

A PROFILE OF CHARLOTTE ZOLOTOW

Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

Navigating the
Neighborhood

THE TEACHER'S ART:

Dreaming
of Kansas

Tales of
Changelings

INTERVIEW:

Kevin Henkes

Imagination
and Risk

By Emily Arnold
McCully

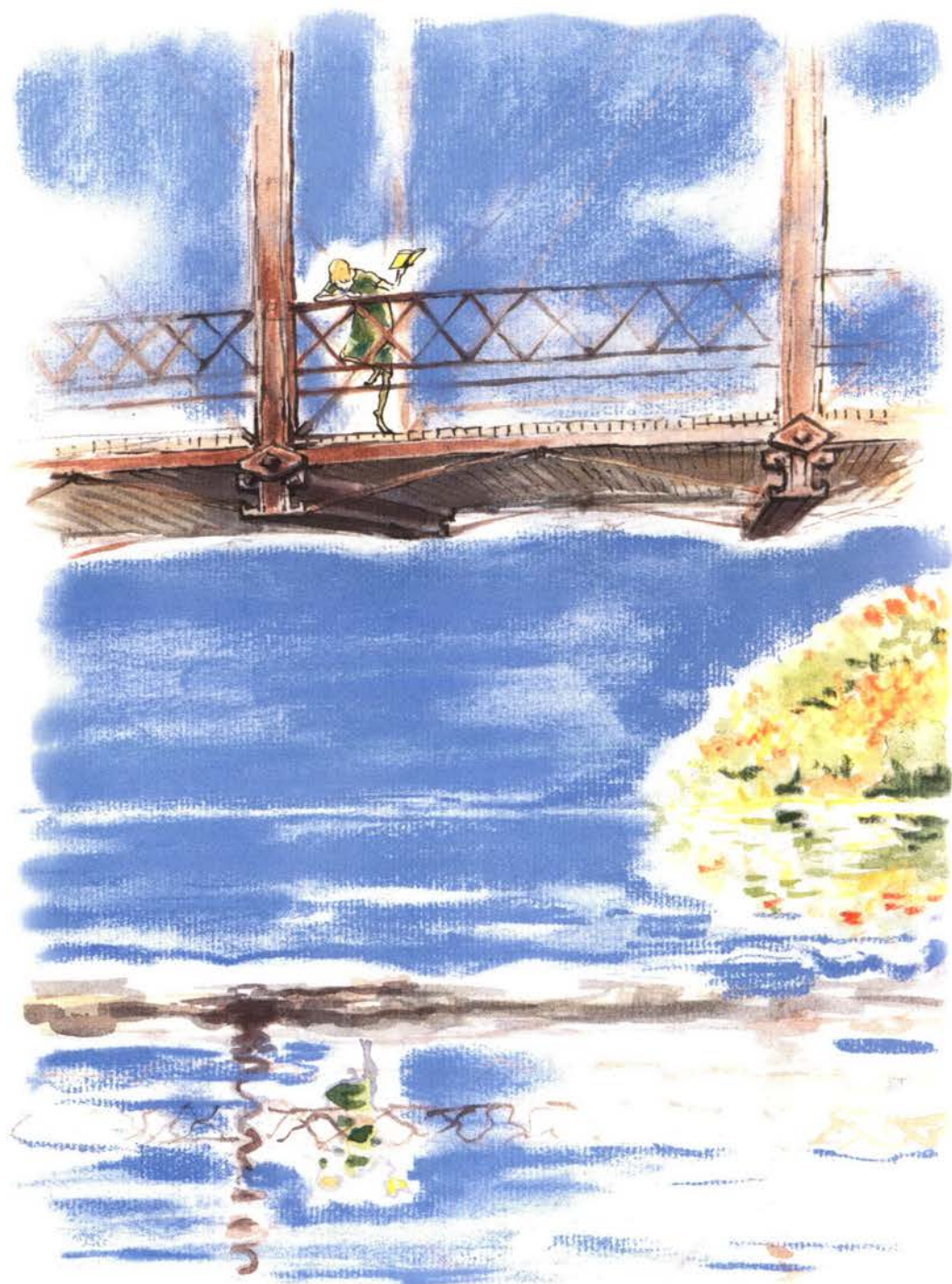
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**New Books
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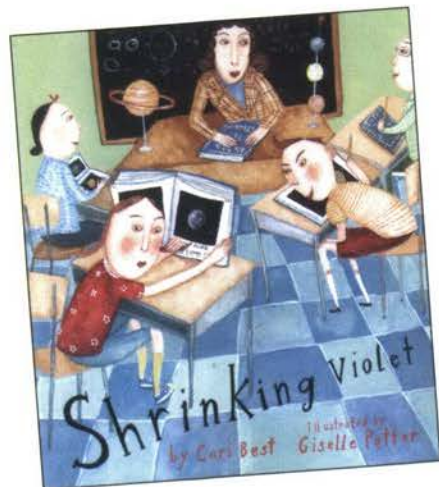
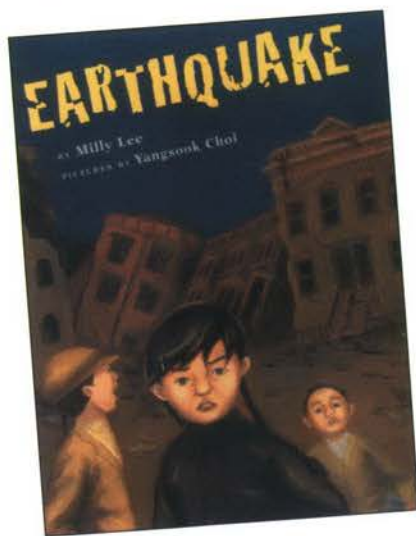
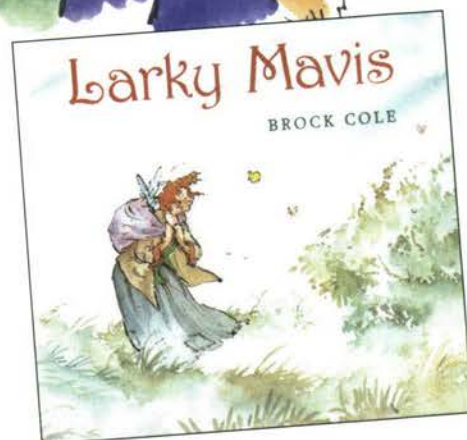
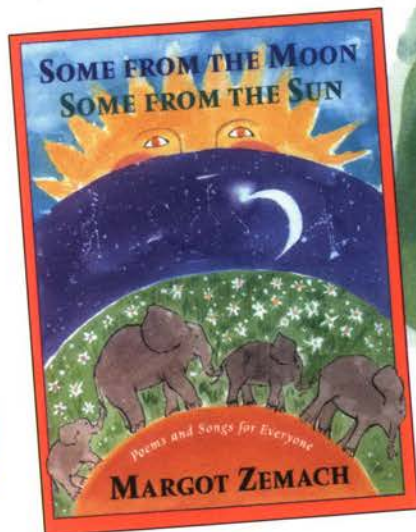
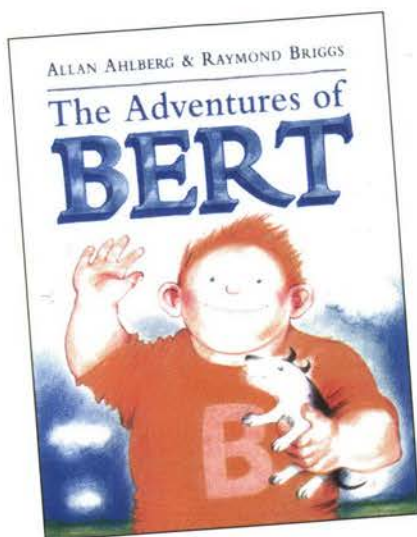
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Illustration by Margot Zemach from *Some from the Moon, Some from the Sun*



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About the Cover Art

We live on a bend of the St. Joseph River in Michigan. The bridge shown here divides our land, resting between our home and the smaller house I use as a studio. Patrice Marantette, the French trader who built our home in 1833, was a farmer with large landholdings who ran a trade with Potawatomee Indians in the area. He built the bridge for business purposes, desiring a shorter route when he took his wagons into town. Now the bridge is used only by walkers, swimmers, fishermen, and (although I made her up) dreamers like this girl, who has taken a moment away from her book to gaze at her reflection in the water.

My wife, the writer Sarah Stewart, has led a decade-long effort to save this increasingly rare iron-truss bridge from inappropriate use, even demolition. Its future now appears solid as we await official confirmation of its status on the National Register of Historic Places.

I haven't actually seen readers on the bridge, but people often come there and stand and do nothing for long periods of time. Like reading, what they do is quiet and contemplative, so this girl's book stands for whatever might be going through their heads, or, for that matter, whatever the river has drawn their thoughts away from for the time being.

—David Small

David Small's most recent picture book is The Journey, written by Sarah Stewart (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001). He received the Caldecott Medal this year for So, You Want to Be President? by Judith St. George (Philomel, 2000).

A new *Young Spirit* book by

Noriko Senshu



Sonny's Dream

Noriko Senshu

Picture Book

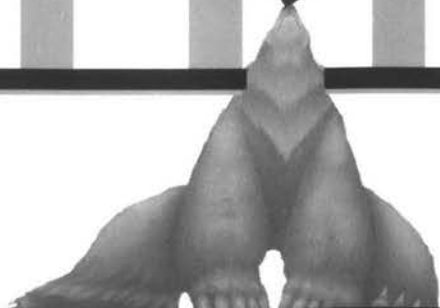
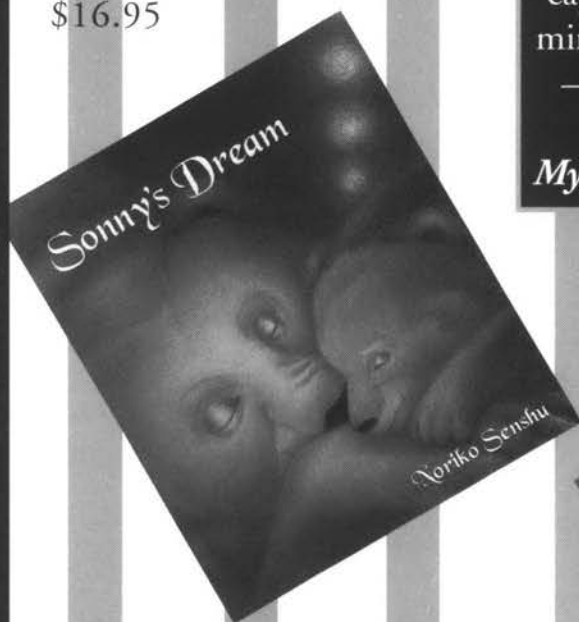
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editor's note

In this issue of the *Riverbank Review*, Jennifer Armstrong writes about children's need to freely explore the communities they live in. She remarks on the fact that mobility is a characteristic of many protagonists in children's fiction, and she asks a provocative question: If this freedom is central to an exciting narrative and to character development, why do we not also recognize it as essential in the lives of real children?

Many of us might wish for our children to have broader territory to roam in. As a city-dwelling parent, I'm conscious of the narrowness of the boundaries imposed on my own sons. Yet I'm reminded of an observation attributed to the narrator's grandfather in Franz Kafka's "A Country Doctor" (in a segment entitled "The Next Village"): "Life is astoundingly short. To me, looking back over it, life seems so foreshortened that I can scarcely understand, for instance, how a young man can decide to ride over to the next village without being afraid that—not to mention accidents—even the span of a normal happy life may fall far short of the time needed for such a journey."

Reading is one form of adventurous journeying. Working through a novel, a child constructs each step with his or her imagination. I sometimes worry that our well-meaning efforts to get children to read are a bit too goal-oriented—or perhaps have the wrong goals. Do we want them to be avid readers so that they will do better in school, score higher on tests, and have broadened opportunities as adults? Though I've read plenty of material that makes such claims (and, I'll admit it, I've used some of it in my shameless promotion of this magazine!) in my heart I know that reading isn't necessarily the magic door to those appealing ends.

Yet it *is* a door to worlds and experiences that are inaccessible by other means. I want my boys to feel the drift of Huck's raft downriver. I want them to lie awake after reading *Tuck Everlasting*, thinking about the great wheel of life. I want lines of poetry to find them and befriend them, ribboning through their minds throughout their days. To me, the love of reading is a gift of tremendous value in and of itself, with effects as far-reaching as they are unpredictable and unmeasurable. It is with this conviction that the *Riverbank Review* is published each season.

—Martha Davis Beck

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Navigating the Neighborhood

Only fictional children seem able to get around town by themselves these days.

By Jennifer Armstrong

Because my husband writes books about urban planning, I have come to understand and appreciate the kind of community design that places the needs of people above the convenience of cars—communities where people without cars (children, the elderly, the poor, or those who simply don't wish to

own an automobile) can participate in civic life by walking, biking, or taking public transit. I also happen to live in such a community. Saratoga Springs, New York, is a classic main street town. I can easily walk to my office, the bank, the post office, the arts center, the health food store, the supermarket, city hall, the park, various coffee shops, the bookstore, the library, dozens of restaurants—in fact, to almost every civic, cultural, and commercial institution our town has to offer. This is the kind of community that traditionally has served as the setting for much realistic children's fiction. Interestingly, this continues to be true, despite the fact that fewer and fewer children live in such an environment.

One of the primary characteristics of juvenile novels is the protagonist's mobility and independence. This is essential to the forward motion of the plot—and to the development of the characters. In fantasy and science fiction, kids zoom around on magic broomsticks and tumble down rabbit holes. In realistic fiction, kids walk, ride their bikes, or take the Number 7 bus. This cannot happen convincingly in the suburban sprawl that now covers so much of our country, where single-use zoning and

gated communities have segregated children from most civic functions; where transportation to almost everything depends on Mom's willingness and availability to be the family chauffeur; and where walking along the side of a six-lane commercial highway strip can be a life-threatening excursion.

Realistic children's fiction can be divided into three broad categories: novels that are both written and set in an earlier time period; books written today, in which the story is set in an earlier time; and books written and set in the present. In a striking majority of *all* the above, the setting is a small, navigable community in which the young protagonist moves around without adult assistance, supervision, or mediation. Fictional kids interact freely with people different from themselves in age, background, and lifestyle, including adults who are not family members or teachers (a group that contemporary children are frequently warned to avoid). Unencumbered by parents, mobile kids learn how to comport themselves as citizens, not as aliens beamed in from the housing subdivisions. They are able to develop naturally: they are not stunted or confined. A traditional, navigable

community serves as a training ground for adult life.

In Robert McCloskey's *Homer Price*, published in 1943, the title character lives outside the Midwestern town of Centerburg, and he gets himself back and forth with complete freedom. The town includes the barbershop, Hirsh's Clothing Store, a café owned by Homer's Uncle Ulysses, a movie theater, and any number of unnamed establishments within easy reach of residential neighborhoods. Homer is part of this town, comfortable in it, and known to all. He has easy conversations with the sheriff and a connection to most other adults in the town.

Donald Sobol's *Encyclopedia Brown* mysteries, written in the 1950s through the 1970s, are set in the seaside town of Idaville, which boasts three movie theaters, several churches, a synagogue, four banks, a delicatessen, antique stores, and Mr. Sweeney's auto body shop. *Encyclopedia* solves his cases primarily on foot from his neighborhood detective agency headquarters, and he gets around town without adult help. On the contrary, he is frequently providing assistance to adults (particularly his father, the police chief) as he solves those devilishly tricky crimes.

Cities have also been a setting for many children's and young adult novels, and urban kids in these books have often been very mobile indeed—perhaps because cities have traditionally been conglomerations of neighborhoods, each



Illustration by Robert McCloskey,
from *Homer Price*

with a concentration of businesses and civic attractions within easy reach. In Louise Fitzhugh's 1964 novel, *Harriet the Spy*, the title character navigated herself along her New York City spy route with complete ease, her pocket of the city feeling very much like a town.

While these stories were written in another era, they still hold appeal for young readers. And many writers today (including those whose books have achieved the greatest critical acclaim and popular readership) have chosen to set their work in similar "navigable" environments of the mid-twentieth century.

Richard Peck has given us the small Illinois farm town where Grandma Dowdel lives, in *A Long Way from Chicago* and in this year's Newbery Medal-winning *A Year Down Yonder*. The Dowdel grandkids begin their yearly visits to this town in the 1930s. As Joey says, "We'd stroll uptown in those first days. It was only a short block of brick buildings: the bank, the insurance agency, Moore's Store, and the Coffee Pot Café." Whether they're in town or out in the countryside, the kids are free to come and go without relying on their formidable grandmother for assistance. Patricia Reilly Giff's 1997 novel, *Lily's Crossing*, shows us a girl living in 1940s Rockaway, New York, who either walks or rows herself in a dinghy everywhere she needs to go. In Kimberly Willis Holt's 1999 novel, *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*, Toby and Cal either walk or ride their

bikes all over the 1960s town of Antler, Texas: to the Dairy Maid, the bowling alley, the Wag-A-Bag grocery, the public library, the church, the post office. Though these books are all set in the twentieth century, in times and settings remembered by many adults, they have the feel of historical fiction. To some people, this kind of mobility on the part of children is imaginable only in a historical context; it's a whiff of nostalgia from the good old days.

Yet in Wendelin van Draanen's Sammy Keyes mysteries, we have contemporary stories featuring a very contemporary young detective. The town of Santa Martina is Sammy's stomping ground. Her parents are not available to drive her anywhere, and her grandmother is unable to. She walks in her hightop sneakers from her grandmother's high rise to school, to the shopping mall, to her friends' houses, to main street shops, and to the county courthouse to solve her cases. If necessary, she catches the bus. She is unstoppable.

A disturbing complement to Sammy Keyes's adventures can be found in the few contemporary novels that are set in the contemporary suburbs—the environment that is home to so many kids today. In *Tangerine*, a dark and compelling novel by Edward Bloor, suburbia is a frightening place where sinkholes open up in the school playing fields, where sand from

nearby construction whirls in eye-stinging dust devils across newly paved streets, where there is constant smoke from the clear-cutting and burning of trees razed to make way for more cul-de-sac housing. This is no futuristic, dystopian fantasy but an accurate picture of much of suburbia today. In *The Girls*, by Amy Goldman Koss (2000), five suburban girls spend much of the novel in their parents' cars. Their lives are dominated by driving. It seems fitting that this is a novel in which fear, intimidation, and powerlessness are the prevailing emotions.

Most children today spend a large part their time subjected to the numbing tedium of the car and highway—or waiting for their rides to come. But very few of today's realistic novels reflect this world, except to show its insidious effects. If this car-bound tedium doesn't make for good fiction, how can anyone think it makes for a good childhood?

Children's literature is telling us that young people—and adults too, for that matter—need real communities. Not the supposedly safe enclaves of suburban developments, but communities where kids can walk from school to the public library, to the movies, to their friends' houses, or to shops where they can spend their allowance on comic books without maternal surveillance. If we don't work to reclaim the cities and towns that allow this, the worlds inhabited by Homer Price, Joey Dowdel, and Sammy Keyes will eventually seem as much a fantasy as Hogwarts School or Wonderland.

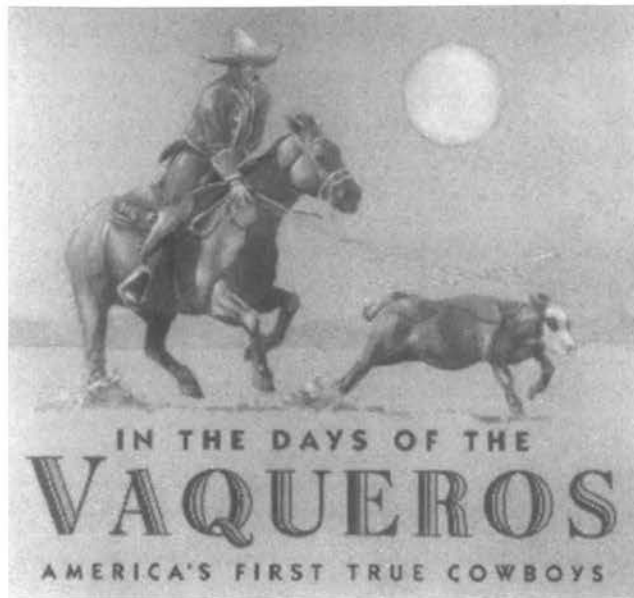


Jennifer Armstrong is the author of many books for young readers, including *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World*, *Black-Eyed Susan*, and *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*.

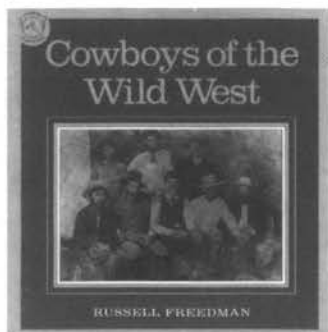
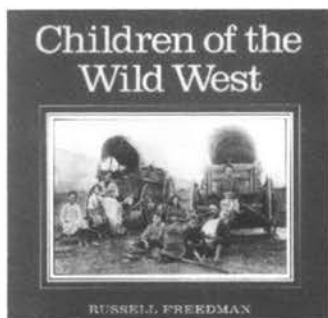
Illustration by Louise Fitzhugh,
from *Harriet the Spy*

New from Newbery Medalist
RUSSELL FREEDMAN

In this rousing account of the first true cowboys, Newbery Medalist Russell Freedman brings to life the days when the vaqueros rounded up the cattle, brought down steers, and tamed wild broncos. With his usual keen eye for detail and careful presentation of historical facts, Freedman recounts how Native American ranch hands in the services of wealthy Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century developed and perfected the skills for this demanding, dangerous work. Three hundred years later, the vaqueros shared their knowledge with the inexperienced cowboys of the American West, who adopted their techniques, their distinctive clothing, their tools, and even their lingo. Illustrated with striking period paintings and drawings.



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Dreaming of Kansas

In an Alaskan village, the books a teacher reads aloud affect her students in unpredictable ways.

By Kirkpatrick Hill

As a child I spent some of my summers on the Yukon River in the village of Ruby, an old mining town in the interior of Alaska. Ruby had a population then of 185, mostly Athabaskan Indians, and it hasn't grown a bit in the fifty years since. The village is 350 air miles from Fairbanks, and 50 miles by boat from

the nearest village, so although it's not nearly as isolated as it was when I was a child, before we had telephones and computers and daily mail planes, it's still wonderfully remote. When I graduated from college I went back to Ruby to teach, and I've been there ever since.

The first year I taught in Ruby, thirty years ago, I had twenty-eight Athabaskan kids in class, ranging in age from kindergarten to sixth grade. As is probably true of most rural areas, people tend to stay put in villages, so for the most part I've never lost my children. I didn't have to watch them walk away at the end of the school year, as city teachers do, knowing I'd probably never see them again, never know what directions their lives took.

I've watched my students grow up and have children of their own—I've even taught some of their children. So over the years, from idle conversations here and there, or sentimental memories shared when they've had a few beers, I've learned what meant the most to my students in their classroom lessons. I pride myself on being a strongly academic teacher, heavy on science and his-

tory, demanding and thorough. I know I worked them hard. But as adults they never say, "Remember when you taught us about DNA?" or "I'll never forget the lessons on the Vikings." It's clear from what they do say that nothing I ever did in the classroom was more important than reading out loud.

Here, for instance, is Nina. She's going off to college and she tells me she wants to travel after that. I'm delighted, since the village's insularity is something I've tried to combat.

"Where do you want to go?" I ask.

She has a dreamy look on her face. "Kansas," she replies.

For a moment I'm stunned. "Why Kansas?"

She looks hurt that I would even ask. "You know, all those books you read to us."

"Books about Kansas? What books?"

"The Oz books," she says. "And *Little House on the Prairie*."

"Oh," I say. "Of course."

Who would have thought that tough little Nina would find in those books the material for a life-shaping fantasy? Was it the description of the plains?

The warmth of Laura and Mary's pioneer family? Whatever it was, I fervently hope that if Nina makes it to Kansas she is not disillusioned.

And here's Stewart. I've just come home after a winter in Fairbanks, and Stewart is on the airstrip, waiting to show me his little boy, Ernie, a two-year-old who's draped over his shoulder, half asleep. I admire Ernie and then Stewart says to me proudly, "I'm reading him *Charlotte's Web*."

This time I check my first reaction ("But he's too young for *Charlotte's Web*!") and respond instead with a smile and a nod. Stewart has held onto something good from his school days, and he wants to give it to Ernie.

But why Charlotte? Certainly the daredevil that Stewart once was would have been more impressed by tales of action and adventure. I've been a reader my whole life, but as a teacher I didn't realize how deeply books are felt by children, nor would I have been able to predict which ones would mean the most to which kids.

When I first started teaching I had some ideas about reading aloud. Like many education theories, they proved to be wrong. For one thing, we were taught to have organized discussions with our kids about each book we read. I found I just couldn't do this. The kids would sit in a semicircle around me, all of us in those little wooden primary-

school chairs, so close that our knees were touching.

I read for a half hour every day, and when I finished we would just look at each other, like people in a trance who were having a hard time coming back to reality. I didn't feel like the teacher during these reading sessions. We were all in the adventure together. We were all enchanted. Analyzing the book—especially according to some educational script—would have broken the spell. It would have ruined something.

