BOOKS FOR HOT DAYS AND WARM NIGHTS

Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

An Interview with
Madeleine L'Engle

BOOKMARK:
Baseball Stories

A Profile of
Barbara Cooney

TRAVEL TIP:
Books on Tape

Katherine Paterson on Moral Values in Fiction

PLUS
New Books for Summer

SUMMER 2000 $5.00

0 74470 94662 5 02>

PUBLISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Dream books...

MY FIRST GARDEN
by Tomek Bogacki

"The plot sounds simple enough. A man on a train remembers his childhood and a garden he made in a courtyard. Below the surface, though, is a deeper story about expanding horizons, the healing power of nature, and the recurring nature of life . . . A lovely book."—Boxed review, *Booklist*

$16.00 / 0-374-32518-9 / Ages 5 up

Frances Foster Books

THE LION'S SHARE
by Chris Conover

"Conover spins a worthy tale of the value of reading . . . Her folk-art motifs, meticulous attention to detail and engaging animal characters may occasionally put readers in mind of Jan Brett, but the artwork possesses an elegance that is entirely Conover's."—*Publishers Weekly*

$16.00 / 0-374-39974-3 / Ages 4–8

ME AND MY CAT?
by Satoshi Kitamura

"Facial expressions speak volumes, and the sense of kinetic movement and moments caught in a series of 'snapshots' will pull in the most diffident listeners. The high humor is infectious and the entire clever premise is well executed."—*School Library Journal*

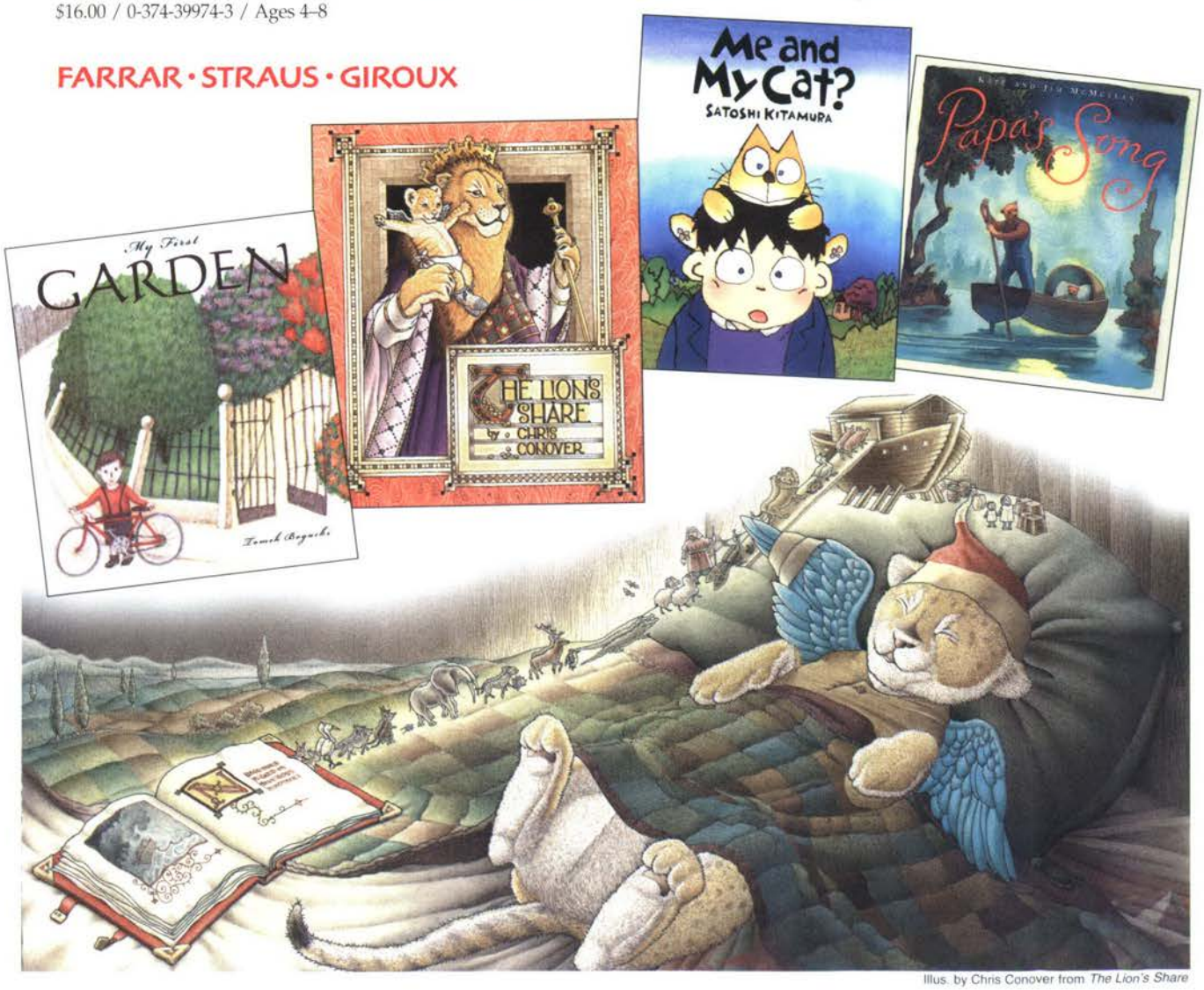
$16.00 / 0-374-34906-1 / Ages 4–8

PAPA'S SONG
by Kate McMullan
Pictures by Jim McMullan

"In this gentle rendition of an age-old dilemma, Granny Bear, Grandpa Bear, and Mama Bear each take a turn at singing Baby to sleep, but Baby Bear stays wide awake. Only Papa Bear knows the 'right song.'"—*The Horn Book*

$15.00 / 0-374-35732-3 / Ages 3–7

FARRAR · STRAUS · GIROUX



Illus. by Chris Conover from *The Lion's Share*

contents

Essays

Reviews

Features

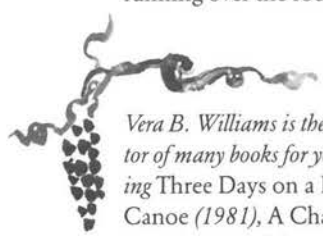
About the Cover Art

Each spring in Central Park you see the figures of small children running in the distance, exciting the whole blue-green landscape with the moving blur of geranium red jackets and sweatshirts.

Each spring, too, I go with my granddaughters of the red-gold hair and pink-gold skin to gather fiddleheads along the Delaware River. Then we sit up in one of the old willows with its remnants of old rope and vine swings and watch the river go by.

Who knows how a certain image appears, then grabs right on to you? But all my life I've loved to swing... that thrill as your feet leave solid ground and your body arcs out. I've canoed a lot, too, and I love rivers big and small. As it says at the end of my book *Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe*, "It seems I can still hear the sound of the river running over the rocks."

—Vera B. Williams



Vera B. Williams is the author and illustrator of many books for young readers, including Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe *(1981),* A Chair for My Mother *(1982),* "More More More," Said the Baby *(1990),* Scooter *(1993), and* Lucky Song *(1997). Ms. Williams lives in New York City. Her cover illustration was created especially for the* Riverbank Review.

Riverbank Review
of books for young readers

Editor
Martha Davis Beck

Art Director
Kristi Anderson
Two Spruce Design

Marketing Director
Christine Alfano

Circulation Manager
Christine Heppermann

Editorial Committee
Christine Alfano
Martha Davis Beck
Mary Lou Burket
Christine Heppermann
Susan Marie Swanson

Copy Editor
David Caligiuri

House Artist
Julie Delton

Computer Consultant
Eric Hinsdale

Cattails
Andy Nelson

Interns
Emily Carlson
Kirsten Keto

Advisory Board
Rudine Sims Bishop, Susan Bloom, Barbara Elleman, Carol Erdahl, Karen Nelson Hoyle, Susan Huber, Ginny Moore Kruse, Margaret O'Neill Ligon, Trudi Taylor, Mary Wagner

Summer 2000
Volume III, Number 2

Please direct correspondence to:

Riverbank Review
University of St. Thomas
1000 LaSalle Avenue, MOH-217
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2009
Phone: (651) 962-4372
Fax: (651) 962-4169
E-mail: riverbank@stthomas.edu
Website: www.riverbankreview.com

The *Riverbank Review* (ISSN 1099-6389) is published quarterly, in March, June, September, and December. Subscriptions are $20 for one year (four issues), $35 for two years. The *Riverbank Review* is published in affiliation with the School of Education at the University of St. Thomas.

editor's note

Science and religion, often assumed to be in opposition, are subjects of focus in this issue of the *Riverbank Review*. Our seasonal poem—"The Summer Day," by Mary Oliver—expresses the joy that can come when a person is both aimless and alert, tuned in to the world around them and willing to hear the sound of their own questions rising into the air. Prayer, for Oliver, may be elusive, but it has something to do with taking time to stroll through a field, eyes and ears open; with learning how to "pay attention."

Katherine Paterson writes eloquently about the challenges of creating fiction that springs from her deepest concerns, which are in large part spiritual and moral. Shunned by those whose religion is more strident and judgmental, Paterson is also viewed with some suspicion by those for whom the whole subject of "values" feels tainted. (Fortunately, her insightful and engaging novels have no trouble finding their audience.)

Divisive as the subject of religion may be, in the past few years there has been an explosion of interest in religious stories for children. There is now a healthy pile of picture books that take up religious subjects in a way that welcomes children of any faith or background. In this issue, Susan Marie Swanson looks at children's books that treat the life of Francis of Assisi, a man who, though he lived eight hundred years ago, has continuing interest for young readers and whose life has been interpreted in a surprising number of ways.

As battles are being waged in the schools between creationism and evolution, it's refreshing to hear Madeleine L'Engle express the view that science and religion are not only compatible, they are interrelated. Both help us to understand the vast and complicated universe we inhabit. If we are curious and open-minded enough, we may even find ourselves naturally led from one of these realms into the other.

Curiosity is the spark that sets this kind of exploration in motion. Though it may be an innate quality in children, if it isn't nurtured it can wither as surely as a plant withers without water or light. Of course, books can be an important tool in this nurturing, but sometimes I think we make the mistake of assuming that a book alone will do the trick. If a child is curious about bats, a book about bats may be a smart purchase—but building a bat house might be even better! Summer is a good time to tap into and extend children's curiosity about the world, as that world warms up and invites investigation in the form of digging in the dirt, canoeing across the water, or hiking down a trail. Our "Summery List" offers a sampling of books that might be happily used in connection with the coming season's activities—including spending a few hours under a tree.

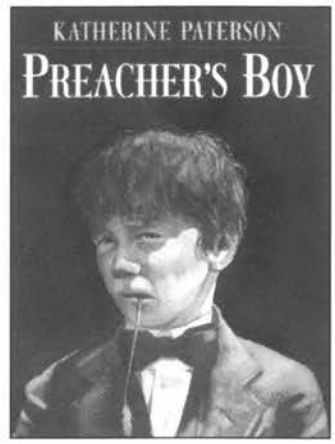
Finally, our One for the Shelf selection, *The Case of the Mummified Pigs*, offers curious young readers a sampling of "ecological mysteries," the solutions of which reveal the quirky intricacies of plant and animal relationships, and the interconnectedness of all living things. Wherever your wanderings take you this summer, the stories in this collection are likely to change the way you look at the world, and at your place in it.

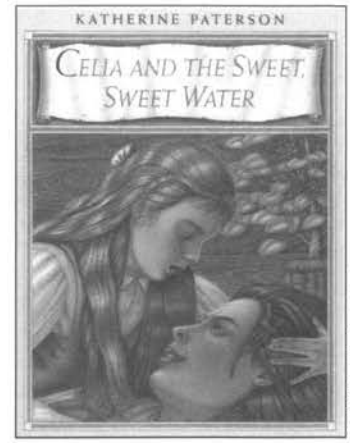
—Martha Davis Beck

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.

★ "Paterson is arguably the premier author among children's book writers today."*





CLARION BOOKS BY
KATHERINE PATERSON

PREACHER'S BOY

★ "With calamitous schemes and a questioning heart worthy of Huck Finn, 10-year-old Robbie joins Paterson's long list of memorable characters in this fast-paced yet meditative story set in turn-of-the-century Vermont."
~ ALA *BOOKLIST* EDITORS' CHOICES

★ "With warmth, humor, and her powerful yet plain style, Paterson draws sympathetic and memorable characters. Readers share the anticipation and the joy of Robbie and his father as they welcome the 20th century at the book's end."
~ *SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*, starred review

0-395-83897-5 $15.00

CELIA AND THE SWEET, SWEET WATER

"Paterson presents an original story with the age-old feel of a classic. . . .Paterson's storytelling makes this a cut above many happily-ever-after tales, and Vagin's use of line in his fine paintings matches the story's style and tone."
~ *KIRKUS REVIEWS*

full-color illustrations 0-395-91324-1 $15.00

THE WIDE-AWAKE PRINCESS

"Paterson, who is best known to an older audience, weaves a princess tale with a couple of twists. . . .The importance of listening, the courage to make a difference, the certainty that good takes time, are ideas skillfully presented and lessons that make the lattice of the story. Vagin contributes dry, slightly exaggerated pen-and-watercolor images that support the wry slant of the text."
~ ALA *BOOKLIST*

full-color illustrations 0-395-53777-0 $15.00

CLARION BOOKS
a Houghton Mifflin Company imprint ~ 215 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003 *ALA *BOOKLIST*

"Drive," She Said...

Five good reasons to pack audio books.

By Christine Alfano

Why bother listening to an audiotape of a story or book? It's difficult. You can't mentally check out for a moment, like you can with music, and join back in when the chorus repeats. You have to stay with it... there's that narrative to follow. If you miss one sentence you might miss something important. Going back to "reread" requires the clumsy task of rewinding—so bothersome, so inaccurate. And distractions abound. While the act of reading—sitting quietly, hunched over an open book—communicates "Do not disturb!" to the world, sitting on a couch listening intently to side four, chapter six of Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* seems to lay out a welcome mat to intruders. "Here I am!" the scenario says, "Not doing anything important—just listening to a tape. Come sit next to me and gab!" It's only a tape, after all: background noise in a big and interesting world.

There *is* one reliable place where books on tape will properly mesmerize: the sanctuary of the automobile. Dread long journeys no more, my friend! Load up the whole family. Confine them to a cramped space for hours at a time. When the landscape starts to look the same, when cans of Coke have been spilled on laps and backseat boundary lines have been drawn and redrawn, pop in a tape and let it work its magic. When you're on the road, there are a few good reasons to bother with audiotapes.

While *reading* in the car is a solitary and exclusive experience (and often induces motion sickness), **1. tape listening is a communal event.** As part of my family's last-minute packing routine, we all tromp to the library to pick out a stack of audio possibilities (our local library lists 1,118 children's books on tape—something for everyone!). We take turns choosing what to listen to, the loudest child, naturally, snagging his or her place first in line. This system has worked strangely well for us. A book my preteen son would never have picked out for himself, say, *Pinky and Rex Get Married*, is just fine to listen to in the context of a car ride. My six-year-old's only adamant choice one summer—*The Meanest Squirrel I Ever Met*, by Gene Zion—was not a title any of the rest of us would have chosen, nor one that we particularly wanted to listen to; but once the tape was playing we found ourselves (adults included) *enjoying* the story: mean squirrels can be very funny! Even stories meant for older readers, like Zilpha Keatley Snyder's *The Egypt Game*, hook all of us as listeners. The youngest couldn't understand the subtle layers of that story, but she didn't really need to. She was swept along by a strong plot and an expressive voice as easily as the rest of us.

Don't be surprised if boos and hisses arise when a story feels ponderous, uninteresting, or poorly read. This problem is easily remedied with one push of the finger. Any objections to the eject-button treatment can usually be quelled by promising to get back to the tape later. (Rest assured that even on the longest trips, you won't have time to listen to everything—we pack at least seven hours of taped material for every hour of travel time. "Survival of the fittest story" is the motto of audio-savvy travelers...)

2. Stories soothe the savage breast. The car can be a volatile place. Seasoned travelers know that long trips bring out the ugliest emotions, and that road rage isn't always directed at someone in another car! Pop in a tape and watch the focus shift instantaneously from who gets that red magic marker, who has to go to the bathroom, what's

the correct way to fold a map, which route is really much more sensible—to the story. Everyone relaxes. We are transported by words.

3. You get to hear a voice. Obvious as it seems, hearing someone telling you a story is the most wonderful reason for listening to a book on tape. Usually it's a solitary voice, sometimes it's a full cast with one actor per role and an orchestrated score. However simple or complex the reading, something intimate occurs when you listen to another human being read—you receive the gift of their interpretation. As long as you're listening, that reader is directing the text, deciding where the emphasis goes, shaping the story in a way that is very different, perhaps, from the voice in your own head. I've read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* too many times to count, but my kids and I had never heard the *Wonderland* that Christopher Plummer creates in his amazing rendition of the story.

Plummer expertly uses vocal modulation to bring the characters to three-dimensional life. The hookah-smoking catarpillar talks ever so slooooooowly, sprinkling his phrasing with odd pauses that made us prick up our ears in anticipation. It was astounding to listen to him go from King to Queen to Mad Hatter to Dormouse to Alice in a matter of seconds. Most important, we were spared the high-pitched voice that males so often resort to when reading female parts. Plummer's Alice speaks in a higher, lighter tone of voice that conveys her innocence and awe and childishness, but doesn't feel put on. His interpretation took us into corners of the story we never knew existed.

Be forewarned: listening can be a risky undertaking, because an actor's reading of a story will imprint itself on your memory. This can be good (as with Christopher Plummer) or bad. On a road trip to Oregon one year, we figured it was the ideal time to listen to *On to Oregon!*, Honoré Morrow's saga of a pioneer family's fateful trip out West. Great story. The reading, however, taxed the skills of the one actor who felt compelled to present every character's voice in a distinct way. It would be impossible now for any of us to read *On to Oregon!* without mentally recreating the wheezy, elongated rasp (like a young Peter Lorre) ascribed to the boy character. Very humorous at the time, and unforgettable, but probably not the intent of the author.

4. You get the benefit of great production. Some books on tape are simple affairs—a book, a reader, and a microphone. Others are much more elaborate—they employ professional actors, producers, sound engineers, and musicians to enhance a story and bring it to life. More is not necessarily better—Nelson Runger's lone voice reading Laurence Yep's *Hiroshima* could not be more effective or intense. But along comes the Rabbit Ears production of an Indian folktale, *The Tiger and the Brahmin*, and I become convinced of the value of production. Ben Kingsley delivers a witty, understated performance that is perfectly matched by Ravi Shankar's musical score. Shankar's dramatic composition uses sitar and tabla to create a sound that winds in and about the reading, evoking India more vividly than the spoken text could do alone.

5. If you are lucky, you get to hear an author read his or her own words. This almost assuredly adds a measure of depth and pleasure to listening. Authors may not be the most polished or dramatic readers of their own work, but because they created the characters

and built the story they have a sure sense of purpose, which shows in a voice. Professional readers will sometimes puff and rant their way through a story, believing, I suppose, that over-the-top vocal technique will add power to the text. Authors seem to know that power rests with the words themselves. When you listen to authors read their own work, they let you in on the underlying emotions of a story: Barbara Cooney's slightly scratchy voice expresses the loneliness that informs her book about young Eleanor Roosevelt; listening to *Eleanor*, you sense Cooney's love for her subject. Jack Gantos's voice has a pushing, edgy quality that propels "wired" Joey Pigza in a manic way through his story *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*. The author's comic timing *and* seriousness come through in his voice and convey the range of emotion in his dizzying portrait of a kid with ADHD.

You and your children have probably read *Charlotte's Web*, but have you ever heard E. B. White introduce it himself: "This is a story of the barn. I wrote it for children and to amuse myself. It is called *Charlotte's Web*, and I will read it to you." He speaks with such a welcoming and easy directness that you hear the story with fresh ears. A kind of humility rises out of his voice, a clarity and simple respect for words and stories. Press the Play button: Mr. White becomes an honored guest in the car. Everybody settles down and listens more intently.

When you're on the road, books on tape perform a dual magic—they allow you to travel together (happily) to a far-off place, *and* they allow you to travel together to the far-off place of a story. Pick the farthest destination possible for your next trip—it can only mean more time for listening.

Christine Alfano is a member of the editorial committee of the Riverbank Review.

Eight Tapes to Take Along

Afternoon of the Elves
By Janet Taylor Lisle
Read by Christina Moore
Recorded Books, Inc., by arrangement with Orchard Books
3 hours, 15 minutes, Age 9 and up, $24.00
ISBN 0-7887-0386-2
A straightforward reading of a riveting story. Two very different girls find friendship through the mystery of a small stick-and-leaf village. Is it the magic of the elves?

Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass
By Lewis Carroll
Read by Christopher Plummer
Harper Children's Audio
6 hours, Age 6 and up, $24.95
ISBN 1-55994-806-X
Familiar stories given a tour de force performance.

Charlotte's Web
By E. B. White
Read by the Author
Listening Library
3 hours, 38 minutes, Age 5 and up, $24.00
ISBN 0-553-47048-5
E. B. White's fine reading provides new interest in a sublime story of life and death and friendship.

Duffy and the Devil
By Harve and Margot Zemach
Read by Virginia Leishman
Recorded Books, Inc., by arrangement with Farrar, Straus & Giroux
30 minutes, Age 5 and up, $10.00
ISBN 0-7887-0638-1
Duffy, a ragged servant girl, makes a bargain with the devil in this highly comic, Cornish version of Rumpelstiltskin.

