

2002 CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

Peter Sís on
Politics and Art

Stories of
Refugees

The Many
Voices of Paul
Fleischman

Off to See
the Wizard

The Teacher's Art:
Touching
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PLUS

New Books
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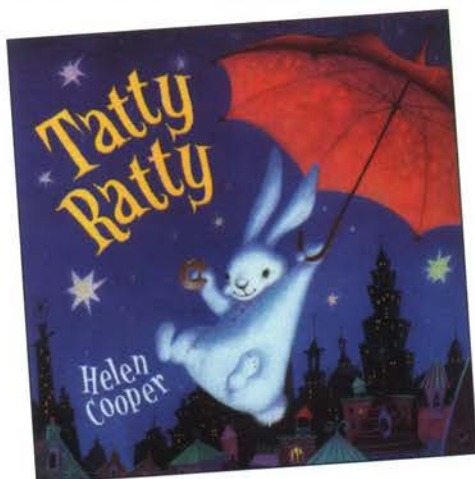


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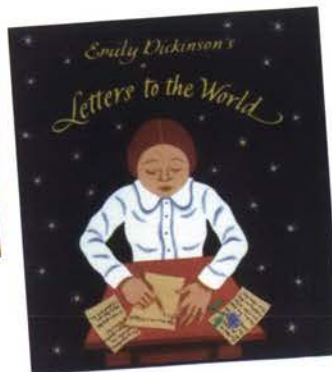
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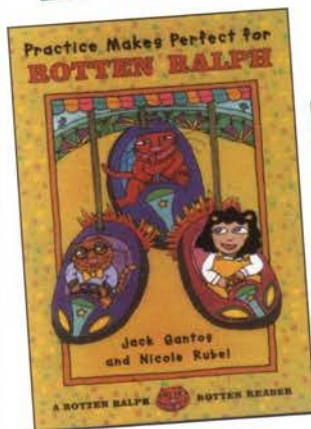
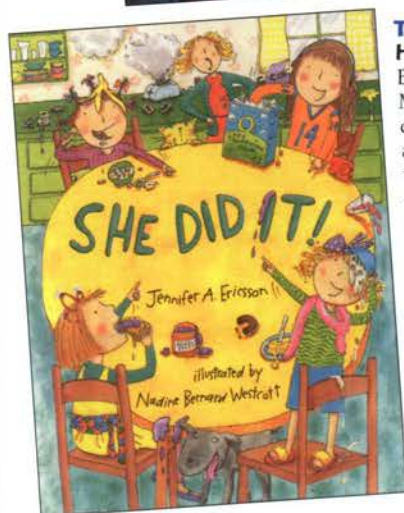
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Illustration by Nadine Bernard Westcott from *She Did It!*



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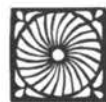
About the Cover Art

This winter I had to go to Charleston, South Carolina, on a photo shoot. Since the location was by a river, I decided to work on the *Riverbank Review* cover while I was there. The woman in charge of the shoot had a little girl who was willing to stand in as a model for me, though, as it turned out, she was less willing to smile. The half smile she wears in this painting came from the stroke of a paintbrush.

When I'm preparing for a project, I often pick up clothing in thrift stores so that I'll have some different options for the models I work with. It happened that I had a red dress in my car. It reminded me of the long, flowing dress the woman in a Winslow Homer painting is wearing, also in a spring setting, and I gave it to the girl to wear. It was oversized, but I liked the way it looked—as if she was dressing up. I liked the contrast between the red dress and the green that I imagined coming with spring.

—*E. B. Lewis*

*E. B. Lewis is the illustrator of many picture books, including *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson (Putnam, 2001), a Riverbank Review Children's Book of Distinction.*



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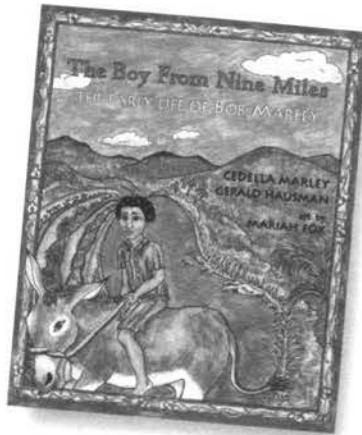
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editor's note

When I learned of the death of the Swedish children's-book author Astrid Lindgren, who passed away on January 28 at the age of ninety-four, I had the immediate urge to find Pippi, pull her off the shelf, and spend some time with that redheaded mischief-maker. So I went on a search, located my tattered childhood copy of *Pippi Longstocking* in my younger son's bedroom, and did just that.

Rereading Pippi's adventures took me back in time. She was an important character in my young reading life, and a formative influence. Pippi was wild—she was a child who had no adults looking over her shoulder, and who, therefore, like Huck Finn, could follow her whims unimpeded. The loneliness implicit in her situation (living by herself in the dilapidated Villa Villekulla, her mother dead, her father lost at sea) didn't diminish the fun; it gave it a kind of heroic foundation. When robbers visit Villa Villekulla one night and Pippi overpowers them with her trademark combination of brawn and wit, her victory would mean nothing without the vulnerability that lies beneath. When she carries her horse across town, outperforms the paid performers in a fantastic circus act, or rescues children from a burning house, young readers somehow know that the real tools in her kit are things they also have access to: courage, imagination, and a sense of fun.

Pippi is an interesting bundle of qualities. Outrageous in her remarks and behavior, she is guided by logic nonetheless. Her world is one not of anarchy, but (like that of Mary Poppins) of eccentric order. Favorite pastimes include strapping brushes on her feet to scrub the floor and setting out on "thing-finding" expeditions, imaginatively recycling common objects for uncommon use. Pippi embodies industry. Allowed to do whatever she pleases, she is continually engaged in work of one sort or another, but since it's work of her own choosing, it feels like play. Though she has a miserable time in structured settings (like a school classroom), this comes from her innate difficulty fitting into them, not from a hostile attitude. It's the structures, not the people, that present the problem for Pippi. Before going to a neighbor's coffee party, Pippi expresses to her friends Tommy and Annika her desire for things to go well: "I have noticed several times," she says, "that people don't think I know how to behave even when I'm trying as hard

as I can. At sea we were never so fussy about things like that. But I promise that I'll take special pains today so you won't have to be ashamed of me."

Making her appearance in 1950, Pippi was an important character for girls in the decades to come. She offered encouragement for at least *imagining* alternatives to conventional paths. When she is asked by the village's kind but convention-bound school-teacher whether she doesn't want to grow up to be "a really fine lady" who "knows how to behave and is always polite," Pippi doesn't reject the suggestion out of hand. If it's something others estimate highly, she'll consider it. But she is forthright in allowing that she already has another goal: to be a pirate. This was an aspiration that, in my wild young heart, I could relate to.



While in some senses we've come a long way since the 1950s, in terms of broadened horizons and tolerance for diversity, Pippi is a character who is probably deemed more problematic today than when she was created—and *Pippi Longstocking* is a book I expect many parents would now shun. The expectations we bring to literature today have narrowed; we expect to find a mirror, not of human feelings and foibles, but of aspired-to social attitudes and norms. We are fearful of "wrong messages," assuming a direct cause and effect relationship between reading and living. Pippi has great fun playing with a pistol and a sword. She mixes medicines she obtains at the pharmacy and glugs the concoction down as an all-around preventive. She entertains strangers alone in her house. Perhaps most significantly, she tells fanciful stories about the behaviors of peoples in farflung cultures—places she claims to have visited on ocean voyages with her father (some of which she returns to, with him, in the less-than-satisfying sequels to the first book). All of these things date *Pippi Longstocking*. But it would be too bad if they scared readers off. Of all the carefully constructed contemporary heroines—girl characters designed by writers with the pedagogical aim of empowering and inspiring young readers—few can match the freckle-faced Pippi for the impact that really counts: the impact of a character who springs straight from a writer's imagination and nimbly walks a tightrope into readers' hearts.

—Martha Davis Beck

Lives of Struggle, Lives of Hope

Stories about refugees give war a human face.

By Jenny Browne

In the weeks following September 11, as the military campaign in Afghanistan unfolded, I was a visiting poet with a group of lively fourth- and fifth-graders in Texas. From the beginning, I decided not to introduce any writing exercises directly related to the political situation. Many students had already written responses to

it in their classes, and much of the writing felt forced, full of canned patriotic language. It seemed that children wanted to speak about these events yet didn't quite know what to say, so they repeated what they had heard on television.

But one rainy morning, a prompt to write a poem in the form of a letter to someone with whom they could not speak directly opened the door to a flood of questions and insights. The directions the poems took seemed in part related to the students' ages. Many of the fourth-graders chose to write to a child in Afghanistan. Their words spoke the worries fourth-graders have: I wish you warm coats, safe sleep, new televisions. Did the bombs hurt your ears? What are your favorite colors? By trying to understand the daily life of children in a war zone in terms of their own lives, they settled in and wrote with detail, compassion, and originality.

Presented with the same prompt, nearly half of the fifth-graders wrote directly to Osama bin Laden. With the exception of the occasional stunt question ("Do you have your turban on too tight?"), their concerns were much like my own and expressed an intense grappling for understanding. What happened

to you that made you so mad? What does this have to do with your God? How do you sleep at night? There was something in the older children, who perhaps already knew a fair amount and therefore wanted to know even more, that sought the story behind the story. They saw a consequence and wanted a reason.

There has been a lot of talk about the right way to discuss recent world events with children. How old is old enough? How much is too much? Similar discussion has long surrounded Holocaust literature for children. Will it help children to think about their own moral choices as potential bystanders, victims, or perpetrators, and to make connections to present-day racism and discrimination around the globe? Or is subject matter like this too painful to explore?

Children can—and should—be challenged to consider their place in a world beset by global inequality and turmoil; yet their responsibility is different from that of adults. Rather than a responsibility to act, it is a responsibility to begin to understand oneself as a world citizen. Adults can help in this process. Literature that offers an opportunity for strong character identi-

fication across differences in culture and circumstance can be a tool in that effort. Books on the refugee experience offer an ideal opportunity for children to imagine the lives of others both like and unlike themselves, and to deal with disturbing world events on a manageable scale.

In Frances Temple's moving novel *Grab Hands and Run* (Orchard, 1993) a family of refugees travels north from El Salvador. Throughout the story, the physical and emotional experience of war is rather graphic and may be difficult for some readers. It would be simplistic to suggest that there is a set point at which children are ready to face such aspects of the real world. Young people cross thresholds of knowledge by degree, often testing them first. For children in wartime situations or other extreme distress, the issue is often forced. No one asks if they are ready. Still, they will protect themselves as best they can, as long as they can. At the outset of Temple's novel, twelve-year-old Felipe knows only the general shape of his father's political activism, and that it is dangerous. When he overhears his parents discussing the possibility of escape to Canada, Felipe finally decides to ask his father directly about his work:

"Jacinto," I whisper one evening when we are alone out in the yard.... "If I'm old enough to be wanted by the army, don't you think I'm old enough to understand what you do?" "...You are right Felipe,"

he says at last. "You are old enough, tough enough.... But do you want everything that goes with knowing? Do you want to have to decide? I myself don't always know what is right to do."

Forced into adult roles, refugee children must often make very adult decisions about the right thing to do. In Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (HarperCollins, 2001) the truth-telling of Sade and Femi Solaja's father, a Nigerian journalist, results in the murder of their mother. After being smuggled to London and subsequently abandoned there, the twelve-year-old sister and ten-year-old brother confront the adult complexities of secrecy and truth. Through this struggle, played out on the streets, in the schoolyard, and in the Kafkaesque political asylum system, Sade and Femi are forced to face their fears. Ultimately they must take the most challenging action of all, in order to free their jailed father: they must speak up. This is the same kind of speaking up that has recently and immeasurably changed their lives.

During a recent school residency, I read through the librarian's guidelines for parent readers who would be evaluating incoming books. One element they were told to look for was the victory of good over evil. I found myself wondering, How will this victory be determined? Despite the frequent use of these two words by political figures of all stripes, the line between good and evil is rarely universally clear. For example, as the refugees in *Grab Hands and Run* make their laborious trek north, Felipe learns about the American government's involvement in the repression in El Salvador that eventually killed his father. He also can see that the American people who shelter the travelers are kind people. In *The Other*

Side of Truth, good and bad are blurred in the character of Mrs. Bankole, who "helps" Sade and Femi by providing false passports to get them to London. Her motive is clearly never their safety, as she disappears when they reach their destination. Questions relating to what is good or evil, right or wrong, are often complex. It can be paralyzing for adults



to realize that they cannot easily resolve such questions for children. Books can't bear the burden of resolving them either, but a good book can show how people work to find solace within struggle.

When Selda, the lonely young narrator in Gaye Hıçılmaz's *The Frozen Waterfall* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993), writes to her Turkish grandmother from her new home in Switzerland, "Sometimes Grandmother, I think I'll wake up and find that this is all a dream, and that we're just playing at being here," the daily alienation, insecurity, and confusion of a "normal" childhood are magnified by her status as an immigrant in a strange culture. Selda herself is not a refugee, but as she adjusts to her difficult new life, she befriends a young man who is. Ferhat is an illegal Turkish immigrant whose much greater challenges put Selda's situation into per-

spective. Selda describes his life as like "being an animal, perhaps, always waiting and watching and being fearful." Selda has a home, fragile as it seems. Ferhat must keep moving, living under the protection and prison of darkness.

One natural response to a tragedy on the scale of the September 11 terrorism—or to a story about the extreme circumstances of refugees—is to feel that one's own problems mean nothing in comparison. Yet, understanding and identification can occur across seemingly vast divides. As Anita Lobel writes in the introduction to her harrowing memoir of the Holocaust, *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War* (Greenwillow, 1998):

Childhoods are difficult even in the best of times. I look at children in happy times, and I see little people with wisdom in their eyes at the mercy of big people who don't know what they are doing. I suppose it is fanciful to compare a life lived placidly with parents in a pleasant house with a living room and bedrooms and bathroom and toys and a kitchen with a refrigerator packed with food, with a life trudging and surviving on the landscape of war. But it is also wearisome as well as dangerous to cloak and sanctify oneself with the pride of victimhood.

Her book is not nostalgic or manipulative. It is true. She writes in closing, "I was born far, far away, on a bloody continent at a terrible time. I lived there for a while. I live here now." The challenge for children and adults alike is how to be both aware and grateful in life, wherever "here" and "now" are.

Stories can help us. As anyone who has ever made a close friend from a different culture or belief system knows, tolerance and understanding evolve

through personal relationships. Children also form relationships with fictional characters.

For younger readers, the worlds within worlds that refugee children create offer a testament to the power of hope and imagination. It is this power,

coupled with the universal gift of small human kindnesses, that strengthen Dara, a young Cambodian girl in *The Clay Marble* by Minfong Ho (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991). The sprawling refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border where Dara lives with her fami-

ly is a bleak place. But Dara's new friend Jantu seems to have magic in her hands, hands that create dolls, kites, and "magic" clay marbles. Slowly Dara learns that the magic is not in the marble itself, but in the hope it restores to her heart.

Stories that dare to show such nuances in even the most extreme situations give them a human face. *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki (Low and Low, 1993) tells a story about Japanese American citizens unjustly held in an internment camp in California during World War II. Baseball games played behind the barbed wire offer welcome diversion for the prisoners, and the ever-present guard is a target for "Shorty" as he steps up to the plate. Yet the guard is also shown as a man with a job to do—a man who unexpectedly gives Shorty a thumbs-up when he hits a home run.

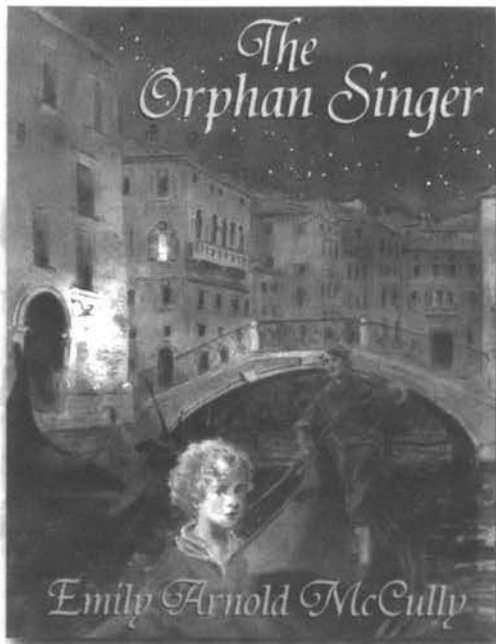
The young Afghani boy in *The Roses in My Carpet*, a picture book by Rukhsana Khan (Stoddart Kids, 1998), finds a world of beauty in the back-breaking work of hand-weaving rugs. The book opens with the words "It's always the same. The jets scream overhead. They've seen me." The jets are only a bad dream, but the boy's life is a nightmare of physical hardship. Still, when he practices his weaving, he creates a world of his own, investing each color with meaning: "White for the shroud we wrapped my father's body in. Black is for the night that cloaks us from enemy eyes. Green is the color of life. Blue is the sky."

The world of those most affected by war can feel as far away to children as the sky. Bringing this world closer through literature can help young people to understand the human costs of political turmoil. Perhaps it can also inspire commitment to a sky that holds only clouds and sun. ~

Jenny Browne is a poet, journalist, and teacher. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.

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Off to See the Wizard

How do children reconcile film adaptations of favorite books with the stories in their heads?

By Monica Edinger

Children, their books, and movies of their books—it's a complicated stew that has been simmering for over a century, since film was invented. For many bibliophiles, film adaptations of beloved stories besmirch the private version already created by the child reader; movies should not interfere with these

uniquely imagined representations of the books' characters and scenes. More than a few film enthusiasts would argue the opposite: a well-done film adaptation deepens regard for the book and often inspires more children to read it. The issue of creativity looms as well. Must filmmakers produce faithful reworkings of books, or is it their right—and calling, as artists—to create something distinctly their own?

Book-loving adults tend to feel passionately about the place of books in children's lives. It is easy for us to feel disappointed when a particular book we loved in our own childhood does not provoke a similar response in a child today, and to worry more generally about the amount of time children devote to reading. Many of us grew up in a world without cable and satellite television, without VCRs, without multiplex theaters. It can be hard for us to accept how different it is for today's children; in their world, stories come as often from a screen or a disk as from a traditional clothbound book. Some-

times children begin with an audiobook, continue with the movie, and lastly, perhaps, read the book itself. The definition of rereading expands when it is possible to move back and forth between book and VCR, reading and

viewing. For media-saturated children, the line between books and movies becomes blurry.

This new world, in which children so easily navigate between the screen and the page, makes many adults feel uneasy. What is happening to our beloved books? Will they become archaic as children gravitate more and more to visual media for their stories? Does the author's vision now mean less to children than that of the filmmaker? In my experience as an elementary-school

teacher, this has not turned out to be the case. While children do have greater access to visual media each year (and greater control of those media as well), they still hold books in the highest esteem. I've watched them manage, with great success, the swirl of new media versions of stories from books. In fact, it is fascinating to make the journey with students from book to film, or from a film back to the book that spawned it.

My first experience with a movie adaptation of a book occurred long before I became a teacher. Like many children of my generation, every year I watched *The Wizard of Oz* on



"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Illustration by W. W. Denslow, from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, by L. Frank Baum (George M. Hill, 1900)

television—I loved it, and I looked forward to this annual event. Decades later, I can still recite large portions of the film’s dialogue by heart. The year I was ten, after having seen the movie several times, I discovered a complete set of L. Frank Baum’s Oz books. I loved them, too, and swiftly read my way through the series. When I saw the movie that year, I enjoyed it as I always had; it didn’t matter to me that the film’s story departed significantly from Baum’s work. I saw them as two totally different experiences.

Years later, remembering both the movie and Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* fondly, I decided it would be interesting to have my students compare the two, so I brought both the book and the movie into my fourth-grade classroom. Enjoying both has now become a regular feature of the year.

It is rare that one of my students knows Baum’s book, but most of them know the movie. For them the movie is old—so old that parts of it are in black and white. (My students, I’m sorry to report, are not fans of black-and-white film.) The movie’s special effects, state of the art in 1939, appear threadbare to my computer graphic-savvy students. Yet they recognize the movie’s significance, and most have viewed it with nostalgic adults who continue to revere it.

I begin by having them read the book. They are immediately delighted with it; the story is a good one, compelling, and far more detailed than the movie’s. After reading the book, when we watch the movie they are generally indignant at what has been changed or left out. Children today are raised to be critics and they engage in the role with ease. It never would have occurred to me as a child to tell an adult what I thought about a movie. Nor do I think it would have occurred to many adults to ask me. My students, in contrast, have been brought up with the idea that their opinions matter. In fact, I challenge them to



Dorothy and friends, in the 1939 MGM film The Wizard of Oz

take a point of view, to tell me what they think, and to back it up with fact. They can easily and happily discuss whether or not the MGM movie is a good adaptation of the book. Yet for all their enthusiastic and opinionated chatter, it is very reassuring to observe them during an actual movie viewing or while they are reading. The critical stance is gone, and there they are, no different from children of earlier generations—completely engrossed in the story itself.

A favorite classroom book of mine is E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*. I consider it one of the greatest children’s books ever written, and I have yet to find a child who disagrees. It is our first book of the year and I use it knowing that many of my fourth-graders will already know the book, either because it was read aloud to them or because they read it themselves. This doesn’t bother me. Studying a classic, familiar work is a good way to teach children how to dig a bit deeper into a novel, how to consider the author’s craft, and how to engage in the beginnings of literary analysis.

What many people don’t know about *Charlotte’s Web*, because the book itself is so powerful and memorable, is that in

1973 a feature-length cartoon was made of it. Reading White’s letters about the different attempts to make this book into a film (in Peter Neumeier’s *Annotated Charlotte’s Web*) makes you ache for all authors whose works have been reduced and changed for the worse by less than creative filmmakers. Proposals included eliminating Fern from the story entirely, keeping Charlotte alive, and making it into a musical. The mediocre final production is horribly sentimental, includes songs, and is just the sort of moral tale White rails against in his letters. The artwork seems weak next to Garth Williams’s wonderful illustrations. Fortunately, while my students usually have seen the movie, they tend to forget about it as they lose themselves in the novel. White’s prose is so magnificent that the movie quickly fades away, an inconsequential and forgettable bit of celluloid.

Of course, my most recent experience with a movie adaptation of a book involved the world’s most famous boy wizard, Harry Potter. The first book in J. K. Rowling’s series, like *The Wizard of Oz* a century earlier, was an immediate and enormous success with children. While that might seem to be a boon to a filmmaker, in fact, it made the first Harry Potter movie a tricky proposition. With a living author and millions of child fans to please, it wasn’t possible for Chris Columbus, the film’s director, to make the sort of changes MGM was able to make in *The Wizard of Oz*, filmed years after the book’s publication and the author’s death. One of the reasons the Harry Potter movie ended up being such a faithful adaptation is that J. K. Rowling made sure of it. Unlike E. B. White, she received iron-clad agreements giving her tremendous influence on the final product.

