our story is the greatest gift we can give another person... to trust with your story is to trust with your life." Over and over again, Rumer Godden gave us the gift of her true stories. Now that she no longer lives among us, as readers we are caretakers of the rich, mysterious truths she gave us. ~

*Krystyna Poray Goddu is author of A Celebration of Steiff: Timeless Toys for Today (Portfolio Press) and co-author of The Doll by Contemporary Artists (Abbeville Press). She lives with her son and daughter in New York City, where she works as a writer and editor.*

# When Books Help

*A psychoanalyst explores why the most therapeutic books for children are the ones they choose themselves.*

By Linda Goettina

Shawn was eight and an incorrigibly bad student: he showed no interest in reading, disrupted the classroom, and made himself a nuisance at school and at home. His literate, well-educated, and book-loving parents were distraught over his behavior and dismayed by his poor academic performance. They were

conscientious people and did all that was recommended, including psychological testing for attention deficit disorder, and when that was inconclusive, they arranged for tutors. Finding that these interventions failed to help Shawn or to ease his difficulties at school, in desperation his parents sought psychological help for him.

When I met Shawn he was a sweet but sad little boy, aware of the academic failure that permeated his whole life. There was no joy in learning about himself or the world around him; he was defeated before he even started. This is not an uncommon picture in my consulting room, but Shawn's defeat seemed thorough and complete.

My office is filled with a variety of materials to capture a child's interest and promote psychological exploration: toys, games, crafts, and books. Books were the last thing I expected Shawn to be drawn to. But after a cursory glance at the toys and games, he headed for the bookshelf. He rifled through the books and settled on one in particular—a tattered and worn copy of Bennett Cerf's *Book of Riddles*.

When he opened that book, Shawn started his journey of self-exploration.

Shawn quickly showed me that he could read, although with much hesitancy, and that he could comprehend what he read. It also became clear that he understood the structure and purpose of a riddle; that it was designed to elicit a response. Flipping through the pages of the book, he paused and read aloud, "What time is it when an elephant sits on a fence?" The room was filled with an expectant excitement. When I shrugged my shoulders, Shawn responded with glee, "Time to get a new fence!" In sharing this riddle with me, he had started a task, completed it successfully, and forged a bond of laughter between the two of us. This boy, who was perceived as a failure at school, began his treatment with a success.

I couldn't have predicted the impact of that book on Shawn's life. I don't think it would have occurred to me to hand Shawn a book as a means of exploring his inner turmoil. In the past he had been read or given other books that were supposed to help him with his problem. Among them was

Robert Kraus's *Leo the Late Bloomer*, a book also to be found in my office, but one that Shawn shunned throughout treatment. And yet, a book of riddles unexpectedly offered an avenue to explore what had gone wrong for Shawn; and the experience of sharing this book served as a catalyst for other successes.

When Shawn ended treatment he was a strong student, no longer plagued by sadness and doubts. His demeanor had a slight comedic edge, and he could easily elicit smiles and laughter from those about him (perhaps recreating his initial pleasure from reading a riddle that made me laugh).

Shawn chose the book that helped him, the book did not choose Shawn. It wasn't a "problem" book about a boy who couldn't read or a child who had troubles in school. It was a nonsense book that somehow spoke to both Shawn and me and allowed us to explore his concerns about success and failure.

Choosing a good and helpful book is something like choosing a *binky*, that stuffed animal or tattered blanket young children carry around with them. Parents often want some input in the selection of this treasured thing, but find that children suit themselves and adopt the item that pleases them and fulfills their needs. I have seen children who have selected a flannel nightgown

out of their mother's drawer, a long heavy silver chain, a wooden spoon. In each of these cases, the parents were concerned about their child's choice and attempted to dissuade them from bonding with such an object. However, each child persisted in her choice and thwarted all efforts to switch the chosen object to one deemed more acceptable by her parents. In no case was the object chosen a symptom of pathological behavior on the child's part. In every case, it reflected the child's personal taste and need.

Likewise, finding a good and helpful book is easiest when the child has the freedom and opportunity to choose. The book has to fit the child's emotional needs as the child experiences them, not as the parent perceives them. Adam best illustrates this lesson.

Adam, at four, was a voracious reader who visited the public library every week. He read everything and took pleasure in a wide variety of stories and subjects, though he had a strong preference for books about trains. On one of his frequent visits to the library, Adam abruptly seemed to have lost all joy and pleasure in books. He rejected every book offered, calling each a "doo-doo" book. He was clearly unhappy, and his mother was exasperated with his behavior. With some judicious questioning, the source of Adam's discomfort was revealed: his mother was pregnant and Adam had recently been told the news.

There is an abundance of books about babies and new siblings, and every year sees new titles. This is as it should be. It would be unrealistic, even neglectful, to find that this important aspect of a child's world was not reflected

in the literature intended for him. Imagine adult literature purged of books about marriage, sex, or romance.

Yet, when a marriage or romance goes badly adults can make the choice to read as they will. When Sue Grafton's marriage ended in divorce she turned to writing detective fiction, finding immense gratification in murder and mayhem. She didn't start writing romances.



I know a young woman, diagnosed and treated for Hodgkin's disease, who made her way through a year's arduous treatment with Jane Austen and J. R. R. Tolkien. Many well-meaning friends gave her books—both fiction and nonfiction—about cancer and illness, but this young woman found contentment and solace in worlds far removed from the cancer ward.

When Adam was presented with the option of reading books about babies and new siblings he let both his mother and me know that this was not a satisfactory solution to his troubles. (Perhaps our impulse to lead him in this direction came from our own histories, each of us being the oldest of multiple siblings—such books could reassure and remind us that all would end well!) When asked what he did

want to read, Adam chose scary books. In particular, he wanted a scary book about a boy lost in the woods with a bear. The closest thing at hand was Lynd Ward's *The Biggest Bear*, which Adam read with satisfaction.

For three months, Adam read nothing but scary books. He reread old favorites and discovered new titles. He could be satisfied *only* by scary stories, and he even lost interest in his train books. Then, as his mother entered her third trimester, Adam got a copy of Brinton Turkle's *Do Not Open*. This is the story of an old woman and her cat, beachcombers who happen upon a mysterious bottle. When the bottle is uncorked, a demonic genie is revealed. This genie's mission is not to grant wishes, but to terrify and frighten, and this is what he tries to do with Miss Moody and

her cat—but he fails in every attempt. He is finally defeated when Miss Moody tricks him into changing to a mouse, and her cat promptly captures and eats him. Adam took *Do Not Open* home as he had all the others, but this book gave him terrible nightmares. The book scared him so much that he couldn't sleep until his mother removed it from his room.

Adam's world was changing. He had moved into a new bedroom, his mother was hugely and obviously pregnant, and a new sibling was about to arrive on the scene. Turkle's book had in a variety of ways exacerbated the fears that Adam was desperately trying to grapple with. (A deeper analysis of Adam's fears might have uncovered explicit concerns about birth and the arrival of a sibling. Perhaps Adam was struggling

## a poem for spring



### A Blessing

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
 Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
 And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
 Darken with kindness.  
 They have come gladly out of the willows  
 To welcome my friend and me.  
 We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
 Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
 They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
 That we have come.  
 They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
 There is no loneliness like theirs.  
 At home once more,  
 They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.  
 I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
 For she has walked over to me  
 And nuzzled my left hand.  
 She is black and white,  
 Her mane falls wild on her forehead,  
 And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
 That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
 Suddenly I realize  
 That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
 Into blossom.

—James Wright

*James Wright's "A Blessing" appears in Above the River: The Complete Poems, copyright © 1990 by Anne Wright, Wesleyan University Press, reprinted by permission of University Press of New England. The above poem can also be found in the following collection for young readers: A Child's Anthology of Poetry, edited by Elizabeth Hauge Sword with Victoria Flournoy McCarthy, illustrated by Tom Pobrt (Ecco Press, 1995).*

with his own wishes to prevent the birth, to put *that* genie back in the bottle.) When he was comforted about his own changing world, Adam's anxiety abated and he eagerly wanted to read *Do Not Open* again. In fact, it became a favored book throughout the last month of his mother's pregnancy. It no longer caused him nightmares, and he was able to anticipate with some pleasure the changes that were happening in his family.

Both Shawn and Adam found help and satisfaction in their chosen books, but perhaps not in the ways that would have been expected or could have been predicted. Shawn used the structure of a riddle to show me that he was a capable boy, while Adam unconsciously confronted symbolic representations of birth in *Do Not Open*, conquering his fears about the arrival of a sibling.

Books can help. They provide escape when denial is the only means of coping, as they did for the young woman with cancer. They provide opportunity for expression of unthinkable and un-doable desires, as they did for Adam when he struggled with his wishes toward his unborn sister. They provide an opportunity to test the boundaries between what one is and what one hopes to be, as they did for Shawn when he read me a series of two-line riddles, the answers shining in his eyes. Books are likeliest to be of help when they are freely chosen, when they are "found" by those in need, when they resonate with one's heart and soul. ~

*Linda Goettina, D.M.H. is a former children's librarian who lives and works in Los Angeles as a psychoanalyst. She continues to read and love children's literature and finds that children's books play an important role in her work with both adults and young people.*



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# Policing the Borders of Innocence

*Protecting children from books may be a dubious effort.*

By Perry Nodelman

**T**hese days, the people I talk to about children's literature almost always have one thing on their minds. They want to figure out what books children should *not* have access to. Asked to evaluate a children's book, most adults automatically focus on what might be wrong with it. Perhaps the language is too

difficult for children's limited capabilities? Might the story or the setting be too strange for children, in their child-like egocentricity, to relate to? Most worrisome of all, could reading the book teach children how to swear, or make them want to have sex, engage in strip-mining, become witches, make fun of members of other cultures, or otherwise go wrong in a bewildering myriad of ways?

The few books that pass this sort of flaw-seeking examination are the ones that adults have not been able to imagine any possible ill effect from, no matter how hard they try—not obviously bad books, then, but not necessarily good ones, either. From this point of view, the good is merely what appears to lack the bad.

An interest in what might damage children and should therefore be kept from them isn't particularly new or surprising. Children's literature first came into existence, some centuries ago, when adults decided that children were different from adults in one important way: they needed to know less. Children's literature is, almost by



definition, a literature that leaves things out. And adults have always judged it in terms of whether or not it has left out enough, or has chosen the right things to leave out.

I doubt that leaving things out of children's books has ever actually managed to keep children as innocent as adults want them to be. My own memories of childhood are filled with knowledge I got from the schoolyard and elsewhere that went far beyond

the innocent world depicted in the books I read. I remember being quite jealous of the children in those books, who could be so safely guileless—who never had to worry about whether the Comies would drop the bomb, or what “going all the way” meant.

I suspect that keeping children innocent has never been the real objective, anyway. What adults want isn't children's innocence, but their own: to not know (or perhaps just to pretend not to know?) that children lack innocence. By leaving the right things out, children's books can reassure adults that childhood is as pure and simple and safe as they like to imagine it is, but surely know in their hearts it isn't.

So, there's nothing new about our current preoccupations. But two things have changed in recent years. First, there is more for children to know, it's easier for them to know it, and more of them do know it. Second, the more children actually do know, the more desperately we adults work to keep things out of the books we provide for them.

Children nowadays live in a world filled with information—information that's bound to leak into their minds, despite all our vigilant efforts to preserve and police the borders of their innocence. There is the Internet. It has bad words on it, not to mention copious information on a wide range of subjects (including witches and going all

the way). There is the vast spectrum of TV programming on cable and on satellite, available in the house of the kids next door, if not in your own. There are complex interconnections between toy manufacturers, movie companies, and fast-food chains, all determined to sneak their own consumer-oriented and very manipulative “information” into the minds of the young. And there are newspapers and magazines and news programs reporting more than many adults want to know about such matters as the ingenious uses our political leaders devise for cigars.

Keeping children innocent of all this is increasingly difficult. I suspect that adult TV cartoon series like *The Simpsons* or *South Park* are so popular because their foulmouthed, knowing children represent a reality many of us recognize with a thrill, even if we prefer not to acknowledge it. (Because we are not supposed to acknowledge it—we have an investment in the idea that childhood ought to be an uncontaminated state, a safe time of life.)

In the past decade or so, the list of things that many people feel should be left out of books for children has greatly expanded. There must be no violence—and for some adults now, violence encompasses descriptions of animals in the wild devouring their prey, or of a fairy-tale wolf devouring *Little Red Riding Hood*, or of Max’s mother in Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* getting angry at her out-of-control child and sending him to his room (without devouring anything). The college students in my children’s literature class this year rejected a book designed to help children deal with alcoholic parents, on the presumption that children with no previous knowledge of drunkenness would be frightened—as they would be frightened, these students told me again and again, by a wide array of human activities, from war to fishing with a hook to

sleepwalking to eating with chopsticks.

On the other hand, the same students agreed that they’d keep a whole range of other books out of the hands of children because the children might *not* be frightened of the bad things the books described, and could use their new knowledge as a justification for behaving badly themselves. On this basis, my students and other adults want to cast out books in which children throw spitballs, indulge in the satanic pleasures of Halloween, or take pride in their nappy hair.

This eagerness to restrict the content of the books adults put in children’s hands has its effects. Publishers, recognizing the growing list of things that more and more adults find offensive, are hardly likely to threaten the sales of books they publish by leaving these things in. With a few notable exceptions each year, children’s books have gotten blander and safer and much less interesting or worth reading by anybody of any age. And the few adventurous books that do manage to get published are increasingly unlikely to find their way into the hands of children. Some of the would-be teachers among my students have told me they wouldn’t use books in the classroom that they themselves approved of, if they could imagine reasons why some parent or other adult might object to them: the specter of lawsuits has come up in more than one discussion.

I worry about all of this. I make a point of encouraging my students to open their minds to the possibility that having knowledge is better than not having it—that recognizing the amount that children actually *do* know might be a first step in introducing those children to healthy ways of dealing with reality. But in my more cynical moments I wonder if it’s not too late—if our efforts to keep children’s literature innocent haven’t already resulted in books so bland and irrelevant

that few children will be interested in reading them.

Or in reading any books at all. On a recent visit to the children’s section of a large bookstore, I found myself surrounded by mothers and grandmothers anxiously asking the salesclerks if this book might not be too hard for a four-year-old, or if that book had any violence or religion or spitballs in it. Many books were being rejected for not leaving enough out. Meanwhile, the children accompanying these paranoid worrywarts were tugging at their mothers’ and grandmothers’ coats, complaining about how bored they were, asking if they could please, please go play with the computers in another part of the store. They had no interest whatsoever in the books that surrounded them.

