

A PROFILE OF TOVE JANSSON

Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

**History
Happens**

By Richard Peck

INTERVIEW:

Chris Crutcher

**Ten Great
Bedtime Books**

**The Wishing
Bone**

By Kate DiCamillo

THE TEACHER'S ART:

**Artificial
Intelligence**

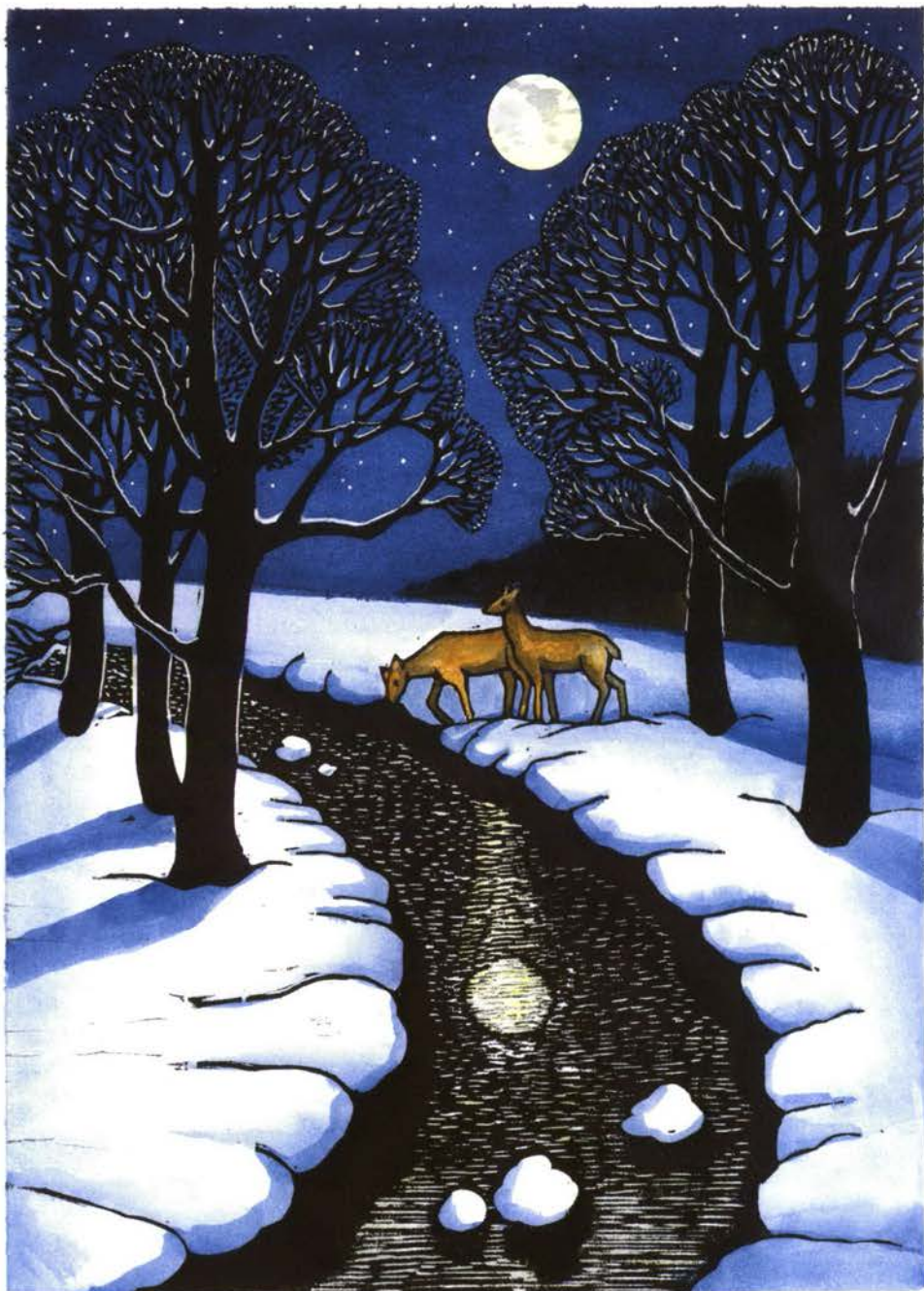
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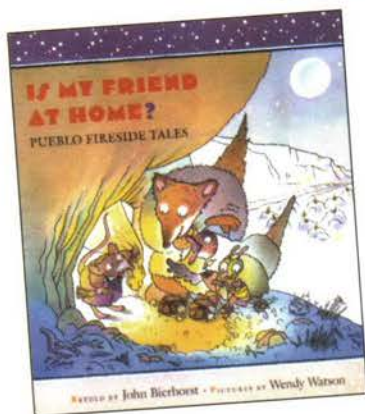
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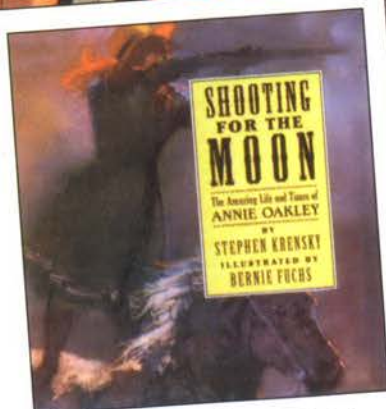
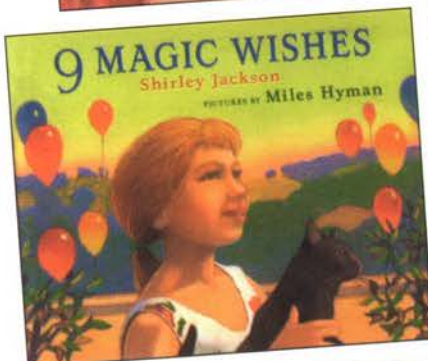
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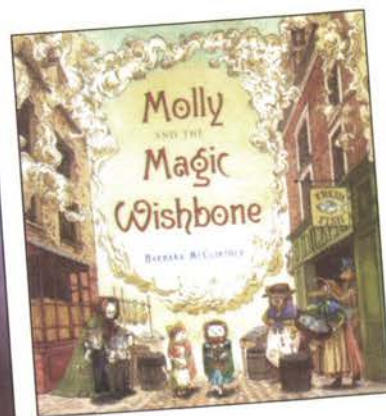
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Illustration by Barbara McClintock from *Molly and the Magic Wishbone*



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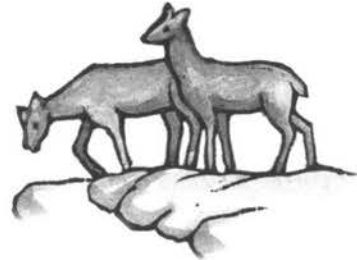
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About the Cover Art

I live on a small hill farm in Vermont. After a fresh fall of snow, the woods that surround my home become silent and mysterious. The deer, confined by the storm to their "deer yard," slip down to the stream for a drink. When the full moon shines on the new snow it is almost as bright as day. The moonlight casts bold shadows from the trees on the snow. The stars glitter in the dark sky. It is a moment of magic and wonder.

—Mary Azarian

Mary Azarian is the illustrator of many books for young readers, including the Caldecott Medal-winning Snowflake Bentley, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (Houghton Mifflin, 1998), When the Moon Is Full, by Penny Pollack (Little, Brown, 2001), and The Race of the Berkebeiners, by Lise Lunge-Larsen (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). Azarian's woodcuts eloquently chronicle a year in rural Vermont in The Four Seasons of Mary Azarian (David Godine, 2000).

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editor's note

Occasional moodiness notwithstanding, I'm an optimist. It's my habit to look ahead with a feeling of hopefulness. This anticipation is intimately connected to the seasons for me, and the season just around the corner has a glow that somehow isn't diminished as the years go by: the sound of trickling water under melting snow makes me feel like dancing, and I'm almost unreasonably excited to put on a corduroy shirt on the first cool morning of fall.

All that hopefulness slid away on the 11th of September. It wasn't something I felt like mentioning; in comparison to the losses borne by others, it seemed a small, even selfish complaint. Yet, like millions who were safely distant from the events on that day, I felt as if something had collapsed inside me. In the weeks since, looking ahead to the future has been like looking at a picture that's missing something invisible but essential. Though in our part of the country we've been blessed with a long, colorful fall, the beauty of the season has offered little comfort.

Perhaps there are times when we need to have optimism and hope stripped away in order to examine what we believe and the foundation our beliefs rest on. Rebuilding a house gives one the opportunity to make it stronger.

In this issue of *Riverbank Review*, Richard Peck reflects on this moment in the life of our culture, a moment when certain things we've long tried to ignore have crashed into our consciousness, forcing us to confront them. His words are bracing, and the challenge he poses is bold: as adults, we need to better fulfill our responsibility to the children in our lives. This may involve setting boundaries we're not in the habit of setting, but there may be more at stake than we're in the habit of imagining. Chris Crutcher addresses this same challenge from a different angle, speaking as both a writer and a family therapist. If we won't listen to young people's stories, he says, if we refuse to look at the pain and alienation that make optimism a missing ingredient in so many young lives, we will bear the cost of that unconcern.

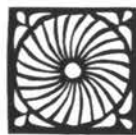
Putting together this issue of the magazine, I was struck, not for the first time, by the heart and imagination and

vision that emanate from those working creatively in the field of children's literature. Just as the shapes of objects seem sharper in cold air, the words of wise, reflective people seem to stand out especially clearly right now. I feel more than usually grateful to listen.

—Martha Davis Beck

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Tove Jansson

This Finnish author gained worldwide acclaim as the architect of Moominvalley.

By Christine Alfano

Moomins, those slightly rotund, hippo-snouted creatures who enjoy pancakes and strawberry jam for supper, speak human language, and possess enviably soft white pelts, are the original inhabitants of Tove Jansson’s fantastic tales, told in a series of eight novels, one collection of short stories,

three picture books, and countless cartoon strips. Maps of Moominvalley and its surrounding landscapes head the first chapter in some of the novels, but you’ll never reach the place by studying the detailed drawings. To wander the byways of Jansson’s keen and vast imagination, to meet the range of odd, intriguing (and terribly human) characters within these pages, you must enter the stories themselves. Once you do, you will declare yourself a citizen of Moominvalley and call the stories your own—the Moomin world is that compelling. A generous capacity to marvel at our own world grounds and defines Jansson’s work.

Tove Jansson was born in 1914 in Helsinki into the richly creative household that would shape her artistic outlook: her father was the renowned Finnish sculptor Viktor Jansson; Signe Hammersten Jansson, Tove’s Swedish mother, worked as an illustrator, book designer, and cartoonist. Bookcases lined the rooms of the Janssons’ studio home,

and Signe’s paintings adorned its walls. At night, Tove sometimes awakened to hear her father playing his balalaika at house parties that could last for days. She grew up in the shadow of plaster casts and sculptures, while pens, drawing pencils, paper, and bottles of India ink were always close at hand.

As a child, Jansson was infused with an awareness of herself as a unique individual with a sure visual sensibility. In her impressionistic memoir, *Sculptor’s Daughter*, she describes her childhood surroundings as they

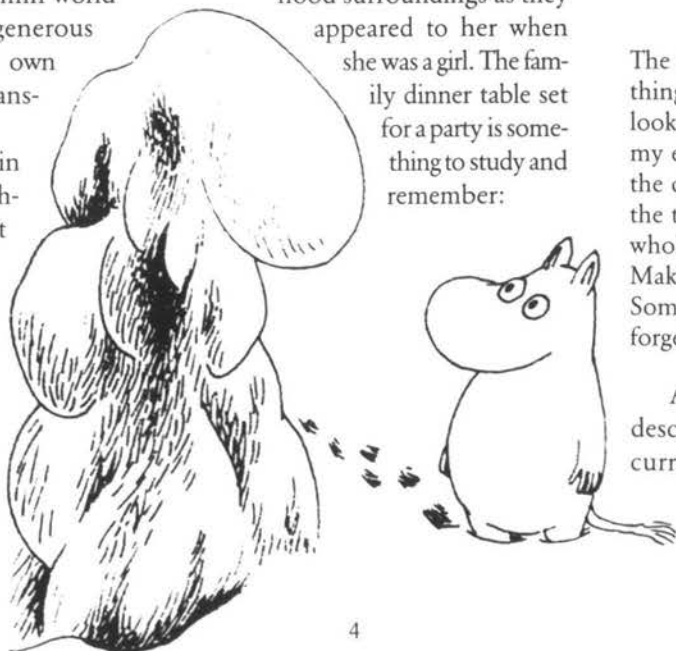
appeared to her when she was a girl. The family dinner table set for a party is something to study and remember:



Tove Jansson in 1950

The table is the most beautiful thing. Sometimes I sit up and look over the railing and screw up my eyes and then the glasses and the candles and all the things on the table shimmer and make a whole as they do in a painting. Making a whole is very important. Some people just paint things and forget the whole.

Also in her memoir, Jansson describes a pivotal incident that occurred one summer, with her beloved housekeeper Annie. They are visiting a beach “where all the pebbles are



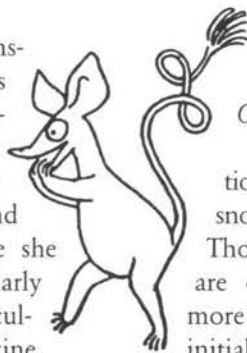
round and precious and beautiful colours." Annie asks Tove if she can see any gold in the water, and when young Tove can find none, Annie tells her that it must be put there first—"Gold looks wonderful in brown water. It multiplies." Tove runs home to fetch every gold thing they own "and the pearls as well" and tosses them all into the water where they look "terribly beautiful." The next day, when they return to see if the gold has grown, it is gone. As an adult, Jansson realizes that Annie stole the jewelry. At the time, however, it wasn't her concern—Tove the child had witnessed the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary. The significance of the experience lay in seeing how the brownish water made the jewelry even more lovely.

Years later, writing *Moominsummer Madness*, Jansson would call up that scene once again. Moominmamma dips her nose into the pond to see its bottom and spots the bright glint of metal:

"It's your golden bracelet," said Moomintroll.... "Good idea, isn't it?"

"Splendid," said his mother. "We'll always keep our bangles in brown pond water in the future. They're so much more beautiful that way."

From childhood, Tove Jansson illustrated her diaries from cover to cover. The ambitious, savvy student sold to her classmates magazines that she wrote, illustrated, and edited herself. By the time she turned fifteen, she was regularly contributing cartoons to the cultural and political magazine *Garm*. She chose to train as an illustrator and designer and was later admitted to the drawing school at the Finnish Art Society, graduating in 1937. After traveling to Paris and Brittany to continue her studies, Jansson returned to



Snork Maiden and the Fillyjonk, from Moominsummer Madness

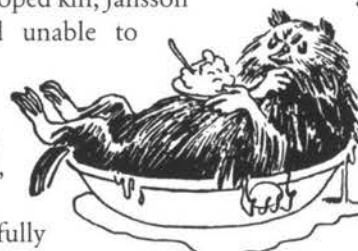
Helsinki, where solo exhibitions of her paintings received critical acclaim. She seemed to embrace her father's philosophy of life: "You can make fun of everything except art."

So where and when did Moomins emerge? One story maintains that the very first drawing of a Moominlike figure was the ugly little creature Tove painted on the wooden planks of their family's privy. She began to include changing versions of Moomins in the work she did for *Garm*. But it wasn't until the anxious and debilitating years of World War II that Jansson turned her energies toward writing and illustrating a children's book.

In 1945 the first Moomin book, *The Little Trolls and the Great Flood*, was published.

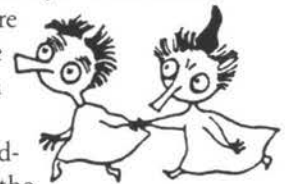
In their original incarnation, Moomintrolls had long snouts and visible mouths. Though these early Moomins are obviously related to their more fully developed kin, Jansson initially seemed unable to

visually express the remarkable personalities of her creations. But in her next novel, *Comet in Moominland*, Jansson's Moomins fully



emerge, rendered in swift, rounded ink lines, with great curving noses, large, expressive eyes and eyebrows, and plump bodies similar to ripened pears. Though other creatures make their appearances, these are the anchoring characters in Jansson's novels; Moominmamma, Moominpappa, and Moomintroll are the soft, quiet emotional vessels in a world full of bizarre, whimsical, and sometimes frightening beings.

Jansson's greatest achievement was her ability to conceive an array of imaginary—yet oddly familiar—creatures that come fully to life on the page. Who hasn't encountered a Hemulen or two in life? These taller, elongated versions of Moomins are the world's pontificators, rule makers, and project planners. One Hemulen focuses so single-mindedly on rearranging his stamp collection that he doesn't notice a tornado whizzing past. Another won't stop trying to get Moomintroll interested in the healthy practices of skiing and igloo building. "I want fresh air, and lots of it," he says. "Believe me: there's nothing more dangerous in life than to become an indoor sitter."

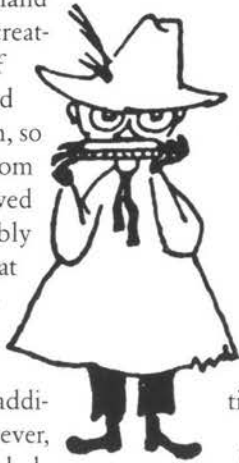


Little My, an adopted daughter of the Moomin family, is the stubborn, scowling little girl in all of us. So tiny when she first appears that she has to be seen through a magnifying glass, Little My is all unabashed curiosity, a small ball of energy with a bomb-shaped bun sticking up on top of her head. Wary of others, yet utterly self-assured, she has the nerve to ruthlessly pour paraffin over an ant colony that Moomintroll has complained about. Afterwards, she berates him for thinking she could get rid of the stinging insects without killing them: "You knew exactly what I was going

to do to them! All you hoped was that I shouldn't tell you about it."

And don't we all know at least one pretentiously philosophical Muskrat? Lying about in the hammock all day long, reading a lengthy tome called *The Meaninglessness of Everything*, this creature is full of bloated self-importance and expects to be waited on. After obviously sitting down on Moomintroll's lovely "Welcome Home" cake, Muskrat tries to defend himself, asserting, "I don't bother myself over things like cakes. I don't see them, taste them, or feel them in any way, ever."

There are too many wonderful characters in Moominland to describe—Jansson created more than sixty of them in her novels, and each is so clearly drawn, so artfully differentiated from the others, and endowed with such recognizably human characteristics that we feel we know them and are happy when they reappear in other volumes. One additional creature, however, bears mention for her darkly alien and utterly mesmerizing presence. The lighter, celebratory aspects of Jansson's stories would not achieve their brightness without the forbidding and lonesome presence of the Groke. Huge and black with perpetually wide open bright-yellow eyes and a teeth-baring grimace, the Groke is attracted to light and moves across any terrain to find it and gaze at it. The ground she passes over freezes solid, and nothing can ever grow there again. Whether the Groke symbolizes death or extreme loneliness, she is avoided by all (even plant life

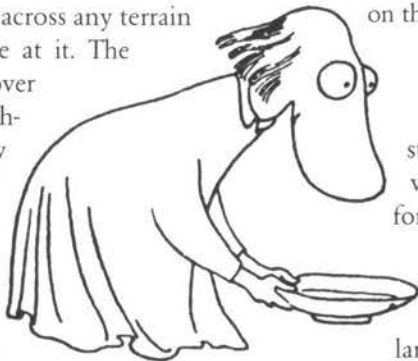


scurries out of her way). Moomintroll faces his own fear of her in *Moominpappa at Sea*, meeting her secretly at the ocean's edge and allowing her to become entranced by his swinging lantern. The Groke proves to be a more troublesome foe than the various natural disasters, giant lizards, and carnivorous fauna that are sprinkled through Jansson's early novels.

Jansson's earlier work features fabulously lush tropical forests with palm trees and towering flowers, and tends toward purely whimsical elements like spun-sugar grass and lemonade rivers. It's as if the young author was working from a somewhat artificial template for a "good" children's story. By her seventh novel, *Moominland Midwinter*, she describes the natural world much more realistically. When Moomintroll wakes from hibernation to experience a snowfall for the first time, Jansson captures his awe:

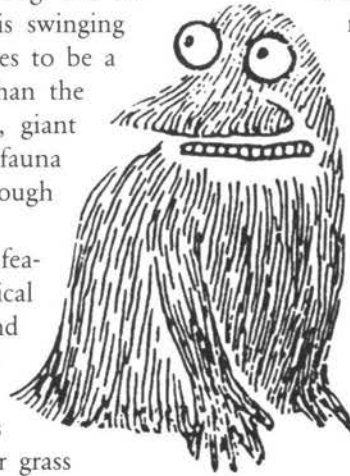
One flake after the other landed on his warm nose and melted away. He caught several in his paw to admire them for a fleeting moment; he looked towards the sky and saw them sinking down at him, more and more, softer and lighter than bird's down. "Oh, it's like this," thought Moomintroll.

"I believed it simply formed on the ground somehow."



The landscapes that surrounded Jansson provided the raw material for Moominvalley. Summers took the family to their island home off the coast of Finland where beachcomb-

ing, exploration, and the adventures regularly offered by ocean storms were the main occupations. Jansson had the observant eye of a natural-



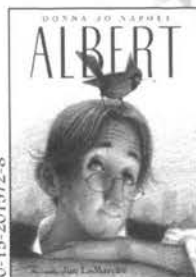
ist. Although the bizarre interiors of Moominhouses are elaborated in careful, appreciative detail, she set the action of most of her stories outdoors. One could almost use the later Moomin novels as a travel guide to the rocky Finnish shoreline.

For much of her later life, Jansson lived in a small house on an island off the Finnish coast with her great friend Tuulikki Pietilä. She garnered numerous awards for her work, including the Selma Lagerlöf Award in 1953 and 1992 and the Hans Christian Andersen Children's Book Medal in 1966. Her books, originally written in Swedish, were loved throughout the world and have been translated into more than thirty languages. Jansson stopped writing Moomin stories in 1970: "I couldn't continue," she said. "I couldn't go back and find that happy Moominvalley again." She died in 2001 at the age of eighty-six.