Another misconception I had about reading aloud concerned what I assumed was a language problem. The vocabularies of these children were very limited. They were village kids. Reading played no part in their lives, unless you counted the Montgomery Ward catalog. They'd seen few movies and no television. So at first, when I read aloud I paraphrased. I wanted them to understand the story and I thought difficult words would get in the way of that. And apart from the issues relating to language and culture, there was a wide range of ages in that little classroom. I assumed I had to simplify what I read in order to take in the first-graders as well as the sixth.

I was wrong. Paraphrasing played havoc with the writer's rhythm and style. And besides, how were their vocabularies going to grow if they didn't encounter new words? So I began to read books as they were written.

When I didn't paraphrase, I found that they could usually understand a word's meaning from my face and my voice. And beyond the recognition of meaning, there's a delight in words themselves. When I saw my students playing Robin Hood, using the archaic language from the story with great relish, I knew I was on firm ground. On other occasions they tossed around phrases from Kipling's *Just So Stories* ("On the banks

of the great, gray, green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever trees") and wonderful, incomprehensible lines from Dylan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, just for the pleasure of it. The first-graders didn't miss a beat, no matter how complicated the story was,



Kirkpatrick Hill in her classroom in 1973.

and the sixth-graders never felt insulted when the material we read was aimed at younger readers, because they weren't sophisticated enough to have taken on those attitudes.

The notion of cultural relativity had just developed currency when I started teaching. The idea is that kids will learn better if the material they study relates directly to their lives. The state of Alaska, acting on this principle, produced a series of basals in the 1960s called the *Alaskan Reader*, which purported to be about village kids. I used literature, not basals, to teach reading, but I thought the relevancy idea was probably a good one, so I gave my students the *Alaskan Reader* to supplement the other books they read. But they had no interest in it at all.

When I first arrived in the village to teach, I found a stack of old standard

readers that I boxed up with disdain and stuffed in the storeroom. One day I found my first-grade girls in there, stretched out on their bellies, poring over these books. They were fascinated by the exotic lives of Dick, Jane, and Sally! So I had to eat some crow, put those "culturally insensitive" books back in the library, and relegate the "relevant readers" to the storeroom. After all, wasn't it insulting to assume that a child could only be interested in, could only relate to his own life, his own culture? These children were interested in everything, everywhere. Though an inevitable isolation came with village life, ethnocentricity was not part of their makeup.

Though we didn't discuss books in the recommended way, there were always ways to extend the experience of the books we read. We had a great time one winter talking about what the students would describe to blind Mary Ingalls if her family lived in our village. The descriptions they came up with were wonderful: the blood-red sun burning through the thick haze of smoke when there was a forest fire nearby; the curling tops of the whitecaps in the Yukon when the wind and rain had made the river rough. If we were looking at a picture book by Eric Carle, we'd talk about how he made the pictures, and then we'd try it ourselves, painting paper and cutting it out to make collages.

We read lots of nonfiction, which we discussed and used as the basis for illustrated time lines we made together and put up on the classroom walls. *Flying to the Moon*, Michael Collins's book about the first moonwalk, *Alone*, by Admiral Byrd, David Macauley's *Castle* and *Cathedral*, and Jane Goodall's books about chimpanzees all gave rise to fascinating projects and great time-line illustrations.

Sometimes I read books with a specific purpose in mind. Marilyn, the first of our village girls to go away to col-

lege, back when it was unheard of, told me she had a terrible struggle when she got there, because half the time she didn't know what was referred to in her reading. She had no clue what calling a couple Tweedledee and Tweedledum meant, or saying that someone's attitude was sour grapes, let alone understanding references to the thunderbolts of Zeus. So I read my students nursery rhymes and fairy tales and all the Greek and Norse myths, so that literary references would not be a problem for them as they had been for Marilyn. Some books we read when I thought a lesson was needed: parts of *All Quiet on the Western Front* as an antidote to romantic ideas about war; *Black Beauty* and *Lassie Come Home* to counter the occasional cruelty to animals that children display; the biography of Sojourner Truth to teach about some of the problems black people have faced.

Later, after electricity and television came to the village, I read them the first part of Richard Feynman's book *What Do You Care What Other People Think, Mr. Feynman?* to reinforce the argument I often made that their proper occupation in childhood was not sitting in front of the TV but messing around with stuff and learning how it works.

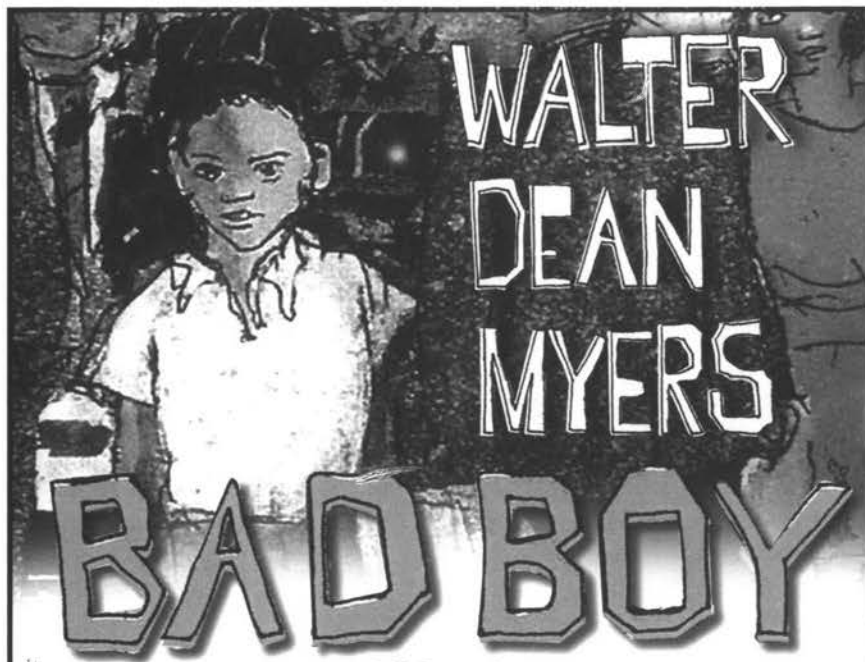
Even though my kids had taught me that cultural relevancy was a non-issue and that simplicity wasn't necessary, I wrote some children's books about Athabascan children that used a village vocabulary (so that no teacher would be tempted to paraphrase my books!) and were about their lives and their problems. I didn't imagine that they would like such a book better than books about children in faraway places; I just thought they should have a book that was about *them*, and that, unlike many books written about the North, by people who don't live here, was absolutely authentic.

My latest book, *The Year of Miss Agnes* (McElderry, 2000), was set in 1948

in a one-room "bush" school on the Koyukuk River. The teacher in the book was based on a real teacher, Agnes Schlosser, one of that old breed who braved the privations of living in the bush and devoted themselves completely to their children. In the book, of

course, one of the best things that Miss Agnes does is to read aloud. ~

Kirkpatrick Hill grew up in a mining camp near Fairbanks and spent her summers in the village of Ruby. She is the mother of six and grandmother of three. She retired from teaching last year.



A Memoir

Jacket art © 2001 by Robert Andrew Parker

"This superb memoir begins with an account of Myers's family history and boyhood . . . in the Harlem of the 40's. Soon, readers are caught up in his turbulent adolescence and his slow, painful development as a writer. . . . Young writers will find inspiration here, while others may read the book as a straightforward account of a colorful, unforgettable childhood." — *School Library Journal*

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Kevin Henkes

A lively picture book about mice and an emotionally charged middle-grade novel aren't so different after all, according to their creator.

By Susan Marie Swanson

In picture books for young children and novels for middle-grade readers, author-artist Kevin Henkes explores the ways that individuals work out their independence and their relationships in families, schools, and communities. Henkes has been praised for his attentiveness to the inner lives of children and for his

sensitive portrayals of common emotions and dilemmas. Since the publication of his first picture book when he was a young college student, Henkes has produced more than twenty-five books, all published by Greenwillow.

Henkes is best known for the appealing mouse characters in his picture books: Lilly, who wears red cowboy boots; Owen, who contrives endless ways to play with—and keep—his fuzzy blanket; and many others, including Wemberly, the newest mouse child. In *Wemberly Worried*, this little worrier (“What if no one else has spots? What if no one else wears stripes?”) survives her first day of nursery school, where she and her beloved stuffed rabbit both make new friends. These mouse children and their families are brought to life in expressive watercolor and black pen artwork complemented by rhythmic, patterned text.

The Birthday Room, Henkes’s most recent novel for children, is the story of a twelve-year-old boy who gains insight into his family and himself during a

summer visit with his mother’s estranged brother. Each of Henkes’s novels is full of resonant visual images: messages spelled out with stones on a hillside (*Words of Stone*), a fragile homemade paper doll (*Protecting Marie*), a plaster castle in a miniature golf course (*Two under Par*). These are quirky, quiet novels that feature memorable characters. Take Spoon, the thoughtful ten-year-old protagonist of *Sun and Spoon*, who has an entirely different kind of charm from that of his whimsical six-year-old sister:

Within minutes, Joanie was busy sweeping the garage floor. Periodically she used the broom handle as a pretend microphone and sang her delphinium song—Spoon was no competition. He didn’t sing; he didn’t dance; he didn’t drag a suitcase full of sticks around with him, calling attention to himself. Spoon could wiggle his ears, but that was about it.

Henkes appreciates—and insightfully describes—the full spectrum of human temperament and emotion. His

new board book, *Sheila Rae’s Peppermint Stick*, is a buoyant book, full of movement and candy-bright color—like Joanie. It’s likely that when we see a new novel from this accomplished creator of children’s books, it will be more like *Spoon*—reflecting the subtleties and quiet discoveries at the heart of growing up.

The father of two young children, Henkes works in a studio in his home in Madison, Wisconsin. This interview was conducted by telephone in June.

Susan Marie Swanson: *I read the introduction you wrote for Bonjour Babar, the recent anthology of Babar picture books, and I enjoyed your account of how you “see Babar every day”—on a postcard taped to the wall in your family’s bathroom. Do you have other anecdotes to tell about children’s book art in your daily life?*

Kevin Henkes: Well, we have an Eeyore cup in our bathroom, so I see Eeyore every day, too. And now that I’m a parent, we read books every day. We have books everywhere.

How has life with your own children influenced your work and your views about children’s literature?

My wife and I were married for ten years before we had kids. When I was out on the road everyone assumed, because of the nature of my picture books, I suppose, that I was a parent. They would invariably say, “How many



From *Chester's Way*

children do you have?" When I became a parent some people said, "Oh, now you're going to get great ideas right in your own home." What I've learned—I knew it all along, I think—is that the real heart and soul of a book come from within. I'm often inspired from the outside, from things that I see in my daily life, but the real guts of the book come from within. It wouldn't matter if I had children or not.

I sense that, for you, children have been an authentic, concrete audience all along and you didn't need kids in the house to understand that. You're not one of those people who says, "Well, I just make my books and if kids happen to like them, that's lovely."

I don't test my books out on kids, and I never have. On the other hand, I'm very aware that I do books for kids. Children's literature is an art form that I chose, and I don't like "adult" children's books. So I think, subconsciously, I'm always keeping in mind that the books are for kids, even though I don't think about a particular child reading the book when I am lost in the creation of it.

You began the work of writing and illustrating picture books when you were

essentially a kid yourself. You went to New York with your portfolio when you were nineteen. Most people who work in children's literature get into it in less intentional ways. They don't choose it as their job when they begin their work lives, the way you did.

I was lucky—lucky that I chose it young, and fortunate to be able to have done it young. I grew up in it. My early years at Greenwillow were extraordinary. I often think of myself during that period the way people describe babies—they're sponges; they take everything in. I was a baby when my career began, and Susan Hirschman, my editor, taught me so much. In those early years I'd often go to New York and stay for a week, and Susan would give me an office to use during that time. I wrote several of my first picture books right there, at Greenwillow. I got to see, first-hand, how a publishing house worked.

I can still remember how I felt when the airplane landed at La Guardia. I felt electric. When I was a child, New York was the place that I wanted to visit. When I got older, the desire grew stronger. I loved to go to plays and I loved to go to museums, but going to Greenwillow

topped it all. I was young and my books didn't sell very well, but I felt—and I love this about Greenwillow—I felt from the very beginning as if I were as important as Donald Crews or Jack Prelutsky or Virginia Hamilton or whomever. I was lucky to be tended and cared for in that way. Susan encouraged me to try different things. She was the one who said, "I think you're a writer and I think you'll write longer books. I think you should." When I first started out I really didn't think that was a possibility. I was an artist, and I thought I would make picture books.

You've spoken in other interviews about some of the picture-book artists who influenced you, people like Crockett Johnson and Maurice Sendak, whose work you knew as a child, and, later, artists like Arnold Lobel and Margot Zemach. What authors have influenced your fiction?

I admire the work of Paula Fox, Brock Cole, Katherine Paterson. But I read much more adult fiction than children's fiction.

Do you think your reading of adult fiction has had a strong influence on your middle-grade novels?

I'm drawn to domestic drama, small

family stories. I like Alice Munro, William Trevor, and Richard Ford. Those are just a few authors who come to mind. I sometimes run across people who say they only read children's fiction, because children's novels are so good. Children's books are my chosen life's work—and yet, statements like that are shocking to me. It's like someone saying that they love theater but only go to children's plays. It doesn't make sense. If you're a reader and you're an adult, why wouldn't you read adult books too?

How do the activities of writing and illustrating balance out in your life?

I think I'm more naturally an artist than I am a writer. The writing is more difficult for me. In some ways it seems more rewarding when it does work. I just finished the art for my second board book, and it was fun to do, a refreshing change. *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick*, the first, comes out this fall, *Owen's Marshmallow Chick*, next spring. Both of them, especially *Owen's Marshmallow Chick*, came to happen because I'd been in the middle of a novel and I was stuck and needed to get unstuck. What often happens in this situation is that I will write a picture book.

My wife often reminds me that when I'm in the middle of a novel I'll say, "Oh, picture books are easier and they're more fun," and that when I'm halfway through a picture book and at the point where I'm working every day on it and working harder and I goof up an illustration for the third time, I've been known to say, "I wish I were working on a novel—they're so much easier." I'm drawn to aspects of both. I love the fact that with novels I can go so much deeper. On the other hand, I love that with picture books I can speak volumes with what I choose to put in the illustrations. It goes both ways.

One thing about both your picture books and your novels that I value, partly because it's territory that other writers and artists have avoided, is how carefully you

attend to the intersections of the lives of children and adults. Chrysanthemum returns to her family with her problem from school and they try to work it out together. The problem of Owen's blanket involves an adult neighbor and his parents. You're exploring places where kids' and adults' lives overlap, sometimes in unconventional ways. I think of that segment in The Birthday Room in which twelve-year-old Ben is dealing with his aunt's worry that she might have a breach baby.

Every now and then someone will say, "But the adults are so present in this book." And I think, "Well, of course." Whether kids are happy with their parents or not, whether they're trying to distance themselves from them or learn about life through them, adults are a very important part of a kid's world. Even when young people feel alienated from the world at large, they still have adults in their lives, and they learn from them. Often in novels for middle-grade readers, if there are adults present, they're misguided and the child is supreme; or else the adults are shadowy and one-dimensional. Real kids have real adults in their lives, and they are often loving and central to their kids' existence. So I want them in my books.

One of the things I'm enjoying about this conversation is that we're talking about ways that the picture books and the novels are connected. People tend to separate your picture books and novels as if they were different species.

I find when I look at them myself, there is much in them that is similar. The intensity of emotion may be expressed in a different way, but Lilly's drama is as real as Fanny's [in *Protecting Marie*]. They both experience real pain and sorrow and excitement. The picture-book characters are depicted as mice, but of course they're real kids.

Visual art recurs as a motif in both your picture books and your novels. Adult characters are artists, kids draw, people encourage children to draw. I'm curious to

bear your thoughts on the place of visual art in children's lives.

I love writing about art. I love writing about painters. When I was a kid I thought for a while that I'd be a painter. When I'm creating the families in my novels I want to write about something that I like, so I often make the adult a painter. It just seems natural to me. The mother in *Sun and Spoon* is an elementary-school art teacher. The fathers in *Words of Stone* and *Protecting Marie* and the uncle in *The Birthday Room* are artists of one kind or another. I love describing those worlds, probably because I'm a visual person. From time to time I think I'll have the parents be something completely different, but then I find myself imagining them in some way connected to the art world.

In Sun and Spoon, the main character and his grandfather recall the time that the boy's grandmother, whom they're mourning, taped paper underneath the dining room table so that he could draw on it with crayons. The grandparents had been to Italy and seen the Sistine Chapel.

When we're young, art is as natural as breathing. Making marks on paper is fun. Then we get to a point in our lives where art becomes elite in a certain way. But that isn't so for a child. When I watch my own kids—they love to draw and paint and build things—I marvel at their joy in creating. I hope they don't lose that.

Could you talk a bit about your work space and what it is like to work at home?

I used to be in the studio pretty much from early in the morning throughout the day. Then I would go and work again after dinner. Now that I'm a parent that's changed dramatically. Because my children are still young, three real hours of work is a good day. I finished the art for *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* about two weeks before my son was born. I decided that for my next book I would try to do another novel because I write in longhand in a notebook and I can do it

many places. If I'm drawing, I really have to be in my studio. As it turned out, my son wasn't a good sleeper so I would drive him in the car until he fell asleep and then I would park and write in my notebook. I wrote at least half of *Sun and Spoon* in the car. When my daughter was born, she wasn't a sleeper either. I ended up going through the same routine. I think of *The Birthday Room* as my daughter's nap book.

What do you like to have around you when you work—that is, when you're not working in the car?

My studio is in an attic room that has two skylights. When I look out it feels as if I'm in a tree house. There are lots of bookshelves, lots of my favorite books. My worktable is a huge wooden table. I have some art on the walls, but not much. When I'm working on the novels—not the pictures books; they're different in

this respect—I collect things that have some pertinence to the novel. There is a shelf on the bookshelf where the stuff from the current novel builds up.

What kind of objects?

In *Protecting Marie*, Fanny has an Advent calendar. This was a gift to me, and so it was on the shelf as I worked on that book. Also on the shelf was a mug that Susan Hirschman gave me, a mug with a kangaroo painted on it. I think Fanny talks about it when she wakes up in the middle of the night.

Did you have playing cards like the ones that appear in Sun and Spoon?

I do have playing cards with suns on them. They'd been in my family for a long, long time. Years before I began working on *Sun and Spoon*, my wife and I were making a garden in the backyard of our first house. As I dug, I hit something. It was a child's fork that had a

picture of a little girl and the name Rilla engraved on it. I still have the fork. It was the inspiration for Spoon. (Fork didn't sound as nice for a character's nickname.)

I knew when I found that fork that I would use it someday. I had no idea exactly how. Often motifs will come to me in that way. Something will strike me. I love that part of writing a novel, weaving things into the narrative that have meaning for me. I do the same kind of thing when I'm working on a picture for a picture book. The result might look simple and easy, but there are reasons why something is a particular color or why the page is laid out the way it is. That's the part of my work that I absolutely love and that keeps it interesting for me. ~

Susan Marie Swanson is a contributing editor to the Riverbank Review.

a poem for fall

When I was a child
I played by myself in a
corner of the schoolyard
all alone.

I hated dolls and I
hated games, animals were
not friendly and birds
flew away.

If anyone was looking
for me I hid behind a
tree and cried out "I am
an orphan."

And here I am, the
center of all beauty!
writing these poems!
Imagine!

—Frank O'Hara



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THE MOUSE AND HIS CHILD

BY RUSSELL HOBAN

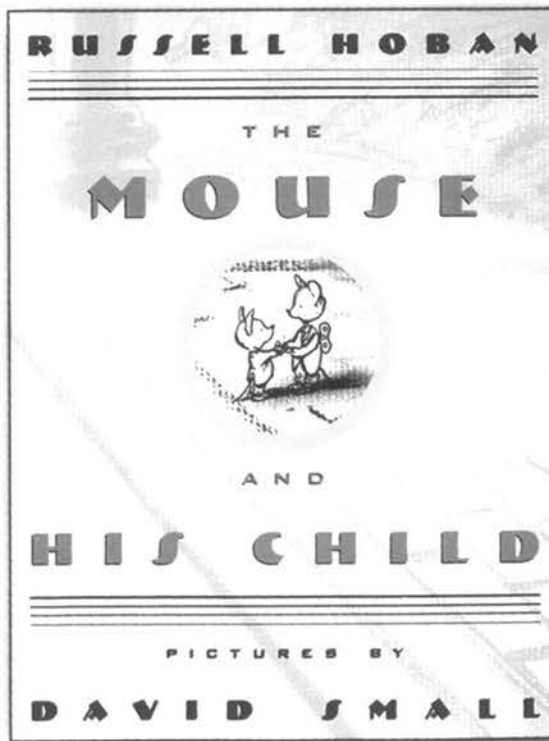
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RUSSELL HOBAN is the beloved author of *Bedtime for Frances* and many other books for children and adults. *The Mouse and His Child* was his first novel, and many consider it part of the canon of children’s literature. We are proud to present a new edition of this masterpiece, lovingly packaged, and beautifully re-illustrated.

DAVID SMALL is the recipient of this year’s Caldecott medal. He says that reading *The Mouse and His Child* as a young adult inspired him to become an illustrator. His passion for the story shines through in this stunning visual interpretation of a classic.

 SCHOLASTIC



ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS

Riverbank Review

Ten Great Books about Trees

ABCedar:

An Alphabet of Trees

By George Ella Lyon

Illustrated by Tom Parker

ORCHARD, 1989

YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Sprigs and seeds held up by realistic hands are shown alongside silhouettes of trees in this extraordinary guidebook.

Ancient Ones:

The World of the Old-Growth Douglas Fir

By Barbara Bash

SIERRA CLUB BOOKS, 1994

INTERMEDIATE

This glorious portrait in words and art situates the Douglas fir in its environment. Also see the author's books about the baobab, the banyon, and the saguaro.

The Blossom on the Bough: A Book of Trees

By Anne Ophelia Dowden

TICKNOR & FIELDS, 1994

OLDER

A premier botanical artist shares her knowledge and exquisite drawings of trees—their flowers, fruits, and leaves.

Drawing Trees: Step by Step

By Stanley Maltzman

NORTH LIGHT, 2000

OLDER

Studying trees and drawing trees are mutually supportive joys, according to this author, artist, naturalist, and teacher.

Giants in the Land

By Diana Appelbaum

Illustrated by Michael McCurdy

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1993

INTERMEDIATE

Supplying masts for British ships was an arduous task for American colonists—only New England pines would do.

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Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

The Gift of the Tree

By Alvin Tresselt

Illustrated by Henri Sorensen

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD, 1992

YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

In this eloquent book, the gradual death of an oak is a source of life for the thriving plants and animals that surround it.

How the Forest Grew

By William Jaspersohn

Illustrated by Chuck Eckart

GREENWILLOW, 1980

YOUNGER/INTERMEDIATE

Succession in a forest—from open field to middle stage to climax—is explained in this unusually beautiful easy reader.

Mighty Tree

By Dick Gackenbach

GULLIVER, 1992

YOUNGER

Three seeds grow into mighty trees. One becomes a Christmas tree, one is cut for paper, and one remains a habitat for wildlife.

Monkey Puzzle and Other Poems

By Myra Cohn Livingston

Illustrated by Antonio Frasconi

MCELDERRY, 1984

OLDER

From the "rough brown cheeks" of shagbark hickory to the "lavender litter" of the jacaranda, the attributes of different trees emerge through verse.

A Tree Is Nice

By Janice May Udry

Illustrated by Marc Simont

HARPERCOLLINS, 1956

YOUNGER

The benefits and pleasures of being near a tree are expressed with irresistible concreteness in this classic.



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Switch Craft

Changeling stories dare to imagine that the baby in the house is not our own.

By Christine Alfano

Autumn calls for stories that evoke a shiver of fear. Venturing beyond the usual Halloween fare, readers will find a rich folkloric tradition—tales of mysterious worlds bordering and occasionally impinging on our own. None of these stories are more potent and profound than the unsettling tales of changelings.

The Random House dictionary defines *changeling* as “an ugly, stupid, or strange child superstitiously believed to have been left by fairies in place of a pretty, charming child.” Stories about the magical and horrifying switching of babes are elemental—wonderful and chilling to read, because they embody aspects of both our fears and our actual experience. What parents haven’t imagined, as they stare, utterly exhausted, at the red, contorted face of a child who’s been squalling for hours, that the creature they hold in their arms isn’t really their lovable baby at all, but a demonic stand-in? The idea that someone who *looks* just like our child might not actually *be* our child is disquieting in a way that ghost or witch stories are not. And what child has not considered the strange and terrible prospect of strangers stepping in as parents? A changeling is the dreaded “other” in our own form—we lock the door at night, but the monster is within. It lives with us, it looks like us, we tuck it in at night and lay a kiss on its little head.