If we adults don’t grow up enough to dispense with our false ideas about childhood innocence, we may soon have no need for any children’s literature at all—except, perhaps, for us to read ourselves when we want to evoke nostalgic memories of how wonderfully safe and unreal childhood never really was. That would be a pity.

Let us try not to be so frightened by the potential dangers in children’s books. Let us try to trust children more and acknowledge the complexity of children’s lives. And let us support authors and publishers who are brave enough to produce books for children that leave things in—enough things to describe childhood as it really is. Then, perhaps children will have better reasons to turn off their computers and open a few books. ~

*Perry Nodelman teaches children’s literature in the English department at the University of Winnipeg. His books include The Pleasures of Children’s Literature (Longman) and a number of novels for children and young adults, including, most recently, Behaving Bradley and, in collaboration with Carol Matas, Out of Their Minds (both Simon & Schuster).*



interview

# Rosemary Wells

*An awareness of children's needs permeates the work of this popular author and illustrator.*

By Martha Davis Beck

**R**osemary Wells was born in New York City in 1943. Her mother was a dancer in the Russian Ballet; her father was a playwright and actor. From a young age, she was drawn both to stories and to art. As an established writer and illustrator, she has frequently expressed the gratitude she feels toward her parents

for the encouragement they gave her in her early artistic pursuits.

Wells's career as a children's author and illustrator spans over thirty years and sixty books. She has received more than twenty ALA Notable Book citations, *The New York Times Book Review* Best Illustrated Book of the Year Award, and the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and is the creator of many beloved characters for young readers, including Max and Ruby, Noisy Nora, and Benjamin and Tulip.

Her books include *Voyage to the Bunny Planet* (Dial, 1992), *Lassie Come-Home*, illustrated by Susan Jeffers (Henry Holt, 1995), *My Very First Mother Goose*, edited by Iona Opie (Candlewick, 1996), *Bunny Cakes* (Dial, 1997), *Yoko* (Hyperion, 1998), and *Mary on Horseback* (Dial, 1998), honored in this issue as a *Riverbank Review* Children's Book of Distinction.

The following interview was conducted in St. Paul in November of 1998, on the occasion of a visit Ms. Wells made to the Upper Midwest.

**MDB:** *What led you to the story of Mary Breckinridge and the Frontier Nursing*

*Service, in Mary on Horseback?*

**RW:** About seven or eight years ago, a group of schoolteachers said to me, "Our readers get tired of Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt. We've got to have some new heroines. Can you find them?" So, this was a great challenge.

I discovered Mary Breckinridge quite by accident: I found her memoir in a box that was shipped to me from a Kentucky bookstore for an entirely different project. Hers was a wonderful life, and I thought, "This is somebody who has to be better known! She saved 25,000 lives in her lifetime—why doesn't anybody know about her?" But then I wondered, "How am I going to do this?" She was politically incorrect—she was the child of a wealthy, established, Southern Confederate family; her great grandfather had been vice president of the United States, her father was an ambassador to Russia—this was no rags-to-riches story. She was also

dumpy and middle-aged when she did her nursing work.

*I love the way Peter McCarty has depicted her, on the horse.*

I know, I adore it. We worship looks and money in this country, and Mary was a rather squarish woman, not particularly attractive. She spent most of her life administering and fund-raising—this was a time when ladies wore veils and white gloves—but there was one

little window of her life when she really was riding on horseback, recruiting nurses, and going out into the Kentucky mountains where there were no roads, no power, no nothing, except a whole bunch of suffering people living in cabins. That's the part I concentrated on. I had to leave out some of her work in this book, because much of it had to do with childbirth, and if you want to keep the

attention of a fourth-grade boy, you're not going to talk about childbirth—he'll run out of the room. Most girls don't like it at that age, either. It was also a challenge, having an adult heroine.

*Though children are centrally involved in the stories.*

There's a key child in two of the stories, and in the other it's a very young nurse. I wrote about Mary through the



Rosemary Wells

eyes of the people she most affected. Maggie Ireland was one of the very first nurses there. She came from Glasgow, Scotland. She had never been on a horse or out of the city in her life, and in three months she was running an inoculation clinic. She was wonderful herself, and was inspired by Mary. There is that one point when she is so downcast—she feels she will never be able to help those people in the mountains, because of their reluctance to let her near them, to let her do anything. She says, “I am a failure. I might as well go home to Scotland for all the use I am.” I love to bring this up.

*It's eye-opening for kids to see that adults have these feelings too.*

Yes. And when she says this, Mary Breckinridge just listens. And then later, when Maggie thinks about the little girl, Lavender, whom she had seen that morning, she remembers how bright her eyes were. She realizes that the little girl must have been feverish, and she says, “I must go back up! She could be dead by morning.” Then Mary says quietly, “If you were a failure, you wouldn't hear that child calling you.” Everything that Mary Breckinridge was is reflected in those three stories. This woman built six hospital outpost clinics with her own hands, and the hands of the people whom she helped.

*One of the many kinds of projects you've undertaken is to write shorter, distilled versions of classic works for a younger audience, as you did with Lassie Come-Home. Can you talk about the impulse behind this kind of project?*

I've just done it again with *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years* [forthcoming in the fall from Simon & Schuster, with illustrations by Susan Jeffers]. It was written by Rachel Field and was a Newbery winner in 1930. I have entirely rewritten it. This took a lot of chutz-

pah, but if I hadn't done it, the book would have died, as *Lassie* would have died.

*The whole issue of abridging is tricky. If children can still find their way to that longer work, and it will be rich for them then, I have questions about offering up a simplified version early on.*

I absolutely agree with you. I would never do it with a book that children should wait for. But these are books that are otherwise going to disappear. Nowadays you can't get a child with the reading level that would be required to read *Lassie* or *Hitty* to read it at that older age. Childhood has changed. You can't get a twelve-year-old girl to read about dolls; they want to read about boys. So, *Hitty* will fade away. You can tell by the number of copies sold. It's gone way down. Yet it has the bones of a brilliant story, as does *Lassie*.

*Lassie* was not originally a children's book—it was written for adult readers.



Illustration by Rosemary Wells, from *Hazel's Amazing Mother*

Most people don't realize that. In 1938, adults read about dogs. The world was different, the culture was different. *Lassie* was originally published as a syndicated five-part piece in *Collier's*. Then it was strung together into a novel, and later it was made into a huge celebrity

vehicle—Roddy McDowall starred in the movie—so it was removed again from its roots. Then it just became an old movie. What I wanted to do was get back to the heart of why this story lived and became so popular (before it was corrupted and eventually trashed by TV), and make it vibrant, new, and wonderful, in a context and at a reading level that kids could enjoy. That's what I've tried to do with *Hitty* as well.

*Tell what is special about Hitty.*

It's the story of a doll's descent through American history from 1829, when she's carved, having all kinds of owners, one after another, until 1929, when she winds up in a pawnshop, looks out the window, and sees an airplane for the first time. It's a great story of American history. But again, I had to change it, because it was too long and Victorian—all her owners were affluent white girls. So I made it more diverse, and I hope much richer, using Rachel Field's voice as much as I could own it. Fortunately, my grandmother was born at about the same year as Rachel Field, and she spoke like that.

*I'd like to talk a bit about your books for younger readers. Many of them focus on the emotional crises that are a universal aspect of children's lives. Can you talk about the role that humor plays in your picture books, as a tool to resolve these childhood traumas?*

When I have villains in my books, I try to make them ridiculous and silly. I think the only way you can deal with a bully is seeing what a bully really is. Instead of seeing the menace and the threat and the humiliation, and all the stuff that bullies use to keep themselves in office, children need to see them for what they are, which are usually very frightened, insecure, and ridiculous people. If you can poke fun at something, you can diffuse it.

I write little soap operas, because what I think really concerns kids is not big issues like racism or abuse or any of that—I don't think kids think that way. What they're involved with is what happens in the morning when they get on and off the school bus, and that's their world. So it's about the immediate emotions—say, in *Yoko*—of being in a class of kids where your lunch is totally different from anybody else's. And when people tease you, how that feels. I do it with humor, and I never try to hammer home the point that "this is right and this is wrong." I just show feelings, as they are, in pictures and words. And from that, it is to be devoutly hoped, some bully may get the idea that words can hurt.

*How is it that animals work better than depictions of people to dramatize children's feelings and interactions?*

I use animals for a number of reasons. The main one is, I draw them a lot better than I draw children. But you also can make them do a lot of things that you can't do with children. For example, in *Benjamin and Tulip*, when Benjamin goes merrily tripping under the tree and Tulip jumps from the tree, rolls him, and pushes him down—if you had children being that rough on the page, it would be a censored book. You can't show the same kinds of things with children; it's not funny.

I like to think of my books as little plays, and the animals are like characters in a play. It removes you a little, and allows you to frame the world of the story as completely believable within its own logic.

*In most of your books featuring animals, the worlds depicted are worlds unto themselves. But in Yoko you make reference to actual ethnicities, which seems like a pretty radical departure. What led you to do this?*

First of all, I love breaking rules. And one dominant rule today is: "Thou shalt not depict any ethnic group with an animal character." I love breaking



*Illustration by Rosemary Wells, from The Island Light, the third book in the Voyage to the Bunny Planet trilogy*

this rule because it's such a silly one—it's so 1990s, so politically correct.

*Yoko* came about because of three little Japanese girls in my daughter Victoria's second-grade class who would bring sushi to school. Despite the fact that we like to think of children as tremendously individualistic and free, they are very conformist, and when someone does do something different, they attack. So, what *Yoko* is about is feeling that you're not allowed to be different.

*I like the fact that it doesn't wrap up too tidily.*

Well, you can't have a pat ending to a story like this. You have to have a believable ending, which is: one person becoming her friend. It's basically the same ending, emotionally, as in *Timothy Goes to School*.

*In Timothy, when the two characters discover each other, it's a lovely moment—their experiences have been parallel, yet they've been oblivious to one another. This discovery, that someone else has similar struggles, is so important in childhood. You're never the same in those struggles again.*

You're never the same, and you have a best friend. *Yoko*, like *Timothy*, is a book about the importance of true friendship and bonding, because without that children live very frightened lives.

*A sensitivity to children's needs, especially the need for parental time and love, is a serious undercurrent in your work. I'm*

*thinking especially of the Voyage to the Bunny Planet trilogy. In what ways do you feel we overlook the needs of children today?*

I think we give a lot of children very lopsided childhoods. I see two screaming needs. As you know, I have the "Read to Your Bunny" campaign which I promote shamelessly everywhere I go—"The most important twenty minutes of your day." I didn't realize fully what this was about until a friend of mine who reads regularly to two little boys in the public school system said to me, "It isn't the books that they're not getting—it's the one-on-one." How can you ever feel, as a child, that you have any importance in this world, if your mother or father doesn't give you half an hour of time, one-on-one, every single day? This is a screaming need. Children are placed in front of computers and televisions where they learn nothing. It is a national affliction. It's so easy to distract children with these screens that put them in an alpha state of mind, and teach them not to be producers or independent thinkers, but consumers. That's one thing.

The other important thing that is lacking from children's lives is work. Our children don't work. When I was in school, this was in the late forties and fifties, every single kid I knew, without exception, had Saturday morning chores. You were lucky if you were

off at two o'clock, after mowing the lawn and doing everything that needed to be done at home.

I'm not saying this has entirely vanished, but when my children were younger, it used to scare me when they'd bring friends over—they didn't know how to peel a carrot. They didn't know

how to cut up a lambchop. They had never done any work, because their parents thought that this was inappropriate; they were just supposed to play. Work *has* to be a part of life, because if it isn't, *play* has no context; play becomes a meaningless activity. But if you spend from nine in the

morning to four in the afternoon raking leaves and putting hoses away and cleaning out the garage, do you know how wonderful it feels to go down to the stream and make little boats?

Play has been destroyed by the lack of work, and by the fact that children now are either completely supervised and organized into team sports, or they're shoved in front of a television.

*The Bunny Planet books offer a different kind of escape. I think the shape of the three children's fantasies is interesting—one of them has time with her mother, one has time with his father, and the other one has time alone, to himself.*

That's exactly what it's about, and the other thing is, it's very meditative. It's about how to get to nirvana, or heaven, with nothing but your mind. Because that's all you need, anyway. And it's about things that don't cost any money being the most meaningful things in life. For example, a first tomato of the year.

I remember how the tomatoes in my grandmother's garden used to smell in July, on the Jersey shore. I'll never forget that—it was the most wonderful smell in the world. She had this garden full of tomatoes and zinnias of different colors, and I remember the colors, and the smell, and the heat, and the ocean. It's such a powerful memory. If I ever were to describe heaven, it would be to go flying back somehow to that garden next to the ocean, to those zinnias and tomatoes. And eat thirty of them!

To think that you can escape something by going to Disneyland is foolish. It's a big cliché, and it doesn't work. It doesn't give you anything. To spend money doesn't do it. What children need is a cup of warm cocoa, some good music, a quiet space, with the one they love. ~

*Martha Davis Beck is the editor of the Riverbank Review.*

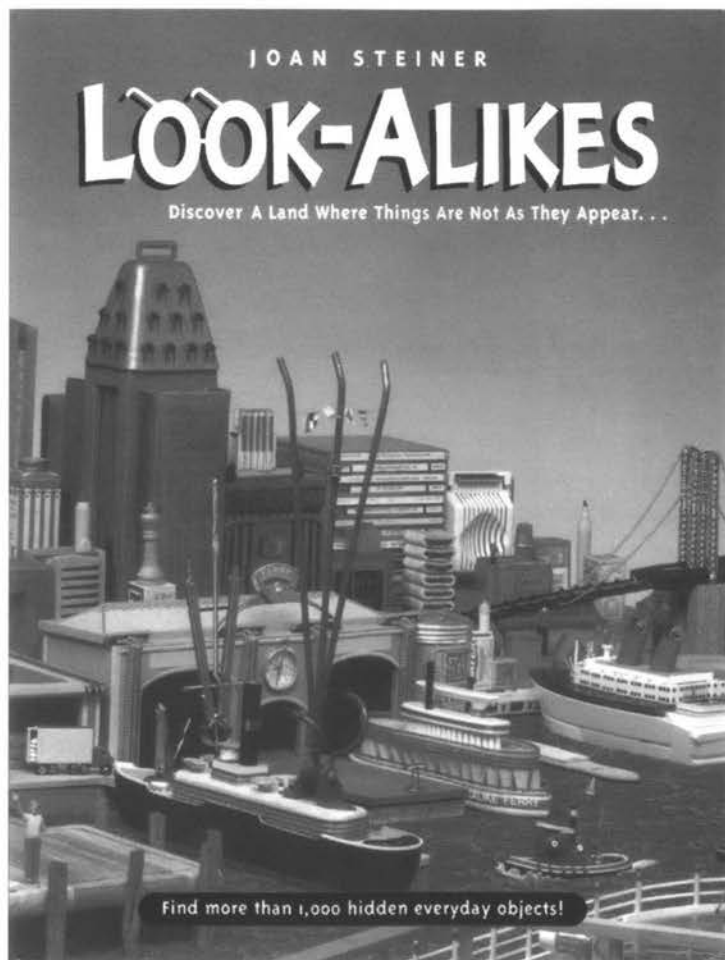
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\* Publishers Weekly (starred)

\*\* Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (starred)

\*\*\* Kirkus Reviews (pointer)

† Horn Book

†† School Library Journal

“Rosemary Wells  
is right on target with children....”\*



Self-Portrait by Rosemary Wells

\*Children's Books Review Service, Inc.

