AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH PARTRIDGE

Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

View from the Edge
By Deb Kruse-Field

A Profile of Jeanette Winter

Ten Great Books about Food

Joan Bauer on Work

Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Zlateh the Goat*

PLUS

New Books for Winter

WINTER 2002-2003

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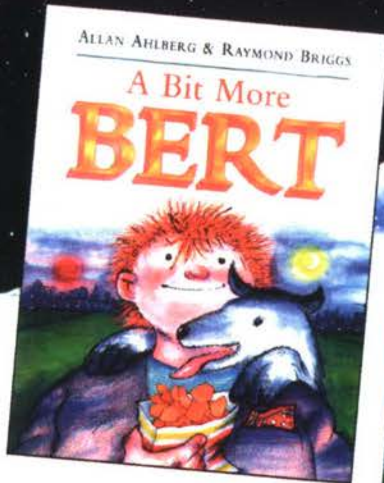

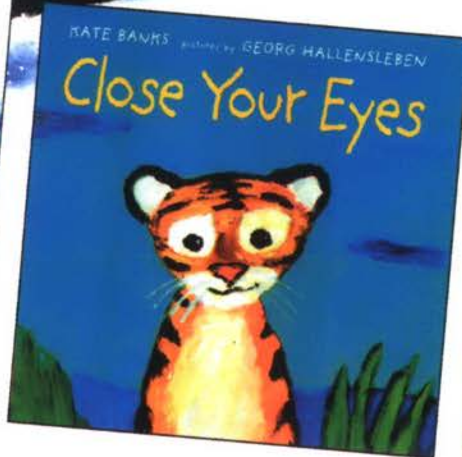

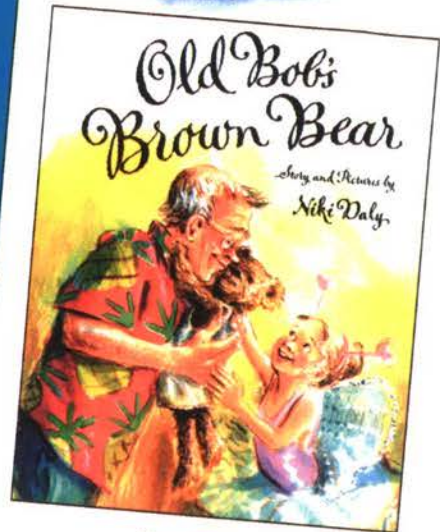

A BIT MORE BERT
Allan Ahlberg
Pictures by Raymond Briggs

★"Bert is back, with six more chapters detailing his hapless but oddly satisfying adventures. Once again Ahlberg metaphorically grabs us by the lapels and hauls us into the book . . . Briggs's illustrations are sublime, again, with Bert evoked in all his cherry-nosed, red-haired affability . . . A bit more Bert is not enough; let's hope we see lots more of him." —Starred, *The Horn Book*
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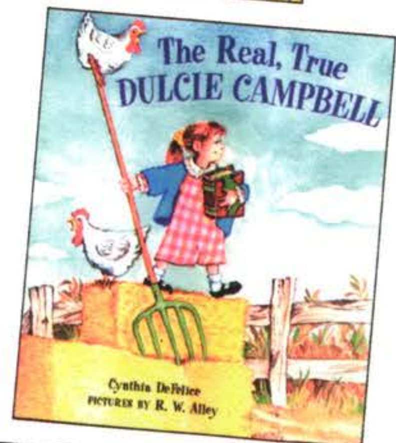
"Against a shadowy pine forest at once mysterious and peaceful, a mother . . . introduces her well-swaddled baby to the pleasures of a snowy night . . . So evocative is Dunrea's finely detailed art that viewers will practically be able to feel the winter air on their own faces, and experience the deep quiet." —*Kirkus Reviews*
$16.00 / 0-374-39992-1 / Ages 3–6



FARRAR • STRAUS • GIROUX

Illustration by Olivier Dunrea from IT'S SNOWING!

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About the Cover Art

Winter in the Northwest is cold but not severe. There is some snowfall every winter in our town, Bellevue.

I love the morning after the first snow. I take my dog and walk along the riverbank in the county park.

My dog named Princess Bear (a big Akita) likes to walk along a path by the Sammamish River. Every winter morning, we enjoy breaking through the morning fog and seeing the beautiful shadow of trees, the calm flow of water, and we listen to the warbling of birds.

I created this picture from this experience.