Changeling stories have a subversive history. Throughout Europe, from pre-Christian times through the nineteenth century, they served as more than literary diversions. The original change-

ling legends were passed from storyteller to storyteller and from town to town for a grimly serious purpose. Without the benefit of accurate scientific and medical knowledge, people used these tales to explain the existence of deformed and retarded children. Shocking as it may be, the stories provided desperately poor families with a rationale for ridding themselves of children who would entirely



Cover illustration by James Bernardin,
from *The Moorchild*

sap scarce family resources. In an informative essay on changeling legends, D. L. Ashliman cites European court records from 1850 to 1900 that show numerous cases of men and women being prosecuted for murdering suspected changelings. “Similar incidents were undoubtedly even more common in earlier centuries,” he suggests, “but public opinion, religious attitudes and legal indifference made it unlikely that such cases would be prosecuted.”

“Once upon a time”—the comforting invitation to fantasy—was not the way the original changeling tales began. Instead, they read like reportage, often indicating precise dates and locales, as in this opening to the Grimms’ tale “A Changeling Is Beaten with a Switch”: “The following true story took place in the year 1580. Near Breslau there lived a distinguished nobleman...”

Sometimes the stories included precautionary instructions. Newborns were prone to be exchanged if they were left alone, without a candle burning, anytime before they were christened. Placing an iron object like a needle or a diaper pin near the baby, or folding a pair of the father’s breeches over the side of the cradle, warded off thieving trolls. The water in which a newborn had been washed should be saved for the protection it would offer. If you suspected you had a changeling in your house, common knowledge would have you attempt the far-fetched: boil water in an eggshell or brew beer in a walnut shell to sur-

prise the changeling and make it laugh. If you couldn't get it to laugh or divulge its age, you might resort to more drastic measures: beat it with a switch; throw it into the fire or into a river; or leave it outside on a freezing cold night, so that its true mother might rescue the strange child, replacing it with the human babe. (Martin Luther recommended drowning—a changeling surely had no soul.)

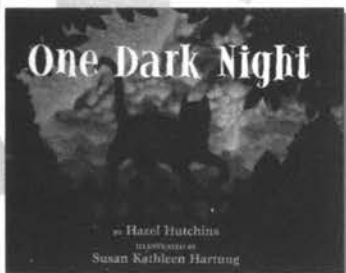
Today, though we don't subscribe to the superstitions surrounding such tales, the idea of the changeling continues to resonate, as can be seen in creative retellings of these stories. Most modern renditions still embrace the myth of a fairy or troll world and make that fantasy the basis of their stories. Four contemporary tales exemplify the best of a transformed folklore.

Eloise McGraw, author of *The Moorchild* (Simon & Schuster, 1996), dedicates her award-winning novel "To all children who have ever felt different." Set on the moors of England in the 1500s, her version of the changeling story assumes the perspective of the unwilling changeling. Saaski, a young fairy child imprisoned in the body of a human baby, wants nothing more than to return to her own folk and the magical world on the moor:

She cared nothing for her jailers, not the young woman who fed her the tasteless gruel and half smothered her with embraces—not the man with his fearful, threatening iron. They might live out their clumsy human lives or die tomorrow for all of her.

McGraw spins a bedazzling tale juxtaposing the trickery and "glamourie" of the moorfolk with the hardscrabble lives of the common people in Saaski's adopted village. The novel is rich in atmospheric and sensual detail. Saaski's beloved moorland comes alive with both natural and supernatural magic. Her strangely accomplished, fairy-inspired

One Dark Night



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ILLUSTRATED BY
Susan Kathleen Hartung



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"Simple, lyrical prose conveys the intensity and sometimes spookiness of thunderstorms...evocative, textured oil paintings have wonderful depth..."—*Booklist*

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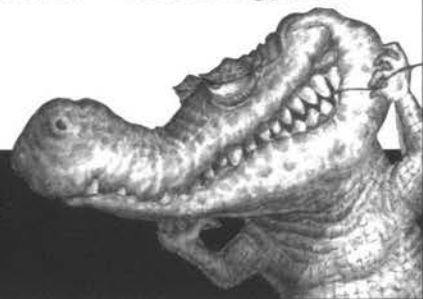
BY MIKE ARTELL
ILLUSTRATED BY JIM HARRIS



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★ "Lyrical and visually hilarious—the watercolors by Harris are sharp-edged and humorously detailed—with a feast of Cajun words and sounds."—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"A wonderful, sly and humorous story told in rhyme and illustrated with verve... All in all, a treat from start to finish."—*School Library Journal*



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piping enchants (or enrages) anyone who hears the tunes.

The heavy scent of roots and cool earth is evoked when Saaski sneaks back, one thrilling midsummer's eve, to the underground world of the folk people. Her mission in that fabulous and dangerous place is to find and return the child she realizes her kind human parents have missed. However, Saaski's immense generosity holds no sway against the villagers' hostile ignorance. The clash that rises out of the all-too-human fear of anyone or anything different brings this utterly absorbing tale to a charged climax.

Kathleen Hersom's *The Half-Child* (Simon & Schuster, 1989) sets readers down in seventeenth-century England, within the circle of a family with a "different" child, slow and clumsy Sarah. Neighbors cruelly whisper that she is surely a changeling and would be better off lost, but readers come to understand Sarah through the gentle eyes of her older sister Lucy. When Sarah does disappear, it's assumed she's been reclaimed by the fairies, but Lucy winds through the years and events of her life nourishing the small hope that Sarah might be alive. Elegant plotting and historic detail enrich the story. Cromwell's

armies march through town and gut the local church. Lucy leaves what's left of her family to work on a farm owned by Puritans (wherein a long and tedious grace is said before and after each meal). Later she returns home to care for her ill father and enters into a short but serendipitous marriage. One clue leads to another until Lucy finally unravels the mystery of Sarah's disappearance. The novel provides an intimate, realistic view of the place and time where powerful changeling superstitions took root. Human behavior, not fairyland fantasy, is the book's potent focus.

Fast-forward to the twentieth century and meet the unwitting hero of a thoroughly modern changeling story in Perry Nodelman's smart and funny *The Same Place but Different* (Simon & Schuster, 1995). Johnny Nesbit would rather be hanging out at the local 7-Eleven with his hockey-loving buddies but finds himself drawn into the frightening and fantastic world of Strangers and Yelpers and Cowalkers when he happens upon the knowledge that his baby sister is a changeling. Johnny's got to get her back in order to "get his family back." Nodelman seamlessly weaves folkloric elements into a novel with a hip contemporary protagonist and

setting. Relentless wisecracking comments keep a story that is rife with seductive sirens and flying attack dogs on an almost lighthearted level. Johnny's approach to the problems he encounters is the approach of a modern teenager, which lends a disarming and pleasing rowdiness to the kind of fantasy that's usually steeped in seriousness.

Selma Lagerlöf and Jeanette Winter's picture book *The Changeling* (Knopf, 1992) also takes an inventive approach to a traditional story form. A troll mother, carrying her awful troll baby in a birch bark backpack, admires an unattended human baby and makes a quick switch. In contrast to most changeling tales, there is no interval of doubt following this act: from the beginning, it's obvious to the farm couple whose baby has been stolen that they have been left with an inhuman creature. The farmer's wife declares, "My baby does not have teeth like nails—my baby doesn't have hair like boar bristles!"

This certain knowledge causes the farmer to attempt to harm the young troll, thinking it will force the troll mother to rescue her child and return his son. His wife responds in the opposite fashion, by protecting the troll child, treating it as she would her own: "He's a child, all the same." Winter's vibrant, stylized illustrations express the mirroring inherent in the story's structure: we see that the troll mother treats the human baby in the same way that the human parents are treating hers. When the boy is returned at last, he reports: "As long as Mother was kind to the troll child, the troll crone was kind to me." In this way, Lagerlöf and Winter dismantle the cruel house that superstition built, erecting in its place a simple abode in which caring for every child, for any child, is the foundation. ~

Christine Alfano lives with her husband and three children (who are only very rarely demonic) in Minneapolis.

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Charlotte Zolotow

For over fifty years, the work of this consummate children's book author has shown that the words in a picture book are just as important as the illustrations.

By Christine Heppermann

Writing in *The Horn Book Magazine* in 1985, Charlotte Zolotow remarked that a little neighbor girl had recently shown up at her front door and asked to look through her house. While the girl poked about upstairs, her mother arrived to offer an explanation: "Ever since we read *Someday*, Andrea's been

searching for a new room in our house. I guess she thinks that because you wrote the book she'll find it here." Zolotow has produced over seventy picture books for young children in her fifty-seven-year career as an author, and looking at the body of work she has created is a bit like discovering a room you've never found before, as the young narrator imagines doing in *Someday* (Harper 1965, illustrated by Arnold Lobel).

It is difficult to hear the name Margaret Wise Brown without thinking of *Goodnight Moon*, or Maurice Sendak without picturing a dancing Wild Thing. Charlotte Zolotow, although she has penned such classics as *William's Doll* (1972) and *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* (1962), is more apt to be associated with a certain mood or tone than with any particular title. Or as Justin Wintle puts it in *The Pied Pipers* (Paddington, 1974), a collection of interviews with children's book authors, "Her success, like her work, has been quiet but sustained." Her texts have been illustrated by some of the most prominent artists in children's literature—Sendak, Garth

Williams, Martha Alexander, William Pene Du Bois, and Tana Hoban, to name a few. Yet her words, which can capture the essence of a parent-child relationship or a stormy summer day in a single, poetic image, are never overshadowed. How fitting that the only award in America to specifically honor picture-book text—an award established in 1998 by the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin, Zolotow's alma mater—bears her name.

Throughout her adult life, Zolotow has remained "terribly tuned in to children," as she told Wintle, and her writing reflects this, with its unwaveringly childlike observations. More than most grown-ups, she seems to understand the inadequacy of crayons that have lost their points and the thrill of going outside in one's nightgown to watch the sun rise. She realizes what a momentous event it can be when a child finally, if fleetingly, feels on equal ground with an older sibling. In other words, she acknowledges important things other adults tend to overlook altogether.

Having always known she wanted to be an author, Zolotow didn't channel



her talent into children's books until she went to work as an assistant to legendary editor Ursula Nordstrom in the Harper & Row juvenile department in 1938. One day she composed a memo to Nordstrom proposing a book she thought Margaret Wise Brown should do about the goings on in a city park over twenty-four hours. Nordstrom responded rather grumpily that she wanted more detail. When Zolotow gave it to her, Nordstrom walked over to Zolotow's desk and said, "You've just written, and I've just taken, your first children's book."

The Park Book, illustrated by H. A. Rey, was published in 1944, heralding



Illustration by Arnold Lobel, from *Someday*

Zolotow's flair for noticing the details that matter to children. Here, as mothers and grandmothers chatter away on benches, "a little boy who had pancakes for breakfast and a little girl who had bread and jam play together in the sand pile" while "a little boy who goes to bed at seven and a little girl who is allowed to stay up till seven-thirty see-saw up and down."

The Park Book also expresses Zolotow's preoccupation with the cycles of life, a theme that appears in many subsequent books, including *Over and Over* (Harper & Row, 1957, illustrated by Garth Williams) and *When the Wind Stops* (Abelard-Schuman, 1962, illustrated by Joe Lasker). Zolotow has acknowledged loving *The Secret Garden* since childhood, and her attunement to the continuous growth, death, and rebirth found in nature manifests itself in her writing. Whether she is describing the natural rhythm of a day in the park or explaining how ocean waves break on the sand, then retreat back into the ocean to form new waves (in *When the Wind Stops*), Zolotow seems to find comfort in pattern, conveying to her readers a soothing reassurance that somehow, even if we can't ever completely comprehend it, nature knows what it's doing.

Zolotow's illustrious career as an

editor at Harper & Row (now Harper-Collins) developed side by side with her career as an author, although she took seven years off from editing when her two children were young. She is credited with discovering young adult novelist Paul Zindel, whom she approached on the basis of the sensitively portrayed teenagers in his play *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*. Under her own imprint, Charlotte Zolotow Books, from 1981 to her retirement in 1993, she published work by both established names (M. E. Kerr, Laurence Yep, Karla Kuskin) and soon-to-be-renowned newcomers (Paul Fleischman, Francesca Lia Block). Asked how her roles as author and editor affected one another, Zolotow responded that she consciously kept a clear distinction between the two: "[As an editor] I have to be careful if I see something isn't working: the temptation's very often there to say how it should be done, which is death to an author. You've got to let him solve his own problems."

It might seem as if the many gritty, emotional young adult novels Zolotow has edited over the years are a world apart from the ostensibly gentle picture-book texts she creates herself. Yet in a sense the feelings she deals with in her writing for young children are just as

raw and forceful, if not more so. As she says in the *Horn Book* article:

We are all the same, except that adults have found ways to buffer themselves against the full-blown intensity of a child's emotions.... Children live more completely than we do. For them each experience is isolated in time. They are the true existentialists.

Thus, a misunderstanding with a friend becomes an all-consuming crisis for the distraught narrator of Zolotow's *The Hating Book* (1969), illustrated by Ben Shecter. An adult in the same situation (in fact, the story grew out of an argument then fifty-year-old Charlotte had with a friend) might try to suppress her hurt, but the young girl's painful feelings never lie far from the surface. It isn't her pride that prevents her from confronting her friend, but a frightening possibility:

What if she should say
Oh, please, just go away.
You're ugly and dumb.
Being with you
was never fun.

Adult readers may view Zolotow's work as "quiet" because the everyday trials and tribulations of young chil-

dren seem relatively trivial, even cute, to them. But for the children themselves, these experiences are pivotal tests of their being.

Critics haven't always warmed to Zolotow's books, particularly the ones that address difficult subject matter. In a 1966 review of *If It Weren't for You* (Harper, 1966, illustrated by Ben Shecter), a story about two brothers, *New Yorker* writer Janet Malcolm commented that "its purpose seems to be to incite fratricide." The book's text is a laundry list of things an older brother would be able to do if only his younger brother didn't exist: "If it weren't for you, I could have a room of my own, I could carve the pumpkin the way I want—frowning, and I could cry without anyone knowing and play in the tub as long as I wanted each night." In the end, however, the older brother realizes that without his younger brother he would "have to be alone with the grown-ups"—an even less attractive alternative. While Malcolm deems *If It Weren't for You* a "dubious approach to the problem of sibling rivalry," Zolotow might counter that children deserve honesty,

that trying to shield them from ugly emotions and situations often makes things worse. Zolotow recalls clearly how she felt as a child when her parents gave away her beloved bull terrier before they moved from Boston to New York, but told Charlotte the dog had run away. According to Zolotow's daughter, the author Crescent Dragonwagon, her mother wondered constantly why the dog had left and worried that he was hungry and lost.

Something similar happens to a six-year-old boy in Zolotow's *My Grandson Lew* (1974), illustrated by William Pene Du Bois, a title Ursula Nordstrom couldn't help referring to as Charlotte's "death manuscript." As in many of Zolotow's books, the truth is relayed by an adult in a manner that provides reassurance and an affirmation of life's continuity. The story opens with a child awakening in the middle of the night and calling out to his mother to tell her he misses his grandfather. The mother is caught off guard by this statement: the boy was only two when his grandfather died, and she had assumed he didn't remember him. But for the past

four years the boy has been remembering lots of details about the man who stayed with him when his parents went out of town, and who hastened to his room to comfort him, as his mother is doing now:

He had a long white bathrobe
and he'd look like a sailboat
coming in the door.
He'd lean over
and pick me up.
His beard scratched
and then he'd smile
and hug me.

Now that the boy knows his grandfather isn't coming back, he and his mother can help each other, since, as the mother explains:

we will remember him together
and neither of us
will be so lonely
as we would be
if we had to remember him
alone.

Another mother and son have a nighttime conversation in Zolotow's *When the Wind Stops*. The boy wants to

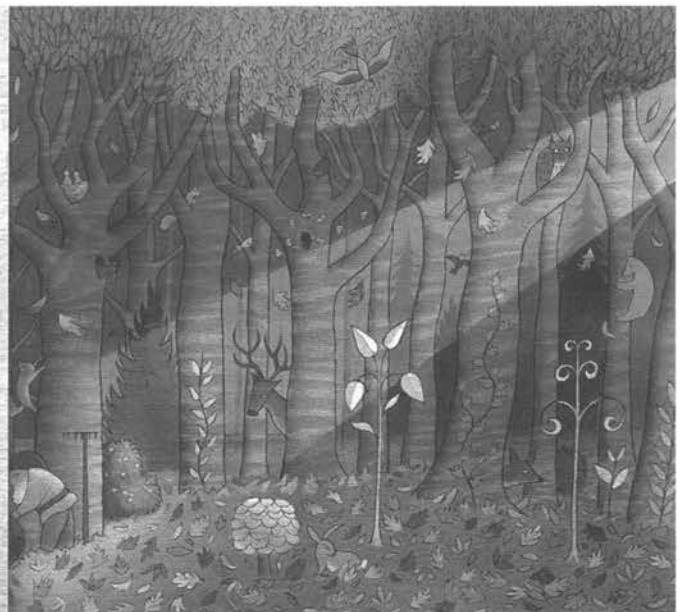
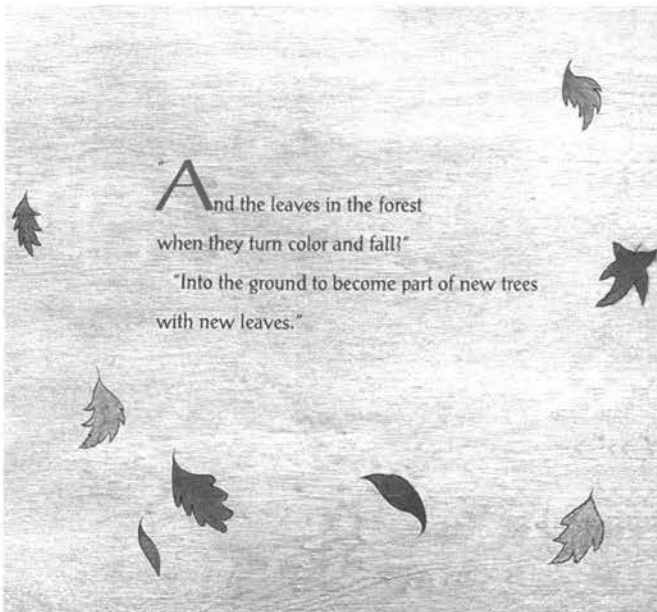


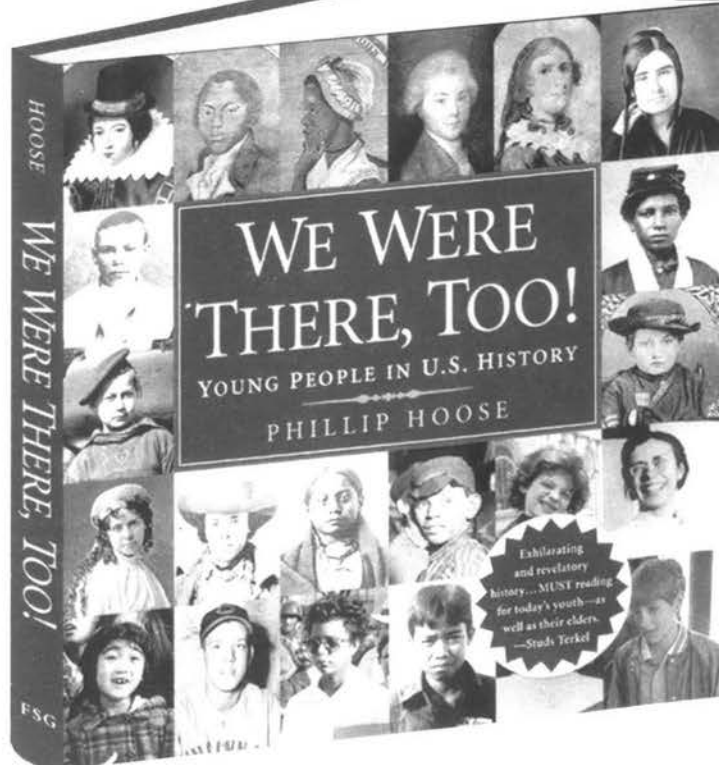
Illustration by Stefano Vitale, from *When the Wind Stops*

★ "A treasure chest of history come to life,

this is an inspired collection. Readers could easily get lost in it by simply dipping into one compelling story after another . . . Because the book is packed with historical documents, evocatively illustrated . . . and full of eyewitness quotations, it should prove valuable to young historians and researchers." —Starred, *School Library Journal*

★ "More than 60 young people of all races and religions are profiled . . . Teachers will find numerous ways to use each profile, but children will like it, too. They'll flip through the pages and find themselves touched by the material in many ways." —Starred, *Booklist*

"Shows young readers how other young people have shaped American history in large and small ways . . . Reminds us all that we are never too young to make a difference." —Marian Wright Edelman, President, Children's Defense Fund



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know why the day has to end. His mother replies:

"Nothing ends."
"Nothing?" the little boy asked.
"Nothing," his mother said. "It begins in another place or in a different way."

Zolotow's texts themselves have had many new beginnings, as publishers reissue them in new editions with new illustrations. (*When the Wind Stops* has had three editions, the most recent published by HarperCollins in 1995 with artwork by Stefano Vitale.) While artwork from past decades may seem old-fashioned today, the emotions in Zolotow's picture books do not. For instance, brothers and sisters still fight, and sometimes they even reveal how much they care for each other, as in Zolotow's *Do You Know What I'll Do?*, first published in 1958. This playful declaration of a sister's love for her younger brother, originally illustrated by Garth Williams, was recently reissued with a slightly revised text and vibrant collage illustrations by African American artist Javaka Steptoe. "Do you know what I'll do when the wind blows?" is one in a series of questions the sister poses to her brother, and her answer—"I'll put it in a bottle and let it loose when the house is hot"—reveals her inclination to perform little surprises that will make her sibling happy.

The wind provides an apt symbol for Charlotte Zolotow's legacy because, as the little boy in *When the Wind Stops* finally realizes, "it really does go on and on." Just as the wind blows from one part of the world to another, her books pass from one generation of children to the next, offering comfort and stirring things up a bit. ~

Christine Heppermann is a contributing editor to the Riverbank Review, and also writes the "Reader at Large" column for The Horn Book Magazine.

In the Ring

Young men grapple with psychological challenges as they spar against physical opponents in three novels about boxing.

By Mary Lou Burket

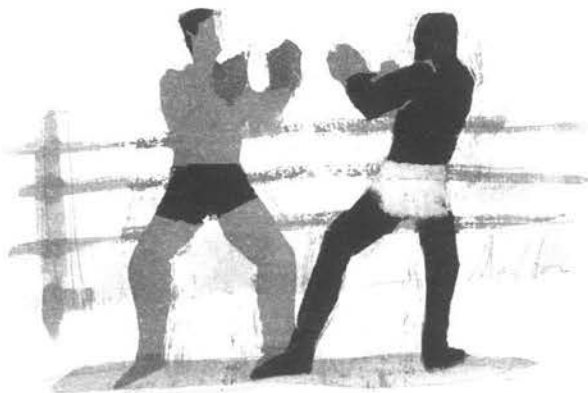
Boxing is a crucible in young men's lives. This broad idea unites three deeply optimistic novels, *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte (HarperCollins, 1967), *Shadow Boxer* by Chris Lynch (HarperCollins, 1993), and *The Boxer* by Kathleen Karr (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000). Whatever the reader may think about a sport in

which "two men got nothing against each other go in and try and beat each other's head" (an observation made in *The Contender*), the authors of these novels aren't concerned with whether boxing is an acceptable thing to do. They seem more interested in what the sport enables them to say about survival—the social, economic, psychological, and physical survival of young men.

Published more than thirty years ago, *The Contender* now feels like a work set in a different era. Young Alfred Brooks is coming of age in 1960s Harlem, to the sound of urgent voices: "He's got his foot on your throat, you gonna lick his shoe? Come march with us, Alfred." Yet Alfred's need to find his own way is a universal drive, transcending time.

Moments after walking into Donatelli's Gym, Alfred is told that "A man must have some fear...and learn to control it, to make it work for him." Since Alfred is afraid of his own future, this is excellent advice. He also fears and grieves for his friend James, who is in jail for robbing the store where Alfred works. Donatelli doesn't offer safety

from these feelings, just a place of opportunity and fairness. "There's no place to hide in a boxing ring," the trainer says to Alfred. "You're all alone up in there



with another man who wants to hit you more times, and harder, than you hit him. There are rules, and there's a referee to make sure you follow them. It's not the street. You follow me?" Alfred does.

Contending is about much more than training as a boxer—it's about striving, and making choices. "It's the climbing that makes the man," Donatelli likes to say.

"People will try to drag you down," he warns, but a boxer must ignore the

noisy crowd. With its rapid-fire dialogue and ardent expression of hope for Alfred's future, *The Contender* continues to be a stirring novel.

Chris Lynch's *Shadow Boxer* is, most of all, a book about two boys without a father. George, now thirteen, was nine when his father collapsed from the effects of years of fighting. ("Basically, Georgie," his mother explains, "your dad was punched to death.") Now George is "the man" to younger brother Monty. Written from George's point of view, the novel comically exposes his perception of his role. He's overbearing but he doesn't know it—"I'm in charge, that's all," he says defensively to Monty.