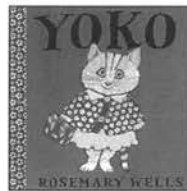


© Rosemary Wells

Praise for *YOKO*

“★Meet our newest heroine. [Rosemary] Wells has tucked a real treasure in this tasty morsel of a tale. Affirming and believable.”

—School Library Journal

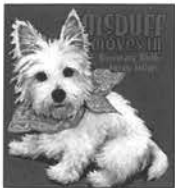


**Yoko**  
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All McDuff books are written by Rosemary Wells & illustrated by Susan Jeffers

\$12.95 (\$17.95) • Ages 2-5



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# 1999 Children's Books



## Picture Books

### Dance

By Bill T. Jones and Susan Kuklin  
Photographs by Susan Kuklin

HYPERION

Preeminent dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones propels his body across bare white pages to express the poetry of dance in this exhilarating photo essay. Coupled with simple, direct text, Jones's movements illustrate the very essence of what it means to say, "I am a dancer. I want to dance."

### I Lost My Bear

By Jules Feiffer  
WILLIAM MORROW

An emotional and comic drama unfolds as a girl frantically searches her home for her favorite stuffed animal. Feiffer's astute ink-and-watercolor artwork reflects every nuance of the girl's shifting moods as she works her way back to her beloved "Bearsy."

### Together in Pinecone Patch

By Thomas F. Yezerski  
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

It is rare for an Irish girl and a Polish boy to socialize in the coal-mining town of Pinecone Patch, Pennsylvania, and almost unheard of for them to fall in love. This eloquently textured story traces the lives of one such couple from their respective homelands to America, where their relationship helps to bridge the rift between two cultures.

## Fiction

### Go and Come Back

By Joan Abelove  
DK INK

How do anthropologists come across to the people they study? Abelove's eye-opening and often hilarious novel tackles this issue by adopting the perspective of Alicia, a girl from a tribe in a Peruvian jungle village where two female anthropologists have taken up residence.

### A Long Way from Chicago

By Richard Peck  
DIAL

Every summer from 1929 to 1935, Joey and his sister take the train to Grandma's; every summer she surprises them with some outrageous act, and the occasional glimpse beneath her "tough as an old boot" exterior. In a small town filled with colorful characters, Grandma stands out. She is a woman readers won't soon forget.

### Mary on Horseback: Three Mountain Stories

By Rosemary Wells  
Illustrated by Peter McCarty  
DIAL

Inspired by the actual experiences of Mary Breckinridge, founder of the Frontier Nursing Service, these short, moving stories give voice to three individuals affected by Mary's mission to bring decent medical care to post-World War I Appalachia. Each tale sends readers into the backwoods homes of the families this unassuming heroine served.

# of Distinction Awards

## Nonfiction

### **No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War**

By Anita Lobel

GREENWILLOW

Best known as a picture book illustrator and author, Anita Lobel spent her childhood in Poland during World War II—"a wrong place at a wrong time." Her vivid memoir about these years tells how she and her brother evaded and ultimately survived capture by the Nazis.

### **Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the *Endurance***

By Jennifer Armstrong

CROWN

The most amazing aspect of Ernest Shackleton's failed 1914 attempt to cross Antarctica is that he and all twenty-seven of his men survived. Armstrong recreates their unbelievable nineteen-month ordeal in riveting detail.

### **Tibet: Through the Red Box**

By Peter Sís

FARRAR, STRAUS & GROUT

The fantastical yet supposedly true anecdotes from Sís's father's journey through Tibet in the mid-1950s are the subject of his latest feast for the eyes and mind. Drawing on childhood memories of his father's stories, he constructs an intricate vision of a land with a powerful hold over one man and his family.

## Poetry

### **Earth-Shattering Poems**

Selected by Liz Rosenberg

HENRY HOLT

Intensity is key in this thoughtfully gathered anthology geared toward young adults—arguably the most intense age group on the planet. Spanning many different time periods as well as countries of origin, the poems speak to life's "peak moments" of love, loss, rapture, and despair.

### **The Llama Who Had No Pajama**

By Mary Ann Hoberman

Illustrated by Betty Fraser

BROWND EER/HARCOURT BRACE

This welcoming volume reunites a perfectly matched author/illustrator team (creators of the picture book *A House Is a House for Me*) and celebrates the career of a first-rate poet for young children. Hoberman's subject matter includes animals, families, and growing up, but the overriding theme is the joy of playing with words.

### **The Sky Is Always in the Sky**

By Karla Kuskin

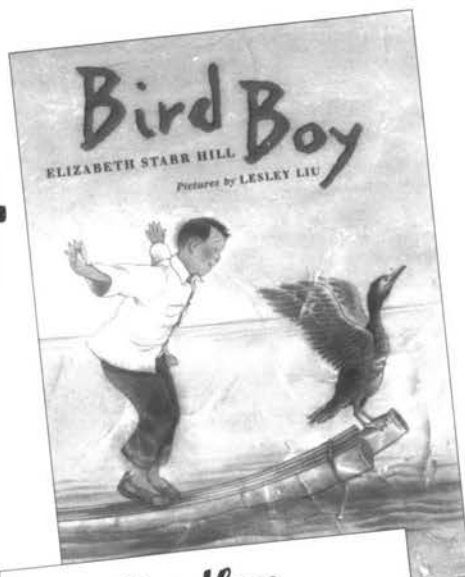
Illustrated by Isabelle Dervaux

HARPERCOLLINS

Funny and intelligent, these thirty-six poems for young children, culled from Kuskin's considerable body of work, are vibrantly interpreted by bright, unpretentious graphics. Readers can delight in everything from the sound of the word "worm" to a dragon who loves the taste of toes.



# Excellent choices



## **BIRD BOY**

by Elizabeth Starr Hill

Pictures by Lesley Liu

Set on the Li River in southern China and accompanied by evocative illustrations, this poignant story has as its hero a young boy who cannot talk — at least not to people.

\$15.00 ISBN 0-374-30723-7 Ages 8 up



## *Goodbye, Walter Malinski*

Helen Recorvits • Pictures by Lloyd Bloom

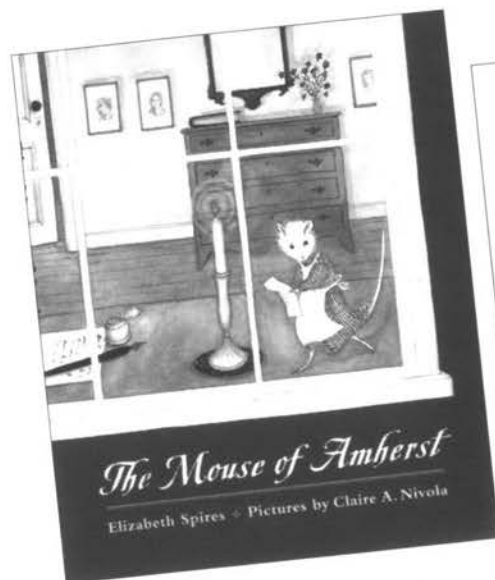
## **THE MOUSE OF AMHERST**

by Elizabeth Spires

Pictures by Claire A. Nivola

★“Delectable . . . [as it portrays] the characters of both Emily Dickinson and Emmaline, a poetry-penning mouse . . . invites readers into the work and life of one of America’s most important poets.” —Starred, *Publishers Weekly*

\$15.00 ISBN 0-374-35083-3 Ages 8 up  
Frances Foster Books



## *The Mouse of Amherst*

Elizabeth Spires • Pictures by Claire A. Nivola

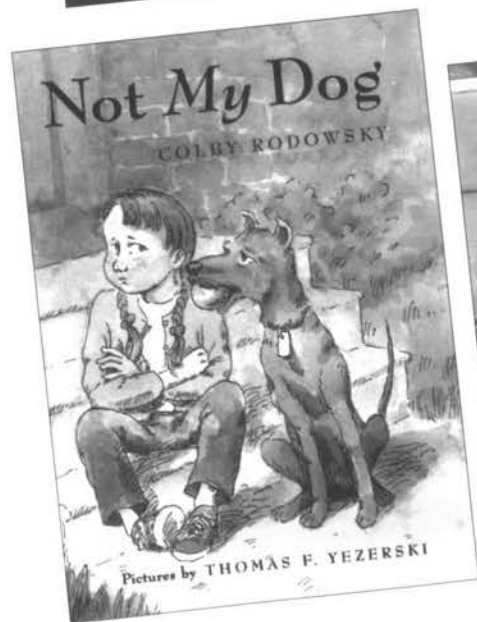
## **GOODBYE, WALTER MALINSKI**

by Helen Recorvits

Pictures by Lloyd Bloom

Direct, understated writing and beautifully rendered pencil drawings capture the high emotional density of an immigrant family’s experience as loss gives way to hope at the height of the Great Depression.

\$15.00 ISBN 0-374-32747-5 Ages 9–12  
Frances Foster Books



## *Not My Dog*

COLBY RODOWSKY

Pictures by THOMAS F. YEZERSKI

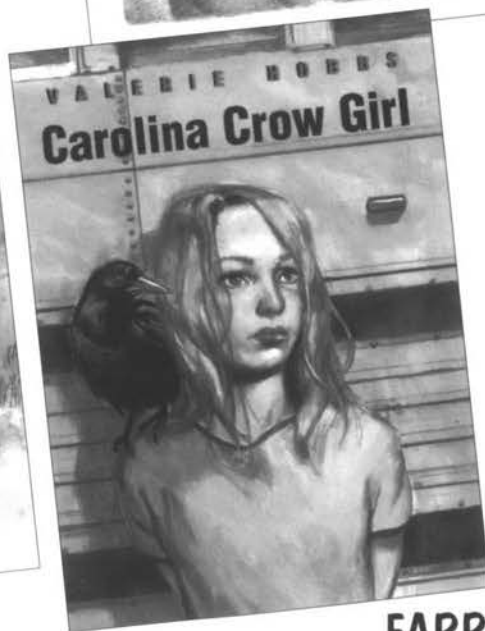
## **NOT MY DOG**

by Colby Rodowsky

Pictures by Thomas F. Yezerksi

“A neat twist on the girl-years-for-dog story, this beginning chapter book has much to recommend it, from the appealingly flawed characters to the multifaceted emotional conflicts.” —*Booklist*

\$15.00 ISBN 0-374-35531-2 Ages 7–10



## *Carolina Crow Girl*

## **CAROLINA CROW GIRL**

by Valerie Hobbs

Eleven-year-old Carolina lives in an old school bus with her peripatetic mother and baby sister in this beautifully written novel that explores the fine line between safety and stagnation, rootlessness and freedom.

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Frances Foster Books

**FARRAR • STRAUS • GIROUX**

# The True Face of War

*How the writer's life has been shaped by war.*

By Gary Paulsen

**M**y father was a professional soldier who made a career in the army, serving as an officer on General Patton's staff. While he fought the Germans across Europe, I played at war. I had a small uniform, a wooden rifle, and a little helmet. While my mother worked at a munitions plant in Minneapolis, I played in the alleys around our apartment building, fighting imaginary "krauts" and "nips," as the Germans and Japanese were known in the demonizing slang of the time. I played a game created from horrors that I did not then understand.

After the Second World War, my father flew directly to the Philippines. My mother and I took a troopship from San Francisco to Manila in 1946 and there, at the tender and impressionable age of seven, I was to see the true face of war for the first time.

A note of history: the Japanese drove the American army out of the Philippines in the first year of the war, and subsequently occupied the islands. The Japanese soldiers did not understand the concept of surrender. They viewed surrendered people as less than human. They treated them as animals, or worse than animals. Women and children were abused, tortured, killed. When it became obvious that they would lose the war—they were being driven out of Manila by the American army—the Japanese, in a last orgy of destruction, slaughtered over a hundred thousand innocent Filipinos. Babies were used for bayonet practice. Women and chil-

dren were herded into steel cages and burned to death with flamethrowers. It was a final horror to the war, and as a child I stepped into its aftermath, into the physical and spiritual and emotional wreckage that was the Philippines. For two and a half years I lived essentially as a street child in Manila, because my parents were alcoholics and I was not supervised. The effect was profound and lasting.

I have hated war, the concept of war, the horror of war, the madness of war, the total destruction that is war, ever since—hated it with an intensity that is sometimes frightening. And yet—when I was seventeen, I heard the drums in a way that I had not heard them before, and enlisted in the service as a regular-army private. Initially there was very little logic in it. People joined the army; they took on a military obligation, and part of it had to be in active service; it was something you did, in a way, to become a man. And so I did. It was as if my childhood steeped in war had never happened.

I enlisted just after the Korean War, months before the war in Vietnam became publicly known. I did not have to fight, though I served three years, eight months, twenty-one days, and nine hours (my three years' enlistment time was extended, and I was trained for a war that JFK fully intended to fight with Cuba). Though I hated the army, I served my time, made sergeant, and was discharged honorably. Through

this experience I came to understand the strange paradox of war: the lure of combat and the consequent damage it does to men.