—Aki Sogabe

Aki Sogabe is the illustrator of several picture books, including The Hungriest Boy in the World, *by Lensey Namioka (Holiday House, 2001),* The Boy Who Drew Cats, *retold by Margaret Hodges (Holiday House, 2002), and* Oranges on Golden Mountain, *by Elizabeth Partridge (Dutton, 2002).*

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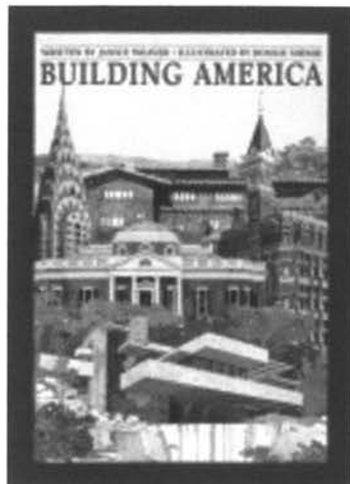

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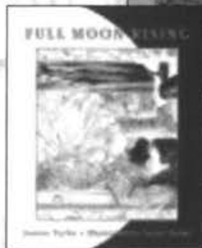

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House Artist
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Riverbank Review
1624 Harmon Place, Suite 305
Minneapolis, MN 55403
Phone: (612) 486-5690 Fax: (866) 261-6729
E-mail: mail@riverbankreview.com
Web site: www.riverbankreview.com

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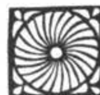
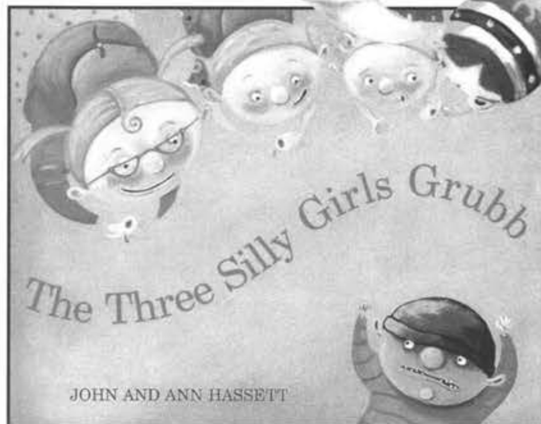

MINNESOTA HUMANITIES COMMISSION

"CROSS THIS BRIDGE AS SOON AS YOU CAN FIND IT."*

The Three Silly Girls Grubb

by John and Ann Hassett



★ **"A clever, funny takeoff on the 'Three Billy Goats Gruff'. This title is grounded in tradition but makes a statement all its own." —*School Library Journal*, starred review**

"The clever collaborators behind this effort clearly express a childlike glee in their eclectic imagery and quick-paced text."—*Publishers Weekly*

"The storytelling is lively, highlighted by growling threats and clever tricks, and the comical double-page spreads match the nonsense."—*Booklist*

"Bouncily silly language lends itself to reading or telling aloud, but to miss the equally bouncy and silly illustrations would be a crime."—*The Bulletin**

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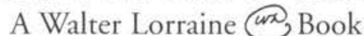
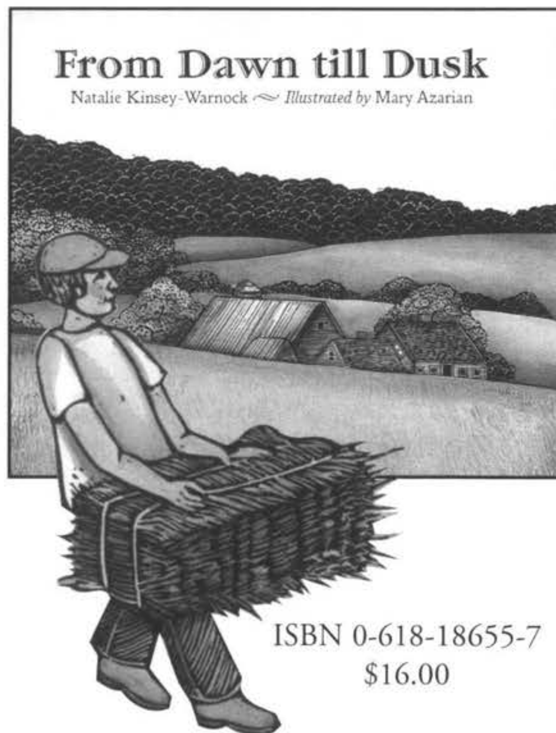
A Walter Lorraine  Book

From Dawn till Dusk

written by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock
illustrated by Mary Azarian



★ **"Farm work, hard work. But there is also lots of fun in this remembrance of growing up 40 years ago on a Vermont farm. The pattern of pairing description of farm chores with rewards is effective, and Caldecott Medal winner Azarian extends the story with effective woodcuts that capture life at its busiest and most fun." —*Booklist*, starred review**

"The story will surely strike a chord in many families, and it should be eye-opening to readers for whom life on a farm is quite different from their own experiences." —*School Library Journal*

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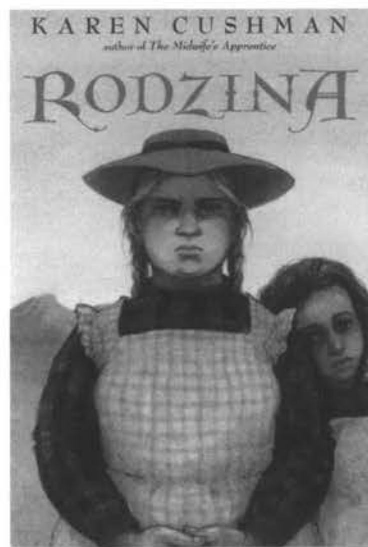

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editor's note

In addition to reading and math, "character education" has recently been put forward as a desired cornerstone of children's formal learning. Like its loaded cousin *values*, the word *character* can mean a great many things. Hearing such words used as a code for a narrow social agenda can be off-putting.