Monty emerges as the character whose future is most at risk. Gutsy, verbal, sensitive, perceptive, he's been schooled in his father's boxing wisdom, handed down through George, who counsels Monty in a makeshift ring: "Take the body, the head will follow," George recites. "Focus, pay attention, and the other guy will show you where he can be hit; don't drop your hands for any reason; don't stop moving; and when you throw that hand, throw it for real." The goal of this instruction, in a larger, rather ominous sense, is for Monty to learn to "take care of himself" as he becomes a man. He's expected to accept these lessons as a form of love.

Lynch illuminates the tangled bonds

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"Jock Culture: Writing and Fighting"

Wednesday, October 3, 2001
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Wisconsin Union Theater
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Robert Lipsyte's novels include *The Contender*, *The Brave*, *The Chief*, and *One Fat Summer*. He is the recipient of the 2001 Margaret A. Edwards Award honoring lifetime contribution in writing for young adults.

Established in 1998, this lecture was named to honor Charlotte Zolotow, distinguished children's book editor and author of more than sixty-five picture books.

For further information about
CCBC or this lecture, contact
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of empathy, aggression, admiration, and disdain between the brothers. His style, which resembles the art of boxing—full of feints and jabs and startling shifts in tone—makes for an unsettling yet fascinating read.

Inevitably, Monty makes good use of what he knows. "You're not my father, you know, George," he declares, an assertion that is ultimately tested in the ring. Sooner or later, Monty is bound to stand up to George, and to do it in the way they both respect, with padded fists.

Life itself is enough of a test for fifteen-year-old Johnny Woods in Kathleen Karr's *The Boxer*, set in New York City's Lower East Side in the middle 1880s. Johnny shares a tenement apartment with his mother and a flock of younger siblings. Desperate for more money, Johnny volunteers to fight an exhibition bout at Brodie's, a saloon where boxers share a pit with rats. Moments after the fight begins, Johnny is arrested in a raid and sent for six months to the Tombs, a notorious prison.

There Johnny meets his savior, aging middleweight Michael O'Shaunnessey—a.k.a. "Perfessor Mike"—who singles Johnny out as a contender. O'Shaunnessey bribes the guards and turns his cell into a training room for Johnny, to prepare him for the day when they both get out. "Money ain't no good if you can't spend it," O'Shaunnessey says. "You throw a little of it around, by and by it comes back to you."

A generous, cheerful, resourceful man, O'Shaunnessey has a progressive view of boxing, which, in 1885, is moving toward official rules. Referees are coming into use, along with boxing gloves and bells for ending rounds. O'Shaunnessey understands the need for strategy. "Boxing should be *scientific*," he says to Johnny. "It also ought to be graceful, something pleasurable to watch."

Writing in a brisk, lively style that mixes action with compassion for the

immigrant class that Johnny represents—uneducated men, women, and children—Karr conveys respect for both her characters and the sport of boxing. Her fight scenes are exciting and she spices Johnny's story with the right amount of relevant detail—the length of a round, the brand of a watch, the signs of brutal "lacing" on a boxer's fragile skin.

For Johnny, who finally wins enough money to move his dependents away from the slums, boxing is a means, not an end. For Alfred, George, and Monty, the sport is all about direction, discipline, and hope. The absence of fathers has enormous impact in these novels, offset by the presence of fatherly figures, men who give the boxers help. (Even George, who is too young to be a surrogate dad, induces his brother to grow.)

Nurturing is not a word one readily associates with boxing, yet nurturing is at the heart of these revealing books about imperiled, sympathetic young men. Alfred is adrift, Monty is gullible, Johnny is trapped. It takes an older male to train and, sometimes, to provide for them, to lead them into the ring.

Training ends in fighting, and fighting is destructive—just one of the many ironies in boxing. Consider that beneath the fighter's rage is self-control, and that before the screaming public is a solitary man. Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that the boxer must endure repeated injury to win.

Yet if boxing seems uniquely fatalistic, in these novels it supports the working out of universal human needs—for purpose in life, for personal strength, for economic freedom. Boxing makes these books dramatic, but the authors, through their insight and their craft, make them resonate with everyday desires. ~

Mary Lou Burket was drawn to boxing through her love of movies.

Imagination and Risk

Books should expand a child's world, not shrink it.

By Emily Arnold McCully



Emily Arnold McCully is the author and illustrator of many award-winning books for young readers, including Mirette on the High Wire, which won the Caldecott Medal in 1993. Many of her picture books feature strong female characters; others offer young readers a slice of historical fiction brought vividly to life with beautiful illustrations.

McCully was the keynote speaker at the Ninth Annual Hubbs Children's Literature Conference at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, last February. This is an edited portion of the address she gave on that occasion.

I don't write books with an audience of children in mind. I don't know many children, and it would be folly to try to anticipate what they want to read. I can only delve into subjects that matter to me and hope that others will be interested as well.

Yet, in the back of my mind, I hope that my books will build an appetite—that down the road there will be more adult readers like me.

But the reading culture that nurtured and shaped my sensibility has been changing. Two novelists of my acquaintance have remarked on it. Paula Fox's fiction centers on the lives of complex, demanding, and fascinating characters. An influential critic once dismissed them as too distasteful to have dinner with. Rosellen Brown has suffered similarly infelicitous readings of her novels. She attempts in her stories to touch on such matters as, in her words, "the primordial relationship between mothers and daughters and...where responsibility and blame lie for the satisfactions of a life." Some readers have told her they are disappointed that her characters are too flawed to be role models.

Clearly, something has caused people to think literature ought to be useful or palliative. When these assumptions hold sway, books have to start passing tests that have nothing to do with literature.

This happened to me in a small way with a picture book of mine called *My Real Family*. The story is about a bear family that adopts an orphaned sheep. The parents don't handle the situation

very well, and one of the bear children becomes wildly jealous. She fantasizes that she herself was adopted; if she could only find her real parents, surely they would love her more. When her mother and father prove that they love her with all their hearts, she happily abandons the fantasy. As a child I entertained the hopeful possibility that I had better parents somewhere, and many of my friends have told me that they did too. It seems to me to be a common and elemental story. But the book generated bitter, angry protests. I was accused of portraying adoption in a negative light. People said they would sooner burn my book than show it to their adopted children.

Blinded by a particular interest they hoped my book might serve, these readers couldn't enter into the story, much less the aesthetic dimensions of the book. To me, this was a failure of imagination. I pointed out that a story can often be a springboard for meaningful discussion of sensitive subjects, but to no avail. Imaginative literary appreciation can be taught, just as art appreciation and music appreciation can be. But it's not something you can force. I worry that children's books are at risk of being appreciated only for their utilitarian value, with classroom usefulness tied

to subject matter and testability. Interrupting the reading of stories for crude assessments of comprehension or projects that neglect the text to focus on the reader's feelings snuffs out the excitement of being thoroughly involved in a story. Whereas children's sensibilities once were perceived as being enlarged by the world of a good story, now children are often taught to fit the world of a story to their nascent sensibilities—an absurd process of reduction.

For children to develop as individuals they must have a capacity for aesthetic enjoyment. It's the only way to ensure independent thought and full engagement with the world. The alternative is, unfortunately, easy to imagine: a soulless, numb tapping at the Internet. We are witnessing a mass addiction to being "connected," swimming in disordered sequences of news and chat—on the television, on the computer, on the cell phone—as if to escape the implacable permanence of the printed page, which silently enjoins us to stop and think.

Isaac Bashevis Singer once said that he wrote children's books because they are "the last refuge of storytelling." Good stories can encompass strangeness and danger. They don't try to mitigate them. I know a lively two-year-old who asks for my wordless picture book *Picnic* every night before going to sleep. She finds endless ways to tell the story of the family driving to a picnic spot, the littlest mouse falling off the truck, the family proceeding gaily onward, unaware of their loss. Fear and comfort are entwined, and she takes them both in stride. But recently when I mailed the book to an earnest new mother she wrote back that she was "worried about that mouse." She had identified the element of fear in the story and was



From *Picnic*



Illustration by Emily Arnold McCully, from *Mirette on the High Wire*

tempted to separate it out, to censor it in her telling.

We seem to have forgotten that literature can work on people in infinite ways, and that this lies at the heart of its enjoyment. There's a danger that as young people turn more and more to electronic media for entertainment, children's literature will take on the narrower functions of teaching kids to read and providing information.

In our culture's frantic search for values, why do we never hear a pitch for the instructive power of narrative, which connects and makes sense of things, shows cause and effect, action and consequence? What about language—the way it affects the depth of our ideas and our appreciation of beauty? In this

anxious time, our faith in stories has faltered. So many factors work against the kind of pleasurable, private, omnivorous reading that was at the heart of my childhood, when the art and power of language were respected, the experience of wonder and the capacity for intellectual adventure alive and well.

My sister Becky and I learned to read before we went to school. My mother noticed that I often tried to draw the things I saw around me, and she said, "Why don't you practice and keep at it until you get it right?" From the time I was three, experimentation, discouragement, and perseverance were all part of my routine.

My sensibilities were mainly shaped by reading—including comic strips—and by radio. I listened to the radio for hours on end, visualizing what I heard (though I'd been in the control room and knew how effects were created)

and drawing the pictures that appeared in my head. Getting these pictures out of my imagination and down on paper is what I spent most of my free childhood hours trying to do, and it's what I now do for a living.

Many of the themes in my books spring directly from my childhood. This was a mostly pre-TV era (though my father worked for RCA and brought home a set in time for us to watch the McCarthy hearings). We had great freedom to explore and to take risks. We were warned that if we made mistakes there would be consequences, but we learned from mistakes. Becky and I rode our bicycles all over Long Island and when we were in junior high we would take the train into New York City, where I sketched interesting bums on park benches. Such excursions would be unthinkable today.

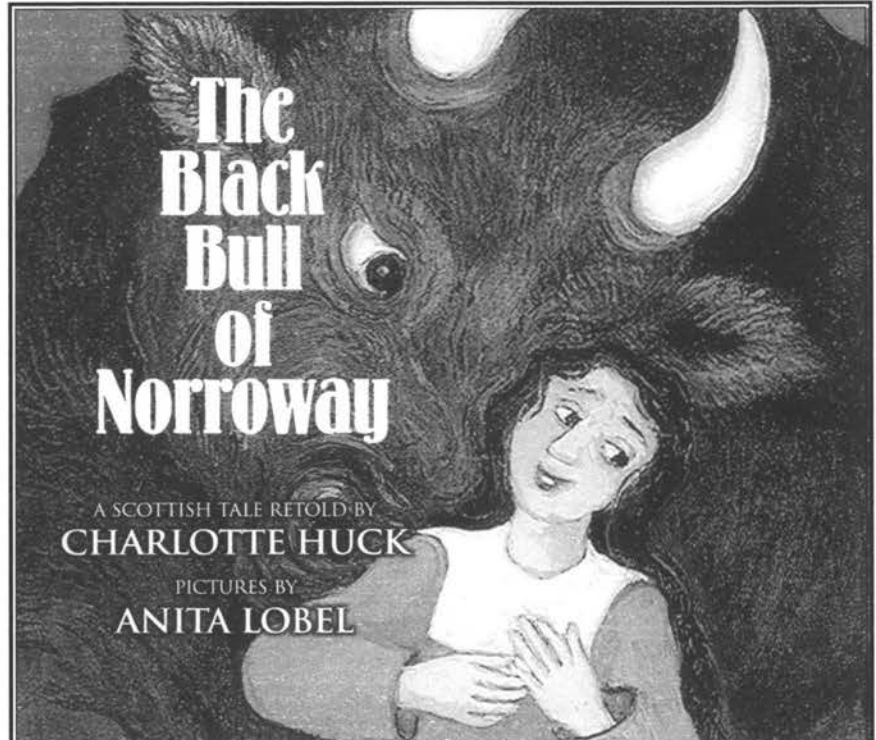
Having hours of free time and the liberty to put myself in a little danger were hugely important to my being a creative child. Joyce Carol Oates, noting that most writers are walkers, credits her panicked flights from bullies with giving her empathy for other people's suffering. Her running, and much of mine, was solitary.

Solitude was probably the greatest gift of my childhood, and it seems to be at risk today. I could be alone almost as much as I wanted. As a child, I usually played with boys, and I preferred to read about them. Books about boys seemed likely to prepare me for the world; they encouraged daring and confidence and expertise, whereas girls' stories were a prescription for staying at home. In those days, girls weren't expected to spend time alone, nor were they given much freedom to act, observe, and fail. It seemed to me that most girls wanted to gather in bunches, and they gave far too much attention to their appearance. Adopting what I considered a loftier view isolated me. I retreated even more into my imagination. The

stories I've written about brave, persevering, adventurous girls are a penance for my early scorn as well as a celebration of larger possibilities.

In the first of these books, *Mirette on the High Wire*, a young girl imagines her singular promise and then realizes

it—with desire, discipline, perseverance, and explicit risk-taking. Creation of both the story and the pictures for this book led me into untried and rather perilous territory. It was a high wire act that recovered for me the sense of possibility that fueled my childhood. ~



"[In] Huck's retelling of this Scottish folktale . . . Peggy Ann wishes for a husband good and kind, and ends up with the Black Bull (actually the enchanted Duke) of Norrway. Lobel's illustrations have a sturdy, literal straightforwardness that matches the no-nonsense text. A solid addition to comparative folktale and storytelling collections." — *The Bulletin*

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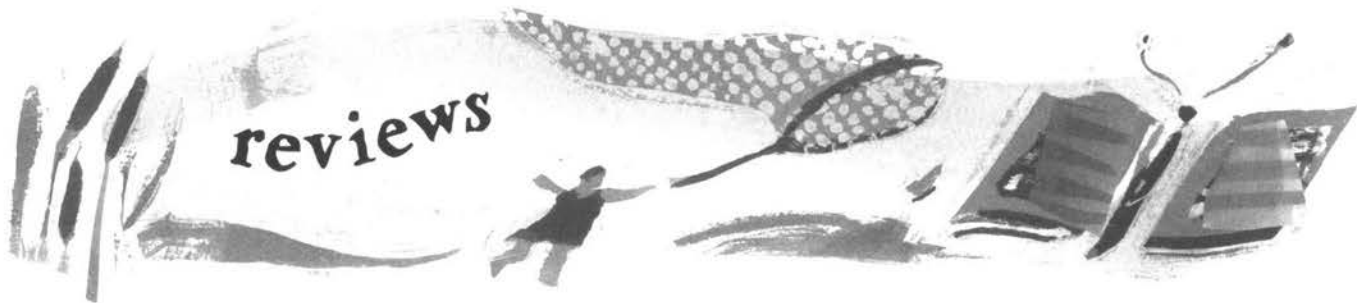
"Huck's effort to find 'traditional tales that show plucky girls' pays off here . . . [her] text is powerful and sweet, well-matched by Lobel's theatrically imagined pictures." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"A superb addition to all folktale collections." — *School Library Journal*

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Picture Books

And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon

by Janet Stevens and
Susan Stevens Crummel
Illustrated by Janet Stevens
HARCOURT

48 pages, Ages 5–8, \$17.00
ISBN 015-202298-8

In this friendly “fractured” nursery rhyme, Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel put a zany twist on “Hey Diddle Diddle.” The book opens with a straightforward reading of the rhyme:

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the
fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed to see such
sport,
And the dish ran away with the
spoon.

By the second spread, however, there is trouble. The panicked cat awakens the cast: “Everybody up! They didn’t come back!” “They” are the runaway dish and spoon, who are supposed to return directly after the reading to prepare for the following night’s performance. The cat’s words invite readers behind the scenes to witness what goes on when the book is closed. It’s a wonderful concept. Does a story have a life of its own? For the Stevens sisters, who clearly had a lot of fun creating this book, the answer is a decided yes. And

what if it took a new direction, for the fun of it? What if, one night, the dish and spoon didn’t return? Their imaginations are off and running.

Initially, the sleepy cat, cow, and little dog suggest new endings to the rhyme, but finally decide to go off “by the light of the silvery moon...to bring back the dish and the spoon.” During their search they encounter myriad characters from other nursery rhymes and fairy tales: Little Boy Blue sleeping under a hay-stack; a frustrated spider sitting on a tuffet (complaining about his lack of success in befriending a certain Miss M.); a Big Bad Wolf who tries to make a meal of the threesome. Often a play on words provides the excuse for a bit of action or a wacky character. At one point, they come to a literal “fork in the road,” wearing sunglasses and a Hawaiian shirt, its tines suggesting spiked hair. Finally, Dish and Spoon fall down a beanstalk, in flight from the Giant, and land by their friends’ side. Dish breaks into many pieces, but a kind Jack of all trades (who is also nimble and quick, and the builder of a well-known house) fixes her and all hurry back to take their places for the next night’s reading—which has been altered to avoid future mishap.

The humor in this book, which features clever wordplay and relies on familiarity with a range of nursery rhymes and fairy tales, will appeal to school-age children, but the book’s generous size and lively illustrations will engage even the youngest listeners.

Intelligent and accomplished in both premise and execution, this is an original and imaginative piece of work.

—*Krystyna Poray Goddu*

Ballerina!

By Peter Sis
GREENWILLOW

24 pages, Age 3 and up, \$14.95
ISBN 0-688-17944-4

Until now, Peter Sis’s accessible and imaginative picture books for young children have focused on interests typically associated with boys—fire trucks, ships, dinosaurs. In *Ballerina!* he has created a treasure for all those girls who would rather jeté and plié than run or walk.

One glance around the bedroom of the child in this book is enough to prove that what Sis announces on the first page in large, bold type is true: “Terry loves ballet.” Uncomplicated black-and-white line drawings show ballet slippers hanging from a bedpost, a ballerina figurine on a bookshelf, posters of leaping costumed dancers on the wall. Yet the room’s most striking feature (and the only one in color so far) is a large, ornately framed mirror, waiting like a blank canvas for Terry to make her mark on it.

When she dons her tights and starts digging into her trunkful of dress-up clothes, the mirror reveals the graceful ballerina she envisions herself to be. On one side of a two-page spread we see a twirling little girl in an undershirt and pink tutu; on the other side is an

elaborate illustration of the *Nutcracker's* Sugar Plum Fairy in a similar position. Sis sticks with this format throughout the book, organizing the drama into a wonderful blend of the fanciful and the concrete. Each piece of Terry's attire—a red leotard, a blue gown, a yellow turban—inspires a different mirrored scene demonstrating a specific movement (a leap, a dip, a flutter). Sis mentions several ballets by name, including *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and, in his usual fashion, he ends with a rewardingly theatrical finale. Terry's "green, blue, violet, red, pink, yellow, and white scarves" transform into a headdress for "the best ballerina of all," each scarf leading—in a fold-out spread—to the bowing ballerina who wore that color earlier on. The audience members (Terry's parents) indicate their appreciation with thunderous applause, and then with something much more valuable than a standing ovation or a bouquet of roses: they reach out to give her a hug.

—Renée Victor

Bridget and the Gray Wolves

By Pija Lindenbaum

Translated by Kjersti Board

R & S BOOKS/FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 4-7, \$15.00

ISBN 91-29-65395-9

What shy and overly cautious child doesn't long to drop the shroud of caution and move fearlessly about the world? Pija Lindenbaum indulges this fantasy with comic nonchalance in her warm and witty picture book *Bridget and the Gray Wolves*. If the title sounds a bit dangerous, don't worry—this Bridget can handle anything.

We first meet Bridget at her day-care playground, where she alone refuses to join in the communal fun. Jump from the roof of a shed? "I might fall down, lose my shoes." Pet a little dog? "He may have a splinter in his



Illustration by Pija Lindenbaum, from *Bridget and the Gray Wolves*

paw. Or a headache." Hold a fat worm? "You shouldn't hold worms—they want to crawl back into the soil." Bridget is a thoughtful girl and, as Lindenbaum concedes, "afraid of most things." The day-care group's trip to the woods to collect pretty leaves provides the story's turning point: Bridget is left behind, and the situation becomes ominous as the illustrations move from the calming yellows and bright, open spaces of the field to the dark, confusing territory of the woods. Standing alone with her small bucket of leaves, Bridget is dwarfed by the trees. We're afraid for her, of course, and when we see the shining yellow eyes and glowing teeth of a pack of wolves, we're prepared for the worst. What does fearful Bridget do? Without batting a lash, she engages the wolves in play!

No visual clues appear to hint at what is real and what is make-believe. Lindenbaum is daring enough to respect a child's fantasy. Which is not to

say that the illustrations are rendered realistically. Lindenbaum (creator of the supremely funny canine character Boodil) is a comic illustrator. Her wolves are wonderfully goofy, loping, bedraggled creatures—we can almost see the fleas jumping from their skinny bodies. Bridget's nervous-looking curls are held back from her face by neatly placed barettes. What a pleasant surprise to see this careful little girl playing catch-the-pine-cone with the wolves as if it's no big deal. At bedtime she sings them sad songs ("They love sad things") and demands that they go to the bathroom before retiring.

Was that quiet self-assurance within Bridget all along? Our last glimpse of her shows a happy little girl who's made her way back to the day-care playground and is preparing to leap from the roof of the shed—a feat of derring-do that perfectly matches the charm and energy of the book.

—Christine Alfano

Five Creatures

By Emily Jenkins

Illustrated by Tomek Bogacki

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-32341-0

In *Five Creatures*, Emily Jenkins and Tomek Bogacki have created a delightful picture book that is both highly sophisticated and welcoming to young readers. Based on the principle of the Venn diagram, the graph that uses circles and the intersection of those circles to show shared and unshared characteristics, *Five Creatures* describes the traits that the members of the narrator's household (three humans and two cats) exhibit. The text and illustrations set a tone of warmth and playfulness without sliding into sentimentality.

Jenkins and Bogacki involve readers in the information-gathering at the heart of the narrative. Readers learn that in the house there are "four who like to eat fish. Three who like to drink milk, one who's allergic, and one who has it only in coffee." The illustrations provide visual clues to help sort out who likes what, yet the reader must make the final leap to identify the person—or animal—the narrator is describing. Filling in the gaps intentionally left by the author and illustrator, the young reader enjoys the pleasure of solving a puzzle. A running joke, handled with subtlety, is that occasionally the feline and human members of the household share the same characteristics: There are "five who love birds...but not all in the same way."

Bogacki's charming, almost tactile illustrations provide another pleasure. His rough strokes and muted tones soften and humanize the geometric shapes in his compositions. Dear, large-faced cats seem alert to all that transpires (when they're not asleep). The illustrations have an innocence that complements the voice of the child

narrator. But more is going on. Bogacki's clever design makes the charming illustrations seem both simple and sophisticated. Curving lines in the pictures are nicely accented by the wavy ribbons of text. Each two-page spread has a large diamond in the middle of it (a rug, a table, a bedspread, a patch of shade) that unobtrusively draws together the individual elements of the family groupings, visually reinforcing the essence of the narrative: the members of the household, different in their interests, characteristics, and abilities, belong to the same close family.

—Kathryne Beebe

Larky Mavis

By Brock Cole

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-34365-9

In *Larky Mavis*, Brock Cole has created an extraordinary and disturbing fairy tale about a village eccentric who finds a strange creature in a peanut shell. Whereas Cole's *Buttons* (2000) poked fun at a quirky family, this picture book does not make light of its character and her stubborn insistence that she is raising a child. Mavis is an object of scorn in her rural community, and her claims of motherhood irritate local authorities.

As rendered in Cole's eddying ink lines and ethereal watercolor blurs, Mavis resembles the flighty red-haired daughter of *Buttons*, but her ungainliness is not an endearing eccentricity. Her unkempt curls and threadbare clothing suggest homelessness or insanity. She wears heavy wooden clogs on her pigeon-toed feet, and her patched skirt billows. As she ambles down a dusty road, "mooning about, mooning about," she gazes idly over her shoulder and twists herself off-kilter; her overbite and wide eyes suggest bewilderment. When she earnestly displays her discovery to an uppity schoolmaster and his uninter-

ested pupils, she gets scant respect. "Let's see what Mavis has found," the man says, patronizingly. "A little worm, is it? Thank you very much, Mavis, for showing us your little worm."

Next, an impatient parson shoos Mavis from his churchyard. "You're not to hang around the church," he warns. "People don't like it." But when he humors her by inspecting her "baby" and saying, "You know I can't christen a mouse," he unwittingly reveals that the thing (whatever it may be) has gotten bigger. Mavis gains credibility, and in subsequent images, three silent children begin shadowing her footsteps and acting as appreciative, though unacknowledged, witnesses.

The mysterious entity, which Mavis names Heart's Delight, is fed by its protector and continues to grow. Because Mavis keeps Heart's Delight bundled in a pale purple cloth that affords only glimpses of a stubbled white stump, a pink hand, or a ruffle of bluish-white feathers, disgusted onlookers speculate about "some kind of deformed bird" or "a calf and a half." Yet Mavis's child friends cast affectionate glances at the blanket. When the anxious townsfolk move to take away Heart's Delight (a doctor wants to "give it some treatments and write an article"), the children's response reflects Mavis's own terror.

Cole provides a suitably remarkable and ambiguous ending to this singular story. Glowing washes of yellow and pink watercolor surround Mavis, and the blanket's contents grow perceptibly. "Mavis hugged Heart's Delight close...and all the others fell back, as startled as if someone had rung the church bells in their ears." The monstrous child emerges as an angelic winged being who lifts Mavis over her persecutors' heads. Without directly invoking any religious faith, Cole places his marginal character in a state of grace and implicitly questions the villagers' judgment and behavior. This startling

and provocative story will invite re-reading, discussion, and individual interpretation.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

Max, the Stubborn Little Wolf

By Marie-Odile Judes

Illustrated by Martine Bourre

Translated by Joan Robbins

HARPERCOLLINS

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$14.95

ISBN 0-06-029417-5

We all know “little wolves” like Max—kids who reject certain gender-specific role expectations: the boy who insists on playing dress-up for fun, and chooses only the frilliest outfits; the girl who would rather die than put on the same getup.