While in the army, I was stationed with men who had fought in both Korea and the Second World War—professional soldiers, sergeants with scarred bodies and,

perhaps more importantly, scarred minds. Men made almost unbelievably tough by combat, many ruined and weakened by the same. These men would play poker with me in the barracks, not caring if they won or lost, sitting in their shorts, drinking whiskey straight out of a bottle with beer chasers, never getting drunk enough to show it. They would forget the kid who was there, forget that I didn't know what they knew, forget me entirely and talk with each other of war, sharing stories filled with the vicious humor and the fierce



Gary Paulsen

love that come with war—stories where death became funny and life became cruel, where joy was morbid and sadness the engine that ran life. But nobody cried, because if they once started to cry they would never be able to stop. They would talk about how they could never be normal again because they had seen too much, done too much, lived too much.

I remember one man who had a funny triangular-shaped scar on his palm, on both sides of his hand. Without thinking, I once asked him what the scar was from—it looked so strange, I don't think I imagined it as coming from war. He was drunk, or as drunk as he got, and he looked at the other men sitting there and apologetically, sheepishly, said:

"There was a Japanese soldier coming at me and my rifle jammed. I took his bayonet through my hand so I could turn it away and get his throat with my other hand. I never did take

good enough care of my weapon..."

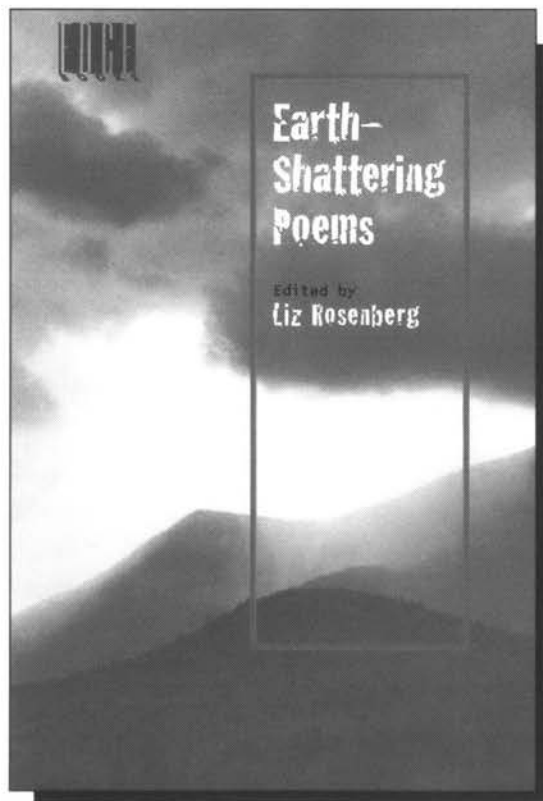
I knew that the scar was an embarrassment to him, not because of the wound or the fact that he had killed a man with his bare hands (I was to find later that this man was one of the most decorated soldiers in World War II), but because it was an indication that he did not properly care for his weapon, a near mortal sin for the combat infantry man.

They taught me much, these men—perhaps more than any other teachers I have had. Later, when I became a writer and began to try to write of war, of what happens to men and boys who fight in a war, the truth of who these men were came through. When I came to write *Soldier's Heart*, a novel based on the true story of Charley Goddard, who lied about his age to enlist in the Minnesota First Volunteers when he was just fifteen, fought through the entire Civil War, and was ruined by it, I wrote not just of Charley, but of those men I

played poker with in the army barracks during long nights when they couldn't sleep and I didn't want to: soldiers sitting on an army blanket draped over a footlocker, chain-smoking cigarettes, letting me see the true face of what most of them called The Job.

I was released from the army in May of 1962, but most of those men stayed on. Some of them fought in Vietnam. Years later when I was on a book tour in Washington, D.C., early one morning I went down to the Black Wall where several of them now live, and I sat and thanked them for what they had given—to me and to all of us—and told them of my hope that my writing might keep some part of it from happening again. ~

*Gary Paulsen is the author of many critically acclaimed books for young readers. He and his wife, the painter Ruth Wright Paulsen, live in New Mexico and on the Pacific Ocean.*



A Riverbank Review 1999 Children's Book of Distinction

## Earth-Shattering Poems

edited by Liz Rosenberg

**A**n intensely serious anthology of poems, classic and contemporary, American and global, that will hit readers with immediacy and passion. . . . A world anthology that is close to home."—*Booklist*

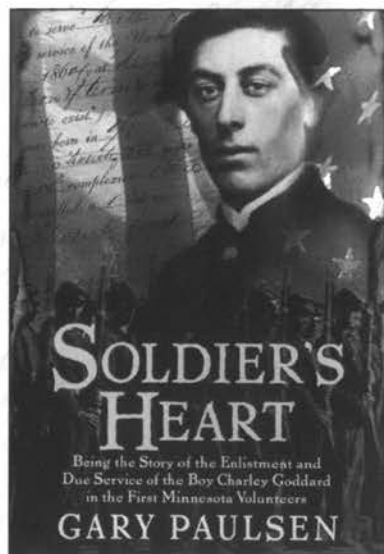
**E**ach one of the selections hits upon some incident or emotion that will prompt serious thought, insight, or wonder. . . . Whether it be the words or rhythm, or the unique events described, each one contains some essence of 'earth shattering' awareness, followed by an after-shock."—*School Library Journal*

**E**clectic."—*Publishers Weekly*

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HENRY HOLT BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

# Rave Reviews for GARY PAULSEN



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language and vivid visual images of brutality and death on the battlefield make it accessible and memorable to young people.” —Starred, *Booklist*

★ “Brilliant . . . a searing antiwar story.”  
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“A stark, utterly persuasive novel.”  
—*The New York Times Book Review*

◆ “[An] unflinching portrayal of . . . war . . . truly remarkable.”  
—Pointer, *Kirkus Reviews*

★ “The novel’s spare, simple lan-

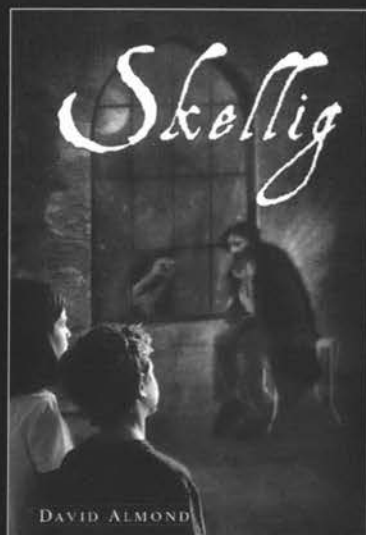


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★ “This work is bold, confident and persuasive, its transcendental themes powerfully seductive.”  
—Starred, *Publishers Weekly*

◆ “Paulsen brings the story he began in *Hatchet* and continued in the alternative sequels *The River* and *Brian's Winter* to a . . . mystical close.”  
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★ “Some of the writing takes one’s breath away, especially the scene in which Almond, without flinching, describes the beauty and the horror that is Skellig.”  
—Starred, *Booklist*

★ “Prose that is at once eerie, magical and poignant.”  
—Starred, *Publishers Weekly*\*

◆ “Almond pens a powerful, atmospheric story.”  
—Pointer, *Kirkus Reviews*

★ “A lovingly done, thought-provoking novel.”  
—Starred, *School Library Journal*

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## Picture Books

### **A Is for Amos**

By Deborah Chandra

Illustrated by Keiko Narahashi

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 2–6, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-30001-1

This inviting alphabet book features a girl and her horse on a lively ride. Amos is a rocking horse in the opening and closing spreads; in between, he is the horse of the girl's imaginings, leading her down a country road, over fields, through a rainstorm, into a dry, cozy barn to get warm, and finally back to her room. On her ride the girl passes a farmer on a tractor who waves to her as she passes; she jumps a fence as nearby children cheer. The weather vane on the barn where she stops to rest is, appropriately, the silhouette of a girl on a horse.

Deborah Chandra's verse flows naturally, its music subtle and pleasing. She never forces a rhyme—but neither does she miss a beat. The text sets the pace of Amos's gentle gallop: "Clippety clap clippety clap / A is for Amos and I'm on his back," the book begins. "B for the bumpity bridge we cross / C for the clippety clop of his trot." For each letter, both upper- and lowercase versions appear in the text,

highlighted in bold. The position of the featured letters within each phrase varies, which adds interest: "H for high fence / I for I'm / J for going to jump this time."

Keiko Narahashi's watercolor illustrations have a dreamy quality that suits a child's reverie: the girl's overalls are a blur of blue and white that suggests the sky, and the landscape she crosses on her horse unfolds in soft hues of green, brown, and gold. Details, such as the synchrony in the motion of Amos's tail and the ponytail of his rider, are both cleverly and lovingly placed. We can feel the longing in the girl's posture as she gazes out the window in the book's opening image, and her tenderness toward Amos,



Illustration by Keiko Narahashi, from *A Is for Amos*

throughout. At the end, as she leans her cheek against Amos's neck, the mood is one of sweet contentment.

The book's visual scheme is sophisticated. The girl's room is only partially revealed at the start. When she returns from her ride, readers discover the inspiration for the journey's highlights: arranged on a rug on the floor of her room are a toy barn, farm animals, and a farmer on a tractor—wearing the same hat as his lifelike counterpart. Sharp eyes will notice one small difference: now that the journey is over, the weather vane on top of the toy barn is simply a horse.

—Martha Davis Beck

### **Bird Talk**

By Ann Jonas

GREENWILLOW

32 pages, Age 3 and up, \$15.00

ISBN 0-688-14174-9

### **When Agnes Caws**

By Candace Fleming

Illustrated by Giselle Potter

ATHENEUM

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-81471-2

It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining, the flowers are blooming, the birds are calling "pork beans" in the trees... What? You thought their vocabulary consisted solely of "chirp chirp" and "tweet tweet"? Not according to Ann

Jonas's clever new picture book about "memory phrases," those "words used by the people who study birds to help us hear and remember bird songs."

Each double-page spread in *Bird Talk* offers an amusing tableau of familiar and not-so-familiar species speaking their respective memory phrases in such a way that they appear to be commenting on the scene at hand. For instance, assembled on the windowsill outside a classroom are an ovenbird crooning "teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher," a yellow-throated vireo reciting "three, eight" (the numbers in the



Illustration by Ann Jonas, from *Bird Talk*

multiplication problem on the blackboard), and several other feathered spectators with pertinent comments regarding the teacher and her students. Occasionally a narrative thread extends from one spread to the next, as when the smoke causing the indigo bunting to shriek "Quick, quick! Help, help! Fire, fire!" turns out to be coming from a harmless backyard barbecue (the setting for the common nighthawk's "pork, beans"). Somewhere in every scene there lurks a mockingbird, living up to its name by repeating the phrase of another bird pictured.

In a sense, *Bird Talk* is like a foreign-language instruction book that you wish came with a cassette to help you speak like a native. Is it "BOB-white" or "bob-WHITE"? Does the robin's

"cheerily-cheer-up!" stay at an even pitch or does it go up and down? Differently weighted type is used throughout the text, but apparently for reasons of stylistic variation, not pronunciation. Jonas's book probably won't enable the average reader to definitively distinguish between the birdsongs in their neighborhood. It also can't, as no human words could, truly capture any bird's call. How can the common loon's eerie cry be translated into English? (The memory phrase for it is "Ha, ha, ha, ha, hoo, hoo, hoo, ha-oo-oo"—a nice try.) Still, *Bird Talk* is enormously satisfying to read aloud, even if no self-respecting blue jay or catbird or tufted titmouse would recognize your rendition of its song.

When *Agnes Caws* is another fun exercise for the vocal cords. This light melodrama features a girl whose bird-calling talent is unsurpassed—yet not surprising, since she is the daughter of famed ornithologist Octavia Peregrine. Judging from the long skirts Agnes and her mother wear in the droll, stylized illustrations, the story takes place in the nineteenth century, a golden age for natural history. The villain, bird collector Colonel Edwin Pittsnap, comes complete with cheesy handlebar mustache and wicked laugh, and behaves in a way that was actually typical for naturalists of that time period: he likes his wildlife specimens dead. Nevertheless, in this story Pittsnap is evil to the core, definitely not the sort of person we want sneaking along behind the Peregrines as they trek into the Himalayas so that Agnes can attempt to call the exceedingly rare pink-headed duck.

Are Agnes's calls for the great hornbill ("Pee-up! Pee-up! Pee-pee-oh!"), the sharp-beaked snakebird ("Chup-lup! Chup-lup! Chup-lup!"), and others accurate representations of what these birds sound like? It's a bit frustrating that Fleming never says, although

the endpapers do include short profiles of each bird mentioned. But author and illustrator clearly intend to emphasize campiness over realism. Agnes hits upon the call for the pink-headed duck by accident when she stubs her toe and just happens to utter exclamations that bring the duck—and Colonel Pittsnap—into view. However, no Dudley Do-Right rushes onto the scene to rescue Agnes and the bird from Pittsnap's clutches. This melodrama ends on a feminist note with Agnes saving herself by calling birds from across the world to bombard the dastardly duck-snatcher. A word to the wise: you may want to make sure your head is covered before reading this part out loud.

—Christine Heppermann

### Book

By George Ella Lyon

Illustrated by Peter Catalanotto

DK INK

32 pages, Ages 4–7, \$16.95

ISBN 0-7894-2560-2

In their sixth collaboration, George Ella Lyon and Peter Catalanotto team up to tackle the topic of "book"—its special power, its place in the world. Lyon supplies the metaphors and Catalanotto infuses them with light.

Lyon invites the reader to wonder at the object in hand, and then simply to wander. The light spilling out of the crevice, as a pajama-clad child opens the portal and floats beyond limitation, entices, too. Likening a book to a house, Lyon beckons, "Walk in. / Find your way. / Light falls / through the windows of words. / Learn the secret passages."