If we can find the soul of an artist within her work, we know that Jansson had a reverence for family, for individual freedom, for nature, and for the entire range of humanity represented in her characters. When Moominpappa remembers his childhood and says "I was permanently astonished," we sense that Tove Jansson maintained a way to marvel at the world. Her pictures and stories extend to readers that capacity for astonishment. ~

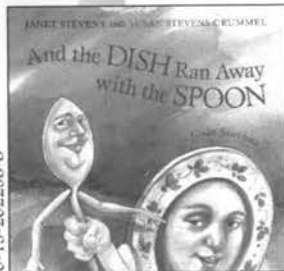
Christine Alfano lives with her family in Minneapolis.

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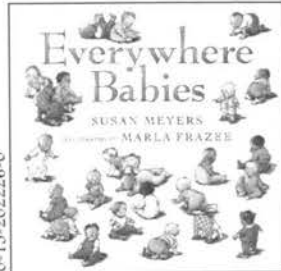
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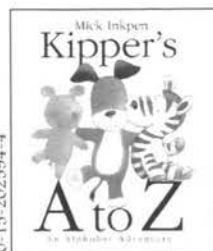
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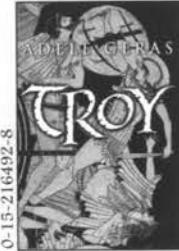
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History Happens

In the wake of September 11, perhaps the best thing parents can do for their children is to start acting like parents again.

By Richard Peck

On Saturday, September 8, my sister and I breakfasted at the White House in a wonderful gathering of writers: Patricia and Fredrick McKissack; David McCullough, the biographer of John Adams; Scott Turow; Natalie Babbitt and Katherine Paterson; John Scieszka, the Stinky Cheese Man; Gail

Godwin and Doris Kearns Goodwin; Patricia MacLachlan, the creator of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. I was the only one in the room I didn't recognize.

We now have our first librarian First Lady—a working librarian, in fact, conducting the first National Book Festival on that September weekend.

From the White House we went to the Capitol lawn where parents and their children, readers of all ages, could move from tent to tent, hearing authors read from their works. Hundreds were expected; thousands came. It was the way the world should be.

Three days later, that world ended. History happened. In the aftermath of the attack, Mrs. Bush was still before us, on radio, on television, on *Oprah*, exhorting us to be there for our children. She urged us to read to them even if they think they're too old to be read to: "Let them hear your voice before they go to sleep."

This advice is, of course, for parents who live under the same roofs as their children. This refers to the child who's at home on a school night, the child who has a bedtime.

We who don't ask our children to define history find, abruptly, that his-

tory has redefined us. In his new book, *Thirty Days in Sydney*, Peter Carey says, "History is like a bloodstain that keeps showing on the wall, no matter how many new owners take possession, no matter how many times we paint over it."

Now history has overtaken us. It's a new epoch when even filmmakers are in sudden search of "family" stories. They'll get over that, but as it happens, we were ready with family stories all along. A story for the young is always about family or the search for family or the creation of a surrogate family.

My latest contribution is called *Fair Weather*, and now I'm jarred myself by its opening line: "It was the last day of our old lives, and we didn't even know it."

It's the story of a journey. There's a journey in every one of my books, a trip out into the world to learn something you couldn't learn at the feet of your peer-

group leader. All American stories derive from the same journey: two boys on a raft making their way down the mythic American river, a voyage that changes its meaning in midstream, like life.

In *Fair Weather*, Lottie, Rosie, their little brother Buster, and their reprobate granddad leave the farm to visit the World's Columbian Exposition, the great Chicago World's Fair of 1893. They who have never seen a lightbulb will witness the great White City exposition blazing brighter than noon. They who have never gone faster than a horse gallops will go on the train. They pack a lunch, but they're not sure



Ferris wheel at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893

they can eat at this speed. They who have never seen a building taller than a silo will ride history's first Ferris wheel.

The curtain rose famously on the twentieth century at the Chicago World's Fair. How differently the twenty-first century has begun. Yet history repeats, and we need to point that out to people so young they have not yet seen the repetition. The real motive behind the 1893 fair was to inform the nation that Chicago had been rebuilt from the great fire of 1871—bigger, better, and more businesslike than ever. A hundred and eight years later, Mayor Giuliani of New York says, "Do you want to help? Come visit us. Bring money. Come see a show."

History repeats, but our young people learn very little history and geography in school and college now. It's hard to teach history in a suburb that doesn't have any. It's hard to teach geography in a ghetto that recognizes no territory beyond this turf.

When danger strikes, we reach for our children. In the names of those thousands of children who lost their parents on September 11, we wonder what we can

do for our own, we who are still here.

Our children have now seen pictures of people falling and jumping from exploding buildings, some of them holding hands. Now it is surely time to ask our children to reassess their taste for video games, which are the pornography of the prepubescent, a violent virtual reality that eliminates the parent who paid for it.

It's time for parents to reassess their willingness to pay for all this electronic mayhem, even at the risk of incurring our children's displeasure.

We're told now of children lying awake at night, fearing an airplane will hit the school tomorrow. That's a fear to anguish any parent, but for every child lying awake in bed, there are any number of teenagers driving drunk because they believe they cannot die. Statistics say that six thousand teenagers will die of drunk driving next year. Suddenly, that six-thousand number has new meaning for us.

What a fitting way to honor the dead, by refusing to collude in our children's self-destructiveness. What a good time for parents to stop paying for the

liquor and the gasoline in that lethal cocktail, what a meaningful moment to serve notice on your college student that you are underwriting no more keg parties, however deeply buried this item may be in the budget of necessities.

The drug traffic that funds many tyrants flourishes in all our schools, particularly in the schools of the affluent who can afford to support it. As parents we underwrite a traffic we're too fearful to mention. Is it possible that our children misinterpret our silence for indifference?

When life makes us start over, I need to write a verse, to gather the sprawling world upon a single page:

September 11

We thought we'd outdistanced
history,
Told our children it was nowhere near;
Even when history struck Columbine,
It didn't happen here.

We took down the maps in the
classroom,
And when they were safely furled,
We told the young what they wanted
to hear,
that they were immune from a
menacing world.

But history isn't a folded-up map,
Or an unread textbook tome;
Now we know history's a
fireman's child,
Waiting at home alone.



Richard Peck's A Year Down Yonder was the 2000 John Newbery Gold Medal winner. It is a sequel to his A Long Way from Chicago, the Silver Medalist of 1999. These books and Fair Weather are published by Dial Books for Young Readers.

This essay is excerpted from an address given at the Upper Midwest Booksellers Association convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, October 7, 2001.



Site of World Trade Center tragedy, New York City, 2001



The Kerlan Awards in Children's Literature: 1975–2001

Edited by Ruth Berman

In 1949, Irvin Kerlan, an avid book collector, donated a portion of his children's literature library to the University of Minnesota. The remainder of his collection was bequeathed to the university at his death in 1963. This generous donation of books, manuscripts, artwork, and letters has been built upon, and the Kerlan Collection is now one of the most comprehensive children's literature archives in the world.

Since 1975 the Kerlan Friends have given an annual award to recognize "singular attainment in the creation of children's literature and in appreciation for generous donation of unique resources to the Kerlan Collection for the study of children's books." The following excerpts are from an anthology of acceptance speeches by Kerlan Award recipients, supplemented by biographical information, manuscripts, artwork, and related materials.

Margot Zemach

Looking back at my work in children's books is always a pleasure and still feels unexpected. As a child, I loved looking at the picture books I had, so much. I looked and looked at them. Once I was given a picture book of a Russian folktale that blazed with color and fairly lifted off the page, and made the walls of my room glow.

Drawing and painting, mainly scenes from folk or fairy tales, was an important way to keep myself company when I was a kid. I had a certain confusion about reality...What was real and what I could make real by drawing it. The problem is still with me...

I usually do a lot of research before beginning a book. I find out whatever I can about a particular country before I illustrate a story set there. The feel of the place, and as

much information on every level as possible. I get so tired of seeing folk or fairy tales set in amorphous countrysides, with pudgy cottages, tarted up Disney World castles, and a cast of "types" wearing vaguely medieval clothes. Illustrations like that don't do anything for a story. They don't tell us anything new about the story, or the time, or the world.

I used to think that I would reach a certain age and bingo! I would achieve techniques that would make it clear sailing, and I would automatically be able to say whatever I wanted. But I guess that's not such a desirable state anyhow. The demands of each story are so different that it is just vital to keep changing all the time...

Both of my parents worked in the theater and I'm probably very influ-

enced by that. The stage sets, the costumes, the illusion. I'm probably trying to recreate that in books. That's why I have used a lot of "break-throughs" of buildings, seeing them from the outside and the inside at once. And why I always want the people I draw to have real contact with each other, and be doing more than just standing around on the page together.

Eve Bunting

My father was a rough, tough Irishman who had a secret passion—for poetry. Only my mother and I were allowed to know of this passion. If any of his rough, tough, brawling, brawny friends had found out about his hidden love he would have been the laughingstock of the townland. Real men read gangster novels or tales of cowboys riding those far off ranges in America. My father, a real man if ever there was one, read Longfellow and Shakespeare and Wordsworth.

He read poetry aloud to me. He made it live. He made it sing. When I was little I'd sit on his knee and he'd read to me of Hiawatha, or the sad, lovesick Highway Man, or the horrors of the Ancient Mariner, doomed to sail on and on forever. Instinctively he knew that poems that told stories would be the ones to hold my interest. He'd taste the words like they were



honey. I've forgotten too many things about him. He died when I was fourteen. But I remember his voice. I hear it when I read Yeats:

I will arise and go now, for always
 night and day
 I hear lake water lapping with low
 sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway, or
 on the pavements gray
 I hear it in the deep heart's core.

I have been to the Lake Isle of Innisfree and heard that lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore. There is a tape of William Butler Yeats reading this poem but he doesn't read it as well as my father.

Wanda Gág

As soon as I felt I could risk it, I abandoned my commercial art career and prepared for my next step.

I said to myself: "I've expressed other people's ideas long enough... now I'll express my own. Whether or not anyone else will like what I do is not important. I'll draw things the way they look and feel to me!"

I rented a little house in the country and furnished it with packing boxes, a few lamps and secondhand chairs, and a most uncomfortable bed. I was very happy in this setup. In a frenzy of freedom I drew the simple objects about me—trees, flowers and weeds, lush fields and bare interiors, barns and woodpiles, squashes, dishmops, anything! Everything seemed to say: "Why not draw me? I'm so neatly put together. I'm a cheap lamp, but what I do to a room can be fearful or cheerful....I'm an old hoe, see my noble crooked lines....I'm a hillside, I unfold myself to you as a symphony. I'll never look just like this again—better capture me now!"

Sometimes as I sat, barefoot and smudged with paint, I gazed at the dis-

tant hills and remembered what I had left behind me: fashion drawings—those anemic females with eyes too big, with mouths and hands and feet too small, with stilts on their heels, with gloves on their hands and furs around their necks in summer!

I reveled in my freedom now, but what would I do in the fall, and the next year, and the next? I had deliberately burned all my commercial art bridges behind me and I certainly had no expectation of turning my summer's work into cash. Still, that is what happened.

Jane Resh Thomas

At the far end of Washington Square, beyond the dogleg corner, was my destination: the Washington Square Library, my destiny, my second home. Through the Gothic door with the little leaded window, the vestibule was blessedly cool and half-dark. I drew in satisfaction with the air. I could smell my sweaty hair and the damp-stone scent of the slate floor. I could drink cold water from the fountain. In a moment, I could enter the treasure trove, Ali Baba's den of riches, where the same books that kings and queens read, the same words that Homer had sung thousands of years ago and Shakespeare had written with a feather in his hand, when the great Queen Elizabeth wore velvet dresses and ruffs around her neck—some of the same books and words were waiting now for me. I could share this inheritance with other readers; here I was equal to the rich and the happy and the beloved. I savored the prospect, drinking more water than I needed, prolonging delicious anticipation.

Once inside, I chose deliberately, calculating how many books I could carry. I never failed to look out the leaded windows over the marsh, where the tall grass blew green in summer,

golden in winter, across to high ground on the other side. One of the two librarians, whose names I've forgotten but whose look and sweet smell (a compound of baby powder, Noxzema, and ambergris) will be with me until I die, checked me out. As I waited, I stared through the invisible bars into the adults' room, hungering for what was denied me there. I would have to wait for years, until Mother wrote me a letter of dispensation when I was eleven and a year too young, according to the rules, to enter the inner sanctum. Now young children can encounter the most depraved, horrific imagery by touching a few computer buttons, but in those days mothers and the Washington Square librarians had charge of their daughters' passage from childhood to maturity.

Jean Craighead George

By definition, nature writing is "a poetic interpretation of nature with a scientific point of view." I can write about the wild orchestra on a June night, but it better not have any cicadas in it because they do not sing until August.

Nature writing took hold and thrived in America. A pristine wilderness inspired the first American nature writer, William Barton....[He] brought poetry to science and influenced two hundred years of writers including Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and, many years later, Rachel Carson.

My great joy is to bring this genre to children. They are the perfect audience for poetry and natural science. What child does not thrill at the sight of a rabbit or a turtle? What child does not sit still when you read aloud: "A large grizzly bear opened her eyes and got to her feet. She was hungry." ~

Excerpted from The Kerlan Awards in Children's Literature: 1975–2001, edited by Ruth Berman (Pogo Press, 2001).

“A beautiful demonstration of
the true meaning of Christmas.”*



The Little Drummer Boy

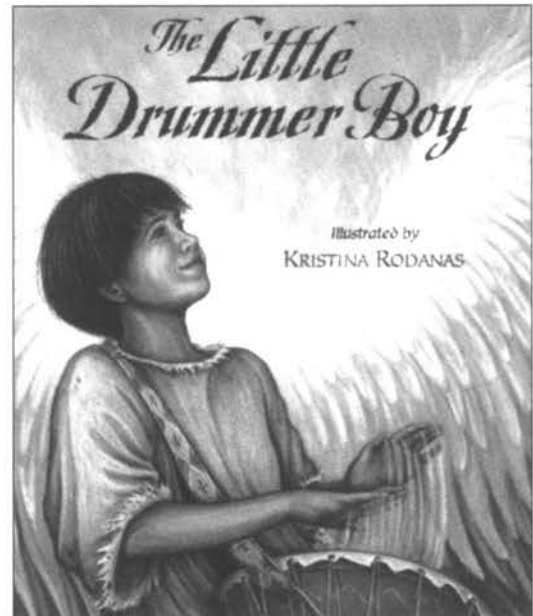
lyrics and music by KATHERINE DAVIS, HENRY ONORATI and HARRY SIMEONE
illustrated in full color by KRISTINA RODANAS

“The contemporary Christmas carol comes to life through marvelously detailed illustrations that depict the people and landscapes of the desert. The range of expressions in Rodanas’s characters’ faces and body language truly make this special.”

-Kirkus Reviews

“When commercialism threatens to overtake the season, this song reminds readers that a gift from the heart brings great joy to both the giver and the receiver. . . . Even libraries that have Ezra Jack Keats’s version may want this one for its fresh interpretation of Bethlehem, the humble stable, and the range of emotion expressed in the boy’s face and demeanor.”

-School Library Journal



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*Kirkus Reviews



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Riverbank Review

Ten Great Bedtime Books

And If the Moon Could Talk

By Kate Banks

Illustrated by Georg Hallensleben

FARRAR, STRAUS, & GIROUX, 1998

AGE 2 AND UP

Poetic text and vivid paintings shift back and forth between a young girl's bedroom and scenes from around the world, all beneath a wondrous full moon.

Bedtime for Frances

By Russell Hoban

Illustrated by Garth Williams

HARPER & ROW, 1960

AGE 4 AND UP

Frances, the inimitable precocious badger, runs through a humorous succession of nighttime anxieties before finally settling down to sleep.

Can't Sleep

By Chris Raschka

ORCHARD, 1995

AGE 2 AND UP

Do you hate to be the last one in the house awake? Don't worry, says this rhythmic picture book, the moon will watch over you and "keep you safe."

Good Night, Good Knight

By Shelley Moore Thomas

Illustrated by Jennifer Plecas

DUTTON, 2000

AGE 4 AND UP

The knight in this charming easy reader doesn't fight dragons. Instead, he gets them drinks of water, reads and sings to them, and doles out good-night kisses.

Hush!

A Thai Lullaby

By Minfong Ho

Illustrated by Holly Meade

ORCHARD, 1996

AGE 3 AND UP

Exquisite collage artwork illustrates the story of a harried mother trying to quiet all the animals that seem determined to disrupt her baby's slumber.

Detach
bookmark
here. →



Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

Hushabye

By John Burningham

KNOFF, 2001

AGE 1 AND UP

Where will three tired bears, a weary fish, a fatigued goose, and others rest for the night? In enchanting rhymed episodes, all end up comfy-cozy.

Little Donkey, Close Your Eyes

By Margaret Wise Brown

Illustrated by Ashley Wolff

HARPERCOLLINS, 1995 (NEWLY ILLUSTRATED EDITION)

AGE 1 AND UP

Coupled with tranquil, lushly textured illustrations, Brown's singsong verse gently steers baby animals and small children toward sleep.

May We Sleep Here Tonight?

By Tan Koide

Illustrated by Yasuko Koide

MCELDERRY, 2000 (REISSUE)

AGES 3 AND UP

On a foggy night, three gophers, two rabbits, and three raccoons find refuge in a toasty cabin where no one is at home—yet.

Moonlight

By Jan Ormerod

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD, 1982

(OUT OF PRINT—CHECK YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY)

AGE 2 AND UP

This quiet, wordless masterpiece follows a little girl and her parents from suppertime onward through their evening routine.

Ten, Nine, Eight

By Molly Bang

GREENWILLOW, 1983

AGE 1 AND UP

Homey images convey the warmth and security of a child's room in this soothing countdown to bedtime.



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The Wishing Bone

Writing is a conjuring act, mysterious at its core.

By Kate DiCamillo

I grew up in a small town in Florida. I spent a good portion of my childhood digging. I do not know, now, what I was digging for. And even then, if I had been questioned closely, I probably would have been at a loss to articulate exactly what I was hoping to find. But whatever it was, I looked for it assiduously. I had my own shovel.

And every day I dug. At the time of this story, I was eight years old and it was summertime and my digging mania was at its apex. One day, under the huge magnolia tree in our backyard, I unearthed a rock. It was a white rock, worn smooth by time, and there was an indentation in the center of it that seemed to have been designed specifically for the human thumb.

I put my thumb into the hollow and took my thumb out, and I felt certain that somebody, many other people perhaps, had done the same thing before me. I was moved in a way that I could not explain to myself. All I knew was that I had found something special.

I took the rock inside and showed it to an expert: my older, rock-collecting brother.

"Look," I said to him, "I have found a very, very ancient rock."

Ancient seemed like exactly the right word to me, accurate, respectful, and at the same time implying a great mystery.

My brother looked up from his magazine. "Let me see," he said.

I handed him the rock.

He turned it over in his hand once, twice, and then handed it back to me.

"That's not ancient," he said. "That's not even a rock."

"What is it then?" I asked.

"A bone."

"Do you think that maybe it's a special kind of bone?"

"No." He opened up his magazine. "I don't."

"Oh," I said.

But I was not convinced.

I took the bone next door and showed it to Beverly Pagoda.

"Look," I told her, "I have found an ancient, magical bone."

Beverly Pagoda was ten years old and her mother (in what my mother referred to as "a mistake with long-term consequences") allowed her to wear makeup. Also, Beverly Pagoda owned a pair of white go-go boots with gold fringe tassels. I was forever trying to impress her; I had yet to succeed.

"A magical bone?" Beverly Pagoda said with disdain, but she opened up the screen door and stepped outside. She was wearing purple lipstick. My heart clenched in jealousy.

"Yes," I said, "magical." And then, in a desperate leap born of imagination (mine was always working overtime) and belief (that something about the

bone was special) and desire (to impress the sophisticated Beverly Pagoda), I said, "It makes wishes come true."

"Right," said Beverly. "I'm sure."

"Really," I said. "Here."

I held out the bone. She took it from me.

"Put your thumb in that hole. And make a wish out loud and your wish will come true," I said.

"Oh, please," said Beverly. But she put her thumb in the hollow and with her eyes wide open, staring straight at me, she said, "I wish for a pony."

She blinked her eyes and then she made a big production out of turning her head, first to the right and then to the left. She looked around the yard and out in the street and down the hill; finally, with a sarcastic flourish, she turned and looked behind her, peering into the Pagoda carport.

"Gee," she said, "that's funny. I don't see a pony."

"Give it back," I said.

"Oh," she said, smirking, handing me the bone, "I guess it only works for you."

"Yes," I said. "It will work for me."

And I believed it.

It was summertime. I was eight years old. My heart was a small motor inside me, humming, whirring, eager to prove itself. I had faith, desperation. I believed in magic.

"Watch," I said. I held the bone in my hand. I put my thumb where it

seemed to belong. I closed my eyes. "I wish for a pony," I said. I kept my eyes closed. I listened to the small-appliance whine of the crickets hidden in the bushes and the tall grass.

I waited. And when I opened my eyes, I looked past Beverly Pagoda, down the hill, to where our street dead-ended into orange groves and honeysuckle vines and overgrowth.

"What's that?" I said to Beverly.

"What?" she said.

"That," I said. "There."

"Where?"

"There," I said. And I pointed at the pony that was walking out of the orange groves, toward us.

"A pony," whispered Beverly. And then she shouted it: "A pony! A pony!" She ran down the hill screaming and whooping.

I followed behind her, more slowly, holding the bone in my hand, stunned, amazed, all-powerful. I had called a pony into being. I had, finally, impressed Beverly Pagoda.