When the discussion of character isn't political, it tends to be abstract—a list of virtues separated from the human presence that would animate them, like an empty set of clothes laid out on a chair.

In my view, the only meaningful context for a discussion of character is human life, as it is lived by actual, flawed, aspiring individuals who struggle, sidestep, and screw up like the rest of us even as they, on occasion, distinguish themselves. Biographies, oral histories—true life stories—are the texts we can most fruitfully share with children to stimulate reflection on this important subject.

When Paul Wellstone, Minnesota's senior U. S. senator, was tragically killed in a plane crash this fall, my sons wanted to know what it was that made this man loved and respected, and now so deeply mourned. Senator Wellstone was my teacher in college, and a man I greatly admired. Still reeling from the tragedy of his death, I saw what is termed a "teachable moment," so I took a deep breath and told them what I could.

I talked about the joy and energy that Wellstone brought to his work, recalling the way he leaped around the classroom years ago, inviting any and all responses from his students—except apathy.

I mentioned that it took courage to speak out in the way that he did, often for unpopular causes. I added that his essential good nature, his refusal to take the low road, was a quality that set him apart. The fact that he had befriended and won the respect of people at the opposite end of the political spectrum was a testament to his essential humanity.

Some of this, I could tell, felt a bit abstract to them. I was more successful in conveying something of this man's character where I had concrete details to relate. Wellstone's genuine concern for the welfare of others was driven home by the hundreds of personal notes brought to a spontaneously erected memorial site at his campaign headquarters. People from all walks of life—veterans, immigrants, laborers, grandparents—wrote down incidents of his kindness and support, or expressed how his efforts had in some way touched their lives. These personal statements were scattered throughout the flowers, candles, and other mementos, for passersby to read. The weight of so many small testimonies added up to something very powerful.

In this issue of *Riverbank Review*, we give attention to two writers whose books introduce children to individuals who have made a difference in the world. In an interview, Elizabeth Partridge talks about her recent biographies of the photographer Dorothea Lange and the songwriter and social activist Woody Guthrie. Aimed at older children, Partridge's writing is filled with the concrete, emotional details that bring a human story vividly to life. She talks about her reliance on primary sources, and her search for "small, revealing details that could easily be missed." Yet her books have weight and a full shape: the anecdote doesn't displace the larger picture. Readers come away knowing a great deal about the era and the social movements that surrounded and affected her subjects.

Partridge's subjects both were complex individuals, and she pays readers the respect of letting Lange's and Guthrie's contradictions and character flaws show. In each book, rather than an idealized picture, readers get something more challenging and truthful: a portrait of a life in which choices, mistakes, and sacrifices were made, in order for a fiercely committed individual to meet his or her goals.

This issue also features a profile of Jeanette Winter, author and illustrator of numerous picture-book portraits of artists who have made an impact on our culture. Winter's subjects have included Johann Sebastian Bach, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Emily Dickinson. Her small, striking books invite young children to draw close to important artists in order to get a feeling for what motivated them to create, and what that creative life might have felt like.

As we think of books to give young readers as gifts for the holidays—or at any time of the year—let's not forget that the story of a real painter, an actual inventor, or a pioneering scientist can be as absorbing as any work of fiction, and can inspire readers to think about their own life possibilities and choices in new ways.

—Martha Davis Beck

Perfect for holiday gift giving!

Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow!

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Judy Sierra
Illustrated by **Will Hillenbrand**

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View from the Edge

Authors often explore the teenage social scene from the misfit's perspective.

By Deb Kruse-Field

Offbeat characters who hover on the fringe of the adolescent social scene are often the protagonists in insightful middle grade and young adult novels. This isn't too surprising: who wants to read a story about a shiny cheerleader with great teeth and a nifty boyfriend? Stories that give young readers something to chew on require multifaceted characters, and often these individuals are snubbed by the popular table at lunchtime.

Anything can sideline us—the wrong skin color, an unfamiliar religion, a below-average IQ, an above-average waistline—and rejection is especially painful as adolescents cast around for an identity and fervently seek connections with peers. Many books for young readers touch on feelings of exclusion, and some authors are in their element plumbing deep into the tangled world of the outcast.

While the fringe can be a place of integrity and self-examination for teenagers who are regarded as misfits or who, by their own volition, set themselves apart from their peers, it is important that writers and readers resist the temptation to romanticize life on the edge. The same kinds of stereotyping and cliquishness that permeate the mainstream can be found at the fringes of adolescent culture. Exalting the outsider as heroic and indicting society as cruel and wrong not only oversimplifies the outcast's story; it can unintentionally encourage isolated adolescents to withdraw rather than reach out, and to behave in ways that are hazardous to others and to themselves.

The adolescent's experience of *feeling* on the outside is not necessarily visible to others. The popular teenager who, on the surface, appears to confidently navigate within the center of social circles may live in perpetual self-doubt. Without warning signals, we are shocked when the seemingly happy teenager expresses isolation through eating disorders, substance abuse, or depression. The definition of what it means to be in or out is a hazy one, but as many authors for young people show, it is often fiercely clear in the adolescent's mind's eye.