As in the duo's *Dreamplace*, Catalanotto's watercolors blend the real and the imagined, the concrete and the conceptual, the self and the world. A pony transforms into a flock of birds in flight. Reflections in a body of water mirror, not the cave on the shore or

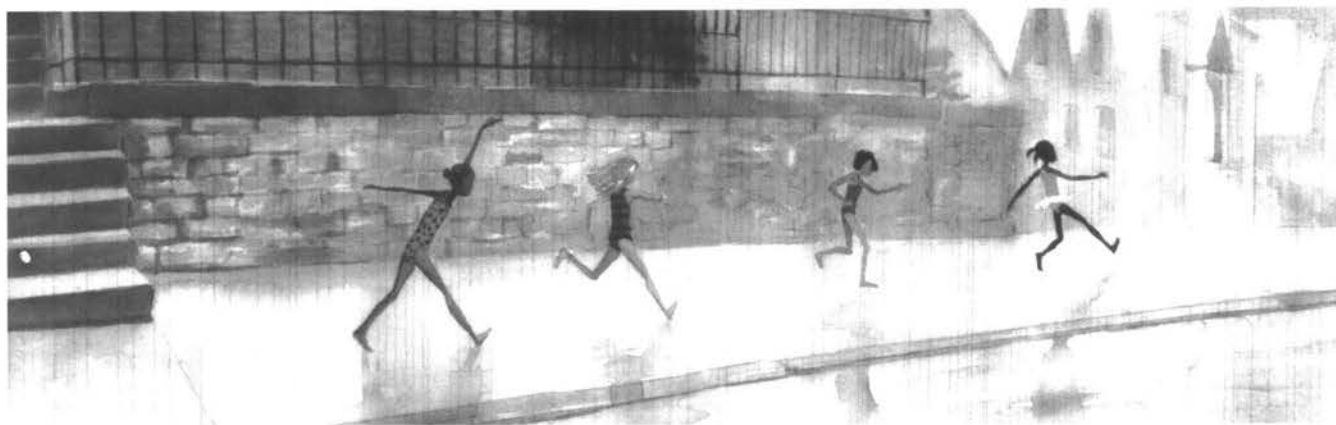


Illustration by Jon J Muth, from *Come On, Rain!*

the exuberant girl in flannel, but a castle and a princess in royal garb as the character makes her way from one reality to the next.

Handprinted words appear as free-floating, three-dimensional entities, suggesting the young reader's immersion in story. A number of words are viewed from behind. Even an adult reader may puzzle briefly over the inscription *bil*, only to discover it is actually *lid*. For beginning readers—or older struggling ones—this oft-repeated device may prove distracting or downright frustrating.

Young poets will appreciate metaphors that depict the book as a farm, a chest keeping the heart's treasure, a gate swinging wide. However, text equating a book with the leaves on a tree that “feed the tree of life” and a facing page on which the author's arms transpose into tree limbs prompt confusion. The idea of a book as “boon companion” may resonate with adults, but is likely to mystify primary graders.

Oh, that each might discover the place in which the absorbed reader in the last illustration resides. Grounded by a bed and a teddy bear—yet moved to a place beyond boundaries, where everyday objects, receding from consciousness, have simply evaporated—this lucky reader dwells in possibility.

—Tunie Munson-Benson

### **Come On, Rain!**

By Karen Hesse

Illustrated by Jon J Muth

SCHOLASTIC

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.95

ISBN 0-590-33125-6

*Come On, Rain!* is the first book I've seen that honors the essential childhood ritual of pulling on a bathing suit and running outside to whoop it up in a summer rainstorm. It's high time. In these pages, anticipation builds like gathering clouds, and the marriage of words and pictures shines.

Author Karen Hesse has proven in previous work (*The Music of Dolphins* and *Out of the Dust*) that she needs to periodically jump the fence of a routine narrative. In *Come On, Rain!* she dances with words. Through the pitch-perfect voice of young Tessie, Hesse lets us feel the oppressive tedium in a day of unremitting heat, and then, the mounting excitement of an impending rainstorm. Electricity fills the air, and her poetic phrasings can bulge with a humid weight or crackle with an unexpected flash.

What luck to pair her text with Jon J Muth's watercolors! He is gloriously talented—a stroke of his brush evokes the shimmering heat of an urban landscape on one page and the joy of a wet and wild rain dance on another. His

subtle palette of grays and yellows and browns (a relief from the trend of glaring neons) moves gracefully from the warmest hues of stifling heat to cooled-off, rain-soaked blues. Muth's experience as an illustrator of comic books lends him the gift of the odd approach: he opts for daring points of view and imbues each page with the full emotion of the moment. Muth's artwork fleshes out Tessie's character and makes her unforgettable. All legs and loopy energy, her quiet manipulations of her mother lead us to the surprising culmination of the story: Tessie and her three neighborhood pals dance in the downpour and are joined, finally and joyfully, by their hot and tired mothers.

*Come On, Rain!* has depth and grace and a sweet, understated current of celebration. The story is as refreshing as a long-awaited rainshower... you can almost smell the rain on hot asphalt.

—Christine Alfano

### **Don't Worry, Alfie**

By Mathew Price

Illustrated by Emma Chichester Clark

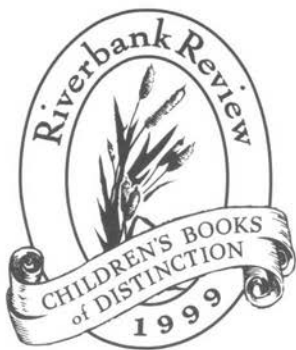
ORCHARD

14 pages, Ages 2–5, \$9.95

ISBN 0-531-30127-3

It would be impossible to create an utterly boring pop-up book—the invitation to interact with a story, through

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FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

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assorted doors, flaps, and pull tabs, is irresistible to young readers. (My own children would enthusiastically peruse a lawn mower repair manual if it was presented to them in a pop-up format.) Mediocre pop-ups, however, are all too common. They rely on “the lure of the flap” to entice readers, but rarely use the features of paper engineering to enhance story lines or define characters.

Here, then, is a nice surprise for pop-up fans: *Don't Worry, Alfie* transcends the standards of the pop-up medium with simple but ingenious paper engineering that adds substance and wit to the story of an affable young bear and his smart, patient mother.

*Don't Worry, Alfie* takes us to the place where curiosity meets caution, as Alfie and his mom walk through a dangerous jungle on their way to the playground. It would be difficult to feel any real danger in Clark's cheerful and sunny watercolor landscapes, but that's part of the book's charm: young children will understand Alfie's wide-eyed fear of the jaw-snapping alligator or the sharp-toothed jackal, but because the illustrations are so decidedly *unscary*, they will also connect emotionally with the reassuring mom, and will feel bravery within their reach.

The book's pull-tab actions bring delight with an economy of motion: the sight of a “slithery python” (green with pink polka dots, mind you) causes Alfie to leap neatly into his mother's waiting arms; the slow approach of a tiger brings a slew of nervous animals up out of the bushes for a quick and daring peek. “Stand quite still, my darling, while the tiger passes by,” whispers Alfie's mother—lift the tree flap and find them still and watchful, waiting for danger to pass. By the last page, we breathe a sigh of relief: Alfie makes it safely to the park and slides gaily down an elephant's trunk as his mother watches from nearby.

A companion book called *Where's Alfie?* is also out, and in it Alfie shows his more mischievous side, playing an escalating game of hide-and-seek in an attempt to waylay bedtime. Both of the *Alfie* books are gentle and funny; likely to satisfy readers—not with ultracomplex paper-wizardry—but with their simple, understated emotion.

—Christine Alfano

### Dora's Box

By Ann-Jeanette Campbell  
Illustrated by Fabian Negrin  
KNOFF

32 pages, Age 5 and up, \$17.00

ISBN 0-679-87642-1

*Dora's Box* is a fairy tale, inspired by the Greek story of Pandora's box, that begins in “the deepest, darkest, most frightening part of the forest,” where a childless couple aids a witch who grants wishes. When the couple's daughter is born, she is named Pandora (called Dora). Her parents have a magic box that the witch gave them in the forest, saying: “Put into this box tokens of everything that is evil or sad in the world, and your daughter will never know them. If she opens the box, however, all your work will be undone.” This story about an indulged child with overprotective parents is also a contemporary fable with a cautionary message about child rearing. In the end, the parents' work *is* undone, because Dora must know “some of the evil and sadness in the world” if she is to have compassion—and, ultimately, if she is to be “loved by all,” as her parents wish.

Fairy tale, reconceived myth, contemporary fable... and picture book. *Dora's Box* is an inspired and problematic pairing of author and artist. Fabian Negrin's artwork unfolds in a series of tableaux, like a pageant. Characters appear in striking, stylized postures. In one picture, the witch sits perfectly

upright, facing the viewer, forearm pressed to forehead. When Dora's mother hurries to collect a boy's tears—so that Dora will not see his sadness—she appears in dramatic profile, striding across the page, her hair sweeping behind her.

But if, as the text explains, she must hurry away to put the tears in the magic box, what is it doing right there at her feet? Why, at the opening, does the witch appear to be restrained by a shackle, rather than the “hunter's trap” of the text? Do berry bushes really scratch the mother through such voluminous long sleeves? Though it does not always jibe with the text, Negrin's artwork has a majesty to it that works well with Ann-Jeanette Campbell's multivalent story. In his hand the character of Dora, depicted from infancy to girlhood, is enchantingly rendered.

Unlike the Pandora of Greek mythology, tormented by her desire to open a forbidden box, Campbell's Dora is practically oblivious to hers. When she discovers its contents—emblems of suffering such as thorns, a hot coal, a dead bird—the parents receive their third wish: now Dora can be “loved by all.” Does the wish that one's child be “loved by all” have fewer snares in it than the wish that she be protected from suffering?

—Susan Marie Swanson

### Gowanus Dogs

By Jonathan Frost  
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

48 pages, Age 5 and up, \$15.00

ISBN 0-374-31058-0

This oversized picture book takes a sympathetic look at the wild dogs that roam the Gowanus Canal and live off the garbage left in the mean streets of Brooklyn. Jonathan Frost must love this neighborhood and all its people, pigeons, and filth. He explores the rough urban terrain along with the abandoned

mongrels, across the drawbridge, past barges, warehouses, factories, and soup kitchens. Frost's adroit line captures the power and mass of both eighteen-wheeler and cement mixer; his panoramas take in the life and labor of this noisy industrial part of the city.

Frost's raw, rugged black-and-white etchings combined with aquatint have the gritty realism of proletarian vistas from the New Deal. In 1938, Peggy Bacon attempted a similar study of the urban underbelly in her rich lithographs for *Buttons*, Tom Robinson's

story of a stray cat. Had Frost stuck to the dogs and their adventures, he might have made a stronger book.

Beneath the tough veneer of Frost's virile pictures lies a sentimental core. Halfway through the story, the focus shifts to the fate of an unnamed homeless man who lives in a cardboard box under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and who falls for one of the dogs. He will do anything for sick little Gracie! Puppy love transforms the bum into a responsible citizen. He finds a job, gets an apartment, and places the rest of Gracie's brothers and sisters with eager owners in the neighborhood. Sadly, this conclusion is not entirely convincing.

The early etchings in *Gowanus Dogs* introduce a vigorous new talent to children's books, but the artist compromises his considerable gift with a pat solution to a serious problem. If only real life would work out as conveniently as the fanciful resolution in *Gowanus Dogs*!

—Michael Patrick Hearn

## A 1999 ALA Notable Children's Book

# \* Ouch! \*



*A Tale from Grimm Retold by  
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"Babbitt's rollicking retelling . . . [and] Marcellino's full-bodied palette make this brilliantly designed book a visually piquant feast as well as a verbally fleet feat. Read it to everyone you can find. Show the pictures. Such artistry is a little bit of heaven on earth." —Starred review / *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

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### **Little Cliff and the Porch People**

By Clifton L. Taulbert  
Illustrated by E. B. Lewis

DIAL

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.99

ISBN 0-8037-2174-9

When Mama Pearl sends Little Cliff to buy a pound of freshly churned butter, she tells him not to stop along the way. But didn't Poppa Joe say he should "Always speak up loudly to the grown folk"? The road is lined with grown folk who call out to Little Cliff and want to pass the time of day. How can he speak up and hurry too? How can he be neighborly and still be home in time for Mama Pearl to add the butter to her dish?

Clifton Taulbert uses this dilemma as a hook to send a child along a road, a road that represents what neighbor-

hoods should be—places of the kindest obligation. Little Cliff can't pass a single house without receiving something special from a neighbor, some ingredient to make Mama Pearl's potatoes taste the way they should. Nonetheless, it isn't nutmeg from the tree or pure vanilla from New Orleans that's important, but his wish to do what's right—and the eagerness of neighborly adults to tell him how.

E. B. Lewis has a gift for painting human shapes and faces—every person in his watercolor portraits is distinctive. He also has a tender sense of



*Illustration by E. B. Lewis, from Little Cliff and the Porch People*

place: you almost feel the heat and hear the insects in his pictures of the verdant Mississippi Delta road. Though a jacket note identifies the setting as the segregated South of the 1950s—when Taulbert was a child—the pictures don't provide consistent clues as to the date. Little Cliff looks like a modern kid in his big shirt.

Despite this, Little Cliff is a credible boy who hopes the prayer before the meal will not be long. His Mama Pearl has hands that look as though they really cook. And the language is as natural as the 'tatoes.

—*Mary Lou Burket*

### **My Nine Lives, by Clio**

By Marjorie Priceman

ATHENEUM

48 pages, All ages, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-81135-7

Depending on the cats one has personally known, they are either the most sublime and enigmatic creatures alive, or annoying bundles of allergens that have nothing to offer society except hair on one's favorite chair. Marjorie Priceman's new picture book adopts the former point of view.

Clio the cat has kept a journal of all her lives thus far, and has managed to bring it with her on each of her life-journeys. This lively and whimsical document provides the answers to some of history's most perplexing mysteries.

We first meet Clio in 3000 B.C. in Mesopotamia where, apparently, she was instrumental in naming some of the constellations. Next, she shows up in ancient China and helps to discover the sundial. After a brief stint in Rome in 600 B.C., when she invents the alphabet, it's off to a Viking ship in 1000 A.D. The ship changes course (for reasons explained by Clio) and ends up not in Greenland, but in America. Some of Clio's other accomplishments include inventing the fork, making the Mona Lisa smile, and creating the first parachute.

These tales are told with the forthrightness and humor that one would expect from an intelligent feline. Priceman cleverly employs styles of illustration that fit the time period: for example, the pictures in the sequence featuring Leonardo da Vinci look as though they came from da Vinci's own journals. In the Viking section several words and phrases are set down in runes, which are fun to decipher.

In her most recent life, Clio thinks she's landed in paradise—in fact, she's with a lovely woman in Wisconsin. Who knows what cat-assisted contributions to civilization lie ahead? The invention of Post-it notes?

—*Betsy Thomas*

### **When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry...**

By Molly Bang

BLUE SKY/SCHOLASTIC

36 pages, Ages 3–7, \$15.95

ISBN 0-590-18979-4

The first few two-page spreads in Molly Bang's new picture book speedily accomplish the exposition. Sophie is angry because it is her sister's turn to play with Gorilla, and the fall she takes in the ensuing tussle adds insult to injury. Bang's choice of toys for these girls is refreshing: they have a big, rugged dump truck to play with, and Gorilla is more gangly than cute (so, too, the family cat). When Sophie "roars a red, red roar," easel, blocks, and inline skates go flying.