This is a true story. You can ask my mother. She heard the shrieks and screams and came outside, wiping her hands on a green-and-white checked dish towel.

"Jesus Christ," she said. "It's a pony." She went inside to get the camera. When she came back outside, she took a picture—this picture—of me sitting on the pony's back. And what is in the picture and what is not sums up most of what I know about the writing process.

First, let's talk about the things that are not visible, the unseen things standing outside that square of light. One of those things is the man from the Penny Family Amusement Troop. He was

there, standing with his hat in his hands, waiting to take the pony (whose name was Sir Alfred) back to the carnival from which he had escaped.

Also, you will note that Beverly Pagoda is not in the picture. She was standing to the right of the Penny Family Amusement Troop man. Her arms were crossed and her lower, purple lip was sticking out. She was working herself up to a considerable fit of rage: the bone, after all, had worked

luck, through will power, through instinct, through defiance, through faith, through something unknowable, inexplicable, magical, I had conjured something from nothing.

And that is what writing is.

There is always somebody who will tell you that you cannot (the Beverly Pagodas of the world who try to work magic and fail). There is always somebody who will insist that the thing that moves you is not special at all (my brother). And, the world (the man



Kate DiCamillo, age eight

for me, not for her.

And the third thing you cannot see is the bone itself. It was there, however, curled in my right fist, resting in my sweating palm.

It would never work again.

And what of the things you *can* see? Well, there is me, atop the pony, triumphant, powerful. It did not matter to me that Beverly Pagoda was angry. It did not matter that I knew already that the bone would never work again. What mattered was this: somehow, through sheer audacity, through dumb

*It was summertime.
I was eight years old.
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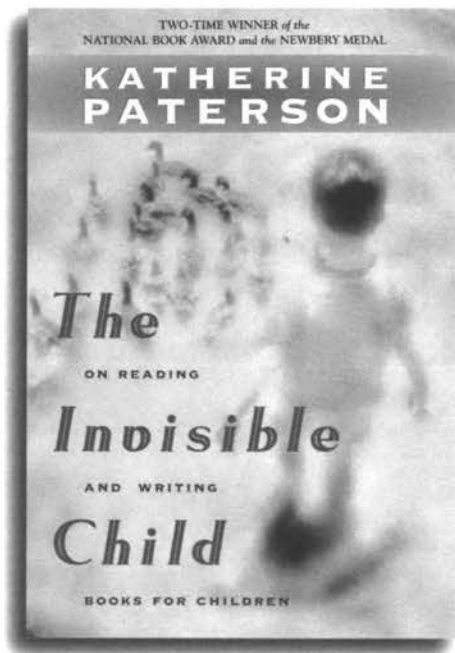
from the Penny Family Amusement Troop) will always (in the shape of editors and critics and the reading public and your mother and prize committees) come to claim the story. It is never, really, yours.

But when it works, none of that matters. When you find something (a word, a phrase, a name, a bone) worth wishing on, and when you believe in the magic of that thing and close your eyes and wish on it, and then suddenly where there was nothing (overgrowth, orange trees, a dead-end street, a disbeliever) there rises a story (there comes a pony) real, alive, well, there is nothing

The Invisible Child

ON READING AND WRITING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

BY KATHERINE PATERSON



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“...a smart, enthusiastic response to the best children’s books, old and new and a stimulating discussion of what stories mean to kids...Teachers, librarians, parents, and older students will want this.”

—*Booklist* (Boxed review)

better in the world.

Part of writing is what Raymond Carver called “being at your station,” showing up daily for the work, in spite of your moods or your health or your belief that the seemingly fickle muse has passed you by or is perched elsewhere, on a more deserving writer’s desk. You will find reference to this, the need to do your work in spite of everything, in most manuals on writing.

Part of writing is paying attention to the world around you: listening to the gas station attendant’s story of his wife’s betrayal; noting the sound that the screen door on the Fluff-o-matic Laundromat makes when it wheezes shut; knowing when the moon sets and rises and what phase it is in. And you will find reference to this need to pay attention in manuals on writing.

Part of writing is an understanding of the mechanics of story (narration and dialogue and transitions) and the basics of writing (punctuation, verb agreement, the elimination of dangling participles). And you will find reference to all of these things in manuals on writing.

What you will not find in writing manuals is a discussion of the central mystery of the whole undertaking, an acknowledgment that writing is some powerful amalgam, a potent stew of ego and defiance and desperation and magic and faith.

It is a pony walking up the hill out of an orange grove. It is a bone. The weight of it in your hand. The feel of your thumb in its groove. The knowledge that what you hold in your hand is special. It is a wish that comes true against all odds. And it is something that we will never fully understand. ~

Kate DiCamillo is the author of Because of Winn-Dixie (2000), a Newbery Honor Book, and The Tiger Rising (2001), a National Book Award finalist. Both books are published by Candlewick Press. This essay first appeared in a slightly different form in A View from the Loft.

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Artificial Intelligence

Machine-scored tests won't turn students into book lovers.

By Lee Galda

Once upon a time, children's books knew their place in the classroom. Works of literature (as opposed to textbooks, which were used for "real" school work) were checked out of the library for children to read when they finished their lessons, or when they had book reports due. "Story

books" sat on shelves behind the teacher's desk and were brought out at special times, perhaps just after lunch, when the teacher read aloud. Some books were smuggled into children's desks and read in surreptitious peeks when the teacher's back was turned. But that was once upon a time, and that time isn't now.

Today, children's literature shapes much of what occurs in classrooms. Children learn to read using picture books or excerpts of longer works, with or without computerized support systems. John Scieszka's wild and funny *The Math Curse* becomes an interactive read-aloud that helps students develop their mental math skills. One immigrant child's arrival in the United States becomes a shared experience and a social studies lesson with Aliko's *Mari-anthe's Story: Painted Words/Spoken Memories*. Seymour Simon's brilliant books about the universe allow students to see the marvels of space up close while giving them a livelier reading experience than that offered by science textbooks. In thousands of classrooms across the country, teachers are using children's

books in similar ways, to accomplish their curricular goals. Children learn to read and write, explore mathematical concepts, and study the physical world through such books. Best of all, they are experiencing fine literature. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Too often, children's books are used in a manner that might enhance the curriculum but doesn't offer the rich, meaningful experience that reading a good book should provide. It seems that as teachers we sometimes lose sight of the reasons we read, and the reasons we want our students to read—to imaginatively participate in new experiences through stories; to learn interesting information about the world through engaging nonfiction; to perceive the world in new ways through poetry—all of which lead to delight. Perhaps, because it's school, we're afraid to relax and enjoy ourselves. We're pressured for time and struggling to cover everything in the curriculum that needs to be covered. We're worried about tests and about our accountability for our students'

success. Pressures like these tend to nudge us toward packaged programs that take the delight out of reading.

Some popular programs ask children to select a book—usually a novel—from lists organized by reading levels, read the book, and then take a test. Computerized tests allow for easy and efficient accountability. We can see how students are progressing by watching how they move up through the reading levels. Library use goes up as students go to the library to check out books, and we see students reading literature that they have selected on their own (albeit from a limited pool). We may conclude that students are becoming more avid readers. Unfortunately, once children finish these programs, they often return to their former reading habits, which in too many cases means little or no reading at all. The points, the competition, or the grade spurred them on, not the books.

You might wonder why that's the case if the books are good ones, and most of them are. A look at the tests commonly used in such reading programs provides at least part of the answer. The questions, designed to be scored by a computer, force children to read in an unnatural manner. They are generally recall questions, written to assess a reader's literal comprehension. They often ask about superficial details. An example of this kind of

question, in reference to E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, might be, "What word did Templeton find in the trash at the fair?" Can you remember? Does it matter? Not really, but a computer can score it. A better question—such as "Do you think that Templeton helped Wilbur out of greed, or had he become a nicer rat by the end of the story?"—asks students to think about what they read, to form opinions, to make inferences: in short, to engage in the kind of behavior that good readers engage in all the time as they read. But such questions can't be scored by a computer.

If rote, literal-minded testing only happened occasionally, it wouldn't necessarily be cause for alarm, but across a school year and across the years of a child's schooling it happens repeatedly. The result is that students learn to read stories looking for the kind of details that are likely to show up on tests, rather than for the rich, open-ended experience that fiction, in particular, can offer.

The same thing can happen with commercially distributed "kits" or book extension activities. Often the discussion questions and extension ideas push students away from the experience of the book. For example, Kay Chora's *Albert's Toothache* is a delightful tale of a young turtle who tells his family he has a toothache. They all tell him that this is impossible because turtles don't have teeth. When his grandmother visits, she responds differently: she asks him where it hurts. When he points to his toe, resourceful Grandma solves the problem. This book appears in units on dental health; it also is frequently incorporated into studies of reptiles and amphibians. In neither case do the accompanying activities lead children to reflect on the book's central theme—the experience of having grownups and older siblings dismiss a problem they don't take the time to understand.

When we are engaged readers of literature, we transform words into mean-

ing even as we ourselves are transformed through our experience of that particular narrative. This potential for transformation is what makes the reading experience powerful. It is also why using stories as the basis for skill exercises or content learning, with little attention to the pleasure and power of those stories, works against the very goal we are working toward—the creation of fluent, avid readers who seek out books on their own, who want to spend time in the spell of a good book. Rather, poorly thought out questions

ask students to respond to questions that don't have a right answer. Even very young children can offer opinions and make simple inferences about character motivations. Asking questions that don't have a right answer says to children that their ideas are important and encourages them to think about what they read. It validates children's expertise as readers and allows them to think of themselves as makers of meaning. When these questions are asked in the context of a group discussion, they become the opportunity for literate con-



As we test students on their reading, what are we measuring?

and activities teach children to read for answers to questions. Many good readers learn to look at the questions first and skim the text for answers rather than engage in reading; struggling readers keep on struggling with a task that seems boring at best.

In contrast, thoughtfully constructed discussion questions, writing prompts, and project ideas can lead children back into a book they have read in such a way that their understanding of the story and of themselves is enriched. One easy way to accomplish this is to

versation about books. As children talk together about the stories they read, they come to realize the breadth and depth of ideas they can generate. They understand that not everyone responds in the same way to the same story, even as they all share a common understanding of what it is "about."

Open-ended questions can be powerful writing prompts, as can questions that ask students to consider the literary elements in a story. Teachers who use journals or other forms of exploratory writing to augment student reading

find that asking such questions creates opportunities for students to think more deeply about what they've read. Considering character traits and motivations, exploring the setting, considering plot structure, or discovering thematic elements in a story are all ways to pull readers back into texts, inviting more precise reading.

Carefully orchestrated projects can also help students discover more about the stories they read, especially if the projects are done with partners or in small groups. By making projects social, teachers create the opportunity for children to discuss their ideas with one another, articulating what they understand about their reading. For example, one project is for children to make a collage that represents a character from a story, using pictures, words, or a combination of both. If this is done as a shared venture, students have a concrete reason to talk about the character, even to argue about the character, and perhaps to discover that literary characters, like people, are complex and sometimes contradictory. Again, this kind of talk leads readers back to the book.

So let's continue to give children's books a significant place in our classrooms, but let's do it in a manner that invites children to explore their reading more deeply. Through this exploration, they will develop an appreciation of literature and a better understanding of themselves. Through narrative, we explore what it means to be human; we experience the lives of others in a way that expands the possibilities of our own. This is the reason to read books. This is why we all, adults and children alike, continue to turn to them as we do. ~

Lee Galda is a professor of children's literature at the University of Minnesota. A former classroom teacher, she is an active volunteer in schools and is coauthor of Literature and the Child, now in its fifth edition.

a poem for winter



The Snow Woman

Melted suddenly and was gone.

I saw her carrot nose. I saw her red yarn
mouth before the gray bird picked it up
and flew away. Her mouth makes his nest now.

The snow woman was a beauty. Everyone said so.
We did her in a ballgown so we wouldn't have to
carve her legs.

We put my old black dancing shoes
on the ground in front of her. As the sun
took her the shoes filled with water.

The snow woman had cranberries for hair,
ripped from the cranberry tree. She was not
flirtatious, but solemn; however, the red color
was great against the white.

Before she melted there was an amazing snowstorm.
She was buried and formless—shaggy—for three days
she wasn't really a woman until the wind blew the storm
off her body. Her yarn mouth hung down after the wind.
We went out and fixed her. She looked like a caught fish
for that moment.

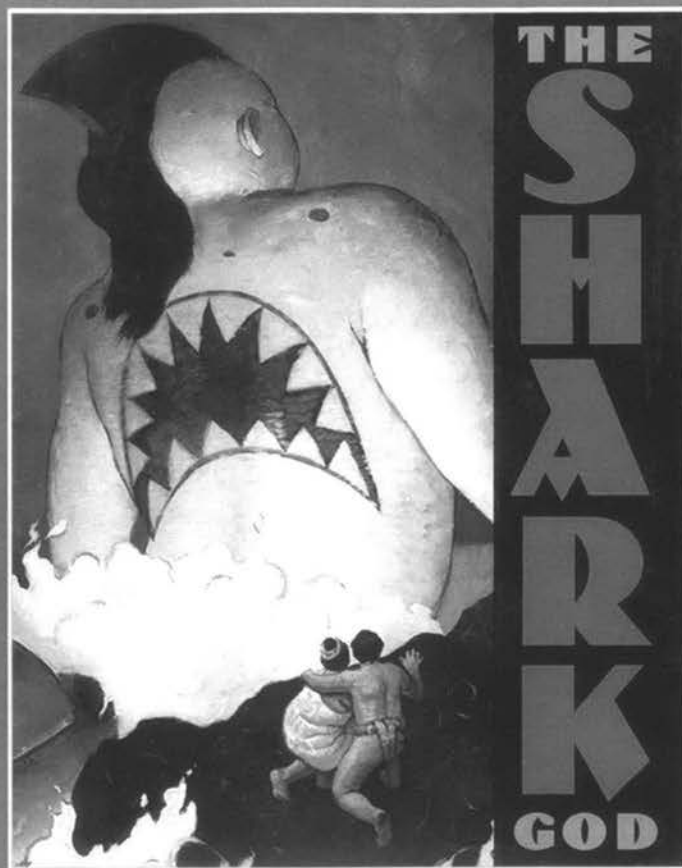
When she melted the backyard felt empty and boring,
like when your beloved brothers leave for college,
and there's no one to talk to late at night.

None of us talked to her. We just lived with her.
We built her with arms lifted, ready to embrace us.

—Deborah Keenan

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Children's books house a wide range of entertaining and unusual families.

By Mary Lou Burket

No two families are the same, but some are more boldly original than others. In classic children's novels, unconventional families win the reader's heart with their self-confidence and verve. Think of the idealistic Marches, the fun-loving Moffats, and the space-traveling Murrays—families set apart

by disadvantages, advantages, and quirks. Their spirit lives on in a number of distinctive, entertaining children's books.

Not that every member of such a family is eccentric. In Lynne Rae Perkins's *Clouds for Dinner* (Greenwillow, 1997), Janet is the straightforward child of parents happy to be living on a hill where they can watch the changing sky. Climbing eighty-seven steps to reach the view is a point of pride—it keeps them young. But Janet is *already* young and wants to live down low, in “a sensible house.”

Janet's aunt and uncle live in such a home, and when she visits them she revels in their big, proper meals and tidy beds. But one morning, she observes a flock of birds outside the window of their house—birds that look like blowing leaves until they lift into the sky. Awed by this event, Janet wishes she could share it with her mother, who is always urging her to “look at something or listen to something or smell something.”

The sophisticated theme—a child's adaptation to a family code that doesn't instinctively fit—might seem to be too subtle for young readers. Yet Perkins makes it clear with a plainspoken text

and witty illustrations that believably express a child's awareness of her world.

Children may also be agents of change in families, a realistic possibility in books for middle readers. Susie Morgenstern's *Secret Letters from 0 to 10* (Viking, 1998) is the story of Ernest Morlaisse, a quiet boy who leads a quiet life. His grandmother, who cares for him, is delicate and old—“really old, like the grandmothers in fairy

tales”—and Ernest fears disturbing her. He never goes out except to walk to school, “never raising his head, always taking the same old way.” From the reader's point of view, Ernest's circumscribed existence is too exquisitely odd to be depressing. Besides, it has an air of Gothic mystery. Where is Ernest's father, who disappeared when Ernest was a baby? What is in the coded letter that his grandmother reveres but cannot read? (Every Sunday, “Madame Morlaisse would extract the sheet of paper from its envelope, carefully unfold it, and stare at it as if it contained the key to all the secrets of the universe.”)

Ernest, who has never been hugged or hurried, is shaken to life by a girl at school—Victoria de Montardent, a bossy romantic who loves as only a ten-year-old can love. Victoria lives in a sprawling flat with two contented parents and a noisy band of thirteen brothers. Her family is, in its way, as unorthodox as Ernest's, but it is also blessed with something Ernest needs—human warmth. Enlivened by that warmth, Ernest grows. He looks for ways to make things happen. “Grandmother,” he dares to ask, “is my father dead?” Important questions have disarming answers in this beguiling novel.

Betsy Byars's *The Not-Just-Anybody Family* (Delacorte, 1986) begins with Junior Blossom, age



Illustration by Lynne Rae Perkins, from Clouds for Dinner

seven, falling off the barn roof on the same day that his granddad, whom they all call Pap, goes to jail for disturbing the peace. It's trouble, all right, but is it an emergency? Junior's sister Maggie thinks it is and wants to call their mother, who is traveling on the rodeo circuit, for help. But brother Vern, who once tried to reach their mother before, to no avail, insists they handle matters by themselves.

By alternating point of view among the family members, Betsy Byars builds suspense and sympathy. Everyone, including Mud the dog (who winds up lost and far from home) misjudges something, and everyone, from time to time, despairs, as the story progresses from place to place: a hospital ward, a Dairy Queen, a taxi cab, a tree. Only the reader sees the full picture and knows the true extent of each danger, which is never very great.

Throughout this comedy of errors, we sense the Blossoms' deep attachment to each other. We sense it when Vern uses a birdcall to communicate with Pap. We sense it when Junior



*Illustration by Jaqueline Rogers,
from The Not-Just-Anybody Family*

thinks of home ("Mud drinking loudly out of the toilet, Pap grinding his teeth"). And we sense it when Mud returns at last, reuniting them all: "Mud leapt up and down, throwing himself at the door. His happy face

appeared framed in the high glass pane every time he jumped." This wonderful story is the first of five about the irrepressible Blossoms.

In Polly Horvath's *The Trolls* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), three children are looked after by their colorful Aunt Sally while their parents are abroad. They've never met their aunt, but she entrances them with stories of her childhood in Canada, near the ocean and the woods, the home of biting clams and cougars. Funny as they are, her stories suggest a family conflict that has never been resolved.

The children wonder why their father has never told them about these fascinating times with Grandma Evelyn, Great-aunt Hattie, and the rest. Aunt Sally doesn't say, but she is adamant that natural disasters aren't as fearful as "the ones that are inside of you, waiting to happen, like what your Uncle John and Uncle Edward and I did to your father." This naturally makes the children wonder even more.

Perhaps Aunt Sally's loyalty to Pee Wee, the youngest of the children, is a clue. When his sisters thoughtlessly disparage him, she is his defender. And she always calls him Frank, his given name. "You're a regular giant," she says, explaining why the name Pee Wee doesn't fit him. "Why, if a boy your age was that tall in Canada, they would make him skip grade school and go right into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

Aunt Sally is a vital force, a maker of costumes, a player of games, a baker of cookies, a sage—all in all, according to the children she befriends, a "satisfactory grownup." She doesn't try to change the past or to explain it. Instead, she asks, "If life must be short, must it also be dreary?" Which suggests another question: If families must be flawed, must they also be sad? ~

Mary Lou Burket is a contributing editor to Riverbank Review.

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Chris Crutcher

In stories about atypical athletes, this novelist explores what it means to play fair.

By Deb Kruse-Field

Chris Crutcher takes growing up seriously in his young adult novels, adding depth to the “sports story” genre with insightful character study and balancing painful circumstances with sensitive humor. Among other awards and honors, he recently received the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement in writing for teens.

Before he thought about writing for young adults, Crutcher was already listening to their stories in his work as a teacher and then as the director of an alternative K-12 school in Oakland, California. Eventually, he became a child protection specialist and family therapist in Spokane, Washington. At about this time, Crutcher wrote his first novel, *Running Loose* (1983), published (like all his subsequent work for young readers) by Greenwillow. Set in Trout, Idaho, a fictional community patterned after Crutcher’s hometown of Cascade, *Running Loose* is the story of a high school athlete named Louie Banks, who, in his senior year, grapples with his decision to quit the football team in response to the actions of his racist coach.

Drawing on his experience as a teacher and a therapist, as well as on his own adolescence, Crutcher went on to write *Stotan!* (1986), *Crazy Horse Electric Game* (1987), and *Chinese Handcuffs* (1989), establishing himself as a respected writer for young adults.

Crutcher may be best known for his poignant and memorable characters, like the sarcastic, smart-as-a-whip girl in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*

(1993), whose physical and emotional scars from abuse prevent her from trusting others, and Bo Brewster in *Ironman* (1995), whose temper lands him in an anger management group.

In addition to his novels, Crutcher has published a popular story collection, *Athletic Shorts* (1991), featuring characters and situations that are at once believable and extraordinary, like the grossly overweight Angus Bethune, who has two sets of homosexual parents and is elected Winter Ball king as a joke. Crutcher has also written one novel for adults (*Deep End*, published by William Morrow in 1992) and has written screenplays for several of his young adult novels.

In Crutcher’s latest novel, *Whale Talk* (2001), a tough yet sensitive young man named T. J. denounces the elitist jock culture at his high school and creates a swim team out of a group of fringe characters who have little swimming ability but enormous courage. *Whale Talk* is a beautifully layered story of community that, like Crutcher’s other books, deftly combines grit and comedy.