Max, the Stubborn Little Wolf is about a wolf pup “like that,” one who has no interest in hunting, as his father insists all boy wolves should, but would rather be a florist. Throughout this father and son’s lighthearted tug-of-war, Max comes across as a strong and self-confident little wolf, quite certain about how he

wishes to spend his days. It’s the highly comic father wolf, overly anxious about his boy’s odd proclivities, who provides the story’s eye-rolling laughs.

Three times, Papa wolf tries mightily to convince Max of his rightful career as fearless hunter but is foiled each time. “Tomorrow,” he declares, “we will go hunting for rabbits and young boars. And if I don’t manage to make you a hunter, my son, I’ll eat my hat, I will!” Max sticks to his flower-lovin’ guns, and through the course of the story Papa wolf winds up consuming progressively less palatable items: hat, pillow, dishes. When will he learn his lesson?

Martine Bourre’s bright and saturated colors provide warm backdrops for her boldly rendered wolf family. Flamboyant brushstrokes conjure the bristles of their fur, while smudged shadow and varying textures lend liveliness to every page. Humorous visual details like Max’s fluffy stuffed lamb and the copy of *Red Riding Hood* lying on his nightstand further the sense of fun, while Papa’s polka-dotted pajamas encourage us not to take him too seriously.

By story’s end, as Max’s interests shift from arranging flowers to manufacturing perfume, we get the definite feeling that he’ll prevail. And unless Papa wolf intends to consume every object in the household, we know that he has got to loosen up. If he thought about it, he’d realize that his stubborn little wolf proudly joins Chester the mouse and Ferdinand the bull as memorable picture-book characters who are quite content to be different, thank you very much.

—*Christine Alfano*

Pearl

By Debby Atwell

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 pages, Age 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-395-88416-0

In *River*, Debby Atwell charted the passage of time by observing humans’ impact on the natural environment. In *Pearl*, her subject is the sweep of American history as seen through the eyes of a fictional observer/participant. Pearl is a centenarian who calmly recounts her own life story, which happens to intersect with major political events. This intimate approach, accentuated by colorful folk art paintings, blends a family tree with the stuff of textbooks.

In each page spread, a block of text and an iconic line drawing are set on the left-hand side, a large tableau on the right. Strong lines stabilize the rectangular paragraphs and pictures, encouraging slow study. As time travel goes, the journey in *Pearl* is smooth and sedate.

Pearl opens the narrative by placing herself within a continuum. “My grandfather told me that when he was just a small boy, he rode in a big parade with the first president of the United States,” she says, using her ancestor to link the storytelling moment to 1789, the year of Washington’s inauguration. In the painting that accompanies this recollection, George Washington holds a

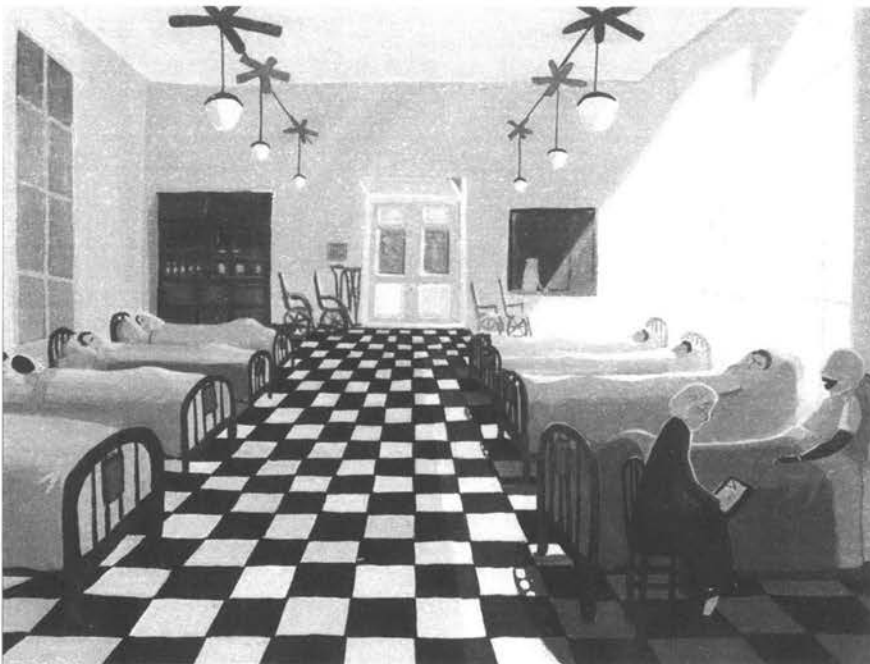


Illustration by Debby Atwell, from Pearl

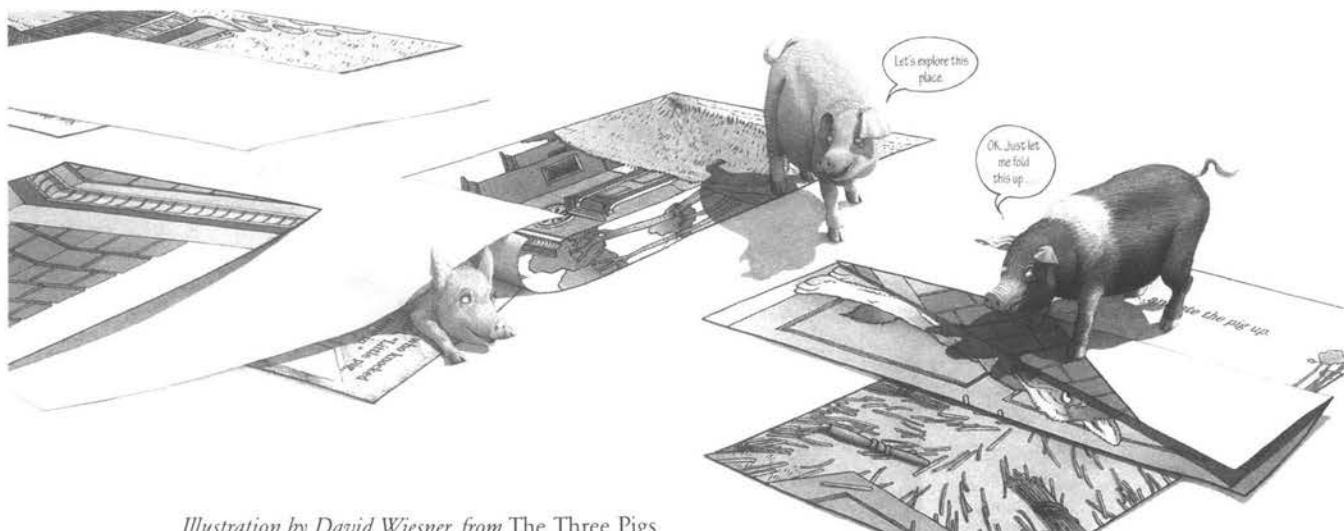


Illustration by David Wiesner, from *The Three Pigs*

small boy to his hip and rides a prancing white horse. Throngs of people wave flags and cheer. Pearl's origins correspond to the birth of the nation.

Pearl describes herself as the youngest of nine children. Because her "father and brothers had all gone off to fight in the Civil War to free the slaves," her mother and sisters "got up before sunrise and started the fire, heated the kettle, fed the chickens, milked the cows, and dressed me." A miniature drawing of battlefield violence is offset by the main illustration, which depicts a sunny day on a traditional farm (missing its male workers). Observant readers will notice that, decades later, a painting of the yellow farmhouse and red barn hang in Pearl's living room.

Throughout, the reader is able to make historical connections between different events in the narrative. As a young girl, Pearl is acquainted with women's suffrage activists ("A lady named Susan B. Anthony talked to my mother"), and years later, she and her daughters vote. In the 1930s, she pays a dime to go to the movies, and in the 1950s, she watches TV: "Moving-picture shows in your own home!" Perhaps because numerical markers might diminish the illusion of oral history, dates aren't specified in Pearl's account.

Instead, the book ends with a time line that includes Pearl's birth year (1862), her honeymoon visit to the brand-new Statue of Liberty (1885), and her move to Alabama, where she hears the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. speak on civil rights (1955).

While she alludes to famous figures and events, Pearl expresses few opinions. She shrugs off flapper attire without mentioning Prohibition ("Fancy clothes are just a way of celebrating good times") and has little to say about the Depression ("Most all of the men lost their jobs because the stock market crashed. I never understood what that meant"). She does meditate on World War II, both in words and in a solemn picture of a graveside ceremony among soldiers and civilians.

Atwell casts her narrator as an American Everywoman, observing events while leading an ordinary life. She fittingly closes the story with Pearl meeting a great-granddaughter, her namesake. "I could see that little Pearl had my father's sky-blue eyes," Pearl says, and this moment of recognition connects the generations. Balancing family and national history, this inventive book calls attention to both individual growth and shared memories.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

The Three Pigs

Written and Illustrated by
David Wiesner

CLARION

40 pages, Age 5 and up, \$16.00

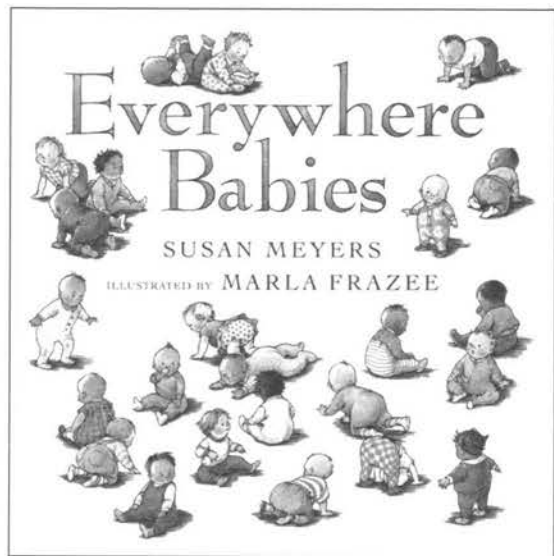
ISBN 0-618-00701-6

This new telling of a tale we all know is fresh and surprising all the way through. On the jacket flap we learn that, "ever since the pigs took to the air at the end of Tuesday," David Wiesner has wanted to give them "a book of their own." In this brilliant adaptation of "The Three Little Pigs," Wiesner serves up a visual and intellectual feast.

The book begins conventionally enough, with "once upon a time," the wily wolf keeping an eye on the first pig, who is busily engaged in building his house of straw. The illustration has a traditional feel, with a flat, muted palette and straightforward renditions of the characters. Then, on the second spread, the full-page illustration fragments into separate panels. When the wolf huffs and puffs, he blows the first little pig out of his panel, and out of the "official" story of "The Three Little Pigs."

When the next panel tells us that the wolf "ate the pig up," we can plainly see that the pig is alive and well. In

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- ★ “A *charming* paean.”
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- ★ “*Warm*, funny, generous, this is a book that belongs in every library, and every lap.”
—*The Horn Book* (starred review)

“*Cheerful*.... Charming.” —*Booklist*

“This *jubilant* picture book ... makes clear that each time a child takes a first step, it is something to celebrate.”

—*Riverbank Review*

“A look-and-point *lapsit hit*.” —*The Bulletin*



fact, he seems more alive than ever: he is portrayed more realistically, now that he has been liberated from his role in the traditional tale. He sneaks behind the second pig's panel, and when the wolf blows down the house of sticks, the second pig joins the first. Together, they liberate the third pig, and the three of them run around outside the visual boundaries of the story while the wolf is trapped inside, pushing against the sides of the frame.

The pigs play with the story panels, fashioning the one that holds the wolf into a paper plane, which they ride to visit other story-worlds. The "cat with the fiddle" from "Hey Diddle Diddle" joins them, as does a mighty dragon who is about to be slain by a prince. The three pigs, the cat, and the dragon then enter a space where illustrations from different stories hang suspended in midair, stretching into infinity. One of these illustrations is the third pig's house of bricks.

The animals decide that they want to go home, so they reassemble the panels of the original story, and the wolf rejoins the action, threatening to huff and puff. But this time the charac-

ters have taken charge of the story's resolution. The door to the house of bricks opens and the dragon's head pops out, scattering letters from the text and giving the wolf a jolly good scare. The three pigs, the cat, and the dragon all live happily ever after. The wolf can be seen through the window, sulking but unharmed.

The Three Pigs is a great achievement. Its conception is bold and its use of space is dynamic and playful. This book can be appreciated on many levels, and most of all, it's lots of fun.

—Antonia Gray

Under New York

By Linda Oatman High

Illustrated by Robert Rayevsky

HOLIDAY HOUSE

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.95

ISBN 0-8234-1551-1

In this abstract expedition through concrete and steel, Linda Oatman High (*Maizie*) and Robert Rayevsky (*Squash It!*) peek under the slate-gray skin of the Big Apple. High plumbs the hidden depths with unrhymed verses, each beginning with the title words:

Under New York,
below offices and theaters and stores,
there are miles of pipes and wires...
carrying light and heat to the city
above.

Rayevsky splits each spread horizontally (with a ribbon of black-and-gold construction tape, a copper pipe, a set of yellow marquee lights). The upper part of every spread provides a street or river view of Manhattan, while the lower portion shows a dimly lit subterranean scene.

Native New Yorkers and visitors alike will recognize famous landmarks, traced in broad strokes of inky black and tinted with layer upon layer of semitransparent color. The very first spread takes an aerial look at cars, bikes, and horse-drawn carriages around Columbus Circle, all atop a foundation of charcoal-and-blue paving stones:

Under New York,
below skyscrapers and moonshine
and sky,
there are stones and sand, clay,
and lots of big rocks
made by glaciers,
millions of years ago.

Subsequent images show how lives and eras literally overlap. Beneath ice skaters in the midnight-blue twilight outside Rockefeller Center, pedestrians jostle in a sepia-brown walkway lined with shops, "a world of its own, / an underground city below the city." Manhole covers conceal workers in hardhats "making new tunnels for water," and a rendering of Madison Square Garden accompanies a look at circus elephants, so large they must approach the venue on foot, via the Lincoln Tunnel.

Rayevsky paints Manhattan in the loose, active way that Ludwig Bemelmans painted Paris, with the addition of collage elements like photos, street signs, and public-works icons. If his images are not always geographically

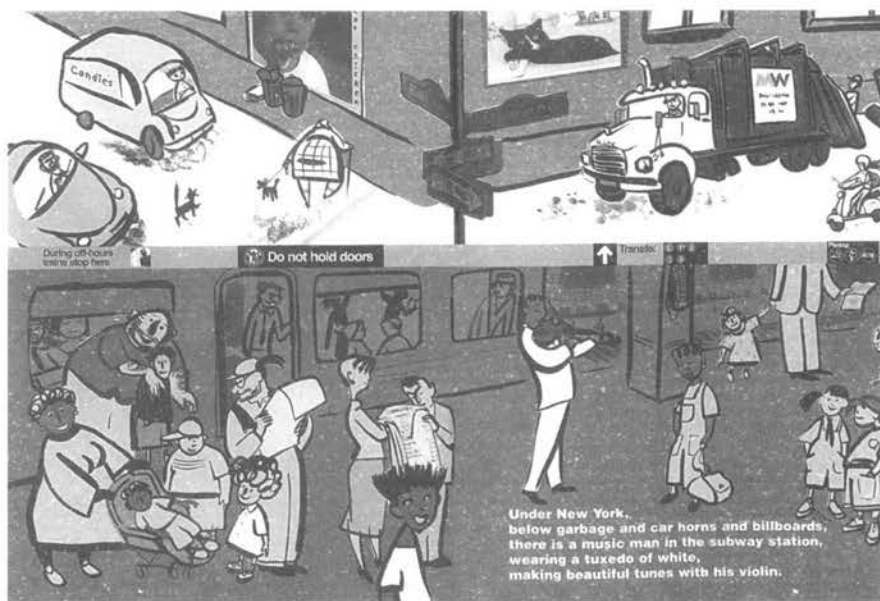
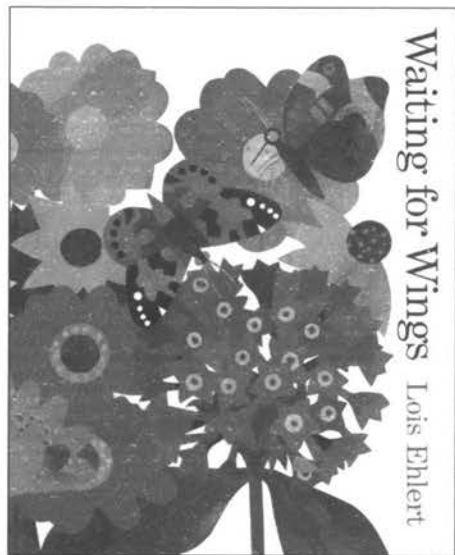


Illustration by Robert Rayevsky, from *Under New York*

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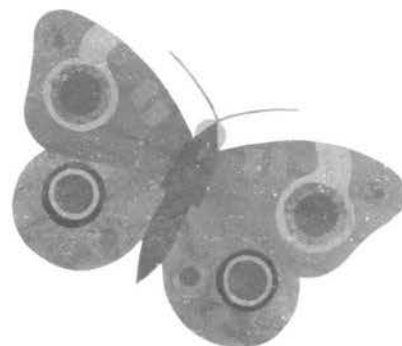


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- ★ "Glorious....Original and *vivid*." —*Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ "*Riveting*." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- "*Stellar*." —*School Library Journal*
- "*Visually splendid*." —*Parenting*



precise, they do convey a busy place where much happens simultaneously. Commuters shuttle between Chinatown markets and the Canal Street subway station. Dog walkers stroll in the daylight, above diners and jazz musicians in a dim but lively cellar. Likewise, High's evocative language suggests general, citywide traffic rather than any specific time or place. Throughout the book, the author gives a sense of constant humming motion on several levels; in a brief afterword, "(Some) Notes from Underground," she mentions two famous basement haunts: the Village Vanguard club and Grand Central Terminal's well-known Oyster Bar.

High and Rayevsky call attention to what's underfoot in New York and, by extension, any modern city. Mildly claustrophobic (like the urban underground it investigates) *Under New York* invites young readers to contemplate how stairs, sewers, and bridges connect the layers of an intricate manmade landscape.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Fiction

Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart

By Vera B. Williams

GREENWILLOW/HARPERCOLLINS

72 pages, Age 7 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-029460-4

Amber, the little sister with brown braids, and Essie, the big sister with yellow hair, are the subjects of four colored-pencil portraits that begin this original book, and of the sequence of twenty-eight poems illustrated with black-and-white pencil drawings that form its heart. The volume concludes with a fifteen-page "album" of pictures depicting incidents and situations from the text. Williams's artwork is remarkably straightforward, both in subject matter (bouncing on the bed,

looking out the window, hugging) and in technique. You can see exactly how the artist's pencils have marked the clearly defined strokes and made roughly blended combinations of colors. These pictures do not mime or co-opt simplicity; they embody and celebrate it.

Like the characters in *A Chair for My Mother*, *Scooter*, and other books by Williams, Amber and Essie are everyday heroes. Their world is a place where parents work long hours at low-paying jobs, and families live in small apartments in city neighborhoods. In *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart*, the depiction of poverty is especially pointed:

Not even half a glass
was in the milk container
And the last banana
was brown
Brown and leaky.

The absence of the girls' father is a central thread in the narrative. After three poems introducing the sisters comes a series of six emotional poems devoted to the problem—Daddy is in prison for forging a check—and the strain it puts on the girls. Like the rest of the poems in the volume, these have affecting titles ("The Question That Always Made Amber Cry," "Conversation under the Bed," "No



Illustration by Vera B. Williams, from *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart*

I Won't / Yes I Will") and display a variety of narrative and poetic strategies.

Sometimes Williams's poems are intimate ("That question never stopped buzzing / right by her ear"), and at other times they offer staccato dialogue, dreamy reverie, or matter-of-fact—but telling—observation:

Essie had fixed cocoa and toast
and though there was nothing
good to spread
on the toast
Essie cut it into triangles
to dip in their cocoa.

The poems lead up to the moment of Daddy's homecoming, a dramatic moment expressed in pictures rather than words. While most of the poems could not stand alone outside this collection, they are no less poems for that fact. It would be nice to see copies of this book in both the poetry and the fiction sections of libraries and bookstores.

The work of a children's-book master making use of the simplest materials and techniques, this unconventional book is a deeply felt study of the lives of two sisters, more fragmentary than comprehensive, but never tentative. Any reader of Vera B. Williams will find this book unmistakably and irresistibly hers. Once again, given the freedom to explore her strongest impulses as an artist, Williams turns to look directly into the eyes of children.

—Susan Marie Swanson

Angel on the Square

By Gloria Whelan

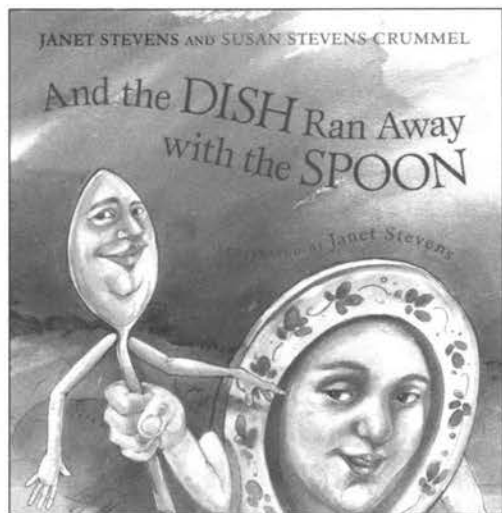
HARPERCOLLINS

304 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-029030-7

On the eve of World War I, twelve-year-old Katya steps into the role of *podruga* or special friend to Anastasia ("Stana"), daughter of Tsar Nicholas II. Unsure of how she should act around the royal family, Katya is at first uneasy about

What Would Happen If the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon—and Never Returned?



And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon

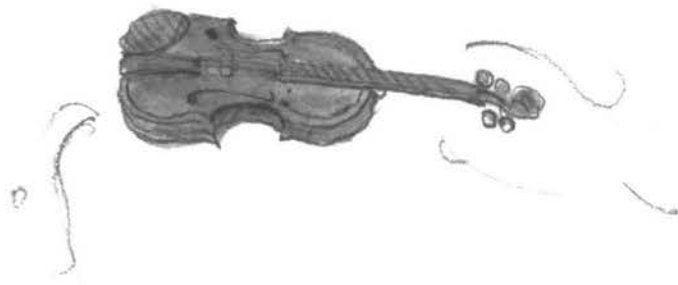
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—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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—*School Library Journal*



her new situation, but Stana's friendship and the tsar's fatherly presence soon make her feel at home. As the years pass and Russia is plunged into the upheaval of revolution, Katya witnesses firsthand the political machinations that lead to the destruction of a family she has grown to love.

Gloria Whelan brings to life the key players in this tumultuous period of Russian history, from the infamous Rasputin to the radical intellectuals who first dared to challenge the tsar. The book's grimmer moments—disillusionment on the battlefield, the royal family's desperate attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy back home—are balanced by warm scenes in the tsar's intimate family circle. Whelan explores the characters' relationships with insight and tenderness, allowing Nicholas and his family to emerge as more than just historical figures.

One of the novel's strengths is its ability to spark in the reader the same fire of conflicting emotions Katya is experiencing. Katya's naïveté initially allows her to believe that her beloved tsar is sincerely interested in helping the Russian people—peasants and noblemen alike. Her loyalties are called into question as she comes to understand the ins and outs of politics and the weight and complexity of choices that will influence the fate of an entire country. Katya's older cousin Misha, whom she initially writes off as a hard-headed and volatile radical, becomes the inspiration for her reevaluation of societal constructs she once accepted without question.

Katya's coming of age mirrors Russia's own transformation. By the end of the novel, Katya has matured into an intelligent, openminded, and hard-working young woman. Both her fate, and her country's, remain uncertain, but the book's tone remains optimistic. As we leave Katya and Russia at the end of the novel, one thing is for sure: even the

darkness of the past can't completely overshadow the characters' hopes for a brighter future.

—Jenny Sawyer

Breaking Through

By Francisco Jiménez

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

208 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.00

ISBN 0-618-01173-0

Breaking Through is the sequel to Francisco Jiménez's acclaimed *The Circuit*. This second novel based on Jiménez's own life experience begins in Francisco's fourteenth year with his deportation from Santa Maria, California, to Mexico. His ten years of worry are over—it is actually happening. He is distraught; he'll have to leave school, and what will happen to his family? They journey together to Mexico, where they wait, hoping to be granted immigrant visas. When they are, the family rejoices, but they separate anyway, with Francisco and his older brother returning to Santa Maria and the rest of the family going to Guadalajara to stay with relatives while the father finds a healer to relieve the pain in his back. When the family reunites in California in the spring, Francisco rejoices.