Literature can't entirely unravel the complex, often baffling dynamics of the adolescent social code, and it can't bear the burden of explaining events, such as the Columbine tragedy. Yet a novel can ask provocative questions that get to the core of who we are and how we fit in, or clash, with others. Adolescents deserve, and can handle, books that reflect the real world, full of truths yet imbued with uncertainties. In these ambiguous spaces, they can imagine possibilities. In exploring the outcast's story, they can often better understand their own.

Trouble is, adults often steer clear of material they perceive as intense or controversial, which is likely to include some powerful novels, such as Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (Random House, 1974), the story of a boy whose seemingly harmless refusal to sell chocolates for the high school fund-raiser provokes several malicious classmates to launch a ruthless campaign against him.

Novels that dwell on the social rim often belie desired cultural values. Teenagers make bad choices, answers elude adults, violence and profanity are a reality in kids' as well as grownups' lives. But it's a shame to pass by a novel like Brock Cole's *The Goats* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987) and miss out on the stretching philosophical questions

that permeate his story. In a culture where adolescents are prone to adopt identities designated by their peers, Cole examines what happens when outcasts elude the society that narrowly and definitively labels them.

Abandoned on an island by their campmates as a cruel joke, socially awkward yet ingenious Laura and Howie escape, setting off with literally nothing on a wandering journey. Cole subtly reveals them shedding their victim identities as they survive on their own, breaking into cottages, foiling the owner of a hot dog stand, and sneaking onto a bus, meanwhile keeping a list of borrowed items in order to pay people back.

Ironically, one of the most meaningful encounters on their journey occurs when they sneak into a state-sponsored residential camp attended by low-income teens from the city. As it turns out, these kids behave in a more civilized fashion than the kids at the camp from which Laura and Howie escaped. Instead of finding a new cast of implacable peers who treat them as misfits, they are perceived by a tough yet convivial teenage boy as bandits: "It's like society, don't you see? They got all these rules that everybody's supposed to play by. But sometimes you see that those rules are going to cut you up. That makes you a bandit. You're a smart bandit when you know you don't have to play that game no more."

While Laura and Howie don't consider themselves renegades, strong parts of their identities, previously suppressed by their tormentors' unforgiving gaze, gradually surface. Still, they worry about returning to camp—what if they become goats all over again? Rather than a forced happy ending, Cole leaves readers with a final image that is open, yet promising: Laura and Howie emerge from the forest holding hands, transformed from their journey and, perhaps, more themselves than ever before.

Laura and Howie's self-discovery arises in part from the bond they develop. In his insightful sports stories, Chris Crutcher frequently explores the ways in which outcasts form their own meaningful communities, perhaps most profoundly in *Whale Talk* (Greenwillow, 2001).

Outspoken and exceptionally athletic, T. J. agrees to assemble a school swim team but defies Cutter High's privileged jock culture by enlisting every oddball he can find—from "big time special-ed" student Chris Coughlin to surly one-legged Andy Mott, a boy with rumored serial-killer potential.

Adolescents deserve, and can handle, books that reflect the real world, full of truths yet imbued with uncertainties... In exploring the outcast's story, they can often better understand their own.

Crutcher avoids sentimentality with his trademark offbeat comedy, uniting the swim team through their idiosyncrasies. T. J. ponders acquiring aquatic bicycle helmets as a solution to the team's chaotic and collision-prone swim patterns, and Chris Coughlin eagerly awaits his favorite song, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," during their workout music rotation. But humor doesn't distract from the serious demons these kids face every day; Crutcher reveals it to be a key survival tool, and he uses it to heighten the absurdity of their painful circumstances.

Crutcher creates psychologically complex and credible characters. Take Andy Mott. At first, all we and the rest of the team know about Mott is the self-centered, delinquent persona he projects. At the team's haphazard Winter Assembly appearance, he reacts to the crowd's taunts by giving them a "double middle-digit salute," a stunt that results in a couple of extra days of in-school suspension. But Mott and his teammates quickly become multidimensional through surprising acts of camaraderie, and through the vulnerabilities they talk about on their long bus rides to swim meets. Even T. J., the charismatic Superman of the team who has chosen to be a lone wolf by rejecting the codes and strata of the prestigious Cutter High athletic tradition, gradually reveals his pain at being covertly shunned as a mixed-race person in an essentially white Northwestern town. Discovering the vagaries that lie beneath their misfit images catalyzes deep personal relationships between these courageous swimmers. T. J., who initially views himself as different from the others on the team, realizes: "I fit better here than I've fit anywhere before."

While Crutcher unites a group of outsiders in his novel, other writers ask, What is it like to live in the shadows and remain there? There's a lot of talk about girls and social exclusion these days. Books for adults, such as Rachel Simmons's *Odd Girl Out* (Harcourt, 2002) contend that many girls equate social isolation with personal danger. They worry that they will be shut out as suddenly as Melinda, the compelling, sharp-witted protagonist in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), who keeps the painful reason she called the cops at an end-of-the-summer teen drinking party a secret. Promptly abandoned by her friends, she enters Merryweather High completely alone and nearly silent as she narrates her story with a bitter and

immediate voice infused with dark humor: "I stand in the center aisle of the auditorium, a wounded zebra in a National Geographic special, looking for someone, anyone to sit next to."