Crutcher continues to write and work part time as a child and family therapist in Spokane. This interview was

conducted in St. Paul at the annual convention of the Upper Midwest Booksellers Association, in October.

DKF: *Since September 11, feelings of anger, fear, loss, and gradual acceptance of a changed world have clouded our country. I’m curious about your reaction to recent events, both as a therapist and as a writer.*

CC: It is a changed world. Day to day it may or may not seem different, but something has been inserted into our consciousness, and I don’t know how that’s going to turn out. One thing I’ve noticed already, though, is that people are being more decent to each other.

And it’s kind of nice to have the flag back. Before September 11, you couldn’t have gotten me to put a flag on my car. It would have meant something very different from liberty, to me. It would have meant that I was closed-minded, and too conservative to consider other people’s points of view.

I don’t think we have any idea of the number of good things and the number of scary things that are going to come out of this. We have to keep an open mind and wait to see how it all unfolds.

*You’ve written about our responsibility to include kids in communities rather than isolate them. In your books, kids who don’t fit into traditional groups often form their own relationships, like the friendship between Sarah and Eric in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. *Making kids feel included and part of a community seems especially important right now.**

In the wake of Columbine and other

incidents, we really missed the boat in terms of inclusion. If we knew what it was like to feel as alone as some kids feel—even the shooters—we wouldn't tolerate it. It's our responsibility to deal with those kids and acknowledge their isolation.

"Zero tolerance"—what a foolish idea. It gives us a false sense of protection. Telling kids to stay away from other kids because they're bad influences: what kind of arrogance is that? Don't help this kid. Isolate him more until he learns to quit cussing or smoking or doing drugs. When we do that, when we say we will validate you if you act the way we want you to, and invalidate you when you don't, then we pay. Everybody pays.

The manuscript that ultimately became Whale Talk was originally about a school shooting. Then Columbine happened, and you told your editor, Susan Hirschman, to throw it out. What was it like to give up all that work and start again?

A lot of people have told me they thought that was a wonderful move, but it wasn't as noble as it sounds. I turned on my TV as the kids were coming out of Columbine High School. First I had to get past the shock of what was happening. And then I realized that my book had just gone into the tank. It wasn't that I was afraid to tackle the subject. I just wasn't going to exploit it, and I couldn't feel bad about that decision. I only had to think about the people who lived in Littleton, Colorado.

So, I knew I had a trashed story, but I figured I could sell it for parts. When I went back to it I had T.J., and some other characters were floating around as well. All I had to do was get an incident going, like the business of this bizarre swim team, and go with it.

T.J.'s father is a powerful character in Whale Talk—a motorcycle guy with a gruff exterior, grappling with feelings of guilt and atonement in relation to a horrible accident.



Chris Crutcher

I love it when a character comes to me full-blown like that. His story of running over the little kid is a real story that I heard about when I was in elementary school. The part that moved me most, that found its way into the book, was the highway patrol's letting him go all the way home before they told him what had happened, which I thought was hugely compassionate. But the thing I used to think about was, God, there were these three hours when his life had already turned over on him, and he didn't know it yet. I've always been interested in that kind of situation, when something awful happens. There's always a moment when you imagine stepping back over that sliver of time and doing it differently. But you can't.

I appreciate the fact that you let your adult characters show their weaknesses.

In adolescent literature you get the perspectives of a lot of kids, but not of adults. As a therapist, I'm always looking for the one adult who ever stood up, or who will stand up and make a connection with a young person who is

struggling. That's the character who can say what the fifty-five-year-old Chris Crutcher sees. It's what Mr. Nak does in *Ironman*, and what the coach does in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. I always have one character who lets me tell the adult side.

We think that we're not supposed to let kids see our vulnerabilities, but in fact, when we do, we become people to turn to. If you know that I've gone through the same thing that you've gone through, you're going to be a lot more willing to tell me your story.

Kids see and hear horrific stories in the media. Yet many of your books are banned because of their gritty content. What are your thoughts on that?

I'm censored by people who are afraid to sit down and talk about real things with their kids. They think that if they can keep their kids ignorant, that's the safe thing for them to do. I applaud that they want to do the safe thing, but I don't applaud their doing it in that fashion.

I've never written about an issue that I haven't heard about from a kid. I've never used language I didn't use or hear as a kid, or now hear from kids. What offends one person is ordinary speech for another. The minute we refuse to listen to the truth in its native tongue, we take ourselves off that very short list of people a young person will turn to. We can get all uptight and say, "I don't want you looking at this" or "I don't want you reading about that." What is that going to accomplish but ignorance?

In the preface to "A Brief Moment in the Life of Angus Bethune," you write that when you need a story idea, you go running.

I have a short attention span, so sitting in front of a computer or sitting with a pen, forcing myself when I don't have much to work on, is just idiotic. Running has a cadence to it. There's a meditative quality to the way your mind flows when you're running. I run with a small tape recorder. I'm playing with

characters, playing with incidents, and all of a sudden I get the pictures of the events that are going to make the story work. I never have true writer's block, unless I'm just overloaded and not paying attention. I've thought about trying to get a tax write-off for running shoes.

That sense of sports being more than something physical is a strong theme in your writing. Friends undergo a week of training that is emotionally as well as physically rigorous in Stotan! Louie quits football in Running Loose because of a moral conflict with the coach. T. J. assembles a swim team out of guys who aren't even swimmers. These aren't typical sports stories. What led you to write this type of story?

I grew up in a town that was so small, everybody played sports. Otherwise there weren't enough people on the team. But I was keenly aware that the athletes led privileged lives in school. I always hated that—and I was one of the privileged ones.

I worked in my dad's service station, like Louie Banks. By ten o'clock at night, we were the only place in town still open. So guys who were part of the in crowd—and also guys who weren't—would stop in and sit around and talk. I'd hear their stories, and I think my sense of fairness was jabbed at an early age, because it was clear that the school and the townspeople didn't treat some of them as well as they treated me, and I felt guilty and a little angry. I love athletics, and I love physical testing, but I hate it when it becomes political.

T. J. is a mixed-race character, and I notice you often include characters from other cultures in your work. Some people argue that authors shouldn't write outside of their race or culture. What do you think about that?

The color of your skin is a function of how close your ancestors lived to the equator, way long ago. Certainly there are cultural differences, and I'm very sensitive to them. I was a dumb white guy running a school in inner-city Oak-

land, and I learned a lot because of my ignorance. But ultimately, you find a way to put yourself in other people's shoes. I don't want to be presumptuous about things I don't know about, but I refuse to believe we can't work out our racial differences by looking at what is similar about us rather than what is different. The similarities far outweigh the differences.

You've taught, directed a school, and worked as a therapist. How directly do you draw upon these experiences to create your fiction?

Any story I pulled out of thin air would be a thin story. As a teacher and as a therapist I've heard amazing stories

*The minute we refuse
to listen to the truth in
its native tongue,
we take ourselves off
that very short list of
people a young person
will turn to.*

of cruelty, heroism, and everything in between. I'm not going to stick people's lives into my books, but the characters, the incidents, and the patterns that take shape in my mind come from the lives of people I have known. You never run out of stories if you spend enough time listening to people talk.

Do you ever struggle to balance your roles, the therapist in you who wants to give advice and the writer who just wants to tell a good story?

Always go with the writer. The therapist can wind up being a preacher, which is actually bad therapy. As a therapist, I listen to people and act as a

guide. As a writer, too, you're looking at the shape of somebody's life: there are things that fit and things that probably don't matter. The trick is to find the things that matter.

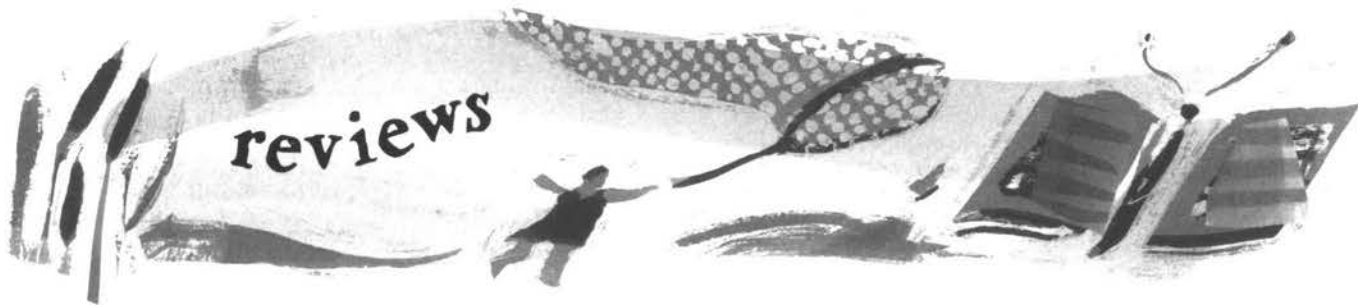
What do you take from your own adolescence?

One of the reasons I write about adolescence is that I do remember mine. I draw the voice from there. Each of the narratives I've written draws in some way on my seventeen-year-old self. My characters are far more heroic, usually, than I would have been, and the power struggle I put into a book may be ten times the power struggle I ever got into, but the process is the same, the response is the same. I remember my sense of what was fair and what wasn't fair. I had a meteoric temper when things weren't right.

Even when your characters face rough circumstances, you weave humor into their voices. Angus Bethune is ridiculed; Bo Brewster discovers that his father is plotting against him. Yet they remain resilient in the midst of pain. In your writing and in real tragedy, what is the role of humor?

It's a healer. Anytime we can laugh we feel better than when we can't, and it puts things in perspective. As a writer, I find balance in humor. If I'm going to tell stories about fathers burning their three-year-old babies against woodstoves, I'd better have a balance for that. Nothing exists without its opposite. The tougher I'm going to get, the more humor I'm going to need. From the character's point of view, it allows him to get over the really tough spots. I work in child abuse and neglect. You need a huge dose of humor to be able to get through things. So that's the strategy that I use in life. If it works in life, it ought to work in a book. ~

Deb Kruse-Field, a former fifth-grade teacher, is now a graduate student of children's literature at the University of Minnesota. She lives with her husband in St. Paul.



Picture Books

The Boys Team

By Amy Schwartz

ATHENEUM

40 pages, Ages 3–6, \$16.95

ISBN 0-689-84138-8

Kindergarten-age friends Oscar, Eddie, and Jacob are a tightly knit trio. You can best see how close they are on Halloween, when, as narrator Jacob proudly announces:

I was Darth Vader.
Oscar was
Darth Vader.
Eddie was
Darth Vader.

In Amy Schwartz's priceless portrait of them, with their matching light sabres, glowing red eyes, and plastic jack-o'-lanterns, the three Darths look both invincible and sweet—though of course they would object to the latter. *The Boys Team* practically vibrates with the energy they exude when they are together. In Star Wars terms, the Force is definitely with them.

As Schwartz has demonstrated in previous picture books, such as *A Teeny, Tiny Baby* and *Some Babies*, she is adept at depicting the qualities children possess at various ages. Here Jacob's narrative is as rambunctious and mercurial as he is. Sometimes the text rhymes, sometimes it doesn't. One moment he

proclaims the three friends' motto to be "Boys only!"; the next he admits that on Tuesday they let Sophie P. play ball with them. Then on Wednesday Julia C. joins in, and on Thursday they can't really leave out Julia D. And, as with most young children, Jacob's mood can change as swiftly as the rules do. On one telling double-page spread, only a brief time-out and a couple of inches of white space separate a fight with Julia D. (she menaces Jacob with her doll, and he hurls the doll off the stoop) from a convivial scene in which the two of them share a snack. There isn't always complete harmony within the ranks of "the boys team," either. But the friction quickly subsides, leaving Oscar, Eddie, and Jacob to bound blithely off to the next activity, be it painting, swimming, or soccer.



Illustration by Amy Schwartz, from *The Boys Team*

Schwartz's ink-and-watercolor artwork conveys the three friends' near-constant movement as they squirm during naptime or race around the playground wearing blankets as capes. It also attentively records the texture of their everyday lives. Her pictures are alive with color and pattern, but not overwhelmingly so. The brightly clad characters in the foreground and background are given plenty of room in which to distinguish themselves. Thus, readers can take time to observe the other children and teachers at school or the moms sitting with their kids at the Chinese restaurant without ever losing track of who the book's real stars are. "We are Mutant Sharks! We take over the park!" proclaims Jacob. Today kindergarten, tomorrow the world!

—Renée Victor

Four in All

By Nina Payne

Illustrated by Adam Payne

FRONT STREET

32 pages, Age 5 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 1-886910-16-2

The big world and a child's place in it are given solid and imaginative expression in this picture-book collaboration between a mother and son. Poet Nina Payne offers up an inventory of objects and ideas that serves both as a vocabulary lesson and as an expression of the essential harmony and balance in the world. The rhyming couplets that form the

poem mirror that harmony in their deceptively simple, pleasing rhythm:

one two three four
roof window chimney door

bird fish bear snake
ocean river puddle lake

Each grouping of four nouns receives its own two-page spread, an intricate cut-paper landscape created by Adam Payne. The paper used for these exquisite collages is wonderfully textural, threaded with flecks and dyed in a range of organic hues. In each scene there is a pleasing balance of large shapes—soft green hillsides, a midnight blue background for moon and stars—and tiny detail: individual blades of grass, the scales on a fish, the dainty white petals of water lilies. Only the sharpest eyes will discern some details: in the spread for “one two three four,” most readers will pick out one bumblebee, two ants, and three ladybugs, but some may have trouble spotting the four minuscule elves hiding in the grass.

The arc of action is playful and inspired, making a child’s imaginative adventure the ground on which basic concepts are learned. In the first spread (“eyes ears nose mouth”), the girl who looks out at us brightly, beneath the leaves of a sheltering tree, seems ready to take in the world that surrounds her. Next she stands at an intersection of ribboning paths that extend temptingly in four directions (“east west north south”). Armed with a lantern and a loaf of bread, she embarks on an outing, marching through a field (“oats wheat corn rye”) and crossing a narrow bridge, seemingly suspended across the heavens (“sun moon stars sky”).

Her destination turns out to be an island, where the ingredients of a cozy home lie heaped in a friendly jumble on the ground. Dressed in overalls, this capable girl sets to work: she is comfortable on a ladder and adept with both a



Illustration by Adam Payne, from *Four in All*

hammer and a paintbrush. After constructing her home away from home (what child doesn’t dream of this?) she balances on its rooftop weather vane, blowing a trumpet. Her call is heard by four creatures across the water (bird, fish, bear, and snake) who hop into a boat and head over. After sharing a meal with her new companions, the girl must return to her real home. Her animal friends serenade her as she departs.

Concept books for young children typically feature simple, generalized forms in bright colors. *Four in All*, in contrast, invites close scrutiny in a well-lit room. Its muted colors and extraordinary delicacy of design may find a more appreciative audience in children who are beyond the age of learning the words in the poem, but not above thinking about them in a new way.

—Martha Davis Beck

Hushabye

By John Burningham

KNOPF

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$14.95

ISBN 0-375-81414-0

The most prized bedtime books are those whose words, rhythms, and images lull the children who read them. John Burningham’s *Hushabye*, originally published in England, is a melodic goodnight poem. Filled with

easy rhymes and gentle, subtly shifting rhythms, the book has a comfortingly steady design as well. Full-page color illustrations on the right-hand pages are balanced by words and small black-and-white sketches on the left. Through the first half of the book, Burningham introduces his droopy-eyed characters—animals, birds, fish, a baby, and even the man in the moon—in the color illustrations. From the facing sketches, the reader may guess why each one is sleepy: The three tired bears climbing the stairs with bags in tow are shown in the sketch opposite pushing a broken-down truck. The baby who stands in a boat, leaning on his oar and rubbing his eyes, has a right to be tired if he spent the day rowing past lighthouses, avoiding treacherous rocks in the sea.

The center spread separates the sleepy pages from the sleeping ones, stating the case plainly: “Now we are tired, we need to lie down. It’s time to sleep for the night. When morning comes, we will wake up again. Tomorrow will be a new day.” The following pages show each character happily asleep. Now the facing sketches and words foretell tomorrow’s activities: the sleeping goose will “fly off again when it’s light” and the dreaming frog will “hop off once more in the morn.” You, too, must sleep now, says the

coaxing parent to the restive child, reading the last words of this yawn-inspiring book: “Your head’s on the pillow. You’ll soon be asleep.”

It’s the oldest story in the world, yet one that needs to be retold over and over, especially to small children who live in the moment and cannot conceive of “later” or “tomorrow.” *Hushabye* promises those for whom there is only the here and now that everything will still be here when they awaken.

There is much to smile over in this understated book, but nothing to break the slumber-inducing mood. Internal rhymes (“The baby’s asleep in the boat that’s afloat”) give the language a gentle swing and sway. The illustrations have a solidity of color and simplicity of line reminiscent of children’s artwork. Soothed by the sight of the world sleeping around them and reassured by the promise of a new yet familiar day, even reluctant sleepers will succumb to *Hushabye*’s soporific spell.

—*Krystyna Poray Goddu*

I Lost My Dad

By Taro Gomi

KANE/MILLER

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$12.95

ISBN 1-929132-04-2

Information is alternately concealed and revealed in this cagey book about an unintentional game of hide-and-seek between father and son. The nerve-racking events take place in a department store, where pillars and room dividers block sight lines for people of small stature—and make those short individuals hard to find, too. Taro Gomi makes use of die-cuts and demi-pages to simulate a child’s limited view as he searches for his “lost” father.

The initial spread (“I was looking at the toys when...”) pictures a smiling boy playing with a miniature crane.

Next to him stands a frowning, mustached fellow in a suit and striped tie. All is well until the turn of an L-shaped page masks the image of the boy and isolates the grumpy man on the left foreground. The boy reappears, alone in the right background, and cries, “My Dad disappeared! I lost my Dad!”

The boy runs through the store, ignored by clerks and casual shoppers (some disciplining their own children). He thinks he sees the top of his father’s head above a fashion display (“There! That’s his hat”), but turning the page reveals the whole hat—on a mannequin. Visual tricks keep coming as he searches. The boy grimaces with worry, then leaps up in astonishment each time he is disappointed, providing a strong sense of before-and-after, hopefulness and letdown.

Leave it to Gomi, who rose to notoriety with *Everyone Poops*, to set one scene in a men’s room. “Which one is he?” the boy wonders, staring at the backs of two men using the urinals; a third man walks away, zipping his fly, and the feet of a fourth man show under the door of a stall. When a flap is lifted, the standing men turn their heads to look at the boy, and neither is his father: “Oh no! Not again! Where could he be?” This perfectly timed sequence alleviates the dreadful tension, and the child and his father, going opposite directions on escalators, soon spot each other through a V-shaped slice in a page. Their reunion brings catharsis, but strangely fails to suggest real relief. The father’s glum frown stays solidly put, and he does not exchange a hug or even a smile with his son. Without further ado, they resume shopping.

Gomi paints iconic figures in angular, planed settings, and his saturated watercolor hues fairly shout against the bright white backgrounds. The stylized illustrations complement the utterly basic, thoroughly effective cut-

out pages. Going through this book is like exploring a maze of office cubicles; Gomi’s understated paper engineering creates a surprising illusion of three-dimensional space. Despite a ho-hum conclusion, this taut story convincingly presents a child’s take on a scary situation, one that adults might casually underestimate.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

“Let’s Get a Pup!” Said Kate

By Bob Graham

CANDLEWICK

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$14.99

ISBN: 0-7636-1452-1

Bob Graham seems to be the only living picture-book creator to realize that people in their twenties are having children—and he is extremely friendly about it. The parents in this book (as well as some of his others) have wild hairdos and tattoos; dad sports a couple of earrings, and mom wears one on her nose. Their house is a cheerful, thoroughly modern mess, complete with music magazines on the floor and a television set that is, on occasion, actually watched! Clothing is casual Friday to the nth degree, every day of the week. With an easygoing charm, Graham lets us in on what truly defines this young couple—how much they love their daughter, Kate.

And she wants a pup! Ever since Kate’s cat died, her bed has felt lonely. An impromptu visit to the Rescue Center is agreed upon. Breakfast goes uneaten, clothes are thrown on, and a two-page spread opens up to depict long aisles of cages holding every kind of dog you might run into at a shelter. Graham’s rhythmic wordplay suggests the overwhelming nature of the place: “They found...big dogs, small dogs, sniffers and sleepers, wire-haired, short-haired, scratchers, and leapers.... They saw a lot of dogs. Then they saw... Dave.” Graham knows how it is when

you fall in love with a dog. Dave is the perfect pup—everything the family hoped for: he’s small, cute, and brand-new. But then on their way out of the Rescue Center, they run into Rosie, the most humble and lovable old gray dog imaginable: “It was difficult for her to get to her feet, but she stood, it seemed, almost politely.” Graham perfectly captures this family’s wistful longing. They take little Dave home but cannot forget big, old Rosie.

They go back for her, of course, and Dave’s chaotic energy is tempered by Rosie’s warm, mellow presence in their home. With simple, cartoonish lines and bright colors, Graham unfailingly snares the emotions of the moment. Here he provides sweet glimpses of family life with the welcome addition of two furry friends. By the end of this heartwarming story, Kate’s bed is no longer lonesome. Dave and Rosie have joined her: “Their weight is comfortable and reliable, and will stop Kate’s bed from floating away into the night.”

—Christine Alfano

Nell & Fluffy

By Anne Liersch

Illustrated by Christa Unzner

NORTH-SOUTH BOOKS

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$15.95

ISBN: 0-7358-1424-4

Children are capable of feeling intense anguish and remorse, not that you’d know it from most picture books. Happier realms are usually their domain, and perhaps rightly so. But periodically it’s refreshing to find a picture book that offers an honest portrayal of a child who is grappling with darker emotions. Nell, of *Nell & Fluffy*, does something very wrong in this story, and the repercussions of her actions have the impact of a bruise to the heart.