The Golden Compass
By Philip Pullman
Read by Philip Pullman and full cast
Listening Library
11 hours, Age 10 and up, $35.00
ISBN 0-8072-8180-8
Fantasy at its best, led by Philip Pullman's hushed, beguiling narration.

Heads or Tails: Stories from the Sixth Grade
By Jack Gantos
Read by Greg Longenhagen
Recorded Books, Inc.
4 hours, 30 minutes, Age 10 and up, $24.00
ISBN 0-7887-1107-9
Tragicomic adventures from the turbulent life of sixth-grade diarist Jack Henry.

The Tiger and the Brahmin
Traditional, by Brian Gleeson
Read by Ben Kingsley
Music by Ravi Shankar
Rabbit Ears Productions
48 minutes, Age 5 and up, $8.98
ISBN 6-3030-8736-1
With the help of a jackal, a well-meaning Brahmin is able to outwit the tiger which plans to devour him. The musical accompaniment is lush, and Kingsley's understated performance highlights the humor of the tale.

Wolf Story
By William McCleery
Read by Anthony Heald
Listening Library
1 hour, 8 minutes, Age 5 and up, $10.00
ISBN 0-8072-7887-4
A charming romp wherein a sometimes flustered father must deliver fresh installments of a bedtime story about a wolf's quest for a multicolored hen named Rainbow.

Radical Faith

The Life of St. Francis.

By Susan Marie Swanson

Why should a general audience of children have books about a man such as Francis of Assisi, a complicated figure deeply committed to his Catholic faith? Francis Bernardone lived eight hundred years ago; his home was a mountain village in northern Italy. The child of a prosperous family, he walked away from wealth and social status to lead a radically unconventional life, following a path so charged with inspiration and spirit that we are still telling stories about him these many years later.

Song of St. Francis, Clyde Robert Bulla's appealing chapter book based on the life of Francis of Assisi, appeared in 1952. In a series of eventful vignettes, Bulla creates a real child who eats cake on the doorstep of his father's shop, plays in mountain caves, and exasperates the people of the village when he sets dogs to barking. Francis's father, a merchant who wants his son to strive for status and riches, opposes Francis's mother, who listens carefully to her son and who wants, most of all, for him to become a good man. When Francis begins to act on his concern for the sick and poor, as well as to devote hours to contemplation and prayer, his father locks him up. His mother frees him. When his angry father accuses him of stealing and drags him before the local bishop, Francis strips off his clothes in the public square and breaks with his family. "He had said good-by to the old life," writes Bulla. "A new life was before him."

This story has been told countless times, as have stories that emerged from Francis's "new life," a life passionately devoted to a relationship with God. In a beautiful new book published this spring, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, Margaret Mayo opens with a brief biography of Francis, telling how the son of a wealthy cloth merchant became a barefoot man who wore a rough robe tied with rope. A short section at the conclusion of the book explains that Francis was proclaimed a Catholic saint only two years after his death and relates how stories about him came to be told and written down.

But the heart of the book is *stories*. There is the story of how Francis served as mediator between a ferocious wolf and the frightened and angry folk of the village of Gubbio. There is the story of how Francis preached to the birds of the Italian countryside, urging them to sing songs of praise to God—and how the birds listened in attentive silence. Such stories are deceptively simple. They can be—and have been—analyzed in terms of their socio-political import, their spiritual messages, and their relation to history. The success of Mayo's book is due in no small part to her decision to open it

Illustration by Valenti Angelo, from Song of St. Francis

Illustration by Peter Malone, from Brother Sun, Sister Moon

with a short biography and to close it with a look at what Francis of Assisi meant to the world after his death. In between come the stories—not episodes in a biography but wild, metaphorical stories about creation, humanity, and the holy. The exquisite artwork by Peter Malone in *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* invites readers to revel in the energy and mystery of the stories.

Can such books belong to a broad audience of children? Some might argue yes, because stories about birds flapping their wings in answer to a man's words, and a wolf who becomes a beloved part of a town he once terrorized, are simply "good stories." Whatever we might say about the inherent appeal of the stories, the fact remains that they are, at their core, deeply spiritual. Francis is relevant to children not simply because he loved animals and the green earth—though it is great fun to read of the cicada which jumped onto Francis's hand to sing with him—but because he led a deeply passionate and independent life. He did not let the values of the culture in which he lived stop him from being true to his inmost self. Francis of Assisi was a person who listened to his heart. He had a deep understanding of what he was given to say and do in the world. Books about such a man need not press a particular way of belief: they can build up the common good.

Perhaps the best-known children's book about Francis is Tomie dePaola's *Francis, the Poor Man of Assisi*. Though at first glance the book might appear to be a picture book, it really is not. It is an illustrated book with an extensive text that invites reading in short segments. The pictures, based in part on dePaola's careful study of medieval frescoes, carefully distill the essence of the elaborate, informative text, rendering the story more accessible to young readers. Unlike most children's books on this subject, dePaola's offers a full consideration of Francis's role in the community of monks that eventually became the Franciscan Order, and it devotes careful attention to Francis's relationships with women of faith, including Clare and Jacopa.

Illustration by Tomie dePaola, from Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi

Unlike Mayo, dePaola blends biographical information about his subject with the evocative traditional stories. The result is an idealized biography that might raise serious questions for readers. In our society, stories full of wonders and metaphors can be misused. They are sometimes turned into high-jump bars to test belief. It is a shame if, reading or listening to the story of how shepherds saw a blaze in the sky when Francis and Clare were speaking of the love of God, we are backed into a corner by an implied question: Do you believe that this happened? We need books about figures such as Francis that take into account the difference between asserting the literal truth of such stories and establishing their deeper significance.

This is not easy to do, nor does every book strive to do it. Fortunately, there is another solution that resides with us as readers. We can read many stories, and different versions of the stories. We can reflect on them, laugh at them, puzzle over them, marvel at their mysteries. We don't need to find the perfect book about Francis.

Brian Wildsmith's *Saint Francis* is a true picture book, with a text of fewer than 1,200 words and rich interplay between text and artwork. It is written in the first person, a strikingly effective choice.

I was born—thank you, God—
over eight hundred years ago.
And still I live in people's hearts.

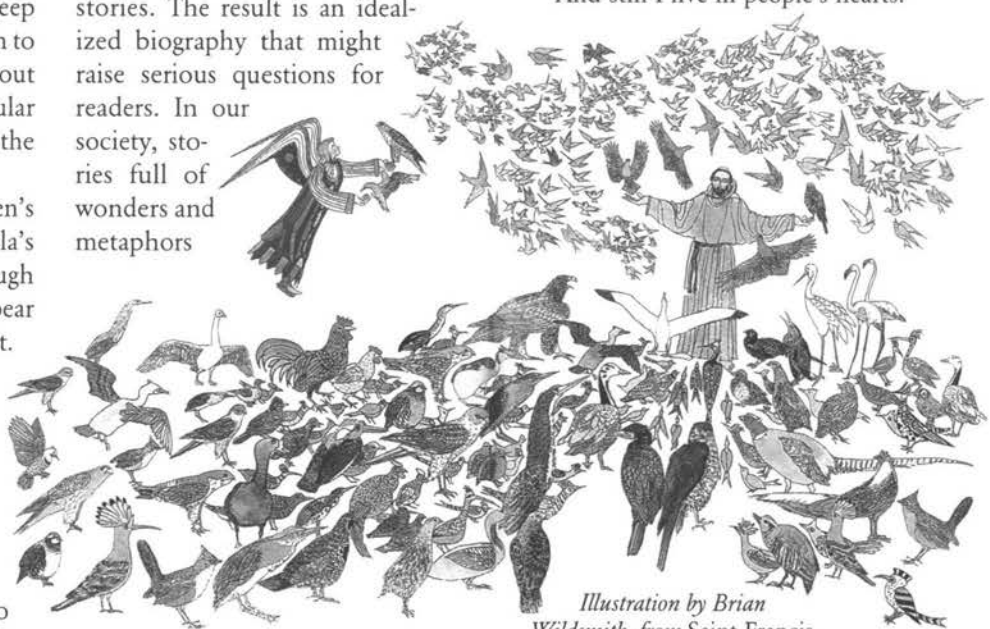


Illustration by Brian Wildsmith, from Saint Francis

I loved my name—Francis. I loved
my city—Assisi.
And I loved my life.

Where other books begin with stories about Francis's birth and how he got his name, Wildsmith plunges right into his subject. For Wildsmith, Francis's story is not primarily a family drama (as for Bulla), a collection of engaging stories (as for Mayo), or a narrative about religious community long treasured by people of faith (as for dePaola). For Wildsmith, Francis's story is a story about joy and love, and joy and love is what Wildsmith evokes in his text and artwork full of birds and sky and rooftops.

Brother Francis and the Friendly Beasts, the work of storytelling Margaret Hodges and illustrator Ted Lewin, follows a more earthbound path, emphasizing Francis's objections to the injustice done to the poor. *A Gift from Saint Francis*, written by Joanna Cole

Illustration by Ted Lewin, from Brother Francis and the Friendly Beasts

Illustration by Michèle Lemieux, from A Gift from Saint Francis

and illustrated by Michèle Lemieux, emphasizes how Francis devoted his life to "telling people about God in simple words that everyone could understand." For Cole, the living Christmas crèche exemplifies this approach.

Francis's passionate regard for the earth, his rejection of exploitive and excessive wealth, his compassion for the suffering, and his advocacy for nonviolence—all of these are Francis's legacy to us as we enter the twenty-first century. The irony in any attempt to make a book about Francis is this: Francis was not trying to create a life that was about himself. He struggled to dedicate his life to God. The story about Francis preaching to the birds is, first of all, a story about the holy, about a creator God as a compassionate presence in nature rather than a rule-making, judging force. Without that core, the story is a bit of chaff in the wind.

But this is hard for us. Many stories about Francis attempt to describe things that cannot be described. If we take those stories and try to pin the metaphors down—to take them literally—we lose sight of the ineffable, vital truth that was the occasion for the story in the first place.

Maybe the best thing to do at such a moment is turn to poetry. That is what Reeve Lindbergh did in her extraordinary tribute to Francis of Assisi, *The Circle of Days*, illustrated by Cathie Felstead. The subtitle, "From *Canticle of the Sun* by Saint Francis of Assisi," is misleading insofar as it suggests that Lindbergh's poem is an *excerpt* from the original. In fact, Lindbergh renders the Canticle's entire text in welcoming rhymed quatrains, beginning with,

Lord, we offer thanks and praise
For the circle of our days.
Praise for radiant brother sun,
Who makes the hours around us run.

For sister moon, and for the stars,
Brilliant, precious, always ours.

The poem, under different titles and in various versions and translations, appears in many children's books about Francis. The poem poses several difficulties, including its length and some difficult subject matter, and it exists in some stiff Victorian translations. Lindbergh's version beckons to the child while remaining true to the original sequence and content.

It is said that Francis of Assisi wrote "Canticle of the Sun" at the end of his life, when he was nearly blind and suffered great pain. Where some authors have tried to make the poem accessible by omitting sections, such as the passage about death, Lindbergh attends to the entire poem: "For brother sleep, and sister death, / Who tend the borders of our breath." Felstead's images of balloons, watermelon, and fireworks evoke the wind, water, and fire that Francis of Assisi sang about all those years ago with a clarity and warmth that is true to his spirit.

Susan Marie Swanson is a member of the editorial committee of the Riverbank Review.

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO.1538 ST. PAUL MN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

Riverbank Review
MOH-217
University of St. Thomas
1000 LaSalle Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2009

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO.1538 ST. PAUL MN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

Riverbank Review
MOH-217
University of St. Thomas
1000 LaSalle Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2009

bookmark

Ten Great Baseball Stories

Baseball in the Barrios
By Henry Horenstein
GULLIVER/HARCOURT, 1997
hardcover: $16.00, *paperback:* $8.00
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE
Through vivid photographs, the reader meets Hubaldo, a Venezuelan boy who plays the "all-American" game.

Baseball Saved Us
By Ken Mochizuki, Illustrated by Dom Lee
LEE & LOW, 1993 / *hardcover:* $15.95, *paperback:* $6.95
YOUNGER
While playing baseball in a World War II internment camp, a Japanese American boy improves his skills and suffers less hostility from whites.

Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man
By David A. Adler, Illustrated by Terry Widener
GULLIVER/HARCOURT, 1997 / *hardcover:* $16.00
YOUNGER
He played in 2,130 consecutive games, then took himself out "for the good of the team" and died with grace.

Make-Believe Ball Player
By Alfred Slote, Illustrated by Tom Newsom
HARPER, 1989 / *paperback:* $4.95
INTERMEDIATE
Henry can invent *play-by-play, but he can't play—which leads to some outlandish situations.*

The Story of Baseball
By Lawrence S. Ritter
WILLIAM MORROW, 1999 (*third edition*)
hardcover: $16.00, *paperback:* $7.95
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER
An excellent history of the game—well illustrated, lively, and insightful, with an emphasis on great individual players.

The Story of Negro League Baseball
By William Brashler
TICKNOR & FIELDS, 1994 / *hardcover:* $15.95
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER
Original research gives this history of a time when "blacks and whites could not be teammates" its authority and warmth.

Thank You, Jackie Robinson
By Barbara Cohen
Illustrated by Richard Cuffari
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD, 1974 / *paperback:* $4.95
INTERMEDIATE
Friendship joins a black man and a Jewish boy who love the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Dodgers' most electrifying player.

This Is Baseball
By Margaret Blackstone, Illustrated by John O'Brien
HENRY HOLT, 1993 / *paperback:* $6.95
YOUNGER
For the youngest fan: a deft introduction to baseball, which promises that, win or lose, "Tomorrow there will be another game."

When Willard Met Babe Ruth
By Donald Hall, Illustrated by Barry Moser
BROWNDEER/HARCOURT, 1996 / *hardcover:* $16.00
INTERMEDIATE
The long and colorful career of Babe Ruth inspires and shapes three generations of a Massachusetts family.

Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear
By Lensey Namioka, Illustrated by Kees de Kiefte
LITTLE, BROWN, 1992 / *paperback:* $4.50
INTERMEDIATE
Yingtao has an eye for hitting baseballs, and Mathew has an ear for playing Haydn—if only they could switch!

interview

Madeleine L'Engle

Throughout her long and distinguished career, the author of A Wrinkle in Time *has inspired young readers to engage with life's mysteries.*

By Krystyna Poray Goddu

Madeleine L'Engle is a prolific writer who moves easily across the boundaries of genre, bridging the secular and spiritual worlds. Since the publication of her first novel, *The Small Rain*, in 1945 she has written more than forty books, including novels for adults; novels for children and young adults (with Farrar, Straus & Giroux); picture books; poetry; collections of prayers; volumes of spiritual essays (with Shaw Publishers); a trilogy of memoirs, *The Crosswicks Journal*; and the poignant story of her long marriage and her husband's death from cancer, *Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage* (1988). She is best known for *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), a Newbery Medal winner, which was followed by the further science-fiction/fantasy adventures of the Murry family: *A Wind in the Door* (1973) and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* (1979), winner of the American Book Award.

Nearly as popular have been L'Engle's books about the teenage Vicky Austin and her family, which debuted in 1960 with *Meet the Austins*, and continued with *The Moon by Night* (1963), *The Young Unicorns* (1968), *A Ring of Endless Light* (1980), which received a Newbery Honor, and *Troubling a Star* (1994). All of L'Engle's books acknowledge and explore the interweaving of science and religion. These concerns come directly from her own life; L'Engle is an active participant in religious and spiritual communities. Librarian at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, she teaches writing workshops and leads retreats at convents, monasteries, and religious centers around the country.

The following interview took place this past winter at L'Engle's apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

KPG: *You have written in many genres, for adults as well as for young readers, and have said that you save your most difficult ideas for children.*

ML: They're willing to accept them. They don't have to pay the rent or the heating bill, so they're freer to take risks. Once we assume the responsibilities of being a wife and mother, for example, there are certain things we no longer dare to do. But children are interested in danger, in all kinds of different things. I don't write any differently when I write books that are marketed for children. Writing is writing. You do your best. Yet, in general, I do try to write as simply as possible. There is an old Elizabethan rhyme: "The written word is to be clean as bone, pure as water, hard as stone. Two words are not as good as one."

Do you use that dictum primarily when writing for children, or in all of your writing?

In all my writing. I think of what Mark Twain said, that he never used the word "metropolis," because he could use "city."

You have said that one of your life's goals has been to have the term "children's writer" abolished. Why is that description so loathsome to you?

When people are writing for children, they tend not to write their best.

When they think of children as their audience?

Yes. And I think that's a terrible insult to children. Children are aware of style, even if not articulately. They sense it—the rhythm, the melody of your writing.

Do you think writers and publishers underestimate children?

I think almost everybody underestimates children!

Your most famous book, A Wrinkle in Time, *almost never got published.*

You can't name a major publisher who didn't reject it. Nobody knew what it was. Is it for children? Is it for grown-ups? I said, "It's for people. Don't people read books?" And then, it became one of the fifty most censored books in the country? "It's about witches," people say. "They're guardian angels," is my reply. "You haven't read the book. It says so."

It's really a beautiful meeting ground of science and religion—of science and spirituality.

I see science as very theological: the more we know, and the greater vocabulary we have, the more we are *able* to know, the more we are able to look for God—and *find* God. I've never felt any conflict between science and religion. People get so upset over the question of evolution. Someone once asked me, "What do you feel about evolution versus creationism?" I said, "Well, I can't get very excited about it. There's only one question worth asking, and that is: 'Did God make it?' If the answer is yes, why get so excited about how? God could do anything He wanted, any way He wanted. If He chose to do it through evolution, why not?"

How do you think religion can be kept central in our lives?

We need to understand that what we learn about the universe is going to change what we feel about God. When we discovered that the planet is not flat, that changed what we felt about God. When we discovered that we're not the only solar system, or the only galaxy, this opened an enormous universe to us. That has to enlarge God. If we try to keep the old God, that won't work. But, science never threatens God—it opens up more possibilities.

The meeting of science and religion is evident in your book of prayers for children, Anytime Prayers. *In one prayer you write: "Thank you, God, / for creating the heavens / with all their glory. / Oh! all the hydrogen clouds / and exploding gasses / and the very firmament of heaven." I wonder, how do you define prayer? And what is its relationship to curiosity and imagination?*

Well, I guess prayer is whenever we consciously try to get in contact with the numinous, the ineffable, the marvelous.

Do you see a relationship between prayer and imagination?

An excerpt from *A Ring of Endless Light*

After breakfast I read to Grandfather. A lot of what I read was over my head, because, somewhat unexpectedly, he asked me to read the works of scientists, mostly cellular biologists or astrophysicists.

"Grandfather, I didn't know you were interested in science."

"I'm interested in everything," he said gently, "but I want the scientists right now because they are the modern mystics, much more than the theologians." So we read about mitochondria, and we read about black holes, those weird phenomena which follow the death of a giant star. I found myself nearly as fascinated as Grandfather obviously was. When a giant star dies, there's what one article called a "catastrophic gravitational collapse." The extraordinary thing is that the star collapses so totally that it actually collapses itself out of existence and becomes what mathematicians call a "singularity." How can you take an enormous mass and shrink it down to nothing? But this nothing isn't really nothing. Its gravity is so great that nothing can escape it, and if you went through a black hole you might find yourself in a completely different time, or even a different universe. And this isn't science fiction. I began to see what Grandfather meant about the scientists being mystics.

Oh yes! When we pray, we are praying to a God we cannot see or touch or hear or feel. It's a matter of faith. And faith always involves imagination.

In another prayer in this book you thank God for "fairytale creatures / that you have made for our pleasure," and then you say something interesting: "Help us to keep the creatures of the imagination / your creatures / and not turn them into our monsters." What did you mean by this? Do you think there is a point at which fantasy or imagination become unhealthy?

If that's all there is, it's just as unhealthy as thinking the world of facts is all there is. Life is a mixture of both. If we try to make our imagination fit into the world of facts, we lose imagination.

Do you think that the genre of fantasy, which seems very far removed from the real world and its concerns and struggles, is a place where those struggles are actually addressed with more freedom than in so-called realistic fiction?

Yes! Definitely. *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, has now become a classic because people are no longer frightened of it. But it terrified people when it first appeared. I think most fantasy writers are trying to find a deeper reality. And some things are more acceptable if they are put in terms of fantasy.

Why do you think fantasy literature is seeing an increase in popularity now?

Because we feel a discontent with what's happening on the planet, and what we ourselves have been doing to the planet, and it awakens a sense of responsibility.

You've talked and written about the so-called butterfly effect: the idea that the death of a butterfly affects the whole cosmos. What do you think are the most important implications of this idea?

That we are a universe. Nothing happens in isolation. We can never say it's only my own business, because it isn't. Every loving thought is like a pebble thrown into the water, with ripples. And bad thoughts are the same.

One of the moments I love in A Wrinkle in Time *is when Meg realizes that Mrs. Whatsit, as a human, "was only the tiniest facet of all the things Mrs. Whatsit* could *be." When I read this I realized that this is true for all of us as humans; we're all just facets of what we could be. It reminded me of the theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin saying: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience." One of the wonderful things you do is put voices and faces and personalities to concepts like "a*

spiritual being having a human experience." Do you think about this, or does it just come out that way because these concepts are such an integral part of you?