Two aspects of the author-artist's craft give this book spark. The first is obvious from the start: color! Bang makes unconventional use of bright colors to outline figures and objects. The angry reds, yellows, purples, and oranges of the opening pages give way to rich greens, browns, and blues as Sophie makes her way out into the trees and is soothed by the beauty of nature and an ocean view. When she returns home, the vivid colors there seem welcoming.

The second highlight is a text rich in gentle sound-effects. Bang's words—only about 160 of them—resonate with deftly handled alliteration, assonance, and consonance. The combination of "screams," "smash," and "smithereens" comes early, describing Sophie's commotion. Other examples are more subtle. Consider the simple rhythm and

pleasing sounds of the text when Sophie begins to calm herself: “Now she sees the rocks, the trees and ferns. She hears a bird.” When Sophie climbs the old beech tree, “She feels the breeze blow her hair.”

Apart from the typeset text, words are worked directly into the illustrations: bits of dialogue, onomatopoeia, and the sentiment “Everything’s back together again.” Unfortunately, these efforts are less than successful, particularly the last, which crowds an otherwise perfect picture of Sophie’s family completing a jigsaw puzzle.

The jacket-flap copy suggests that this book will get people talking about things they do when they get angry. I’d like to give Sophie’s method a try, but the climb up the big tree on my block would offer me a view of a clogged interstate freeway and a sprawling paper-recycling plant. Maybe time with this lovely picture book would do more good. Molly Bang takes us to the wonderful, restful place where Sophie goes, and when “the wide world comforts her,” it could comfort us, too.

—Susan Marie Swanson

## Fiction

### Among the Hidden

By Margaret Peterson Haddix

SIMON & SCHUSTER

153 pages, Ages 8–12, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-81700-2

Although *Among the Hidden* envisions a possible world in which a totalitarian regime’s population law makes criminals out of families with more than two children, much of what it depicts is uncomfortably close to reality. There is a rich upper class, the Barons, who live in fancy subdivisions and

bribe officials into giving them special treatment. Family farms survive, but just barely. Internet chat rooms provide the only means of communication for certain people. And an individual would have to be shut away somewhere, completely cut off from society, in order to believe everything the government says.

Such an individual is Luke, an illegal third child born into a farming family. Up until he is twelve years old, his parents allow him outdoors, provided he obeys their command to hide whenever someone other than his mom, dad, or two brothers comes around. Then the Government decides to bulldoze the woods behind their isolated farm and build luxury houses, reducing Luke’s living space to his windowless attic bedroom, the only place his parents feel he can stay with little risk of being spotted. His sole remaining connection to the outside world is a heating vent, which ultimately becomes a doorway to an entirely different perspective on his situation. What he sees through this thin slat in the ceiling brings him into contact with another third child, Jen, a Baron’s daughter and underground activist who won’t rest until all “shadow children,” as she calls them, are free.

Like Haddix’s previous novel *Running Out of Time*, *Among the Hidden* packages a thought-provoking premise in a rapid-fire adventure story. Readers can be carried along by the sheer adrenaline of it all (e.g., Will Luke get caught by the Population Police for repeatedly sneaking over to Jen’s house? Will Jen survive the shadow-child rally she organizes?) and may also find themselves involved in a fairly sophisticated look at propaganda and its effects. Before meeting Jen, Luke accepts the standard perception of the Government as an all-knowing, all-powerful entity. After meeting Jen, he doesn’t know what to believe. Is it

true he could have been using his family’s computer and TV all these years without fear that the Government was watching him through the screens? “They’ve spent so much money trying to convince people they can monitor all the TVs and computers, you know they couldn’t have afforded to actually do it,” Jen explains. She gives Luke articles to read by Government protesters who label the Population Law evil, unnecessary, and “Our Country’s Biggest Mistake.” But ultimately Haddix shows that whatever the truth may be, it is more convoluted than either side will admit. For Luke, it is enough to realize that illegal doesn’t always equal wrong—though the authorities have outlawed him, he still has the right to exist.

—Christine Heppermann

### Bare Hands

By Bart Moeyaert

Translated by David Colmer

FRONT STREET

111 pages, Age 10 and up, \$14.95

ISBN 1-886910-32-4

On New Year’s Eve, Ward and his best friend Bernie trespass on the property of Betjeman, a brute with a plastic hand. Ward resents the farmer for running after his mother: he fears that Betjeman will eventually move in with his family. The two already had an ugly confrontation at Christmas. When the lonely man raised a glass “to the four of us,” Ward toppled the entire holiday meal into Betjeman’s lap, “plates, meat, gravy, and all.” Betjeman will never be his father, Ward vows. When Ward accidentally kills the man’s duck, Betjeman kills Ward’s dog, Elmer. An eye for an eye is the law in this bleak land. So, Bernie goads Ward on to take his revenge: to punish Betjeman with his bare hands.

Although the author is a Belgian who writes in Flemish rather than French,

this book was the 1998 winner of the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis, the German Newbery Medal. The first edition was published in the Netherlands, and is the source of this translation. *Bare Hands* is indeed a powerful story, worthy of the accolades it has received abroad. It is a taut, tense novella told in the unadorned and dignified prose of a folktale. There are no descriptions of characters or place, even colors are introduced sparingly. The locale of the story is never named. The author depends on active verbs that move the story relentlessly forward. Moeyaert's short, punchy sentences are almost hypnotic. His story bristles with raw emotions. Ward's fear and hatred of Betjeman is almost unbearable, as is his pain: he carries his dog's corpse around with him. "I hugged Elmer tighter. I wanted him to wake up like he had this morning, when my mother threw open the window and said it was the last day of the year... I should have spent more time looking at Elmer this morning. The way he stretched, burying his paws in my pillow... I should have spent more time looking at Elmer." *Bare Hands* is not an easy read, but it is a rewarding one.

—Michael Patrick Hearn

**Soldier's Heart:  
A Novel of the Civil War**

By Gary Paulsen  
DELACORTE

107 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-32498-7

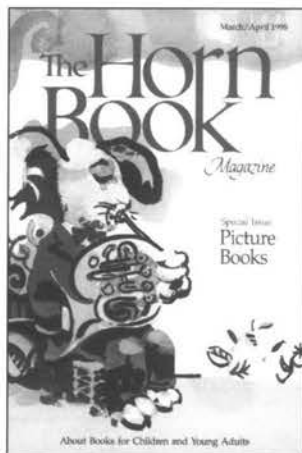
Charley Goddard is just a boy—fifteen—when he hears “the drums and songs and slogans” and makes the trek from his home in Winona, Minnesota, to nearby Fort Snelling to join up with the First Minnesota Volunteers in the Civil War. It seems like a great adventure: “The only shooting war to come in a man's life, and if a man didn't step right along he'd miss the whole thing.”

Charley is not drawn by principles, is less concerned with the issue of slavery than with “teaching Johnny Reb a lesson.” The war is, for him, a rite of passage to manhood, a ticket out of the slow-moving rural world of his upbringing. We follow him, wide-eyed

and excited, on the train ride to Chicago, through Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland (where he first sees a slave woman, referred to in a somewhat jarringly contemporary way as a “woman of color”), on to Virginia and straight into the Battle of Bull Run.

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Excitement evaporates as the sudden, horrifying reality of war surrounds Charley and lifts off the page in Gary Paulsen's clean, hard prose. Charley sees his compatriots blown apart before his eyes. Bodies are everywhere. At night, after this first battle,

the soldiers walk among the dead, lanterns in hand, looking for those they recognize. Charley is filling his canteen from a stream in the morning; as the light increases, he notices that the water is tinged with pink, and then he sees bodies in the water upstream.

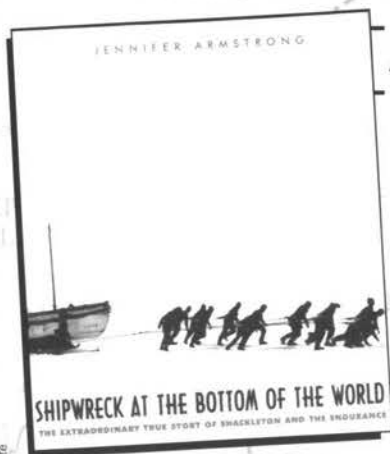
In Charley's second battle, a new enlistee about his age annoys him with his cocky banter; Charley already knows better. When the boy is fatally wounded in the stomach, he asks Charley to help him position his gun so that he can bring on the end more swiftly. As Charley stands over him, they are just two young men: one with his life draining out of him, the other certain that death lies just ahead. When winter comes, near Washington, D.C., the wind is so brutally cold that Charley and another soldier have to make a wall out of corpses to shield themselves. At Gettysburg, the First Minnesota Volunteers are well positioned; it is their rain of bullets that massacres the advancing Rebel troops.

If the war is hard to read about, its end does not bring relief. Charley returns home deeply changed, unable to live among other people. His mental health—in fact, his life—hangs by a thread.

Paulsen doesn't address the issues that bring men to war; he is interested in describing what war *is*. In our age of missiles, which can make war seem more remote and its effects less palpable, a novel like *Soldier's Heart* may be an important one for young adults to read—and to remember.

—Martha Davis Beck

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**The Spring Tone**

By Kazumi Yumoto

Translated by Cathy Hirano

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

176 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-37153-9

At the opening of *The Spring Tone*, Tomomi Kiriki dreams she is a huge, roaring monster—in her sleep she expresses a rage that she cannot otherwise voice. Tomomi's waking life has been derailed: her beloved grandmother has died; her parents' marriage is falling apart; she's failed the tests

that would have gotten her into the best junior high school; her body is changing, and her days seem pained and awkward. Tomomi's approaching adolescence meets family crisis head-on in this story.

Author Kazumi Yumoto (*The Friends*) hones in on the time in this young girl's life when emotions are recalibrated, when a new awareness of the world, and oneself, opens its sleepy, tentative eye. Change is seeping into Tomomi's world; she alternates between working her way through it and sinking under the new-felt weight of it, shifting between a waking state of throbbing headaches and hair-trigger impatience and the delirium of sleep.

The novel takes place during the two weeks of spring break, and the plot itself ambles along listlessly, like a sullen teen at a church social—but this is not a bad thing. The book's meandering style helps us to understand the crush of boredom Tomomi feels with this surplus of time in her unhappy household; as the days unfold we encounter characters and situations that might have been cropped from a strictly plot-driven novel.

Tomomi's relationship with her little brother Tetsu is pivotal to the story. He's the kind of intense and unrelenting kid who refuses to eat anything but noodles or custard, who obsesses over questions like "What is the scariest thing in the world?" and feeds his obsession with copious research on man-eating sharks and goblin cats. Over spring break, he and Tomomi are near-constant companions. She must tend to him, and she finds herself going along on his freakish quests to find dead cats to leave in their cranky neighbor's pristine yard. One such journey brings them to an illegal dumping ground where abandoned cats congregate, where they meet the old, square-faced woman who carts buckets of cabbage and fish slush to

the starving cats in an attempt to help them survive. Turning away from the strife in their own family, Tomomi and Tetsu look to the old woman for a sense of purpose.

The old woman, Tomomi and Tetsu's humble grandfather, their overworked parents, their cranky and heartless neighbor, memories of grandmother, and the endless mangy cats all whirl into the vortex of Tomomi's experience. Through it all she comes to understand something about the nature of her rage. *The Spring Tone* is an oddly affecting story, full of moments that catch and hold the imagination, moments that express the difficult grappling that is part of growing up.

—Christine Alfano

**A Walk in My World:  
International Short Stories  
about Youth**

Edited by Anne Mazer

PERSEA

223 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.95

ISBN 0-89255-237-9

Each of the sixteen stories in this compelling collection has a young person at its center, most often a child younger than twelve years old, sometimes an adolescent. They are, each one of them, memorable characters: Ravi, desperate to win a game of hide-and-seek; Pedro, challenged by a fascist government's pressures on his family life; an unnamed village boy, struggling to survive at school in town, who receives a gift: "until then I'd only seen pictures of apples." These three characters live in India, Chile, and Russia, and, when they were young, so did the authors who created them (Anita Desai, Antonio Skármeta, and Valentin Rasputin).

Editor Anne Mazer notes in her introduction that the book is intended to be "a collection of classic stories." Some of the stories collected in *A Walk*

*in My World* were written by authors who have received global acclaim—including Italo Calvino (Italy) and Naguib Mahfouz (Egypt)—others by authors celebrated in their own countries but less familiar to American readers, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Indonesia) and Xiao Hong (China).

Not only does this collection sweep around the globe, it compasses the human heart. The stories treat themes of enduring interest to youth: connections and disputes with parents, separation and loss, sexuality, political and class conflict, ways of learning. They are stories about growing up.

Deeply sympathetic to the child's point of view, the narrators of *A Walk in My World* nevertheless speak with the perspective of years. One older storyteller recounts how his grandfather, at the age of twelve, discovered that a powerful merchant family was cheating workers (this in a story by Heinrich Böll, of Germany). Another unnamed narrator describes events from her past, when she was a girl in England, visiting her father and stepmother: "I then saw—but no, I did not really understand this at the time; it is something I understand now that I am older..." (V.S. Pritchett, England). A third character's life changes when she is hurt in a clumsy attempt to help her mother, who favors her siblings. At this story's conclusion, an adult perspective brings resolution. While Yaaba lies unconscious, the village women chide her mother: "And so you think every child will be good?" (Ana Ata Aidoo, Ghana).

The point of view in these stories, originally written for adults, differs from that in much children's and young adult fiction, which often adopt the perspective of a young person. This difference poses appropriate challenges to teenage readers, offering them a taste of the many kinds of fiction that exist in world literature.

—Susan Marie Swanson

## Nonfiction

### Bridges Are to Cross

By Philemon Sturges

Illustrated by Giles Laroche

PUTNAM

32 pages, All ages, \$15.99

ISBN 0-399-23174-9

The best way to evoke appreciation for the beauty and variety of bridges around the world is simply to offer some choice examples. This is what architect Philemon Sturges has done in a simple text that links cut-paper illustrations by Giles Laroche.

It's striking that a book depicting artificial structures made of concrete, stone, and steel should feel so warm. This is because Laroche presents each bridge within its larger setting, surrounded by settlements, mountains, and clouds, and crossed by hikers, trucks, and trains. Beneath the Golden Gate Bridge, sailboats play, and London Bridge is all but dancing in its bright blue paint. These may be motionless constructions, but surprising depth, controlled detail, and glowing color animate them all.