The book’s first sentence proclaims that “Nell loved animals,” and we see from the scads of stuffed creatures that



Illustration by Bob Graham, from “Let’s Get a Pup!” Said Kate

fill her bedroom, as well as the tiger slippers on her feet, that she is, indeed, enamored. “The only thing she was missing was an animal that was actually alive.” That’s a big step for a kid—from nonchalantly tending a well-worn teddy bear to the consistent care and maintenance required by a living thing. But, like any child, when Nell receives a guinea pig for her sixth birthday she is overjoyed—and certain she can handle the responsibility.

Nell does love Fluffy. She feeds him a fresh carrot every day, lets him run around the kitchen, and never gets angry when he mistakes her toys for food. Best of all, Nell talks to Fluffy—and he seems to understand her. When she begins first grade, however, the other children in her class boast about their bigger, better pets. Nell’s disappointment gnaws at her. She figures that if she is ever to get a dog or a cat or a horse—a “big kid’s pet”—she will have to get rid of Fluffy. A child’s logic ensues: consequences are shoved aside, an ideal future brightly imagined. Nell puts Fluffy into a box with straw and some carrots and leaves him in some bushes near the corner store.

When she refuses to tell her parents what has happened to Fluffy, Nell is sent to her room. The slow realization of the awful thing she’s done is underscored by Christa Unzner’s astute, mood-setting ink-and-watercolor illustrations: Nell sits in her bedroom, her face a badge of worry and self-doubt; all the stuffed animals in her room face her, and their unblinking stares compound Nell’s shame.

Fluffy is returned four agonizing days later, on the eve of Nell’s seventh birthday, by the neighborhood lady who happened to find him. It may be a puzzle to some readers how loving parents could withhold this happy news from their truly mournful daughter. (They wait to surprise her until the uncharacteristically somber present-opening time rolls around.) But Nell’s elation and relief at Fluffy’s return are palpable. When she gazes at her beloved pet from her bed that evening, all of her toys gaze too, this time with a welcoming air of forgiveness. This sensitive story allows children to see something important—that other children sometimes make awful mistakes.

—Christine Alfano

South, North, Back & Forth

Loon Summer

By Barbara Santucci

Illustrated by Andrea Shine

EERDMANS

32 pages, Age 5 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-8028-5182-7

Two Homes

By Claire Masurel

Illustrated by

Kady MacDonald Denton

CANDLEWICK

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$14.99

ISBN 0-7636-0511-5

To & Fro, Fast & Slow

By Durga Bernhard

WALKER

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$15.95

ISBN 0-8027-8782-1

Divorce can be harder on children than adults realize. Even in families where lines of communication remain open, there is a natural wish on the part of children for their once intact family to be reunited, even if they recognize the troubles that tore the family apart.

Loon Summer tells the story of a girl spending her first vacation up at the lake without Mom. Familiar activities Rainie enjoys with her dad have an empty feeling caused by her mother's absence. Barbara Santucci gives Rainie's sadness the space it needs in this quiet, sensitively conceived story, yet the summer she describes is also one filled



Illustration by Andrea Shine, from
Loon Summer

with pleasures and new discoveries. It's true, as Rainie says, that things are different, but her father's promise that "some parts will be the same" refers not only to shared activities at a favorite place, but also to the love both of Rainie's parents have for her, even when one of them isn't with her.

Some differences offer opportunities for growth, or simply for a new experience. In summers past, Rainie's mom would bait her daughter's hook when they went fishing, help her to create necklaces made of violets, and make jam from berries the three of them picked together. While Rainie can't help feeling tearful as she slides a flower necklace over her head, she is proud when she sticks a wiggly worm onto the hook, and she enjoys eating the sweet blueberries as she and her dad pick

them. This is also the summer that Rainie learns to swim underwater, like the young loons she and her dad enjoy watching on the lake. The loons that, as Rainie points out to her father, stay together for life provide a metaphor for both what is lost and what remains.

Andrea Shine's soft watercolors create a lyrical mood that perfectly suits the story. She captures the shimmering quality of sunlight on water, the drama in a changing sky, and the multitude of hues in a strip of woods or grassy wetland. Slivers of cut paper add subtle accents to the landscapes in each painting.

Sometimes divorce happens when children are so young, a life with two homes is the life they know from the get-go. *Two Homes* offers a warm and lively picture of a young child (not obviously a girl or boy) who travels comfortably between two loving environments.

"Here I am! I am Alex," the pixieish child declares, pointing happily at a bold self-portrait. In the next spread, Alex's parents are introduced in similar fashion: they each smile down from lovingly drawn pictures. With these preliminary introductions out of the way, the reader is given a tour of the double world that is home for this child.

The scenes pictured in *Two Homes* are simple and the text spare, suitable for sharing with very young children. In each home Alex has a cozy bed-

room, one with a bunk bed and a basketball hoop, the other with a fish tank and an easel to paint at. Both environments are pleasantly cluttered—they look loved and lived in. Blocks spill across the floor at Daddy’s house; dress-up costumes are tossed about at Mommy’s. Home is a place where Alex swings back and forth in a rocking chair, playing cards with Daddy. It is also a place to curl up in an armchair, reading a book with Mommy. It is wherever Alex happens to be.

Durga Bernhard’s *To & Fro, Fast & Slow* focuses on the experience of a child who spends some of her time in the country with her mom and some in the city with her dad. On the colorful cover, the girl herself divides the image into quadrants, her arms and legs extended so that she forms an X. The title appears above and below her; city buildings (and a leaping black cat) are to her left, rolling hills (and a bounding black dog) to her right. As the cover suggests, the mood of this book is energetic and its design is lively, full of



Illustration by Kady MacDonald Denton, from *Two Homes*

creative touches that mirror the ingenuity required to keep two different households peacefully in tandem. While some children of divorced parents are uncomfortably caught “in between,” this girl nimbly negotiates her way “to and fro.”

The book’s endpapers show curving roads that end as arrows, one leading “to Mom’s,” the other “to Dad’s.” Soft scenes from each landscape, rural and urban, are nestled in the curves of each road. Indeed, the book proper begins with the girl in transit, heading south with her mother in the top half of the page and north with her dad in the bottom half. A white stuffed bunny sits beside her, whichever car she rides in, and on the next spread (“back & forth”) we see her being dropped off at each location

by the parent whose visit has ended, the white bunny sticking out of a pink knapsack that makes the trip too.

Most of the pages in *To & Fro, Fast & Slow* feature inset images or are sliced in half—some horizontally, some diagonally—to show parallel pastimes at the girl’s two homes, or to contrast different activities, making the point that each home is a place for work and play, for quiet and noisy times, and for occasions that are both sad and happy. While the word pairs that describe each scene relate most obviously

to physical activity, the book’s comforting subtext asserts that this child’s full range of moods can be expressed and her different needs met in both environments. She is shown doing fun things with each of her parents—going on a bike ride and building a snow fort with her mother, going to the movies and sharing ice cream sodas with her father—and also spending time on her own. The quiet moments and the loving expressions on her parents’ faces help to settle the book’s mood, keeping it from feeling chaotic. The book ends on an intimate note, with two images that together fill a circle. In the top half, the girl kisses her country dog “hello”; in the bottom half, she hugs her city cat “good-bye.”

Bernhard’s illustrations are vibrant and appealing and, most of all, grounded in the immediate world of a child. The vision expressed in *Two & Fro, Fast & Slow* is that of a young life that has been fundamentally divided but is nonetheless kept in balance.

—Martha Davis Beck

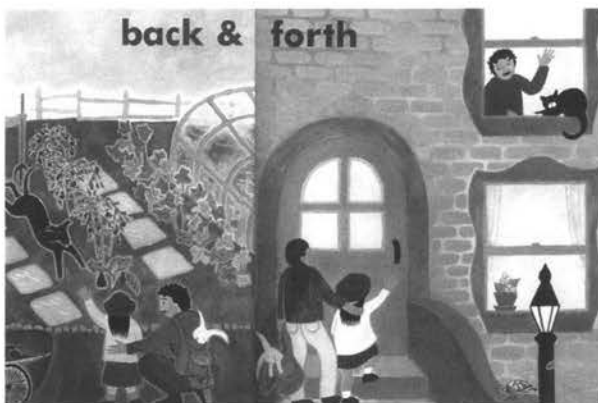


Illustration by Durga Bernhard, from *To & Fro, Fast & Slow*

A Place to Sleep

By Holly Meade

CAVENDISH

32 pages, Ages 4-7, \$15.95

ISBN 0-7614-5096-3

A massive brown bear fills the first page of Holly Meade's enchanting book about animals' sleep habits, and he becomes the first subject of its musing:

When this bear needs
to snooze, where
does he choose to
lay down his furry self?

Twelve animals in all (including humans) are followed to their favorite bedtime lairs in an intriguing format that features Meade's big, bold, cut-paper collage on one page and, on the next, a contained black pen-and-ink study that answers the question posed. It's a formula that could become repetitive, but Meade's wordplay enlivens each simple question, while her extravagantly large and beautifully rendered images compel readers to turn the page.

Subtle rhymes float within her controlled phrasing, and alliteration creates a lulling back and forth:

When this elephant needs to
snooze
where does he choose to rest his
wrinkly self?

The reply to this question is conversational and sprightly:

Hard to believe, but!
Standing on his
feet he nods and
Naps as necessary.

Playful typographical design energizes the book. The text loops from one page to the next, interacting with the shape of the animal portrayed, often mimicking that animal's style of movement: the text about the jack rabbit hops across the pages; the elephant's query travels back and forth with the same sway-

ing weight as its heavy trunk. Unfortunately, in some spreads, the words are swallowed by the gutter at the center of the book; otherwise the movement of the text enhances Meade's animal portraits.

Of course, a story like this is meant to entice young ones to sleep, and the two children at book's end, stretching and yawning and wearing pajamas, move "to beds clean and soft." We're with them, feeling wonderfully cozy, Meade's pages having turned toward the softer, blue-green palette of which sweet dreams are made. Her final image places us outside the sleeping children's house. It's dark. The book says "Good night." Where shall *we* go to sleep?

—Christine Alfano

Rent Party Jazz

By William Miller

Illustrated by Charlotte Riley-Webb

LEE & LOW

32 pages, Age 6 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 1-58430-025-6

Sonny Comeaux is a boy growing up in New Orleans in the 1930s. Times are hard. His mother works in a fish cannery, and to make ends meet, Sonny starts each day "like a working man," helping the coal man with his deliveries throughout the French Quarter. When Sonny's mother temporarily loses her job, he despairs over what to do. He would gladly take a second job, but she is firm about the importance of his staying in school, to "learn everything you can—*everything*, so things will be better for you." Still, they both know that if the rent can't be paid, they will be thrown out on the street.

Sonny has a taste for music, and on his way home from school he lingers in Jackson Square, where he hears fine jazz that draws crowds of passersby. The joyful music makes Sonny even more

aware of the sadness and worry in his own household. In a scene reminiscent of *Ben's Trumpet*, by Rachel Isadora, a virtuosic horn player named Smilin' Jack notices the glum but attentive boy in the crowd and steps forward to befriend him. When Sonny describes his situation, Smilin' Jack proposes a splendid solution: a party to raise the rent money.

In an afterword, author William Miller explains that rent parties were common in African American neighborhoods throughout the South during the first half of the twentieth century, and in other parts of the country as well. Musicians would play and neighbors would gather, bringing whatever food they could. As people enjoyed the party they tossed spare change into a hat (or the equivalent) to help their neighbors pay the rent. Such events were forerunners of other kinds of musical benefits to raise money for the poor, the displaced, or the unjustly imprisoned.

Charlotte Riley-Webb's acrylic paintings fill the page with bold swirls of color that evoke the pulsing energy of jazz and the warmth of community.



Illustration by Charlotte Riley-Webb,
from *Rent Party Jazz*

Music splashes out of Smilin' Jack's horn in arcs of red and gold. At the party, warm brown hands fill the air, graceful as birds lifting into flight, as the people dance to Smilin' Jack's music and eventually join him in singing "When the Saints Go Marching In." A bucket full of coins assures that, for the time being, Sonny and his mother will make out okay. Smilin' Jack's farewell hug enfolds Sonny, leaving the boy with a happy heart—and the dream of one day learning to play the trumpet.

—*Martha Davis Beck*

The Ugly Duckling

By Hans Christian Andersen

Retold by Kevin Crossley-Holland

Illustrated by Meilo So

KNOPF

32 pages, Ages 5–8, \$23.95

ISBN 0-375-81319-5

This faithful retelling of "The Ugly Duckling" marries the smooth prose of Carnegie medalist Kevin Crossley-Holland with stunningly conceived watercolors by Meilo So. The details and the spirit of Hans Christian Andersen's original semi-autobiographical tale breathe again through Crossley-Holland's poetic language. The story's setting comes through vividly in its opening:

How lovely it was in the summer country! Green oats, and wheat green and gold; the thick sweet smell of newly scythed hay.

Sensual particulars wind in and around the subtle humor of the short, clipped dialogue, making this retelling as rewarding as it is accessible. "He's not a turkey," says the mother duck about her odd-looking child. "He's my own baby. In fact...if you look at him carefully, he's rather handsome."

A perfect complement to the text, So's nuanced illustrations place the tale firmly in a traditional setting, but the grace of line and composition in these

paintings is anything but conventional. In the same loose style she employed in *Tasty Baby Belly Buttons*, So captures both the comedy and the poignancy of the ugly duckling's changing fortunes through subtle yet telling details: in one scene, the poor duckling, trapped

in a house with a supercilious cat and hen, holds aside a lace curtain with his head, while through the lace a silhouette of the menacing pair can just be seen, the whole image rendered in tones of gray and white.

As the duckling moves through his

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Illustration by Meilo So,
from *The Ugly Duckling*

frenetic adolescence and approaches maturity, the illustrations seem to open up; featuring fewer elements and larger details, these paintings convey the serenity that befits a no-longer-ugly bird. In the final spread, So's brilliant use of negative space gently frames the swan and his reflection within a fringe of lilacs, and the closing words echo the pleasure readers will experience in this special edition of a familiar tale: "I never knew," he said. "When I was the ugly duckling, I never knew there was such happiness as this."

—Kathryne Beebe

Fiction

A Book of Coupons

By Susie Morgenstern
Illustrated by Serge Bloch
Translated by Gill Rosner
VIKING

64 pages, Ages 9–12, \$12.99

ISBN 0-670-89970-4

Most children would call it a dirty trick if you told them you were going to give them a present and then handed them a spelling test. The students in Monsieur Noël's fifth-grade class might see the situation differently. For one thing, if they aren't prepared for the test, they

can always pull out the coupon books their teacher distributed at the beginning of the school year and flip to "One coupon for copying from your neighbor." Those who have already used that particular coupon still might not think the test is such a bad deal, because, over the course of this buoyant short novel, Monsieur Noël manages to persuade them that he—that any teacher—is like Santa Claus. (His festive last name can't be just a coincidence.) "I'm giving away penmanship and spelling. I'm giving away math and science. I'm giving away everything life has taught me," he exclaims to his skeptical students on the first day of school. Monsieur Noël may not be handing out Game Boys or candy bars, but it doesn't take long for the class to realize that what he does have to offer is pretty incredible.

Translated from the French and illustrated with effervescent black-and-white sketches, *A Book of Coupons* resists becoming a mere "learning is power" public service announcement by celebrating goofing off as well as studying hard. Monsieur Noël's coupons for "skipping a day of school" or "telling a lie" or "singing at the top of your lungs wherever you like" probably wouldn't go over well at a traditional institution of learning, and in fact they don't make a big hit with his principal, the grim

Incarnation Perez. She has it in for him from her first visit to his classroom, when he impulsively pulls her into his jitterbug demonstration. What the formidable Madame Perez never comes to understand is that Noël's unorthodox teaching methods are the very reason why some of the coupons she finds so appalling are hardly ever used: "The students didn't need the 'coupon for not listening in class,' because the classes were too interesting. They didn't need the 'coupon for skipping a day of school,' because they wanted to come too much."

The teacher tries repeatedly to help his dour, rather pathetic boss see that "life just isn't that serious." Yet she still manages to force him into retirement when the school year is over. This doesn't mean *A Book of Coupons* ends on a down note. On the contrary, some readers might find Monsieur Noël's final speech about using, not hoarding, all the coupons life gives you a little too rah-rah for their taste. Then again, passion and enthusiasm are what this man is all about. His smiling, grandfatherly face would be the perfect illustration to accompany a definition of *joie de vivre*.

—Renée Victor

Dancing in Cadillac Light

By Kimberly Willis Holt

PUTNAM

176 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.99

ISBN 0-399-23402-0

It's the summer of 1968, and Jaynell Lambert is a girl whose body, mind, and world are all on the brink of change. It's the summer her father stops calling her "boy"; it's the summer before a man walks on the moon; and it's the summer that Grandpap moves in and stuns the family with his purchase of a 1962 Cadillac convertible. As 1968 ends and 1969 begins, the upheaval of Jaynell's world intensifies as she deals with the death of her grandfather while

attempting to maintain her balance as her emotions undergo the normal upheaval of adolescence.

Grandpap's Cadillac is the central symbol in the story, functioning as an emblem of both the realization of dreams and the need for second chances. Even after Grandpap is gone and the Cadillac is sold, the car remains a presence in the novel, a reminder of the ways in which it fulfilled each family member's dearest wish and a testament to an individual's ability to turn his or her life around.

Although Kimberly Willis Holt's narrative relies a bit on clichés, the satisfying characterization and vivid setting lift the novel up. The book is distinctly southern in flavor, from the language to the metaphors to the location itself, and Holt successfully establishes the Texas setting from the outset. "It was July," she writes, "hot as cinders. Uncle Floyd called July *'Wet Dog Days'* because all month long the air smelled like a stinky mutt caught in the rain."

This novel simultaneously considers the past, the present, and the future. It opens on the threshold of a new era and closes in a changed world—one that has seen a man walk on the moon. While the story moves forward, it also pays attention to the past and to the need for remembering what *was* in order to create a wiser present and future. Indeed, it is the revelation of Grandpap's history that enables Jaynell to cross into young adulthood, as she is forced to reevaluate her narrow assumptions about the world.

—Jenny Sawyer

Equinox

By Monte Killingsworth

HENRY HOLT

118 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 0-8050-6153-3

Equinox rewards a close reading. It is a pleasure to learn the geography and weather of fourteen-year-old Autumn's

island home off the coast of Washington state, and to imagine the rhythms of her life with her father, Harley, in their cabin with its woodstove, its outhouse, and its shower rigged up on the porch. Her mother works at the whale museum on nearby San Juan Island, spending

weekends with Harley and Autumn. Their friend Forrest, an artist who lives in the lighthouse cottage, is an intriguing character who has always got something brewing, whether it be soup, herb tea, or handmade paper—all made with ingredients grown or foraged on the little

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island. Forrest encourages Autumn to keep a journal of writing and drawings, and one distinctive aspect of this novel is the way it takes journal keeping as its subject. Monte Killingsworth tells his story in Autumn's present-tense narration, but the novel is an account of her keeping a journal, not the journal itself: "The light is thick and green on the page. The pen glides.... I want to look at this page tomorrow or next week or when I'm an old woman and be very sure that what I see then is exactly how I'm feeling right now."

The story unfolds in a week's time. On Sunday, Autumn thinks she understands the problem: her father wants to leave their isolated home and move to the larger San Juan Island. By Friday afternoon, she has learned more complicated truths about the adults in her life. When she discovers that her mother is involved in a long-term lesbian relationship with a young woman Autumn considers a friend, the distraught girl nearly drowns in a storm at high tide on the autumnal equinox. Forrest res-

cues her, and, as we learn in the epilogue, helps see to it that when she goes to live on San Juan Island she gets into an arts high school. Almost lost in the twists and turns of Autumn's thinking are revelations that precede the crisis that drives her out into the storm: she learns how her mother became pregnant at eighteen, when she had known Harley for only a few months, how she disappeared and returned with her baby, how Harley has struggled to keep the three together.

Certain confusions arise from Killingsworth's interesting novel. Is Autumn skipping school during this mid-September week? Even careful readers may not understand whether several weeks or a year and several weeks have passed between the final chapter and the epilogue. Jennifer Danza's delicate pen-and-ink artwork appears to simply illustrate the story until, in the epilogue (a handwritten letter from Autumn to Harley) the drawings are presented as Autumn's own work.

—Susan Marie Swanson

The Land

By Mildred D. Taylor

PHYLLIS FOGELMAN/PENGUIN PUTNAM

392 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.99

ISBN 0-8037-1950-7

With *The Land*, Mildred Taylor continues her Logan family saga by moving back in time to the years immediately following the Civil War to tell the story of Paul-Edward, Cassie Logan's grandfather. The son of a white daddy and his former slave, Paul-Edward is raised in a way that was not typical at the time. He is privileged and educated: his white half brothers teach him what they learn at school, and their father encourages Paul-Edward's education and takes him along on business excursions. But he is also black in a post-Civil War South, where slaves may have been legally free but were certainly not treated as equals or even, in many cases, as human beings. Although Paul-Edward's early family life seems almost idyllic, adolescence brings home the harsh realities of his situation and he is forced to acknowledge his lack of acceptance by both blacks and whites, even his most trusted and beloved white brother. Blacks distrust his whiteness, whites discriminate against him because of his blackness, and passing as white is dangerous. Paul-Edward needs to find in himself the strength to craft the life that he wants, for society is determined to thwart him.

We follow Paul-Edward as he leaves his family and their Georgia land, using his riding ability to find a place as a horse trainer, then to the backbreaking labor in a lumber camp, his success at making furniture, and his struggle to clear forty acres in Mississippi in order to have some land of his own. All the while he is engaged in an unending struggle to live with dignity. Paul-Edward's close friendship with Mitchell, with whom he grew up, his growing love for Caroline, who will eventually become his wife, and his passion for the land he is determined to own—with its beautiful tree-



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ringed meadow (the setting of Taylor's *Song of the Trees*)—all express his character. Though he struggles against fierce odds, it comes as no surprise that Paul-Edward endures. His qualities are mirrored in the character of his descendants, whom many readers already know—David Logan and his daughter, Cassie, in the trilogy that begins with *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. To read Paul-Edward's story is to understand the source of the determination, pride, and strength of the Logan family as it continues through Cassie and her brothers.