Most of my students were delighted with the movie, their complaints limited to the inevitable problem of what was left out: “I have read all the Harry

Potter books and I am a huge fan of everything that says his name! I think the movie was great even though they skipped some parts like the duel and the potions test. Everything was like I imagined it and the graphics were great!" One former student, however, told me he had no intention of seeing the movie, as doing so would "ruin the books for me." He had very distinct images in his mind of all the characters and wanted to keep them for future books of the series; for this reason, he wanted no part of the movie. Yet one of his former classmates told me she "couldn't wait for the movie" and when she saw it she was not disappointed in the slightest. The characters were as she had imagined them. Far from diminishing her pleasure in the books, the movie enhanced it. Then there was the fourth-grader who wrote: "The movie is pretty cool, but it sort of ruins my imagination because it's saying that the characters have to look a certain way and the Quidditch game has to be played in a certain way and it makes the novel fact not fantasy and when it was fantasy everybody thought of the novel differently." An interesting observation by a child more concerned with how the film compromised each individual viewer's idea of Harry than whether or not it was faithful to the book.

The Harry Potter phenomenon is far from over—there are three books and many more movies to come. How the interplay between book and movie versions of this story will affect child readers and viewers remains to be seen. I suspect that younger children, who did not encounter the books when they first came out, will openly and without reservations embrace both the books and the movies. They will move between the two media without difficulty, rewinding the VCR to replay certain scenes as they reread favorite passages or volumes in the series of books.

This is not to suggest that children will eagerly devour all books and movie adaptations. It seems likely to me that they will continue to respond to them differently depending on circumstances and their particular tastes. Films and books that seem terribly different from one another, like *The Wizard of Oz*, will be enjoyed as two completely different stories. In cases where the movie is a pale shadow of the book, as happened with *Charlotte's Web*, I trust that the book will be what children remember. And then there will be

works like Harry Potter, where book and movie will become intertwined experiences that complement and support each other.

I'm confident that the bubbling stew of children's stories, in all their various forms, will offer satisfying nourishment for some time to come; and in this world of ever changing and mixing media, the book will remain a central part of the mix. ~

Monica Edinger is a fourth-grade teacher at the Dalton School in New York City.

Books on Film

What films do justice to the books that inspired them? Book and film lovers will have a range of answers to that question. Here's a list *Riverbank Review* staff put together, ranging from animated shorts to full-length features.

Babe

Directed by Chris Noonan

1995: 89 MINUTES

Adapted from the book by Dick King-Smith.

Black Beauty

Directed by Caroline Thompson

1994: 88 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by Anna Sewell.

The Children of Noisy Village

Directed by Lasse Hallström

1986: 90 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by Astrid Lindgren.

The Cricket in Times Square

Directed by Chuck Jones

1973: 29 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by George Seldon, illustrated by Garth Williams.

Island of the Blue Dolphins

Directed by James B. Clark

1964: 99 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by Scott O'Dell.

Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile

Directed by Michael Sporn

1987: 30 MINUTES

Adapted from the picture book by Bernard Weber. Not currently available on VHS or DVD: check your library.

The Secret Garden

Directed by Agnieszka Holland

1993: 102 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

The Snowman

Directed by Dianne Jackson

1982: 26 MINUTES

Adapted from the picture book by Raymond Briggs.

Souder

Directed by Martin Ritt

1972: 105 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by William H. Armstrong.

The Witches

Directed by Nicholas Roeg

1990: 91 MINUTES

Adapted from the novel by Roald Dahl.



profile

Paul Fleischman

This versatile Newbery-winning author hears voices—and that’s good news for his readers.

By Deb Kruse-Field

Voices surround high school senior Rob Radkovitz. There’s his multilingual mother (“Fais de beaux rêves”), his bibliophile grandmother (“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”), his labor historian grandfather (“Let me get this straight. They’re paying you with *pastry*?”) And then there’s the radio:

a whole world of voices streaming into his room. One of these voices, Rob hopes, will be that of his father, who, last Rob knew, was a radio disc jockey.

Performed with others or read alone, *Seek* (Cricket, 2001), Paul Fleischman’s latest book, is a radio script, sound portrait, and novel all in one. As Rob tunes in to the voices around him, his own voice emerges: “I hadn’t been positive, when I’d brought the shortwave down from the attic, whether I’d actually changed or just convinced myself I had. Now I knew.” Voices, like the ones in *Seek*—strong and spare and resonating with truth—are a trademark of Fleischman’s work.

Best known for his innovative poetry and prose written for multiple readers, Fleischman intends for his books to be read aloud around a family’s kitchen table or performed in a classroom. But his stylistic range is as multi-dimensional as *Seek*’s fifty-two voices. Fleischman has written more than thirty books, including seven picture books, fifteen contemporary and historical novels and novellas, three books of poetry, two collections of short stories, and four nonfiction books. His works

of poetry and prose are like aural sculptures, masterfully connecting surprising voices and objects: cicadas sing, villagers whisper secrets to wooden statues, and teenage boys talk of winning back girlfriends with tomatoes. What could be a cacophony of unrelated voices is instead a literary symphony to which the reader can’t help but listen.

Though Fleischman’s uncanny ear is remarkable, it’s not surprising. Like Rob, he “grew up in a house built of voices.” Born in 1952 in Monterey, California, Fleischman spent his childhood and adolescence in Santa Monica. He tuned in to his shortwave radio, listening long into the night to faraway voices speaking in Arabic, Japanese, and Russian. Deciphering these mysterious languages was not important, Fleischman writes in a 1986 essay in *The Horn Book*; it was the “verbal music” that entranced him.

As a child he played the piano, filling the house with rhythmical sounds along with the rest of his musical family. Cutting classes in high school, Fleischman retreated to the public library where, instead of reveling in books, he listened to records: Schubert, Chopin,

Beethoven, Brahms. He attributes his appreciation of sound and language to his father, children’s book author Sid Fleischman, who won the Newbery Medal in 1987, just two years before his son did. Growing up, Paul listened to his father read aloud after dinner, chapter by chapter, from *Mr. Mysterious & Company*, *By the Great Horn Spoon!*, and other manuscripts in progress. Soaking up the sounds of language, the younger Fleischman was apprenticing to be a writer without knowing it.

After attending the University of California at Berkeley from 1970 to 1972, he rode his bike up the coast, took a train across Canada, and lived for several years in a two-hundred-year-old house in New Hampshire that didn’t have electricity. It wasn’t until 1977, when he was close to completing a degree in history at the University of New Mexico and casting about for a suitable profession, that the idea of writing dawned on him. He was immediately successful. Renowned editor Charlotte Zolotow accepted his first picture book, *The Birthday Tree* (1979), a charming story with a poetic ring. Thereafter, Fleischman was recognized as a budding new talent in children’s literature.

Poignant images and fantastical elements weave through several of his early books, like the supernatural novel *Half-a-Moon Inn* (1980), in which Miss Grackle, the deceitful owner of an inn,

peels back her guests' eyelids to read their dreams. A hedge grows in the shape of its trimmers' aspirations in the magical picture book *The Animal Hedge* (1983), and mistaken fortunes entrap a thief in the comical folktale *Finzel the Farsighted* (1983). Fleischman's two early short story collections teem with mystical encounters as well. A young peddler agrees to meet with the spirits of his customers' parents on All Souls Eve in order to make a sale in *Coming-and-Going Men* (1985). In the Newbery Honor-winning *Graven Images* (1982), a sculptor who is hired by a ghost discovers that his prestigious patrons, seemingly worthy of being immortalized in stone, were actually thieves and murderers.

After these first efforts, Fleischman realized that he was subconsciously writing prose in 4/4 meter. Writing, he found, was astoundingly similar to composing music. Because he works his story structure out in detail before starting, Fleischman devotes much of his writing time to exploring the music of language. Writing only one page per day, he painstakingly pores over every syllable, word, and phrase. He infuses his stories with subtle alliteration and creates cadences that transport the reader, in sentences like the opening of *Saturnalia* (1990):

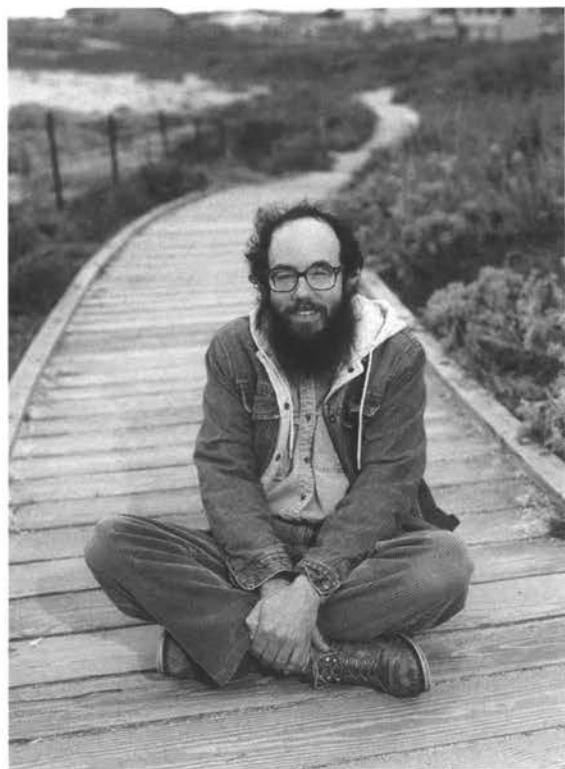
The weather vanes of Boston were pointed north—the frigates, the angels, the cocks, the cow—and so, below, was Mr. Baggot.

Like a composer, Fleischman writes many of his works to be performed and heard rather than simply read. His poetry and prose for multiple voices invites the participation of more than one reader, a notion that stemmed from his delight in playing the recorder with a New Hampshire musical group. In his Newbery acceptance speech for *Joyful Noise* Fleischman noted, "Playing a piece of music, I discovered, gave far

more pleasure than merely listening to it. And playing music with other people was infinitely more enjoyable than playing alone." Fleischman infuses this joy of interacting with others into his poetry: in *I Am Phoenix* (1985), a tribute to birds and nature; *Rondo in C* (1988), a lyrical picture book with twelve narrators responding to a single piece of piano music; *Big Talk* (2000), a collection of three playful poems for four voices; and *Joyful Noise* (1988), a boisterous paean to insects. Wasps and beetles may seem like unlikely muses, but Fleischman brings these tiniest of creatures to colorful life. Book lice banter back and forth about their literary tastes. Voices of boatmen blend, intermittently shouting out the order to "Stroke!," and moths serenade in unison:

Porch	Porch
light,	light,
hear my plight!	hear my plight!

While families or students performing together can provide the "reader's theater" synergy Fleischman has imagined in the structuring of his works, the author's prose works for multiple voices—*Bull Run* (1993), *Seedfolks* (1997), *Mind's Eye* (1999), and *Seek* (2001)—can be just as satisfying to a reader alone with the book. A distinctive story arc runs through each of these works, and each one is a treasure trove of sophisticated references and subtle imagery for young adults who crave richly layered stories. Elva, a former English teacher confined to a convalescent home in *Mind's Eye*, rambles on



Paul Fleischman

about Winston Churchill, *My Fair Lady*, Robert Frost, and Greek mythology to her paralyzed roommate, sixteen-year-old Courtney. In *Seek*, Rob recalls his labor historian grandfather desperately trying to tell him about unions, scabs, and "Bloody Thursday." Rob muses, "He may be the very first to attempt teaching it to a six-year-old." Fleischman's unpretentious prose and appealing, dry-witted characters make these layers and references intriguing rather than befuddling. He makes avant garde narrative forms accessible and invites all readers to stretch the boundaries of what they know and think about.

Though Fleischman usually incorporates humor gently, in the form of comical asides, sometimes his wit is more overt. A fan of *Mad* magazine as a teen, he secretly hid copies of it in his notebook during school. He has said, "I loved humor that mocked the adult world. As an adult I realized there's

very little young adult humor that asks teenagers to laugh at themselves." This type of humor inspired *A Fate Totally Worse than Death* (1995), a parody on teen horror novels, in which a heartless high school senior feels her social status threatened by a Norwegian exchange student. The lighthearted poem "Seventh Grade Soap Opera" in *Big Talk* is a good-natured stab at the gossip that runs rampant through junior high. And in *The Case of the Two-Minute Cough* (1983), a wacky mystery for intermediate readers, Phoebe and Dash pose as detectives and cough syrup experts in order to track down the thief of a precious old bottle of Dr. Mooseheart's Two-Minute Cough Conqueror.

Pleasure never comes from television or from school classrooms in Fleischman's picture books. It is the outside world—like the beaches and alleys that Fleischman scoured as a child in search of odd treasures—or events like the puppeteer's captivating performance in *Shadow Play* (1990) that bring joy. Like their author, Fleischman's young characters are innovators. A skilled string-figure storyteller himself, Fleischman incorporates this craft into *Lost! A Story in String* (2000), in which a young girl learns the magic of recounting a story with a piece of yarn. Students' imagination turns a class trip into a wild time-travel journey in *Time Train* (1991). And then there's the protagonist in *Weslandia* (1999): reminiscent of the young nonconformist Fleischman, Wesley is an outcast in his neighborhood, anomalous for disliking both pizza and professional sports. Creating his own backyard civilization, Wesley grows a new staple crop that he names "swist," from which he utilizes the plant's fruit, tuber, and stalk to eat, make ink, and invent new games.

Compelling characters make experiences such as yellow fever and the Puritans' Indian Wars vivid and immediate in Fleischman's historical novels

Path of the Pale Horse (1983), *Saturnalia* (1990), and *The Boring Room* (1991), books that bring forgotten and surprising slices of history to life. *Townsend's Warbler* (1992), a creative nonfiction work, describes a nineteenth-century American naturalist's cross-continental explo-

*Fleischman's works
of poetry and prose
are like aural sculptures,
masterfully connecting
surprising voices
and objects.*

ration as it converges with the journey of a group of migrating birds. Sixteen riveting voices in *Bull Run* (1993) tell the tale of the bloody Civil War battle in a series of monologues. The reader immediately comes to know characters like Carlotta King, a slave who is determined to escape to freedom, James Dacy, a keen-eyed Union artist, and the spirited Toby Boyce, who recalls, "I was eleven years old and desperate to kill a Yankee before the supply ran out." Boyce plays the fife in the Confederate band, but his enthusiasm dwindles as he witnesses the realities of war: gambling, liquor being stashed in watermelons, and, finally, dying men:

My stomach emptied. He was a Yank.
How I'd longed back home to kill
one. Here I finally had my chance.
But instead I ran, dodging dead bod-
ies, ran back through the Southern

men, past the wagons, past the doctors, and kept on running toward Georgia and Grandpap.

In nonfiction works like *Dateline: Troy* (1996) and *Cannibal in the Mirror* (2000), Fleischman juxtaposes the historical past with the present. The Trojan War is made relevant in *Dateline: Troy* when reports of its battles are set alongside actual modern-day newspaper articles. Fleischman's retelling of the ancient war ends with the slain Greek king and Trojan princess and the final question, "Who could tell the victor from the vanquished?" On the neighboring page a headline about the Croatian and Serb war reads: "The Human Cost of War."

Nature abounds in Fleischman's books, often intertwining with human actions and imagery. Racing against the sun, determined Olivia meets the terms of her deceased father's annual bike journey—finishing the sixty-mile route before sunset—fulfilling a rite of passage (*Rearview Mirrors*, 1986). In *Seedfolks*, a young Vietnamese girl grows lima beans in a vacant, rat-infested lot, uniting a community around a garden, and in *Whirligig* (1998) ocean winds cause lovingly made wooden sculptures to spin in the four corners of the United States. One small gust sets in motion the lives of the people who cross paths with the whirligigs, including Brent, who created the propelling monuments to atone for inadvertently killing a girl with his car when he meant to destroy himself.

But it may be the radio waves in *Seek*, traveling alongside nighttime butterflies, that serve as the most apt metaphor for Fleischman's own voice, searching out listeners on many different channels, endlessly reverberating. ~

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

Harcourt Children's Books Spring-Summer 2002 Highlights

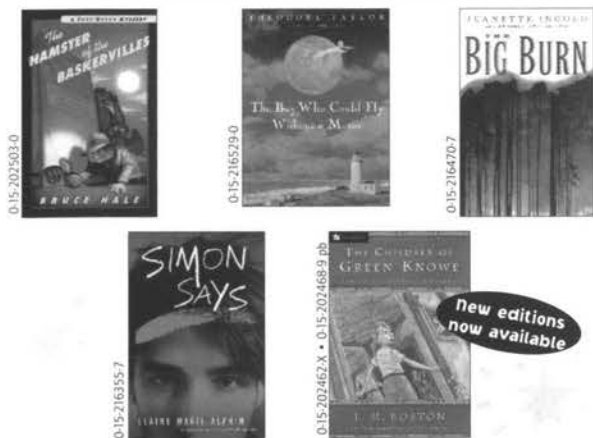
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19 Varieties of Gazelle

Poems about the Middle East strike an especially powerful chord at this moment in our history.

By Naomi Shihab Nye

September 11, 2001, was not the first hideous day ever in the world, but it was the worst one many Americans had ever lived. May we never see another like it. For people who love the Middle East and have an ongoing devotion to cross-cultural understanding, the day felt sickeningly tragic in more ways than one. A huge shadow had been cast across the lives of so many innocent people and an ancient culture's pride...

I kept thinking, as did millions of other people, What can we do? Writers, believers in words, could not give up words when the going got rough. I found myself, as millions did, turning to poetry. But many of us have always turned to poetry. Why should it be any surprise that people find solace in the most intimate literary genre? Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases those details. We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortably into experience, holding and connecting it more successfully than any news channel we could name.

—Naomi Shihab Nye



Naomi Shihab Nye is an award-winning poet and children's book author. The daughter of a Palestinian father and a German American mother, she grew up in St. Louis, in Jerusalem, and in San Antonio, where she now lives. The following poems are excerpted from 19 Varieties of Gazelle, published by Greenwillow Books (Spring 2002) and reprinted with permission from the publisher. A portion

of the poet's and publisher's proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Seeds of Peace (www.seedsofpeace.org).



Going to the Spring

In the evenings the women
walk to the spring,
my cousins balance huge buckets
on their heads.

They know all the stories of water
that comes through pipes:
their brothers are digging trenches,
laying down tile.

On the roof a silver tank
will cook the water in the sun.
They know there are countries
where men and women kiss in the streets,
where a man's hand on a woman's knee
does not mean an earthquake.

Still they take the buckets,
the fat fold of cloth that rests
on the head, and go to the spring,
trains of women in twos and threes,
greeting each other with murmur and hum,
a nod so slight the bucket barely tips.

Pages are turning, centuries of breeze.
These feet write history on the dirt road
and no one reads it, unless you are here
to read it, unless you are thirsty
and cup your hands where the women
tell you to hold them,
throwing your head back
for the long sweet draft.

They know I can't carry the bucket.
Still they offer it, grinning.
They eat sour peaches and laugh
at the way I look into things,
as if there were something waiting there
to be seen.

Stain

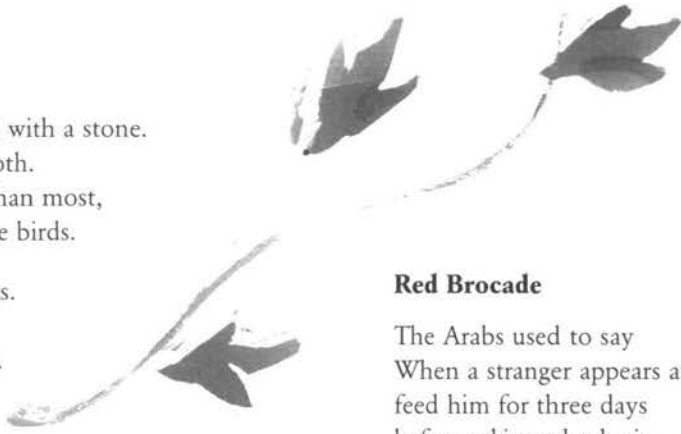
She scrubbed as hard as she could with a stone.
Dipping the cloth, twisting the cloth.
She knew the cloth much better than most,
having stitched its vines of delicate birds.

The red, the blue, the purple beaks.
A tiny bird with head held high.
A second bird with fanning wings.
Her fingers felt the folded hem.

The water in her pan was cool.
She stood outside by the lemon tree.
Children chattered around her there.
She told the children, "Take care! Take care!"

What would she think of the world today?
She died when she was one hundred and six.
So many stains would never come out.
She stared at the sky, the darkening rim.

She called to the children, "Come in! Come in!"
She stood on the roof, tears on her face.
What was the thing she never gave up?
The simple love of her difficult place.



Red Brocade

The Arabs used to say
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength enough
to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

How Long Peace Takes

As long as a mirror opening its eye
to stretch a room lengthwise

As long as the slow crawl of loosening paint
and the bending of slim wax tapers

As long as blue thread spinning
a vine of birds up one seam down the other
and the bodice don't forget the bodice
doubly thick with wings and hidden treasure

As long as my Sitti twists her hanky
around two small gold coins
in the bed in the bed
and says she is not tired

As long as the bed
and all the people who slept in it

As long as the splitting of almonds
the stirring of lentils
the scent of marimea
and the Universal Laundry

As long as the question—what if I
were you?—has two heads

As long as the back of the skull is
vulnerable and the temple and the chest

As long as anyone feels exempt
or better and one pain is separate
from another and people are pressed flat
in any place

And longer

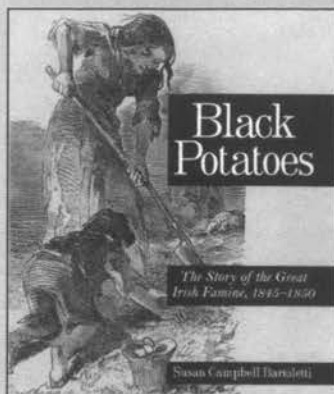
If every day the soldier slaps
another cousin's face



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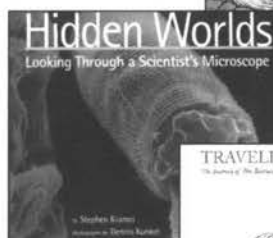
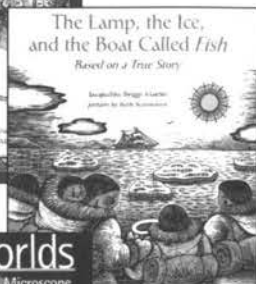
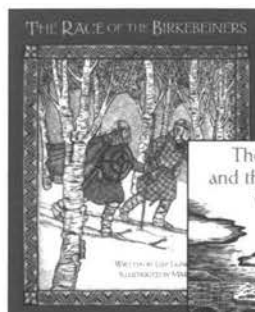
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interview

Peter Sís

An innovative picture-book artist reflects on how the recent death of his father and the events of September 11 have affected his creativity.