Well, the direction a story takes is usually tied into things I'm struggling with in my own life. Although I don't really plan it, it just happens.

Many people would say that there are fewer literate children these days than a generation ago, and that their attention spans are shorter. Your characters not only embody ideas, they talk *about ideas—big ideas. They quote Shakespeare and Goethe, they discuss philosophy. Do you ever worry that fewer children these days will be able—or inclined—to make the leap to understand and be stimulated by these discussions in your books?*

The only way I have of measuring it is the mail I get. And I'm getting just as much mail from kids as I ever did. The only difference is that I'm getting more and more mail from older people, too.

How do you think your work has changed over the years? How has it developed, grown?

Well, I hope it has grown, as I have. Certainty is a useful thing, but I'm less certain about things than I used to be. I'm more willing to live with the questions, which are not going to get answered in this life—except in story, or in poetry.

Why is it we can answer them there?

In stories, you learn how complex being human is. And you see—if that character can do this, so can I. It opens you up to accepting that we are quite often able to do the impossible. But you know, when I'm writing I'm not trying to put forth any point of view; I'm listening to the story. Nevertheless, there always is a message. There is a point of view that expresses what you think about life and how we should live it. And that's important for a writer to realize: a book is going to influence people.

An excerpt from *A Wrinkle in Time*

Mrs. Whatsit sounded surprised at his question. "If we knew ahead of time what was going to happen we'd be—we'd be like the people on Camazotz, with no lives of our own, with everything all planned and done for us. How can I explain it to you? Oh, I know. In your language you have a form of poetry called the sonnet."

"Yes, yes," Calvin said impatiently. "What's that got to do with the Happy Medium?"

"Kindly pay me the courtesy of listening to me." Mrs. Whatsit's voice was stern, and for a moment Calvin stopped pawing the ground like a nervous colt. "It is a very strict form of poetry, is it not?"

"Yes."

"There are fourteen lines, I believe, all in iambic pantameter. That's a very strict rhythm or meter, yes?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded.

"And each line has to end with a rigid rhyme pattern. And if the poet does not do it exactly this way, it is not a sonnet, is it?"

"No."

"But within this strict form the poet has complete freedom to say whatever he wants, doesn't he?"

"Yes." Calvin nodded again.

"So," Mrs. Whatsit said.

"So what?"

"Oh, do not be stupid, boy!" Mrs. Whatsit scolded. "You know perfectly well what I am driving at!"

"You mean you're comparing our lives to a sonnet? A strict form, but freedom within it?"

"Yes," Mrs. Whatsit said. "You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you."

Do you have stories that you know you still need to tell, or ideas that you still need to explore?

They'll come if I'm meant to use them. It requires shutting up and listening...

How do you do that?

Music helps. Since I broke my hip, I haven't played the piano. Not that that would be impossible, but it takes so long. What used to take two minutes now takes ten. And I feel awful that I haven't played. For me it is a way of unloosing my subconscious.

It helps get you back into the listening mode?

Yes. My fingers are doing what they're supposed to do without my having to think about them, and that releases my subconscious to give me ideas.

Do they come to you as ideas, or just as a sense that you're ready to sit down and write?

They come as ideas quite often. Bach is my favorite "idea maker."

Are you working on something now?

I'm working on a book on aging. And then I'm working—still, way up in the back of my brain—on another book about Vicky.

What would you like to be remembered for?

Courage. And I want to be remembered as a storyteller. Because that's who I am. There's a wonderful story about a young student going to a holy monk, saying, "You know, in the olden days there were people who used to walk and talk with God. Why isn't that happening nowadays?" The old man replies, "Well my son, nowadays nobody can stoop so low." This may be why I write children's books. Maybe children are willing to stoop.

Krystyna Poray Goddu is author of A Celebration of Steiff: Timeless Toys for Today *(Portfolio Press) and coauthor 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.*

Moral Values in Fiction

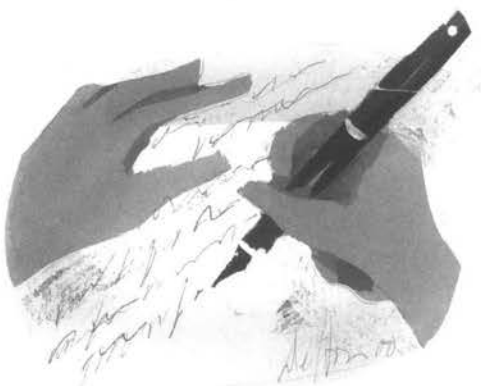
Whose definition do we go by, when deciding what makes a "moral" book for children?

By Katherine Paterson

In a time when the nightly news offers up stories of teenagers commiting mass murder, when many college students regard drunken binges as celebrations of life, and when cheating and lying are widely believed to be the only ways to navigate "the system," the loss of values is everywhere lamented. A question that often comes to those of us who write for the young is this: What values does this book instill? It is a question that makes me distinctly uncomfortable.

In the first place, the word "values" has become such a code word that it is hard to look at it dispassionately. The word itself is neutral. I do not, for example, hold the same values as does a member of Ku Klux Klan. I would consider many of his values sinful and destructive. (Neither, I'm sure, would he feel that mine were valid.) Trying to define "values" by adding the word "family" is no better. None of us, I believe, even if we should be staunch members of the NRA, would applaud the values of a family which dealt in drugs and left a loaded gun under a blanket for a six-year-old to find and use to kill his classmate. I suspect that when we ask writers to uphold "values" or even "traditional family values" in their books for the young, each of us has something different in mind, shaped by our own *personal* values and family traditions.

But is the whole matter of values subjective? Isn't there, finally, a difference between right and wrong, a core of values upon which most of us who care about children and the books they read can agree? Couldn't we, for example, at least agree that the Ten Commandments (which has been at the backbone of the Judeo-Christian moral



code) be the guide to right behavior and the basis for moral fiction?

This would certainly suit me. I was raised on the Ten Commandments. But then I wonder who will interpret this guide. *Thou shalt not kill* is about as straightforward as a commandment can get, and yet people of goodwill are deeply divided on this injunction when it comes to abortion, capital punishment, and war. This being said, when someone in a book is killed, does that mean the author is condoning murder? Should a writer never put a murder in a story for fear that a child might misconstrue the act in the book as permission, indeed, instruction to kill another person?

The Commandment that is most often quoted to me is "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord wilt not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

There is some debating among scholars as to the exact meaning of this commandment. Does the prohibition against using the name of God lie in taking an oath and then breaking that oath; in other words, using the name of God to swear falsely? Or is it a more general prohibition against any careless use of the name of God in speech? The scholars may continue to argue about the meaning of the original Hebrew, but in real-life America, when the Commandment is quoted to me, it is because one of my characters has used the word "Lord" or "God" colloquially or as an expletive.

The question for me, as a writer, becomes, Even if this particular character would almost certainly use this language in this way, should I refrain from putting it in his or her mouth for fear some child would misconstrue the speech of a character as modeling appropriate language for the reader?

We could go through all ten Commandments in this way. Does the pro-

hibition against adultery mean that a writer can never suggest that such a thing has happened? Does the prohibition against covetousness mean that no hint of greed or envy can ever appear in a novel?

You get the point. If we demand that books for the young simply model exemplary language and behavior and exclude any unworthy speech or action, we would have to bar children from reading most great literature, including the Bible.

The question we are struggling with here is, What makes for moral fiction?

Is a book moral because it contains no speech or behavior that might possibly be interpreted as inappropriate or wrong by *any* reader? Or is a book moral because it deals honestly and responsibly with the world as it is, including, of course, the consequences of sin? Or, if you are not comfortable with the word "sin," the consequences of self-destructive and antisocial behavior?

In 1572 the painter Paolo Veronese was hauled before a church court to explain why, in painting the Last Supper, he had included, among other figures, people scratching themselves, a man with a nosebleed, and persons with deformities. He was charged with blasphemy for filling a holy picture with such unholy subjects. When questioned, Veronese replied simply, "I thought these things might happen."

When I wrote a story about a boy coming from a simple home in rural Virginia, I thought he might speak as the children I knew there spoke. When I wrote a story about an angry foster child who is raging at the world that regards her as disposable, I thought she might lie and steal and bully and curse. But just as Veronese's picture of the Last Supper was larger than its profane details, so, I hope, are my stories. If the characters I have drawn ring true, then children reading the book can find themselves in that larger picture. They can have a share, not in prohibition and admonition, but in the hope and grace with which I truly believe the story is infused.

In my book *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Crowell, 1978), a lost and desperate child meets a foster mother who loves Gilly not because she is lovable but because it is the nature of Maime Trotter to love. Gilly is ultimately drawn into that circle of love, kicking and scratching all the way. Many unhappy children, some in prison for their crimes, have loved this book. They can see themselves in this terrible child and are able, then, to love themselves a little. And as they learn to love themselves, they are freed to reach out and begin to love other people. If Gilly had been good, she couldn't have helped them. For some readers, mostly Christian adults, this is a highly immoral book; for other readers, mostly lost children, it is a story of redemption.

"If we demand that books for the young simply model exemplary language and behavior and exclude any unworthy speech or action, we would have to bar children from reading most great literature..."

I am quite aware that people who do not share my faith fear that I may be imposing my own religious values on young readers. I am also resigned to the fact that many of my fellow Christians think I make a mockery of that same faith.

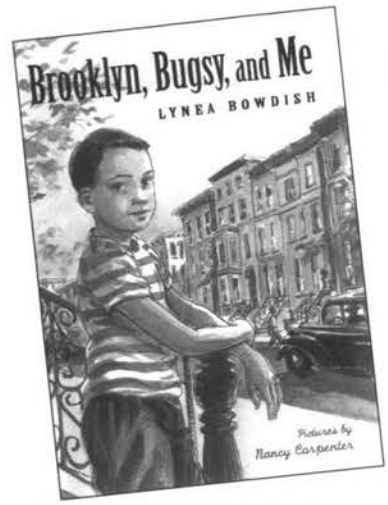
But I'm not trying either to impose or oppose belief. I am trying, out of who *I* am, to write stories for children as *they* are. Flannery O'Connor wrote:

> The sorry religious novel comes about when the writer supposes that because of his belief, he is somehow dispensed from the obligation to penetrate concrete reality. He will think that the eyes of the Church or of the Bible or of his particular theology have already done the seeing for him, and that his business is to rearrange this essential vision into satisfying patterns, getting himself as little dirty in the process as possible... But the real novelist, the one with an instinct for what he is about, knows that he cannot approach the infinite directly, that he must penetrate the natural human world as it is.
>
> ... The novelist and the believer, when they are not the same man, yet have many traits in common—a distrust of the abstract, a respect for boundaries, a desire to penetrate the surface of reality and to find in each thing the spirit which makes it itself and holds the world together.

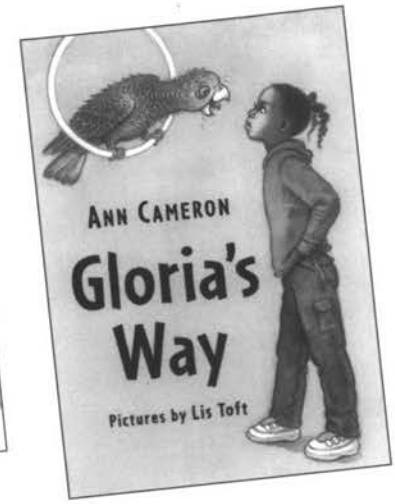
I suppose that is as good a definition of moral fiction as one could hope for —"a distrust of the abstract, a respect for boundaries, a desire to penetrate the surface of reality and to find in each thing the spirit which makes it itself and holds the world together." As writers for today's youth, then, we must be honest, we must deal with the world as it is. And yet, to be writers of moral fiction we must go beneath the surface of things as they are, searching for those deeper truths that reveal each creature as valuable and unique and that hold us all in harmony together.

Katherine Paterson is the author of thirteen novels for young readers and the winner of the 1998 Hans Christian Andersen Author Award. Her latest novel is Preacher's Boy, *published by Clarion Books.*

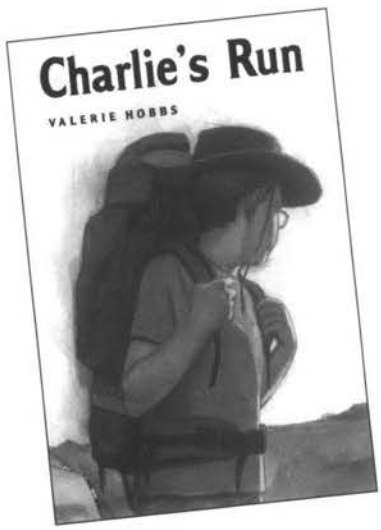
Great summertime companions



BROOKLYN, BUGSY, AND ME
by Lynea Bowdish
Pictures by Nancy Carpenter
"Sam is a likable narrator, whose discovery of new territory — both geographic and emotional — will involve readers in this perfect candidate for the 'skinny books' collection: it's short, easy reading that is both well-developed and satisfying." —*The Horn Book*
$15.00 / 0-374-30993-0 / Ages 7–11

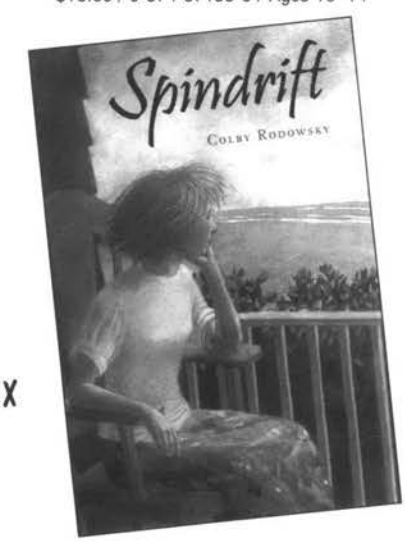


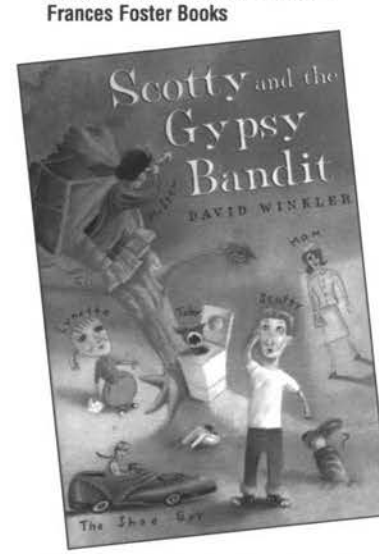
GLORIA'S WAY
by Ann Cameron
Pictures by Lis Toft
"The stories are warm and funny, as Gloria, a spunky kid . . . gets into some strange predicaments . . . Great fun, with subtly placed, positive messages that never take center stage." —*Kirkus Reviews*
$15.00 / 0-374-32670-3 / Ages 6–9
Frances Foster Books



CHARLIE'S RUN
by Valerie Hobbs
"A fast-paced, engrossing read with two characters on opposite ends of the ethical spectrum who meet in the all-too-human middle . . . The simple but eloquent narrative and realistic dialogue illuminate Charlie, a principled child who struggles to keep his head up in increasingly turbulent moral waters." —*Kirkus Reviews*
$16.00 / 0-374-34994-0 / Ages 10 up
Frances Foster Books

SPINDRIFT
by Colby Rodowsky
★ "This well-paced, affectionate story offers a compelling account of how one family and one teenager cope positively and optimistically with several of life's hurdles." —Starred, *School Library Journal*
$16.00 / 0-374-37155-5 / Ages 10–14





SCOTTY AND THE GYPSY BANDIT
by David Winkler
"An offbeat, darkly humorous tale that takes a preteen from the death of his father to a healing round of Thanksgiving deliveries to local children's shelters, with murder, romance, adolescent pranks, and plenty of growing up in between . . . Enjoyably quirky." —*Kirkus Reviews*
$16.00 / 0-374-36420-6 / Ages 10 up

FARRAR • STRAUS • GIROUX

A Summery List

Books for hot days and warm nights.

Illustrations by Eric Hanson

Take to the Sidewalk...

Anna Banana:
101 Jump Rope Rhymes
Compiled by Joanna Cole
Illustrated by Alan Tiegreen
William Morrow, 1989
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

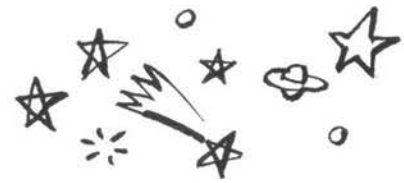
The Concrete Wave:
The History of Skateboarding
By Michael Brooke
Warwick, 1999
INTERMEDIATE

Hopscotch Around the World
By Mary D. Lankford
Illustrated by Karen Milone
William Morrow, 1992
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Beat the Heat...

Come On, Rain
By Karen Hesse
Illustrated by Jon J Muth
Scholastic, 1999
YOUNGER

Splash!
By Flora McDonnell
Candlewick, 1999
YOUNGER



Study the Stars...

Exploring the Night Sky:
The Equinox Astronomy Guide for Beginners
By Terence Dickinson
Illustrated by John Bianchi
Firefly, 1987
INTERMEDIATE

Find the Constellations
Revised edition
By H. A. Rey
Houghton Mifflin, 1976
INTERMEDIATE

The Stars:
A New Way to See Them
Worldwide edition
By H. A. Rey
Houghton Mifflin, 1976
INTERMEDIATE

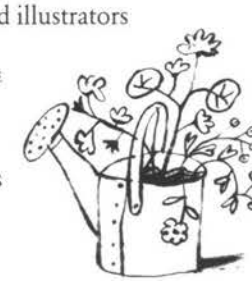
Grow a Garden...

Backyard Sunflower
By Elizabeth King
Dutton, 1993
YOUNGER

Blue Potatoes, Orange Tomatoes
By Rosalind Creasy
Illustrated by Ruth Heller
paperback: Little, Brown, 1997
INTERMEDIATE

Compost Critters
By Bianca Lavies
Dutton, 1993
INTERMEDIATE

Down to Earth:
Garden Secrets! Garden Stories! Garden Projects You Can Do!
By Michael J. Rosen and 41 children's book authors and illustrators
Harcourt, 1998
INTERMEDIATE



Garden
By Robert Maass
Henry Holt, 1998
YOUNGER

A Gardener's Alphabet
By Mary Azarian
Houghton Mifflin, 2000
YOUNGER

Befriend a Bug...

Children of Summer:
Henri Fabre's Insects
By Margaret J. Anderson
Illustrated by Marie Le Glatin Keis
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997
INTERMEDIATE

Fireflies!
By Julie Brinckloe
Macmillan, 1985
YOUNGER

Insects Are My Life
By Megan McDonald
Illustrated by Paul Brett Johnson
Orchard, 1995
YOUNGER

Get the Shivers...

The Random House Book of Ghost Stories
By Susan Hill
Illustrated by Angela Barrett
RANDOM HOUSE, 1996
INTERMEDIATE

Short and Shivery: Thirty Chilling Tales
Retold by Robert D. San Souci
Illustrated by Katherine Coville
DOUBLEDAY, 1987
INTERMEDIATE

Sing All the Verses...

Rise Up Singing: The Group-Singing Song Book
Edited by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson
SING OUT, 1992
ALL AGES

Dance in the Dark...

The Moon Jumpers
By Janice May Udry
Illustrated by Maurice Sendak
paperback: HARPER, 1999
YOUNGER

Nicholas Cricket
By Joyce Maxner
Illustrated by William Joyce
HARPER, 1989
YOUNGER

A Summertime Song
By Irene Haas
MCELDERRY, 1997
YOUNGER

Take a Trip...

Greetings from Sandy Beach
By Bob Graham
KANE/MILLER, 1992
YOUNGER

Night Driving
By John Coy
Illustrated by Peter McCarty
HENRY HOLT, 1996
YOUNGER

Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe
By Vera B. Williams
GREENWILLOW, 1981
YOUNGER

Ride Out the Storm...

Thunder Cake
By Patricia Polacco
PHILOMEL, 1990
YOUNGER

Time of Wonder
By Robert McCloskey
VIKING, 1957
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Tornado
By Betsy Byars
Ilustrated by Doron Ben-Ami
HARPER, 1996
YOUNGER

Twister
By Darleen Bailey Beard
Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX, 1999
YOUNGER

Sleep Outside...

Henry and Mudge and the Starry Night
By Cynthia Rylant
Illustrated by Suçie Stevenson
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 1998
YOUNGER

Sleep Out
By Carol Carrick
Illustrated by Donald Carrick
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1973
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Starry Night
By David Spohn
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD, 1992
YOUNGER

Snap Some Pictures, Make a Sketch...

Drawing Life in Motion
By Jim Arnosky
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD 1987
INTERMEDIATE

Take a Look Around: Photography Activities for Young People
By Jim Varriale
MILLBROOK, 1999
INTERMEDIATE

Stand in the Sand...

The Castle Builder
By Dennis Nolan
MACMILLAN, 1987
YOUNGER

Out of the Ocean
By Debra Frasier
HARCOURT, 1998
YOUNGER

The Sun, the Wind and the Rain
By Lisa Westberg Peters
HENRY HOLT, 1998
YOUNGER

Pack a Picnic...

Having a Picnic
By Sarah Garland
ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS, 1985
YOUNGER

Mud Pies and Other Recipes: A Cookbook for Dolls
By Marjorie Winslow
Illustrated by Erik Blegvad
paperback: WALKER, 1996
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Picnic
By Emily Arnold McCully
HARPER, 1984
YOUNGER

The River Bank and Other Stories from *The Wind in the Willows*
Adapted and illustrated by Inga Moore
CANDLEWICK, 1996
INTERMEDIATE

Stay Awhile...