Mildred Taylor is arguably one of the most important authors of our time. No other has so carefully chronicled the aftermath of the Civil War and the beginnings of the civil rights movement. In *The Land*, as in her other works, Taylor creates setting through careful attention to details of time and place. Although the first-person point of view in *The Land* doesn't produce as compelling a narrator as Cassie in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Paul-Edward's story is integral to the Logan saga, and it engages key threads of our history and identity as a nation.

—Lee Galda

The Mouse and His Child

By Russell Hoban

Illustrated by David Small

ARTHUR A. LEVINE/SCHOLASTIC

244 pages, Ages 9–12, \$16.95

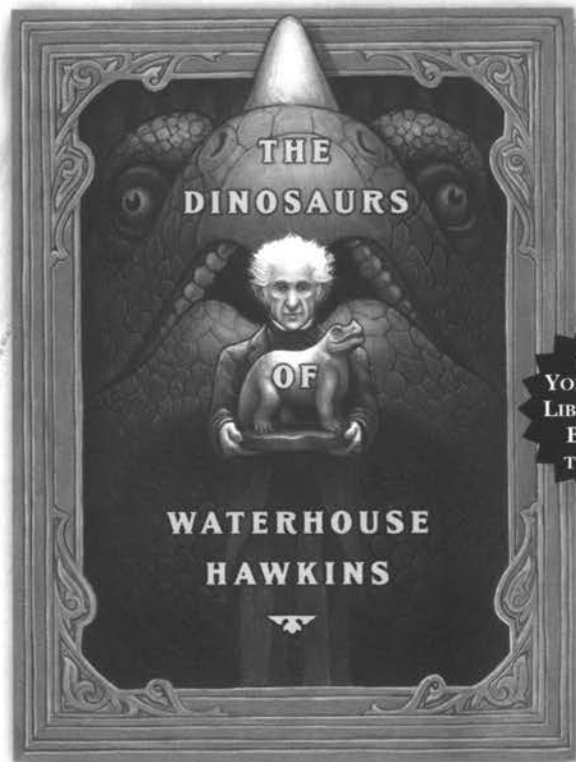
Russell Hoban's singular *The Mouse and His Child* borrows motifs of classic children's literature—talking toys, animal communities, and the tension between mortality and the longing for eternal life—and infuses them with a darker sensibility. The novel forebodes an ill wind in the willows. But as it rejects sentimentality and lays waste to naïveté, this story of two clockwork mice, linked at the hands in a perpetual dance, has a haunting, surreal beau-

ty. The mouse and his child, after being crushed at Christmastime and thrown in the trash by humans, desperately hope for the day when they will be “self-winding” and have a “territory” to call home; flesh-and-blood readers root for the mechanical underdogs, for

their victory over the junkyard rats that would deny them their happiness.

The novel was first published in 1967 with illustrations by Lillian Hoban. In this marvelous redesign, 2001 Caldecott Medalist David Small (illustrator of Judith St. George's *So You Want to Be*

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Illustration by David Small, from
The Mouse and His Child

President?) approaches *The Mouse and His Child* with due respect and a commendable trace of humility. Small reimagines the existentialist characters and shadowy scenery, alternating grainy charcoal and ink wash. His smoky illustrations replace the original book's crosshatched pen-and-ink sketches, but rather than attempt to erase the memory of the original work, Small creates pictures that resonate with the previous compositions. Those who are familiar with the old illustrations may experience a sense of déjà vu upon encountering Small's fluid drawing of a blue jay who works as a town crier, his twin portraits of an owl snatching and later dropping the book's bullfrog-oracle, and his rendering of that crucial plot device, the Bonzo Dog Food can, with its mirror images that descend toward infinity, conceptualized as "the last visible dog."

Small pays homage to the thirty-four-year-old book, but makes sweeping changes, too. In this edition, unlike the first, there is no map of the dystopian hundred-acre wood where the mouse

and his child endure rust and breakage. And whereas the original had only modest pictures interspersed with the written text, Small provides each of the ten chapters with a full-page opening image and a captioned three-quarter spread, in addition to inset illustrations. Small emphasizes the diminutive size of the tin mice by dwarfing them in the space of the pages, and he acknowledges their tenuous existence in pictures of their ragged, slouching enemy Manny Rat (attired in a "greasy scrap of silk paisley tied with a dirty string"), an army of bloodthirsty shrews, a toy elephant losing her plush coating and falling into decrepitude, and a rowdy crowd of predators and rodents at an absurdist performance by two crows (the Caws of Art Experimental Theatre Group) in which a rabbit is literally savaged to death by his critics.

The Mouse and His Child is a masterpiece, and David Small (and the editorial-production team at Scholastic) have done a worthy job of refreshing it. This wonderful new design never intrudes, but in fact enlarges the classic text.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Necklace of Raindrops and Other Stories

By Joan Aiken

Illustrated by Kevin Hawkes

KNOPF

96 pages, Ages 9–12, \$15.95

0-375-80584-2

Trust Joan Aiken to take the simple structure of easy-reader prose and turn it into art—droll, enchanting, absorbing art. In *A Necklace of Raindrops*, the award-winning author of *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* offers up a collection of stories delightful in their whimsy and wry in their wit. This reissue of a volume first published in 1968 features fine pen-and-ink illustrations by Kevin

Hawkes that capture the classic atmosphere of the stories' settings.

While the stories in *A Necklace of Raindrops* are simple enough for beginning readers (one actually begins "The cat sat on the mat"), they are much more than reading exercises. The mat in this story happens to be a wishing mat, and before the story ends, a fairy, an old bus, and a bit of magic have combined to create an imaginative and unconventional narrative from an unassuming start.

Aiken's sharp-witted fancy can always be counted on to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. In "The Baker's Cat," Mrs. Jones bakes yeast buns one rainy day with no help from her cat, Mog. "Don't sit on the buns, Mog," says Mrs. Jones. The buns begin to rise, and we find out matter-of-factly that "this is what yeast does. It makes bread and buns and cakes swell up and get bigger and bigger." Mrs. Jones shoos Mog outside into the rain so she can bake in peace, but Mog (who likes water) makes no effort to stay dry and returns with a snuffle. Mrs. Jones, concerned, gives

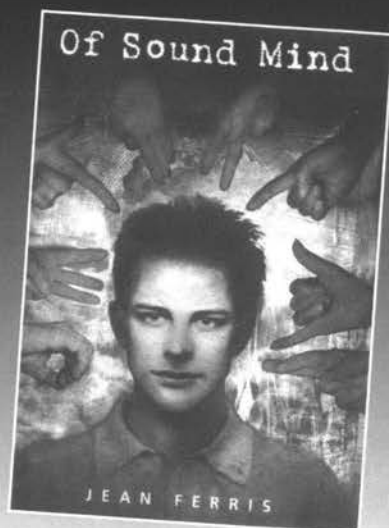


Illustration by Kevin Hawkes, from
Necklace of Raindrops and Other Stories

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“This historical novel, winner of the 2000 Whitbread Award, deals with one of the more lurid and fascinating bits of English history.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

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TENDER
Valerie Hobbs

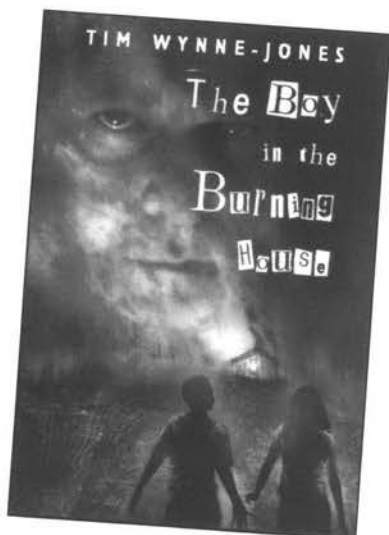
★ “Fresh, believable situations . . . [and] characters with, well, character, worthy of our caring.” —Starred, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

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Tor Seidler
Pictures by Brett Helquist

“The fun is in the magnificently ratty details, the subtle wordplay and in the chance to visit ratdom . . . This is not classic quest fantasy with good versus evil but a more charming and lovable fantasy with bad doings by relatively good rats and good doings by relatively bad ones.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

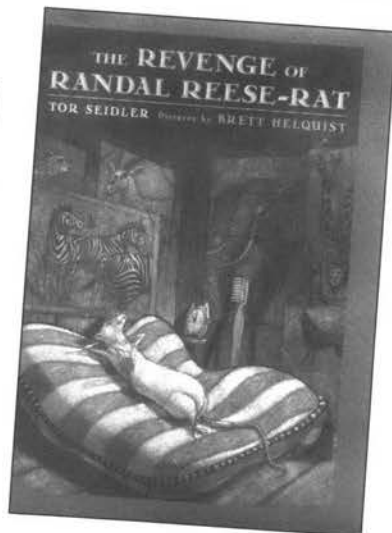
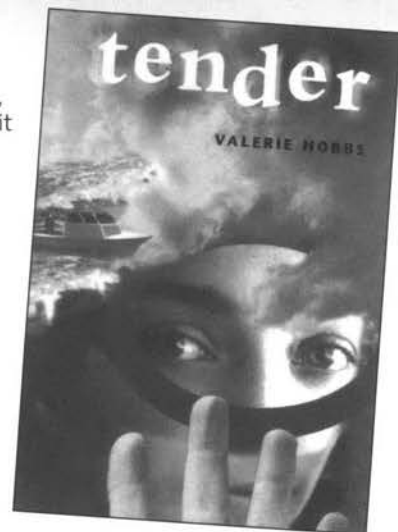
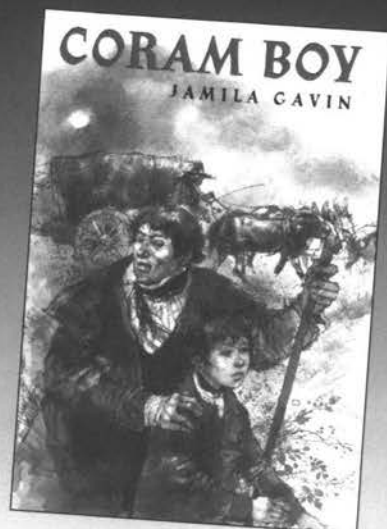
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THE BOY IN THE BURNING HOUSE
Tim Wynne-Jones

★ “Wynne-Jones is known for his quirky, offbeat characters, and this book does not disappoint . . . A gripping, fast-moving plot that offers the pure adrenaline rush of a thriller.” —³Starred, *The Horn Book*

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Mog warm milk with yeast in it, for "yeast is good for people when they are ill." In Aiken's imagination, yeast doesn't just work on bread: the combination of a warm fire and a tummy full of yeast gives rise to a cat of surprising proportions and results in an event

that involves the entire town.

A floating apple pie, a magic quilt, a one-legged house that hops, and other fairy-tale delights inhabit the other seven stories in this collection—each just the right length to read before bed. Without talking down to or belit-

ting the intelligence of its intended young audience, *A Necklace of Raindrops* offers the pure enjoyment of story and language with a child's sense of humor and love of the unusual. This is a collection to treasure.

—Kathryne Beebe

2001 National Book Award Finalist

"Haunting grace ... exquisite voice." *New York Times Book Review* **2001 Kiriya Prize Notable Book** ★ "A beautifully written and affecting work." *School Library Journal* "An important new voice in Asian American children's literature." *VOYA* ★ "A beautiful novel." *Booklist* "Remarkable and important." *Brock Cole* "A must read." *Korean Quarterly* "Real, painful, and beautiful." *Norma Fox Mazer* "Touching ... subtle but powerful." *JADE Magazine* ★ "Astonishing and memorable." *The Horn Book Magazine* "Poignant." *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* ★ "Triumphant and consistently absorbing." *Publishers Weekly* "Vivid present-tense narrative." *Riverbank Review* "Short, powerful strokes of language propel us great distances." *Chris Lynch* "Haunting." *aMagazine*. "Beautifully written—sometimes funny, always moving." *Jacqueline Woodson*

Parents Wanted

By George Harrar

MILKWEED

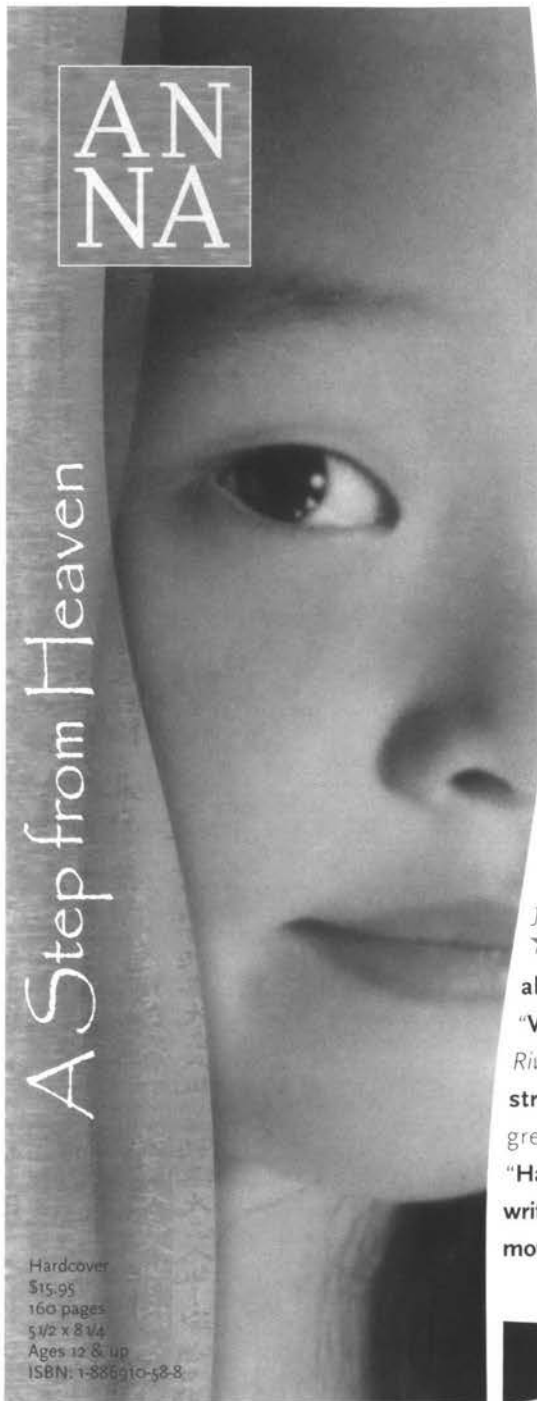
239 pages, Age 10 and up, \$17.95

ISBN 1-57131-632-9

After an early childhood punctuated by abuse from his birth parents and, later, a string of unsuccessful foster home experiences, twelve-year-old Andy Fleck is ready to find a real family and to embrace the safety and security that comes with adoption. But Andy *isn't* ready for rules—or the trust required for a stable, loving parent-child relationship. A final chance comes in the form of Jeff and Laurie, a couple who can't have children of their own, who agree to stick it out with Andy despite his many behavioral problems, in hopes of establishing a solid relationship that will eventually result in adoption.

Andy's tendency to test the rules and to push his foster parents to the limit sparks a series of incidents that jeopardize his last opportunity to find a family of his own, culminating in Andy's decision to trump up sexual abuse charges against his foster father. Andy's false accusations stem from his fear of rejection, and as events come to a head with an investigation by social services and the possibility of losing Jeff and Laurie altogether, Andy is forced to reevaluate his ideas about parents and to accept the fact that, finally, there are two adults who will love him unconditionally.

The first-person narrative captures the frenetic pace and often disjointed thought patterns of Andy's hyperactive mind. Although Andy's attention



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deficit disorder is not explored overtly, George Harrar does a superb job of enabling the reader to understand the way Andy's mind works (and, consequently, the impetus for much of his behavior). Slowly but surely, as Andy settles down, so too does the narrative, and although Andy still has a lot of growing up to do, the novel's ending is hopeful.

Harrar's adeptness at probing the minds of his characters extends beyond the thoughts of his protagonist; he also proves adroit at developing and portraying the emotions of foster parents struggling with a difficult child. Jeff and Laurie are just as unsure as Andy is—they're just as vulnerable, and they want just as much for everything to work out. Ultimately, their wisdom sparks the change in Andy. Laurie says, "It's not enough to say the words. You have to treat us as your parents." Occurring at the climax of the novel, Laurie's statement establishes a sense of parental control and mutual understanding in this fledgling family. It also reveals her as a person Andy can both trust and respect.

Parents Wanted provides a sympathetic but unflinching look at the challenges faced by a child and his foster parents. While Andy's story has a happy ending, the realism and honesty prevent this novel from seeming formulaic. Harrar has written a powerful book about second chances, trust, and redemption, and about the difficulty of building a family.

—Jenny Sawyer

Run If You Dare

By Randy Powell

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

192 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.00

ISBN 0-374-39981-6

Like Randy Powell's other novels, *Run If You Dare* contains interesting characters, clever dialogue, and a plot that twists humor through the various tragedies of

adolescence. As far as Gardner is concerned, being fourteen is difficult enough, but now his father has lost his job and can't seem to find himself. Troubled by his father's almost adolescent disaffection with life, Gardner alternates between compassion and anger. The two of them

have always been close, and Gardner's admiration for his dad makes it difficult for him to recognize that his dad is just as full of doubts and anxieties as he is himself.

As his father plunges deeper into midlife crisis, Gardner struggles to adjust

2001 National Book Award Finalist

2001 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award

"Each poem stands as a **finely wrought** whole of such **high caliber** that one can hardly name a favorite." *The Horn Book Magazine* "Inspired ... The poems ... seem not works of artifice, but **honest** statements of pure, natural truths." *School Library Journal* ★ "Resonance and heart." *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* "Oh, Marilyn Nelson, what a **magnificent** job you have done to bring the past so **alive** it looks like our future." *Nikki Giovanni* "Strong and lyrical." *The Shy Librarian* "Tremendous creativity and imagination." *Cooperative Children's Book Center Booklist*. "Uncommon **sensitivity** and **soul**." VOYA "Nelson has crafted **spare, singing lines** that succeed in creating a biography in poems that brilliantly evoke Carver's life." *Ashley Bryan* "Brilliantly conceived." *NAPRA ReView*



CARVER
a life in poems
Marilyn Nelson

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Hardcover
\$16.95 • 112 pages
b&w photographs throughout
6 x 9 • Ages 12 and up
ISBN 1-886910-53-7

to the changes in his own life. He learns to accept his mother's new responsibilities as a wage earner, negotiates the complexities of a teenager's social life, and searches for self-definition, which for him involves chopping wood and running cross-country. As Gardner's muscles become more defined, so does his sense of self.

The first-person narration allows Powell to express Gardner's quirky and poignant perspective and makes the reader care about what happens to this good kid caught in a situation he hasn't chosen and is afraid to understand. As he and his family struggle through this new phase of life, they do so with humor, affection, and occasional anger. They could be us. At the novel's end the family is still together, and Dad has found a job that he is trying to enjoy. Gardner is more comfortable in his maturity,

comfortable enough to know that while no life is perfect, his is very much worth living. "Like Dad said," he observes, "I'll take what's left of my life and run with it."

—Lee Galda

Seek

By Paul Fleischman

CRICKET BOOKS

176 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 0-8126-4900-1

Those who are familiar with Paul Fleischman's work know that he writes to be heard as well as read. *Seek* is his newest experiment with reading as performance, and it succeeds beautifully. The story is constructed as a collage of voices and sounds. We get to know high school senior Rob's life story through conversations he has with his divorced mother; the comments of his close

friends, bibliophile grandmother, irascible grandfather, and two devoted aunts; and his own reading of the essay he is writing for his English teacher, which begins, "I grew up in a house built of voices."

Voices have always been important to Rob. His father, a radio host, left the family when Rob was just a baby, leaving behind a tape of one of his radio shows. Rob, burning with the desire to know his father, becomes obsessed with the radio and spends hours listening, scanning the country, hoping to hear his father's voice and thus to claim his own past. Yet, when his father does finally contact him, Rob rebuffs him, not out of anger but because he has come to realize that he is complete, even without him.

There is, of course, much more—Rob's mother finally remarries, Rob becomes involved in high school life and has a romance himself—but the compelling narrative line is his discovery of himself through his pursuit of his father. The fifty-two characters in *Seek* build a sound mosaic that reveals the complexity of one person and his life. They also speak of their own lives and the times in which they live, sometimes with pathos, often with humor. Read silently, the novel is an engaging, beautifully crafted story. Read aloud as a performance piece, the story will be amplified by the power of its many distinctive individual voices.

—Lee Galda



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**The Sisterhood of the
Traveling Pants**

By Ann Brashares

DELACORTE

294 pages, Age 12 and up, \$14.95

ISBN 0-385-72933-2

For Lena, Bridget, Carmen, and Tibby, the summer that begins with discovery in the form of a worn pair of blue jeans on a thrift store shelf evolves into four

*For a list of award finalists and information on other upcoming features,
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different odysseys of growth and self-discovery, four journeys fueled with a little help from a magic pair of pants ("the Pants"). Actually, the only magical aspect of the Pants is their unusual ability to fit and flatter each one of the four friends. But this small miracle is magic enough for four girls who haven't spent a summer apart since birth. In a pact made the night before they go their separate ways, the girls agree to keep the jeans traveling among them, each wearing (never washing) the Pants for two weeks before sending them along to the next person on the circuit. The Pants, indeed, seem to be "infused with the promises of summer."

The magic of the Pants plays itself out in different ways as the summer progresses, but in their varied experiences—from soccer camp in Baja, California, to vacation at the home of grandparents in the Grecian countryside—the girls look to the Pants for the same things: pluck, understanding of themselves, and a reminder of their friendship. In short, the path the Pants take not only traces the adventures (and misadventures) of four friends, it also highlights the universality of the girls' experiences and the ways in which their love for one another proves to be unconfined by the limits of time or place.