By Nathalie op de Beeck

In sophisticated, philosophical picture books, Peter Sís explores memory and epiphany. Profound questions about growing up and leaving home are anchored by personal observations as Sís recalls his childhood in Prague (*The Three Golden Keys*, 1994), sifts through souvenirs of his father's travels (*Tibet: Through the Red Box*,

1998), and muses on adventurous thinkers like Galileo (*Starry Messenger*, 1996). The Czech-born artist has also created an array of whimsical and equally original books for young children, based on the everyday lives of his American-born son and daughter. *Ship Ahoy!* and *Trucks Trucks Trucks* (both 1999) feature the machine-related interests of his son, Matej, while *Madlenka* (2000) and its sequel, *Madlenka's Dog* (2002), follow his daughter, Madeleine, on strolls around a city block in Manhattan. The palimpsest-like *Three Golden Keys* and *Tibet* suggest layers of time and ghostly presences in ancient places, revealed to those who would seek them out; the *Madlenka* books take a step in this same direction of discovery, reveling in the transformative power of daydream. Even Sís's most direct and outwardly simple books place imagination center stage and show how it can redefine the world.

December found Sís contemplating the significance of his children's books and rethinking his responsibilities as a parent, a son, and an artist. In his Soho studio—cluttered with small Tibetan objects, research for a project

on Darwin, art supplies, and a half-completed watercolor for his forthcoming book, *Scranimals*—Sís discussed the difficulties faced by children and the aims of his artistic work.

NodB: *Just before the World Trade Center disaster, your family moved to a new home outside the city and your father passed away. How have you been recovering from these events?*

PS: We moved on the first of September, and my father died on the seventh. I landed in Prague on the eleventh and then couldn't get back because there were no flights. I knew my family was okay, but I was upset about what had happened in New York, because we lived here for the past ten years.

When I got back on the eighteenth, everything was deserted, and it was very eerie with all the smoke rising up from the World Trade Center site. I took a walk from my studio around the fire station. My book *Firetruck!* (1998) is dedicated to that station—when my son was little, he was completely obsessed

with it. The fire station had hundreds of flowers and hundreds of candles placed outside it, and letters from little kids. What my son doesn't know, what I'm dealing with now, is that about a dozen firefighters from that station died. I can't ask which ones, because I didn't know them by name; I just knew what they looked like.

How do you see your daughter and son coping with the crisis?

They are nine and seven, and they used to go to school two blocks from the Trade Center, at P.S. 234. They know that all the kids from their classes were evacuated and experienced all kinds of trauma. When the president was coming, the media interrogated the kids, asking, "Are you still scared?" Rather than letting them get over it, they rubbed it in.

When we moved into our new house, we didn't have any television, which was a blessing. I thought they didn't know anything. Then Madeleine went to visit our new neighbors and when she came home she said, "I've just seen the World Trade Center on TV." I was afraid we couldn't let her go see the neighbors again. Then she said, "Well, I really didn't see very much..." She didn't want to affect us.

Do you imagine yourself addressing either the current crisis or the death of your father in your writing and art?



I'm dependent on my father in terms of creation. I wouldn't even be in New York without his willing me to be here. Even though I had a wife and children in America, I flew back to Prague quite often to see him. Now I look at a project and wonder, What would he think about it? Does it make sense?

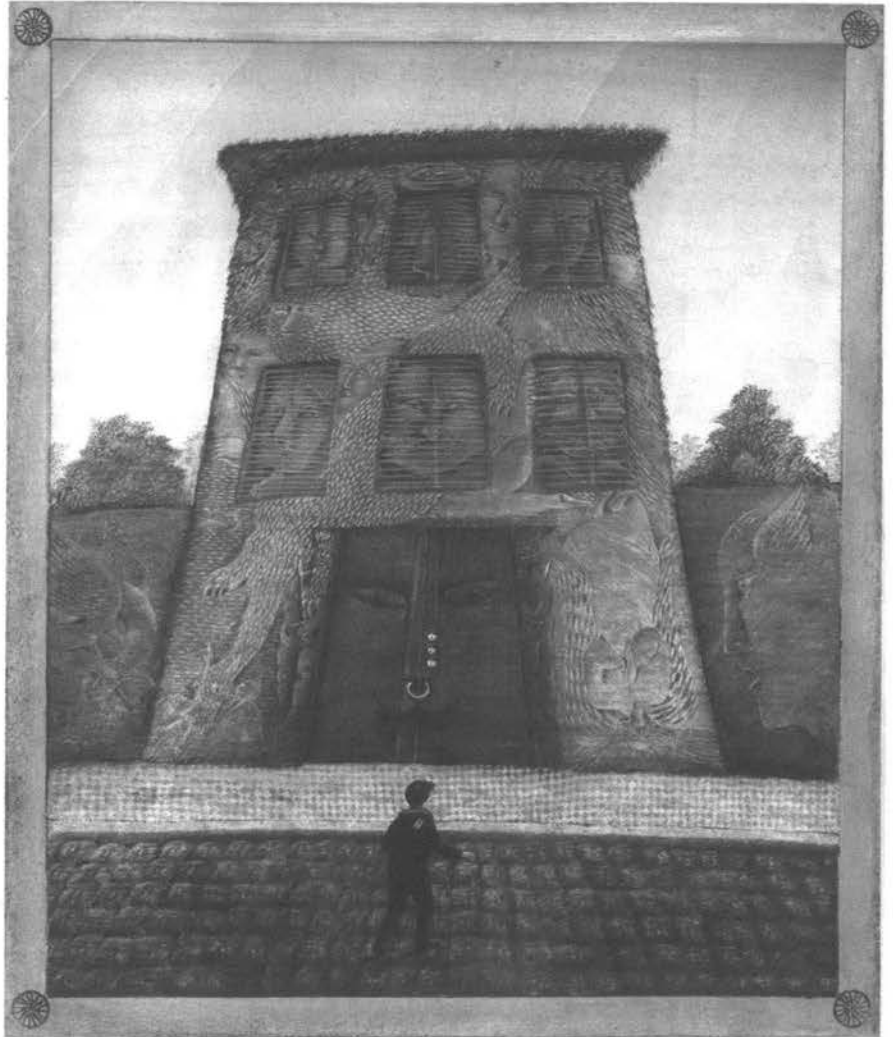
We worked most closely on *The Three Golden Keys* and *Starry Messenger*. I think he had a problem with my doing a book about him [*Tibet*], when he was diagnosed with cancer. It was strange because I sort of built him a memorial, and we were both a little embarrassed. I knew for a long time that he was ill, but when his death came, I lost all motivation. I lost the person to whom I would say, "Look what I've done." And then with what happened in Manhattan, I thought, I'm making these books that are supposed to be cute, but who cares?

It was a great relief when I bumped into two wonderful writers, Charlotte Zolotow and Walter Dean Myers, and they said the same thing: "What am I doing? This is not important." Right now I feel a necessity to deal with darker things.

Do you feel inclined to take on something more in the style of The Three Golden Keys or Tibet, something a bit weightier and more foreboding than your playful, recent work?

In *The Three Golden Keys*, the darkness isn't so much evil, but Prague for me was always scary. The whole book is dark to convey that feeling I had when I was a little boy. I'm thinking now of doing a followup to that book, with Madeleine being older, dealing more with the feelings of danger, fear, and darkness—feelings that can be hiding under a pillow.

When you're a child, your immediate vicinity is the whole world to you. Even in a small, quiet town, you worry about threats to your home, because you're the center of the universe. Did you have that feeling when you were young?



From *The Three Golden Keys*

All my life! That's just the trouble—one should be more humble. But when you are a child, you can't help but worry about your street or your apartment or your bed.

People say to me, "How was it to live behind the Iron Curtain? It must have been terrible." As a child you don't know what kind of political system you live in. Yet, I grew up in the toughest time of communism. At school, a teacher would say, "The greatest guy in the world is Lenin," and we would all repeat, "Oh, Lenin." We heard stories geared to the idea that if you saw your parents doing something, you should tell your teacher or the police. We were

completely indoctrinated.

Parents must have been petrified, because they couldn't say, "Listen, what they tell you at school is rubbish," because a child might say, "My father said it's rubbish," and then the father would go to prison. When I reached fourth or fifth grade, my father said, "We have to talk." Gradually I learned that you lead this life, that you say, "Yes, I agree." You know it's not true, which is a terrible way to live. For Americans it's incomprehensible because nobody lives like that here.

Lots of people are afraid to speak their minds.

But it's not as though your sister

will be kicked out of school, your family will be kicked out of the apartment. We knew that the punishment could be severe. I can't say I met more than two or three people who really believed in the communist system in Czechoslovakia, but everybody was pretending they did. Prague was the City of Lies. With a totalitarian regime, you never know how many people believe in it, and how many people have the natural talent of seeming to believe, to survive.

Can you discuss political matters—either relating to your past experience or to the present—with your children?

I don't know how the current situation is for Madeleine—she doesn't want me to talk about it. But she has been learning about people coming to America, and she recently asked me, "How did you decide to become a settler?" She is American, and she thinks I am a settler. She said, "I have nothing against you. You're a nice settler. I'm glad you settled here." It's funny that she sees it that way. Sometimes you feel like you're talking about such an unimportant thing, and then you realize that's not true. Kids see importance in different things.

As a writer for children, how do you balance out your impulse to deal with certain subject matter, which may be weighty, and the subjects that emerge as naturally appealing to children?

I recently published a little book called *Ballerina!* (2001). When somebody says, "I really like *Ballerina!*" a part of me would like to say that there are other books that took more time or that reveal more of me as I am. But maybe I'm wrong—maybe *Ballerina!* is my best work because it's simple and just about imagination.

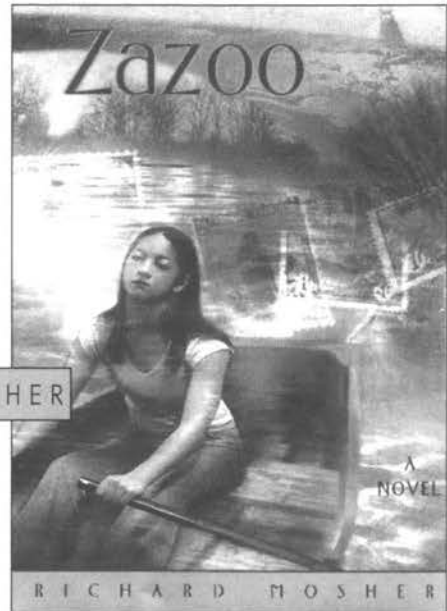
My father wanted me to be an artist. Artists in Europe are supposed to suffer, and then maybe they are recognized. At the same time, he always gave me the message that I should be successful. Maybe that's the problem: you

★ "A beautiful and lyrical novel, with poetry woven throughout."*

Zazoo

A NOVEL BY

RICHARD MOSHER



Jacket illustration © 2002 by Cliff Nielsen.

★ "Brought from her Vietnamese homeland when she was a toddler, 13-year-old Zazoo lives with her adoptive grandfather in France. . . . A story of love, devotion, and unwavering commitment that bridges generations and cultures."
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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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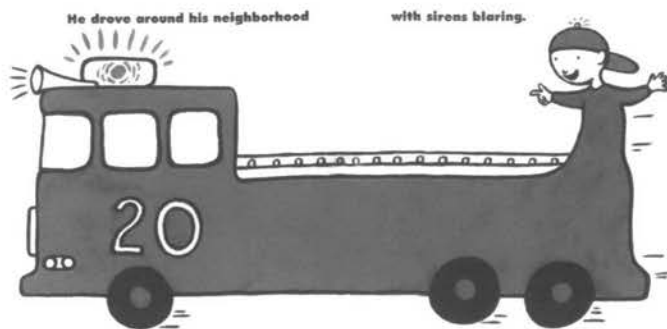
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want to have a book that sells two million copies, but also to be a wonderful artist. You're in America, so you can accomplish anything you want—that's the American dream—yet at the same time you want to stay truthful to yourself.

You seem discontented with conventional read-aloud books and more inclined to create books that cannot be grasped quickly. Are you trying to get readers to slow down, to observe words and pictures more closely?

I grew up with children's books made at the end of the nineteenth century, or the beginning of the twentieth century. We had no television, and because of the political atmosphere, people tended to stay home and go through books very carefully.

I came to the United States in 1982 to work in film, and by a complete fluke I ended up in children's books. I was so full of myself when I started that I thought, Sure, kids will like what I



From *Fire Truck*

draw for them. If I had known anything about the market, I wouldn't have thought I had a chance to say something to kids who grew up with pizza and baseball.

As a writer and artist, I like the idea that somebody's looking for something, that there are more layers to things. The first book I wrote as well as illustrated was *Rainbow Rhino* (1987), which I still love. Since then, I've been extremely lucky. I've written strange, romantic stories about immigration, belonging, or leaving home. Maybe I've reached a lonely segment of the population.

How have editors and others supported you in your efforts to create unconventional work?

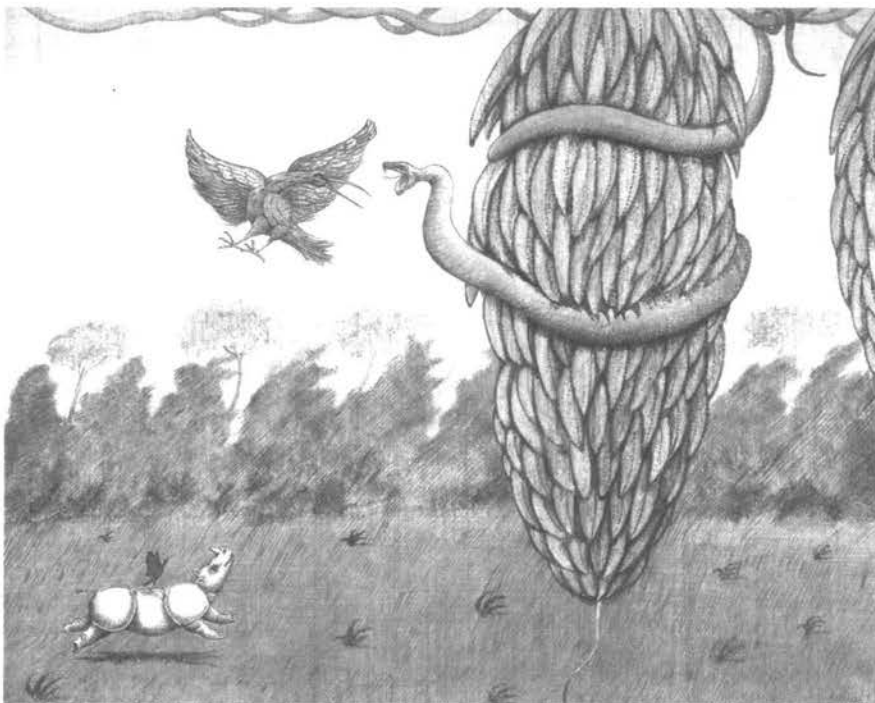
It's interesting how things fall in place. When I was in Los Angeles in the 1980s, I sent my work to Maurice Sendak, and he called me from Connecticut. He wanted to know where I stood, and when Maurice Sendak

calls, you don't tell him, "I really want to make films, but I'm trying to make a living, so I'll make some books in between." Later, at the American Library Association convention, he gave me a piece of paper with some editors' and publishers' names on it—including Greenwillow Books. Everybody refused to see me, but I struck up a conversation with a woman who was standing at the Greenwillow booth. She asked where I was from, and I said, "I'm from Czechoslovakia," and she said, "I was born there." That was Ava Weiss. She looked at my portfolio and she said, "We have work for you." They gave me *The Bean Boy*, and after that I think I did twenty-six books with them.

What was it like to work with Jacqueline Onassis on The Three Golden Keys, when she was at Doubleday?

I met with her, and she said, "Why don't you do a book about Prague?" I created a lot of sketches, because we didn't know each other, and I wanted to show that I could explore some different options, and then, because she had carte blanche at Doubleday, she said, "Why don't we do a sixty-eight-page book?" which is pretty much unheard of for a picture-book project. She opened up possibilities that wouldn't have been there without her.

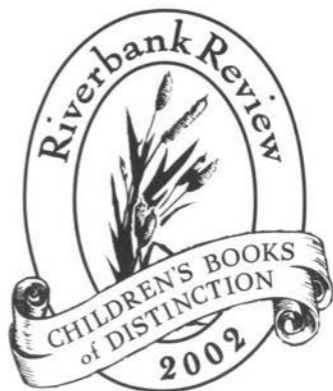
She saw all the art and all the proofs. But the book wasn't ready until June, and she died in May, so she wasn't there for the unveiling. I later went to Random House, and then ended up at



From *Rainbow Rhino*

Riverbank Review

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Farrar, Straus & Giroux, because I was following [editor] Frances Foster. I am so lucky to be with them, because they have an intellectual curiosity. If *Madlenka* was with a giant corporation, it might have sold more copies, but that's the dilemma of being both an artist and commercially successful.

Madlenka has die-cut windows, and its sequel, Madlenka's Dog, has many paper-engineering features to be manipulated by the reader. Are you moving in the direction of toy books?

Last summer I was a visiting instructor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where they have the Cooperative Children's Book Center. I got to see all kinds of books from the nineteenth century, like the German toy books with movable parts by Lothar Megendorfer. I just love them. But it may be just my romantic notion—maybe it has nothing to do with America today.

In *Madlenka*, I was trying to get something of a cinematic or time-travel effect. It's also a bit like a puppet theater. I was able to create the effect of *Madlenka* getting into other countries by using die cuts: you could follow her into new and different pictures. It also added a three-dimensional quality to the book.

But the danger with devices like that is that they can become too cute. Another problem is the added expense of paper engineering. Books like that can't be produced in any country with the Western financial scale; they have to be done in Asia or South America.

Speaking of Madlenka, how do your daughter and son feel about being characters in your books?

They started to argue about who's got more books. I said to them, they're not about *you*, really, they're about kids who look like you.

In *Dinosaur!* I didn't ask Matej's permission, but I showed him without any clothes. He's taking a bath, so he's

naked in the beginning of the story. He took it very personally. At first he didn't realize that many books would be printed; he had thought it was just one book. So, when I went to speak to his class, I drew in underwear. He was sitting there looking worried, and when I opened it up he was relieved. It was a very sensitive issue for him, that I dared to draw him, and that other kids would be looking at him without his underpants.

You've almost finished illustrating Jack Prelutsky's book of nonsense animals, Scranimals. What's next?

I want to do *Madlenka's* third book, but I'm also working on a book about Darwin. My father, who was so helpful on *Starry Messenger*, said, "You can't do Darwin. It's impossible." It became sort of a cloud hanging over me. I have to do it just to prove to myself that I can. But it's not going to be easy.

It's interesting that, having grown up in a country where there were severe limitations on freedom of speech, as an artist living in America you've been drawn to Western thinkers—like Galileo and Darwin—whose ideas and speech were so vigorously attacked. What are your thoughts on this?

Being truthful to oneself is very hard in a totalitarian regime. Yet when I look around in the free world, when I see where we are, what we're talking about—television, movies, shopping malls, video games, SUVs—it is obvious that it is still very hard being truthful to oneself. Even if it is a different "hard," it is the same "oneself." Perhaps just life itself is not easy. So who can be better role models than Darwin or Galileo? ~

Nathalie op de Beeck teaches at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is completing a doctoral dissertation on American picture books of the 1920s to 1940s. She writes about children's books for Publishers Weekly and other publications.

a poem for spring



April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you.
Let the rain beat upon your head
with silver liquid drops.
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.
The rain makes still pools on the
sidewalk.
The rain makes running pools in
the gutter.
The rain plays a little sleep-song
on our roof at night.
And I love the rain.

—Langston Hughes

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Migrants Yes

Russell Hoban's The Mouse and His Child takes readers on a fantastic, philosophical journey.

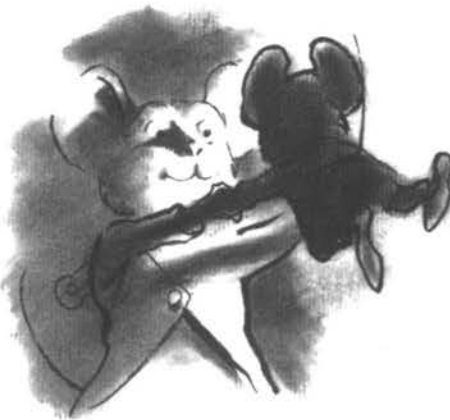
By Antonia Gray

“Books in nameless categories are needed—books for children and adults together, books that can stand in the middle of an existential nowhere and find reference points,” Russell Hoban once said. Hoban’s *The Mouse and His Child*, recently reissued with stunning charcoal and ink wash

illustrations by David Small, is such a book: a dark, disturbing gem of a novel, lyrically written, filled with astute observations about human nature and a sprinkling of social satire.

The story begins in a toy shop, where two clockwork mice—a father and son, joined at the hands—live peacefully in the company of a tin seal, a windup elephant, and the various inhabitants of a dollhouse. Things soon change. The mouse and his child are sold, they break, and they’re tossed into a trash bin, rescued by a homeless man who fixes them as best he can: they no longer dance in a circle, but now walk in a straight line. The man winds them up and sets them going along the road. In this way their journey begins.

The mouse and his child set out on a quest both to find a new home and to become “self-winding,” to gain a measure of control over their destiny. Darkness descends almost immediately in the person of Manny Rat, who rules the territory outside the toy shop with cruelty and cunning. This smooth-talking, black-hearted creature takes the mouse and his child back to the dump where he lives. His work is thieving and foraging, and to this end he enslaves



Illustrations by David Small

beaten up old toys that, like one miserable donkey, he destroys if he is displeased with their efforts, discarding their parts into a can labeled “Bonzo Dog Food.” The mice manage to escape Manny Rat during a botched bank robbery, yet he pursues them as they venture on in the company of a fortune-telling frog. Along their way, the mouse and his child engage with the imponderable questions of what it means to be alive, to forgive one’s enemies, to be part of a family, and to have a home or territory to call one’s own.

Though it is not a book for the

fainthearted, Hoban’s multilayered fable speaks both to readers who, like the mouse child, possess the bravery of youth, and to disillusioned adults like his father who suspect that some questions are better left unasked. *The Mouse and His Child* may be both a more disconcerting and a more engaging read for adults than for younger readers; it is a book to grow into, rather than out of.

A powerful undercurrent of myth flows beneath the surface of this story, as it does in many great works of literature for children. In their work, Joseph Campbell and other scholars of myth and folklore have distinguished the characteristic building blocks of traditional story structures. One of the best known is the “hero’s journey,” set out in Campbell’s influential book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In this structure a character is called upon to undertake a journey—or quest—both for his or her own good and for the greater good of the community. On the journey, a variety of challenges must be overcome, and the hero encounters allies and enemies who help or hinder the journey’s progress.