Each bridge represents a problem solved—a canyon crossed (Peru), a garden reached (Japan), and even a town supplied with water (an aqueduct in Spain). One bridge, as Sturges says, is “very old and very new” because it is

constantly being repaired. Another is covered, to keep the bridge—not the people crossing it—protected from the weather. Whatever problems bridges solve, they are a wonder. And this is a book of wonders.

—Mary Lou Burket

### A Caldecott Celebration: Six Artists and Their Paths to the Caldecott Medal

By Leonard S. Marcus

WALKER

49 pages, Age 7 and up, \$18.95

ISBN 0-8027-8656-1

To commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Caldecott Medal, Leonard S. Marcus has written a skinny study of a fat subject. The book offers profiles of six artists, one for each decade of the medal's existence. It does not pretend to be a history of the award. But with so many to choose from, why these particular books and illustrators? Readers have good reason to quibble that every artist represented in the book, except Marcia Brown, is male; all six are white. Women have dominated the award from the beginning, and the Caldecott Medal can be proud of its multicultural heritage.

By choosing only living artists, Marcus had the good fortune to speak with each of the individuals profiled. Only the interview with Robert McCloskey was conducted earlier, for an April

1992 *Parenting* article, and the artist at seventy-eight apparently had little to say about *Make Way for Ducklings* (1941). Marcus wisely bolsters these brief recollections with wry commentary from Marc Simont, another Caldecott Medal-winner and McCloskey's roommate when *Make Way for Ducklings* was a work-in-progress. The discussion of Marcia Brown and *Cinderella* (1954) is a beautifully succinct little essay about the book's evolution. The artist's fierce intelligence comes through loud and clear. The chapters on Maurice Sendak, William Steig, Chris Van Allsburg, and David Wiesner cover ground that will be familiar to those who have read other interviews or the artists' Caldecott Medal acceptance speeches.

As an exploration of the artist and the book, *A Caldecott Celebration* does not compare with Pat Cummings's *Talking with Artists* (1992). Marcus does not consider the artistic merit of the picture books discussed. The question of influence is never addressed, the intentions of the artists never defined. The author provides the bare bones, but more connective tissue is needed. He never explains exactly who Randolph Caldecott was or how the American Library Association selects the winner. The text is somewhat redeemed by the generous use of color illustrations, both preliminary and finished art, as well as by vintage photographs of the artists.

—Michael Patrick Hearn

### Crossing the Delaware: A History in Many Voices

By Louise Peacock

Illustrated by Walter Lyon Krudop

ATHENEUM

40 pages, Ages 8–12, \$17.00

ISBN 0-689-80994-8

“We looked upon the contest as near its close, and considered ourselves a vanquished people,” one American



Illustration by Giles Laroche, from *Bridges Are to Cross*

recalled. By the winter of 1776, American troops had failed to win a single victory in their war against the British. It seemed as if the war—the very cause—was all but lost.

*Crossing the Delaware* recounts this crucial juncture when a cold and suffering army crossed the Delaware by night and took the British by surprise. The story is told from alternating viewpoints—from the author's, as she roams the site where Washington's army was camped; from that of a fictional soldier writing to his wife; and from observers and participants, including Thomas Paine and Hessian commander Johann Rall.

"Could I march barefoot in the snow?" the author wonders. "Could I cross an ice-filled river in the dark?" Conditions were forbidding, but Washington believed that Hessian soldiers who were fighting for the British would lower their guard on Christmas Day, and so they did. The Hessians were so ill-prepared to fight that they retreated through the town and did not kill a single man.

Considering its many separate points of view, *Crossing the Delaware* gives a remarkably flowing picture of events. Augmenting the text are Walter Krudop's icy blue paintings of freezing soldiers awaiting orders, hauling boats, and tramping through the falling snow. They suggest what heroism is—a stoic patience.

*Crossing the Delaware* joins the list of excellent recent books about America's fight for independence. (Among them are *The Hatmaker's Sign* and *Samuel Adams*, both reviewed in previous issues of the *Riverbank Review*.) Louise Peacock's narrowly focused book should be accessible to readers who are old enough to imagine the past but young enough to like a lot of pictures. Although she says a bit too

often that the crossing was "a desperate thing to do," Peacock makes a stirring case for why the War for Independence was not lost. Strategy saved the day, and so did ordinary men.

—Mary Lou Burket

**In Search of the Spirit:  
The Living National  
Treasures of Japan**

By Sheila Hamanaka  
and Ayano Ohmi

WILLIAM MORROW

48 pages, Age 7 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-688-14607-4

Japanese culture is a mixture of the very old and the very new. While it is rare to spot a geisha, they are around—likely carrying cellular phones. Japanese people ride the fastest trains in the world, and are comfortable sitting on their knees in the seats. Tokyo is a bustling, high-tech city, but the majority of Japan is made up of small fishing

that their ancient crafts and performing arts would be lost forever. In the 1950s, the Japanese government decided to honor those elders who had devoted their lives to the perpetuation of traditional arts by bestowing on them the status of Living National Treasure. With this honor, recipients are given grants that allow them to continue to practice their art and to train apprentices. This fascinating book describes the lives and art forms of six such Living National Treasures.

We meet a bamboo weaver, a potter, a Noh actor, a Bunraku puppet master, a sword maker, and a kimono dyer. These artists have several things in common: lifelong training, a devotion to hard work, and a deep passion for and dedication to their art. Some came to their art against their family's wishes; others were forced to give up their heart's desire to take over the family business.

*In Search of the Spirit* offers an intriguing peek into Japanese culture. One



*"You should be aware of  
the seeds of feeling in your  
heart and take care of them.  
And try to express the feeling  
sincerely and honestly."*

—Bamboo weaver  
Iizuka Shokansai

*Photograph from In Search of  
the Spirit: The Living National  
Treasures of Japan*

villages. While embracing the future, the Japanese have managed to preserve many of their own traditions, also to borrow customs and crafts from the ancient civilizations of China, Korea, and India, and to keep these traditions alive and thriving.

After the devastation of World War II, the Japanese people began to worry

comes away with a great respect for each artist's level of commitment, and an appreciation of the beautiful works they create. Photographs show examples of the finished crafts and give glimpses of each artist at work. Clear line drawings illustrate either a step-by-step process for making a finished piece, or an elaboration of the performing art represented.

They demonstrate the difficulty as well as the patience, persistence, and artistry that are needed to complete these traditional works.

—*Betsy Thomas*

### **My Name Is Georgia**

By Jeanette Winter

SILVER WHISTLE/HARCOURT BRACE

48 pages, Ages 6–10, \$16.00

ISBN 0-15-201649-X

In vivid paintings accompanied by spare, poetic text, Jeanette Winter has created a sensitive portrait of an important American artist. The illustrations, done in Winter's own distinctive style, also express Georgia O'Keeffe's sensibility—no small accomplishment! Some of O'Keeffe's actual paintings—her impressive flowers (here, a camellia and a jack-in-the-pulpit), a white skull against the blue sky, and a series of studies of her beloved Pedernal mountain in New Mexico—are shown as works-in-progress.

Winter's text is written in the first person. Fragments of O'Keeffe's own writing are interspersed throughout, set in italics. This device may confuse some readers—a note regarding the two varieties of text is offered in small print on the top of the acknowledgments page. Once understood, the scheme has a powerful effect. O'Keeffe's simple words resonate strongly: "I've always known what I wanted... I did things other people don't do." Winter shows her as a girl, standing barefoot and solidly apart from her stockinged sisters. In another image, as her sisters stand in a line braiding each other's hair, Georgia runs across the grass, her loose black hair flying like the birds that sail above her.

From a young age, Georgia O'Keeffe felt herself to be different from other people, but was comfortable being different. Born in Wisconsin, she went to art school in Chicago and in New York City, painted still lifes and studied the human figure, but then packed her bag (and easel) and headed out West. "I have things in my head that are not like what anyone has taught me," she said. Her need for an artistic community led her back to New York (where she met and married the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, whose figure is recognizable in one of Winter's paintings), but eventually she returned to the wide-open space she loved. She lived in New Mexico, painting the beauty she found in the desert landscape, until her death at the age of ninety-eight.



*Illustration by Jeanette Winter, from My Name Is Georgia*

Winter energizes her compositions by letting birds, stars, clouds, or the edges of flowers extend beyond the bold, square boundaries of her paintings. Many of the illustrations include details that add interest—a swarm of bees that chases after O'Keeffe's Model A as she returns home from an after-

noon of painting in the desert; the black birds that follow Georgia through her days, symbolically replaced by white birds in the book's final pages.

—*Martha Davis Beck*

### **Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange**

By Elizabeth Partridge

VIKING

122 pages, Age 10 and up, \$19.99

ISBN 0-670-87888-X

Dorothea Lange has been the subject of several excellent biographies for children, including *Dorothea Lange*, by Robyn Montana Turner, and Milton Meltzer's *Dorothea Lange: Life Through the Camera*. A natural subject for a children's book, Lange had a patient, comprehending eye and brought attention to the poor and dispossessed by taking photographs that showed their true condition. Today, her photographs continue to define the Great Depression. At least one of them—"Migrant Mother"—is a cultural icon.

Elizabeth Partridge's book, although compassionate toward Lange, suggests what a challenging subject Lange really was. Born at a time when people expected women to care for families, Lange repeatedly boarded her children so that she could work, first in a studio and later on the road, for weeks at a time. "The boys hated moving from place to place," Partridge writes. "They never knew when they would be boarded out again, or where they would go." Lange's stepchildren from two earlier marriages suffered as well.

It's difficult to reconcile this woman with the one who took such intimate pictures of children throughout her life. The "vulnerability" of children "must have touched the tender, unprotected

places" inside Lange—Partridge writes—the places remaining from her own painful childhood. Born in 1895, Lange was seven when polio struck, causing her to limp for the rest of her life. When she was twelve her father abandoned her, her mother, and her brother.

As a child, Lange always enjoyed "looking at pictures," and though she had never owned a camera, by the time she finished high school she knew that she wanted to be a photographer. Her mother disagreed, and eventually Lange fled New York for San Francisco, where she joined the Bohemian crowd. Later she wrote, "They were people who lived according to their own standards, and did what they wanted to do in the way they wanted to do it."

Lange's story is one of rugged inner faith, relentless work, and a direct response to history as it happened all around her. Some of the most interesting and least familiar photographs in *Restless Spirit* are ones Lange took of workers in the San Francisco shipyards during wartime and of the Japanese Americans she followed to internment.

As the daughter of Lange's assistant, Ron Partridge, and a lifelong family friend, Partridge has written a biography that is kind as well as fair. It's a handsome book, as well, and one that shows young readers the breadth of Lange's concerns.

—Mary Lou Burket

**Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the *Endurance***

By Jennifer Armstrong

CROWN

134 pages, Age 10 and up, \$18.00

ISBN 0-517-80013-6

At the beginning of *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World*, Jennifer Armstrong calls the Antarctic "the most hostile place on earth." At the end, this seems like an understatement. The unfath-



Dorothea Lange, photographed by Ron Partridge, from *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange*

omable obstacles Sir Ernest Shackleton and his twenty-seven crewmen faced during their failed 1914 attempt to cross Antarctica are so vividly recalled in the pages of Armstrong's book that virtually the only way to bear reading about them is to keep one amazing fact in mind: all twenty-eight men survived.

In the expedition's early days, the crew members of the aptly named *Endurance* appear fun-loving and relaxed, as if their journey were one long fraternity party. Photos taken by the ship's photographer, Frank Hurley, show them holding an impromptu soccer game on an ice floe and raising glasses of stout below deck. Armstrong reports their favorite toast to have been "To our sweethearts and wives—may they never meet!" But as the months wore on and their ship remained stuck fast in ice 100 miles from Antarctica, this festive mood became harder and harder to maintain. By thoroughly describing each increasingly desperate stage of the expedition, Armstrong lends an

immediacy to the physical and mental rigors the men experienced. Their anxiety is palpable as the *Endurance* groans and trembles against the pressure of the ice. When the crew abandons ship to search for open water, dragging several tons of gear behind them, readers can practically feel the killer whales brushing underneath the floe on which the men have pitched their tents.

Smoothly incorporated within the story's framework are mini-lessons on navigation, meteorology, natural history, and geology. Fascinating in itself, this background information accentuates just how miraculous it was that any of the men, let alone all of them, made it home alive. Once they

launched their lifeboats into the tumultuous open sea, they relied on the navigational skills of one person, ship's captain Frank Worsley, to guide them to a tiny uninhabited island, the only land within several hundred miles. It is incredible to realize that Worsley got them there using sodden nautical charts, some basic instruments, and the heavens, which he couldn't always see due to "fog, cloud cover, blizzard conditions, rain, and foul weather of every description."

Navigation on the rescue mission Shackleton and five crewmen undertook from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island, eight hundred miles away, was even more harrowing. As Armstrong tells it, Worsley's "sun sights were the crudest of guesses, and to look up positions in the tables he had to peel apart the wet pages one by one." Details such as these make *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* a book to finish in one breathless sitting, then dream about all night long.

—Christine Heppermann

## Reviewers in This Issue

**Christine Alfano** lives in Minneapolis with her family. A former bookseller, she has written about children's books for the *Hungry Mind Review* and other publications.

**Martha Davis Beck** is the editor of the *Riverbank Review*. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and two sons.

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

**Michael Patrick Hearn's** most recent book is *Myth, Magic and Mystery: One Hundred Years of Children's Book Illustration* (Roberts Rinehart, 1996).

**Christine Heppermann** is a freelance writer and reviewer who lives in Minneapolis with her husband and daughter. A former bookseller, she writes a regular column for the *Horn Book Magazine*.

**Tunie Munson-Benson** is a writer and language-arts consultant who created *The Book Nook Program*, a celebration of literature in the schools.

**Jessica Roeder's** writing has appeared in the *Pushcart Prize*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*. She lives with her husband and two rabbits in a very small apartment.

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

**Betsy Thomas** is a writer living in Minneapolis. A former children's bookseller, she is the author of the picture book, *Green Beans* (Lerner Publications).