Injured and lurking on the perimeter, Melinda observes the high school social scene through a narrow lens. Her experience is extreme, but utterly believable. She is not reflecting on her pain; she is living in its burning center: "There is a sprinkling of losers like me scattered among the happy teenagers, prunes in the oatmeal of school. The others have the social power to sit with other losers. I'm the only one sitting alone." Without her clique, Melinda isn't just lonely; she doesn't know who she is.

Readers watch Melinda emerge as an artist and wait in anticipation for her to discover that while she agonizes over how to make her drawing of a tree "say something," she is, in fact, discovering her own new voice, a voice that gives her the courage to confront her secret head-on, to speak out, and to begin to save herself.

When Vinnie, the lonely young protagonist in Katherine Paterson's *The Flip-Flop Girl* (Lodestar, 1994), hesitates to befriend ostracized yet proud Lupe, a girl who wears bright orange flip-flops for shoes, the normal confusion and insecurity of choosing friends are intensified by Vinnie's alienation and desperation to fit in with the right group:

> If she played with the flip-flop girl, she was sure that Heather and the rest would never let her in their group. Still it was better than standing around on the playground all alone, wasn't it?

Neither of the girls can afford the right clothes, and they both miss their fathers—Vinnie's recently died of cancer and Lupe's is in jail. They handle rejection differently. Whereas Vinnie

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★ "With this inspiring book, Kalman sensitively handles a difficult subject in an age-appropriate manner."
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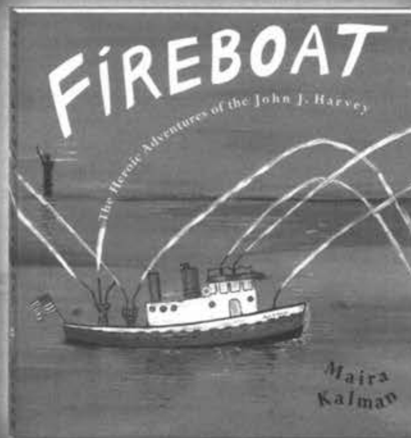

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a poem for winter

Pretzels in the Park

Near the icy pond,
a weathered man warms
golden twists of bread.
Papa asks for two,
picking the smaller for himself.
My words of thanks
spread in a chilly cloud
before my face.
I break the corners
into crusty smiles,
and lick my fingers
flecked with white,
tasting the salt,
melting, melting...
Papa finishes his treat,
but fluffed-up pigeons
circle near my feet.
Carefully, I tear apart
a ragged loop, the last,
scattering as many pieces
as I can to share with them.

—Joanne Ryder

From Food Fight, *edited and illustrated by Michael J. Rosen (Harcourt, 1996). Reprinted with permission from the author.*

dreads the stares of her classmates at recess, Lupe confidently plays her solitary game of hopscotch. Flip-flopping back and forth in her loyalty to Lupe, Vinnie nearly jeopardizes their tentative friendship. Paterson masterfully renders the intense emotions of shame and jealously felt by a girl who is shoved to the fringe and aching to get to the warm and safer center.

Vinnie wavers, Melinda nearly vanishes, but in Louis Sachar's hilarious yet tender novel *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom* (Random House, 1987), Bradley Chalkers is hard to miss sitting in the back of the room–"last seat, last row." Fearing rejection by his peers, Bradley intentionally sidelines himself before others have a chance to. For instance, rather than saying hello to friendly new student Jeff Fishkin and risk being snubbed, Bradley threatens, "Give me a dollar or I'll spit on you." It takes Carla, the new school counselor, to help Bradley realize that when you risk reaching out to others and show them your true self, you may get the cold shoulder, but you also may eventually form a solid bond.

Jerry Spinelli probes the outsider's story in several of his books, and in *Loser* (HarperCollins, 2002), he depicts his most nuanced and resilient protagonist yet. Donald Zinkoff is universally reviled by his classmates. But unlike Bradley Chalkers, who accepts the judgment of his peers and makes a point of shutting himself out, Spinelli's protagonist perseveres. Zinkoff laughs too loud, ignores social rules, and mucks up Field Day with his ungainly legs, but his heart is as big as the giant snicker doodle that he bakes for his new neighbor. As Spinelli traces the unfolding of Zinkoff from the beginning of first grade to his eventual matriculation into middle school, we see kids gradually trade their accepting "little-kid eyes" for discerning "big-kid eyes," which finally brand Zinkoff a "loser."

When we are rejected, we must face the fact that the way in which we see ourselves eludes others. Thus, an outcast learns to step aside. But even when both teams have been picked for the football game, Zinkoff doesn't act like a leftover. As the narrator in *Loser* puts it: "A normal leftover would see that he's one too many, that everybody but him has been picked and that therefore he better just get on out of there and go play something he's good at, like Monopoly." Zinkoff, instead, looks for cracks in the social code, continually wiggling his way back in. Though he's never completely on the inside, Zinkoff refuses to be left out.