Children’s literature is a genre that is particularly rich in hero’s journeys. Such stories may lean toward the spiritual (as is the case with Katherine Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* and Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*) or the secular (think of Louis Sachar’s *Holes*, or Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet*). A quintessential hero’s journey, *The Mouse and His Child* may seem on the surface to be

pointedly, almost painfully, secular, yet it has elements that may be interpreted as spiritual. The mysterious figure of the tramp who first sets the mouse and his child on their way is one example. His advice at the beginning is for the mice to experience as much as they can—to “be tramps.” When he appears at the end of their journey he seems to approve of the life they have made and offers a simple blessing: the wish for them to “be happy.”

The influence of the divine in this story may also be hinted at through the innate goodness of the mouse child, and the way in which his innocence comforts and inspires those close to him, even Manny Rat. In fact, the mouse child’s impulses, which embody the Christian virtues of kindness, tolerance, and forgiveness, may be felt as all the more humane for the fact that there is no obvious overarching spiritual presence in the universe of this story. One of the most interesting paradoxes of Hoban’s story is the way in which the surface of the text depicts a world of cruelty, confusion, and chaos, while underneath a pattern emerges through which a sense of order is established, a scattering is regathered, and the most innocent, fundamental longings are fulfilled.

At the heart of *The Mouse and His Child* is the quest to have territory of one’s own and a family to share it with. A young shrew soldier explains to the mouse child what territory is:

“A territory is your place,” said the drummer boy. “It’s where everything smells right. It’s where you know the runways and the hide-outs, night or day. It’s what you fought for, or what your father fought for, and you feel all safe and

strong there. It’s the place where, when you fight, you win.”

Hoban’s story suggests that if you know the feelings the shrew describes, you are fortunate indeed. If not, then, like the mouse and his child, you may be willing to endure any hardship to find a home of your own, and when you have it within your grasp you’ll defend it with all your might.



In their travels the mice receive wisdom and help from many sources, including some archetypal characters from the 1960s, such as a guru-like muskrat philosopher, and a group of crows who perform in an experimental theater troupe (The Caws of Art) to an unappreciative audience. The most unlikely mentor of all, Manny Rat, is the one who ultimately fulfills the mice’s dream of becoming self-winding.

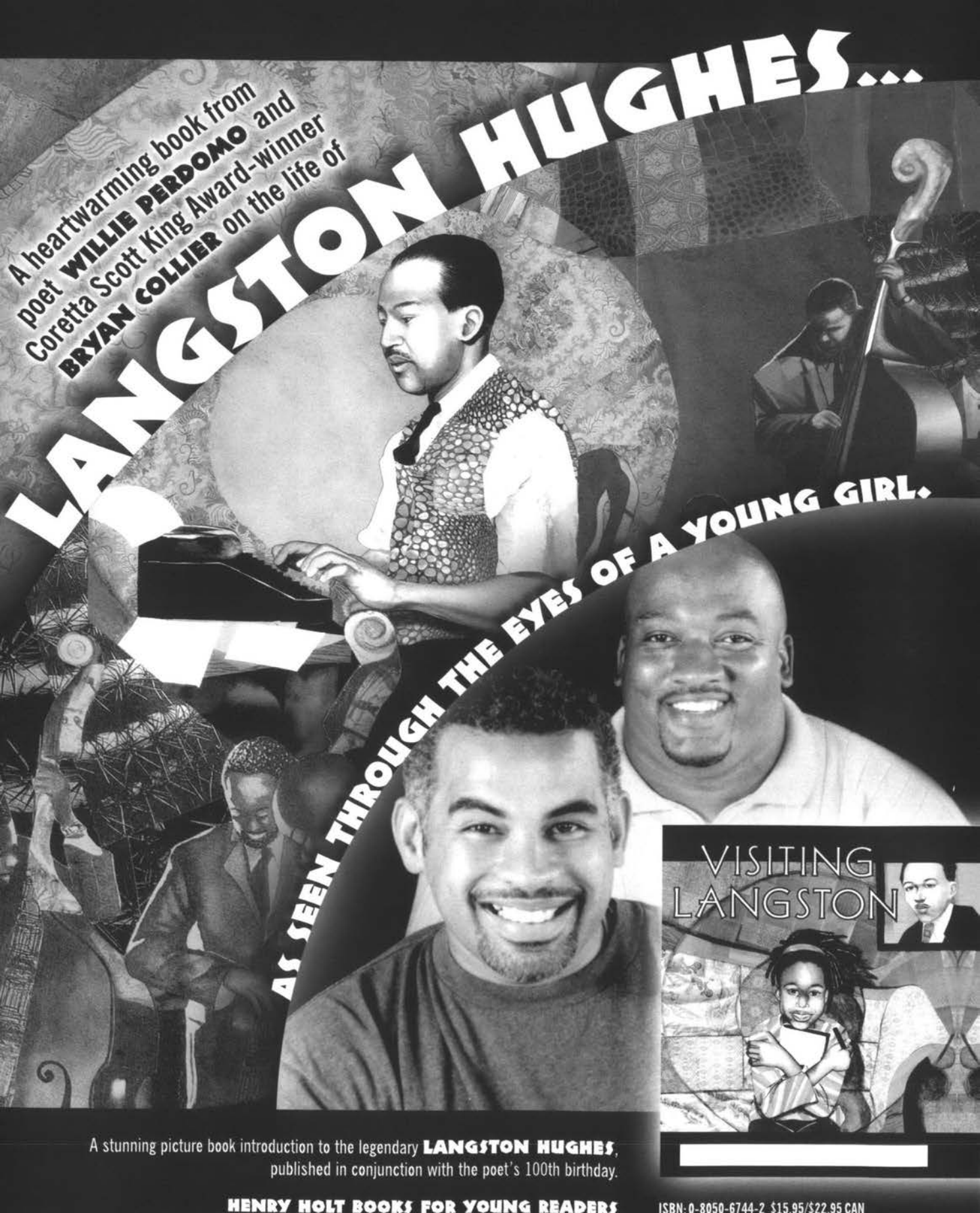
Good and evil are not fixed in this story, but shift in challenging ways—

particularly in the character of Manny Rat. As the story progresses, the rat is torn between a desire to exploit and destroy the mice and a curiosity inspired by their goodness and by the home that they ultimately create with their friends. It becomes clear that Manny Rat, too, longs for a family and a home, but his darker nature has twisted these desires into poisonous envy. Seeing “the whole little party, in their manifest contentment, mutual esteem, and pride of place” toward the novel’s end proves too much for confused, conflicted Manny Rat. Pretending to be a reformed character, he offers to wire the dollhouse for electric light, then bungles an attempt to burn it down using gunpowder, nearly blowing himself up in the process. The innocent compassion of the mouse child in response to this near-catastrophe becomes the catalyst for Manny Rat’s true spiritual redemption—at least for the time being.

When he hears the mouse’s appeal—“Speak to us, Uncle Manny”—the rat feels “the darkness that dwelt within him open to the light.”

In stories, as in life, it’s often the journey rather than the destination that counts, for that is where true character is forged. Showing courage and humanity, the mouse and his child are pilgrims who find a family, defeat a deadly enemy, and help others. When their place in the world is secure, they convert their recovered dollhouse into an inn and put up a sign outside that reads “Migrants Yes,” opening their doors and their hearts to tramps whose journeys are not yet complete. ~

Antonia Gray has a master’s degree in children’s literature. She lives in Berkshire, England.



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Touching the World

Writing poetry is exercise for the senses.

By Joyce Sidman

I face a roomful of fifth- or sixth-graders on the first day of a week-long poetry residency armed with three things: an activated imagination, a handful of poems, and a random object from the classroom, like a stapler or a roll of tape. My goal is to lead these students into the mind-set of Muhammed al-Ghuzzi's poem "The Pen":

Take a pen in your uncertain
fingers.
Trust, and be assured
That the whole world is a sky-blue
butterfly
And words are the nets to capture it.

We will get there by using the tools of close observation, sensory detail, and metaphor. Younger children live and breathe metaphor; it comes to them as naturally as speaking. Older students often must be reminded, so I read them Valerie Worth, who looks at earthworms and sees

new rubies
Dug out of
Deepest earth

and describes a beetle that

keeps
Its precious
Innards
Packed in
A lacquered
Coffer of
Curious
Compartments.

Why read poems about worms and beetles? Because the physical world—and the profound lessons that direct

contact with that world offers—have, sadly, receded into the background of their lives. Kids today don't get out much, either at school or in their leisure time. They may frequent the playground as young children, but after a certain age—roughly seven—many of them begin to conceptualize the world in their play, approaching it through the "virtual" avenues of television, video games, and the Internet. If they want to find out

about oak trees, they cruise the Web. If they want to play a game, they hit homers with a game pad or build roller coasters with a mouse. More often than not, the dominant images they view each day are created by other minds, other imaginations—with sometimes dubious motives.

There are times when I want to leave the classroom behind, to haul my students—and myself—outside, just to feel the sunshine and smell the wind. To collect things that we usually take for granted or barely see: blades of grass, each with its own perfect symmetry and delicate tip, feathers from unknown birds, flowers from weeds, even dollops of mud. I want us to lie on our backs and notice how clouds fold together and curl apart, how



Joyce Sidman with a student at Alice Smith Elementary School in Hopkins, Minnesota.

the branches of trees are echoed in their leaves, how ants meet and kiss, exchanging mysterious information before continuing on in opposite directions.

To more fully engage myself and my students with the physical world, I turn to poetry: the reading of it and, more importantly, the writing of it. Poetry, with its focus on the particular, can help restore rusty powers of observation, reawaken dulled senses, rekindle a latent sense of wonder. While it is not always possible to go outside and find leaves and feathers, there are always—even in the classroom—opportunities to observe.

After Valerie Worth, I read William Carlos Williams:

Between Walls

the backwings
of the
hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle

We talk about why, out of all the things on earth he might choose, Williams writes about a bit of broken glass in a city alley. The tougher, more alienated students are especially fascinated by this poem: by the concept that someone—a poet, no less—might deliberately go looking for beauty in an ugly, abandoned place.

In the contemplative silence that follows, we pick up an object—any object—from their very ordinary, familiar classroom. I ask them questions. What does it look like? What does its shape remind them of? What could it be if it were huge? Tiny? Does it make noise? Does it smell like anything in particular? Might it have dreams—and if so,

what would they be? I record their ideas on the board, then ask for volunteers to fashion sentences, incorporating all these wonderful details and metaphors. Thus we create a group poem that serves as a model, perhaps about a tape dispenser with “shiny, glistening jaws” or a piece of chalk that “sounds like the bones of a ghost” when it moves across the blackboard.

Emboldened, they each choose an object and finger it, squint at it, frown. They consider color, purpose, possibilities. Then, with a bit of encouragement, they begin to write their own poems. I invite them to write in the first person, taking on the voice of the object itself. Always, they surprise and delight me (and themselves) with images like these:

I am a tube, encasing soft stone.
I despise the feeling of teeth, boring into
my hide, chomping on my eraser.
(Pencil)

Sounds like money
jangling in one’s pocket,
twinkling and twinkling as if stars
were planted in the heart of each
sphere. (Bracelet)

I am a frozen ice cream cone,
waiting to be licked.
A curious, alert ear,
listening to the crashing waves.
(Shell)

In talking with young poets about my own writing process, I often use the word *obsessed*. “I am currently obsessed with dogs,” I’ll say, and read them a dog poem. Or, “I’ve been obsessed with eggs for about a month now.” I want them to see that it is natural for a poet to dive into something far deeper than they normally might, in order to discover its depths, its possibilities. Says poet John Moffit,

To look at anything,
If you would know that thing,

You must look at it long:
You must
Be the thing you see.

Sometimes we write our poems as riddles, then challenge each other to figure them out. Thus an electric fan becomes a “clover in a cage,” and a kitchen timer is a “snow-white watermelon” with numbers for seeds. Or we’ll choose objects we own that are important to us, and write “bragging” poems about them: “My cello is as sleek as a galloping horse, / its sound like a million tenors.” A good starting point for bragging poems is Francisco X. Alarcón’s “Mariposa,” in *From the Bellybutton of the Moon and Other Summer Poems*. (Children’s Book Press):

Mariposa

Mariposa
is the name
of my favorite
cow

because she has
the mark
of a butterfly
on her face

how wonderful
the butterfly
on my cow
Mariposa!

her big
round eyes
come through
the wings

how she loves
to smell the flowers
she finds along
her path!

the butterflies
of the fields
fluttering
follow her

perhaps
more than a cow
she really is
a butterfly!

Another way for students to steep themselves in the tangible is to begin with the intangible, as Emily Dickinson did. "Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul," she wrote, and "Grief is a Thief—quick startled." Middle school students are particularly adept at describing the miasma of human emotion. If hope is a bird, I ask them, what would fear look like? Smell like? Taste like? How about anger? Love? Boredom? As students tap each of their five senses, amazing images pour forth: "Silence is a burning candle eating up wax." "Depression knocks on your door / With a sad grin on its face, / pale yellow eyes, / dressed in black." "Fear is a spider web inside my heart."

Poetry is subversive. These young poets start by writing about a hairbrush or the quality of happiness, but end up writing about themselves:

A kepa is a little hat that Jews wear...

My kepa has my name sewed with the best sewing by my grandma...

If a fire came to my house, the red and orange flames devouring it,

I would save my kepa.

As the class moves through the week with ever sharpening powers of observation, we move closer to the personal. Reading work by poets as diverse as Arnold Adoff and Edna St. Vincent Millay, we write poems about important memories, people, and places of refuge—events and entities that have changed who we are. We use concrete images and sensory details to place the reader squarely in our shoes, in this way showing the world what we see and feel.

My final challenge to students is to write a poem explicitly about themselves. The week's intense observation has opened up all kinds of doors. In rediscovering the things that are most familiar to them, they are now looking with fresh eyes at both the world around them and the possibilities in themselves. Their final poems are often a wonderful, rich reversal of their first efforts, using tangible objects as metaphors for their own experience:

I am a shell, fragile and open a stranger in the sands of time...

I feel like a book, always being jammed into a locker...

I am a statue, perfectly still, listening to what no one thinks I can hear.

Children's poetry has never been stronger. Many excellent children's poets are publishing today—poets like Kristine O'Connell George, Nikki Grimes, Janet Wong, Paul Fleischman, and Douglas Florian—and teachers are using this poetry in the classroom, not just in language arts, but in science, social studies, and history. More poets are visiting schools to share their passion, and teenagers are discovering the joys of performance poetry and poetry "slams."

Why this resurgence of interest in poetry? Maybe because, at this time in our society, we need it profoundly. We—and the children we care about—need the excuse to pause, stretch out our arms, and touch the world. To handle its lovely, mysterious objects and feel their power. To chase, with a gossamer net of words, that sky-blue butterfly, and capture both a piece of the world and a piece of ourselves. ~

Joyce Sidman has taught for the past five years in the Minneapolis schools as a writer-in-residence. She is the author of Just Us Two: Poems about Animal Dads (Millbrook, 2000) and is currently at work on a book of dog poetry that includes work by student writers.

Make Poetry a Part of Your Day

Young People's Poetry Week is April 15-21, 2002.

National Poetry Month is the entire month of April.

Kids and poetry create a magical mix.



The Children's Book Council is a nonprofit trade association of U.S. children's book publishers and packagers and is the sponsor of Children's Book Week and

Young People's Poetry Week. Visit the Web site: www.cbcbooks.org

Young People's Poetry Week
La Semana de la Poesía Infantil y Juvenil
2002



2002 Children's Books

Picture Books

The Journey

By Sarah Stewart

Illustrated by David Small

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

A young Amish girl's diary entries juxtapose her unpretentious rural home life with the more dramatic sights of Chicago, where she has come with family members for a weeklong stay. As the sweeping, warm-hearted illustrations reveal, the two places are at once very different and, in some respects, not so different after all.

The Other Side

By Jacqueline Woodson

Illustrated by E. B. Lewis

PUTNAM

"Don't climb over that fence when you play," a black girl's mother warns her; but she can't seem to ignore the white girl who regularly peers at her from the other side of the fence. Sun-drenched paintings that suggest the 1950s depict the children figuring out how to turn this concrete symbol of segregation into a friendly meeting ground.

The Stray Dog

By Marc Simont

HARPERCOLLINS

A masterful conjunction of spare text and evocative watercolor paintings tells of a family that spends wistful days thinking about a stray dog they met at the park. After cleverly thwarting the dogcatcher the next weekend, the brother and sister dance for joy when they realize they can finally bring their new dog, Willy, home.

Nonfiction

Dig, Wait, Listen: A Desert Toad's Tale

By April Pulley Sayre

Illustrated by Barbara Bash

GREENWILLOW

Desert creatures parade overhead as a spadefoot toad sits deep beneath the sand, waiting for the "plip, plop" of rain that will compel her to dig to the surface. The sounds, colors, and diversity of life in the southwestern landscape burst from the page in this well-orchestrated glimpse at an amphibian's life cycle.

Is My Friend at Home? Pueblo Fireside Tales

Retold by John Bierhorst

Illustrated by Wendy Watson

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

Seven short trickster tales from the Hopi Indians recount how animal mischief caused, among other things, Coyote to lose his long ears and peaches to change from sour to sweet. Affectionate cartoon illustrations of the friends and foes in native dress complement the colloquial storytelling style.

Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Doreen Rappaport

Illustrated by Bryan Collier

JUMP AT THE SUN/HYPERION

This powerful picture book focuses on the simple yet profound words Martin Luther King used to deliver his message. Accompanied by striking collage artwork, the text stresses King's commitment and courage, which led him to say *together* when others said *separate* and *peace* when others said *war*.



of Distinction Awards

Poetry

Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart

By Vera B. Williams

GREENWILLOW

Poems about two sisters living under less than ideal circumstances—their mother works long hours, their father is in prison for forgery—convey both their painful emotions and the strength and happiness they derive from being together. Dynamic color and black-and-white pencil drawings by the author augment this tender sibling portrait.

Carver: A Life in Poems

By Marilyn Nelson

FRONT STREET

A multitalented inventor, artist, and naturalist, George Washington Carver was above all a man of integrity and faith. Vignettes written from Carver's perspective and from the perspectives of people who came in contact with him illuminate the many fascinating sides of this complex individual and examine the racist world into which he was born.

Dirty Laundry Pile: Poems in Different Voices

Selected by Paul B. Janeczko

Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

HARPERCOLLINS

What would a vacuum cleaner say if it could talk? An elm tree? A mosquito? This effervescent collection, illustrated with playful watercolors, adopts the personae of a diverse assortment of objects and typically nonverbal beings to see what's on their "minds."

Fiction

Seek

By Paul Fleischman

CRICKET BOOKS

An assignment to produce an autobiography for his senior English class brings a cacophony of voices into Rob's head—voices of people he loves and of strangers he has heard on the radio while he searches the airwaves for his absent disk jockey father. Told entirely in dialogue, this extraordinary narrative lets readers listen in as a boy's life unfolds.

A Step from Heaven

By An Na

FRONT STREET

Korean immigrant Young Ju eloquently records the pain her family endures as her parents work to give their children the advantages of an American life. This sensitively observed, multilayered young-adult novel shows how hope can survive in even the most dismal circumstances.

True Believer

By Virginia Euwer Wolff

ATHENEUM

Fifteen-year-old LaVaughn returns in this absorbing sequel to *Make Lemonade*. In accomplished, natural-sounding free verse, she details the exhilaration and heartbreak of a first crush; the grief of growing apart from her two best friends; and the determination to one day escape the inner city and attend college.



The Children's Books of Distinction Awards are presented annually by Riverbank Review. For more information, contact Riverbank Review, 1624 Harmon Place, Suite 305, Minneapolis, MN 55403, (651) 486-5690.



Picture Books

The Brave Little Seamstress

By Mary Pope Osborne

Illustrated by Giselle Potter

ANNE SCHWARTZ / ATHENEUM

40 pages, Ages 4–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-84486-7

In Mary Pope Osborne's *The Brave Little Seamstress*, the tailor of the Brothers Grimm tale becomes a plucky girl in a pink party coat with easy solutions to gigantic problems. As in their earlier

collaboration, *Kate and the Beanstalk*, Osborne and illustrator Giselle Potter infuse a classic fairy tale with charm and humor—and give it a female protagonist. Potter's pencil, ink, and watercolor illustrations, combining soft colors and precise cartoonlike lines, nicely complement the story's fantasy landscape and whimsical narration.

The story begins with an open window, the shutters thrown wide to reveal our seamstress shooing flies from her toast—an ordinary beginning to a tale that escalates quickly into hyperbole, complete with giants, castles, and mytho-

logical creatures. The seamstress's pride at having handily killed seven flies is uncontainable; she stitches the words "SEVEN WITH ONE BLOW" on the back of her favorite coat and sets off to tell the world. A dim-witted giant thinks the words refer to seven of his kind; the fretful king thinks they refer to knights, and so he provides a menu of new challenges for the competent seamstress: slaying giants, taming a unicorn, capturing a wild boar, and frightening away an army. Of course, the combination of brains, confidence, and a witty tongue is unstoppable. At the story's conclusion, the seamstress has inherited the entire kingdom (or, should we say, queendom). The book ends with a song to the seamstress/queen, as sung by "many a minstrel":

Out of a seamstress
A great queen was made,
As kind and wise
As she was strong and brave.

Osborne's narration is fresh and vivid throughout. The lively dialogue between heroine and challengers makes for fun reading aloud: after a tiring day the seamstress snaps at the needy king, "All right, one more feat....But that will have to be all for today." Potter's witty illustrations add much to the humor: the giants bring a smile with their ill-fitting pants and bad haircuts, and the bonneted seamstress darts about the pages with her swinging skirt and busy feet, full of herself and ready for whatever comes next.

—Margaret Willey



Illustration by Giselle Potter, from *The Brave Little Seamstress*

Countdown to Spring! An Animal Counting Book

By Janet Schulman
Illustrated by Meilo So
KNOFF

32 pages, Ages 2–6, \$9.95

ISBN 0-375-81364-0

Here's a book that captures the rush of seeing the first spring crocus burst forth from the drab winter ground. Meilo So illustrates this basic counting story with the exuberant splashes of color for which she is known, and her style proves ideal for expressing the season's cheering fecundity.

The first double-page spread observes a house that sits just beyond a vibrant field of blossoms. "It's spring! Do you think the children who live here will remember their animal friends on this special day?" the text inquires. We then move on to counting the creatures—from ladybugs to a mother fox and her kit—deserving remembrance. Although So depicts the animals amidst the flora, her pictures include plentiful white space, and they never become so decorative that they obstruct the business at hand. Young children will easily be able to spot all five mice "running in and out of the tulips" and all four bunnies "sniff, sniff, sniffing" around the poppies. There is movement and variation in each scene. One particularly animated illustration strips away all the flowers and focuses on seven yellow chicks who are using a rake propped against a bucket for a bridge. Another spies three squirrels "scurrying up and down" a budding pale-green tree.