Family Reunion
By Marilyn Singer
Illustrated by R. W. Alley
MACMILLAN, 1994
YOUNGER

Grandaddy and Janetta
By Helen V. Griffith
Illustrated by James Stevenson
GREENWILLOW, 1993
YOUNGER

July
By James Stevenson
GREENWILLOW, 1990
YOUNGER

Knoxville, Tennessee
By Nikki Giovanni
Illustrated by Larry Johnson
SCHOLASTIC, 1994
YOUNGER

Stina
By Lena Anderson
GREENWILLOW, 1988
YOUNGER

Summer Is

Start a Series...

Anastasia Krupnik
and others in the series
By Lois Lowry
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1979
INTERMEDIATE

The Book of Three
and the rest of the **Prydain Chronicles**
By Lloyd Alexander
HENRY HOLT, 1964
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER

Dinosaurs Before Dark
and others in the **Magic Treehouse** *series*
By Mary Pope Osborne
RANDOM HOUSE, 1992
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Half Magic
and others in the series
By Edward Eager
HARCOURT, 1954
INTERMEDIATE

Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures
and others in the series
By Cynthia Rylant
Illustrated by Suçie Stevenson
BRADBURY, 1987
YOUNGER

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
and others in the series
By Mildred Taylor
DIAL, 1976
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER

the Perfect Time to...

Share Some Poems...

Adam Mouse's Book of Poems
By Lilian Moore
Illustrated by Kathleen Garry McCord
ATHENEUM, 1992
YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

And the Green Grass Grew All Around: Folk Poetry from Everyone
By Alvin Schwartz
Illustrated by Sue Truesdale
HARPER, 1992
ALL AGES

The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom
Selected by Jack Prelutsky
Illustrated by Meilo So
KNOPF, 1997
ALL AGES

Every Time I Climb a Tree
By David McCord
Illustrated by Marc Simont
paperback: LITTLE, BROWN, 1999
YOUNGER

Neighborhood Odes
By Gary Soto
Illustrated by David Diaz
HARCOURT, 1992
INTERMEDIATE

A Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Caribbean Poets
Edited by John Agard and Grace Nichols
Illustrated by Cathie Felstead
CANDLEWICK, 1994
ALL AGES

Solve a Mystery...

The Mysterious Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
paperback: PUFFIN, 1995
OLDER

The Diamond in the Window
By Jane Langton
Illustrated by Erik Blegvad
HARPER, 1973
INTERMEDIATE

The House of Dies Drear
By Virginia Hamilton
MACMILLAN, 1968
OLDER

The House with a Clock in Its Walls
By John Bellairs
Illustrated by Edward Gorey
DIAL, 1973
INTERMEDIATE

The Long Secret
By Louise Fitzhugh
HARPER, 1965
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER

The Westing Game
By Ellen Raskin
DUTTON, 1978

While Away the Hours...

The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm
By Nancy Farmer
ORCHARD, 1994
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER

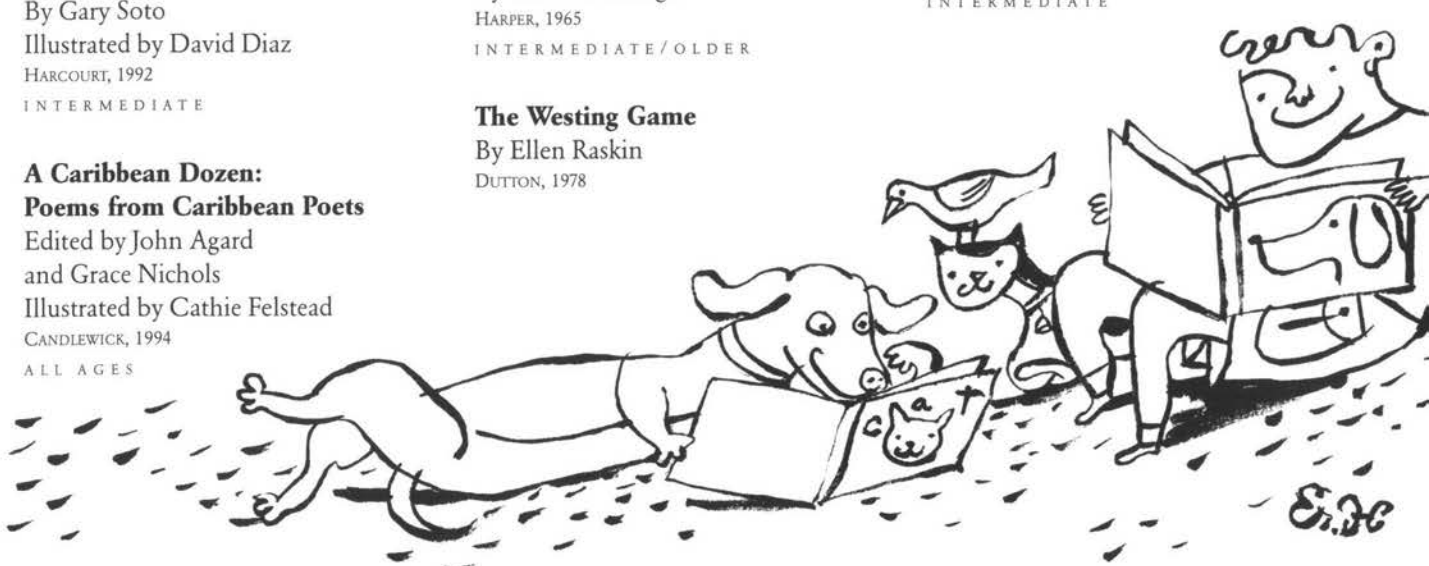
The Golden Compass
By Philip Pullman
KNOPF, 1996
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER

Gone-Away Lake
By Elizabeth Enright
HARCOURT, 1957
INTERMEDIATE

Island of the Blue Dolphins
By Scott O'Dell
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1960
INTERMEDIATE

The Moorchild
By Eloise McGraw
MCELDERRY, 1996
INTERMEDIATE

Tuck Everlasting
By Natalie Babbitt
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX, 1975
INTERMEDIATE



profile

Barbara Cooney

The work of this picture-book artist reflects both her adventurous spirit and her love of the New England landscape she called home.

By Jackie C. Horne

"It happens all the time. Readers assume writers always tell their own life stories," observed Barbara Cooney, referring to people who confuse her with her beloved character, the intrepid Alice Rumphius. In *Miss Rumphius* (1982), a picture book that won the American Book Award, author-illustrator Cooney created the story of a woman who satisfies both her obligations to herself (traveling to faraway places, then returning to live by the sea) and a deeper obligation to give something back to the world (planting lupines across the Maine countryside). Cooney, who passed away this spring at the age of eighty-three, may not have been Miss Rumphius. Yet in *Miss Rumphius* readers will find a great deal of Barbara Cooney, not only in the details from the artist's life that are sprinkled throughout the book—a favorite armchair, familiar New England landscapes, a portrait of her local library—but in the story's central thread. During a career that has spanned more than half a century and featured illustrations for more than one hundred books, Cooney, like Alice Rumphius, took to heart the words of Alice's grandfather: "You must do something to make the world more beautiful."

Born in 1917 in Brooklyn, New York, Cooney had drawing "in her blood." Her great-grandfather was a commercial artist who, like Alice Rumphius's grandfather, made cigar-store Indians and painted pictures "by the yard." And Cooney's mother was an avid amateur painter. But the young Cooney received little in the way of formal art training as a child. "The only art lesson my mother gave me was how to wash my brushes," Cooney said. "I became an artist because I had access to materials and pictures, a minimum of instruction, and a stubborn nature." Despite being known as the "class artist" at her boarding school, Cooney never considered attending art school, choosing instead a liberal-arts program at Smith College. But upon graduation in 1938, Cooney decided to take a stab at a career in book illustration, and moved to New York to study etching and lithography at the Arts Students League. A year later, she put together a portfolio to show to art directors at publishing houses, and was hired for her first job: illustrating Bertil Malmberg's *Ake and His World* (1940).

A wartime marriage ended in divorce, but in 1949 Cooney would form a more lasting tie, with physician Charles Talbot Porter. The two settled in Pepperell, Massachusetts, with Cooney's two children from her first marriage; two additional children soon followed. Despite her busy life as a mother and wife, Cooney did not abandon her illustration work; in fact, during the first twenty years of her illustration career, her neatly detailed scratchboard etchings graced more than fifty books. Working not in a separate studio but in a room where her family loved to gather, Cooney

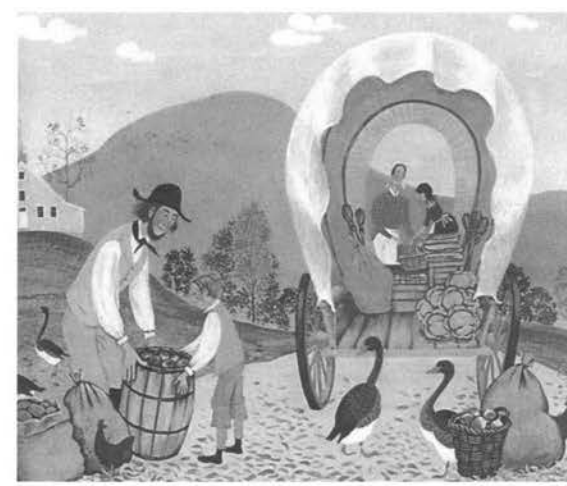
illustrated scenes that were deeply intertwined with her everyday life. "I drew what was near at hand... Children—and animals," Cooney remembered. Well aware that publishers were often more interested in the "warm and fuzzy" quotient of a picture book than its overall artistic merit, Cooney, characteristically wry, noted of her work during this period, "It sometimes seemed that the number of jobs offered was in direct proportion to the quality of the fur I drew." Her incidental illustrations for novels and songbooks—"decorations," she termed them—as well as her early attempts at the picture-book form (Margaret Wise Brown's *Christmas in the Barn* [1952], for example) are characterized by the gentle but never cloying sweetness of their subjects and the skilled draftsmanship of their form.

From Where Have You Been?

During the first two decades of her career, Cooney most often illustrated the texts of other writers. Of her few early published prose efforts, she later remarked, "They are all fortunately out of print, and if anyone asks, I say, 'I have no extra copies.'" She longed to illustrate in full color, but her editor, wary of the expense of such a format, refused, justifying her action by telling the young artist, "You have no color sense." Throughout the 1950s, Cooney toiled with awkward, unspontaneous overlays to add touches of color to her meticulously detailed scratchboard work. Her growing skill in the use of this method can been seen in *Chanticleer and the Fox* (1958), the first picture book for which Cooney provided both art and text. In her retelling of "The Nun's Priest's Tale" from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Cooney turned the limitations of preseparated color printing to her advantage. The bucolic, peaceful scenes are rendered in five-color pages, while black and red alone are used for more dramatic, danger-filled moments: Chanticleer's nightmare; the reader's first sight of the fox, the touch of red in its eye and tongue all the more menacing for its understatement; the fox running off with the foolish, gullible rooster. Cooney was awarded the Caldecott Medal for her work on *Chanticleer*. The prestige of the award led her editor to rethink her earlier assessment about Cooney's lack of color sense. Finally, Cooney had earned the right to use all of the colors in her paint box.

The next twenty years would prove a richly experimental time in Cooney's artistic life, a time when the sense of place that so characterizes her later work first began to develop. Like Miss Rumphius, Cooney traveled the world, absorbing the broad landscapes and tiny details that give such an air of authenticity to her paintings. The castles and farmhouses of a French alpine village are sprinkled through Cooney's *Mother Goose in French* (1964); the Greek cave where Hermes was said to have been born finds its way into *Dionysos and the Pirates* (1970); the horse-chestnut tree with a bench around it that stands in the courtyard of the Grimms' house in Steinau, Germany, appears in *Little Brother and Little Sister* (1982). Cooney experimented with almost every medium, including watercolor, pen-and-ink with wash, charcoal, acrylics, pastels—even collage, varying her methods to meet the needs of the subject at hand, and searching, perhaps, for a color medium in which she felt as comfortable as she had with her black-and-white scratchboard work. Her lack of formal training in color sometimes proved frustrating to her. That she was not always satisfied with her efforts can be surmised by the fact that she contemplated switching careers during the later part of this period, from illustration to her new love, photography.

It was only after winning the Caldecott Medal a second time, for her work on Donald Hall's *Ox-Cart Man* (1979), that Cooney felt that "my apprenticeship was over at last. I would not change careers after all." The subject of Hall's lyrical tale—the cycle of seasons in the life of a rural New England family in the 1830s—was perfectly suited to the illustration style Cooney adopted for the text: American-primitive folk art. While touches of American folk motifs had been present in much of Cooney's earlier work, *Ox-Cart Man* was the first book in which Cooney created complete illustrations in the style reminiscent of the art of Edward Hicks and other, anonymous early-American folk painters. It was the style that she would adopt for all of her subsequent picture-books.



From Ox-Cart Man

Intriguingly, Cooney's work on *Ox-Cart Man* was the first that she completed in her new house, which

From Island Boy

she and her son planned and built on the coast of Maine. Returning to the place where she had spent summers as a child, playing outdoors with a passel of cousins in the woods and fields, proved inspirational for Cooney, not only as an illustrator but also as an author. The few books that she had both written and illustrated prior to this period were mostly retellings or collections of the work of others, rather than texts solely from her own imagination. Cooney's rediscovery of Maine coincided with the discovery of her own storytelling voice, a voice brimming with the same combination of detail, artistry, and deeply felt emotion found in her best paintings. It is hard to imagine that the author who wrote, "The waves scalloped in and out, lapping at their feet. The sky was the blue of heaven, and the sea went on forever" (in *Hattie and the Wild Waves*), could have helped but become a writer.

Often more personal than her earlier work, and simultaneously more demanding and more rewarding for her readers, Cooney's later picture books draw on themes typically associated with the folk-art tradition. Like *Ox-Cart Man*, *Island Boy* (1988) celebrates both the hardiness and independent spirit of rural New Englanders and the rugged beauty of the landscape they inhabit. The Tibbetts family plows and plants, fells trees and builds stone walls, carving a home for themselves on a lonely Maine island. Though the youngest son, Matthias, leaves to sail as a cabin boy, his heart always skips a beat when his island home comes into view; he keeps his promise to himself to return, raising children and a grandchild in the same place where he himself was born. Rendered in the cool grays and blues of the ocean and sky, the landscape of *Island Boy* becomes almost a character in the story; a lasting and permanent haven for Matthias the man and his family.

In *Island Boy*, the cycle of seasons underlying *Ox-Cart Man* connects to the larger cycle of life itself. Matthias is born, travels, returns to the island, grows old, and dies, all within the scope of a thirty-two-page book. That death is a part of the cycle, an event to be accepted, not feared, is an understated keynote in Cooney's story, as is her trust in the interconnectedness of life across generations. Matthias's love for his daughter Annie and for her son Matthias, and their love for him in return, express a continuity that is as solid and real as the ground beneath their feet. This belief in the special relationship between young and old undergirds many of Cooney's picture books, including *Miss Rumphius*, where young Alice learns from her grandfather the importance of giving something back to the world, a lesson that she in turn passes on to her great-niece.

From Hattie and the Wild Waves

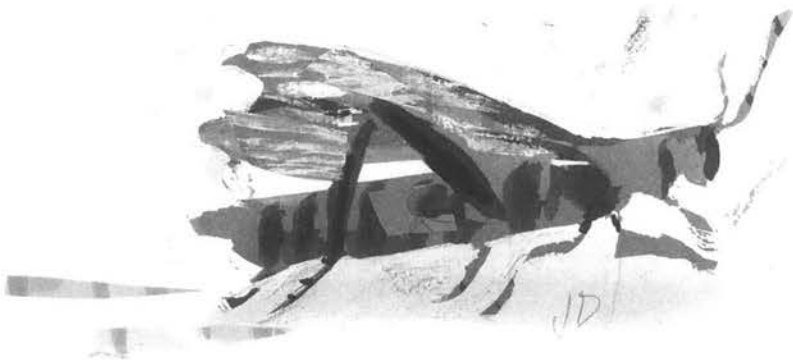
If Cooney draws upon folk-art traditions to give depth to her work, she also moves beyond them in her portrayal of strong, determined female characters. The predominance of female protagonists in her later books is

striking, especially when compared to her earlier work. From her illustrations of the lives of real-life iconoclasts Emily Dickinson (Michael Bedard's *Emily*, 1992) and Eleanor Roosevelt (*Eleanor*, 1996) to her most autobiographical book, *Hattie and the Wild Waves*, Cooney persistently portrays unconventional girls and women struggling against restrictive community values to discover and express their own individuality. Hattie takes pleasure in things that "nice girls" in turn-of-the-century Brooklyn aren't supposed to enjoy: whistling like John the Coachman; standing in the bow of her father's sailboat; walking along the shore, trying to understand the language of the wild waves. Hattie knows that she doesn't want simply to be a bride like her older sister, or make lots of money like her brother—she wants to be a painter. And though few encourage her, in the end Hattie finds a way to make her dream come true: "The time had come, she realized, for her to paint her heart out."

Hattie is but one of the many creative spirits that inhabit Barbara Cooney's work. Her sensitive portraits of painters, writers, and craftspeople in books such as *Emily*, Jane Boulton's *Only Opal* (1994), Mary Lyn Ray's *Basket Moon* (1999), and her own *Miss Rumphius* and *Hattie*, illustrate Cooney's belief in the power of creative endeavor to add resilience to the spirit and give meaning to life. Through her work, Barbara Cooney inspires young readers to believe that they, like Hattie and like Cooney herself, can and will offer a lasting gift of beauty to the world.

Jackie C. Horne, a former children's book editor, teaches at the Center for the Study of Children's Literature at Simmons College and reviews books for Publishers Weekly. *She is working on a Ph.D. in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British Literature at Brandeis University.*

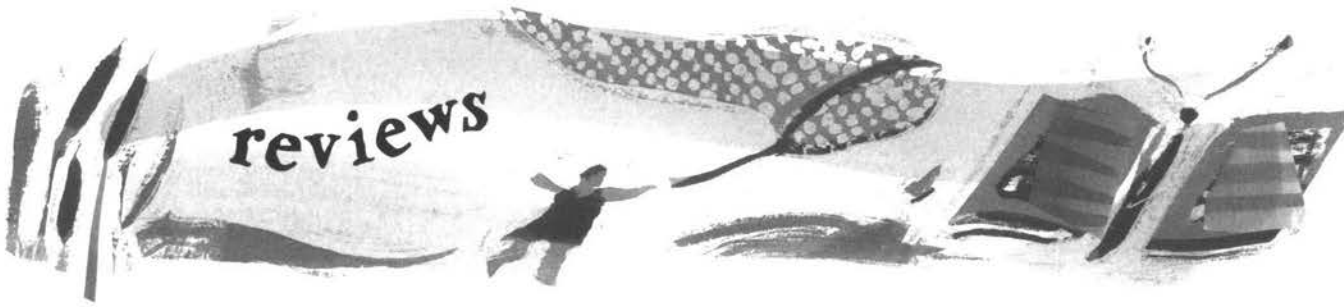
a poem for summer



The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver



Picture Books

Andrei's Search
By Barbro Lindgren
Translated by Elisabeth Kallick Dyssegaard
Illustrated by Eva Eriksson
R&S Books / Farrar, Straus & Giroux
28 pages, Ages 4–7, $14.00
ISBN 91-29-64756-8

The dedication for *Andrei's Search* exclaims: "A warm greeting to Korney Chukovsky in his heaven!" Inspired by Chukovsky, who insisted that children be allowed access to nonsense, fantasy, and other works of the imagination, Barbro Lindgren leads readers into appropriately dreamlike terrain. *Andrei's Search* is a quietly stunning tribute to a child's wishes that breaks free from a convention of most picture books today: it honors the unattainable.

Lindgren's story, set in St. Petersburg, Russia, is about a boy who has lost his mother. We don't know why she is absent or where she has gone (does the world always make sense to a child?), only that one day two aunts take Andrei to a "big house full of children." Andrei makes one friend at this orphanage—little Vova—who becomes a companion in his inevitable search.

Andrei's story begins before his birth, and in its beginning his connection to his mother is imaginatively described: "he had lived inside her stomach, right under her heart. There he had his own room with a bed and a chair. And a staircase led to an attic where the moon shone in through the window." A perfect coziness is depicted: a tiny, warm room with a solid-looking red wooden bed, flowered wallpaper, the steps to an attic full of toys. This ideal image gives way, a few pages later, to a picture of Andrei's real dwelling after birth. The scene is painted in muted colors: laundry hangs in the kitchen, clutter lies on the floor.

Eva Eriksson's line in these pencil-and-watercolor illustrations is sure enough to capture the full range of emotions on a young boy's face. Her range of color expresses the emotional breadth of the story, from the drab tones of the orphanage (think industrial green) to warmer hues (Andrei and Vova clothed in red) to a soft sky blue, the color Andrei's mother favors.

As the boys head out into the swirl of the city to find Andrei's mama, fantasy and reality intertwine. They receive pierogis from a kindly baker, make friends with an abandoned dog —and they theorize about the things they see. Andrei's dreaminess is not the saccharine cliché of too many children's books—rainbows and friendly unicorns. His fantasies are at once startling and subtle: Vova asks why an apple tree has flowers on it. "It wants to flower," says Andrei. "That's what trees want to do."