Ann Brashares deftly fleshes out the personality of each of the four friends over the course of the narrative. As Lena, Bridget, Carmen, and Tibby's characters emerge, so too do they change; the girls' thought processes and behaviors mature over the course of the summer. For Lena, this means getting over her fear of boys. Bridget reevaluates her impetuous behavior. Carmen comes to terms with change and disappointment, and learns to trust again. And Tibby finds the meaning of happiness and the courage to embrace it.

The book is humorous, irreverent, bittersweet—and wise. In spite of its

whimsical, lighthearted subject matter, this is an intelligent novel that understands both its characters and its audience. The girls' "manifesto of the Pants" sums it up best: "Remember: Pants = love. Love your pals. Love yourself." It's an important message in

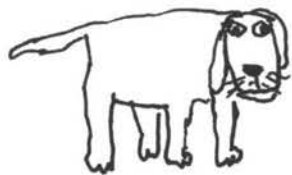
a society in which girls are bombarded by images that foster dissatisfaction and self-hatred, and Brashares conveys it with subtlety and sensitivity.

Despite a somewhat disappointing conclusion, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* is both a sweet story and a tes-

SHARON CREECH

LOVE THAT DOG

a novel



Jacket art © 2001 by William Steig

★ "Creech continues to explore new writing paths with her latest [novel], written as free verse from the viewpoint of a middle-school boy named Jack. Jack's class assignments incorporate responses to eight well-known poems (included in an appendix) and gradually reveal the circumstances, and Jack's hidden feelings, about the loss of his beloved dog. . . . This really special triumph is bound to be widely esteemed by Creech's devoted readers." —Starred review / *Kirkus Reviews*

★ "By exposing Jack and readers to the range of poems that moves Jack, Creech conveys a life truth: pain and joy exist side by side. For Jack and for readers, the memory of that dog lives on in his poetry. Readers will love that dog, and this book."

—Starred review / *Publishers Weekly*

★ "Creech has created a poignant, funny picture of a child's encounter with the power of poetry. This book is a tiny treasure."

—Starred review / *School Library Journal*

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tament to the emotional distances we travel on the path to maturity.

—Jenny Sawyer

**Stories from Where We Live:
The Great North American Prairie**

Edited by Sara St. Antoine

Maps by Paul Mirocha

Illustrated by Trudy Nicholson

MILKWEED

262 pages, Age 9 and up, \$19.95

ISBN 1-57131-630-2

As the poet Gary Snyder has observed, “Nature is not a place to visit. It is our home.” *The Great North American Prairie* is part of a remarkable publishing adventure called “The World as Home.” Other books in the “Stories from Where We Live” anthology series include *The North Atlantic Coast* and *The California Coast*. Soon there will be more. They are all intended to connect young American readers to the regions of the land we inhabit. Each book is a feast of stories, poems, and excerpts from journals and memoirs.

In its quiet but exuberant way, this book speaks to one of our nation’s great needs: to reinhabit the land we have paved and ploughed. Until we “know” the identity of our places, beyond their cityscapes and highways, we will not be truly home.

Editor Sara St. Antoine gives us selections that range widely in time, from Plains Indian traditional songs to Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland in the 1890s and early 1900s, Carl Sandburg and Hal Borland at midcentury, and Louise Erdrich and others from the present era.

Farm girls—cutting hay, driving big machines, working with horses—are omnipresent. The book is solidly inclusive: traditional Native American songs and tales, a black homesteader community, the European immigrant experience with sod huts and High Plains blizzards are all represented. An

essay about reintroduction of the bison looks to the future.

The writing is mostly effective, often very powerful. While the poetry is easily accessible, it is not up to the caliber of the prose in this collection, but this is a small complaint given the book’s many strengths.

Trudy Nicholson’s animal illustrations subtly return the reader to the book’s organizing concept, the ecoregion we call prairie.

Appendixes and ecoregion maps are excellent tools that prepare classroom teachers or homeschoolers to integrate the book into their teaching—be it science, geography, or literature—and provide any reader with context. One appendix introduces prairie ecology, and another maps the setting of each text. In addition, readers are directed to the “World as Home” Web site (www.worldashome.org), where they will find extensive instructional guides to each anthology.

The Great North American Prairie, an exceptional collection that capitalizes on young readers’ inherent interest in the natural world, is a strong resource for both learners and teachers of any age or disposition.

—John Caddy

**Nonfiction &
Traditional Literature**



**Children of the Dragon:
Selected Tales from Vietnam**

By Sherry Garland

Illustrated by Trina Scharf Hyman

HARCOURT

64 pages, Ages 9–12, \$18.00

ISBN 0-15-224200-7

At first glance, *Children of the Dragon* might seem to be simply the latest addition to the ever-growing pile of multicultural folktales—yet to over-

look this collection would be to miss a valuable contribution. As Sherry Garland writes in the book’s introduction, too many of us think of Vietnam merely as the battleground of a war that ceased more than twenty-five years ago. *Children of the Dragon* highlights the variety and richness of a four-thousand-year-old culture—one in which the word *Tet* brings to mind a time of festival and renewal as opposed to a military action.

The tales in *Children of the Dragon* have been passed down orally for generations. Garland, who has worked with Vietnamese immigrants for several years and has spent time in Vietnam, offers these stories to a new audience in lively prose that asks to be read aloud. A range of folktales are included, from charming *pourquoi* legends (how the tiger got its stripes, why there is a man in the moon) to tales that gently illustrate the perils of greed or the rewards of kindness. Some stories, such as “The Legend of the Monsoon Rains,” are specific to Vietnam, while others, like “The Bowmen and the Sisters,” are strikingly similar to fairy tales in other parts of the world. Some are written in the spirit of the darker Grimm tales—happy endings are not guaranteed. In the haunting “The Boatman’s Flute,” true love exists but is not acknowledged until it is too late. Notes at the end of each chapter provide a frame of reference for readers unfamiliar with Vietnamese culture.

While Garland’s characters inhabit archetypal folktales, they also retain their own identities, a quality enhanced by Trina Scharf Hyman’s acrylic and ink illustrations. The characters’ expressive eyes and distinct personalities are characteristic of Hyman’s art. Most of the illustrations are modest in size; they enhance the stories without overwhelming them. A few of the larger ones are striking: a half-page illustration for “Chu Cuoi—



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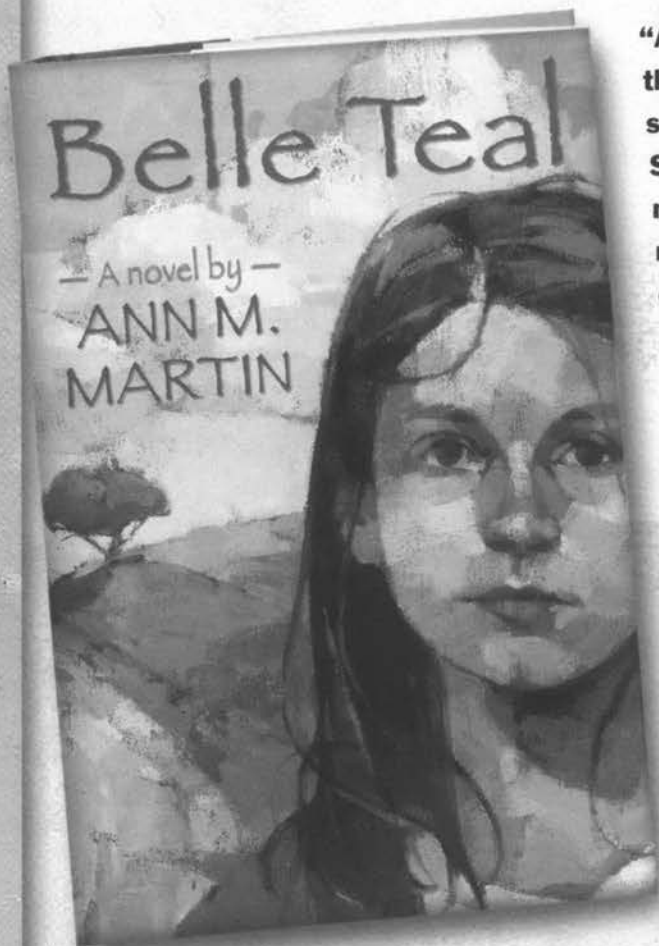
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★ **“Honest and moving . . .”***



“A young white girl witnesses the integration of her public school in the early 1960s South. . . . a genuinely moving tale about the necessity to reach out to others, even when it is difficult.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Martin . . . emphasizes the strength Belle Teal finds with the women of her family and shows a simple acceptance of life’s difficulties, an approach that shows respect for young readers. . . . this is a solid piece of work with an absorbing plot.”

—School Library Journal

By Ann M. Martin

Ages 10–14 • 0-439-09823-8 • \$15.95

★ **“Preteens will relate to Belle Teal, whose observations and realizations provide an eye-opening introduction to social and personal injustice.”**

—Publishers Weekly, starred review*


Scholastic Press

The Man in the Moon,” in which a tall young Chu Cuoi converses with an old man framed by a wreath of pink and yellow blossoms, firewood, and red and gold good-luck banners, is notable for both its decorative detail and its evocative feeling.

The identity of a people finds voice in the stories they tell. Garland and Hyman’s work fills a significant void, offering American readers a view of Vietnamese culture from within its unique storytelling tradition.

—Kathryne Beebe

The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins

By Barbara Kerley

Illustrated by Brian Selznick

SCHOLASTIC

48 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.95

ISBN 0-439-11494-2

This is a dinosaur book unlike any other. It begins at a time before anyone knew what a dinosaur looked like. In the 1850s scientists had just begun to fill in the picture from the bits of bone and teeth that had been discovered.

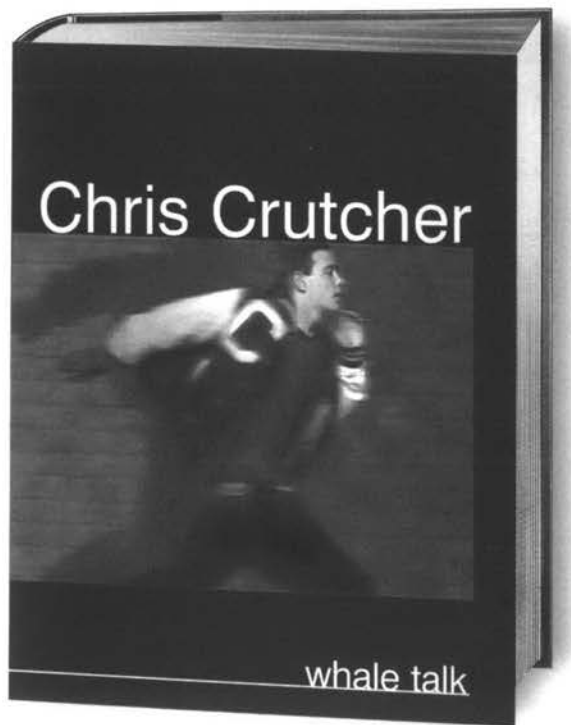
Enter Waterhouse Hawkins, a naturalist and artist who sculpted animals. He was commissioned to build replicas of dinosaurs for Queen Victoria’s new museum of science and art, the Crystal Palace. With the help of paleontologist Richard Owen, Waterhouse created small models, then scaled them up to the enormous size they’d had in life. Skeletons of iron supported concrete casts made from these huge clay models. The casts were then finished and painted.

The central image of the book is marvelous. To launch his dinosaurs and enhance his scientific standing, Hawkins threw a New Year’s Eve party to which he invited twenty-one scientists and supporters. He moved the mold of his iguanodon outdoors, put up a tent around it, and served a grand surprise dinner inside the dinosaur. The toast for the evening was “The jolly old beast is not deceased / There’s life in him again!” Waterhouse’s reputation was assured.

With the success of the Crystal Palace trailing him like confetti, Hawkins sailed for America, which had just found its first two fossil dinosaurs. In New York, he was invited to build more dinosaurs for exhibition in Central Park. He worked on them for two years before the project fell afoul of the corrupt politician Boss Tweed, who had his thugs sledgehammer Waterhouse’s

Whale Talk

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A Cutter High School bus provides surprising sanctuary to seven unlikely members of the swim team. Why do they need sanctuary? Listen. It’s all here in this riveting, tragic, funny page-turner of a novel.

★ “Crutcher’s gripping tale of small-town prejudice delivers a frank, powerful message about social issues and ills.”—Starred review / *Publishers Weekly*

“The veteran author examines how the sometimes cruel and abusive circumstances of life affect every link in the human chain. Through it all shines Crutcher’s sympathy for teens and their problems.”

—Featured review / *ALA Booklist*

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models and casts and bury the bits in the park, where they remain to this day.

Today Hawkins's creations still stand on Dinosaur Island in Crystal Palace Park in Sydenham. The Crystal Palace itself is no more; the dinosaurs have outlasted it, as the bones of their originals have outlasted time.

Barbara Kerley's whimsical narrative and Brian Selznick's brilliant, quirky paintings lovingly tell the story of Hawkins's life, and the elegant design of the book evokes Victorian England in its prime.

—*John Caddy*

Gandhi

By Demi

McELDERRY

40 pages, Ages 7–10, \$19.95

ISBN 0-689-84149-3

Demi tells the story of a deeply spiritual life in this beautiful book, and her approach highlights both the promise and the difficulties of its genre: picture-book biography. Intertwining rich illustration and concise, lyrical text, such a book brings its subject to life in a way that no ordinary prose biography can. On the other hand, working within the confines of a short text and with an audience of young readers in mind, a picture-book biography must simplify a complex adult life, and such simplification may be misleading.

Demi's description of Gandhi's spiritual life is inspiring. She begins with maps on the endpapers, locating the countries important to Gandhi's story: Great Britain, where he was educated; South Africa, where he practiced law and became a social activist; India, the country of his birth, where he inspired a

nonviolent struggle for national independence; and Pakistan, the Muslim nation created when India was divided at the end of British rule. Throughout the book, the author-artist works from the premise that she states in her author's note: "Gandhi was someone who completely succeeded in living his life according to the way in which he believed life should be lived—filled with spiritual awareness, love, and peace."

The artwork is colored in intense hues—purple, red, green, pink, blue—with the striking addition of gold, which brings shine and luster to an array of objects, including textiles, spinning wheels, musical instruments, architectural details (including prison bars), vessels, fire. In using rich color, especially gold, in a book about a man who renounced worldly goods, the artist cleverly appropriates color to describe

spiritual, rather than worldly, riches.

Fitting Gandhi's complicated legacy into the pages of a picture book poses many challenges. Some of the pictures are difficult to understand, particularly images that depict civic strife and nonviolent resistance. For example, a stunning picture depicting the plight of refugees at the division of India and Pakistan is explained only in the most general terms in the text. Demi emphasizes Gandhi's connection to his mother's religious faith, Jainism. Her choice to leave out any reference to his connections to Hindu tradition allows her to emphasize her subject's belief in "the brotherhood of people of all religions," but it is only partially accurate.

Demi's text is sensitive to cultural differences, consonant with an emphasis on spiritual tradition: "When Gandhi was thirteen years old, he was married

according to Jain tradition. His wife was Kasturbai Makanji, a beautiful thirteen-year-old girl who possessed qualities of patience, strength, and courage." Demi emphasizes how Gandhi's spiritual life helped him cope with racism and develop as a leader. She describes his compassion for impoverished people and his spiritual practices, including meditation and study of the Bhagavad-Gita. One of the most affecting passages in this moving book is a list of the few objects Gandhi possessed at his death: "two spoons, two pots, three monkeys, three books, one pocket watch, one pair of eyeglasses, one tin bowl (a souvenir from prison), one desk set, two pairs of sandals," and a homespun cotton garment.

—*Susan Marie Swanson*



Illustration by Demi, from *Gandhi*

Mobile Books

Down Cut Shin Creek: The Pack Horse Librarians of Kentucky

By Kathi Appelt and
Jeanne Cannella Schmitzer

HARPERCOLLINS

64 pages, Ages 8–12, \$16.95

ISBN 0-0602-9135-4

Hannah's Bookmobile Christmas

By Sally Derby
Illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska

HENRY HOLT

32 pages, Ages 4–7, \$16.95

ISBN 0-8050-6420-6

Those of us who live in communities with well-stocked libraries and bookstores take for granted our access to the printed word. And in this day of online shopping, anybody with a computer and a credit card can order just about anything without ever leaving home. Precisely because most of us cannot imagine living without books, it's important to learn about a time when they were precious and treasured for their rarity—and to be reminded that even today not everyone has easy access to books.

The well-written and moving *Down Cut Shin Creek* is an inspiring story of a time not so long ago when it took dedication and perseverance to bring books to people who wouldn't otherwise have them. A lively documentation of the pack horse librarians of Kentucky, who mounted horses to carry books and other printed materials into remote regions of that state during the 1930s, the book clearly places

these women (for they were primarily women) in the larger cultural context of the Depression era. The authors describe both the social environment of the times and the geography of Kentucky in succinct and understandable language, outlining the development of President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration and the particular problems of the people of Kentucky. Linking the government's need to create employment with people's hunger for books, the authors present a satisfying story that is all the more pleasing for being true.

Interest is sparked by the second chapter, "An Ordinary Day (The Way It Might Have Been)," which follows a young librarian as she departs from home in the dark of early morning, leaving her two small children in the



Photograph from *Down Cut Shin Creek*:
The Pack Horse Librarians of Kentucky

care of her mother in order to make her rounds through the cold and sleet. This woman's story—the physical hardships of her work, her relationships with those to whom she brings books, the snippets of personal background that flit through her mind—is as engaging as any fiction, though it is constructed from historical material. This librarian and the book's supporting characters come to life in a few well-chosen details; the poverty and grimness of daily life in eastern Kentucky are further illustrated by the well-placed black-and-white photos. In one haunting image, four children, huddled together in bed, peer out from under their covers; the walls of their home are covered with newspaper.

Succeeding short chapters make it easy for children to absorb the information that further explicates, and puts into context, the librarian's story. The authors do not shy away from the unpleasant aspects of life in rural Kentucky—abandoned families, moonshining, routine violence, daily hunger—nor do they dwell on the tragedies of many of these lives. Instead, they focus on the women as heroines, on the communities that developed around them, and, most of all, on the great power of the books and other materials they brought to people who needed not only to feed their bodies but also, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it, "to feed their minds."

In the fictional *Hannah's Bookmobile Christmas*, Hannah and her Aunt Mary, a bookmobile librarian, also offer this sustenance. This contemporary picture book, told from eight-year-old Hannah's point of view, is a heartwarming Christmas story. Like the librarians of *Down Cut Shin Creek*, Hannah and Aunt Mary battle the elements to bring books to people who can't otherwise



Illustration by Gabi Swiatkowska, from *Hannah's Bookmobile Christmas*

obtain them. On Christmas Eve day, the pair set out on their rounds, keeping a nervous eye on the increasingly heavy snowfall as they urge on their elderly bus, Blue Bird. Their regular clients—the local writer, the wheelchair-bound boy, the three-year-old to whom Hannah reads—exchange books, chat about the threatening weather, and present Hannah and her aunt with edible Christmas gifts. The spirit of a community that has been forged through a shared love of books pervades the text. In the end, Hannah, Aunt Mary, and the cat, Dickens, spend a cozy Christmas Eve snowbound but safe in the warm bookmobile, nourished by good books and food made by loving hands.

The beautiful acrylic paintings by first-time illustrator Gabi Swiatkow-

ska are a highlight, especially those of the blue bus plowing through the changing light and landscape as the day moves on and the ominous weather looms, growing more treacherous on each page. Also distinctive are the luminous renderings of the characters' faces, with their widely set high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes. The brief afterword explains that bookmobiles are again becoming popular as a way to bring books, magazines, videos, and CDs to urban and rural communities where they are still hard to come by. Like the pack horse librarians of the 1930s, bookmobile librarians continue to bring words and pictures in contemporary forms to people whose lives would be poorer without them.

—Krystyna Poray Goddu

Handel, Who Knew What He Liked

By M. T. Anderson

Illustrated by Kevin Hawkes

CANDLEWICK

40 pages, Ages 9–12, \$16.99

ISBN 0-7636-1046-1

M. T. Anderson, author of the fast-food-slurping novel *Burger Wuss*, cultivates loftier tastes in this deluxe picture book about the German composer George Frideric Handel (1685–1759). Kevin Hawkes, illustrator of *Weslandia*, sets the scene with shimmering impressionist paintings of drawing rooms, concert halls, and magnificent palace lawns.

In the manner of Sallie Ketcham and Timothy Bush's *Bach's Big Adventure*, this project begins by demonstrating Handel's childhood boldness. Although his father worried about financial security, "little Handel knew what he liked. What he liked was music. So he smuggled a clavichord up into the attic without his parents knowing." When Handel visits an estate where his brother works as a servant, he impresses a duke by playing the chapel's organ, and his music career takes off.

Since Milos Forman's film *Amadeus*, allusions to composers' wild-at-heart lifestyles are de rigueur, and this tale is no exception. As a young man in Hamburg, Handel refuses to yield his harpsichord chair to his friend Mattheson, who naturally demands a duel. Their courtly brawl takes place in a snowy square, lit by a midnight-blue evening sky and observed by a huddled crowd: "Mattheson thrust his rapier right toward Handel's heart—but luckily the blade hit Handel's coat button, and broke." Later, there's a hair-pulling match between two divas in frothy lace costumes and, in England, a fireworks accident that sends concert spectators fleeing: "No one knows what Handel was doing during



Illustration by Kevin Hawkes, from Handel, Who Knew What He Liked

all this. Perhaps ducking suavely to save his wig from bright hungry sparks." Hawkes pictures a bemused Handel scratching his chin and watching the explosion. Readers who consult the book's helpful discography can seek out Handel's *Music for Royal Fireworks* for themselves and rate this unplanned light display against the dramatic music.