Once all the animals have been enumerated, they receive an Easter basket packed tight with carrots, lettuce, berries, cheese, and other goodies. The children haven't forgotten them after all! (It seems too early for a spring harvest, so we'll assume the children collected most of this bounty from the grocery store, not the garden.) The bas-



9 Butterflies

Illustration by Meilo So, from *Countdown to Spring!*

ket of treats is an apt metaphor for the abundant visual feast offered in this special book.

—Renée Victor

The Forest

By Claire A. Nivola

FRANCES FOSTER/FARRAR, STRAUS & GIRoux

32 pages, Ages 3–6, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-32452-2

What creature exemplifies, better than a mouse, the potent mix of vulnerability and courage? Here, in Claire Nivola's *The Forest*, is yet another brave mouse—this one in jaunty blue overalls and red shoes—who is coming to terms

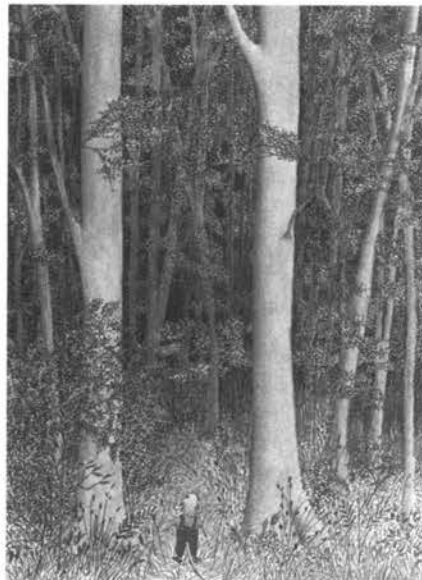


Illustration by Claire A. Nivola,
from *The Forest*

with his fears. *The Forest* is narrated in the first person, a distinctive choice that establishes an introspective tone from the first sentence:

I had always been afraid of the forest, that dark and unknown place at the farthest edge of my little world.

The mouse's "little world" is the prettiest of sunlit villages—charming adobe houses with red-tiled roofs and brick streets—but off to the east, beyond rolling fields and farmland, stands the great unknown, the focus of the mouse's long-standing fear, a fear he describes as having always been "hidden inside me no matter what I did or where I went." The mouse decides he must leave the safe and familiar and explore this forest that plagues him so. But even contemplating this sojourn is a challenge. "Would I lose myself?" he wonders, standing at the edge of the woods. "Would I die of fear?"

Once he's inside the forest-world, the mouse panics, begins to run, but falls "headlong to the ground," where he lies very still with "thundering heart." When his pulse calms he opens his eyes, looks around, and feels an array of sensations—sunlight warming his back, moss against his face, a gentle breeze stirring his fur. A large white butterfly attends him "like a guardian angel." The mouse experiences an episode of pure communion with nature. He takes off his red shoes, the better to feel the mossy

earth under his feet, and relaxes, taking in the beauty all around him. When the sun begins to set, he puts his shoes back on and then, filled with “the sweet murmuring world of the forest,” he begins the long walk back to the village.

Nivola’s reflective narrative and dreamlike depictions of the forest are wonderfully soothing. The illustrations that juxtapose the tiny mouse and towering trees are powerful, but also strangely reassuring. And the little mouse himself is a compelling narrator, admitting his irrational fear as he resolves to overcome it. His subtle gesture of removing his shoes in the forest, surrendering in this way to the natural world, captures the gentle message behind this book: by accepting the large and sometimes overwhelming mysteries of life, one can be filled with the “sweet murmurings” of the forest.

—Margaret Willey

In the Space of the Sky

By Richard Lewis

Illustrated by Debra Frasier

HARCOURT

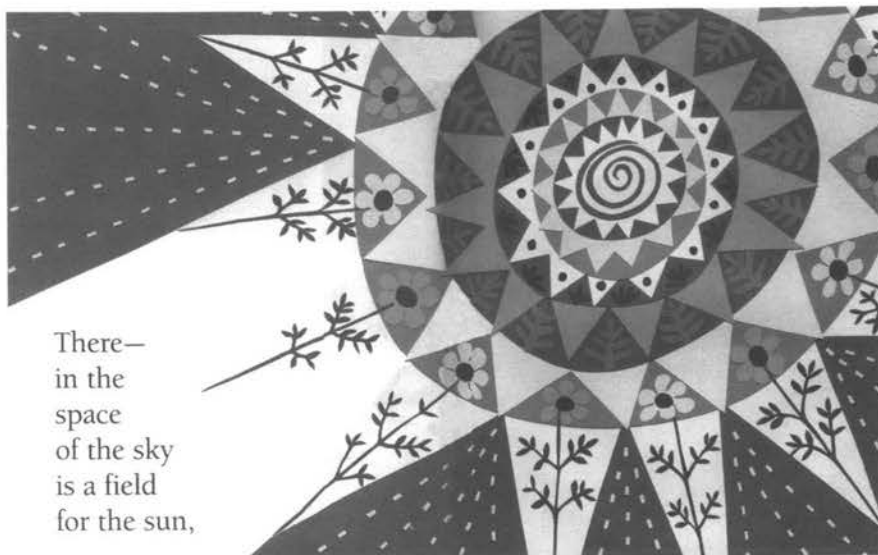
24 pages, All ages, \$16.00

ISBN 0-15-253150-5

The title of this book embraces infinite territory, and Richard Lewis and Debra Frasier answer the challenge brilliantly. Lewis’s words are both inspiring and accurate:

There—
in the space of the earth
are hills bending,
waters gathering,
seeds opening...

He reminds us that everything around us is always becoming. Earth is process; the hills really are bending and folding in the movements of eons; the waters unendingly gather and give; seeds sprout in continual rebirth. In this book Frasier returns to the archetypal images she used in *On the Day You*



There—
in the
space
of the sky
is a field
for the sun,

Illustration by Debra Frasier, from *In the Space of the Sky*

Were Born. Her collage of the moon stuns with its ivory beauty.

The connecting image of the book is the spiral: the circle that grows, the double helix of every living cell on earth, the root metaphor of our lives. We circle and circle and seem to cover the same territory, but we can climb as we go around. Frasier shows us how the spiral embraces itself in the yin and yang image as well as in the shell of every snail.

Lewis’s language is simple, clear, and evocative. His words are anchored in the world of the senses and in metaphor, but remain entirely available to children. Indeed, his is the language of play and dream:

There—
in the space of the sky
is a field for the sun,
a sea for the moon,
clouds where storms can hide,
stars where silence sings.

These are words that resonate deeply. *In the Space of the Sky* is a true and synergistic collaboration between language and collage. It will feed children’s need for color, for myth, for hope, for belonging to the whole of the earth.

—John Caddy

One Rainy Day

By Valeri Gorbachev

PHILOMEL

40 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.99

ISBN 0-399-23628-7

One Rainy Day is a lark of a story: it offers surprises at each turn of the page, has a knockout punchline, and—as always with Valeri Gorbachev’s accomplished artwork—serves up a fanciful visual picnic.

The opening pages introduce us to a drenched, disheveled-looking pig bearing a basket and a bouquet across a dry and sunny field. The story that follows provides an answer to the reader’s inevitable question: Why is this pig so wet? Enchanting two-page spreads are split into diagonals: in the bottom left, Pig tells Goat his tale while he goes about changing into dry clothes and sharing a snack with his friend; in the upper right we see Pig’s adventure in the rain.

Gorbachev’s tale is a variation on the traditional folktale “The Mitten.” A large leafy tree shelters a succession of comically rendered animals from a summer cloudburst. The ploy here is not that each animal is larger than the

last, but that their numbers gradually swell. Initially, Pig shares the dry space beneath the branches with one small mouse. Then two porcupines arrive, three buffaloes, and so on. Readers can count along as each group of animals bounds through the drenching rain. A climactic four-page foldout captures the huge, hilarious final group—fifty-six animals, mightily enjoying their crowded refuge from the downpour.

There is an unmistakably cheerful quality to Gorbachev's illustration—his loose, playful inkwork looks almost nonchalant, but is beautifully controlled. He renders the scrubby little bristles on Pig's head and the architectural details of Goat's front porch with equal aplomb. His watercolor palette of earth tones and soft blues and greens is illuminated by small flashes of white—the expressive eyes of elephants; the neat rows of crocodile teeth.

It's the sweet humor of both text and pictures that make the lasting impression: you've never seen a goofier-looking quartet of running leopards or eight happier hippos. Throughout *One Rainy Day*, we are as enthralled as Goat is by Pig's unfold-

ing yarn. The story's unexpected ending compounds its giddy fun.

—Christine Alfano

Pandora

By Robert Burleigh

Illustrated by Raúl Colón

SILVER WHISTLE/HARCOURT

32 pages, Ages 5–8, \$16.00

ISBN 0-15-202178-7

The cover of this picture book is startling at first glance—it's a close-up of a woman's face wearing an expression of fear and dismay. The woman's name is emblazoned across her forehead: Pandora, who, like the biblical Eve, unleashed evil in the world because she was unable to control her curiosity. The story justifies this strong, provocative image. In *Pandora*, author Robert Burleigh and illustrator Raúl Colón, who also collaborated on *Hercules*, have created a haunting and fine introduction to a classic Greek myth.

The book starts with a glossary of names and places, an explanation of Burleigh's decision to use a clay jar to represent Pandora's nemesis (rather than the more familiar box), and a brief foreword that defines Pandora's place in the pantheon of Greek mythology as the

first woman in creation, born on Mount Olympus and given by Zeus to Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, along with a sealed jar that was never to be opened.

Burleigh tells the story in poetic stanzas, beginning the first with a question: What was in the jar? Thus the reader is immediately thrown into Pandora's dilemma. Despite her beauty, and the ease and splendor of her life as the wife of Epimetheus, she is tormented by the forbidden jar, which sits in a room by itself, on its own pedestal. Pandora tries but cannot escape the pull of the jar; this predicament is her fate and there is no relief for it. Burleigh writes:

like a map where all the roads lead
to one city,
Pandora's mind,
All the songs and old stories
seemed somehow to lead back...
To the mysterious, sealed jar.

Pandora does what she must do, and when she opens the jar that must never be opened, trouble is set loose upon the world in many manifestations: war, anger, falsehoods, greed. Pandora is horrified and ashamed, but her servant, Xerxes, comforts her: "Harm and evil are in the world now.... We must be brave, very brave." Pandora learns that hope was also in the jar, and she resolves to cling fast to it despite her terrible mistake.

Colón's watercolor and colored-pencil illustrations are marvelous. Heavily influenced by classical art, they have a stirring energy that comes from Colón's modern palette, his use of flowing cross-hatchings, and his unusual rendering of light. Both living and nonliving elements pulse with the weight and mystery of the tale. Appropriately, the jar is given particular attention: it glows and undulates on its pedestal. Pandora, beautiful but flawed, goddesslike but human, is presented in both classical splendor and startling disarray. Some

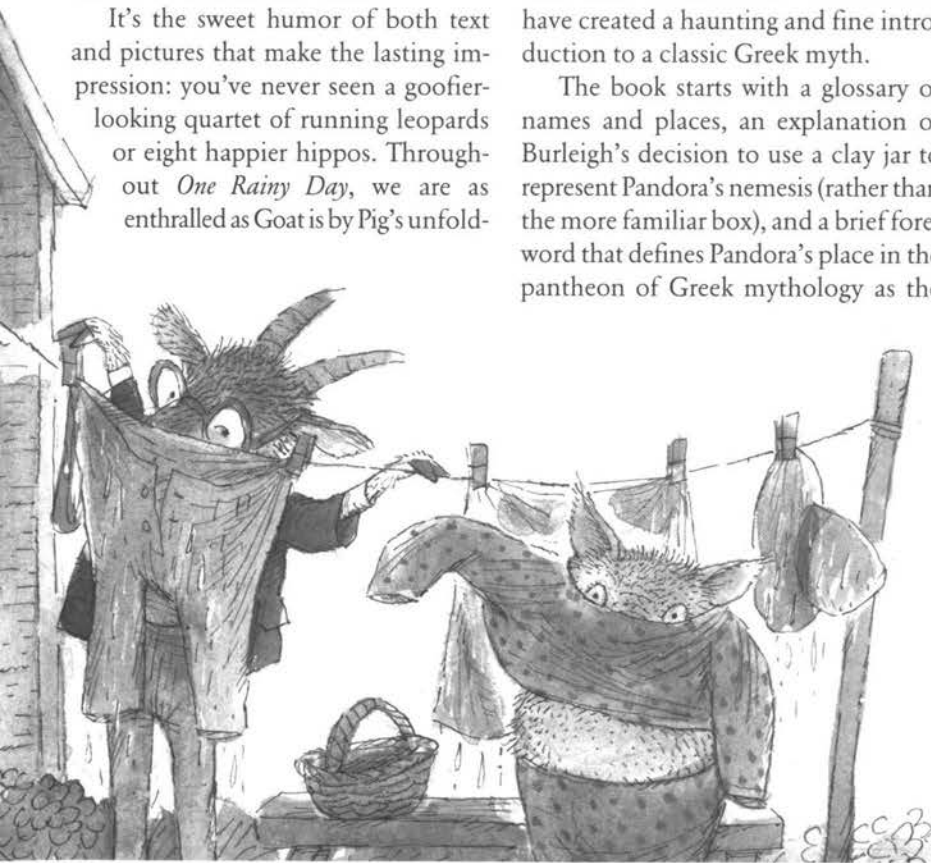


Illustration by Valeri Gorbachev, from *One Rainy Day*



Illustration by Raúl Colón, from *Pandora*

may find this retelling too formal for children; readers of all ages with an interest in classical mythology are likely to find it arresting and powerful.

—Margaret Willey

Fiction

Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio

By Tony Johnston

Illustrations by Raúl Colón

BLUE SKY/SCHOLASTIC

128 pages, Ages 9–13, \$15.95

ISBN 0-439-18936-5

This new novel by veteran writer Tony Johnston, known for her picture books and poetry, is a delight. Her spirited narrator, a boy named Arturo Rodriguez, tells stories of his Mexican American family, his Los Angeles neighborhood, and his struggling school in language peppered with Spanish words—some

defined in context, and some in the glossary at the back of the book. Arturo's language is also enriched by the fact that he is an attentive, enthusiastic listener and observer. He recalls the thoughtful lessons of his gentle father; tries out vocabulary from his friend Raul, "the mad linguist"; quotes the earthy wisdom of his grandmother; listens to the radio; and reads the *Los Angeles Times* and the graffiti he encounters in the concrete riverbed near his house. Add to this a clever wit and a knack for putting the world together with in-the-moment city metaphors, and you've got an irresistible, elaborate, and believable voice.

Arturo is a pleasure to listen to, whether he's telling us about his morning ("My hair wakes up stupid"), watching a basketball player get out of the car ("Coach Tree slowly unfolds himself out. Like a giant and rusted pocket-knife"), or describing a moment of fear during a standoff with gang members ("Fear spears my *tripas*. Then a weird

wave of heat sprawls over me, and I'm sweating *galones*, soaking my shirt").

The novel's structure is similarly rewarding. Each of the nine chapters is an episode about heroes—about the people who make life good in the challenging place and time in which Arturo lives. The first hero is his grandma, who by simply being her stubborn, centered self persuades the boy and his friends to ask their teacher to start calling them by their Spanish names, instead of "Arthur" and "Ralph." "I wish I could be like her," Arturo says, "getting people's names back for them—or something important like that. So far I'm just hanging out." While he "hangs out," he notices the good done by an eccentric neighbor who rescues a cat; the ex-NBA player who helps coach basketball at his school; the high school students in his brother's band, Mega Mango, who let him play with them; and a music teacher, a school librarian, a police officer. When gang violence strikes his home, Arturo is done hanging out and figures out a way to do some good of his own.

Sweetness and grit mingle on every page of *Any Small Goodness*. Raúl Colón's jacket illustration and spot art at the opening of each chapter are elegant and witty. Near the end of the book, Arturo's father tells him, "In life there is *bueno* [good] and there is *malo* [bad]. If you do not find enough of the good, you must yourself create it." This artful, appealing novel is something very good.

—Susan Marie Swanson

House of Sports

By Marisabina Russo

GREENWILLOW

192 pages, Age 8 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-623803-X

Twelve-year-old Jim is a basketball nut. What he's not nuts about is the attention lavished on him by his Holocaust-survivor grandmother who talks with a

thick German accent and does things way too slowly for the frenetic pace of Jim's basketball-dominated world. Nana, however, is not to be dissuaded by Jim's unresponsiveness and attitude. Hoping to show him the world outside his "house of sports," she invites him to spend the weekend with her in New York City, and to enjoy an evening at the opera. Though *Madame Butterfly* bores Jim, the weekend is not entirely a flop: the revelation of Nana's secret (a brand-new laptop computer) and the stories she's been writing about her life as a Jew growing up in Nazi-occupied Germany plant the first seeds of interest—both in Nana and in writing—in Jim's mind.

Part of Jim's obsession with basketball stems from his less-than-stellar academic record—and his general disinterest in school. Overshadowed by an intellectually gifted older brother and parents who are committed to lifelong learning, Jim feels as if the only place where he can excel is on the basketball court. Even there, his position is tenuous; his ability is often overlooked because of his small size. His drive to prove himself (and to show his dedication to his traveling team) is further jeopardized when his grandmother ends up in the hospital and his beloved dog, Jake, has a serious accident.

Jim's relationship with Jake—and his commitment to his faithful pet during the dog's final weeks—provides a microcosm in which Jim puts into action the qualities of love and devotion that he seems reluctant to demonstrate elsewhere. Later, after recognizing his desire to show his grandmother that he both cares for and admires her, he draws on these same reserves of love and courage to deal with her last days and with her death, and later to speak in celebration of her life at a Holocaust conference.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2002 WINNERS!



Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

WRITTEN BY DOREEN RAPPAPORT
ILLUSTRATED BY BRYAN COLLIER

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Winner

CORETTA SCOTT KING
AUTHOR HONOR



Jump at the Sun

An imprint of Hyperion Books for Children

Although *House of Sports* tends toward the maudlin, Jim's emotions, as he struggles to process the deaths of two family members, are realistically rendered. Marisabina Russo does a superb job of portraying a preteen struggling with priorities and learning the importance of differentiating between acting out of obligation and acting out of love.

—Jenny Sawyer

Lord of the Deep

By Graham Salisbury

DELACORTE

182 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-72918-9

Thirteen-year-old Mikey admires no one more than he admires his stepfather, Bill. As a deckhand on Bill's charter deep-sea-fishing boat, the *Crystal-C*, Mikey tries to copy Bill's every move. If Bill takes off his shirt in the blistering Hawaiian sun, Mikey does too. When it's time to bait the lines, Mikey memorizes which lures Bill chooses so that some day, when he has his own boat, he will know just what the ono, marlin, and other "fighting fish" will go for. But, as Graham Salisbury shows over the course of a single momentous day, even a "lord of the deep," like Bill, has his flaws. Combining dramatic action at sea with taut emotion, *Lord of the Deep* deflates Mikey's hero worship into a painful but more realistic evaluation of his stepfather as a man with the capacity to disappoint him.

The catalyst for Bill's fall off the pedestal comes in the form of two boorish brothers who charter his boat for three days. The novel opens on day two; the fact that on the previous day they got "skunked"—they didn't catch anything—has increased the pressure on Bill to produce results. Readers feel the tension building as the brothers, Ernie and Cal, slap cards onto the table

during their time-killing poker game and needle Bill about their empty fish box. Although Mikey understands charter fishing's economic importance to his family, he finds it hard to comprehend why Bill puts up with Ernie and Cal's condescension, why he lets them call him "Billyboy" and suggest he doesn't know what he's doing. Mikey also doesn't know what to make of the strained relationship between Cal and his teenage daughter, Alison, whom Cal has brought on board, obviously against her will. Mikey's innocence is very gradually eroded throughout the fishing trip as he realizes that people's motivations aren't always as straightforward as he has imagined.

Graphically described encounters with ocean life, be it a dead whale surrounded by ravenous sharks or an enraged eight-hundred-pound marlin charging the boat, keep the excitement level high. The *Crystal-C* does see action after all, and it's overwhelming to everyone on board for various reasons. A mistake by Mikey costs them the marlin, and even Bill's philosophical response does little to alleviate the boy's shame. While Bill is tangling with what turns out to be a record-breaking mahi-mahi, he stoically endures having a hook lodged in, then removed from, his forearm. "The man is made of ice," Mikey thinks, awestruck. After the climactic catch, a different kind of test arises, revealing that Bill's principles are less staunch than his ability to withstand pain.

Ultimately Ernie and Cal bribe Bill into lying so that their catch will meet record book requirements. With considerable poignancy, *Lord of the Deep* registers the confusion, anger, and sadness Mikey feels when he can't reconcile Bill's act of deception with the iconic figure he has believed in for so long. Bill tries to assure him that there is a place "in between" right and wrong. Mikey may or may not come to accept

this explanation in the future, but he does realize by the book's end that his stepfather doesn't have to be perfect to be worthy of his love and respect.

—Renée Victor

Lord of the Nutcracker Men

By Iain Lawrence

DELACORTE

216 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-72924-3

It's 1914 and Johnny's life has turned upside-down. His father has gone to fight the war in France, his mother works far away in a munitions plant, and Johnny must leave the excitement of wartime London to live with his sharp Auntie Ivy in the safety of the Kent countryside. The only power Johnny seems to have is over his armies, the ranks of nutcracker men and toy soldiers Johnny's father made for him before the war, who fight battle after battle in Auntie Ivy's garden. Johnny's armies grow with each carved soldier his father sends him from the front—incarnations of the other men he sees. But as the war continues, the letters and the soldiers become darker and more frightening, as the details of Johnny's father's experiences in war begin to mirror the battles Johnny acts out in play.

In *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, Iain Lawrence offers his readers the same pleasures of sharply drawn characters and a well-told story as in his earlier novels, including the High Seas trilogy and the award-winning *Ghost Boy*. Told partly through letters written by Johnny's father, *Lord of the Nutcracker Men* presents a clear-eyed view not only of the horrors of the war, but also of the strain on those far away from the battles. Lawrence weaves an emotionally honest tale of a boy's growing ability to deal with the responsibilities he must increasingly assume, whether that entails a seeming power to control



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Riverbank Review

events in the war with his toy soldiers, owning up to hurt he has caused, or learning when to keep (or reveal) secrets that aren't his own.

The letters from Johnny's father make the action in the trenches especially vivid. Absorbing this intense, first-person account of the war, the reader feels Johnny's fears—and the danger of his father's situation—directly. Lawrence is content to leave certain events mysterious until late in the story, and the questions he plants in the reader mirror Johnny's own uncertainties.