"Why is [a tugboat] bobbing?" asks Vova.

"Because it is so happy, of course!"

Illustration by Eva Eriksson, from Andrei's Search

"Why is it happy?"

"Beause it can make clouds."

As though a child penned the perfect ending to this story, Andrei and Vova find the home with the attic window and the moon, and they find Andrei's long-lost mother. The story feels like a perfect dream that you are sad to wake up from. Children who read *Andrei's Search* can bask in its sweet beauty; they're under no pressure to awaken, just yet.

—Christine Alfano

Illustration by Betsy Lewin, from Click, Clack, Moo

A Cake for Herbie
By Petra Mathers
ATHENEUM
24 pages, Ages 3–8, $15.00
ISBN 0-689-83017-3

Herbie, an affable duck who lives by the sea, has already appeared in two picture books starring his best friend, Lottie the chicken. In *Lottie's New Beach Towel* and *Lottie's New Friend* we learn that the outboard motor on Herbie's boat is less than reliable, that he is a devoted friend, and that he has a sweet tooth. We get some hints about his appetite for words, too: "I'm so hungry I don't care if there is *sand* on my sandwich. Get it, Lottie?"

In *A Cake for Herbie*, Lottie plays the supporting role. Duck and chicken are out doing their weekly grocery shopping when a poster announcing a poetry contest catches Herbie's eye. He wants to win first prize, a big layer cake. "Can you write a poem?" Lottie asks. "I think so," says Herbie, pressing his ear to his sack of groceries. "You know how I always make up things like: Listen to those cookies shout, *Open up, let us out!*" To this, Lottie answers matter-of-factly: "I thought I heard something."

One of the delights of the Lottie and Herbie books is the way the stories nimbly progress from scene to scene. Like the other volumes, this book is designed in a horizontal format. Petra Mathers presents her illustrations in panels of various sizes across that space, demonstrating her uncanny ability to distill and pace a narrative. Mathers also knows a thing or two about that essential picture-book attribute, the page turn: Grocery shopping completed, Herbie gets to work on an alphabet of food poems, chewing his pencil as he writes in a spiral notebook, stoking his imagination with chocolate pudding, and cooling his hot head with ice cubes. Suddenly, it is the night before the contest and Herbie is having terrible dreams; he calms himself with the thought that Lottie will come to the contest with him. Turning the page, we find one sick chicken. Herbie's on his own.

The birds at the poetry contest are a snobby bunch. When Herbie turns tail and flees into the rain, he stumbles across a cheerful restaurant where the creatures in the kitchen banter in rhyme. At closing time they all sit down to hear Herbie's poems, A to Z. When a celebratory cake appears at this after-hours poetry party, Herbie can't wait to tell Lottie. The cake makes a good snack for the car ride, and—what luck!—Lottie's up late and is recovered enough to sit down with her knitting and listen to the whole story.

—Susan Marie Swanson

Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type
By Doreen Cronin
Illustrated by Betsy Lewin
SIMON & SCHUSTER
32 pages, Ages 3–7, $15.00
ISBN 0-689-83213-3

Once upon a time, there were typewriters. They never wore out, and they never lost their usefulness, so people found them hard to throw away. One may have found its way into the kind of place where no one ever looks—perhaps a barn—and stayed there. Until one day…

This is the story of that "one day." How Farmer Brown discovered a note his cows had typed, politely asking for electric blankets. How Farmer Brown, incredulous, refused. How the cows declared a strike and invited the hens to join their side of the fray. How the hens were rebuffed, and Farmer Brown's typed ultimatum was brought to the barn by a neutral party—Duck.

How the cows responded with a pleasing offer:

> Dear Farmer Brown,
> We will exchange our typewriter
> for electric blankets.
> Leave them outside the barn door
> and we will send Duck over with
> the typewriter. Sincerely,
> The Cows.

How Farmer Brown agreed and all was well, until one day…

This clever fable—written by a lawyer, Doreen Cronin, in her picture-book debut—is terse down to the final page, which has no words at all. The story is a model of growing tension, but with a funny resolution. Though not the first example of an animal labor dispute in a book for children—remember Martin Waddell's *Farmer Duck*?—the notion of a group of powerless beasts commanding such an old and undervalued tool is subversive and fresh.

Betsy Lewin illustrates the cows from above and behind as if to emphasize their stubbornness and size. She gives the lowly chickens indignant stares and dresses stingy Farmer Brown in a ratty hat. These are clever depictions; instantly understood, yet faintly ironic, they serve the story perfectly.

—Mary Lou Burket

Cold Little Duck, Duck, Duck
By Lisa Westberg Peters
Illustrated by Sam Williams
GREENWILLOW
32 pages, Ages 3–6, $15.95
ISBN 0-688-16178-2

When disappointments get you down, often just sitting still for a while and focusing on brighter things can change your whole situation. Such is the case for a young duckling in *Cold Little Duck, Duck, Duck*. In this uplifting picture book, illustrations and text fashion a sweet heroine whose wish comes true when she uses patience and positive thinking to bring about her own happiness

With friendly pencil-and-watercolor drawings, Sam Williams evokes a rainbow of landscapes, from a desolate winter prairie to a vast sky full of fanciful daydreams, to a joyful profusion of flowers, grass, and blue waters. His furry, vivacious characters are full of gentleness and whimsy. Lisa Westberg Peters's language is simple and expressive. Her verse features repetition of monosyllabic words (a different word on each spread) emphasizing successive aspects of the story.

The small duck flies into a wintry landscape from, we assume, her yearly vacation down South. It is soon clear by her puzzled expression that she did not expect to be greeted by lingering snow. A sympathetic bear, patiently waiting for spring, pokes his head into the story and tells Little Duck the disappointing truth. "You're way too early, Duck, go back. You're beginning to shiver, Duck." Little Duck does not heed this advice. Instead, she tucks her head under her wing and thinks of spring treats, treasures, and memories gone by, of "squiggly worms and shiny black beetles, of crocuses and apple buds, and blades of grass in squishy mud." Her memories flood the landscape with a sumptuous feast of colors and images.

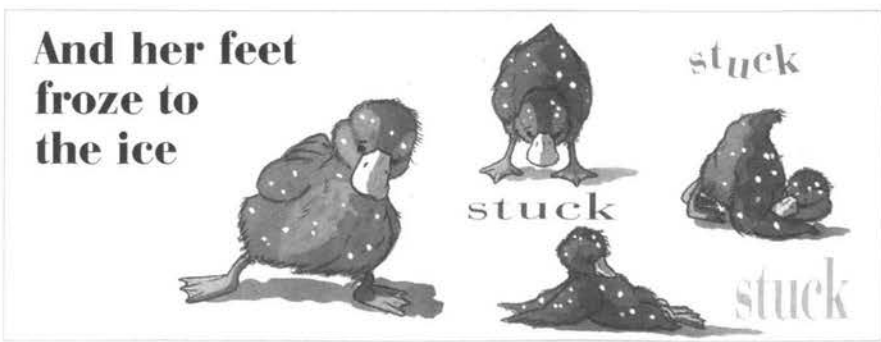


Illustration by Sam Williams, from Cold Little Duck, Duck, Duck

What is at first only imagined soon becomes a reality: "a V of ducks flew by, flock, flock, flock. They saw that spring was in the air and quickly spreading everywhere." Our hopeful little friend opens her eyes and realizes that her dream has come true—spring has returned and all her friends and relatives have come home. The new arrivals, perhaps a little surprised to see the young duck standing on the shore alone, invite her to join them in the water. With glee, she slips about on the melting ice, dancing and spreading her wings, finally plunging headfirst into the warm water. Cold Little Duck is now warm, happy, and contented. Her decision to wait out the last stretch of winter—an act of youthful persistence and optimism—finds its just reward in the coming of spring.

—Emily Carlson

Crab Moon
By Ruth Horowitz
Illustrated by Kate Kiesler
CANDLEWICK
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.99
ISBN 0-7636-0709-6

Crab Moon begins in a dreamlike tone suited to its nighttime subject: "The summer Daniel turned seven, his family rented a cottage at the beach. They arrived on the weekend of the full moon." After dark, Daniel and his mother witness the midnight visit of thousands of horseshoe crabs which have come to the beach to breed. The next morning, Daniel finds a stranded horseshoe crab on the beach and helps it escape into the sea. Ruth Horowitz has an ear for the rhythms of the waves and the tides, and a gift for original metaphors that make the sea creatures seem familiar. The crabs push on the beach like "restless cobblestones," and later, the barnacles and slipper shells on a crab's back look like "jewels on a crown." An almost saccharine ending

nearly upsets the integrity of the work, but luckily the down-to-earth scientific information of the afterword and Kate Kiesler's engaging illustrations counteract that tendency.

Kiesler's paintings truly reward the reader. The first one places you in the middle of the beach—up to the toes in warm sand and seashells. The sea comes hissing from the corner of the dedication page, and, throughout the book, the foreground of sand and shells serves as a frame for the larger beach landscapes, done in looser oils. The bold lines of the path to the sea, a white rail fence, and even the beam of Daniel's flashlight give the two-page spreads a dynamic energy. The frame of the beach drops away entirely at the climax of the story, allowing the reader, like Daniel, to get as close as possible to the horseshoe crabs.

Crab Moon would make you homesick for the seashore even if you grew up on the prairie. The lesson in Daniel's act of kindness, driven home by an all too familiar warning about the destruction of the horseshoe crabs' spawning grounds, at times threatens to overtake the story. However, the sweeping renderings of the beach and Horowitz's descriptions of the crabs themselves forge a closer identification with the animals' plight than all the moralizing will ever do. In the end, *Crab Moon* remains a graceful if somewhat sentimental book, and Kiesler's illustrations make it worth looking over.

—Kathryne Beebe

Illustration by D. B. Johnson, from Henry Hikes to Fitchburg

Henry Hikes to Fitchburg
By D. B. Johnson
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.00
ISBN 0-395-96867-4

Henry, a bear who bears an uncanny resemblance to a certain Concord intellectual, and his friend (also a bear) both want to visit the distant town of Fitchburg, but they disagree about how to get there. Henry decides to hike, but his friend chooses to earn money for train fare, and they have a friendly contest to see who will reach Fitchburg first. Henry and his friend part ways, and so begins a delightful story. On one side of the page, we see Henry walking; on the other, his friend working. Henry finds a honey tree; his friend carts flour from the mill. Henry presses flowers; his friend pulls weeds. Although the miles and the money add up at an equivalent rate, the pleasure each bear takes in his tasks does not. Both eventually end up in Fitchburg, but it is left to the reader to decide who had the more enjoyable time.

The complex colored-pencil-and-paint illustrations make *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg* worth reading more than once. Transcendentalism may not immediately suggest cubism, but D. B. Johnson's gently off-kilter illustrations encourage the reader's involvement. There is much to observe here—an idea that Henry (who observes a beehive perhaps a little too closely) would approve of. In softly textured, angular pictures, Henry's friend moves not-quite-square bookcases. Henry, as bare as a bear can be, wades a stream, his clothes and books piled on his head, his furry leg extended at a comical angle. Henry's friend, with his striped trousers and bouncing pocket-watch, must endure a crowded train ride surrounded by newspapers and a bespectacled bear in a large bonnet—while Henry blissfully munches berries in a blackberry patch.

The reader certainly enjoys both journeys. Grown-ups will chuckle over the familiar names: Mr. Hawthorne's garden needs to be weeded; Mrs. Alcott's woodbox must be filled; Mr. Emerson's books are to be rearranged. Johnson introduces Henry David Thoreau and other nineteenth-century Concord thinkers in a simple afterword; his tone isn't too far above the heads of the intended audience. As an extra treat, the passage from *Walden* that inspired Johnson's story also appears. The countdown of miles and cents and the amusing illustrations

keep the story moving along so that the formula (alternating between Henry and his friend) never seems unbearably repetitive. *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg* sweetly combines an intellectual sensibility with a droll humor and offers a lovely picture book that will appeal on several levels.

—Kathryne Beebe

Mama, Across the Sea
By Alex Godard
Adapted from the French
by George Wen
Henry Holt
40 pages, Ages 4–8, $16.95
ISBN 0-8050-6161-4

As Alex Godard's picture book opens, a tiny girl sits on a tin roof at noon. It's hot. The girl's hand shades her eyes as she scans an expanse of brilliant turquoise water. "Suddenly she saw a speck on the horizon," we read. "The speck was moving slowly toward the shore in a trail of white foam. 'Mama!' cried Cecile." It's not Mama but a fisherman, with the day's catch.

In this quiet story, set on an island in the Caribbean, Godard allows the events to unfold slowly, imitating the jumble of life. Cecile's mother is employed "across the sea," an all too common result of economic hardship in this part of the world. Though the girl knows it's unlikely her mother will return soon, still she waits and watches the water. Then one day she devises a scheme to lure her mother back home: she draws a picture, glues fine, pink sand and pretty shells on it, and sends it to her mama. The letter Mama sends back, telling Cecile that she's found a good job but won't get any days off for a long time, nearly breaks Cecile's heart.

Heavy with disappointment, Cecile listens to a tale told by Racik a storytelling flutist, about the power that the sea holds for those who live near it. Racik tells of a younger brother who is unable to have patience fishing. When a siren riding a sea turtle speaks of gold deep in the ocean, the boy dives into the water. His older brother never sees him again. Like Cecile, the older boy scans the sea daily trying to divine whether his brother will return. While there is quite a difference between a drowned fisherman and a woman seeking opportunity, Godard's refrain recurs: those that go "across the sea" don't seem to come back easily. If you're left behind, as Cecile is, the loneliness and waiting are almost unbearable.

Using pastels over colored paper, Godard's illustrations sing with nutmeg browns, tropical blues, and conch shell pinks. He frequently uses frames, such as doors and windows, to direct the attention of the reader. Though the dimensions of Cecile's body and face are inconsistent from one page to the next (a slight annoyance), this is compensated for by Godard's succulent color and lyrical story, ably translated by George Wen.

Illustration by Alex Godard, from Mama, Across the Sea

Does Cecile's siren call, her picture, achieve its effect? Not quite as she imagines. The picture does capture her mother's heart, but Cecile is the one to travel "across the sea," to visit her mother. Yet, there is hope, at story's end, that one day the entire family will be together, at home. As Cecile boards the ship bound for the mainland, she calls out to her grandparents at the port: "Wait for me... I'll come back. And maybe Mama will be back, too."

—Amy Timberlake

Me and My Cat?
By Satoshi Kitamura
Farrar, Straus & Giroux
40 pages, Ages 4–8, $16.00
ISBN 0-374-34906-1

What does Satoshi Kitamura mean by that question mark in the title of his new picture book? Is that a young boy pictured on the front cover with his cat—both wide-eyed, looking charged by caffeine—or isn't it? The title's odd, intriguing query pulls us into another of Kitamura's fantastical yet familiar worlds.

After all, it is just a normal little boy, his room strewn with toys, a cat lying curled on his bed... who is visited by a witch in the middle of the night. Nicholas reports the strange event almost matter-of-factly: "Late one night an old lady in a pointed hat came in through my bedroom window. She brandished her broom at me and fired out some words."

The effect of the witch's curse dawns on us as the narration is turned over to the slightly confused feline, Leonardo. The witch has switched their identities, so we get to experience a day in the life of a cat with a little boy's brain. He doesn't have to go to school! Will he make the daring leap from the tall bookshelf to the top of the cupboard? Can he defend himself from the tough alley cats that

Illustration by Satoshi Kitamura, from Me and My Cat?

prowl the garden wall? What's more, Kitamura treats us to the spectacle of the cat in the boy's body: he patiently eyes the pet goldfish, crouches contentedly in the litter box, dismantles a room in a feline frenzy. And while the "cat" watches the "boy," Kitamura's perfunctory descriptions heighten the bizarre nature of this personality switch: Nicholas "scratched himself earnestly, and when he was done, he challenged his shoes until they surrendered." You'll never see a more catlike boy, nor meet a cat quite this smart and observant.

Kitamura has a halting, angular line that lends an edgy quality to his cartoonish characters. He is in love with indigo—as Mom drags "Nicholas" down the hall to wash up for school, the deep blue carpeting pulses off the page and works to intensify the presence of little orange "Leonardo" peeking up from the foreground.

Alarmed by both her son's and her cat's weird behavior, Mom finally calls in the family doctor. "Nothing to worry about... He's just a little overtired," says Doc, and if you've ever spent time with an overly tired child, all of the action seems plausible. A sly reverse-transformation does take place at the end of this wonderfully offbeat tale, but just now, the concerned mom comforts her frazzled "son," while the "cat" sits close by. Kitamura uses images of familiar paintings as a way to expand on the emotions of the moment—for this scenario, a portrait of Madonna with Child hangs, perfectly placed, on the wall.

—Christine Alfano

Messenger, Messenger
By Robert Burleigh
Illustrated by Barry Root
ATHENEUM
32 pages, Ages 5–7, $16.00
ISBN 0-689-82103-4

"Snow, wind, sun, rain, / Morning's come around again," and a skinny young man sits up on his no-frills futon. His cramped studio apartment reveals a great deal about his life: burglar bars crisscross the window, four locks secure the door, and a stack of books teeters on the unused gas stove. Yet the single room seems cheerful, thanks to a hungry orange tabby cat, the man's colorful clothing, and—leaning against the wall—a bright yellow mountain bike.

Calvin Curbhopper is a courier, and the next spread shows him starting work, carrying his bicycle down the stairs. As he pedals past pedestrians on a city bridge, his bright clothes stand out against the eggyolk-tinted glow of the early sunshine. He wears a purple windbreaker, fingerless gloves, and crimson cycling pants that match his helmet and headphones. A turquoise

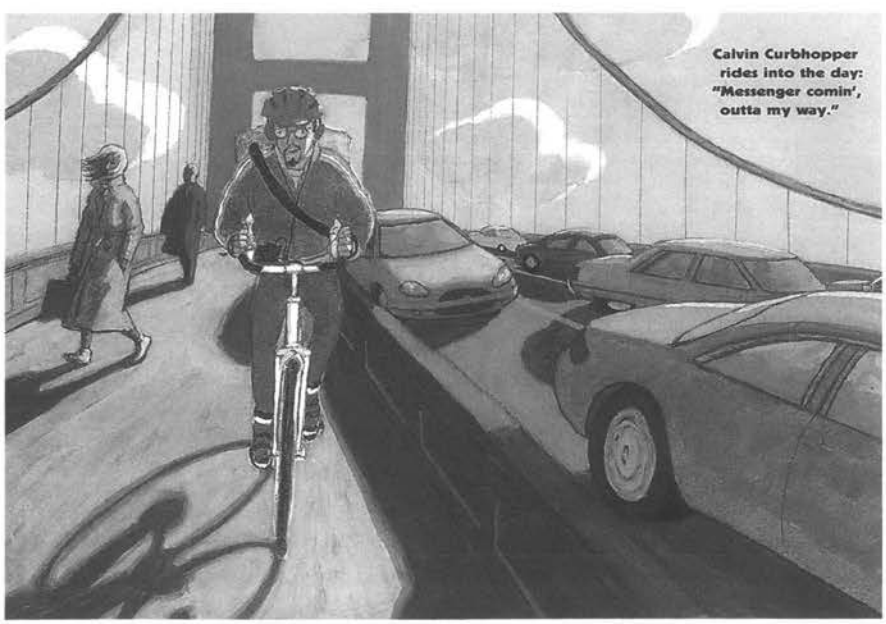


Illustration by Barry Root, from Messenger, Messenger

bag is strapped to his back. Jazzy words complete the scene: "Calvin Curbhopper / rides into the day: / 'Messenger comin', / outta my way.'"

Robert Burleigh's concise, slangy rhymes provide more atmosphere than explication. The economic verse suggests efficient, swift motion. Calvin makes "shortcuts through tunnels and parking lots," yet has no close calls with vehicles. The cool courier's only moment of trepidation comes in a litter-strewn neighborhood, where broken-down cars sit along the curb and two people look at him suspiciously: "No place to be, this street, not at all, / But messenger man's gotta answer each call."

If Burleigh says almost nothing about the specifics of Calvin's job or the packages he delivers, Root's close-ups do provide details of street life. The messenger wears a silver whistle around his neck (although he doesn't use it in these pages), and his glasses have green-tinted shades that snap down when necessary. He conserves time by having a take-out soda and burger "on the run," and he fields a cell-phone call from his dispatcher without dismounting: "Calvin Curbhopper radios in. / 'Messenger, messenger, where you been? / Got a quick pickup, can you take it?' / Hey, no way messenger not gonna make it!"

Barry Root's gouache illustrations pack a wallop, conveying the noisy energy of the city where Calvin glides. The artist preserves the vibrant palette he used in Carol P. Saul's *Someplace Else* and Tony Johnston's *Fishing Sunday*, emphasizing complementary color and blocky, in-your-face urban space. He shows the messenger cruising among skyscrapers and row houses and, on the last assignment of the day, stepping into an elevator packed with business-suited people.