## Poetry

### Cool Melons—Turn to Frogs! The Life and Poems of Issa

Story and haiku translations by  
Matthew Gollub

Illustrated by Kazuko G. Stone  
Calligraphy by Keiko Smith

LEE & LOW

40 pages, Age 4 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 1-880000-71-7

Issa's life story has the makings of a great folktale: the half-orphaned and ill-used stepchild is sent away from home, only to transform himself into the Lay Priest of the Temple of Poetry. But Issa's story did not end neatly with his assumption of a new name. In the tradition of haiku poets, he wandered Japan writing and teaching. He returned home to bury his father. His conflict with his stepmother wore on. He married more than once. His children died, many of them in infancy. Through it all, he wrote poems. With time, his poems and his hard luck made him a folk hero.

*Cool Melons* introduces Issa by scattering thirty of his poems throughout a streamlined biography. Each of the book's colored-pencil-and-watercolor illustrations represents one haiku, which is written in Japanese calligraphy down the side of the page. A note at the end of the book compares a haiku to a telegraph (though these days haiku are more familiar than telegraphs); some of the pictures fill in details that the telegraph or haiku would leave out. The illustration accompanying the haiku "New Year's— / even the Buddha wears / a bright red hood for luck" includes three red-hooded statues (one of which holds a pinwheel), a number of hanging toys, three dishes of food, and a stick of incense burning upright in a pot.

Such illustrations depict aspects of

Japanese life as Issa experienced it, but they also drown out haiku that began as stark observations. The simpler illustrations—the butterfly perched on a cracked bowl before a sleeping dog, the accurately detailed dragonfly, the silhouette of a wild goose flying high above a winter scene—represent without eclipsing the words.

Combining a prose story with haiku is not unusual. Issa himself, like poets before him, wrote a haiku-and-prose account of his travels. The difficulty comes in selecting thirty from a life-work that numbered over 20,000 poems—and then using those poems to represent both the spirit of haiku and the course of a man's life. Traditional haiku make fresh, unpretentious observations of fleeting but commonplace sights. They are not often autobiographical or even particularly personal. When Gollub puts undue stress on the connection between biographical events and poems, the poems suffer. Haiku require complete and fresh—if momentary—attention; emphasis on biography deflects that attention. At their best, Gollub's translations convey the poems' instantaneous, new quality. At their worst, they are quaint or cute. But Issa's startling images will remain with readers, who'll find in the library, if not always in print, many more examples of his frog-, flea-, worm-, and sparrow-filled poems.

—Jessica Roeder

### What Have You Lost?

Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye  
Photographs by Michael Nye

GREENWILLOW

224 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.00

ISBN 0-688-16184-7

One day, when all of the poems ever published are indexed and cross-referenced on a single computer database,

we will be able to determine with a few keystrokes what percentage of poems concerns loss. For now, we can only guess that the number is considerable. Which of Shakespeare's sonnets were not written against loss? How many of Emily Dickinson's poems aren't tinged by losing? Naomi Nye's latest anthology takes a fresh look at this perennial theme.

Nye does not reprint old favorites or the overanthologized. All of the poets represented here are contemporary. Most write in free verse. Some have not published before. Even the luminaries, such as Lucille Clifton, are less celebrated than they deserve to be. And Nye includes as a matter of course translations of poems from Japan, Nicaragua, Mexico, Chile, and Italy.

In the hands of a different anthologist, this would be a thinly disguised self-help tract for the treatment of adolescent angst. We'd have poems on lost boyfriends and girlfriends, lost football games, *gained* weight, perhaps lost grandparents. Nye takes a different tack. Most of the poems do not concern adolescence. Nye trusts her readers to care about points of view that are not their own. A father loses his son to kindergarten; a child frees a rescued wren; an old poet wins fame long after losing his desire for it. The book becomes an exercise in expanding compassion. Losses extend beyond the personal or individual—whole towns, lands, languages, and cultures are lost—and responses include bewilderment, grief, anger, bemusement, and joy.

The photographs, black-and-white portraits taken before a generic school-photo backdrop, come to resonate with the poems. The people in the photos take on the role of witnesses. Gestures that at first glance seem forced or hermetic become sympathetic, if not quite interpretable. They are expressions of loss and assertions of survival.

It would be a lonelier project to read all these poems without the very real presences in the photographs.

Readers will want to spend time with this anthology, stopping to think, to reread—and to write. The quiet "conversations" that emerge from groups of poems about similar losses

are well worth joining. From the introduction (which ends, "Maybe you are writing one now") to the expansive contributors' notes (which give a sense of where these poems came from), *What Have You Lost?* encourages readers to pick up a pen themselves.

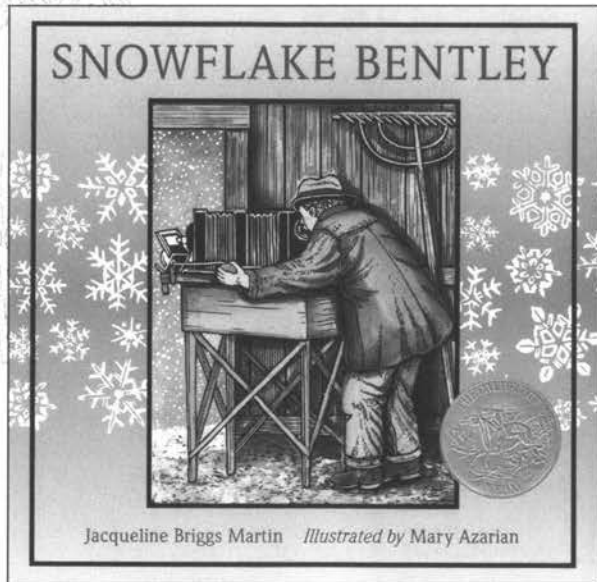
—Jessica Roeder

**1999 CALDECOTT MEDAL WINNER**

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## SNOWFLAKE BENTLEY

written by JACQUELINE BRIGGS MARTIN  
illustrated by MARY AZARIAN



Ages 4-8 • 32 pages • \$16.00 • ISBN 0-395-86162-4

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"This is picture-book biography at its very best: written like a prose poem and beautifully illustrated."  
—*New York Times Book Review*

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## one for the shelf

Originally published in 1950, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the first of *The Chronicles of Narnia* to come from C. S. Lewis's pen. By 1956 there were seven novels, which can be read in the order that Lewis wrote them or in the sequence he later preferred (and which the current publisher has adopted), arranged according to time in Narnia. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, four ordinary children reach the realm of Narnia by groping through a wardrobe full of old coats. This novel, which invites readers to gradually discover the mysteries of Narnia along with Lucy, Edmund, Susan, and Peter, makes a fine place for readers to enter.

Why a Deluxe Edition? Well, why homemade cocoa in a ceramic cup instead of powdered mix in styrofoam, or a raspberry plucked from the bush instead of one chipped out of the freezer? This hardcover volume is generously sized, the paper is thick and cream-colored, and the original black-and-white artwork appears along with new color illustrations. Of course, the paperbacks have their place. This is, after all, a series of seven books, to be taken on car rides and read by people eating sandwiches. But in a marketplace where publishers are busy spinning gold into straw—producing novelties and simplified excerpts from the *Little House* books, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and others, including *Narnia*—this reissue of a classic children's novel with new color plates is something special.

Artist Pauline Baynes was in her twenties when she began illustrating the series. Revisiting it some forty years later, she achieves remarkable results. She uses color to capture the comforts of Tumnus the faun's cave and the Beavers' snug lodge, and she understands how to make banners and flags flap in the wind. She beautifully renders the coming of spring to the woods where the White Witch's long winter spell is losing its grip: gauzy green

### **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**

*Deluxe Edition*

By C. S. Lewis

Illustrated by Pauline Baynes

HARPERCOLLINS 1997 / hardcover: \$24.95

175 PAGES, ALL AGES

appears in the trees and crocuses poke through the snow. When Lucy and Susan appear astride the great lion in midleap, the countryside of Narnia is laid out below them in springtime splendor.

In a book of poems entitled *Happiness* (Coffee House Press, 1995), Deborah Keenan has written about a household transformed by a reading of the closing chapters of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. While the TV laughs downstairs, a mother reads quietly to a boy and his college-age brother. She reads the passage toward the end of the novel where Aslan, the beautiful and fearsome lion, dies. Although it is late, she reads on. Her nephew joins the little group in the bedroom

...as the story gathers toward its inevitable, disguised Christian joy. A boy, two young men, a reader—a novel ends, a lion rises up, the comfort in the room is excruciating,

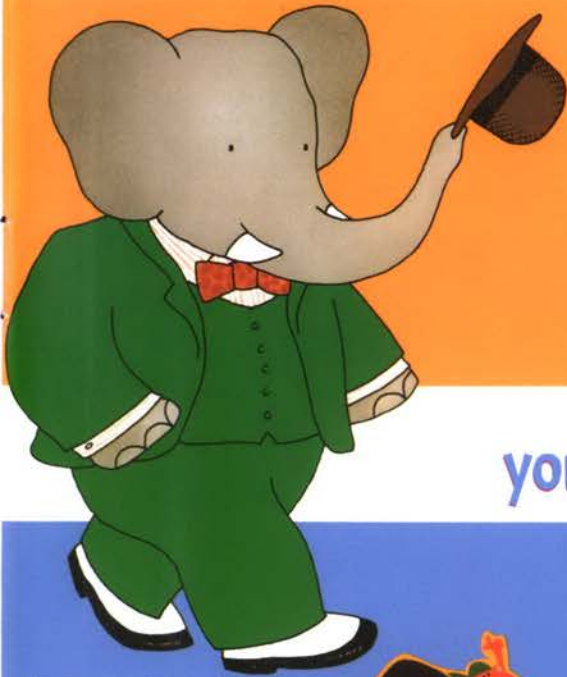
its lyric quality makes my heart almost sick with gratitude. I have been afraid of forgetting this moment I was allowed to have.

A child who encounters this book might someday join the discussion and debate over what Keenan calls the "inevitable, disguised Christian joy" in Narnia. Lewis called *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* a fairy tale. Like fairy tales, and like scripture, this novel explores what it means to develop loyalties, to confront evil, to cope with frailties in ourselves and others—and to come face-to-face with forces that transcend us. Although we can't pick up any book with the assurance that a moment like the one Keenan "was allowed to have" awaits us, if we would have such moments in our lives, we need books such as this. ~



*Illustration by Pauline Baynes, from The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Deluxe Edition*

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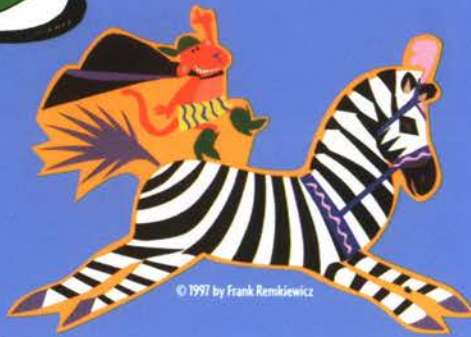


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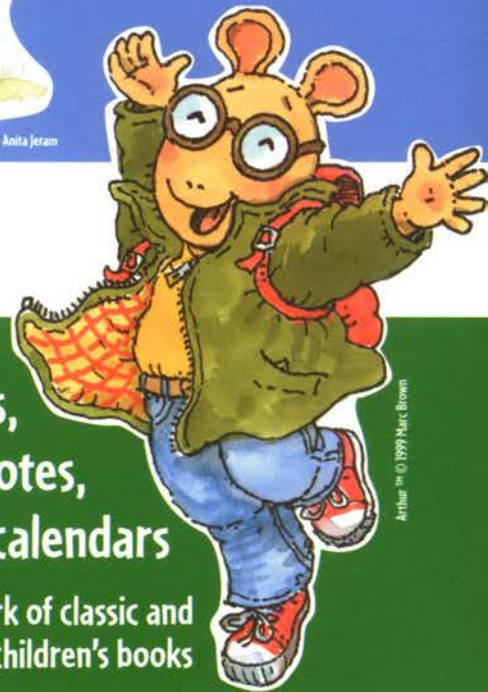
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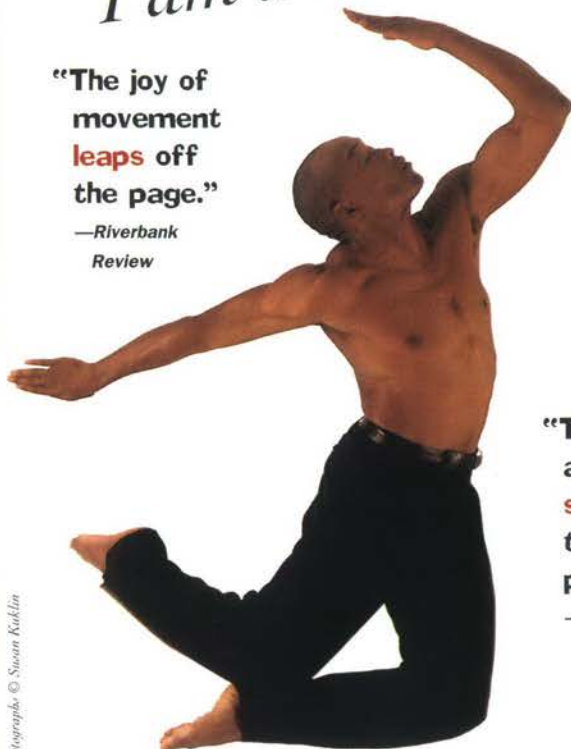
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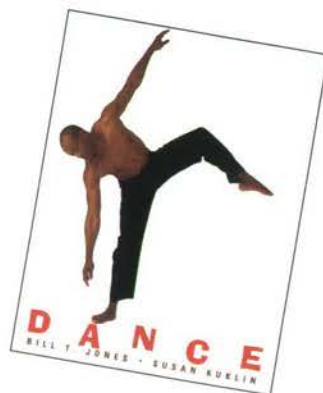
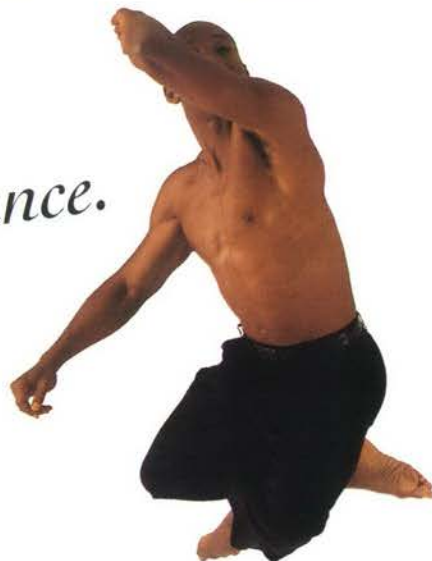
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