The emotions of the characters ring true: early in the novel, Johnny enjoys the soldiers and the excitement of wartime London. Later, in his fierce garden battles, he plays out his anger at being separated from those he loves. But most of all, Lawrence is honest in depicting the terrors and long-lasting effects of the war, as well as its closeness. In an author's note, we learn that letters from the front arrived in England in only two to three days, and in some parts of the country, you could hear the dull rumble of the guns. It was not a war one could imagine away. Lawrence doesn't sugarcoat it for his readers, and without being overly graphic, he effectively conveys the real pain and helplessness people experienced both at home and on the battlefield—as if they were merely toys in the hands of the generals of the day.

—Kathryne Beebe

Mara's Stories:

Glimmers in the Darkness

Retold by Gary Schmidt

HENRY HOLT

148 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-8050-6794-9

Mara is a concentration-camp prisoner, the daughter of a rabbi, who tells stories from her bunk each night. According to Gary Schmidt's introductory note, he voices his pointed adaptations

of Jewish folktales through the fictional Mara as a tribute to "all the men and women of the barracks who tried, in the middle of the darkest night, to bring some light to themselves and to their children." Tales set in a ransacked Jewish ghetto or in a gas chamber or at

the edge of a ditch, with Nazi gunfire echoing off the trees, will inevitably rouse strong emotion. But Schmidt's framing of the stories increases their intensity further, compelling readers to view storytelling not merely as entertainment, but as vital sustenance.

A 2002 ALA Notable Children's Book

THE OTHER SIDE OF TRUTH

BEVERLEY NAIDOO

Smuggled out of Nigeria in the 1990s after their mother's murder, 12-year-old Sade and her younger brother are abandoned in London—fearful of their new surroundings and of what may have happened to their journalist father back in Nigeria.

★ "Through [her] compelling characters, Naidoo has captured and revealed the personal anguish and universality of the refugee experience." —Starred review / *School Library Journal*

★ "While the book honors its political and ethical engagements, it succeeds as a first-rate escape-adventure story as well." —Starred review / *The Horn Book*

★ "This thought-provoking novel offers a gripping, open-eyed exploration of what happens when principles meet practical reality in hand-to-hand combat." —Starred review / *The Bulletin*

★ "This powerful novel . . . humanizes contemporary politics." —Starred review / *ALA Booklist*

★ "Readers [are] likely to find [Sade's] determination exhilarating." —Starred review / *Publishers Weekly*

Ages 10 up. \$16.95 Tr (0-06-029628-3); \$16.89 Lb (0-06-029629-1)

HarperCollinsChildren'sBooks

1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019 www.harperchildrens.com

Divided into eight sections with titles such as “Questions Angels Fear to Ask” and “Miracles Covered with Ashes,” the stories Mara tells have varied sources, all clearly traced in Schmidt’s absorbing end notes. Some selections originated during the Holocaust; others derive from Hasidic tales that, although they were first recorded at least a century earlier, gain heightened significance in this context. For example, the two stories in the “Living and Dancing” section show Holocaust-era Jews using the Hasidic belief in the joyful power of dance to defy the evil that surrounds them. A rabbi’s wife fears the lively music emanating from her home will alert the Nazis in a story called “The Dance.” But when she enters the room to tell her husband’s disciples to quiet down, her courage is renewed by the “blazing ribbon of blue fire” threading among the dancers. In “From the Stones,” the names inscribed on tombstones rise into a dance above the heads of Jewish prisoners who are being forced by Nazi storm troopers to desecrate their loved ones’ graves in order to collect paving material for German roads.

Mara’s listeners retrieve their dignity during the all-too-brief periods they spend gathered at her bunk. They even laugh occasionally, as Schmidt includes a sprinkling of humorous narratives involving jokes at Hitler’s and his minions’ expense. In the Hasidic tradition, Schmidt seems to favor enigmatic endings, and one can imagine that the people in the barracks also appreciated the sense of mystery Mara’s stories kindled. There are many certainties about the Holocaust, the most terrible of them being, as Schmidt reminds us in his opening, “that six million people—one million of them children—were murdered because they were Jewish.” But perhaps the character of Shmulik opts not to betray his people for Nazi gold in “Shards,” and perhaps the

strangers in “The Three Men” who helped the rabbi and his driver escape in an invisible car were divinely sent. *Mara’s Stories* offers testimony that hope can flare up despite the most sinister, concentrated efforts to snuff it out.

—Renée Victor

The Rag and Bone Shop

By Robert Cormier

DELACORTE

154 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-72962-6

Robert Cormier, one of the finest American novelists for young adults, died in November 2000. He crafted complex, perfectly structured plots, characters who both engage and repel readers, and stories that range from the lyrical (*Other Bells for Us to Ring*) to the disturbing (*I Am the Cheese* and *The Chocolate War*). *The Rag and Bone Shop* is his last gift to readers.

Told from two alternating points of view, this novel probes the nature of guilt and innocence. Trent, a powerfully mesmerizing police interrogator who is known throughout the state, is a lonely and isolated man. His wife is dead, and his only pleasure comes from his professional success and notoriety—he seems able to obtain confessions from anyone. Jason, about to enter eighth grade, is a bit of a loner. He doesn’t have close friends, isn’t especially successful in school, and is thoroughly glad it’s summer. When a seven-year-old neighbor is found murdered, Jason, the last person to see her, is the prime suspect. With strong community pressure to solve the murder, Trent is asked to interrogate him.

Most of the story is conveyed through Trent’s conversations with Jason, which, while they are painful, are fascinating to read. Though at a point it is clear what the outcome will be, the diabolical cleverness with which Trent causes Jason to feel guilty is compelling. One

can almost smell the fear and anxiety in the small police station room as Jason’s sense of himself is first shattered and then rebuilt according to Trent’s design. The ending is brilliant Cormier. All actions have consequences, some unexpected, and as events spin to their logical conclusion, hope, trust, and the resilience of the human soul are tested. This is a riveting read, not for the faint of heart.

—Lee Galda

The Seeing Stone

By Kevin Crossley-Holland

ARTHUR A. LEVINE/SCHOLASTIC

342 pages, Age 13 and up, \$17.95

ISBN 0-439-26326-3

The first book in a planned Arthurian trilogy, *The Seeing Stone* immerses the reader in two worlds: the often uncomfortable, filthy reality of the Middle Ages, and the magical world described in the legend of King Arthur. This skillful blending of reality and fantasy is accomplished through the character of Merlin, the greatest wizard of all time. The world of young Arthur de Caldicot trembles on the brink of the thirteenth century, whereas the world of King Arthur arose from legends a thousand years earlier. Yet the character of Merlin spans them both. He is counselor and teacher to both Arthurs, embodying a power neither quite understands.

Arthur de Caldicot, a boy with a young man’s ambition, doesn’t understand many things about his life: he is mainly interested in becoming old enough and trusted enough to be made a knight. He endures teasing about his pleasure in learning. He doesn’t understand why his father is reluctant to make him a squire to Lord Stephen, or why he seems to favor his eldest son over Arthur. He is too young—and too much a part of the world he lives in—to understand the reasons for his society’s class system, or why justice is

uneven with respect to class and gender. He struggles to do things with his right hand, because it is "unnatural" to use the left. He wonders how the priest can hate Merlin so, as the clash between reason and superstition becomes entangled with religion. The Crusades he understands as a great adventure, and longs to go, but of course he does not know the grim and bitter reality of the struggle between Christianity and Islam.

When young Arthur gazes at the legendary King Arthur through the seeing stone, the reader sees both worlds, and the characters have startling similarities. As Arthur de Caldicot matures over the course of time he learns that he, like his namesake, has been "adopted" by parents not his own, and he thoroughly dislikes the man he discovers to be his father. Further, he realizes that this means he cannot marry the girl he has assumed for years would be his betrothed, because she is his half-sister. By the end of the book, Arthur is beginning to recognize the echoes between his own life and the life he watches through the stone as he makes ready to leave for the Crusades.

The theological, moral, and political questions raised in *The Seeing Stone* offer opportunities for discussion and comparison with our own era. Although it enriches the reading of the story to know the Arthurian legend beforehand, Kevin Crossley-Holland has crafted his novel so that fresh readers can discover what they need to know about King Arthur as young Arthur de Caldicot discovers it through his seeing stone. The one hundred short chapters, all titled, are not choppy, but instead offer bits and pieces of two mosaics—the lives of the two Arthurs. They also make this an easy book to read aloud. With its richness of detail and vivid imagery, clear exposition of medieval thought and politics, and web of magic, *The Seeing Stone*

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Margaret Willey for *Clever Beatrice*
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Margaret Read MacDonald for *Mabela the Clever*
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Marisabina Russo for *Come Back, Hannah*
 (Greenwillow/HarperCollins)

Catherine Stock for *Gugu's House* (Clarion)

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 (McElderry/Simon & Schuster)



The Charlotte Zolotow Award is given annually to the author of the best picture book text published in the United States in the preceding year. Established in 1998, the award is named to honor the work of Charlotte Zolotow, a distinguished children's book editor and author.

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

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

is well worth the time it takes to read. Those who do will eagerly anticipate the next installment, as they leave Arthur de Caldicot setting off for Jerusalem, a squire at last, pursuing his own as yet undefined quest.

—Lee Galda

Things Not Seen

By Andrew Clements

PHILOMEL

256 pages, Ages 10–14, \$15.99

ISBN 0-399-23626-0

Fifteen-year-old Bobby Phillips is used to feeling invisible. His parents don't really listen to him, and the popular kids at the University of Chicago lab school look right through him. Still, he's not ready to be truly invisible, which is what happens when he wakes up one morning to get ready for school. He's gone. Vanished. Nothing but an invisible shape to hold up his clothes and swallow his food. That this unlikely situation occurs in the most ordinary of circumstances makes the story less unbelievable than it otherwise might be. Bobby is an ordinary kid. He chafes under his parents' control, he's politely disrespectful to them, and he doesn't much like school. His mother teaches English literature at the University of Chicago, and his father is a physicist. Both are intelligent and successful, but when their son comes to the breakfast table in his new form, their world is shaken. They decide to keep Bobby's invisibility a secret, sure that his father will be able to figure out some solution. When Bobby's parents are in a traffic accident, he is forced to fend for himself for a few days. Thus begins his quest for a cure and his journey toward self-confidence.

Andrew Clements's characters make this book a pleasure to read. Bobby gradually changes from an immature, sarcastic, scared boy into a young man who realizes that his parents really do

love him, but also that he must take responsibility for himself and find the solution to his unusual problem. Bobby's eventual unraveling of the reasons for his invisibility are plausible and quite logical. His growing relationship with a blind girl, whom he literally runs into on his first excursion outside of the house in his new state, forces him to explore what it means to have vision, and to recognize that sight doesn't guarantee a clear view of reality. The character of Alicia, who lost her sight suddenly one night when she fell out of bed, striking her head, is an interesting and poignant counterpoint to Bobby: he cannot be seen, and she cannot see, but their vision of one another is clear.

The adults in this novel are all bright and caring, but their intelligence and adult self-assurance blind them to the solution to Bobby's invisibility. It is Bobby and Alicia who figure out what happened to him and how to undo it. The two of them grow beyond their parents' vision, both literally and figuratively. The well-developed characters and a dose of perceptive humor combine to make this a fast-paced, entertaining book that is replete with strong metaphors and important themes. In other words, *Things Not Seen* is vintage Clements.

—Lee Galda

Three Clams and an Oyster

By Randy Powell

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

224 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-37526-7

Flint McCallister, Rick Beaterson, and Dwight Deshutsis have a problem. Their four-man flag football team is sorely in need of an "oyster"—the fourth player who will not only keep them eligible to play in the league but will also fulfill the role of designated outsider, allowing the original players to continue as

the "three clams." Unfortunately for McCallister, Beaterson, and Deshutsis (whose use of one another's last names is a macho expression of intimacy), they haven't been able to find a decent oyster since their original teammate, Glen Como, died in a freak accident two summers ago.

With forty-eight hours left to find a fourth man, the clams are left with one of two options: Cade Savage, the current oyster, whose commitment to the team has deteriorated into nothingness due to serious drinking and drug use, and Rachel Summerfield, a talented athlete who has the potential to propel their team into stardom. The choice seems obvious. But the three guys are dubious about Rachel and reluctant to turn their backs on Cade.

Although the sport of flag football lies at the heart of *Three Clams and an Oyster*, the novel is more concerned with the psychology of teenage male friendships than with the action of football practices and games. Sports fans may find themselves wishing for more details relating to the sport, but for most readers, the smooth integration of a few football-dominated scenes into an otherwise dialogue-driven text will prove refreshing and sufficient.

Randy Powell uses his story to ponder the nature of loyalty, and the lengths to which one should go for a friend. Initially, Flint is the most hesitant to give up on Cade, but by the conclusion of the novel, he has realized the danger of his previously bottomless commitment to a person who never keeps his promises. Loyalty, Flint learns, should not become an excuse for exploiting oneself or disregarding the needs of others.

Inevitably, the three friends make the wisest choice for the team, though they're not sure what to make of her unshaven legs, her assertiveness, and, at bottom, the fact that she's a girl. The team continues as *Three Clams and an*

Oyster, but Rachel alters their group dynamic permanently—for the better—forcing the guys out of their comfort zones and into new ways of thinking and playing. Indeed, the end of the book finds these three clams emerging, slowly, from their shells.

—*Jenny Sawyer*

When Dad Killed Mom

By Julius Lester

SILVER WHISTLE/HARCOURT

192 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.00

ISBN 0-15-216305-0

One of the writer's tasks is to "weave himself into others' pain," suggests Julius Lester in an afterword to this searing but surprisingly readable novel. *When Dad Killed Mom* is Lester's attempt to see past lurid headlines to the people, particularly the children, affected by sudden, unthinkable tragedy.

Switching back and forth between the perspectives of fourteen-year-old Jenna and her younger brother, Jeremy, the narration begins when school officials pull the siblings out of class and inform them that their mother has been murdered. The situation they find themselves facing—their father, a university psychologist, shot their mother, a respected artist, while she sat at the local coffee shop—is beyond their comprehension. It sounds like a TV talk show topic, not like something that could ever happen in their family, which, from their standpoint, seemed no worse or better than anyone else's. Right after hearing the news, Jeremy rushes back to the art room to retrieve the picture he drew for his mom so he can show it to her when he gets home. Jenna, who is more worldly than her brother, but also in denial, alternately sobs and escapes into the concerns that previously claimed her attention, wondering how best to attract the guy she hopes will ask her to the eighth-grade dance. The tandem narratives poignant-

ly illuminate the strange disconnect between the way things are before a cataclysmic event and the way they are afterwards. For Jeremy and Jenna, mundane activities such as lying on the couch, shopping for clothes, and having a snow day off from school take on

an almost surreal tinge. Familiar routine provides some comfort, but it is also an excruciating reminder that their world has changed irrevocably.


As the children decide separately where they will live and how they will react to their father, who is awaiting

A 2002 ALA Notable Children's Book

DIG, WAIT, LISTEN

A DESERT TOAD'S TALE

BY APRIL PULLEY SAYRE
PICTURES BY BARBARA BASH




★ "Several inches below the surface of the desert sand, a spadefoot toad waits and listens for rain. . . . Sayre writes about the natural world in a way that is clear, precise, and poetic. The text, which is akin to that of any good fiction picture book in its brevity, attention to sensory details, and read-aloud potential, also conveys the life cycle of a single species in a cogent and memorable way. . . . Bash's pictures illustrate the desert scenes with pleasingly varied colors, perspectives, and layouts. Preschool and primary grade children will find this well-crafted book a wholly satisfying introduction to the spadefoot toad . . . and the idea of life cycles in general."

—Starred review / ALA Booklist

"This is top-notch nonfiction for the very young, introducing readers to desert wildlife in general and in particular to the remarkable spadefoot toad."

—Kirkus Reviews

Ages 6 up. \$15.95 Tr (0-688-16614-8);
\$15.89 Lb (0-688-16615-6)

 **Greenwillow Books** An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
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trial, Lester convincingly delineates each sibling's unique struggle. Jenna has always been Daddy's girl, and her grieving is complicated by guilt over the many times she succeeded in pitting her parents against one another. The disturbing sexual undercurrent to Jenna's relationship with her father, which she naively tried to use to her advantage before the murder, helps to establish that, for all Jenna's apparent sophistication, there was a lot about her family and herself she didn't understand. Jeremy finds himself in the uncharacteristic position of having to enlighten his sister—and the court—after he discovers his mother's diary among her artwork. The diary not only exposes their father's lies, it also gives Jeremy and Jenna the opportunity to reevaluate their mother and what they meant to her.

The drama in the courtroom has a few weak spots, notably key information supplied by Jenna that seems to come out of nowhere. Also, Lester strains to concoct a dysfunctional background for the father in order to humanize him. Still, he confronts a difficult and important subject without sensationalizing it, bravely crossing into emotional territory where many writers for young people would be afraid to go.

—Renée Victor

Where Heroes Hide

By Helen Recorvits

FRANCES FOSTER/FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

144 pages, Ages 8–12, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-33057-3

It's the summer of 1956, and although World War II is long over, the effects of the war still linger for Junior's family. A wartime pilot and hero, Junior's father, Joe, can't seem to forget the tragedies he witnessed, and he remains emotionally volatile, alternately inspiring awe and terror in his ten-year-old son. Joe's mercurial emotional state is particular-

ly troubling when it causes him to act irrationally toward Junior's best friend, Lenny, a polio victim. Though Lenny is no longer contagious, Junior's father is overprotective of his son, and he forbids him to spend time with Lenny.

Ignoring his father's restrictions, Junior enthusiastically dives into summer: he hangs out with his friends (including Lenny) and tries to figure out a way to earn enough money to purchase the bike he's been coveting. The boys have plenty of fun outwitting a school bully, swimming in the neighborhood pond, and attempting to find a lucrative summer job—it's a bright vacation, dimmed only slightly by Joe's occasional explosive outbursts. As the summer draws to a close, father and son experience two unexpected moments of bonding that spark the beginnings of change in Joe and enable both of them to reconsider what it means to be a hero.

The event that serves as a catalyst for the turnaround in Joe's behavior involves Lenny risking his life to prevent a neighborhood apartment building from burning down. The magnitude of courage that lies behind Lenny's heroism is never fully explored. Nonetheless, *Where Heroes Hide* is an engaging middle-grade novel that contains all the right elements for this age group: best friends, a lemonade stand, awkward first encounters with the opposite sex, and a dearest wish fulfilled.

—Jenny Sawyer

Zazoo

By Richard Mosher

CLARION

248 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-13534-0

Picture a canal in rural France, an old stone mill perched between the canal and the river, and a boat—purple, and flat-bottomed. Now climb in the boat and float slowly down the canal as

Zazoo unfolds into the lovely, lyrical story of the maturation of a beautiful Vietnamese orphan who has been raised since she was two by her adopted Grand-Pierre, a grizzled old Frenchman whose name is a cross between “grandfather” and “old stone.” At almost fourteen, Zazoo is poised on the brink of womanhood, simultaneously eager for it (what girl doesn't long for breasts once her friends start maturing?) and reluctant to leave the safe and idyllic childhood she has had in a tower room in the old mill on the canal.

Zazoo's metamorphosis from child to young woman begins with a boy on a bike, a mysterious stranger who appears beside the canal early one October morning while Zazoo is in her boat. The boy, Marius, asks Zazoo about the village pharmacist, Monsieur Klein, talks with her a bit, and then vanishes, promising to return “soon.” Impatient, Zazoo wonders what soon means. As she waits for Marius to return, she becomes increasingly aware of her Grand-Pierre's decline. He's more and more forgetful, needs help dressing, and can't always care for Zazoo as he has in the past. Zazoo realizes that she needs to know more of both his story and her own.

Most of Zazoo's memories come to her in poems that she and Grand-Pierre made up to chronicle her life, or in visual images of punting or skating on the canal and the river. She knows that her parents were killed when they stepped on a land mine, but she doesn't know, exactly, how Grand-Pierre found her in Vietnam. She knows that he is considered a hero by many of the villagers for his work in the resistance during World War II, but she doesn't know what that means. As she asks Grand-Pierre, prodding him to explore his own memories, she learns about the ambiguity of adult life. Hero to some, Grand-Pierre is a murderer to Monsieur Klein, and the two men haven't spoken since the end of the war. Warm

and wonderful to Zazoo, Grand-Pierre metaphorically turned to stone when the love of his life, a young Jewish girl, sister of Monsieur Klein, was hanged by the Nazis. And Marius has appeared out of the mist on his bicycle because his beloved grandmother once loved—and lost—Monsieur Klein.

As Zazoo learns all of this, she and Marius exchange postcards with beautiful art on the front and carefully written messages on the back. Marius visits Zazoo a few more times, and their tentative romance slowly grows. By the end of the story, Monsieur Klein and Grand-Pierre have reached a new understanding, Marius and his grandmother have journeyed down the canal, and she and Monsieur Klein are joyously reunited. Zazoo and Marius are happy to be together as the past melds into the future.

Richard Mosher's lyrical style carries the complex plot as he weaves together three love stories spanning more than fifty years. His liberal use of imagery and poetry establishes a tranquil mood, and he creates a sense of place so vivid you can smell the apple peels burning on the stove. Zazoo's poetic nature, her unusual sensitivity, and her growing understanding of love

and loss, innocence and guilt, and peace and forgiveness make her a compelling character. *Zazoo* is a beautiful book that asks to be read carefully, and more than once.

—Lee Galda

Nonfiction & Traditional Literature

Atlantic

By G. Brian Karas

PUTNAM

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.99

ISBN 0-399-23632-5

There must be something about water—its universality, its importance to life, its variability—that invites children's-book writers to personify it. With his colorful new picture book *Atlantic*, G. Brian Karas joins Suzanna Marshak (*I Am the Ocean*), Thomas Locker (*Water Dance*) and Jean Marzollo (*I Am Water*) in writing about water in the first person.

Atlantic's large format and strong variation in layout and use of color are

appealing. While blues and greens dominate, Karas throws in a golden-hued pebbly beach, underwater volcanoes of deep brown streaked with rusty red, and a pitch-black sky with a pale yellow, tide-pulling moon.

One attractive spread contains the illustrations in large, curving arrows to show how the ocean's water circulates around the globe. In another spread, stylized outlines of fish and other sea creatures pack the ocean, suggesting its rich store of life.

With both his words and his art, Karas lends whimsy to an informational book for the very young, who will gain a sense of what an ocean is, how big it is, and how people use it, abuse it, and are affected by it. His language is playful, accessible, and engaging:

I rub shoulders with North
America
and bump into Africa
I slosh around South America and
crash into Europe

Seagulls sing to me
Sand and pebbles
rattle and clatter a chorus
as I rush in
and pull away

The visual focus in some of the spreads is more the children who live near the ocean than the ocean itself, but Karas's identification with his subject builds as *Atlantic* proceeds. In a brief afterword, Karas offers more facts about the Atlantic, continuing in the first-person voice. His text might have been able to accommodate a few of these facts; as written, it applies, for the most part, to any world ocean.