In Jiménez's description of his family life, work, and school experience, we see a boy who is determined to be good and do well. We witness his respect for his father even as he chafes under his demand for unquestioning obedience. We observe the closeness between Francisco and his brothers, and the comfort provided by his mother's love. We watch a young man who struggles to do homework after working all day to feed his family, a young man whose eventual academic achievement takes him away from his family but not, we trust, from their love.

What is truly remarkable about this book is the joy that springs from its pages. The family is extremely poor, but

they work hard and love one another. Francisco encounters prejudice, but he also engenders respect. He comes up against obstacles and then finds a way around them. His hope and his love for his family shine through his words as he tells his own lived version of the great American dream.

—Lee Galda

Every Time a Rainbow Dies

By Rita Williams-Garcia

HARPERCOLLINS

166 pages, Age 14 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-688-16245-2

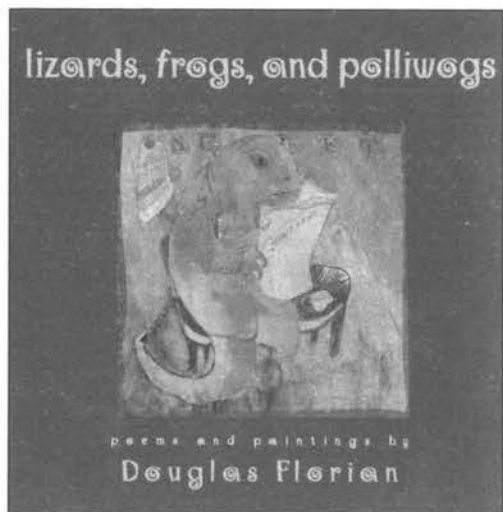
One of the most powerful new voices in young adult literature, Rita Williams-Garcia explores loss and love, identity, and self-determination in *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*. This multilayered novel is full of visual images—beautiful and horrible—as well as deft characterization and passionate writing.

The novel begins on a rooftop in Brooklyn where sixteen-year-old Thulani is sitting with his pigeons when he hears a scream from the streets below. At the second scream, he looks down and sees two men raping and beating a young woman. He rushes to the street, finds the victim, and covers her with his T-shirt. Later, when he finds the rainbow-colored skirt that was torn from her, he takes it home and hangs it on his wall. The skirt becomes a metaphor for the mysterious young woman he begins to love.

Loving is not easy for Thulani. His beloved mother left Brooklyn three years earlier to return to Jamaica for what Thulani thought was a brief visit to his father. She was, in fact, going home to die. Trying to spare Thulani pain, she denied him the opportunity to say good-bye. Now Thulani lives in her house with his older brother, Truman, and Truman's wife, who is pregnant with their first child.

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—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"Full of wordplay and *wit*." —The Horn Book

"Readers will *relish* this addition to Florian's series of unnatural history." —The Bulletin



ing, pushes Thulani to grow up, to get past his mother's death, to be responsible. Thulani retreats to the roof and his birds until the night he rescues Ysa, who, for her own reasons, retreats from him as he attempts to get to know her. Drawn out of himself by the violent incident he has witnessed, Thulani pursues Ysa gently. As she slowly lets him into her life, Ysa is revealed as a stark contrast to her new friend. She has plans for her life and is focused on her goals; Thulani, a drifter and dreamer, may not even finish high school. Yet they are alike in their longing for family, their fierce honesty, and their growing passion.

Thulani's pursuit of Ysa, and his increasing irritation at being treated like a child by his brother, push him toward adulthood and independence. He gets a job, begins experimenting with photography, and starts to think about the future. The only false note in Thulani's transformation is his short-lived sexual relationship with a girl he doesn't really care for; he seems too sensitive to so deliberately deceive himself and others.

Williams-Garcia develops the relationship between Thulani and Ysa so compellingly that when they finally make love it seems inevitable and right. Their joining, so unlike the rape that began the novel, is healing for them both. Thulani's return to Jamaica to find the father he has not seen for thirteen years is a step forward into a future that might allow him to fulfill his own promise. Perhaps this future will also be bright with the colors of Ysa's rainbow.

—Lee Galda

Fair Weather

By Richard Peck

DIAL

160 pages, Age 10 and up, \$16.99

ISBN 0-8037-2516-7

It's 1893, and life is moseying along at a slow but comfortable pace on the Beckett family farm—until the letter

from Aunt Euterpe arrives. It's an invitation for thirteen-year-old Rosie, her older sister, Lottie, and their younger brother, Buster, to travel to Chicago to attend the World's Columbian Exposition. But the trip to Chicago yields more than just the excitement of the fair. There's the surprise appearance of crotchety old Grandpa; there's the shock of leaving behind rural Illinois for a city teeming with people; and then there's the problem of Aunt Euterpe. Still, Rosie and Lottie take it all in stride and enjoy the eclectic array of fair entertainment, from the blazing lights of the midway to the elegance of tea at the Turkish Garden.

The World's Columbian Exposition is the perfect setting for a novel about change, progress, and the widening of horizons. For the country, the exposition brought to light new ideas regarding developing technology, consumerism, and politics. For the Beckett family the fair is also a catalyst for change. As Rosie says on the first page of the book, the day Aunt Euterpe's letter arrived was "the last day of our old lives, and we didn't even know it." For Rosie, it's a place where she comes into contact with strong women whose views about equality strike a chord deep within her. The exposition enlarges her view of the world: for the first time in her life, she is able to see the possibilities beyond the limited acreage of the family farm. Even Aunt Euterpe changes for the better, thanks to the fair, leaving behind the solitude of her widow's life for the sociability and elegance of Chicago high society.

Richard Peck's characters are well drawn and likable, and include a range of personalities, some comically stereotyped, others more nuanced. Rosie and Lottie are farm girls through and through—but also serious young women ready to explore the new worlds that are opened up for them by the fair. Grandpa and Aunt Euterpe, comic types at

the outset, emerge as memorable, three-dimensional characters by the end of the novel. Young Buster Beckett serves mainly as a source of comic relief—with his constantly changing menagerie of pocket pets, he is the quintessential seven-year-old boy: curious, rambunctious, and dead set against dressing up for anything.

One of the most striking aspects of *Fair Weather* is its skillful melding of fact and fiction. Pictures from the Chicago Historical Society lend a note of authenticity to the novel while simultaneously helping to flesh out the sights that Rosie describes. These include photos of the exposition's Women's Building and of the infamous singer Lillian Russell. A note from the author at the end of the book offers an explanation of what happened "after the fair," from politics to products that endured, reminding readers that both for the Becketts and for America as a whole, the World's Columbian Exposition was a doorway to the future.

—Jenny Sawyer

The God of Grandma Forever

By Margriet Hogeweg

Translated by Nancy Forest-Flier

FRONT STREET

112 pages, Age 10 and up, \$14.95

ISBN 1-886910-69-3

A common issue in the lives of many families, but one that is rarely dealt with in children's literature, rears its awkward head in *The God of Grandma Forever*, an intriguing novel first published in Sweden. Its unconventional story is set in motion as a fundamentalist Christian grandmother comes to live with her religiously indifferent son and daughter-in-law. While the contrasting beliefs of the two generations lurk at the periphery of the story, the novel's focus is the ability of the granddaughter, Maria, to straddle these disparate philosophies as she forges a relationship with her grandmother.

The slightly conspiratorial tone of the narration tells us that we are seeing things from Maria's distinctive point of view—readers have access to her feelings and experiences, which are expressed with a childlike bluntness. Bright and unselfconscious, Maria moves openly and imaginatively through her days; she visits and has conversations with her *other* grandmother, who "sleeps" under a stone in the nearby cemetery. When her very much alive, ninety-three-year-old grandma moves into Maria's beloved attic (where she is used to playing pirates with her friend Jacob, and where she retreats periodically to be by herself and think) she is upset but accepts it. Slowly, Maria begins to build a rickety friendship with this sullen, almost completely bedridden woman who is more apt to scold Maria and crabbily dismiss her ("You're just a silly monkey") than to welcome her daily visits.

The generational chasms that form the story's distinctive geography are realistically handled by Margriet Hogeweg. The local minister's visit is nervously, fussily anticipated by Grandma and tolerated with a shrug by Maria's parents. Grandma wants freshly baked cake served; Maria's parents make do with a couple of leftover store-bought cupcakes. When Maria convinces her grandma to come to school as a special guest and the subject of a class report, she and her animal-rights-conscious classmates are aghast when the old woman shows up wearing a real mink coat.

Grandma's attic bedroom, filled with the sounds of radio preaching and psalm singing and the rustle of Grandma turning the thin pages in her Bible, is initially foreign turf to Maria. She is gradually drawn there to hear the Old Testament stories that her grandma knows by heart. Cantankerous Grandma is a natural storyteller: her Noah sends invitations to all the people in his neighborhood to come to a festive ark open house (no one shows up, of course);

her Goliath takes on a laughing, red-headed, freckled David.

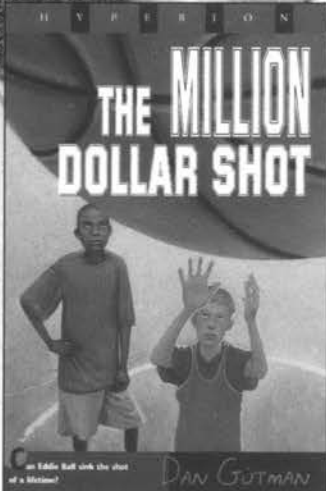
Maria is openhearted enough to see beyond her grandmother's flaws, and the two form a connection that seems likely to influence Maria long after Grandma's passing. *The God of Grand-*

ma Forever is a moving novel that shows how remarkable and rewarding even the most tentative friendship can be. It is also a daring one, in its willingness to openly ponder questions of faith and doubt.

—Christine Alfano

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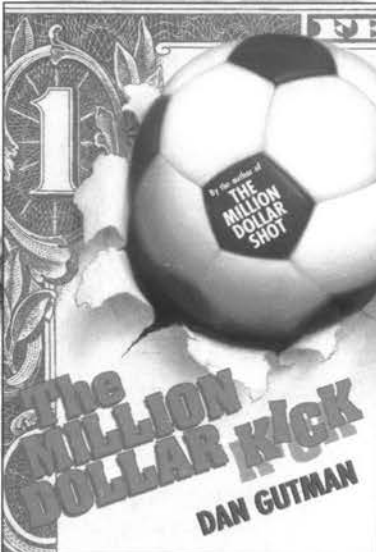


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HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Hole in the Sky

By Pete Hautman

SIMON & SCHUSTER

192 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-83118-8

"I stand at the edge of the world," says sixteen-year-old Ceej from his home on the rim of the Grand Canyon. He is indeed living at the edge—of the canyon, of safety, and of the world he has known as a child. That world has already changed profoundly. A prologue explains how the flu began its inexorable destruction of human life in the year 2028—five billion dead the first year, nine hundred million the second, seventy million the third. Now, ten years after the initial outbreak, those who managed to escape the virus live in isolated, well-defended settlements. Those who were hit by the flu and survived are all damaged in some way; Ceej's older sister, Harryette, can no longer hear or speak except through sign language. She and Ceej live with their uncle, a former national park ranger at the canyon. They live alone, visited only by Ceej's friend Tim and his father, who is a trader. They avoid strangers, both to keep the virus out of their home and to steer clear of Kinkas, bands of survivors who attack the unwary.

The two men set out on a venture, with Harryette, to regulate a dam on the Colorado River that will destroy the canyon if it overflows. When they don't return, the boys correctly assume that they have been captured by the Kinkas. The boys attempt to find them, but are themselves discovered by the Kinkas and are forced to retreat to the safety of the canyon. Unfortunately, dangers lurk even there: Ceej is bitten by a rattlesnake. Bella, a Hopi girl, finds them and uses her traditional knowledge to help Ceej recover.

Bella takes over as narrator, explaining her own presence in the canyon.

She is looking for the Sipapuni, a holy place beside the Little Colorado River that her grandfather described to her. It is the "hole in the sky" through which Native tribes originally entered this world. Postponing her own journey, Bella joins the boys as they return to the rim to find Harryette.

The narration switches again, this time to Tim. In his account, Bella exposes herself to the flu in a brave but vain attempt to rescue Ceej's and Tim's fathers. Harryette is the only one they manage to extract from the Kinkas, and it is she who narrates their final descent into the canyon and the journey to the Sipapuni. Once they are there, Ceej and Bella disappear—perhaps passing through to a better life in the world beyond. Tim and Harryette aren't sure what has happened; they themselves may have passed through as well. The ambiguous ending leaves this as a distinct possibility.

Combining a dramatic setting, a stirring adventure, Hopi mysticism, and a gentle love story, Hautman's novel is sure to appeal to a wide audience of readers.

—Lee Galda

Love That Dog

By Sharon Creech

HARPERCOLLINS

112 pages, Ages 8–12, \$14.95

ISBN 0-06-029287-3

Jack's comment on the opening page of this spare novel says it all:

I don't want to
because boys
don't write poetry.
Girls do.

Thus begins the saga of a boy's school year, presented in free-verse journal entries from September to June. Forced to read and write poetry for the first time in his life, Jack is, at best, a reluctant student, skeptical

about both poetry and his own writing ability. As the year progresses, he finds, to his utter amazement, that poetry can be inspiring, and that his experimentation has enabled him to develop his poetic voice.

Jack's writing exercises also help him come to terms with the loss of his beloved yellow dog, Sky. Sharon Creech slowly allows the story of Sky's life and death to unfold. The story begins obliquely, as Jack splices the details into a poem by William Carlos Williams they've studied in class:

So much depends
upon
a blue car
splattered with mud
speeding down the road.

As Jack leaves Williams's construction behind, Sky's real story starts to emerge, and Jack's process of healing begins.

Creech's slim novel is filled with moments of warmth and humor, and in this rather minimalist approach to storytelling, she is able to develop characters and their relationships with one another to a surprising degree. Miss Stretchberry, Jack's teacher, is an effective presence throughout the novel; her passion for poetry is eventually mirrored by Jack's own enthusiasm. And children's book author Walter Dean Myers, in a cameo appearance, seems like flesh and blood with his laugh that sounded

like it was coming from way down
deep
and bubbling up and
rolling and tumbling
out into the air.

Creech even takes time to explore Jack's relationship with his father, a man whose love for his child comes through in his daily greeting: "Hey there, son!"

Part of the joy of *Love That Dog* is

discovering, with Jack, the liberating and cathartic nature of writing. Poetry does not come easily to Jack, nor does the emotional adjustment to life without his yellow dog. But with a little help from a persistent teacher and some inspiration from Mr. Walter Dean Myers himself, Jack learns to embrace an activity that originally seemed frustrating and difficult, and to make peace with the tragedy in his past. Nothing can bring Sky back, but Jack finds a way to do the next best thing: through Jack's own memories and words, his beloved yellow dog will live on forever.

—*Jenny Sawyer*

**On the Bright Side, I'm Now
the Girlfriend of a Sex God**

By Louise Rennison

HARPERCOLLINS

236 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-028813-2

Your family is moving to New Zealand. Your boyfriend hasn't kissed you in a week. Worst of all, you have the biggest nose on the planet. For Georgia Nicolson, a fourteen-year-old English girl, this could mean only one thing: trauma rama!

Life was just fabbity-fab-fab-fab for Georgia when we left her at the end of *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging*. Now she's back, with more problems than ever—that is, if you think boys, a three-year-old sister, and pimples can be catalysts for crisis. The second installment of Georgia's saga, like its predecessor, is written in diary form, chronicling her day-to-day (sometimes minute-by-minute) thoughts and misadventures. From outwitting school bullies to winning a hockey match, from saving the neighbor's poodle from her killer cat to capturing the boy of her dreams, Georgia's witty commentary on the trials and triumphs of teen life is lively and engaging.

Although the plot of the novel is thin

—the book revolves around the question of whether or not Georgia will be able to win back Robbie, a.k.a. "The Sex God"—it moves at a good clip and manages to evolve into a decent story. *On the Bright Side* is equal parts pulp fiction and astute social satire.

Louise Rennison's flippant tone and cynical worldview may be off-putting to some readers. Georgia's parents are barely present, and when they do appear, they function as comic foils or as examples of immorality and apathy. Though this is a common formula in

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teen fiction, the humor in adults who do nothing right can feel a little thin after a while.

Nevertheless, Georgia's voice comes through loud and clear in this undeniably funny book. She is a character many young readers will be able to

relate to. Being fourteen has its troubles, but as we leave Georgia at the end of the novel, we also see the brighter side of being a teenager. As she would probably admit herself, all things considered, life is pretty marvy.

—*Jenny Sawyer*

The Other Side of Truth

By Beverley Naidoo

HARPERCOLLINS

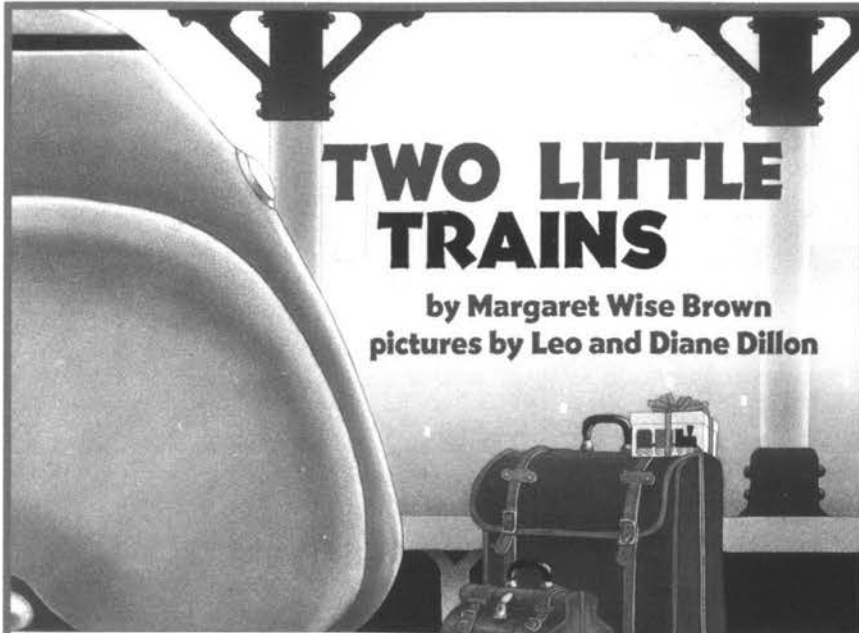
272 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-029628-3

In November 1995, the Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa was hung by his country's government in a backlash against his criticisms of the abusive Nigerian regime. Set immediately after this historical event, *The Other Side of Truth* relates a fictional account of one family's battle against this same dictatorship. Smuggled out of the country, fourteen-year-old Sade and her younger brother, Femi, find themselves alone in London. Their mother is dead (murdered by a bullet meant for her husband), their father is in hiding back in Nigeria, and their London-based uncle's whereabouts are unknown. As the story unfolds, Sade and Femi have the good fortune to be taken in by the London foster care system, but their fate, like that of their father, remains uncertain.

From the outset, the book plunges into the chaos and uncertainty of Sade and Femi's shattered world, making this story a true page-turner. As the reader waits for resolution of the larger question—what will happen to Sade and Femi's father?—the children's day-to-day experiences, from acclimating to a new school to adjusting to their mother's death, add an undercurrent of electricity to the already-charged plot. Sade and Femi's reactions to the changes that continuously remold their lives are realistic, and Beverley Naidoo explores her characters' emotions with insight and sensitivity.

One of the main issues within this novel is the courage it takes to stand up for what is right in the face of overwhelming adversity. Sade's struggle with two school bullies, though it is minor in comparison to her father's fight against the dictatorial Nigerian government, helps her to understand the difficulty inherent



TWO LITTLE TRAINS

by Margaret Wise Brown
pictures by Leo and Diane Dillon



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—Starred review / *The Horn Book*



“A handsome reinterpretation [of] Brown’s remarkable text.”

—Starred review / *ALA Booklist*

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in exposing the truth and the strength one inevitably gains by doing so.

This novel's authentic flavor comes in part from Naidoo's incorporation of Nigerian proverbs and folktales into the story. Through them, the culture and history of Sade's country emerge in a tangible way for the reader. Within the story, Sade's remembrance of these stories and sayings from her childhood allows her to reconnect both with her homeland and with her mother, and to find comfort and wisdom in a world that has been turned upside down.

The Other Side of Truth offers an eye-opening commentary on human rights violations still occurring in various parts of the world today. Despite its gritty subject matter, the book's tone is hopeful, encouraging the reader to believe, along with Sade and her family, that the truth will ultimately prevail and tyranny will be defeated.

—Jenny Sawyer

A Step from Heaven

By An Na

FRONT STREET

160 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 1-886910-58-8

When Young Ju's mother tells her they will fly through the sky to reach their new home in "Mi Gook," a name that always makes her parents smile and stop fighting, Young Ju assumes they are moving to heaven. Instead, "Mi Gook" is "Ah-me-ri-ka," a strange and confusing place far from her grandmother in Korea, definitely not in the clouds.

Through a vivid present-tense, first-person narrative, divided into powerful short chapters, readers experience Young Ju's initial disorientation and her sense of isolation as she grows older without feeling much closer to fitting in. This is her family's story as well as hers, and it is harrowing to witness her father, as his dreams disintegrate, inflict

his rage on his wife and two children. A poignant collection of material objects indicates that Young Ju's parents never achieve the kind of success they hoped for in the United States. A "not forever" dilapidated apartment takes the place of the house they can't manage to save up for, even though both parents have more than one job. Their old station wagon, with its peeling faux paneling, ripped seats, and belching exhaust, embarrasses Young Ju, who makes her mother drop her off blocks from the beach so her friends won't see it.

While Young Ju can't help feeling self-conscious about her family's poverty, she has graver concerns as well. Her father's physical abuse escalates throughout the novel, and his main victim, Young Ju's mother, seems determined to endure it until it ends in death. In a wrenching climactic scene, this almost

happens. Young Ju summons the courage to call 911, putting her family on an ultimately more positive, if painful, road.

Despite the suffering, Young Ju's voice remains strong, her academic success and strength of spirit pointing her toward a brighter future made possible by her parents' sacrifices. Her father's hands permanently smell of ammonia and bleach from cleaning offices; her mother's are callused by "years of abuse from physical labor." In an epilogue, Young Ju's hands and her brother's "turn pages of books, press fingertips to keyboard buttons, hold pencils and pens. They are lithe and tender." Young Ju's mother has earned the satisfaction of providing not only for her children, but also for herself, having realized that she, too, can be brave and make her own choices.

—Renée Victor

Coming up

IN THE WINTER ISSUE OF

Riverbank Review

Cover Art by Mary Azarian

Bedtime Books

A Profile of Tove Jansson

The Picture Books of Taro Yashima

Books Writers Give as Gifts



Harcourt Children's Books Fall-Winter 2001 Highlights



PICTURE BOOKS



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Khephra Burns
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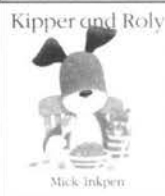
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Riverbank Review

Nonfiction & Traditional Literature

The Black Bull of Norrway

Retold by Charlotte Huck

Illustrated by Anita Lobel

GREENWILLOW

40 pages, Age 6 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-688-16900-7

A Scottish folktale that takes place in Norway (Norrway, to the Scots), this is the story of a courageous and compassionate young girl who proclaims that her only requirement for marriage is that the man be good and kind and love her. "I'd even be content with the Black Bull of Norrway," she declares, and her two older sisters, whose desires are more materialistic, are horrified. Naturally, when it is her turn for marriage, the Black Bull comes for her. Children familiar with the tale of Beauty and the Beast will quickly realize that the bull is a bewitched prince and that it is up to the heroine (prosaically named Peggy Ann) to break the spell with kindness and compassion. Indeed, she grows fond of the bull in their travels and does break the spell. But that is not the end of the story: now it is up to the bull, revealed as a handsome duke, to defeat the Guardian of the Glen in a battle. He cautions Peggy Ann to stay absolutely still so that he will be able to find her afterwards. When she fails in this, she undergoes further tests and hardships before finally winning back the duke.

In a concise and informative author's note Charlotte Huck declares, "Rather than write modern fairy tales with brave heroines I prefer to search for the traditional tales that show plucky girls." *The Black Bull of Norrway* is certainly such a tale.

Peggy Ann is modest in her desires; courageous despite her fears; compas-

sionate even to the unlovable; clever, faithful, and persevering.

Huck tells the story in language that is at once traditional and natural to the contemporary ear. The twists and turns of the plot will be enjoyed by children who recognize them as familiar elements of folk and fairy tales. Well paired with the straightforward yet melodious text are Anita Lobel's dramatic earth-toned illustrations. In keeping with the tale's origins, her paintings evoke the craggy, dark landscape of the Scottish highlands.

—*Krystyna Poray Goddu*

Clever Beatrice

By Margaret Willey

Illustrated by Heather Solomon

ATHENEUM

32 pages, Ages 4-8, \$16.00

ISBN: 0-689-83254-0

Move over, Paul Bunyan. Another oversized mythic male is roaming the northern forests of the Midwest (in this case, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan) and like all great giants, he is very large, very sure of himself, and more than a little dim-witted. In a modern twist on traditional "contes"—stories that originally featured voyageurs tricking rich and powerful giants—clever Margaret Willey introduces readers to a delightfully different foil: young Beatrice, who strides across these pages with a bright resourcefulness.