Burleigh and Root follow Calvin Curbhopper through his workday, from the sun-warmed morning to the late, frosty afternoon to the evening at his apartment: "Wind, snow, rain, sun, / Messenger, messenger, / day's work done." In this selective account of a fast-paced, physically demanding job, they encourage an amiable second glance at the wiry guy jockeying through traffic or walking into an office lobby with a manila envelope.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Mountain Town

By Bonnie and Arthur Geisert

Houghton Mifflin

32 pages, Ages 4–7, $16.00

ISBN 0-395-95390-1

"During the last half of the nineteenth century, prospectors rushed to the Rocky Mountains, hoping to find gold and silver. Where the precious ores were found, towns sprang up within days." As they did in *River Town*, Bonnie and Arthur Geisert examine a year in the life of a town in a particular geographical region of the country. Though the time period is not specified, it is roughly mid-twentieth century.

We first see the mountain town when the high slopes are lightly dusted with snow. As winter progresses, the town fills with skiers while the townspeople go about their everyday lives—shopping, working, even robbing banks! In the spring, hikers enjoy the mountains; in the summer the whole town turns out for the Fourth of July celebration. Late summer brings thunderstorms, beautifully depicted in a two-page spread filled with ominous clouds in shades of gray and white. Autumn means high school football and preparing for winter.

The intricate illustrations abound with details that children will love: bank robbers sneaking into the vault via an old mining tunnel; the town's Fourth of July parade; and the framed picture of a prize pig in a place of honor in the bank. The palette is muted, but the illustrations are full of bits of bright colors, especially pinks, purples, and yellows. The double-page spread showing the trees in their autumn splendor is full of color. There is minimal text; it's the artwork that moves the story along, as it also captures the rhythms of the seasons. The text on the book's final page offers the most information about happenings in the town, and gives many "hidden picture" details to look for—the recurring blue car, a burning chimney, the school mascot. While the art as a whole is wonderful, the faces of the people are curiously crude and undeveloped.

Children will enjoy this book because of the captivating illustrations and won't even realize they're getting a dose of geography and social studies. Teachers will love *Mountain Town* for the window it opens onto a specific type of American community.

—Andrea Wilk

The Upside Down Boy
(El niño de cabeza)

By Juan Felipe Herrera

Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez

Children's Book Press

32 pages, Ages 5–10, $15.95

ISBN 0-89239-162-6

Juan Felipe Herrera has dedicated this picture-book memoir to his third-grade teacher, one of the heroes in his story about beginning school at age eight. His parents, migrant farmworkers, settle in town so that their boy can attend school. Juanito's father tries to reassure him: "A new place has new leaves on the trees and blows fresh air into your body."

The text of *The Upside Down Boy*, presented in English and Spanish, is compelling. The experiences Herrera describes—the struggle of the new-

comer, the nurture of family, the excitement of learning—are familiar children's book themes, but Herrera sweeps them up into a big-hearted, exuberant exploration of the magic of metaphor, and the potential for poetry to invigorate everyday life. At school, though he doesn't know enough English to understand when to play and when to eat his lunch, Juanito is still thinking like a poet:

> When I jump up
> everyone sits.
> When I sit
> all the kids swing through the air.
> My feet float through the clouds
> when all I want is to touch the earth.
> I am the upside down boy.

The Upside Down Boy is a sequel to Herrera's first book for children, the celebrated *Calling the Doves*, illustrated by Elly Simmons. Although Simmons's composition is stylized, the artwork in the first book is essentially realistic, focusing on the life experiences that support Herrera's imaginative flights. Not so the illustrations in this new book, which has a different artist. Elizabeth Gómez's brightly colored paintings have a kinetic wit, but they too often lapse into a stiff, literal interpretation of the poetry that infuses the text. Not that Herrera makes it easy. It's a tough assignment to illustrate a book that is essentially about language.

When Juanito puzzles over the similarity of the word "recess" to "*reces*" (Spanish for "cattle"), the picture of cows in the schoolyard doesn't enhance our understanding of his struggle. The illustration that accompanies Juanito's poem about his parents ("Papi Felipe with a mustache of words. / Mama Lucha with strawberries in her hair.") reduces Papi's "mustache of words" to a single word—"mustache"—written across his upper lip. Juanito's mother has a wig of strawberries instead of hair. At the end of the story, when Juanito says his classmates' paintings "look like flowery fields back in the valley," he does *not* mean that the children have painted those flowery fields in their pictures. He means, the schoolroom is starting to feel like home.

The music of language has given Juanito a foothold in a new world. Chosen to lead the singing at the school open house, he blows the pitch on his father's harmonica. "Ready to sing out your poems?" he asks. "Uno… dos… and three!"

—Susan Marie Swanson

Fiction

Adaline Falling Star
By Mary Pope Osborne
SCHOLASTIC
170 pages, Age 10 and up, $16.95
ISBN 0-439-05947-X

"Boys and girls, this is Adaline Carson. She's a mute and none too smart, and I'm sorry to say she has the devilish mixture of white and Indian blood... always keep an eye out for her, because she is and always will be part savage." In this way, Adaline Falling Star—neither mute, dumb, "devilish," nor "savage" —is introduced to schoolhouse children by her father's cousin, Silas. Because her Arapaho mother has died of cholera, eleven-year-old Adaline is forced to stay with Silas's family in St. Louis until her father, explorer Kit Carson, returns from a westward expedition.

When the explorers finally return to St. Louis, Kit Carson isn't on the steamboat, and there's no message for Adaline. Overwhelmed by her mother's recent death and the loss of her father, Adaline cuts off her hair and slashes her body with a knife. Cousin Silas happily prepares to commit Adaline to an insane asylum. The night before she is to be taken there, Adaline slips into the darkness to follow a trail of rivers back to the Arapaho. And this is just the beginning of the story.

One theme Mary Pope Osborne explores is the experience of a mixed heritage. Particularly interesting is Adaline's struggle to reconcile the tension between the tenets of modern science and her Arapaho beliefs. Science saved Adaline's life on the night of her birth by demystifying the appearance of cometic showers to her Arapaho relations, who saw in this event a darker omen. Yet when Adaline's mother dies and travels on the trail of ghosts to the Land-Behind-the-Stars, science is no help at all. Science teaches Adaline that the stars extend to infinity. How will she ever find her mother?

The basic premise for this novel is factual. While researching another book, Osborne read that Kit Carson married an Arapaho woman, and with her had a daughter named Adaline. When the real-life Adaline was sent to live with her St. Louis relations, one relative apparently remarked that Adaline "was a wild girl." "I sensed that Adaline had been misunderstood," writes Osborne in her author's note, "and that she had her own story to tell." But because she could find so little on Adaline, Osborne's story is fiction. Using a framework of mid-nineteenth-century history, Osborne tells the story through Adaline's no-nonsense, sometimes very funny, voice. Osborne's sentences are deceptively simple. A closer look reveals the kind of craftsmanship that occurs in Shaker furniture—each word fits so perfectly, each image is so right, we don't notice the artful language. We simply enjoy the story.

—Amy Timberlake

Because of Winn-Dixie
By Kate DiCamillo
CANDLEWICK
182 pages, Ages 8–12, $15.99
ISBN 0-7636-0776-2

Kate DiCamillo's debut novel is the story of ten-year-old Opal's summer in the Florida town where her father is the new preacher. Opal's engaging voice reads aloud beautifully: "Anyway, while me and Winn-Dixie walked home, I told him how I got my name and I told him how I had just moved to Naomi. I also told him about the preacher and how he was a good man, even if he was too distracted with sermons and prayers and suffering people to go grocery shopping." Opal's big dog is named Winn-Dixie because that's the name that jumps to mind when she finds him, a mangy stray romping through the produce section of the Winn-Dixie grocery store. Will her father let her keep him? "You are a suffering dog," she reasons, "so maybe he will take to you right away."

The novel is suffused with gentle humor. In a running gag, a parrot squawks at just the right moments to make us grin. Someone shows up at a garden party with a huge jar of pickles. Winn-Dixie is always sneezing.

We care about DiCamillo's characters not because she tells us so much about them but because she tells so little. Each detail, carefully chosen, resonates. The Dewberry boys like to ride bicycles, and their mother shaves their heads. Gloria Dump loves peanut butter, and she's a good listener. Such character tags have special significance in this story: sometimes they are all we can know about a person. When Opal asks her father to tell her ten things about her mother, who left the family when Opal was three, he tells her that she was funny, she could run fast, she knew the constellations, she hated being a preacher's wife, she drank... Opal hurries to write the ten things down.

DiCamillo describes her book as "a hymn of praise to dogs, friendship, and the South." It is also an homage to Southern fiction, a literary tradition that echoes throughout the novel—in its Florida setting, in a plot that blends realism and fantasy, and in characters such as a painfully shy man who plays guitar for the animals at the pet shop. Echoes sound in stories an elderly librarian tells from the days of the Civil War and remembrances of the time "back when Florida was wild." Everywhere in the novel, life's sadness is inextricably bound up with its sweetness.

What does this mean for child readers? Here is fine literature *for them*. *Because of Winn-Dixie* is the work of an

author who not only understands how to structure a book and bring her characters to life, but who knows how to use literary techniques and traditions to make something wonderful and fresh. Hopefully this is the beginning of a long friendship between Kate DiCamillo and young readers.

—*Susan Marie Swanson*

Homeless Bird
By Gloria Whelan
HarperCollins
216 pages, Age 10 and up, $15.95
ISBN 0-06-028454-4

Set in modern India, *Homeless Bird* stitches together a tapestry depicting rebellion against a class-conscious society, a coming-of-age chronicle, and a love story, using threads of metaphor and poetry. Koly is married at thirteen and a widow shortly thereafter. She and her family were tricked by the parents of the bridegroom, a dying youth who needed the dowry money to travel to the Ganges in hopes of a miracle. As a widow, Koly is the virtual slave of her mother-in-law, a mean-tempered, greedy woman.

Koly keeps her spirits up by learning to read—her father-in-law, a schoolmaster, secretly teaches her—and by working on her embroidery. Ironically, it is this feminine domestic skill, learned from her own mother as part of her preparation to be a wife, that allows her to escape the horrible life she is destined for as a penniless widow. Abandoned by her mother-in-law in the city of Vrindavan, the "city of widows," Koly is not sure what to do. A ricksha driver rescues her, taking her to a home for widows that is supported by a wealthy benefactor. Koly now has a safe place to sleep, is able to find a job, and is surrounded by kindness. Her life begins to look up when the benefactor notices her embroidery and takes her to the shop of a sari maker, who recognizes her artistry. The ricksha driver sees something in Koly as well, and after he returns home to rebuild his small farm, he asks her to marry him, defying their society's practice of shunning widows.

Koly's resilience and her cheerful, kind heart keep her hopeful when others might only despair. Rather than succumb to a future in which she is just another beggar, buffeted by fate, she uses a chance encounter to craft a life in which she quietly defies existing social practice and creates her own happiness.

Because the life of a poor woman in India, especially a widow, can be devastating, this story could have been unspeakably depressing. But it isn't, and this is not just because of the happy ending. Well-chosen detail, imagery, and metaphor make the setting so tangible the reader feels the heat, tastes the dust, and witnesses the squalor. But Gloria Whelan also evokes the culture's beauty—herons, tamarind trees, and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. Koly's ultimate good fortune, whether fate or the reward of her efforts, is believable and satisfying.

—Lee Galda

The Janitor's Boy
By Andrew Clements
SIMON & SCHUSTER
140 pages, Ages 8–12, $15.00
ISBN 0-689-81818-1

It is tempting to call *The Janitor's Boy* a "school story," just as it was with Andrew Clements's best-selling *Frindle*. However, both are much more. *The Janitor's Boy* is about fifth-grader Jack Rankin, who struggles with his identity among his peers because his dad is the school janitor. The nasty boys in his class tease him, wondering aloud how much education one needs to clean up vomit, and remarking on how "nice" Jack's dad looks in his green polyester uniform. Were this *just* a "bullies against the good kid" story it would have been a good book. A subtle layering of emotions, complex characterization, and wonderfully clever language make *The Janitor's Boy* an excellent story to read aloud and discuss.

Jack is in many ways a typical fifth-grade boy. He has good friends, a reputation for being slow to anger but tough to fight, and he is curious. He loves his mom and dad, although he's beginning to separate from both, and he thinks his little sister is a pain. He gets solid grades, is never late for anything, and has a good head on his shoulders. His trouble begins when his class moves into the old high school building, the one that his father, the janitor, takes care of. Jack, of course, blames his father for everything bad that happens, and comes up with a perfect revenge: a huge wad of bubblegum smeared all over a desk. When the assistant principal discovers that Jack did it, he assigns Jack junior janitor duty for three weeks—plenty of time to spend cleaning gum off desks. In the course of events Jack is forced to think about his father. Now they also have time to talk as they ride home from school together. When Jack accidentally gets locked in the town's steam tunnel, he learns some surprising things about his father, and emerges from the experience with a better understanding of himself and with new respect for his dad.

There is lightness to this tale as well, and humor in its telling. While scraping gum, Jack decides that he has earned a Ph.D. in Chewology and considers giving a lecture entitled "A Very Sticky Decade." In short, this is a story that will move readers, but also bring a smile.

—Lee Galda

Kite
By Melvin Burgess
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX
192 pages, Ages 10–14, $16.00
ISBN 0-374-34228-8

This is a disturbing book. *Kite* is in part an exposé of gamekeeping in England, which is the farming of game birds such as grouse and pheasants for what is called "sport shooting." Because wild wariness is gone from coop-raised birds, this "farming" requires killing off such predators as weasels, foxes, owls, magpies, crows, and jays in large numbers. The farm in *Kite* raises pheasants. "When the woods were full of sweet young birds, they attracted the vermin for miles around looking for an easy meal. Vermin. Rats, weasels and... jays, crows, magpies and hawks: [they were] everywhere."

Enter Tom Mase, the gamekeeper whose job it is to keep the pheasants safe, with poison, gun, and noose. When he'd done his work

> the vermin hung, row after row after row, along... the old shed. Each species was nailed up together. Yards and yards of magpies hung by their feet, the recent ones in glossy blue-black and white; the older ones a clammy mess of feathers, moldering flesh, and bones. After them, a long dark line of crows, waiting to turn green and rain their little bones onto the grass. Then, the splendid jays... Stoats and weasels were nailed up by their noses, as were the rats, their wonderful long tails hanging down.

In this unsettling setting we find Taylor the gamekeeper's son and his chum Alan, who are forced to wrestle with all the moral dilemmas that arise when we humans reduce nature to a production line and destroy whatever resists our efforts.

Taylor collects and "blows" the eggs of wild birds, removing their insides to save the shells. A neighbor, Reg Harris, has seen a huge hawk, the threatened red kite, over his land and pays Taylor to climb to its nest and destroy the eggs.

Taylor steals the three warm eggs; the kite abandons her nest. But the boy is enraged with himself and rushes home in a frenzy of guilt. Once in his room, he finds one egg damaged but not broken. (He tries to blow the other two, which are perfect, but the killed embryos are too large to blow out through the needle holes he poked.) The surviving, damaged egg is brooded under one of the family chickens.

This egg becomes Teresa, reared in secret by Taylor and Alan. When the inevitable happens and she is shot by Reg Harris, she does not die. She does suffer injury and continuing cruelty until she is saved by a repentant Tom Mase, who is fired for his efforts.

Unfortunately, the two boys are the only characters drawn round; the rest are rather flat. Reg Harris is all evil; his rich uncle Teddy, the birder, is eccentrically angelic. Two things redeem the writing: the unsentimental portrayal of animals *as* animals, and the dead-on accuracy of the teenage boys.

Like *Black Beauty* or *Beautiful Joe*, this story is disturbing but worthy. It tackles real issues of animal treatment and raises important questions about the nature and future of human beings.

—John Caddy

145th Street: Short Stories
By Walter Dean Myers
DELACORTE
152 pages, Age 12 and up, $15.95
ISBN 0-385-32137-6

Walter Dean Myers's best work is difficult to put down, for to stop midstory is to interrupt an urgent soliloquy by a passionate character. Myers's teenage narrators testify to the changeable experience of life in Harlem, where a sense of close-knit community coexists with a threat of danger from disaffected residents and trigger-ready police. "I'm not saying that 145th is weird or anything like that, but it's, like, intense," explains one of its residents.

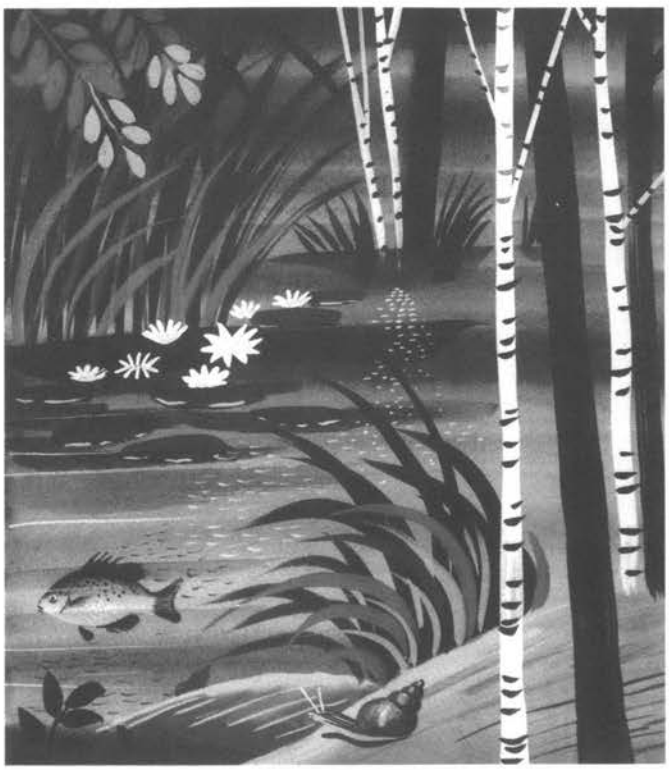
These ten interrelated tales supply balanced jolts of optimism and pessimism. "Big Joe's Funeral," which begins as wry comedy and closes on a blue note, tells how a man cashes in his life insurance and spends part of it on a fake funeral for himself: "'Nothing too fancy,' he said. 'Just something nice.'" His neighbors get into the event, which mimics a New Orleans jazz funeral without the dead guy, but Big Joe's angry stepdaughter-to-be disrupts the fun by falsely reporting a shipment of crack cocaine to the police. "They searched the coffin, the hearse, all of us, and two guys who were just sitting on their stoop, but they didn't find anything because naturally there wasn't anything to find," shrugs the unnamed narrator. "Everybody was mad but in a few minutes the partying was on and we forgot about the police."

Misguided police play a scarier,

remembrance

Leonard Weisgard

1916–2000



"Books for me have always, for as long as I can recall, been a source of real magic in this wildly confusing world."

—Leonard Weisgard

Leonard Weisgard, illustrator of more than 300 children's books, passed away on January 14 of this year. Best known for his illustration of Alvin Tresselt's *Rain Drop Splash* (which received a Caldecott Honor in 1947) and of many books by Margaret Wise Brown, including the "Noisy Books" and the Caldecott Award–winning *The Little Island* (1946), Weisgard broke new ground in the 1940s and 1950s, introducing bold, graphic elements of modern art to the children's picture book.

fatal role in "The Baddest Dog in Harlem," a melancholy story that escalates from a casual conversation among friends to paranoid firing upon an alleged sniper. Other highlights include a story of how a lone youth defuses a gang threat ("Monkeyman") and a reprise of "Big Joe's Funeral" in which Big Joe and his future stepdaughter lock horns again ("Block Party—145th Street Style"). The book's lightest moments come in "The Streak," a breathlessly told comic story about how a kid turns a losing streak (a missed layup in a key basketball game and a mistake with the school's meanest bully) into a winning streak (a date with a beautiful classmate and redemption on the basketball court).

145th Street doesn't have the sustained voice of *Slam!*, Myers's 1997 novel of a high school basketball star. Nor does it have the experimental verve of last year's *Monster*, an award-winning novel about crime and prison life, styled as a screenplay and illustrated by the author's son, Caldecott Honoree Christopher Myers. Yet this story collection serves as an excellent introduction to Walter Dean Myers, or, for longtime fans, another worthy variation on life in Harlem from a prolific, political, and versatile author.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

Spider Sparrow
By Dick King-Smith
Illustrated by Peter Bailey
CROWN
163 pages, Ages 9–14, $16.95
ISBN 0-517-80043-8

Spider Sparrow is a bit of a departure for Dick King-Smith. Thematically and stylistically somewhere between *Godhanger* and his lighter, funnier work, like the Sophie books or *Three Terrible Trins*, King-Smith's new novel engages some weighty ideas. Its central premise is the familiar notion that someone dis-

abled in one sphere will have special or extra abilities in another. The main character, though retarded, has an almost mystical ability to communicate with animals. He's a sort of idiot savant who can get wild animals to literally eat out of his hands.

Tom Sparrow and his wife Kathy live in the English countryside on the charmingly named Outoverdown Farm, where Tom is in charge of the sheep. One night during lambing season, Tom stumbles across a newborn in one of the lambing pens—a tiny baby boy no more than two days old. Tom and Kathy, childless for many years, are thrilled when they receive permission to adopt the baby. By the time he is two years old, it's clear to everyone that all is not right with the boy. Unlike other children his age, he knows only a few words, walks in a weird scurry using his long arms and legs (thus the nickname Spider) and never cries or fusses at night the way most children do. At the same time, his parents can't fail to notice that Spider has a remarkable talent with animals. Although he can barely speak, Spider can imitate the sound of an owl (and that of several other creatures) with unnerving accuracy.

In 1939, when Spider is nine, Britain enters the Second World War. Because so many farm laborers have enlisted, he is put to work scaring away crows from the newly planted fields ("crow-starving," it's called on the farm). The other workers are astounded by Spider's affinity with animals. A mare that is skittish around children allows Spider to hug her; only Spider can get anywhere near a group of wild horses; even foxes and otters fall under his spell.