Zinkoff's confident, joyful core draws energy from his parents' constant support. Unlike the removed or nagging parents in so many contemporary coming-of-age novels, Zinkoff's parents offer unconditional love. They never ask why he can't run faster or suggest ways he might change to blend with the popular crowd. When things go wrong at Field Day, his father takes him for a ride in the car. As adults, we can feel paralyzed when we're stumped for answers to help an excluded child. The approach of Zinkoff's folks suggests that we don't always need solutions; the most important thing is often just being there.

Like the rest of these authors, Spinelli subtly raises some important questions: Can you be an outcast and still be happy? How do we lose our compassionate "little-kid eyes"? Donald Zinkoff, who seems to embrace life more fully than anyone else around him, makes readers realize that, painful as it can be, the fringe is also a place of unexpected growth and discoveries.

Deb Kruse-Field has a master's degree in literacy education and children's literature from the University of Minnesota. She lives in St. Paul and is currently a freelance writer, teacher, and education consultant.

Jeanette Winter

In an inviting, unconventional style, this picture-book artist tells stories about people who have made a difference.

By Susan Marie Swanson

Narrative infuses Jeanette Winter's artwork. Even a lyric outburst like "Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are" becomes a story in the hands of this picture-book artist. Her small board-book treatment of the classic verse (Harcourt, 2000) opens vertically to enhance its effect. A child gazes out the window at a far-off star, props a ladder up against the sky, and starts to climb. After a long ascent the child looks that friendly star right in the eye—then returns to earth and cozy house with a bit of shining starlight in hand.

"I always knew I wanted to make pictures that told a story," Winter once said, and she has stayed true to that conviction over the course of more than thirty years of illustrating and writing children's books. Even when the text of one of her picture books is a sophisticated narrative, as it is in *The Changeling* (Knopf, 1992), written by Nobel laureate Selma Lagerlöf, the story unfolds so clearly in the pictures that a reader can grasp the essence of the story without reading the words. Winter goes straight to the emotional core of this tale of a human mother's kindness to the troll baby that has been left in place of her kidnapped infant, capturing in her paintings the mother's sorrow and compassion as well as the twists and turns of the plot.

To assemble a stack of Jeanette Winter's books, you need to hunt around the library for a while. Some of her work is shelved with the nonfiction, including picture-book biographies of muralist Diego Rivera and composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Some books can be found under the names of their authors in the picture-book section: Winter's artwork illustrates texts by Mary Lyn Ray, Roni Schotter, Tony Johnston, and others. Still other titles are located under her own name. Her most recent book, *Niño's Mask* (Dial, 2002), is one of the latter, on the shelf with the picture-book W's. It is the story of a fictional child who creates a mask to wear to the fiesta in his Mexican village, thereby earning himself a starring role in the celebration.

"Perro [Dog], are you there in the wood?" Niño asks as he carves his dog mask from wood cut under the full moon, just as the village mask maker taught him. Niño is one in an engaging succession of Jeanette Winter characters who are fully absorbed by the making of their art. In *My Baby* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001) an African textile artist creating a patterned *bogolan* cloth is similarly engrossed by her materials, which she gathers step by step, first searching the market for "the whitest cloth," then digging mud from the streambed ("The mud here is best") and collecting just the right leaves to add to the dye mixture. In Winter's tellings, Emily Dickinson reads the dictionary "as others read a story-book," and Bach falls in love with the pipe organ (*Emily Dickinson's Letters to the World*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002; *Sebastian*, Harcourt, 1999). Of clay artist Josefina Aguilar, Winter writes simply, "She loved the clay" (*Josefina*, Harcourt, 1996).

Writing about her childhood, Winter has described how she delighted in her "deluxe 64-color box of Crayolas....I loved the smell and look of the crayons with their striped wrappers." Born in 1939 of Swedish immigrant parents, Winter was raised in Chicago. During her teen years, the young artist took classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. She left the city to attend the University of Iowa, where she earned a bachelor of fine arts degree. Soon after graduation, she and her artist husband,

Roger Winter, settled in Dallas, where they raised two boys, Jonah and Max. After their sons were grown—both young men are, among other things, poets—the couple settled for a time in Maine. In recent years they have divided their time between New York City and rural Texas.

The Christmas Visitors (Pantheon, 1968), Winter's first picture book, is a retelling of a Norwegian folktale published while she was still in her twenties. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Winter illustrated a popular series of easy readers written by Sue Alexander, beginning with *Witch, Goblin, and Sometimes Ghost!* (Pantheon, 1976). The pen-and-ink illustrations depict round-headed children, sweet and droll, in keeping with the gentle quality of the stories. Here and there, Winter introduces patterns—swirling snow, a rock wall, cattails at the edge of the lake—that offer a glimpse of the stylized patterns that characterize her mature work. *The Magic Ring* (Knopf, 1987), a retelling of a Grimm tale, features full-color watercolors outlined with black ink, capturing the mystery and enchantment of a fairy-tale wood.