Willey snares the vitality of contes in her telling: "Sure, she was little, but Beatrice loved riddles and tricks and she could think fast on her feet." Her language swings us along into the story as Beatrice, eating the last bit of her family's porridge, determines that "it is time...to go out into the far north woods and get some money." Of course, there are only two ways to earn cash in that area: lumberjacking or tricking giants. The satisfying rhythm of this tall tale emerges when Beatrice once, twice,

and then three times fools the forest giant into believing she has bested him in their wagers.

A little girl's exaggerated claims of strength bamboozle this boasting dullard every time. In their contest to see who can throw a huge iron bar the farthest, Beatrice asks the giant if he knows anyone who lives in Canada. He concedes that he has brothers living there ("They like the wind and snow") and our plucky heroine convinces by implication: "Brothers of Mister Giant! I am going to throw this bar your way—watch your heads!" Oh, but the giant doesn't dare to allow his brothers to be disturbed in such a way, and so he hands over more gold coins. Incredulous that the giant has fallen for every bit of her trickery, Beatrice backs slowly away from his cabin, holding a bag full of money to her chest. We're right there with her—amazed and gratified that she's managed to pull it off.

Heather Solomon's highly original collage and painted illustrations bring a fitting three-dimensional effect to *Clever Beatrice*. On the story's first page, Beatrice's eyes meet ours as she seems to step confidently toward us out of the frame of the painting. Here is a girl who looks smart and brave enough to outwit a giant!

—*Christine Alfano*

The Cod's Tale

By Mark Kurlansky

Illustrated by S. D. Schindler

PUTNAM

48 pages, Age 5 and up, \$16.99

ISBN 0-399-23476-4

There are those who think that by simply cutting down the word count and adding a few pictures, an adult masterpiece magically transforms into a successful children's book. Thankfully, this is most emphatically *not* the case with Mark Kurlansky's *The Cod's Tale*, an adaptation of his best-selling adult work, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That*

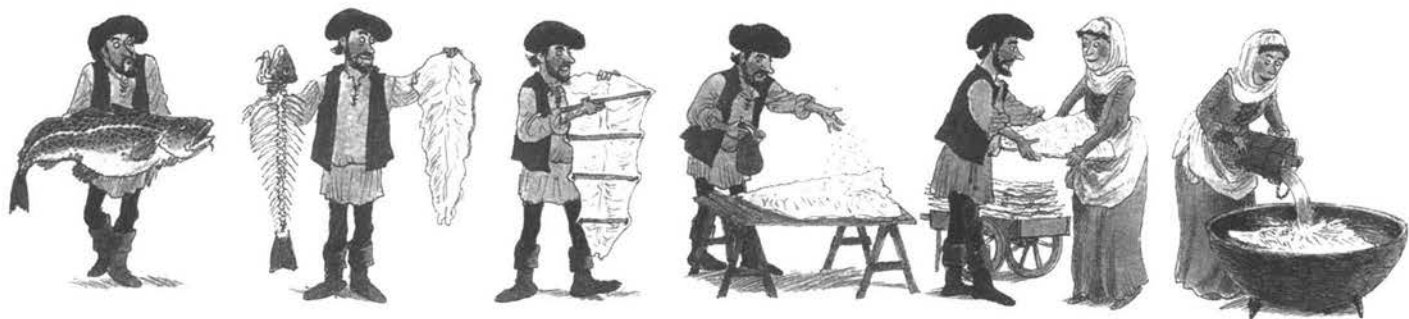


Illustration by S. D. Schindler, from *The Cod's Tale*

Changed the World. With great skill, Kurlansky has taken a very grown-up 294-page history and, with the help of S. D. Schindler's buoyant, entertaining watercolors, has created a child-size version of an adult work that succeeds on its own terms.

It helps that Kurlansky tells a fascinating story. Who knew that cod could be considered an important unseen force behind the great tides of Western European history? Kurlansky has a fondness for the unexpected, and this work, like the history of the codfish itself, is never predictable. Codfish schools, once plentiful, have now become extremely scarce due to overfishing. But the Vikings once fed their ships and colonies with dried cod, the perfect food for long sea voyages, being both easy to obtain and long-lasting. Basque fishermen grew rich by selling the cod they found off the coast of North America—long before Columbus sailed for the New World. The Wampanoag showed the Pilgrims how to fertilize their crops by sowing codfish heads among the plants. Cod played an integral role in the infamous triangle of molasses, rum, and slave trading between Europe, the American colonies, and the Caribbean, serving as food for the merchants who sold the slaves, the slaves whose labor provided the molasses and rum, and the Europeans and colonists who bought molasses, rum, and slaves.

Clarence Birdseye learned to freeze vegetables in Canada, then in 1924 established a frozen-fish factory in a codfish-

rich town in Massachusetts, eventually making fish sticks available in every school lunchroom in America. The ability to freeze fish allowed cod fisherman to stay out longer and catch more fish, eventually reducing the cod population to today's scarce level.

In sidebars and insets, Kurlansky and Schindler present fascinating cod lore, from a 1393 recipe for dried cod (called "stockfish") to cooking tips from the British navy of the 1920s. A range of cultures bordering the Atlantic play a role in this history, from Nova Scotia to the French Caribbean. A running time line connects cod to historical events, while the watercolor-and-pen illustrations present a whimsical cartoon history of cod in full-page panoramas and lively spot illustrations. Even the endpapers—made using a Japanese printing technique in which an entire inked cod is pressed against rice paper—are arresting.

With humor and skill, Kurlansky and Schindler have created an entertaining work that retells familiar history from a highly unusual perspective.

—Kathryne Beebe

Days of the Ducklings

By Bruce McMillan

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 Pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-04878-2

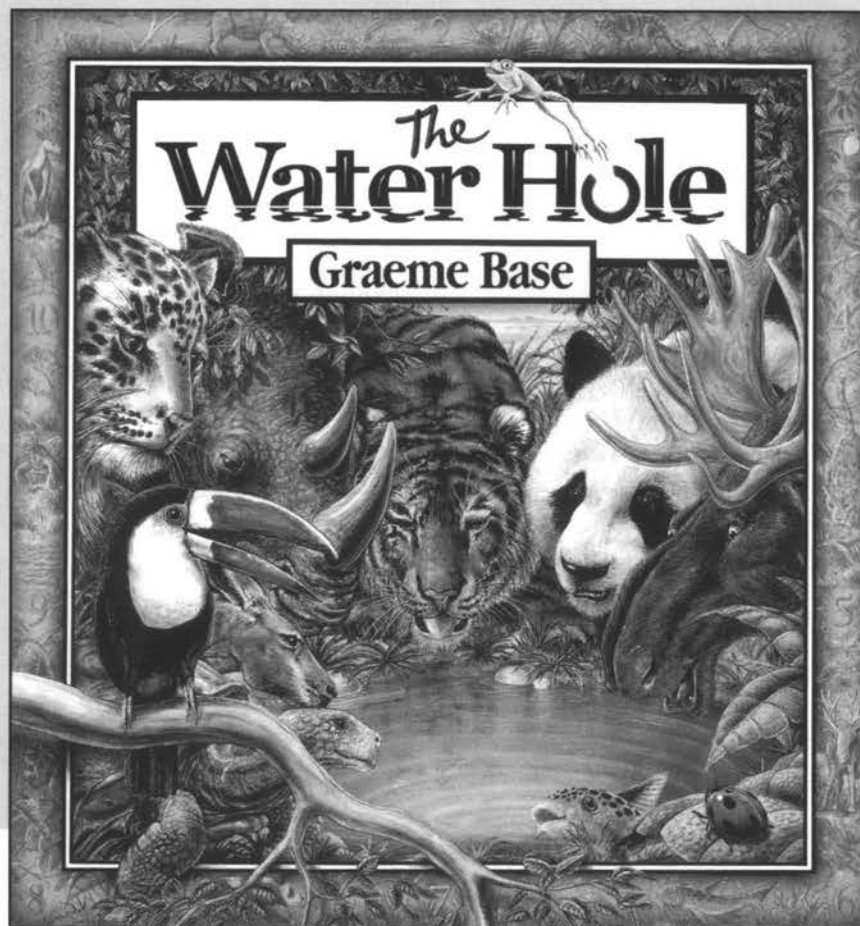
Days of the Ducklings details the true story of Drífa, a young Icelandic girl who has obtained a license from the

Ministry of the Environment to reestablish a colony of common eider ducks on Hvallátur Island. In the process, the ducklings' down feathers will be gathered for use as insulation for jackets and bedclothes. For this project, Bruce McMillan revisits the setting of his award-winning *Nights of the Pufflings*, which also dealt with the restoration and preservation of an animal habitat.

We follow Drífa as she painstakingly collects eider duck eggs from nearby islands, takes them to Hvallátur, and waits for them to hatch. Then her work really begins. Caring for 208 eider ducklings is no easy task, no matter how cute they are, or how sweetly they follow Drífa around. They must be fed, watered, cleaned up after, sheltered—and acclimated to the rugged conditions on the island, located just seventy-five miles south of the Arctic Circle. Each day, Drífa leads her charges down to the beach at low tide to let them get a feel for being in the water while she watches for wayward ducklings and predatory seagulls.

It would be easy to become attached to the ducklings, but we are reminded that Drífa must not allow them to become too tame, or they will not survive as wild birds. Photographs of the ducklings clambering over Drífa, waddling after her, responding to her cooing, and settling on her as she naps testify to their affection for her. It's clear, though, that she knows that the best way to help the ducklings is to care for

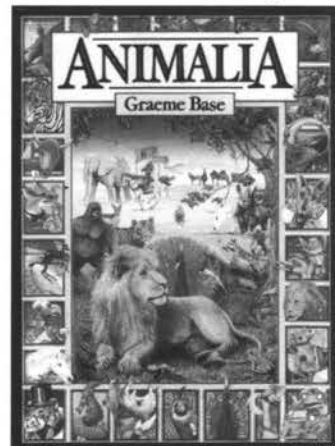
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them with equal measures of practicality and imagination. For example, when the ducklings are a little older and Drifa notices some of them straying during their trips to the beach, she builds a walkway to help them find their own way between the water and their pen. The book chronicles the ducklings' development over the course of a summer, emphasizing Drifa's sense of responsibility as she nurses the hatchlings along, then watches over them as young adults.

McMillan's text and photographs do justice to his appealing subjects without sentimentalizing them; the sensitive images complement the abundance of factual material in the text. Close-ups of Drifa and the ducklings are balanced by panoramic views of the landscape. *Days of the Ducklings* is an engaging and inspiring portrait of a young person rising to meet a challenge. At the back of the book, there is more information on the eider duck and a selected bibliography.

—Antonia Gray

**A Dragon in the Sky:
The Story of a Green
Darter Dragonfly**

By Laurence Pringle

Illustrated by Bob Marstall

ORCHARD/SCHOLASTIC

64 pages, Ages 8–12, \$18.95

ISBN 0-531-30315-2

How often do we think of the air right over our heads as wilderness? According to this engrossing nature study, it is here, above city parks and highways and even World Series games, where migrating dragonflies pursue their prey. Ordinarily, a mosquito dying and being eaten may not seem like high drama, but in Laurence Pringle and Bob Marstall's account, one insect chasing another becomes as suspenseful as "cheetahs pursuing gazelles on Africa's Serengeti Plain."

Author and illustrator take the approach they took in *An Extraordinary*



Photograph by Bruce McMillan, from *Days of the Ducklings*

Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly (Orchard, 1997): they follow one fictional representative specimen from egg to the end of its life cycle. An inviting painting of a New York wetland, done in the cool greens and creamy parchment tones Marstall uses throughout the book, opens the story, setting the stage for the birth of a green damer dragonfly nymph called Anax. Pringle's precise, dignified descriptions get close to his subjects without anthropomorphizing them. We witness Anax "growing up" underwater—feeding, molting, pumping water across his gills for oxy-

gen, and narrowly escaping the giant water bug and other predators. The elegant illustrations zoom in close and pull back to offer both exciting microscopic views and a strong feel for the ecosystem in which Anax develops. Printed in green alongside the main text is complementary information: an excerpt about a dragonfly from a Tennyson poem, a note referring to an ancient fossilized dragonfly with a twenty-seven-inch wingspan ("as wide as that of a crow").

Although each segment of Anax's life history is fascinating in its own right, his story figuratively as well as literally

takes flight when he reaches adulthood: "As they migrated, Anax and other dragonflies sometimes flew at a steady twenty-five miles per hour. At that pace, flying from dawn until dusk, they could cover three hundred miles in a day." A map shows that Anax's path took him from his New York birthplace down the East Coast, all the way to Florida—a typical trip for a green darner, according to Pringle, who says members of this species have even been spotted flying over the Gulf of Mexico. A different wetland is pictured toward the end of the book, this one with an alligator floating half-submerged in the sand-colored water. But Anax's mission is the same as his father's: he mates with females, who altogether deposit thousands of eggs, so that some will survive to start the cycle all over again.

—Renée Victor

**Interrupted Journey:
Saving Endangered Sea Turtles**

By Kathryn Lasky

Photos by Christopher G. Knight

CANDLEWICK

39 pages, Ages 6–10, \$16.99

ISBN 0-7636-0635-9

Sea turtles are a promising yet difficult subject for a children's book. In their early years they face dangers from every direction; their famous first crawl to the water sends them unaware through a gauntlet of prey animals. Whether a child finds the hatchlings cute or bug-like, their peril will provoke sympathy. Full grown, sea turtles are slow giants. The difficulty comes in trying to understand these silent, ancient beings. A writer would have to be either ignorant or saccharine to anthropomorphize them. Turtles, as the seasoned nonfiction writer Kathryn Lasky points out, never meet their parents, nor do they socialize except at mating time. To humans, they're inscrutable. When they're young they swim out of sight, reappearing years later as

breeders, as fishing-net casualties, or as startling carrion washed up on the beach.

Interrupted Journey abounds with sea turtles; photos of the animals grace almost every page. But the book provides no start-to-finish turtle—or human—protagonist. Instead, Lasky constructs

a narrative around efforts to protect Kemp's ridley turtles, the species of sea turtle most threatened by extinction. The result is compelling, informative, and heartening, made immediate through Lasky's close observation and Christopher Knight's photographs, which



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Fiction and Poetry Award

Winner: *Carver: A Life in Poems* by Marilyn Nelson (Front Street)

Honor Book: *Everything on a Waffle* by Polly Horvath (Farrar)

Honor Book: *Troy* by Adèle Geras (Harcourt)

Nonfiction Award

Winner: *The Longitude Prize* by Joan Dash; illus. by Dušan Petričić (Foster/Farrar)

Honor Book: *Rocks in His Head* by Carol Otis Hurst; illus. by James Stevenson (Greenwillow)

Honor Book: *Uncommon Traveler: Mary Kingsley in Africa* written and illus. by Don Brown (Houghton)

Picture Book Award

Winner: *Cold Feet* by Cynthia DeFelice; illus. by Robert Andrew Parker (DK Ink)

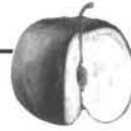
Honor Book: *Five Creatures* by Emily Jenkins; illus. by Tomek Bogacki (Foster/Farrar)

Honor Book: *The Stray Dog* retold and illus. by Marc Simont (HarperCollins)

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document the activity of sea-turtle rescuers, step by step.

Beginning with a boy's rescue of a juvenile Kemp's ridley beached by cold weather on Cape Cod and concluding with a man's sendoff of hatchlings in Mexico, Lasky follows human efforts to protect the turtles from north to south, along the Eastern seaboard. Along the way, she introduces rescuers: veterinarians, volunteers, and one hotel proprietor/turtle rehabilitator. Knight's camera has caught these people absorbed in work. To these individuals, informed action is more important than the certainty of results. Whatever the odds for an individual turtle's survival, the rescuers "know that they are doing their part to help return the turtles to health, to help return them to the sea."

Lasky explains that humans "represent the worst hazard" for sea turtles. Years of human interference, which resulted in the decimation of the Kemp's ridley population, must now be countered by interference of a different sort. But this is a delicate proposition. The great number of casualties expected in an animal producing as many as a hundred eggs per nest cannot be offset by a tiny nesting population. Readers will be relieved to note that, at the single known, established nesting place for Kemp's riddels, the interventions seem to be working. Yet they might wonder how turtles hatching in transplanted nest "corrals" can make it to the sea through a dense neighborhood of netting-protected nests. The answer is another intervention: volunteers carry hatchlings to the water's edge. This handling doesn't seem to hinder the young turtles' determination. If sea turtles survive, it will be through the combined force of restorative effort and the mysterious, innate purpose that sends female turtles to shore and hatchlings to the sea.

—Jessica Roeder

Always Planting Apple Trees

Johnny Appleseed: The Story of a Legend

By Will Moses

PHILOMEL

32 pages, Ages 6–10, \$16.99

ISBN 0-399-23153-6

Johnny Appleseed

By Rosemary and

Stephen Vincent Benét

Illustrated by S. D. Schindler

MCELDERRY

40 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-82975-2

Fall brings us two new books on Johnny Appleseed: a picture-book biography by respected folk artist Will Moses, great-grandson of Grandma Moses, and a picture-book edition of the 1933 poem "Johnny Appleseed" by Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benét, illustrated by S. D. Schindler.

In *Johnny Appleseed: The Story of a Legend*, Will Moses's lively, colorful folk art accompanies what feels like a fireside tale, giving us both the legend and the living man. Born in 1774, John Chapman grew up in a large family and spent most of his childhood in the woods around Longmeadow, Massachusetts. In his early twenties he received a vision of angels telling him to plant apple trees in the wilderness. From then until late in his seventies, Chapman followed this vision. Even during

his lifetime, now-familiar anecdotes began to be told about the man who wore a tin pot for a hat and showed extraordinary kindness to everyone he met.

Will Moses has painstakingly researched local historical sources and contemporary accounts to include almost every element known about Chapman's life, recounting several stories that may not be familiar to contemporary readers. Moses's art matches his writing style: the oil paintings record scenes from Chapman's life in fascinating detail. In warm, vibrant colors, tiny people and animals fill the town scenes with life, and beautiful pink-and-white apple blossoms fill the wilderness. A tall, lanky Johnny, depicted with dark eyes and an untamed black beard, wanders the pages, playing with a mother bear and her cubs, riding an ice floe down a river, and always, always planting apple trees.

In the second *Johnny Appleseed*, S. D. Schindler's illustrations transform a short poem by Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benét into a delightful picture book. The Benéts wrote "Johnny Appleseed" as part of *A Book of Americans*, a poetry collection intended to introduce schoolchildren to great figures of American history. The rhythm and rhyme of "Johnny Appleseed" recall early American ballads, and the simple verses are well suited to a picture-book format.

The Benéts are less concerned with historical details than with creating a

portrait of an American legend in verse. Therefore, there are fewer anecdotes and facts in this *Johnny Appleseed*, but the few that appear are highly evocative. We learn that Johnny Appleseed dressed in rags but carried his seeds in the best deerskin bags he could find. And,

At seventy-odd
He was gnarled as could be
But ruddy and sound
As a good apple tree.

S. D. Schindler's soft, colored-pencil illustrations bring this sprightly, gnarled Johnny Appleseed to life. As an old man, Johnny Appleseed capers about juggling apples and bending down branches so children can reach the fruit. The illustrations' fine, hatched lines offer an amazing range of textures—Johnny's tweed vest seems positively fuzzy; the wispy grass seems to wave in the wind. Capturing the colors of the Ohio Valley that Johnny Appleseed planted, the crisp, clear russets and blues and greens bleed all the way to the edge of the page, inviting the reader to step into that world.



Illustration by Will Moses

Schindler's finest spreads illustrate John Chapman's ongoing legacy. One shows an apple tree (roots and all) growing from a seed into a mature plant. At one end of the spread, Johnny drops the seed in the ground; at the other end, a modern child in jeans reaches for a ripe apple from the full-grown tree.

In both books, the appearance of

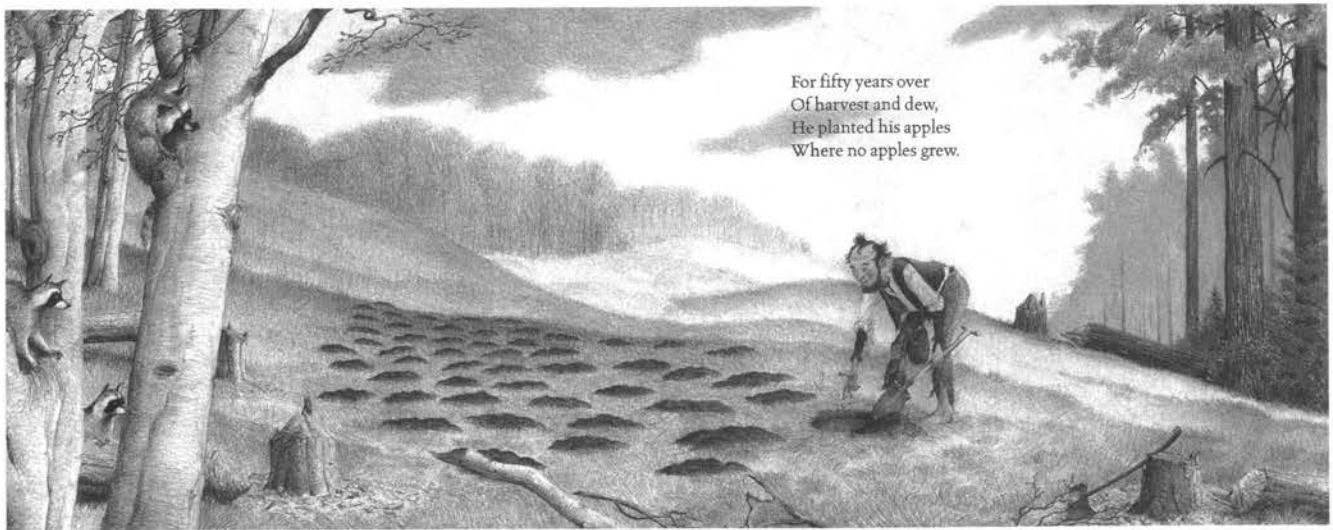
Indians is presented as at least initially threatening to Johnny, a scenario that is historically credible but might rub some readers the wrong way. In the Benét poem, there is reference to a "stalking Indian." in Moses's account, "a band of rampaging Indians" chase Johnny, but Moses observes: "Most of the time... Johnny and the Indians got along just fine—after all, they were a lot alike." A note from the Benét's son Thomas points out that his parents were writing in the 1930s and did not intend any disrespect. Being quite progressive for their era, they wrote elsewhere:

But just remember this about
Our ancestors so dear
They didn't find an empty land.
The Indians were here.

This short note helps a modern audience to put both the poem and the Johnny Appleseed legend in a historical context.

Each *Johnny Appleseed* offers its own distinct pleasures, while giving readers an engaging portrait of one of America's most beloved folk heroes.

—Kathryne Beebe



For fifty years over
Of harvest and dew,
He planted his apples
Where no apples grew.

Illustration by S. D. Schindler

The Race of the Birkebeiners

By Lise Lunge-Larsen

Illustrated by Mary Azarian

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 pages, Ages 5–9, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-10313-9

Based on a saga from medieval Norway, this story is a satisfying brew of heroic survival story, political history, and miracle tale. Both the text and the artwork incorporate extensive research without getting bogged down. When storyteller Lise Lunge-Larsen, whose previous books include *The Troll with No Heart in His Body*, explains that the warriors known as Birkebeiners “could sleep through snowstorms by burying themselves in drifts and putting shields on top for protection,” we can trust that we’re learning something we need to know. The world of the story is a world of snow, hand-hewn and carved wood, and winter trees, making woodcut artist Mary Azarian, who won the Caldecott Medal for *Snowflake Bentley*, an inspired choice for illustrator. Her presentation of the architecture of medieval Norway—from the towers of the wooden churches to the open fires set in the middle of rooms—is striking. Details in costume are equally intriguing: iron helmets, belts with pouches or axes attached to them, and, of course, the birch bark leggings for which the peasant Birkebeiners (“Birchleggers”) were named.

The story of the dramatic rescue on skis of the one-year-old Prince Hakon, heir to the throne, by a team made up of warriors, his mother, Inga, and the priest who took the baby and his mother into hiding following the king’s death, is familiar to every Norwegian—and to cross-country skiers everywhere, who commemorate the story in annual ski races in Norway and the United States. Lunge-Larsen’s retelling is appropriately vigorous: “The farther they skied into the mountains, the

faster and fiercer the snow fell. It blinded their eyes and stung their cheeks, but they hunched their shoulders and skied on.” There is a physicality to her prose that brings the story to life: “The big man took the child awkwardly into his arms, for he had never held a baby before. He strapped him to his chest and then he secured his shield on top to protect the prince from the wind.”

Appended to the story of the mountain rescue is a second story, a brief account of how Inga underwent the “Ordeal of the Burning Irons” in order to prove that her child was the true son of the king. After she holds red hot irons, her hands are wrapped in strips of cloth, and three days later, when the



Illustration by Mary Azarian, from *The Race of the Birkebeiners*

cloth is ceremoniously removed, her hands show “not a trace of a burn.” Both stories in this picture book are based on a saga crafted by a medieval author whose task was to celebrate and secure Hakon’s place in history as a great king ordained by God. Curiously, Lunge-Larsen concludes the rescue story and begins the ordeal story with the words, “Now, if this were a fairy tale, the story would be over. But this story is true, and what happened next is perhaps most miraculous of all.” Readers may be confused, as a result, as to

the “truth” of the story they have just read, which is the truth of stories powerful enough to survive from generation to generation.