From cover to cover—endpapers in wake-up green at the front and soothing aquamarine at the back—*Atlantic* is a pleasing contribution to the "I am water" literature.

—Lisa Westberg Peters



I begin where the land runs out
at the end of yards
and streets
and hills

Illustration by G. Brian Karas, from *Atlantic*

**Dig, Wait, Listen:
A Desert Toad's Tale**

By April Pulley Sayre
Illustrated by Barbara Bash
GREENWILLOW
32 pages, Age 4 and up, \$15.95
ISBN 0-688-16614-8

Less is more: in just thirty-two pages, April Pulley Sayre and Barbara Bash convey the particulars of a spadefoot toad's habitat, survival strategies, and reproductive cycle without relying on scientific jargon or a profusion of facts. The succinct, dynamic story focuses on carefully selected aspects of this desert animal's life and introduces young readers to one of its essential and unique behaviors: listening and feeling for the sound and vibration of rain from a resting spot deep beneath the desert floor.

From the outset, readers listen hard, along with the endearing toad, for the signal to dig out of the burrow. The text bristles with the sounds that the toad might hear, from the "Thunk, thunk, thunk. Clink, clunk, clink, clunk" of a herd of galloping peccaries to the "tsk, tsk, tsk" of a rattlesnake. When the much-anticipated "plop thunk *gussssshhhhhh!*" of raindrops hitting hot sand finally arrives, the toad takes her cue. She emerges from the ground to engage in the fast and furious rituals of mating, laying eggs, and feasting on insects. All told, she stays out in the desert air for just about a month before the dry heat forces her once again to dig down to the moist, dark safety below.

A sideways excursion into the fertilization and hatching of the eggs provides further excitement; turn the page after the eggs are laid, and suddenly you're holding a puddle teeming with fat black tadpoles! Watery blue-greens immerse this two-page spread in a cool relief that contrasts with the previous pictures' golden hues. Bash's ink-and-watercolor illustrations enlarge on Sayre's compact, poetic text. As the

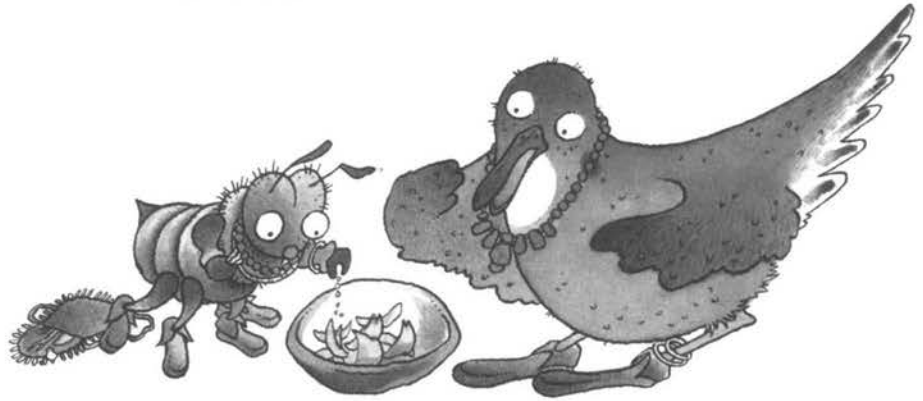


Illustration by Wendy Watson, from *Is My Friend at Home?*

tadpoles grow into toads, Bash splits her images into discrete panels that reveal development through time.

Rich in sensory details, full of observational delights, yet never over the heads of younger readers and listeners, *Dig, Wait, Listen* is a rare breed of book: it imparts solid information and engages from start to finish. Sayre's added notes divulge more about this fascinating creature and its desert neighbors.

—Christine Alfano

**Is My Friend at Home?
Pueblo Fireside Tales**

Retold by John Bierhorst
Illustrated by Wendy Watson
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX
32 pages, Age 4 and up, \$16.00
ISBN 0-374-33550-8

Renowned editor and translator John Bierhorst retells seven Hopi trickster tales in this spare and luminous collection. At the start we learn that they are meant to be told in the wintertime, after the sun has set. What better time to draw out such glowing stories and bask in their warm humor?

Each story begins with a simple exchange between an imagined storyteller and her audience that ritualizes the telling and reminds us that the tales are shared: "Shall I begin? Yes." The tricksters we encounter are an array of animals with quite human personalities; their relationships with one another

can be friendly or contentious.

Several of the tales cleverly "explain" phenomena in the natural world—we discover why Coyote has short ears, why Snake has no friends, why peaches are sweet. But subtler lessons are also imparted. In "Why Mouse Walks Softly," Mouse, the consummate hostess, desperately wants to impress her visiting friends, Coyote and Beetle, with a well-stocked larder, and so she spends an entire night making noisy trips to and from the "big houses" in the village, stealing whatever bits of food she can find. After bragging to her guests about all she has to offer, she falls soundly asleep. Coyote and Beetle realize what's up and repay Mouse with a song:

night is coming
Mouse starts running
close your windows, big people...

Embarrassed, Mouse makes a vow—not to stop stealing but, rather, to always walk softly while she burgles pantries. The story packs a double whammy: we learn why mice are so quiet, and also that the very human urge to impress our pals can be difficult to resist.

Wendy Watson's warmhearted illustrations place the stories within the context of the Pueblo culture and convey their richly comic mood. Almost every picture juxtaposes warmth and cold, dark and light. Her cool blue-and-purple watercolors give way to

heated oranges and yellows, depicting both winter's harsh freeze and the comfort to be found in a fire's glow.

These seven finely honed stories cast a knowing eye at human faults and foibles, but they are never mean-spirited; they evoke the softer laughter that comes from recognition. *Is My Friend at Home?* holds a mirror up to the human race, and we see ourselves within these animal tricksters.

—Christine Alfano

Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Doreen Rappaport

Illustrated by Bryan Collier

JUMP AT THE SUN/HYPERION

32 pages, All ages, \$15.99

ISBN 0-7868-0714-8

A single portrait fills this picture-book cover, and the face is iconographic. There is a kindness in the eyes that look beyond us, a strength and optimistic assuredness in the man's smile. Deep browns define the set of his jaw while light plays off his forehead and cheekbones. We see this face and equate it with words like *struggle* and *hope* and *justice*. Not many books could risk forgoing a title on the cover, but this book doesn't need one. We know who we're looking at.

In writing this brief history of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., Doreen Rappaport says, she was inspired by his words: "They are simple and direct, yet profound and poetic." She uses important words and phrases as landmarks throughout the book and shows how at first they shaped the young Martin and, later on, how King's own words helped to shape the thinking of our nation. As a boy, confronted by the "White Only" signs common throughout the South, Martin recalls his mother's words, which jump boldly from the page: "You are as good as anyone." As an adult activist and preacher, embracing the pacifist teachings of Gandhi,



Illustration by Bryan Collier, from *Martin's Big Words*

Dr. King proclaims, "Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that."

Within this picture-book format, Rappaport deftly conveys defining moments in King's youth and goes on to outline his work as a preacher and the progress of the civil rights movement. The keenly measured text distills events to their essence.

Bryan Collier's collage images use contrasting light and dark to powerful and varying effect. The warm glow of stained glass windows illuminates a woman and a girl in church together. On another page, a sickly, awful light rises up behind a hostile-looking crowd as King kneels alone, head bowed, in the foreground. While the text describes the violent reaction against the

civil rights movement, Collier's striking artwork conveys the brutal force of this reaction.

To a child, "big words" might mean long and complicated ones. Rappaport redefines the notion here and lets readers feel the force of the ideas behind seemingly simple words. Floating on the surface of the last page, elusive as ghosts, the words *freedom*, *peace*, *together*, and *love* carry a deeper meaning and a greater weight than they normally might. They are the "big words." This spare and elegant portrayal reaches beyond the essential facts of King's life and achievements to communicate, especially to young readers, the powerful legacy of those words.

—Christine Alfano

Meltdown: A Race against Nuclear Disaster at Three Mile Island

By Wilborn Hampton

CANDLEWICK

104 pages, Ages 10–14, \$19.99

ISBN 0-7636-0715-0

In a first-person account, former wire service reporter Wilborn Hampton describes his role in covering the 1979 nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, a nuclear power plant on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. Safety checks had failed and radiation was leaking outside the plant.

Throughout, Hampton is disarmingly honest about his ignorance of nuclear physics and his need to study the subject as events unfolded—something reporters commonly do in order to explain a subject to their readers. Hampton's narrative makes it abundantly clear how hazardous his profession can be. Dosimeters, which measure radiation, were handed out to members of the press covering Three Mile Island.

While it is not as dramatically written as Hampton's earlier *Kennedy Assassinated!*, this book pulls the reader along. Neither power utility nor government officials knew precisely what would happen to the disabled nuclear reactor. Would it explode? Would the radioactive fuel melt into the ground and contaminate the environment for years to come? The threat of a meltdown was what attracted journalists from around the world to Pennsylvania.

One of the most enlightening incidents occurred when Hampton's editor called late one night to tell him that unnamed "informed sources" were saying that the situation had suddenly worsened. Hampton by then had come to trust a government scientist who was insisting otherwise. Hampton advised his editor not to send the story over the wire, choosing instead to rely on his source. The incident dramatically illus-



From *Meltdown*

trates the dilemma reporters face in trying to beat the competition and also getting the information right.

The book's opening, which offers a summary of the origin of atomic power and the U. S. bombing of Hiroshima at the end of World War II, could have been both shorter and stronger. The final chapter updates the reader on the ultimate outcome at Three Mile Island and chronicles the much more devastating 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union.

Each chapter opens with an uncaptioned photo; the reader must turn the page to find the caption. This might make for dramatic design, but it's inconvenient and inconsistent with the reportorial nature of the book. *Meltdown* includes a glossary, recommended resources, a bibliography, and an index.

Because journalists rarely report on themselves, the public has little insight into how journalism works. In addition to conveying the history of an important event, *Meltdown* helps to fill that gap. Young people already thinking about future careers will gain insight

into a profession that plays a vital part in a democratic society.

—Lisa Westberg Peters

Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story about Brain Science

By John Fleischman

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

96 pages, Age 9 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-05252-6

The skull of Phineas Gage has been displayed at the Harvard University Medical School for 150 years. It is the sole, striking image on the cover of this book. In the top of the skull is a prominent hole.

This book is about Phineas's brain, and what happened when Phineas had an explosive accident that drove an iron rod through his cheek and out the top of his head. The iron rod was a tamping iron three feet long, used to compress gunpowder in a hole drilled into stone. This young foreman of a railroad construction crew survived his terrible injury and lived another eleven years.

As we mature, there is a stage at

which the macabre fascinates us. The arresting images of Phineas's skull will engage that attraction. The subtitle proclaims that the story is "gruesome," but it is more sad than grisly.

Phineas made a physical recovery—indeed, he never even lost consciousness—but his mind was deeply changed. He lost all social skills and became abrupt, profane, and unpredictable. He became increasingly restless. There are reports that Phineas was exhibited, iron rod in hand, by the famous showman P. T. Barnum. Yet Phineas was a hard worker and a strong one, and for seven years after his recovery he drove a stagecoach between Valparaiso and Santiago in Chile.

The Gages were an adventurous family. While Phineas was in South America, his mother moved from Vermont to frontier San Francisco. Phineas showed up ill one night at her door, still carrying the iron that had pierced his skull. A few months later, after a series of seizures, Phineas died. His iron was buried with him. How Phineas's skull and iron got to Harvard from his grave in San Francisco is a story in itself.

How does the brain work? What does it mean to be human? These two questions are at the core of this book. The narrative of Phineas Gage becomes the vehicle for exploring the incomplete answers we have given over the past centuries, and the still incomplete answers science can give us now.

John Fleischman is a fine science writer, and he has organized his book adroitly. Alongside the story of Phineas Gage, we receive an engaging survey of medical history, and through this case history from the field of brain science we learn how society has changed—and failed to change—in 150 years.

The book is well designed and nicely finished off with a glossary, an index, and a list of resources for those who want to investigate further.

—John Caddy

What Charlie Heard

By Mordicai Gerstein

FRANCES FOSTER/FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

40 pages, Ages 5–10, \$17.00

ISBN 0-374-38292-1

This remarkable picture-book biography has two kinds of text. A narrative on the life of American composer Charles Ives (1874–1954) is set in conventional type and enclosed in white boxes within the illustrations. It begins "Charles Ives was born with his ears wide open" and concludes "Maybe, if you open your ears like Charlie, you can hear the beautiful, funny, sad, joyous, amazing music he heard." Meanwhile, a visual cacophony of onomatopoeic words in different sizes, colors, and letter forms is penned and painted right into the ink-and-watercolor artwork. A string of letters trails out behind the horses' hooves ("GALLOPGALLOP GALLOPGALLOP") while a column of red "clang"s rises from a fire truck bell, and little "ribbit"s cluster around frogs in the cattails.

The result is both highly original and strikingly true to its subject. Author-artist Mordicai Gerstein has filled his pictures with words not simply to amuse us, but also to describe the world that Ives was born into, to explore how his passion for music developed, and to give a sense of what his compositions were about and how they were received—and, often, rejected—by listeners. It is not the task of any picture-book biography to tell all of the important truths of a complicated adult life, yet such books are most successful when they engage big ideas and when they incorporate an understanding of the deep sorrows and joys that visit any human life. *What Charlie Heard* succeeds in this. For example, while Gerstein chooses not to describe the more conflicted aspects of Ives's relationship with his father, focusing instead on their vigorous shared enthusiasms, he offers an



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Illustration by Mordicai Gerstein, from *What Charlie Heard*

arresting description of the young man's sorrow upon his father's death. He explains the sad fact that Ives lost his health and stopped composing before his music developed an audience. A succinct biographical note suggests several pieces of Ives's music that readers might sample.

Gerstein fills his text and artwork with fascinating details from Ives's childhood. His birthplace was right next to the bell tower of the Congregational Church in Danbury, Connecticut. When the town barber was engaged to give the boy drum lessons, he had young Charlie pound on an overturned washtub in the barber shop. The same young fellow who spent hours on baseball and football fields worked hard at making beautiful sounds on the pipe organ. When he grew up, he wrote music "full of the sounds that had filled his life and his heart."

—Susan Marie Swanson

Wildflowers around the Year

By Hope Ryden

CLARION

90 pages, Ages 8–12, \$17.00

ISBN 0-395-85814-3

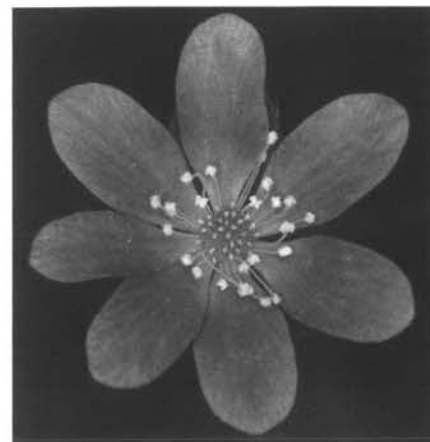
Wildflowers around the Year makes its mark with spectacular close-up photography and a chatty, inviting text. Hope Ryden portrays the wildflowers in seasonal order, from the early-blooming skunk cabbage to the fall-blooming aster. Though its glossy cover and beautiful photographs may make some hesitate to drop it into a knapsack, the book's subject and its compact, nearly square format make it suitable for young flower enthusiasts to take along on day trips.

For each flower, Ryden offers a brief tale of its history or reproduction strategies. Often, she describes how the flower attracts pollinators: the trailing arbutus uses perfume to attract insects;

the columbine attracts hummingbirds with its red color and cone-shaped petals filled with nectar; the common skullcap offers insects a landing platform with dotted lines, a "road map" of sorts leading toward nectar inside; asters evolved long-lasting blossoms that help them overcome the disadvantage of fewer insects in the fall.

Ryden's pollination facts are fascinating and not something a reader would be likely to learn about in a standard field guide. But of the thirty-eight flowers presented, only three are photographed with clearly visible pollinators. These three photos effectively illustrate the points made in the text. The toad-flax, with its tightly closed blossoms, is inaccessible to lightweight insects that would carry away very little pollen; only the "biggest, fuzziest, and fastest" insects are able to pry open the blossoms. The reader can see both types of insects working the bright yellow flower. Most of the time, the reader must imagine the pollination Ryden describes—goldenrod "crawling with insects," a "bumblebee forcing apart the [gentian's] closed petals." It's also worth noting that the focus of the book is eastern wildflowers; western wildflower species are excluded entirely.

All in all, *Wildflowers around the Year* is a good supplement to more tradi-



Photograph by Hope Ryden, from *Wildflowers around the Year*

tional guidebooks. Its sharp photos may invite young artists to produce their own images with paint and paintbrush or encourage budding photographers to try their hand with a macro lens.

—Lisa Westberg Peters

Poetry

Bubblegum Delicious

By Dennis Lee

Illustrated by David McPhail

HARPERCOLLINS

32 pages, Ages 4–8, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-029773-5

Canadian poet Dennis Lee and illustrator David McPhail have blown a perfect bubble. Their collaboration in this exceedingly kid-friendly book of poems is playful and buoyant, with just the measure of stickiness needed to make “goober and guck” sandwiches or glom onto a bully.

McPhail’s ink-and-watercolor artwork pictures a young boy and his dog taking part in an extended daydream. They demonstrate their basketball skills against an elephant and a giraffe during Lee’s joyful quatrain “Dunking.” In “Mighty Hunters,” armed with a bow and arrow, they stalk a group of colorful giant insects down an alley. Bugs big and small scuttle about on nearly every spread, and, with their bulgy eyes and gangly limbs, they help keep the finely drawn illustrations from becoming too sweet.

One or two poems per spread is the general rule, but many pages contain mischievous bonus rhymes displayed in smaller type and tucked into sneaky places, such as the inside of a rolling trash can or along a dragon’s sloping spine. Since these auxiliary poems are often a tad more subversive than the main offerings, finding them provokes a deliciously naughty feeling. It’s hard

not to get the giggles, for instance, when you look down past Lee’s lovely “Lavender and Bergamot” and find this, printed on the side of a miniature, bug-driven delivery truck: “My father was a killer bee, / My mother was a bat, / My uncle was a warty toad, / and

that’s why I’m a brat.”

Lee’s poems can be very silly, and they do focus on underwear, toe jam, and other subjects that are hilarious to a limited age group. But his poetry never feels gratuitously gross or condescending, the way some humorous verse for

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children does. Several of the selections convey heartfelt paeans to friendships lost and found, as in these stanzas from "If Lonesome Was a Pot of Gold":

If Lonesome was a pot of gold,
I'd be a millionaire.
If missing you was party time,

I wouldn't have a care.
And if a flock of memories
Could make a person sing,
I'd be an all-night radio
And play like anything.

Lee keeps the spring in his step by shifting expertly back and forth between sentiment and absurdity. At his best,

he combines both in a single poem. He even generates a kind of giddy sympathy for "The Faithful Donut," whose "sugar shines with longing" and "jelly glows with tears" while it waits for the poem's narrator to make good this vow: "And I will cross the ocean, / And I will cross the sea, / And I will crush you to my lips. / And make you one with me." What young child won't want to gobble this up?

—Renée Victor

Carver: A Life in Poems

By Marilyn Nelson

FRONT STREET

103 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 1-886910-53-7

George Washington Carver's generous intellect embraced scientific inquiry and a humble aesthetic; he addressed himself not only to the agricultural needs of poor Southern farmers but also to their need for simple beauty. Assembling an education for himself, he studied painting and music as well as a range of sciences, and he synthesized his knowledge using a generous and personal faith. He has long been a topic for school-children, primarily in a simplified form, as the inventor of many strange uses for the peanut. Now Marilyn Nelson has shown what seems, after the fact, to be obvious: his challenging life is also fertile ground for a poet.

His story contains fascinating detail and a potentially mythic, very American trajectory. Born a slave, rescued as an infant from the men who stole and sold his mother, fostered by the childless white couple who had been his mother's owners, Carver set out alone to seek an education, his idea of a fortune. Until his death, he continued his quest for knowledge, both to satisfy his own curiosity and to help people improve their lives. He was a gifted teacher to college students and farmers alike.

Each poem in this volume is a complete work on its own; many originally

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themes,
fresh
variations

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appeared in adult literary magazines. Accompanied by black-and-white archival photographs, the sequence of poems creates a powerful image of Carver as an independent, inspired man whose sense of purpose was only truly shaken by the deaths of those he loved, particularly his brother and Booker T. Washington. In "How a Dream Dies," Carver doubts his vision for the future after Washington's death, which came amidst the devastating realities of World War I. He recovers enough to continue his work in "Out of the Fire," noting "how disaster / is seeded with triumph, how / a man is purified by despair."

With a practiced ear and a light touch, Nelson crafts the varied voices of a horse breeder, an art teacher, a former slave, a jealous Tuskegee Institute colleague, even the flowers that witness Carver's mute terror as he stumbles away from a lynching. Carver's voice also emerges, in quotations, in first-person poems, and through his thoughts as relayed by Nelson in the third person. Nelson's version of his voice is sometimes weary, sometimes ironic, always steady, musical, and wise. In "Bedside Reading," for instance, Carver peruses the Bible while musing on the document he uses as a bookmark, the \$700 bill of sale for the thirteen-year-old girl who became his mother. He enumerates: "Fifteen cents / for every day she had lived....Seven hundred dollars for all of her future." This poem subtly illuminates the historic scope of Carver's life, which began when slavery was an American institution and ended during World War II: he closes his Bible "on his only link with his mother" and then, in a moment of forgetfulness, blows at his lamp's electric lightbulb as if it were a candle.

—Jessica Roeder



George Washington
Carver

Don't Step on the Sky: A Handful of Haiku

By Miriam Chaikin

Illustrated by Hiroe Nakata

HENRY HOLT

32 pages, Ages 3–8, \$16.95

ISBN 0-8050-6474-5

The haiku form of poetry too often comes across as short, sweet, and simple. It's not so, of course, as any serious student of haiku knows. Haiku is an ancient form of Japanese poetry that once adhered to strict syllable counts and was influenced by Buddhist thought. Today the emphasis on counting syllables has loosened up, at least in English. A haiku remains a short poem of close observation and surprise that, whether it is serious or humorous in tone, often presents images of the natural world, as Miriam Chaikin explains in the note that introduces *Don't Step on the Sky*.

Chaikin clearly has studied the haiku form, and the result is a lovely little book that offers just the right amount of reading for a relaxed sitting.

Hiroe Nakata's softly stylized watercolors make the perfect accompaniment for a journey that begins at dawn:

Early morning,
a lone crow on a high post:
caw caw empty world.

Soon we see a little girl who is getting her hair brushed by a window where flowers are blooming. The little girl, like many of the ancient Japanese haiku masters, addresses what she sees:

Lovely lily
alive for only a day.
Take good care of yourself.