Winter's breakthrough as a picture-book artist came in 1988 with the publication of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Knopf). She abandoned the black outlines that had characterized her early work and began to work with acrylic paint in simple shapes, creating paintings remarkable for their originality of composition, color, and narrative content. Telling a story of slaves traveling to freedom on the fabled Underground Railroad, the narrative is based on the old song "Follow the Drinking Gourd." Not long after came *Diego* (Knopf, 1991), an introduction to the life of Mexican artist Diego Rivera written by Jonah Winter. Where the pictures of travelers moving across fields, forests, and mountains in *Follow the Drinking Gourd* are quite large, Winter's witty solution to the problem of presenting the life and work of a man known for his huge wall murals was to tell the story in images smaller than snapshots, framed with patterned borders.

From Follow the Drinking Gourd

Winter's painting style is unconventional—and not particularly easy to describe. Her colors tend to be vivid and are often unusual. In *The Christmas Tree Ship* (Philomel, 1994), when a boat full of evergreens first sets sail on Lake Michigan, it is across the bluest of blue lakes, against a pink sky, under purple clouds. The people onshore waving good-bye are wearing vivid green, orange, and blue clothing. Turn the page and the sky is green, with blue and pink clouds scattered across it, and the peaceful waters a deeper blue.

Observers have often compared Winter's style to folk art, presumably referring to her uncomplicated shapes, simple compositions, and flattened perspectives. The term "folk art," however, implies limited proficiency or lack of knowledge about the techniques of fine art—certainly not the case with this artist. In *Georgia* (Harcourt, 1998), artist Georgia O'Keeffe hikes across desert sand that appears in a strip at the bottom of the page, collecting bones that rest on top of that pinkish strip, in a composition familiar from children's drawings. The big flat field of sky offers plenty of space for a display of clouds and stars rendered in stylized patterns. Rather than shading or modulating her colors, or arranging her compositions according to conventional rules of perspective, Winter

From The House That Jack Built

achieves perspective by overlapping shapes and by composing her pictures in such a way that the view looks from one layer through to the next—looking through doorways and windows, for example, past desert to mountains, through scaffolding to mural. This strategy gives Winter plenty of opportunity to work with another aspect of her visual vocabulary: patterns. The stormy ocean waves of the crossing to America in *Klara's New World* (Knopf, 1992) are covered with a regular pattern of stripes and bordered with a sharply defined edging of lacy foam. Forested hills along the Hudson River are covered with trees arranged as perfectly as polka dots. Yet the effect is essentially realistic. Hannah represents a real girl emigrating from Sweden to Minnesota. Plants might not always grow in such regular patterns, but Winter makes sure that there are turnips growing in the garden, and that the seeds from Sweden that Hannah plants are accurately painted gentians. This artist does not forsake accuracy for the sake of style.

Winter was among the more than forty children's book illustrators who developed a personal statement and a work of art on the theme of human rights for an exhibition celebrating the dedication of a children's literature research center at the University of Connecticut. *Tikvah* (SeaStar, 1999), the book that documents the exhibit, features many symbolic images—for example, Eric Carle's collaged wolf and lamb, Jane Dyer's brightly clad children jumping up toward a white dove, and Uri Shulevitz's ruined house against a dawn sky—accompanied by reflective statements.

Jeanette Winter's response is different. Her picture and text tell the story of a particular child, Iqbal Marsh, a Pakistani boy who spoke out against child labor. Winter recounts how the boy was sold to a carpet factory when he was only four years old and worked for years shackled to a carpet loom. When the boy gained his freedom, his witness to the horrors of child labor became known around the world. He was shot and killed when he was twelve years old. "The circumstances of his death," Winter writes, "are unresolved."

This contribution embodies several of the qualities that define Winter as a writer and illustrator. Her choice of Iqbal as her subject reflects an abiding interest in narrative, especially biographical narrative. It demonstrates her belief in the power of stories about creative, committed individuals. This story, and especially the painting that accompanies it, also shows the author-illustrator's fascination with the work of human hands: here, a carpet pattern springing to life on a loom that dwarfs the child manipulating the colored threads.

One of Winter's artist-heroes is the painter and photographer Ben Shahn, who, like Winter, told stories in his art. Shahn's passion for social justice infused his work: he first came to prominence in 1932, when his series of twenty-three paintings telling the story of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial were exhibited. Diego Rivera, another social realist close to Winter's heart, was committed to the idea that art should empower people to understand their history. This led him to paint murals, accessible to everyone, rather than to

From Josefina

work only on canvases to be exhibited in galleries. Winter displays similar passions. She tells stories about people who make a difference in the world. She illustrates picture books, objects that, while being works of art, are both widely shared and accessible. She creates her work for a humble audience: young children.

In her picture-book biographies, Winter returns again and again to the

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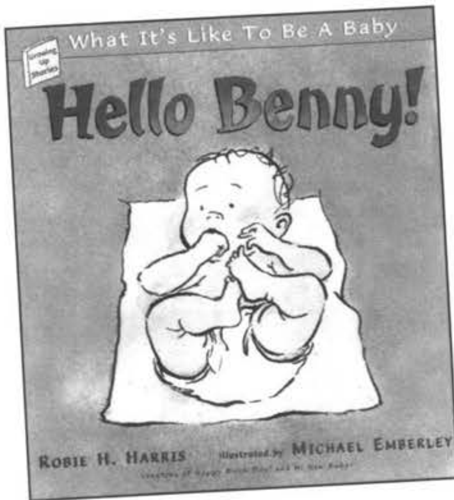

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theme of the determined, hardworking creative individual. Of Bach she writes:

> Sebastian practiced from morning
> till night.
> By moonlight, he copied music
> to play the next day.
> It was a good way to learn,
> and he wanted to learn everything.