Hawkes fills his candlelit images with velvety reds and lustrous golds, and encloses the written text in ornamental gilt frames; one glittering spread, depicting boats on the Thames during a performance of Handel's *Water Music*, recalls N. C. Wyeth's way with color and billowing clouds. Anderson commendably avoids baroque extravagance in his writing, which comes with helpful footnotes defining such terms as *libretto* and *oratorio*. He concisely details contentious issues (John Gay's satirical *The Beggar's Opera* was a response to the perceived elitism of Handel and others), then concludes on a victorious note, with the hero composing his *Messiah*. Handel remains more an artistic force than a personality, but even the classically illiterate are likely to recognize his lega-

cy, the Hallelujah Chorus. This splendid costume drama plus music history induces readers to provide the only missing ingredient: a sound track.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

I Live in Tokyo

By Mari Takabayashi

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-07702-2

Oh, to be male in Japan on Valentine's Day! It is the custom there, seven-year-old Mimiko explains in this cheerful month-by-month introduction to her city and culture, for girls to give chocolates to boys on February 14. Mimiko adds an aside: "This year my father gets more chocolates than my brother. He looks really happy!" Readers of *I Live in Tokyo* will understand how Dad feels, because the book itself is like a box of confections: each component of the winning narrative and appealing toylike illustrations is as enticing as the next.

At the book's beginning, Mari Takabayashi's diminutive postcard-style scenes capture both the Tokyo shopping areas' bustling graphic overload and the Royal Palace grounds' pastoral tranquility. Once a sense of place is established, the focus quickly shifts to

Mimiko's calendar, which details how she and her family—and presumably many Japanese people—celebrate different events throughout the year. The simply-drawn, round-faced figures exude a genuine sweetness: even the tiger in the Japanese zodiac wears a smile. Often a pleasing collection of objects accompanies Mimiko's descriptions. In January, for instance, when Mimiko talks about how her family welcomes the new year, the colorful illustrations show examples of Japanese New Year's cards as well as typical holiday food and an elaborately decorated kite and badminton racket. In April, when Mimiko's class studies *kanji*, the characters used in Japanese writing, a frame composed of the characters for common words (*mother, sun, eye*) surrounds an illustration depicting the students at their desks.

While *I Live in Tokyo* looks at tradition, it undeniably does so from a kid's perspective, and a modern kid's at that. In May, Mimiko discloses "My Top Ten Favorite Meals," and number four on her list is hamburger, preceded by omelet rice, tempura, and curry rice. Mimiko sits through her grandmother's tea ceremony, but admits that "the long ceremony gets boring and my feet fall asleep." On the Shichigosan holiday in November, Mimiko at first feels

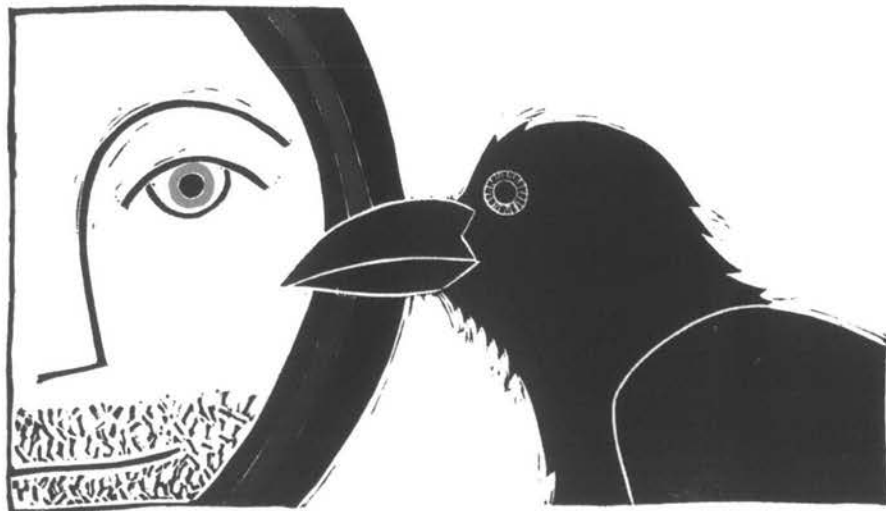


Illustration by Kelly Dupre, from *The Raven's Gift: A True Story from Greenland*

“like a princess” in her kimono. Then she gets itchy and frustrated because she can’t run in all that confining material.

The book includes a short glossary of Japanese words and teaches other basic information, such as how to wear a kimono. More importantly, it reveals Mimiko’s everyday life as a vital, joyous blend of the traditional and the new. She is at once a Japanese child and any child: she sometimes does origami after school, sometimes watches TV.

—Renée Victor

**The Raven’s Gift:
A True Story from Greenland**

By Kelly Dupre
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 pages, Ages 4-9, \$15.00

ISBN 0-618-01171-4

The trajectory of *The Raven’s Gift* is a clockwise loop around and through the harsh, exhilarating landscape of Greenland that begins in the childhood dreams of the narrator: “How far does ‘far north’ go? I wondered as a boy.” Though author-illustrator Kelly Dupre has traveled to Greenland herself, her first picture book is told in the voice of Lonnie Dupre, her husband, who undertook a fifteen-month, 3,200-mile expedition with a companion in 1997-98—and encountered a raven along the way.

Dupre’s linoleum-block prints disarmingly combine whimsy and gravity. While the postures and facial expressions of people and animals are often droll, the repeating patterns and irregular shapes that represent Greenland’s waves, cliffs, and ice evoke the forbidding power of the Arctic. The simple shapes of airplane, kayak, and dogsled have a welcoming clarity about them, inviting young readers to travel along, as do informative sidebars about Greenland’s wildlife, history, and topography.

Text and illustrations emphasize the explorers’ respect for the Inuit people who make Greenland their home.

They have studied Inuit ways, and once their trip is under way they are welcomed by villagers:

During our visits, they taught us how to predict the weather and showed us the best routes to take

along the way. Often, after an evening meal of seal, the Inuit shared with us their stories and legends. One of my favorites tells how the northern lights are the spirits of their ancestors playing ball in the sky.

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illustrated by
R. GREGORY CHRISTIE

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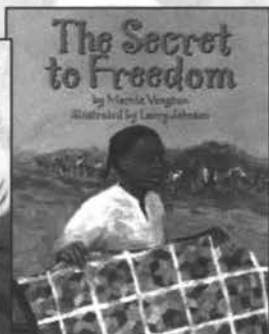


RENT PARTY JAZZ
by WILLIAM MILLER

illustrated by
CHARLOTTE RILEY-WEBB

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—Kirkus Reviews
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THE SECRET TO FREEDOM

by MARCIA VAUGHAN
illustrated by
LARRY JOHNSON

“[A] well-written story... Johnson’s expressive acrylic paintings are rich in color and emotion.”

—School Library Journal

“Powerful and touching.”
—Kirkus Reviews

AGES 6 AND UP © \$16.95 HC
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While some of the book's pages describe months of preparation or weeks of kayak paddling, in the raven story—within-a-story each page encompasses only a few moments. The exhausted narrator encounters a raven whose foot has become tangled in musk-ox fur. Discouraged to the point of abandoning the

expedition, he speaks softly to the bird: "I told her that I was sad, tired, and afraid.... As I talked, the raven looked back at me. Then, with her sharp beak, she picked up a small rock, showed it to me, and set it back down." In this moment, the narrator reconnects with his strength and spirit, and finds himself

able to continue the difficult journey.

The pacing of this picture book—the great leaps across time and space surrounding this moment when time seems to stop—is its most arresting quality. We may undertake grand adventures, the story tells us, but their deepest significance may be in moments that loom large, when the world outside you and the world inside illuminate one another and you find strength and inspiration to carry on. To incorporate such a testimony into a good-humored, informative children's book is no small achievement.

—Susan Marie Swanson



Six Starred Reviews for



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The story of
Amber and Essie
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ALA Booklist



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Kirkus Reviews



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School Library Journal

"An artistic mini-epic with two mini-heroes overcoming all odds of the inevitably bewildering, irrepressibly hopeful journey called childhood."

—Starred, featured review / *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"Poems and [black pencil and full-color] illustrations provide a portrait of close sisterly relationship that intimately and lovingly draws the reader into the joys and sadness of their lives. A wonderful story, brilliantly told." —Starred review / *Kirkus Reviews*

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Side by Side: Five Favorite Picture-Book Teams Go to Work

By Leonard S. Marcus

WALKER

64 pages, Age 8 and up, \$22.95

ISBN 0-8027-8778-9

If ever a book created an occasion to head to the library for more, this is the one. First, you'll want to check out books created by the picture-book collaborators featured in *Side by Side*, especially the five titles that receive close discussion: *Louis the Fish* (Arthur Yorinks and Richard Egielski), *The Glorious Flight* (Alice and Martin Provensen), *The Stinky Cheese Man* (Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, with book designer Molly Leach), *Sam and the Tigers* (Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney), and *The Magic School Bus Explores the Senses* (Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen). You might want *Where the Wild Things Are*, since Maurice Sendak mentored Yorinks and Egielski, and some Dr. Seuss, since Smith and Scieszka loved his work when they were kids. While you're at it, why not look for some more titles by Leonard Marcus, who opens up a world of creativity in this new offering.

Marcus explains that most picture-book teams do not work side by side like the writers and artists in this volume.

Instead, they work separately, under the guidance of editors. What is the point of exploring these exceptions? First of all, they make fascinating and lively stories about interesting people. Moreover, these collaborations provide an engaging context for descriptions of the work that goes into the making of picture books. Readers will learn about thumbnail sketches and dummies, and they'll get a sense of the trail of revised and abandoned drafts that writers leave behind. Finally, Marcus's descriptions of these collaborations offer insight into the creative process—which involves relationships, research, technical considerations, serendipity, and hard work, as well as talent and imagination.

The need for both perspiration and inspiration is apparent in the abundant illustrations. In the section on Lester and Pinkney, for example, photos of the writer and artist and reproductions from the finished book are augmented by sketches, a photo of Pinkney's grandson posing as Sam, and a chart presenting four different drafts of the opening to the story.

A variety of voices emerges when Marcus quotes from his interviews with his subjects. Egielski recalls the time he needed a picture of a fish and peeled the label off a can of salmon in the grocery store (he was on a tight budget at the time). We get a feel not only for the banter but also for the tireless persistence that characterizes the collaboration of Smith and Scieszka: "Doing humor," observes Scieszka, "is like ditch digging! You do it over and over again until you get to the bottom of the thing." Alice Provensen describes the depth of her bond with her late husband and collaborator: "Martin and I really were one artist." Throughout, we find the thoughtful voice of Marcus, who offers straightforward explanations and descriptions, assuring that none of his readers, young or old, will feel left out.

—Susan Marie Swanson



Photograph by Howard Hall/HHP, from *Swimming with Hammerhead Sharks*

Swimming with Hammerhead Sharks

By Kenneth Mallory

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

48 pages, Ages 9-12, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-05543-6

This book, one of the Scientists in the Field series, is a welcome antidote to shark hysteria. Kenneth Mallory places the fish in its ocean context, as an animal beautifully adapted to its niche. Superb photographs highlight nearly every page.

The ocean, still largely unexplored, is filled with mysteries. Solving some of

the mysteries of ocean life can help us preserve that life. This book follows two strands, one science, one education: first, the hammerhead studies of field scientist Pete Klimley and, second, the making of the IMAX film *Island of the Sharks* at Cocos Island off Costa Rica.

Hammerheads, among the most sociable of sharks, spend much of their lives in large schools that concentrate at certain volcanic islands. The "sea-mount" of Espiritu Santo in the Gulf of California is the site of Klimley's research.

Clear demonstrations of scientific inquiry—asking questions, forming hypotheses, then designing experiments

to test them—are at the core of this book and the series; they present science as it happens in the field, allowing scientists to take off their lab coats. Mallory does a fine job of sharing his excitement as he dives off Cocos Island with the sharks.

Hammerheads are fascinating; I've wondered most of my life why their heads are built like a double-headed claw hammer, and now I know. As they swim along, they wag their odd heads from side to side to sense their paths. It has to do with magnetism. For more, you'll have to read the book.

—John Caddy

Poetry

Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art

Edited by Jan Greenberg

ABRAMS

80 pages, Ages 10–14, \$19.95

ISBN 0109-4386-7

Inspired as a child by the art she discovered in the Great Hall at the St. Louis Art Museum, Jan Greenberg was similarly excited, as a young adult, to discover the long-standing tradition of art-inspired poetry, such as Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Homer's description of Achilles's shield. The result of this discovery, long germinating, is a book of beautiful and diverse artwork accompanied by the poets' response to the work.

Divided into four parts—Stories, Voices, Impressions, and Expressions—*Heart to Heart* offers readers access to a range of perspectives and creative projects. The first section includes poems that evoke particular memories or tell a small story of their own in response to something seen in a work of art. Dan Masterson writes poignantly of his boyhood days with his big brother on their city street, in response to Edward Hop-

per's 1930 painting *Early Sunday Morning*. In *Voices*, Angela Johnson writes eloquently about her urban community in response to artist Faith Ringgold's warm mixed-media piece titled *From Above*, which shows an African American family enjoying an evening meal on the rooftop of their city home. *Impressions* contains responses both visual and visceral, such as Jane Yolen's plea to "look beyond the eyes, to see who looks out at you" in response to Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. *Expressions* connects the reader to both the artists and their forms, while the poets' words further engage us in the actual experience of making art. Hettie Jones understands this as she reflects on *Open Drawer* by Elizabeth Murray—"What's to be done with our lives? / Oh / Forever another surprise!"—proving that with eyes and hearts wide open, *we* will never fail to be delighted by the beauty of color and form.

—Michelle Reale

Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems

By Francisco X. Alarcon

Illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

CHILDREN'S BOOK PRESS

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.95

ISBN 0-89239-168-5

Iguanas in the Snow is a splendid book, the last in a series by this author and illustrator celebrating the seasons. Winter is the highlight here, and this book will remind you gently and joyously that while snow and cold air on your cheeks may be the postcard version of the season, a warm-weather winter holds just as many delights and pleasures.

Award-winning poet Francisco X. Alarcon and illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez have synergistically created a spirited and colorful romp through winter using Mexico and California as the backdrop. Family members and friends enjoy winter in many different ways,

witnessed by the mischievous iguana, which appears in one form or another on every page. The poems, given in both Spanish and English, are short, sweet, and evocative of the season as it is experienced in the barrio and the Buena Vista Bilingual School, where the children of migrant farmworkers sometimes attend.

Personal identity, and the way it connects to the identity of a place, is highlighted in "San Francisco," as a boy named Francisco (like the poet) celebrates the fact that the city is named after him: "here everybody / knows how to / spell my name." In "In My Barrio,"

you can hear
the music
of life
coming out
of murals
in full color.

The pages of this book are filled with beautiful color themselves, illustrating the bounty of nature to be enjoyed in California, whether you are a permanent resident or a migrant worker expecting to return to Mexico at the end of the harvest season. The ubiquitous iguana, triumphant and playful, is a reminder



Illustration by Maya Christina Gonzalez,
from *Iguanas in the Snow*



Illustration by Kate Kiesler, from *Toasting Marshmallows: Camping Poems*

of the poet's grandmother's home in Mexico. A strong sense of connection to one's heritage, as well as to nature, pervades this volume and is articulated in the last poem, accompanied by an illustration of four children of different sizes and hues standing under snow-laden trees:

Children are
the blooming
branches of trees

one day their seeds
will become
the roots

of other trees
bearing their own
blooming branches.

—Michelle Reale

**Toasting Marshmallows:
Camping Poems**

By Kristine O'Connell George
Illustrated by Kate Kiesler

CLARION

48 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.00

ISBN 0-618-04597-X

The experience of camping—the sights, the smells, the physical tasks—are uniquely satisfying, and sometimes challenging to the uninitiated. Whether or not readers have had the experience of pitching a tent, hiking rocky terrain, or roasting marshmallows beneath a starry sky, they will enjoy these poems about

the fun and adventure of camping.

Kristine O'Connell George, author of the award-winning *The Great Frog Race* and *Old Elm Speaks*, trains her eye on both the obvious pleasures of camping and those that are not so obvious, such as seeing a gentle doe for the first time, “close enough to touch,” and the unexpected peace that comes from just enjoying nature with nothing else to do: “I might sit here all day / by myself, alone / quiet and still, / silent as stone.”

Spending day and night outdoors, campers are warmed by a crackling campfire, find sleeping outside a rare pleasure, and even see small spiders as the amazing creatures they are:

gray spiders spinning silver,
looping silky lines
through smoky wisps

The result is a desire to remain:

We will have to stay
at least one more day.

Toasting Marshmallows is a testament to the enduring pleasures of a great American tradition. George's poems, accompanied by Kate Kiesler's soft and engaging illustrations, will tempt readers to dig out the camping gear and roll out the sleeping bags in anticipation of their own possible adventures in the great outdoors.

—Michelle Reale

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.

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

Kathryne Beebe is currently studying medieval history at *Oxford University*.

John Caddy produces *Self Expressing Earth (SEE)*, an Internet-based program at *Hamline University* that teaches ecological literacy through making art.

Lee Galda, coauthor of *Literature and the Child*, is a professor of children's literature at the *University of Minnesota*.

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*).

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

Michelle Reale is the circulation manager of a busy public library and a freelance book critic. She lives in *Glenside, Pennsylvania*.

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

Susan Marie Swanson is the author of *Letter to the Lake* and *Getting Used to the Dark* (both published by *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

A hardworking man's livelihood is threatened when a four-lane highway bypasses his small restaurant. Though the place has a gas range and hot and cold running water, Molly Bang tells her story as if it were a folktale. The man is called simply "the owner." His son, engagingly present everywhere in the book's detailed cut-paper illustrations, is never mentioned in the spare text. The visitor who changes their lives is "the stranger." As we turn the pages of *The Paper Crane*, eager to see what happens, we feel the deep quiet and serenity at the heart of this picture book.

When the mysterious stranger enters the deserted restaurant, the owner graciously serves him a meal even though he has no money. The stranger shows his gratitude by folding a paper napkin into a traditional origami crane. "You have only to clap your hands," he says, "and this bird will come to life and dance for you. Take it, and enjoy it while it is with you."

First published in 1985, *The Paper Crane* won the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award and has since appeared in paperback and foreign language editions. What makes this picture book so satisfying? For one thing, Bang's illustrations are exquisite. The three-dimensional quality of the paper cutouts draws us in. The pictures are full of textures: tissue, thick brown paper, foil, colored and printed papers, pieces of fabric, snippets of yarn—enriched with deft bits of drawing and painting. As the weeks pass, different kinds of flowers appear in the vases at the restaurant.

Sometimes Bang offers large tableaux that span two pages, and for other scenes she creates staccato sequences of small pictures. One such sequence depicts the little boy, barefoot and clad in pajamas, alone in the restaurant dining room. He claps his hands and dances with the graceful

The Paper Crane

By Molly Bang

32 pages, Ages 4–10

GREENWILLOW, 1985

paperback: \$5.95 hardcover: \$16.95



Illustration by Molly Bang, from The Paper Crane

crane, now taller than he is, even when he joyfully stretches his arms to the ceiling.

When word of the dancing crane spreads—by word of mouth, not on the 10 o'clock television news—the restaurant becomes a lively gathering place. The magical crane brings together children and adults of many difference races and cultures. Alone, with friends, or with family, the guests are enfolded by the earthy comforts of the restaurant. They eat fresh muffins, soup, salads, and desserts garnished with fruit.

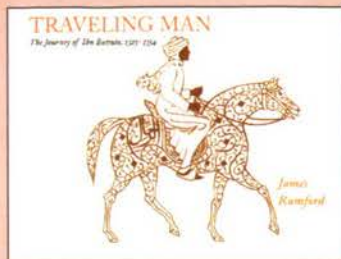
Through it all, the owner and his son work from morning until night. Months later, when the stranger returns, plays a melody on his flute, climbs onto the crane's back, and flies away, it isn't a sad moment. The real gift is not the bird, but the good fortune to continue doing meaningful work. The renewal of the restaurant continues as the story of the stranger and the

magic crane is told over and over again. The supernatural magic of the crane brings the real-life magic of food, fellowship, and storytelling. On the last page of the book, the boy is shown practicing the flute, inspired by the example of the gentle stranger. As he grows, he's bound to bring some magic of his own into the world.

Because a traditional Japanese paper fold is central to the plot, this book has sometimes been treated as if it were rooted specifically in Japanese culture. But the story's roots have a broad reach. In the Taoist tradition, pure white cranes are sacred symbols of wisdom, and there are ancient Chinese stories in which immortal sages ride on the backs of cranes. In many places the crane signifies good fortune, prosperity, and long life. In *The Paper Crane*, kindness and hard work are celebrated, and ordinary lives are full of mystery.

—Susan Marie Swanson

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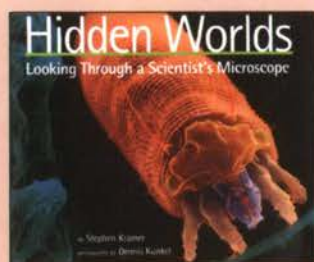


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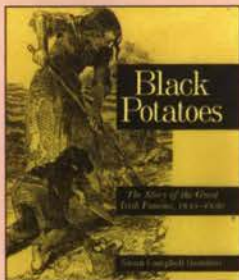
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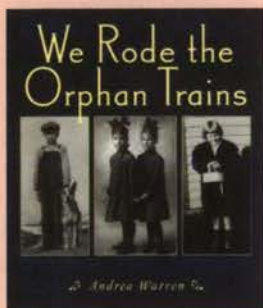


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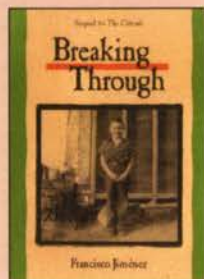


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