—Susan Marie Swanson

Sigmund Freud: Pioneer of the Mind

By Catherine Reef

CLARION

152 pages, Age 12 and up, \$19.00

ISBN 0-618-01762-3

When Sigmund Freud was a little boy, his mother called him Sigi, a playful name for someone who would later change the course of human thought. Freud’s radical goal as a psychoanalyst was to “make the unconscious known,” says Catherine Reef, the author of this lucid and balanced biography.

In the mid-1880s, Freud was young and happily employed in neurological research when his desire to marry led him into medicine, a better-paying field. Eager to make himself known, he published an article praising cocaine—a legal substance at the time—but regretted his stand when a friend he was treating with this little-known drug became dependent on it.

This was not the last time Freud would reevaluate his thinking on a subject. Reef portrays him as a scholar who was flexible and honest in most respects (less so in others), and inarguably bold. Freud delved into taboo subjects, such as sex, and looked beyond conventional wisdom. His colleagues didn’t notice sexuality in children, didn’t think that dreams had meaning, didn’t recognize the symptoms of “hysteria” in men. Freud did.

Throughout the book, Reef introduces terms advanced by Freud—Oedipus complex, wish fulfillment, ego, id, and others—that are now a part of ordinary parlance. She gives due consideration to Freud’s critics, both in his day and in ours. Rather than pre-

senting a defense of his ideas, she underscores his overall importance. "It is impossible," she says, "to understand psychology at the start of the twenty-first century without some knowledge of Freud."

This book is an excellent place to begin to build that knowledge. It is a humanizing portrait, from Reef's account of Freud's courtship of his wife, through his productive if not always lasting friendships, to his last days as a Jewish refugee escaping Hitler at the age of eighty-two. Readers will be drawn to the book's surrealistic jacket illustration by Cliff Nielsen and will not be disappointed by the solid and interesting text. Beautiful design and telling photographs enhance this fine biography.

—Mary Lou Burket

**Woody Guthrie:
Poet of the People**

By Bonnie Christensen

KNOFF

32 pages, Age 5 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 0-375-81113-3

Bonnie Christensen's picture book biography of Woody Guthrie is a great introduction to the folksinger who wrote over a thousand songs, including such classics as "This Land Is Your Land." Her mixed-media illustrations have a rough-edged feel reminiscent of woodcuts and a palette that features both strong black lines and subdued earth tones. The text is concise and consistently involving, and it tells just enough to make the reader want to know more.

Guthrie lived a hard life during hard times. Born in Oklahoma in 1912, he supported himself from the age of seventeen by selling newspapers, singing, dancing, and playing the harmonica. As a young man, he traveled the railroads with migrant workers. He briefly settled in Texas, where he learned to play the guitar and write songs, and where he formed his first country group. By

1935, in the midst of the Depression, Guthrie had joined the masses of bankrupt farmers fleeing the Dust Bowl for migrant work in California, where he was disillusioned by the low wages and appalling conditions in the workers' camps.

Christensen tells us that "it was clear to Woody that the people needed a voice to speak for them, a voice to ask their questions. They needed someone who was not afraid of the bosses, someone who knew what it was like to be poor. Woody Guthrie became their

★ "A delightfully **humorous** story about cooking and personal achievement."

—Booklist, starred review

★ "Prepared to **perfection** and served up with style."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

★ "The **playful** nature of both the illustrations and the text is **appealing**."

—School Library Journal, starred review



FANNIE IN THE KITCHEN

The Whole Story from Soup to Nuts of How Fannie Farmer Invented Recipes with Precise Measurements

by Deborah Hopkinson
Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter
0-689-81965-X \$16.00

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voice, and songs were his way of speaking." Guthrie's concern for his fellows, his desire to lift them up emotionally and protest on their behalf, provided the backbone for his musical career. "I... made up songs telling what I thought was wrong and how to make it

right," he said. And so he did, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, writing songs and performing in concert and on the radio to encourage American soldiers at war and downhearted workers at home. He was an outspoken advocate of unions as a tool for negotiating better

pay and working conditions. In 1952 Guthrie was diagnosed with Huntington's disease, which had claimed his mother, and he was unable to sing or play the guitar in the years leading to his death in 1967, though he was able to enjoy his son Arlo's music and to hear his own songs being played by other musicians.

Guthrie's story is especially interesting because of his involvement with so many of the people and issues of his day. He was patriotic, but, as the text reveals, toward the end of his life he worried that some of the verses of "This Land Is Your Land" were being censored by other singers because they "addressed hardship and unfairness in America." Guthrie thought these were important issues, and he made sure to teach Arlo every verse so that the song would live on in its original form. At the end of the book are the complete lyrics to "This Land Is Your Land" and a chronology of Guthrie's life.

—Antonia Gray

Poetry

A Poke in the I

Selected by Paul B. Janeczko

Illustrated by Chris Raschka

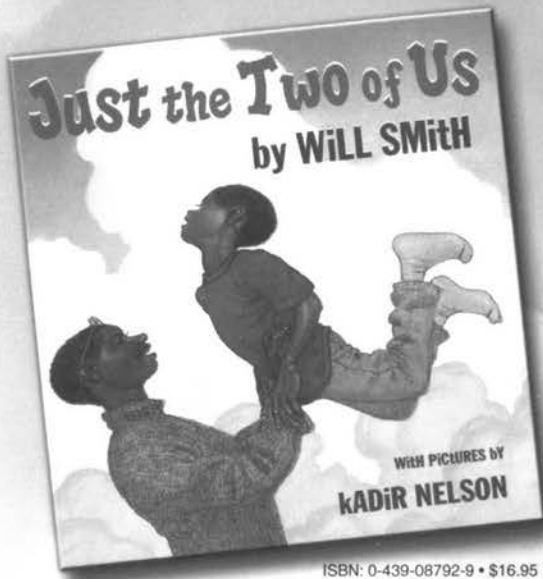
CANDLEWICK

35 pages, Age 5 and up, \$15.99

ISBN 0-7636-0661-8

In concrete poems, the type plays a prominent role in what the poem says, often through expressive typesetting. Concrete poems can be comic or serious, and the borders of concrete poetry are not always clear. This new anthology of concrete poems greets the reader with a clever bit of design before the book gets under way: the copyright notice is typeset to form a page-size copyright symbol corraling the Library of Congress cataloging data. Is it a poem? Probably not, but the book designer *is*

★ "... [A] unique and beautiful title ... "★



by

Will Smith

illustrated by **kADiR NELSON**

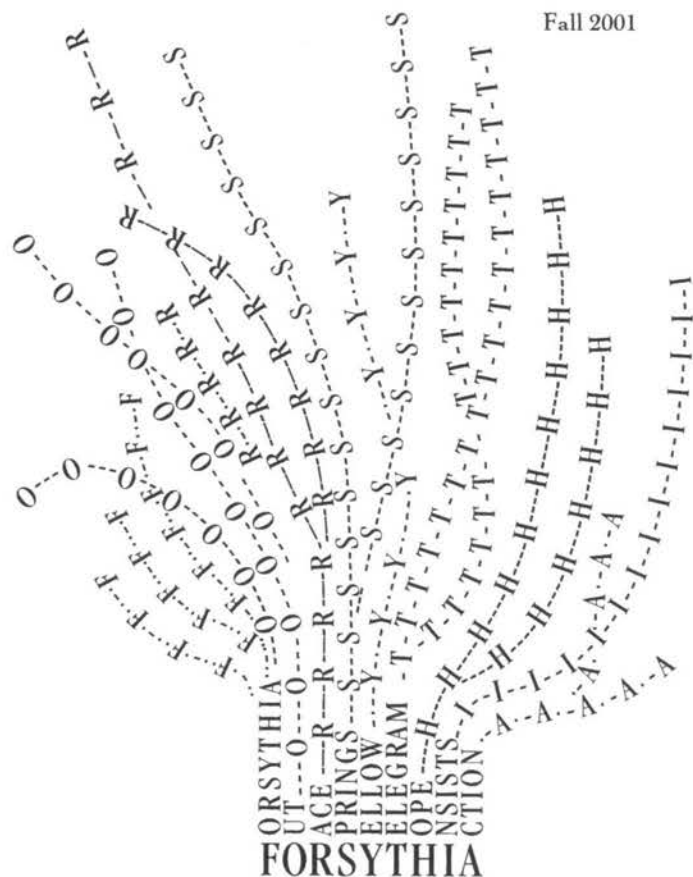
★ "The lyrics from Smith's rap (of the same title) are beautifully illustrated . . . Nelson uses a broad palette in his pencil and oil paintings to capture emotion and gesture in close-up or landscape views. The pictures are full of light, shadow, and love." — *Kirkus Reviews**

" . . . Smith has transformed the lyrics of his 1997 song into a wonderful book for youngsters . . . the words are expressive . . . [and] convey the sure sense of a parent's love and care. . . . the stunning images . . . conjure up a marvelous atmosphere of spaciousness and freedom . . . A lovely book . . . " — *School Library Journal*

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Poem by Mary Ellen Solt, from *A Poke in the I*

making a joke within the confines of publishing requirements—a promising start. Throughout, *A Poke in the I* is, more accurately, a poke in the ribs.

The lines of “A Weak Poem” droop down the page, the lines of “Skipping Rope Spell” roll up in spirals one after another, and those of “Giraffe” form a giraffe’s shape while bemoaning the fact that the long-necked animal can’t see how lovely his closer-to-the-ground parts are. “Acrobats” repeats *acrobats* in a rectangle of type that seems jumbled and contorted but is in fact carefully patterned. The blooming branches of “Forsythia” are made of the word’s letters and their symbols in Morse code.

For all their visual brashness, some of the poems demonstrate the subtler side of concrete poetry. Most notable for shades of meaning are John Hollander’s “Swan and Shadow,” a wistful ode, and “Eskimo Pie,” in which an adult transforms eating a Popsicle into a test of his

fidelity to a lifetime of sensory experience. The latter poem is so firmly rooted in adult sensibility as to be out of place in this light and playful collection; the poem’s sensory memories include the taste of wine and of (presumably a lover’s) “cool skin.” Most children won’t notice the typographical error in the key line; for adults who do, it will render that part of the poem nonsensical.

Thanks to the rigors of deciphering contorted print each day, the current generation of young readers may be better equipped than previous ones to read concrete poetry. But adults will be pleased to find this book entirely legible: the poems are almost all set against white pages, and the type is crisp.

Chris Raschka’s energetic paint-and-torn-paper illustrations play along with the poems rather than against them. Patterns and colors repeat from page to page, unifying the book. Blue, green, red, black, or yellow, his stylized figures lend

the book a contemporary, urban attitude. They sport contrasting colors at the knees and cheeks, expressive painted eyebrows, and extravagantly shaped hair (or none at all); they might be dreamy or shy, but they are always chic.

Raschka’s poetic contribution—a single word, *cat*, set in a torn-paper armchair—is more an illustration than a poem. The majority of poems in this collection are created with a range of poetic tools. Among these, the manipulation of type is the showiest and perhaps the most engaging, since even the wariest eye must follow the playful type wherever it leads.

—Jessica Roeder

**Some from the Moon,
Some from the Sun:
Poems and Songs for Everyone**

By Margot Zemach

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

48 pages, All ages, \$17.00

ISBN 0-374-39960-3

Readers today take for granted the vivid colors that appear in their books, but this book is resplendent. Looking at the layers of bright watercolor ink in the pictures, we half expect to find a dripping brush close at hand. It is fitting that the work of an artist so expert in her use of color be given such beautiful treatment.

Margot Zemach died in 1989, in her late fifties. The jacket copy calls *Some from the Moon, Some from the Sun* “her final book.” The text is an assortment of twenty-seven folk rhymes, some of them as well known as “This little pig went to market” and “Star light, star bright,” and many less familiar, like the title rhyme:

The elephants are coming
One by one,
Some from the moon,
Some from the sun.

Taken together, the text and illustrations celebrate the tradition of rhymes memorized in childhood and



Illustration by Margot Zemach, from *Some from the Moon, Some from the Sun*

passed on to children and grandchildren. Thus, the book is a hodgepodge: a rhyme about eating worms bumps up against a couplet about birds and a sweet verse about friendship. The world of Zemach's artwork is a place where little girls wear giant hair ribbons and generous skirts, boys wear knickers, and geese run loose in the yard. But for all its old-fashioned iconography, the art has a contemporary feel. "Little Jumping Joan" might be wearing a shawl, pinafore, and shoes that button, but she also looks sturdy and self-assured. The angels that lean over the bed to bless a child's sleep are anything but traditional beauties.

Though readers needn't be Zemach aficionados to enjoy this good-humored book, the volume is designed as a tribute to its illustrator. The endpapers are a jumble of lively sketches of animals,

apparently from Zemach's papers. An extensive bibliography lists nearly fifty more books written or illustrated—or both—by this celebrated artist. The book concludes with an engaging biographical sketch featuring personal narrative, photos, childhood artwork, and other examples of artwork that trace Zemach's development as an artist. "I never ever had enough paper," says Zemach. "I drew on any scrap of paper I could find: napkins, the backs of envelopes, even tissues. . . . I liked to sit in bed listening to radio dramas, illustrating stories or nursery rhymes for my own amusement: Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin, Jack Be Nimble." The pictures in this new book, like so much of Zemach's art, give one the sense that they were painted in much the same frame of mind as that childhood work.

—Susan Marie Swanson

**Words with Wings:
A Treasury of African-American
Poetry and Art**

Selected by Belinda Rochelle

HARPERCOLLINS

48 pages, Age 7 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 0-688-16415-3

In Belinda Rochelle's picture book *When Jo Louis Won the Title*, the young protagonist's grandfather told stories in which "words were like wings." One of these stories helped Jo take pride in her name by explaining its significance to her family and to history: her grandfather arrived in Harlem in the first moments after Joe Louis's boxing victory. The freedom and spiritual power associated with wings come through words that may transcend pain but are not free-floating or forgetful. Now Rochelle brings this conception of winged words to an anthology that introduces young readers to poems and visual art by African Americans.

Rochelle has selected works of artists from various times, aesthetics, politics, and backgrounds. Yet, almost alchemically, the works gain in power when they are brought together. In the introduction and biographical notes, Rochelle explains the artists' differences but also notes their participation in community. William Stanley Braithwaite (1878–1962), for instance, "wanted to be considered a poet, not a black poet, but he served as a mentor to other African Americans who were writers, including Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar." Each work has the force of conviction. The poems speak in unmistakably powerful, personal voices—whatever the tone—and are often directly addressed to the reader. Each of the paintings (plus one sculpture) contains a distinct, unified vision. Together, these vital pieces make for a vigorous, felicitous introduction to art.

Most often, the visual art has a straightforward correspondence to the poem with which it's paired, but two of the more complicated pairings are par-

ticularly inspired. The book opens with Lucille Clifton's "auction street," which calmly demands that the reader "consider the block" where people were sold as slaves, and honor it "for the music it has had to bear." This is a difficult place for an anthology to begin, but the poem is an act of consecration. On the facing page, Jacob Lawrence's bustling *Community*, with its smiling, muscular figures, seems at first glance to be out of place. Yet the painting supplies human figures to connect by association with the unnamed "thousands" sold on the auction block, while the poem voices the history that underlies the joy of the painting's thriving community. Later in the book, Clifton's poem "listen children," a declaration that "always / all ways / we loved us," is paired with William H. Johnson's assemblage of key figures and incidents related to the Underground Railroad.

Again, the celebration of community stands alongside remembrance.

Children will find not only history and community but also childhood experiences here. Rita Dove's "Fifth Grade Autobiography" and "Primer" capture moments of preadolescence with their passionate, conflicting emotions. Other poems offer an adult's broadened understanding, with hindsight. The speaker in Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," for instance, grieves that he didn't thank his father for waking up early on his day off to heat the house and polish shoes, responsibilities described as "love's austere and lonely offices." Yet he also acknowledges that he woke "fearing the chronic angers of that house." This anthology succeeds because it makes room for such whole, complicated visions.

—Jessica Roeder



Sharecropper, by Elizabeth Catlett, from *Words with Wings*

Reviewers in This Issue

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

Kathryne Beebe, a freelance writer and reviewer, is currently studying medieval history at Oxford University.

Mary Lou Burket's book reviews have appeared in *Publishers Weekly*, *The Five Owls*, and other publications.

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

Krystyna Poray Goddu is the author of *A Celebration of Steiff: Timeless Toys for Today* (Portfolio Press) and coauthor of *The Doll* by Contemporary Artists (Abbeville Press). She lives in New York City.

Antonia Gray is a graduate student of children's literature at the University of Reading, England.

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

Jessica Roeder's writing has appeared in the *Threepenny Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, and other publications.

Jenny Sawyer, a former editorial intern at the *Riverbank Review*, is currently a student at Bryn Mawr College.

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.

Renée Victor is a freelance writer based in Minnesota. A former teacher, she writes about children's literature for a variety of publications.



one for the shelf

Following recent incidents of gun violence in American high schools, attention has focused on the destructive pressures brought on by cliques and the peer ostracism that seems to be a rite of passage for many young people. *Warriors Don't Cry* is a book that should put most teenagers' sense of isolation or "outsider" status into sobering perspective. We have most of us been teased and left out, and felt the sting of cruel or thoughtless words. But the experiences of the black children who stepped forward in the late 1950s and early 1960s to integrate all-white schools (most famously in New Orleans, and in Melba Patillo Beals's home of Little Rock) stand beyond what many of us can imagine, let alone claim as our experience.

Beals's memoir begins with this powerful statement: "In 1957, while most teenage girls were listening to Buddy Holly's 'Peggy Sue,' watching Elvis gyrate, and collecting crinoline slips, I was escaping the hanging rope of a lynch mob, dodging lighted sticks of dynamite, and washing away burning acid sprayed into my eyes." It's hard to read those words without recoiling, or trying to soften the descriptions by imagining a more nuanced context: surely it wasn't quite that bad; after a rough beginning, things must have improved...

What is eye-opening, even for readers with some knowledge of this era, is the unrelenting nature of the violence Beals describes. It continued without letup for weeks and months on end, making the lives of the targeted children a living hell. No place was safe. School classrooms, stairwells, hallways, and bathrooms were all sites of abusive pranks. Melba and the other eight students who integrated Little Rock's Central High had to be escorted to school by armed guards, and, for a time, in army vehicles. Though efforts were made to keep students' home addresses and phone numbers private, gunshots came through the living room windows of Melba's home, and at night she received anonymous death threats on the phone.

Warriors Don't Cry

By Melba Patillo Beals

312 pages, Age 12 and up

WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS / POCKET BOOKS

paperback: \$12.00

ISBN 0-671-86639-7



Melba Patillo (left) with classmate
Thelma Mothershed

Who were the perpetrators of this violence? White classmates and their parents who favored segregation; city residents who crowded around the school to yell racist insults and threats and to wave posters bearing racist sentiments. State and city officials—and school administrators—also played a role, condoning violence by turning their backs on both the incidents and their own responsibilities, refusing to ensure the safety of these students.

The black community was divided: to some the "Little Rock Nine" were heroes; to others they were troublemakers. Some were worried about losing their jobs or becoming, by association, targets of violence themselves. These weren't idle worries. Melba's mother, one of the first blacks to integrate the University of Arkansas, was pressured by her boss to withdraw Melba from school, under the threat of losing the teaching job she had held for fourteen years. From the first day Melba

walked up the steps of Central High, she gradually became isolated from her old friends and social life. Even those who admired what she was doing began to seem like people living in another universe. Her story is, in part, one of great loneliness.

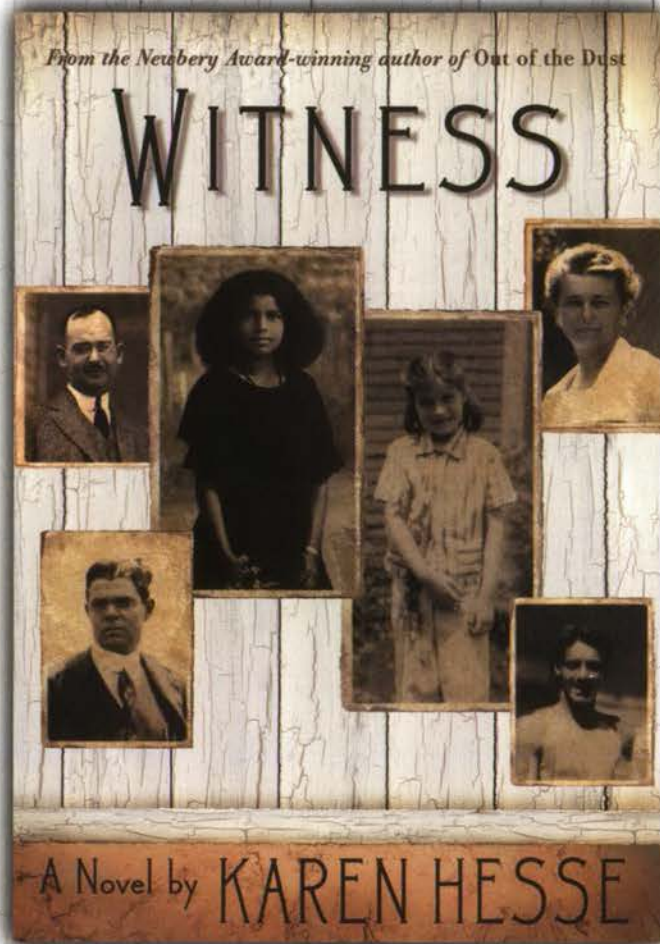
This would be an exhausting book to read if it weren't for Beals's astonishing spirit. As she describes the support she received from her Grandma India, a woman of fierce determination and strong religious faith, it becomes apparent that Melba has inherited these same qualities. The morning after someone has shot through the windows of the Beals's house, Grandma India is up early, tacking up pictures to cover the bullet holes in the walls. When Melba can't help but cry out in anguish, her grandma tells her that she has to be strong, that she can't let her tormentors see her pain, but that she can "talk to God about it." Melba does just that, in the journal that becomes her outlet and the main record from which this important book is derived.

—Martha Davis Beck

★ “...stunning ...haunting ...
memorable ...”*

New from the Newbery Award–winning author of *Out of the Dust*

KAREN HESSE



0-439-27199-1 • \$16.95

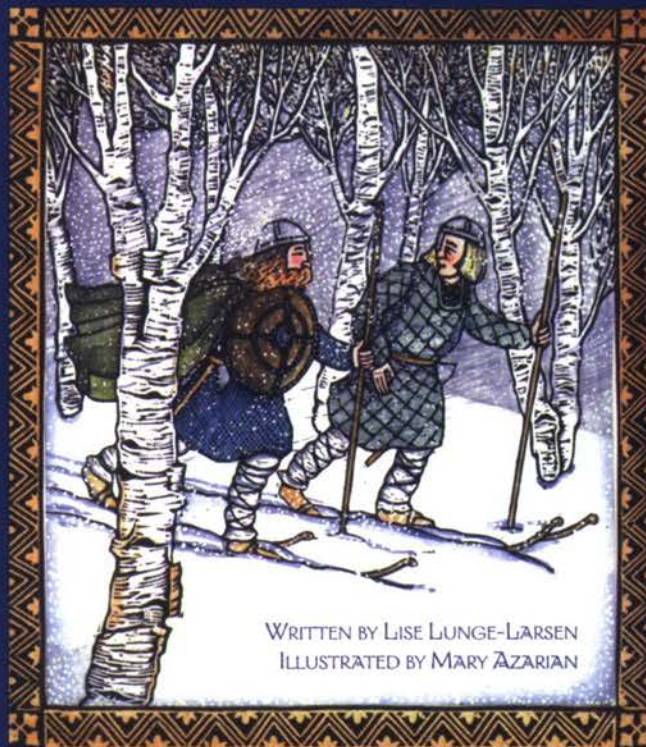
★ “What Copland created with music, and Hopper created with paint, Hesse deftly and unerringly creates with words: the iconography of Americana, carefully researched, beautifully written, and profoundly honest.”—*Kirkus Reviews**, starred review

★ “Based on real events, Hesse tells a story of the Ku Klux Klan in a small town in Vermont in 1924. She tells it in the same clear free-verse style as her Newbery winner, *Out of the Dust* . . . The voices personalize the history and reveal how events felt to different people. . . . it will spark discussion about how such a thing could happen on your street.”—*Booklist*, starred review

www.scholastic.com

THE RACE OF THE BIRKEBEINERS

Written by Lise Lunge-Larsen • Illustrated by Mary Azarian



WRITTEN BY LISE LUNGE-LARSEN
ILLUSTRATED BY MARY AZARIAN

It is the year 1206, and deep in the snow-covered mountains and valleys of Norway the fiercest warriors in the land struggle to ski a baby to safety. Mary Azarian's strong, sure woodcuts capture the warmth and ruggedness of medieval life, while Lise Lunge-Larsen's dramatic telling is direct and mesmerizing.

"Snow-swept folktale comes to life in beautifully composed woodcut illustrations." — *Booklist*

0-618-10313-9 • Ages 5-9 • \$16.00

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