But the war progresses, intruding more and more on the life of this once-isolated farm. The foreman's son is killed at Dunkirk. A Messerschmitt crash-lands on the farm, and its pilot is captured by the farmhands. The squire's son, an RAF flier, is shot down over France. None of this means anything to Spider—he's oblivious to the world outside Outoverdown Farm. For Spider, all life and all death takes place within the familiar pasture fences.

This is an ambitious book for King-Smith, but it may hold more appeal for teachers and parents than for children. Ponderous and heavy-handed at times, it lacks the sense of humor and fun that informs most of the author's tales for young readers. Though the author's attempt to imbue the story with a spiritual, even religious, dimension feels

somewhat forced, it is nonetheless thought-provoking. As one would expect from King-Smith, the details of life on a gentleman's farm in 1930s England are convincingly depicted. The language seems true to the time, which results in some vernacular that may be rough-going for the intended audience.

—Andrea Wilk

What's in a Name
By Ellen Wittlinger
SIMON & SCHUSTER
146 pages, Age 12 and up, $16.00
ISBN 0-689-82551-X

Would you rather live in "Scrub Harbor" or "Folly Bay"? This is the question before the voters of a Boston bedroom community, which has been altered by an influx of wealthy homeowners drawn to the town's oceanside beauty. Does it really matter what the community is called? After all, what's in a name? In fact, there *are* important issues of identity in how and what we name people and places, as we see in each glimpse of ten teenage lives that unfold as the campaign to change the name of Scrub Harbor approaches a vote.

These ten cleverly constructed stories within a story begin with Georgie, who is definitely not one of Scrub Harbor's wealthy residents. She lives with her mother, a teacher, above a dog-grooming business, where she helps out on Saturdays. A loner, she doesn't get along well with most of her peers. Her dad has been gone for six years when he surprises her with a phone call. O'Neill, on the other hand, is one of the affluent, living with his parents and his "super jock" brother, Quincy. He also lives with the suppressed knowledge of his own homosexuality. Ricardo, an exchange student from Brazil, is used to being a leader but now finds it difficult to enter high school social life. Not many people welcome him; most see him as "that Spanish kid." Georgie's best friend Christine, who has loved O'Neill for years, is shaken by the discovery that he is gay. Nadia, who emigrated from Russia with her parents, is another teen who struggles to fit in. Many think her odd because of her excessive shyness. Nelson struggles with his identity as a brilliant young man on his way to a "successful" life and with issues facing him as a young black male. Shaquanda is bused to the Scrub Harbor high school from the inner city because she is so bright. Her worlds collide every day.

These are just a sampling of a full cast of characters, who are drawn as "types" without being stereotypes. The intensity of thought expressed in each chapter takes us inside these young people; their commentary on themselves and their peers is honest, fresh, and sometimes brutal, and their interlocking stories explore issues of class and identity in an unusually complex way. Shaquanda's chapter is pivotal; she explicitly articulates the class conflicts operating in Scrub Harbor while at the same time putting it in perspective: it seems trivial in contrast to the vast difference between where she lives and where she goes to school. The stories in *What's in a Name* encourage us, its readers, to think about who we are and what we represent, but also to look beneath the surface. The last line of the book sums it up concisely: "You think you know someone, but then they surprise you."

—Lee Galda

Illustration by Kees de Kiefte, from
Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs

Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs
By Lensey Namioka
Illustrated by Kees de Kiefte
LITTLE, BROWN
121 pages, Ages 8–12, $15.95
ISBN 0-316-59011-8

Recent emigrants from China, the Yangs seem more at home in the United States with each succeeding book. Eldest Brother, so devoted to his music, has always been focused on his goals and unconcerned with fitting in. Now, in this fourth book about the Yangs, he has an inescapable problem. He needs a violin.

So Eldest Brother gets a job—actually a string of bad but progressively better jobs—and dedicates himself to making money. "I admire a kid who doesn't wait for handouts," a family friend declares, in a show of support. But Eldest Brother neglects the very thing he works to pay for, the very thing he lives for—will he ever be quite so in love with music again?

Every time I read about the Yangs I'm impressed by how honestly yet lightly Lensey Namioka writes. I'm thinking of the "look of great suffering" on the face of Mr. Yang, an accomplished musician, whenever his youngest son plays. I'm thinking of Third Sister's intuitive grasp that cer-

Riverbank Review

Ten Great Baseball Stories

Baseball in the Barrios
By Henry Horenstein
GULLIVER/HARCOURT, 1997
hardcover: $16.00, *paperback:* $8.00

YOUNGER / INTERMEDIATE

Through vivid photographs, the reader meets Hubaldo, a Venezuelan boy who plays the "all-American" game.

Baseball Saved Us
By Ken Mochizuki
Illustrated by Dom Lee
LEE & LOW, 1993
hardcover: $15.95, *paperback:* $6.95

YOUNGER

While playing baseball in a World War II internment camp, a Japanese American boy improves his skills and suffers less hostility from whites.

Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man
By David A. Adler
Illustrated by Terry Widener
GULLIVER/HARCOURT, 1997 / *hardcover:* $16.00

YOUNGER

He played in 2,130 consecutive games, then took himself out "for the good of the team" and died with grace.

Make-Believe Ball Player
By Alfred Slote
Illustrated by Tom Newsom
HARPER, 1989 / *paperback:* $4.95

INTERMEDIATE

Henry can invent *play-by-play, but he can't play—which leads to some outlandish situations.*

The Story of Baseball
By Lawrence S. Ritter
WILLIAM MORROW, 1999 (*third edition*)
hardcover: $16.00, *paperback:* $7.95

INTERMEDIATE / OLDER

An excellent history of the game—well illustrated, lively, and insightful, with an emphasis on great individual players.

Detach bookmark here. →

Riverbank Review
of books for young readers

Bookmark is a regular feature in the *Riverbank Review*, a quarterly magazine about children's literature published in affiliation with the Univ. of St. Thomas in Mpls./St. Paul, MN. For subscription information, call (651) 962-4372.

The Story of Negro League Baseball
By William Brashler
TICKNOR & FIELDS, 1994 / *hardcover:* $15.95
INTERMEDIATE/OLDER
Original research gives this history of a time when "blacks and whites could not be teammates" its authority and warmth.

Thank You, Jackie Robinson
By Barbara Cohen
Illustrated by Richard Cuffari
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD, 1974
paperback: $4.95
INTERMEDIATE
Friendship joins a black man and a Jewish boy who love the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Dodgers' most electrifying player.

This Is Baseball
By Margaret Blackstone
Illustrated by John O'Brien
HENRY HOLT, 1993 / *paperback:* $6.95
YOUNGER
For the youngest fan: a deft introduction to baseball, which promises that, win or lose, "Tomorrow there will be another game."

When Willard Met Babe Ruth
By Donald Hall
Illustrated by Barry Moser
BROWNDEER/HARCOURT, 1996
hardcover: $16.00
INTERMEDIATE
The long and colorful career of Babe Ruth inspires and shapes three generations of a Massachusetts family.

Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear
By Lensey Namioka
Illustrated by Kees de Kiefte
LITTLE, BROWN, 1992 / *paperback:* $4.50
INTERMEDIATE
Yingtao has an eye for hitting baseballs, and Mathew has an ear for playing Haydn—if only they could switch!

Riverbank Review

tain groups, including her own, are "more ethnic than others," and other pointed glimpses of these hopeful children living in a swirl of expectations. They long to please their parents and themselves, and they try, each in their own way, to succeed within two divergent cultures. Namioka skates across this ice with humor and ease, and her books always end on a positive note.

Eldest Brother's predicament may be the darkest one of all. In China, we are told, he would have been *given* an instrument, but in the United States he's got to acquire one on his own. From the beginning, when we see him hold a cherished violin that he may never be able to afford, we feel how much is at stake.

This book is the last of the series, the publisher says. I'm going to miss the Yangs, a true quartet of individuals, tenderly and playfully depicted in the art of Kees de Kiefte. I'll wonder if Yang the Youngest ever hits his dream home run, if Third Sister ever drops her American name, if Second Sister ever sees Shanghai again, if Eldest Brother ever plays at concert halls around the world.

—Mary Lou Burket

Nonfiction

Anne Frank: A Hidden Life
By Mirjam Pressler
DUTTON
192 pages, Age 11 and up, $15.99
ISBN 0-525-46330-5

Closing Anne Frank's diary opens a Pandora's box of questions: Who was Anne Frank before she started writing her diary? Who were the other people living in the Secret Annex? What happened after they were arrested? How did the Netherlands perceive Jews? Why did Anne's father edit her diary? Would Anne have written if she hadn't

spent those years in confinement? Mirjam Pressler, editor of the impressive definitive edition of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, tries to answer these questions in her companion to the diary.

Although some questions can't be answered, Pressler does admirably well in answering quite a few. Not only does she provide answers, she leaves us with unforgettable images. Particularly striking is the last known sighting of Anne Frank at Bergen-Belson. A nurse saw Anne wrapped only in a blanket. Anne had thrown away what she wore because "she had such a horror of the lice and fleas in her clothes." The nurse gathered some clothes for her, but two days later both Anne and her sister were dead from a typhus epidemic that had spread through the camp. Pressler's account makes clear what any reader familiar with the Holocaust knows and those less aware of the events of the war need to hear: despite the fact that Anne died of disease, the inhumane conditions she lived under constituted murder as surely as if she had been shot.

That said, Pressler's book may be inappropriate for children of, say, eleven or twelve, for whom it is recommended by the publisher. Besides an uneven writing style and research that relies heavily on only a handful of sources, the most troublesome issue is the author's extrapolations—without clearly allowing that she is merely speculating. For instance, Pressler is convinced that Anne experienced her first orgasm with Peter (the other adolescent in the Annex) but was unable to confide this to her diary. Pressler spends several pages outlining her argument, highlighting relevant passages of the diary. Though she uses the word "assumption," this doesn't seem a clear enough delineation in a book intended for young readers. And her evidence is, to this reader, quite slim.

Pressler has devoted a great deal of time to the study of Anne Frank, and is very knowledgeable about her subject. This book will be a valuable reference for teachers or librarians, but for eleven-year-olds, the guidance of an adult may be necessary.

—Amy Timberlake

Satchel Paige

By Lesa Cline-Ransome
Illustrated by James Ransome
Simon & Schuster
40 pages, Ages 9–12, $16.00
ISBN 0-689-81151-9

You think Satchel Paige was born fully grown, with his right hand curled around a baseball? Lesa Cline-Ransome will tell you that Leroy Paige, born in 1906 in Mobile, Alabama, came into the world just like other people—his hand and a baseball simply happened to be a "perfect match." Between practicing pitches on his mama's chickens and earning the nickname "Satchel" by carrying bags to help feed his eleven brothers and sisters, Leroy grew up knowing how to throw strikes. His coach told him, "You concentrate on baseball and you might make something of yourself," and that's just what Satch did. He played on a semipro team for only a year before he was striking them out, one after another, in the professional Negro Leagues. Satch became a distinctly American self-made hero who not only pitched better than anyone else but became the first black pitcher drafted into the major leagues, and the first black inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was so good, he'd load the bases and call to his outfielders, "Why don't you have a seat. Won't be needing you on this one."

Illustration by James Ransome, from Satchel Paige

You can see the hand of the Coretta Scott King Award–winning James Ransome in the energy of the illustrations. The most successful are the simplest: Satch on the mound, tall and powerful, his white-and-red uniform outlined against a wide blue sky; a two-page spread with portraits of Satch and his colleagues "Cool Papa" Bell, Oscar Charleston, and Josh Gibson. Saturated swaths of blues, golds, and deep greens set off crisp, sunlit uniforms, and expressive faces communicate the excitement of the game.

In this engaging biography, we meet a hero who follows rules of his own making and plays the best game in a league where "only the ball was white." A formal bibliography at the end and a baseball-cardlike page of vital statistics make this book somewhat sophisticated for the youngest fans, but readers of all abilities can enjoy dynamic illustrations and a story that sounds as if it's being told to you over the backyard fence. Occasionally the prose forgets its folksy tone and too-formal phrases wander in, but the charm of the rest makes up for it. Like Satchel Paige himself, Lesa Cline-Ransome and James Ransome's book is long and lean, sassy and bold, and thoroughly entertaining.

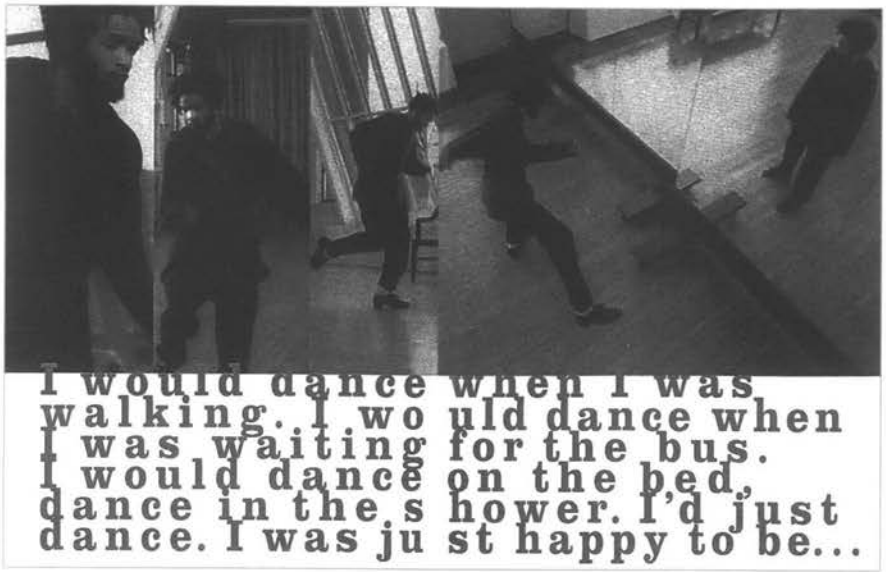
—Kathryne Beebe

Savion! My Life in Tap
By Savion Glover and Bruce Weber
Designed by Paula Kelley
William Morrow
80 pages, Age 10 and up, $19.95
ISBN 0-688-15629-0

There are two extremes on the young adult biography continuum: to one side, the serious tomes, sometimes excellent, more often fact-heavy and stodgy, consulted only when a report is due the next day. On the opposite side sit the hastily written, fluffy teen-heartthrob bios, sounding the depths with probing questions like, "What's your idea of a perfect date?" Well, a gust of fresh air has just blown the dust and fluff off of the genre! *Savion! My Life in Tap* seriously explores the life and creative process of a young and gifted dancer, and it does so with an ease and energy that will appeal to any reader.

A glowing foreword by Gregory Hines attests to Savion Glover's impressive accomplishments in the art of tap. Like Hines, Glover has breathed life into a dance form that for some has been considered either quaint or demeaning to its black practitioners. The alternating voices of the book—Bruce Weber's lively reportorial style, and Savion's intelligent and articulate musings—piece together an extraordinary history. We move through Savion's childhood (his mother recognized and supported his inherent talent) to his astonishing successes in musical theater, including his ambitious and acclaimed production *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*, a history of racism expressed through dance, music, and poetry. Paula Kelley's bold, kinetic design captures the momentum of Savion's dance: for example, huge black, red, and gray letters stomping across one two-page spread —TICKETY BLOOH KAH TICKETY BLOO KAH SHUCK—let us hear his feet in action.

To know about Glover and his art is to move beyond the boundaries of his life—after all, he "learned not just to dance, but to hold the dance in high regard, to revere its history, its community, its etiquette, its respect-your-elders tradition." Glover cannot talk about his own work without harkening back to the dance styles of so many tap greats. He makes it clear that his own original technique springs from the creativity of other dancers and from the distinct rhythms of a range of musical styles. Glover brought innovation to tap by infusing it with the music that



From Savion! My Life in Tap

he loved: funk and hip-hop informed Glover's vocabulary of movement and brought the sounds of tap up-to-date.

It's hard to imagine a combination of text, photography, and book design that could better express the motivations and the creative process of a dancer. This book is vibrant; it's got raw energy and the insistent impulse to move at its core. Glover uses a term, "hitting," to describe a state of culmination in his dancing—knowing that he has performed at his peak, that he's connected with his audience: "Like, we going to put it down, not loud, but properly." *Savion! My Life in Tap* hits.

—Christine Alfano

Window on the West: The Frontier Photography of William Henry Jackson

By Laurie Lawlor

Holiday House

132 pages, Ages 10–14, $18.95

ISBN 0-8234-1380-2

William Henry Jackson (1843–1942) is remembered for his black-and-white photographs of canyons, mesas, mountains, trees, and rivers in the vast American West. Picture the West and you probably see it as Jackson did, as a peaceful landscape full of natural wonders.

The social landscape was, of course, less pure. In 1871, while on a government expedition to the Yellowstone River region, Jackson and his fellow "explorers" were met by health enthusiasts who planned to build a toll road to the springs! Ranchers, farmers, miners, soldiers, and tourists were rapidly changing the face of the West in the years from 1868 to 1893, when Jackson was hauling his heavy equipment around on the back of a mule. People were around him and they have a subtle presence in his pictures, but his obvious and most enduring subject was the land.

Somewhat improbably, then, Laurie Lawlor looks at Jackson's work as a "window on" social change. The result is a divided history, meager in its profile of the enterprising Jackson and digressive in its coverage of a multitude of subjects—migration, railroads, treaties, economics, and inventions—which constitutes the complex history of the West. It's a pity that Jackson himself isn't more in focus.

It would have been wonderful, for instance, to learn more about Jackson's ties with Thomas Moran, the landscape painter. Twenty years after meeting, these old friends set off without adequate maps or supplies in search of Wyoming's Devils Tower. Their misadventures fill one of the book's best chapters, and they make us wish for more about these men.

Unlike most artists in the East, Jackson had no formal training. Lawlor says this gave him "fewer preconceptions about how the West was *supposed* to look. This made it easier for him to start fresh. He just jumped in and started shooting." One of the loveliest examples of his work is printed opposite the title page and shows a frontier figure clad in buckskin. Against the timeless landscape, this man's clothing is a startling reminder of the fact that time has passed. The West has changed, but Jackson's vision of the West remains a part of common memory.

—Mary Lou Burket

The World According to Horses: How They Run, See, and Think

By Stephen Budiansky

Henry Holt

101 pages, Age 10 and up, $16.95

ISBN 0-8050-6054-5

This cool analysis of *Equus caballus* could come as a shock to devotees of Misty and Black Beauty. Science journalist Stephen Budiansky is captivated by horses, but his amazement is un-

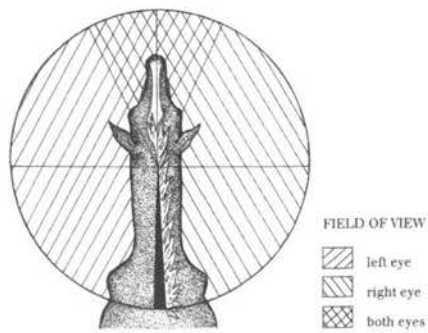


Illustration by Barbara Paxson, from The World According to Horses

softened by sentimentality. He considers the horse a marvel of nature's engineering, designed for optimum physical performance through eons of evolution. He observes the horse with a clinical eye, telling how it has served humans as a piece of riding equipment, as a ritual object, and, yes, as a hearty meal.

Budiansky has adapted his general-audience study, *The Nature of Horses* (Free Press, 1997), into a compact volume for younger readers. He covers much the same ground as he did in the original, but avoids such topics as mating and genetics. Junior readers won't, for instance, learn about "flehmen," a stallion's upper-lip-in-the-air response to a mare; nor will they hear about Przewalski's horse, an endangered link to horses of prehistory. Such omissions are something of a loss, for they demystify both common horse behavior and unusual species.

On the other hand, the author doesn't shrink from discussing the horse as "meat on the hoof" or speculating on how "a traveler making his way across the spare, windblown steppes of the Ukraine 60 centuries ago might have stumbled upon an eerie sight... A dead horse, its head and limbs hanging from a skin suspended on poles, [which] marked sacred sites across pagan Europe." The latter information accompanies a gruesome black-and-white photograph of the sacrificial practice. Readers of *The Nature of Horses* will recognize the undated image as one taken by early anthropologists in Soviet Asia, but this book's caption reveals virtually nothing about the disturbing picture's source. Again, clarification is in order.

Budiansky is more in his element when explaining how a horse's mind and body operate. He describes how an aggressive horse issues a warning but won't necessarily attack, and he explores how grooming establishes a friendly bond: "Horses most often groom each other on the lower neck. When horses are brushed at this place by a person, their heart rate decreases 10 percent or more." He distinguishes human "language" from "horse sounds" like the long-range whinny, the intimate nicker, or the snorty "blow" of a startled horse, which he compares to a dog's bark. "A horse's whinny is shaped more by the laws of acoustics... than by any wordlike meaning," he concludes.