The poems that follow present the observations and discoveries of this young protagonist, illustrated by Nakata as she goes about her day:

A cardinal in the yard.
My heart stops.
A red secret.

Occasionally the poems lapse into cliché, as with the image of raindrops as a "gallery of diamonds," but generally they keep readers looking at and listening to the world around them with fresh eyes and ears, even when the day is done:

The windows keep me
awake all night,
arguing with the wind.

Notice that it's not the wind keeping the girl awake, it's the windows—a subtle but significant difference.

In the best haiku tradition, Chaikin's poems are often funny, forcing us to notice the world in new ways:

The cat sits on her haunches,
watching the street.
How like an eggplant!

Nakata's whimsical illustrations are painterly enough to avoid being too sweet, and her palette of moss greens, muted blues, grays, roses, and golds is at times almost ethereal. I only wish this little girl had met a little boy in the course of her day, to remind us that boys also get down on their hands and knees to look at puddles, and might curl up afterward with a good book of haiku.

—Patricia Kirkpatrick

Emily Dickinson's Letters to the World

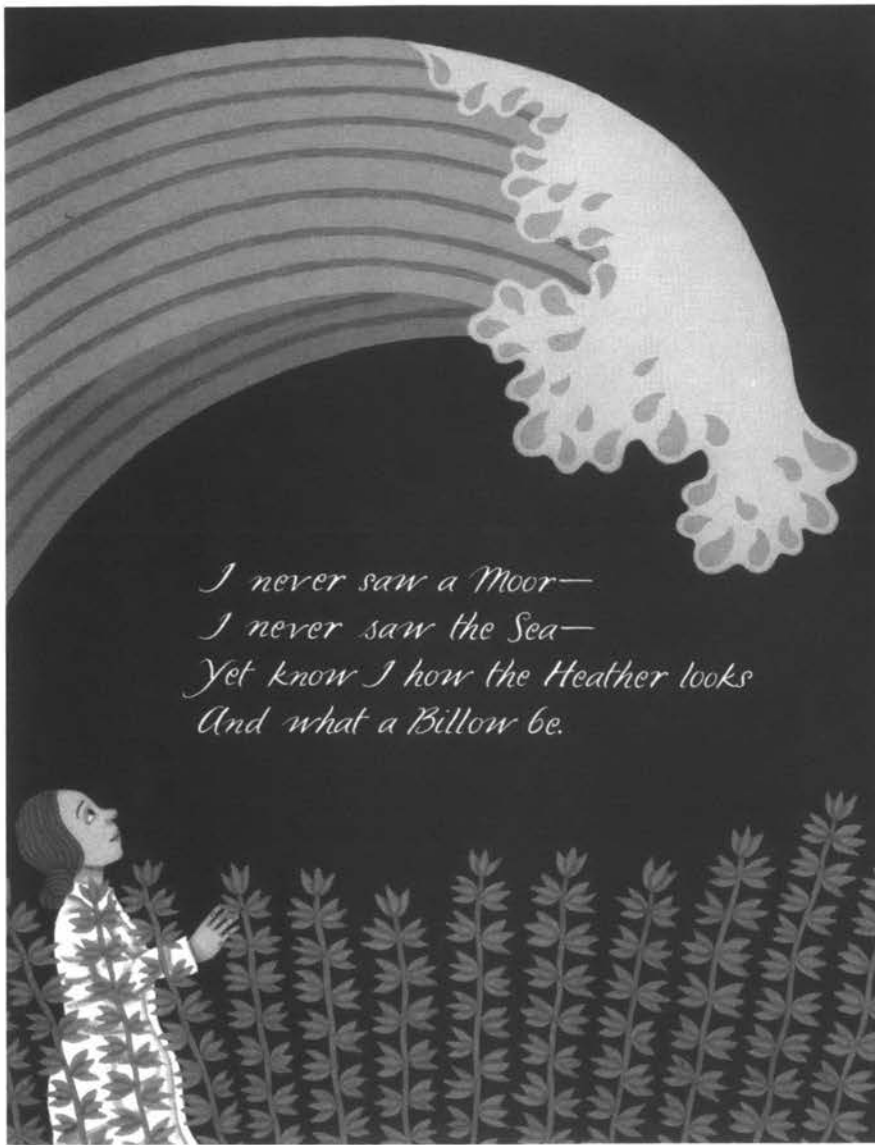
By Jeanette Winter

FRANCES FOSTER/FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

40 pages, Age 5 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-32147-7

Although Emily Dickinson published few of her poems in her lifetime, she certainly wrote for readers, and so it is suitable that this book takes her first reader's point of view, thereby creating



*I never saw a Moor—
I never saw the Sea—
Yet know I how the Heather looks
And what a Billow be.*

Illustration by Jeanette Winter, from Emily Dickinson's Letters to the World

just the mixture of intimacy and dizzying spaciousness that Dickinson's poems often evoke. That first reader, our narrator, is Emily Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, who discovered the bulk of her sister's work.

Left alone after Emily's burial, Lavinia gravitates to her sister's room. In a few unadorned sentences, she reminisces about her sister's life, her writing, and her love of words. She takes one of Emily's white dresses from the bureau and holds it up as if to try it on. Then

she happens upon a drawerful of poems. She begins by reading "This is my letter to the World," and at once her narrating voice gives way to a progression of handwritten poems that reveal Emily Dickinson's sense of wonder and her audacious imagination.

Every serious Dickinson reader must face, eventually, the contradiction between her grand, unsparing vision and her frequent posture of tininess. In the poems included here, Dickinson declares herself a child, a mouse, a bird—any-

thing little and commonplace. Amid such startling originality, her claims can seem coy. But this volume suggests that littleness is only a matter of perspective. In rapid succession the poems leap vertiginously from night sky to mountaintop to bee's-eye view. The poet's image appears in most of Jeanette Winter's fantastical, stylized paintings. Whether she is dancing giant-size and barefoot on a snowy rooftop or soberly conversing with a field mouse, Winter's Dickinson is always the same woman in the same neat chignon and white dress. We get a sense of her ability to take the point of view of the tiny and the universal, not fearlessly but with the poet's perceptive sense of calm. Dickinson's claims of her own smallness don't read as pleas for sympathy or exemption. Instead, they emerge from the sensible point of view of an adventurer observant enough to be humbled and enlarged, alternately.

—Jessica Roeder

Love to Langston

By Tony Medina

Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

LEE & LOW

32 pages, Age 6 and up, \$16.95

ISBN 1-58430-041-8

Introduced by author Tony Medina as "one Harlem poet's homage to another," this beautifully realized picture book creates a biography in verse and painting just in time for the 100th birthday of poet Langston Hughes.

Although he is associated with Harlem and the artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. He spent a lonely childhood in Kansas, where he lived with his maternal grandmother, who had been a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Hughes was profoundly influenced by his grandma's stories and, no doubt, by the racist taunts of classmates and teachers from

those unhappy times.

Hughes lived in Cleveland during his high school years. He graduated as an honors student with the dream of becoming a poet, a goal neither of his parents supported. Nevertheless, he made his way to New York City and attended Columbia University for a year before dropping out to travel. The story of Hughes throwing all his books overboard as he sailed to Europe is often told. Medina reports that Hughes kept only *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, his favorite poet.

Hughes continued to travel for the rest of his life, but he made his home in Harlem and always returned to it. Before his death in 1967, he published thirteen volumes of poetry. He experimented with the rhythms of jazz, the blues, and the spoken language of common people, incorporating spontaneity and playfulness into his poems, as well as performing his poetry to music with such legendary jazz musicians as bassist Charles Mingus. He also mentored other poets, published children's books, translated works from Spanish, and spoke out against injustice throughout his life.

Medina portrays this life in fourteen poems spoken in Hughes's voice. Medina's poems are accessible yet spirited and imaginative evocations of a poet's inner life, set in a narrative context. They borrow patterns of repetition from the blues and syncopated rhythms from jazz. End rhymes are inconsistent and some poems seem flat compared to others, but when the poems are good, they are very, very good. "Jazz Makes Me Sing" ends with these lines:

The blues celebrates
the bruised with
sad stories and
funny-sounding news
It makes me think
about my sadness
and how I ain't alone

Yeah, it makes me
think about my sadness
and how I ain't alone

Medina's poems are beautifully accompanied by R. Gregory Christie's paintings, which recall the folkloric work of other African American artists, such as William Johnson and Faith Ringgold. Christie's art features vibrant colors, bold brush strokes, and simple compositions. His use of the color red, whether for school desktops, a brownstone's steps, or the stripes of Langston's shirt, deserves its own poem. But the poignant details of his faces, which reveal character and emotion with delicacy and strength, deserve the most praise.

The tension between restraint and freedom, joy and anguish, boldness and subtlety, is at work throughout this book. Whether you know the life and work of Langston Hughes well or are just being introduced, *Love to Langston* offers authentic riches.

—Patricia Kirkpatrick

A Movie in My Pillow / Una película en mi almohada

By Jorge Argueta

Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez

CHILDREN'S BOOK PRESS

32 pages, Ages 7–12, \$15.95

ISBN 0-89239-165-0

Poet Jorge Argueta's first book for children is a collection of twenty-one poems written from the point of view of a young boy, Jorge, who immigrates with his father from a village in El Salvador to San Francisco. In an introductory note, Argueta explains that he was among the thousands who fled civil war in El Salvador during the 1980s.

One of the most satisfying things about *A Movie in My Pillow* is the way highly metaphorical and lyrical poems are arranged and presented to form a coherent narrative. At the beginning, the child speaker proclaims:



Illustration by R. Gregory Christie,
from *Love to Langston*

I live in San Francisco
in the Mission District...
Here in my neighborhood
you can taste
a soup of languages
in the wind.

As he brings that "neighborhood of sun" to life, Jorge also describes his former life in El Salvador, which he left in a wrenching hurry:

I didn't say goodbye to Neto
my best friend
I didn't say goodbye to Koki
my happy talking parakeet.

Jorge's longing for home is rendered in a short lyric about *pupusas*, a favorite food, and the fear he feels in a new city is expressed in a voice that warns his father away from the sidewalk cracks: "Don't step on the sidewalk snakes / Can't you see that they are cobras?" Later on, buoyant poems about a bicycle, a yo-yo, and a goofy conversation with a new friend show Jorge finding happiness in his new life. Poems remembering a grandmother whose stories "filled her shack / with stars" show how firmly El Salvador is

lodged in Jorge's heart. When the boy's mother and younger brothers arrive from El Salvador, Jorge describes his emotion:

when we hug each other
we feel like a big nest
with all the birds inside.

Elizabeth Gómez's brightly colored artwork offers extravagant interpretations of the metaphors in the poems. The illustration of the "family nest," for example, pictures the family standing in a bird's nest up in a tree. The approach is good-natured, but the literal representations tend to limit the readings of some poems.

Like other titles from Children's Book Press, *A Movie in My Pillow* is bilingual. The text appears in both English and Spanish, with the languages given equal emphasis; neither the English nor the Spanish version is referred to as a translation. It is appropriate that ideas like these appear in both English and Spanish: "Now I can speak / English too"—"Ahora también puedo hablar inglés." "And in my dreams," Jorge continues:

I speak in Nahuatl
the language my grandma says
her people...learned
from the birds.

—Susan Marie Swanson

**My Chinatown:
One Year in Poems**

By Kam Mak
HARPERCOLLINS

32 pages, Ages 5–8, \$16.95

ISBN 0-06-029190-7

This book offers fifteen glimpses, through paired poems and paintings, of the year in which the narrator, a boy from Hong Kong, becomes accustomed to life in Chinatown. Chinatown alone, not New York City as a whole, must vie with Hong Kong for the narrator's affection; in his mind, the city outside Chinatown is linked to school, "where the English words / taste like metal in my mouth." His Chinatown, in contrast, is part big city and part insular community, where he can stand undisturbed in a specialty shop and stare at the paper birds and dragons, visit with a shoemaker at work, or

buy from a cart enough Chinese food to spoil his appetite for dinner.

Though each glimpse of Chinatown will fascinate readers, the homesick boy finds his early experiences disappointing. The sequence of poems opens as a New Year's celebration ends dismally for him; he wades alone through red scraps of paper, fails to come up with a firecracker, and notes that the color red must mean "someone else's luck this year." Later, when the street carts stock kumquats, he sees "wooden crates packed full of suns," but his pleasure is mitigated: his mother can't pickle them the way his grandmother, still in Hong Kong, always did. Throughout, his sense of loss makes all the more touching the resilient openness of his observations. By the end, he's adequately enamored with his new neighborhood to anticipate recurring celebrations, even projecting a time when he might race on a dragon boat rather than watch from a distance. We're not surprised at the development: through his attention, we've seen Chinatown's charms. All the same, when he speaks of "home" he still means Hong Kong.

Through both poems and paintings, the narrator is a coherent, recognizable character. The boy interacts with his sister, a young friend, a few animals, and a variety of adults, but his spirit, we sense, is independent. As his mother selects a live carp from a tank, the boy notes, "He waves his tail gently / and looks straight at me." The painting shows the fish in question unmistakably meeting the viewer's gaze. That night, the boy pretends to be ill in order to avoid meeting the carp again at the dinner table. Later, he's drawn to meet the eye of another animal, this time a tic-tac-toe-playing hen to whom he doesn't mind losing for the joy of watching her eat her pay in chicken feed.

An uncluttered design allows the straightforward poems and realistic paintings to shine. In each spread, the



Illustration by Kam Mak, from *My Chinatown*

painting is on one page and the poem faces, set against a clean white background. Single off-white words announce the progression of the seasons. This simplicity will be helpful to young readers and those for whom English is not a first language.

—Jessica Roeder

My Kingdom for a Horse: An Anthology of Poems about Horses

Edited by Betty Ann Schwartz

Illustrated by Alix Berenzy

HENRY HOLT

45 pages, Ages 8–12, \$17.95

ISBN 0-8050-6212-2

It's not every poetry collection for elementary-school-age readers that borrows from Shakespeare's *Richard III* for its title, much less dares to wear a quotation from the bard's *Henry V* on its cover to attract readers' attention, but this intriguing anthology of horse poems does just that: "I will not change my horse with any that treads. / When I bestride him, I soar, I am a hawk. / He trots the air. The earth sings when he touches it."

Though the rest of the poets in the book aren't in Shakespeare's league, these lines aptly represent the poetry in the volume, which is rich in metaphor and full of passion for horses. A variety of forms are presented: rhymed couplets by Rachel Field, simple repeating patterns by Aileen Fisher, galloping rhythms by Kristine O'Connell George, brief quatrains by Christina Rossetti, and long, lanky lines by Walt Whitman.

Especially satisfying poems that help give the collection depth and breadth include Robert Frost's "The Runaway" and an excerpt from a Navajo horse song that concludes, "The long rainbow is in his mouth for a bridle / With it I guide him." There's a sweet sampling of Jack Prelutsky ("Early one morning on Featherbed Lane, /

I saw a white horse with a strawberry mane") and a poignant image from Tony Johnston ("Santo feeds / while the moon / comes up / curved like the bowl / of a silver spoon").

Some thematic anthologies have trouble managing so many different kinds of poems, and, as a result, the reader feels jolted about or gets lost along the way. Editor Betty Ann Schwartz has organized her twenty-five selections so expertly that a reader of this book gets a good, long ride over varied terrain. Illustrator Alix Berenzy's dramatic, dreamy illustrations—most of them in white and colored pastels on dark paper—contribute to the coherence of the whole.

While *My Kingdom for a Horse* offers an enjoyable poetry adventure for a general audience, the volume seems



Illustration by Alix Berenzy, from *My Kingdom for a Horse*

bound to enchant an audience of young horse lovers. It would be fitting to find it on display with the gear at the saddle shop and alongside the plastic horses at the toy store, as well as in bookstores and libraries.

—Susan Marie Swanson

Reviewers in This Issue

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

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.

Patricia Kirkpatrick is a poet and children's-book author. She teaches writing and children's literature at Hamline University in St. Paul and writes regularly for *Ruminator Review*.

Lisa Westberg Peters is a former newspaper reporter and a children's-book author. Her most recent book is *Cold Little Duck, Duck, Duck* (Greenwillow, 2000).

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

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

Susan Marie Swanson works as a poet in school classrooms across Minnesota. Her most recent children's book is *The First Thing My Mama Told Me*, illustrated by Christine Davenier (Harcourt, 2002).

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

Margaret Willey is the author of several young-adult novels and picture books. She is the recipient of the 2002 Charlotte Zolotow Award, for *Clever Beatrice* (Atheneum, 2001).



one for the shelf

The splendid thing about *Black Beauty* is that it is written from the viewpoint of a horse—a horse that cannot speak yet understands his master's words. A horse that is a friend to other horses. A horse that feels compassion, joy, and pride as well as pain.

The reader is drawn through Black Beauty's life by curiosity (Where will he go next?) and apprehension (How will he be treated?). Black Beauty is, at various times, a squire's favorite carriage horse, a job horse, and a cab horse in the city. Despite misfortune, he maintains his dignity as he lives out his mother's observation that "a horse never knows who may buy him, or who may drive him; it is all a chance for us."

Several qualities prevent this Victorian novel from becoming mired in sentiment—its pacing, for one, which never dwells on suffering; and for another, the fact that Black Beauty by and large escapes the gravest hardships, which he hears about from others. The novel also abounds

Black Beauty

By Anna Sewell

original publication: 1877

Age 9 and up

hardcover: WILLIAM MORROW, 1997, \$22.00

Illustrated by Lucy Kemp-Welch

ISBN: 0-688-14714-3

paperback: ALADDIN, \$3.99

in realistic detail about the needs of horses. Vicariously, the reader feels the bearing rein and bit, gallops freely in a field, and knows how large and clean and airy a stall should be.

Every chapter dramatizes kindness and its opposite, effectively making Anna Sewell's case for better treatment of the hardworking animals that powered the economy of England, where she lived. Sewell made the public care about the animals it used so inefficiently and cruelly, yet *Black Beauty* speaks to modern readers, too. It is supremely readable, with features children love: simple words, brief chapters, ample dialogue, and unforgettable drama. Among its great scenes are a stable fire, a chase, and a violent storm in which Black Beauty, all but struck by a fallen tree, refuses to pull his master's dogcart across a washed-out bridge, thereby saving several lives.

About the latter incident, Black Beauty says, "I will never say I was not frightened, for I was. I stopped still, and I believe I trembled; of course I did not turn round or run away; I was not brought up to that."

Black Beauty illustrates the virtue of animal instinct, which, compared with human reason, is "much more prompt and perfect in its way," in the words of one of Beauty's kinder masters. The novel also illustrates the gravity of helplessness in animals that serve human beings. Sewell's message is clear: those with superior power, whether they be boys with stones or careless passengers or laborers or grooms or people of means, should be kind. This message is communicated through a horse that, by nature, "does his best." He deserves the kindness he receives. Yet Sewell never suggests that human kindness should be earned. Rather, she believes that it is right, and she makes us feel that it is right.

—Mary Lou Burket

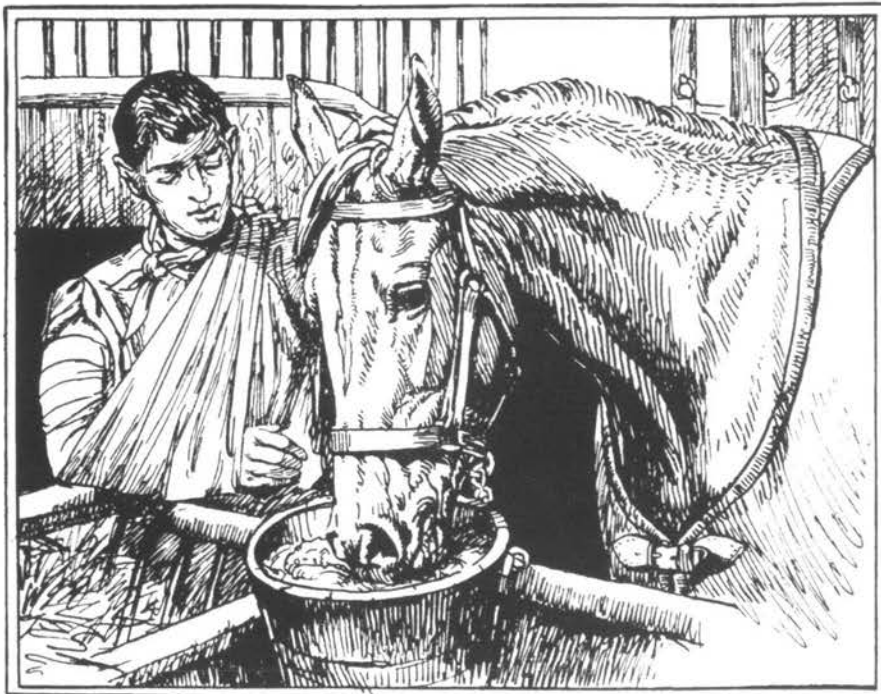
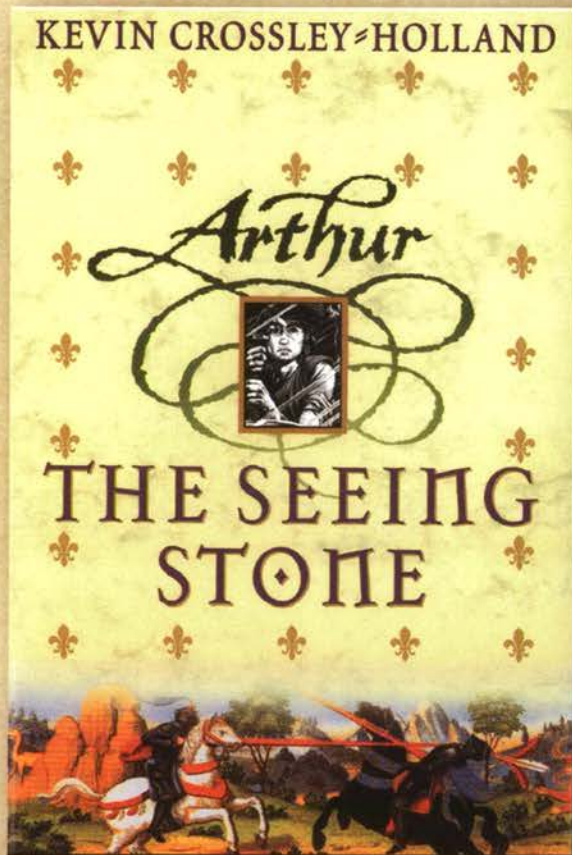


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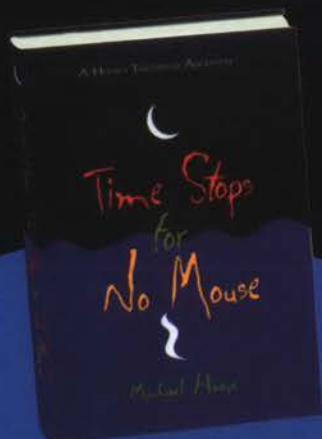
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