Revelatory chapters evaluate the horse's endurance, its skeleton and musculature, and its specialized vision: "A horse can see almost directly behind

itself without turning its head" and has a small blind spot "where the nose itself blocks the horse's view." Readers with a budding interest in veterinary science will learn a great deal about horse physiology and psychology from this distilled volume. Advanced horse observers should proceed directly to Budiansky's more edifying, better-illustrated *The Nature of Horses*. In either case, horse enthusiasts should brace themselves. Budiansky offers a clear-eyed look at a common but little-understood animal, not a cuddly or loyal pet.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Poetry

The Basket Counts
By Arnold Adoff
Illustrated by Michael Weaver
SIMON & SCHUSTER
48 pages, Age 8 and up, $17.00
ISBN 0-689-80108-4

The Basket Counts is a welcome addition to the growing number of children's books about basketball. In a series of poems using his "shaped speech" style, which incorporates the rhythm and meaning of words into their spacing and layout, Arnold Adoff explores shooting the "pebble rubber ball" before the school bus arrives, and practicing on "The Hoop behind the Bedroom Door."

Basketball players will recognize themselves in these details, and girls will be delighted at the number of poems about female players such as "Jumper":

She
has
springs in
k n ees and
f l i p
w r ist
f i n g e r
t i p s.
Her
shot
arcs
s i lent ly
through
o p e n
s t eel
and
c l ing
ing
net.

In the poem "This Team the Silver Spokes," a youngster watches a group of players in wheelchairs spin and fly and decides that

I need to make that happen
on my m o v i n g feet.

This linking of different players gently reminds us how easy it is to take our running and jumping for granted.

Adoff's poetry highlights the movement that is such an essential part of the game. Conveying that movement is a challenge for any artist, and Michael Weaver attempts it in his gouache illustrations by incorporating swirls to depict motion. But since most of the illustrations feature one person, the back-and-forth dance between players is largely absent. From the detailed basketball on the cover to the page numbers (on tiny basketballs), the book's design is fittingly hoop-centered.

An important poem comes near the end, containing this reminder:

Most players don't go pro
most players don't go
most players don't
most players
most
most
must
must
must keep the books as open
as the o p e n shot
inside for the easy
lay up for the easy
two.

This would be a wonderful poem to post at playgrounds and gyms across the country.

Many boys and girls are passionate about their hoops, and *The Basket Counts* provides an opportunity for these young hoopsters to read poetry about the game they love.

—John Coy

Light-Gathering Poems
Edited by Liz Rosenberg
HENRY HOLT
128 pages, Age 12 and up, $15.95
ISBN 0-8050-6223-8

Shared pain shrinks. Shared joy grows. These are two fundamental reasons people turn to poetry. Poetry anthologies often stress the pain but rarely focus on the joy, or in Liz Rosenberg's term, the Light that the poet and reader can together gather.

Pain and suffering are often referred to as the "human condition." I'd suggest, and the poems collected in this book remind us, that the human condition is far more balanced than that. It also consists of common healing moments of joy and illumination. Light in this collection means wisdom, joy, discovery and revelation, enlightenment, beauty, and, of course, healing. Poetry has celebrated all these forever, just as it has struggled with the shadow side.

One problem for contemporary artists and poets is the difficulty of celebrating the light. For unlike any time before, our internal store of images is created more by the media than by direct experience. So many images of profound beauty and joy have been stolen by the marketplace in order to sell tampons or dental adhesives. We no longer own a public language of celebration that we can trust.

So in our hunger for positive emotion we are offered sentimental and banal attempts at art, such as gift-shop verse and "sofa landscapes" by "starving artists." This anthology is a wonderful corrective. As Rosenberg notes, "each poet here is a 'shard' of light forming a greater whole."

Rosenberg has collected some ninety short poems from many times and places, back as far as Rumi in thirteenth-century Persia, and extending from Issa's Japan to Langston Hughes's Harlem to William Blake's visionary worlds. As Rosenberg reminds us, "poets do speak to each other, across ages and vast distances"—and, happily, to us.

The most surprising light in the volume is cast by the excellent biographical notes Rosenberg gives us at book's end. Carefully selected for life detail rather than writerly gossip, these notes shine. Many offer suggestions for further reading.

—John Caddy

Movin':
Teen Poets Take Voice
Edited by Dave Johnson
Illustrated by Chris Raschka
ORCHARD
64 pages, Age 12 and up, $15.95
ISBN 0-531-30258-X

Teens have much to tell us, but adults are often unsure how to cut through the style and the reserve to *hear* them. *Movin': Teen Poets Take Voice*, edited by Dave Johnson, offers adult and young adult readers the chance to hear the voices of thirty-five teen poets.

These poets cut a wide swath, from an instructional poem about how to use chopsticks to a wistful remembrance of playing camping in the bedroom to a funny poem about match point at a championship volleyball game. Some of the poems are short and powerful, such as "Simplicity" by Nadeema Arshad:

> If home is where love is,
> And love is where trust is,
> I guess I'm homeless.

That poem comes so quickly, it's necessary to pause to appreciate its terse, resonant message. Other poems, like Amy Biegelsen's "InLine," have both linguistic force and images that pack a punch, the combination of which makes for great reading aloud:

> Bleached blonde hairdo stands in
> Lexus lease line and absently
> fondles cubic zirconium
> wedding ring while imploring adopted
> Nicaraguan children to please hush
> up and behave properly, like
> mommy does.

Teenagers in America are bombarded with images and messages about how to look, how to act, how to feel. Sorting through this bombardment can be a major challenge. Writing poetry provides a means for teenagers to pause and examine who they are.

The poetry in *Movin'* is accompanied by illustrations in pen-and-ink and watercolor by Chris Raschka. Expresive and direct, they are a perfect pairing with the verse. The poems in the book were created in a series of workshops initiated by the staff of Poets House, at branches of the New York Public Library. Workshops were led by Johnson, Clara Sala, Helen Decker, and Melanie Hope. These poets created a space where teenagers were able to write poetry about their lives and their concerns. The partnership between the New York Public Library and Poets House provides a model that can be emulated in other communities. For, as Johnson says in his introduction, these young poets "are not just the 'voices of the future.' They are also the voices of *now*."

—John Coy

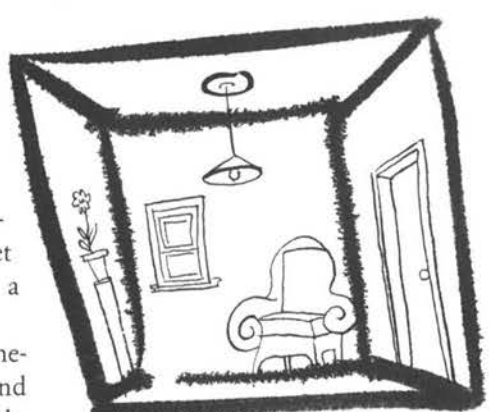


Illustration by Chris Raschka, from Movin'

River Friendly, River Wild
By Jane Kurtz
Illustrated by Neil Brennan
SIMON & SCHUSTER
40 pages, Age 6 and up, $16.00
ISBN 0-689-82049-6

The eighteen poems collected in this picture book describe a cycle of devastation and recovery. Jane Kurtz, who lives in Grand Forks, North Dakota, saw her home and neighborhood destroyed by the flooding of the Red River in April 1997. *River Friendly, River Wild* documents that experience through the persona of a girl who recounts the flood's effect on her family, her neighbors, and herself.

Before any of Kurtz's poems have been read, the book's opening illustrations tell us something interesting. On the title page is the small image of a house, submerged up to its roof in soft green water. A single leaf fills the next page. What we will soon witness in palpable, human terms is subtly established: in a flood, that which seems large and personal (a home) is suddenly made small, while seemingly insignificant items (such as a leaf) are swept into one's sphere of attention.

In the normal cycle of seasons, the river is powerful but unthreatening. Its fullness from snowmelt and rain is described by the narrator in the first poem, "The Red River," as she plays at a friend's home close to the riverbank: "full of spring rain, / it crawled up her yard, / leaving chunks of trees / that we made into pirate ships." On this spring day, there is no sense that the girls' homes will become debris claimed by the river.

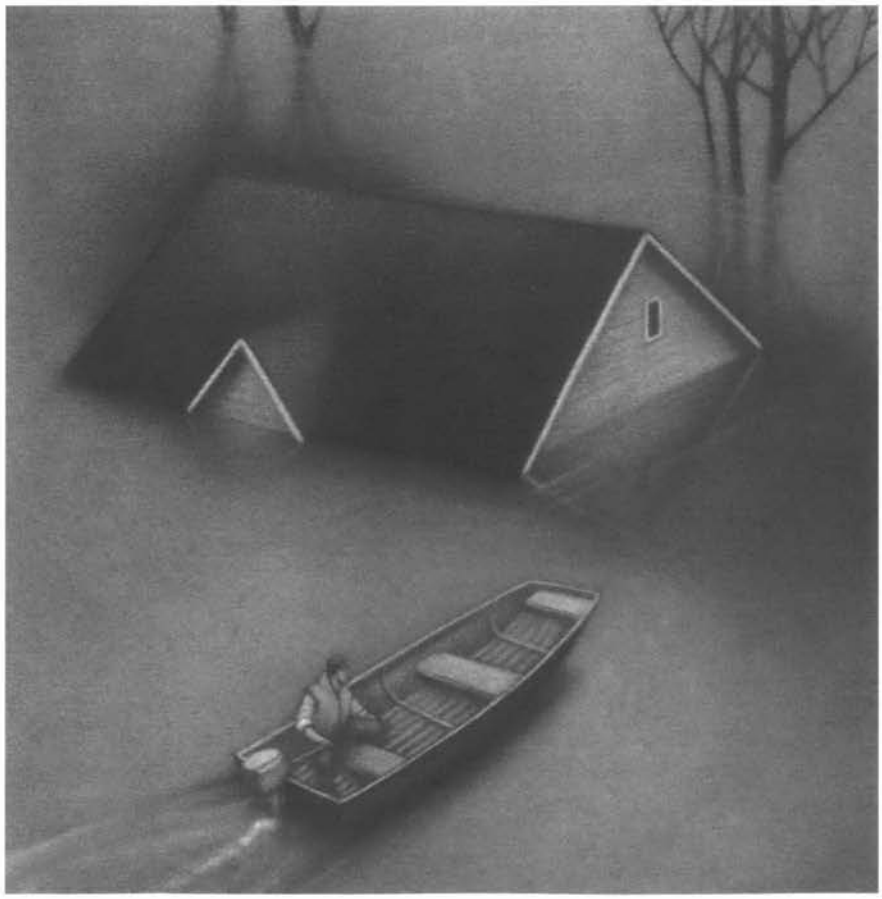


Illustration by Neil Brennan, from River Friendly, River Wild

Foreshadowing the disaster to come, the girl's cat knocks plastic houses off the Monopoly board as she and her brother play during an unexpected April blizzard. A week later, when the blizzard's melt swells the already full river beyond its banks, the sandbagging begins:

> Scrape, scritch, shovel the sand.
> Swish, thump, drop it in the bag.
> Wrist twist 'til the bag's closed.
> Mom turns the wire to shut the bag's mouth.
> One, lift, two, swing, three, catch, four, toss.

As the water rises, a number of actions are taken "just in case." In addition to the sandbagging, engineers work furiously to patch cracks in the dikes, and residents living near the river pack up belongings to spend the night on higher ground. A turning point comes in "Fleeing—Just After Midnight—April 18." The girl says, "Most things you lie awake and worry about / don't happen. / This / one / does." The sound of sirens fills the darkness as the city—higher ground included—is evacuated.

Through a child's sensitive eyes, we see adult confusion and despair ("My parents don't know what to do. / They wander around like balls of string, / winding and unwinding"), but also cooperation and caring, and the generosity of strangers who donate food, supplies, and their own time and effort to help with the enormous—and to the residents, intensely emotional—cleanup. Something interesting happens as this city is threatened, its people mobilized into round-the-clock defensive action. As its neighborhoods are swallowed by encroaching water, the *community* is strengthened.

Neil Brennan's paintings (stunning oils, with a dark glaze overlaid) may at first seem too beautiful and calm for a story about upheaval and destruction.

Yet, the poems are really about the deepening of one's awareness, even in the midst of great turmoil. The artist appears to understand this. Each picture finds a still point in a world that is turning upside down.

—Martha Davis Beck

Salting the Ocean:
100 Poems by Young Poets
Edited by Naomi Shihab Nye
Illustrated by Ashley Bryan
GREENWILLOW
111 pages, Age 8 and up, $16.95
ISBN 0-688-16193-6

Over the years Naomi Shihab Nye elicited these poems during her residencies as a visiting poet in school classrooms. These are fine and true poems, though they might never have been written without the nudging presence of the poet. Does this make them collaborations of a sort? Sure, of the best and oldest kind. Poets have always written off of one another; poems have always helped more poems emerge from the creative fire. Literature builds on itself, is inherently collaborative, never begins from scratch.

Nye organizes the poems loosely by theme: Self and the Inner World; Where We Live; Family; the Wide Imagination. Until the final section, perhaps too many of these poems are the result of formula exercises à la Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies and Dreams*. But the poems of the final section often transcend the formula approach and prove that kids write the real thing, with truly "wide imaginations." (In my own thirty-five years as a poet in the schools, I learned after a time that kids, given permission and seeing my confidence in them, would naturally rise to poetry with no formulas given or needed, as with some of the poems here.)

Ashley Bryan's pictures for *Salting the Ocean* are brilliant, and contribute greatly. Clearly, he read with his heart and found his pictures in the poems. Bryan's pictures are more than decorations; they are a mature artist's reflections on the lives of children.

Another delightful aspect of the book is the editor's comments in the index. Don't miss her descriptions (in the Afterword) of tracking down these no-longer-so-young poets to get permissions.

The best thing about poems by children is how powerfully they speak to other children. We find our best audience in our peers. Two good things to do with this book: (1) Give it to a child. (2) Read it and recapture a younger you, when you saw the world new and could have found words and perceptions like these, if only a visiting poet had asked. (If one *did* ask, expect a phone call.)

—John Caddy

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

Kathryne Beebe *graduated from Carleton College this spring with a B.A. in English Literature.*

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

John Caddy*'s poetry has won the* Los Angeles Times *Book Prize and the Minnesota Book Award. He currently produces Self Expressing Earth (SEE), an Internet-based program that teaches ecological literacy through making art.*

Emily Carlson *is an intern at the* Riverbank Review. *She lives in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota.*

John Coy *is the author of* Night Driving *(Henry Holt) and* Strong to the Hoop *(Lee and Low). He lives by the Mississippi River in Minneapolis.*

Lee Galda, *coauthor of* Literature and the Child *(Harcourt), is professor of children's literature at the University of Minnesota. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and children.*

Nathalie op de Beeck *writes about children's books for* Publishers Weekly *and other publications.*

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

Amy Timberlake*'s reviews have appeared in* BOOK: The Magazine of the Reading Life, New Moon Network, hip Mama, *and* HUES, *and are forthcoming in* The Horn Book Guide. *She lives in Evanston, Illinois, with her husband.*

Andrea Wilk, *a former children's bookseller, currently works for Henry Holt and Company. She writes about children's books for various publications.*

one for the shelf

The Case of the Mummified Pigs: And Other Mysteries of Nature
By Susan E. Quinlan
Illustrated by Jennifer Owings Dewey
128 pages, Ages 9–12
Boyds Mills Press
hardcover: $15.95 / *paperback:* $9.95
ISBN 1-878093-82-7 (hardcover)

When I notice ants at all, it's usually because I want them gone. They're swarming a peanut butter jar in my kitchen cupboard or using my leg for a highway while I lie in the grass, and I can't help but take it personally, as if they exist only to annoy me. But that doesn't mean I'd ever want the world to be rid of "large blue" butterflies, a British species now extinct because a certain kind of ant wasn't around to care for it in its larval stage. Or of birch trees, which sometimes need ants to protect them from caterpillar infestations. Both of these helpful ant activities are described in Susan E. Quinlan's absorbing *The Case of the Mummified Pigs*. The fourteen ecological mysteries unraveled within its pages show, among other things, that nature has no clear-cut good guys or bad guys. If we look at an insect and see only a pesky picnic crasher, then we aren't paying close enough attention.

Children can easily memorize the definition of "ecosystem" in science class without ever feeling they are part of one. Quinlan's accounts of scientific sleuthing drop readers into the thick of things as they demonstrate the often profound and unpredictable effects one species can have on another. Why would cedar waxwing tail feathers turn from yellow to orange? After carefully piecing together all the clues, ecologists traced the change back to a single species of berry-producing shrub, brought to the northeastern United States from Japan, which introduced a new pigment into the birds' diet. Why did six thousand reindeer die suddenly on the predator-free Saint Matthew Island? Because they ate themselves out of existence. Without wolves or other large carnivores to keep the population down, the twenty-nine reindeer introduced onto the island in 1944 increased their numbers to the point where, just twenty years after the initial herd's release, they had no nutritious food left to sustain them. It is enormously satisfying to tag along with the scientists in *The Case of the Mummified Pigs* as they solve such puzzles, but dizzying and sobering to consider the "millions of secret connections" Quinlan reminds us are left to uncover. So many connections undoubtedly involve humans. How can we ever know which of our actions produce relatively benign consequences, like a small change in a bird's feather color, and which will prove deadly?

Each chapter in Quinlan's book bears a title worthy of an Agatha Christie novel: "The Puzzle in the Postcard Scene," "The Mystery of the Missing Songs," "The Riddle of the Green Tree Islands," and so on; and at times the "villains" seem as fiendishly clever as any a mystery novelist could dream up. (Witness the plant shoots in "The Mystery of the Disappearing Hares" that produce poisons to keep from being eaten.) Yet Quinlan manages to convey the intrigue in each situation without glamorizing what scientists do. Like detective work, much scientific investigation involves painstakingly gathering data that doesn't always amount to anything. Sometimes the culprit is obvious—sometimes the butler did do it—but scientists still need to perform rigorous tests in order to make their case. Jennifer Owings Dewey's pencil illustrations of the plants and animals studied are graceful and attractive but not prettified. She judiciously depicts the lovelier subjects, such as the woolly daisy, as well as the less comely (albeit more kid-appealing) flesh fly and carrion beetle.

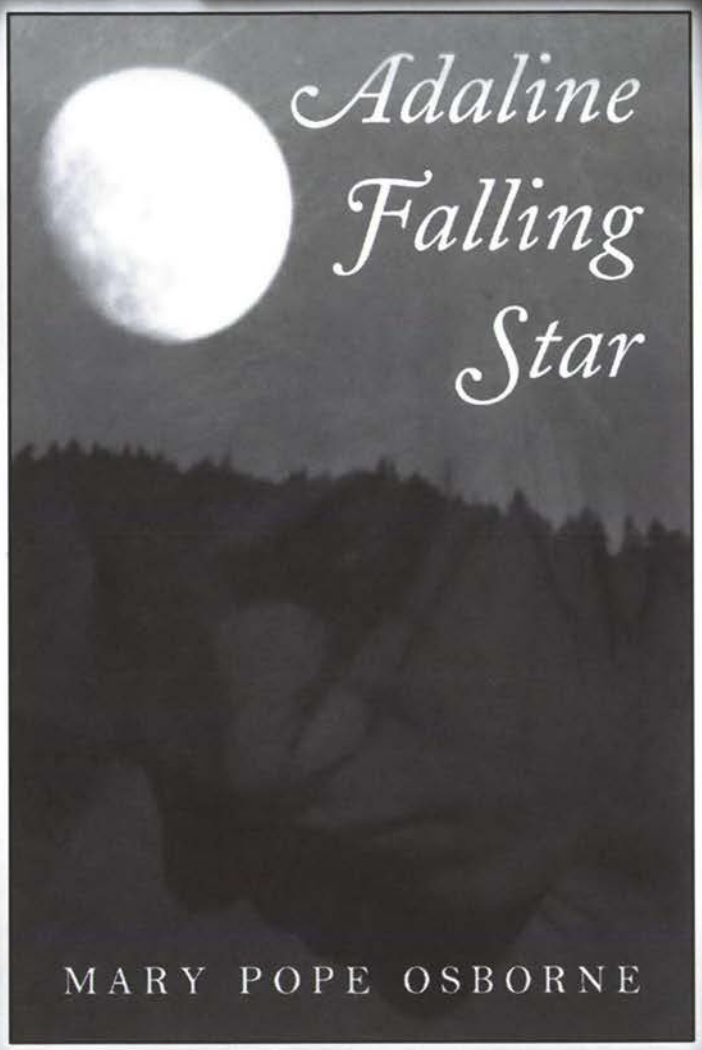
In the end, all the cases point toward "the land organism," a term Quinlan says naturalist Aldo Leopold used to convey the provocative idea that the earth "is like a single living thing" since "we cannot change one part of nature without affecting other parts." It's something to think about, the next time you find yourself reaching for the Raid.

—Christine Heppermann

Christine Heppermann is a member of the editorial committee of the Riverbank Review *and a regular contributor to* The Horn Book Magazine. *She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and daughter.*

★ *"Truly extraordinary...Not to be missed."*

-*School Library Journal*, starred review



0-439-05947-X • $16.95

"Adaline Falling Star is the mixed-race daughter of famed frontier scout Kit Carson and Singing Wind, an Arapaho Indian woman....Told in the girl's colorful frontier voice, this is an engaging tale of true grit and self-discovery." -*Booklist*

"Vivid historical detail and descriptive prose fuel the narrative. Adaline possesses a wisdom marked by an often heartbreaking sense of humor." -*Publishers Weekly*

"Smart, strong-willed, and with a distinct narrative voice, Adaline makes a memorable protagonist; her adventures will keep readers riveted." -*Kirkus Reviews*

SCHOLASTIC

Scholastic Press

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

RIVERBANK REVIEW
MOH-217
1000 LaSalle Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2009