Writing in the voice of Georgia O'Keeffe, Winter describes the artist's indefatigable spirit:

> Even in winter,
> I went far out into the faraway,
> and painted in the bitter cold.
> I painted when the wind was so
> strong
> it nearly blew me away.
>
> I slept under the stars
> to see the morning sky when I woke.

In the voice of Emily Dickinson's sister, Lavinia, Winter describes the poet's deep absorption in her work:

> On many a night
> her lamp burned bright
> until dawn.
> What kept Emily awake,
> we wondered.

Writing of Josefina Aguilar, Winter says, "Every day she went to the patio. Jose mixed the clay and the children helped paint while Josefina made her world." This is what Winter does in her work as a picture-book writer and illustrator: she makes a world. *Making* is at the very heart of Winter's oeuvre. It's not surprising to find that she's done a version of *The House That Jack Built* (Dial, 2000) that pictures Jack hauling wood up a hill, pounding nails, and hosting the wedding of the maiden all forlorn and the man who kissed her, right there in his little house.

Susan Marie Swanson's most recent picture book is The First Thing My Mama Told Me, *illustrated by Christine Davenier (Harcourt), a* New York Times *Best Illustrated Book for 2002.*

Riverbank Review

Ten Great Books about Food

A Cake for Herbie
By Petra Mathers
ATHENEUM, 2000
AGES 4–8
Even though Herbie the duck's funny food-related poems don't take the cake at the poetry contest, they find an ideal audience at a colorful local restaurant.

Eat Up, Gemma
By Sarah Hayes
Illustrated by Jan Ormerod
LOTHROP, 1988
AGES 2–6
Baby Gemma won't eat anything—until her big brother comes up with a clever way to present her meal.

Elliot's Extraordinary Cookbook
By Christina Björk
Illustrated by Lena Anderson
R&S BOOKS, 1990
AGE 8 AND UP
A friendship between a Swedish boy and his elderly neighbor leads to the sharing of simple, delicious recipes, along with food lore and cooking tips.

The Giant Jam Sandwich
By John Vernon Lord
and Janet Burroway
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1972
AGES 4–8
How does the town of Itching Down get rid of 4 million wasps? By trapping them between two enormous slices of bread, spread with truckloads of strawberry jam.

Honest Pretzels
By Mollie Katzen
TRICYCLE, 1999
AGE 8 AND UP
The renowned Moosewood author offers school-age chefs easy-to-follow vegetarian recipes that produce tasty results.

Detach bookmark here. →

Food

How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World
By Marjorie Priceman
KNOPF, 1994
AGE 4 AND UP
When the supermarket is closed, this fanciful tale sends a girl traveling the globe—to Sri Lanka for cinnamon, to Jamaica for sugar—to get what she needs for her pie.

The Hungriest Boy in the World
By Lensey Namioka
Illustrated by Aki Sogabe
HOLIDAY HOUSE, 2001
AGE 4 AND UP
A young boy in ancient Japan unwittingly swallows the Hunger Monster and develops an insatiable appetite for everything in sight—from sushi to fishing nets to the quilt on his bed.

Never Take a Pig to Lunch
Poems selected and illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott
ORCHARD, 1994
AGE 4 AND UP
Whether it's extolling the virtues of noodles or moaning over a "sliver of liver," this energetic poetry anthology aims for kids' funny bones as well as their stomachs.

Pete's a Pizza
By William Steig
HARPERCOLLINS, 1998
AGE 2 AND UP
A glum day turns bright when Pete's father plays pizza chef and pretends Pete's the dough, sprinkling him with flour (talcum powder), cheese (scraps of paper), and other ingredients.

The Seven Silly Eaters
By Mary Ann Hoberman
Illustrated by Marla Frazee
HARCOURT, 1997
AGES 4–8
All seven of the Peters children are picky eaters, a fact that tries the patience of their beleaguered mom.

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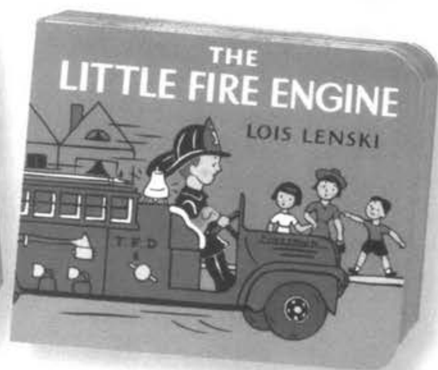

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Beach Girl

Two very different environments—an overcrowded house and the expansive Lake Michigan shoreline—forged a budding writer's self-image.

By Margaret Willey

One of the things I tell students during visits to middle schools is that if they grow up to become writers, the community they now live in will become their own unique metaphor, reflecting in its streets and buildings and landmarks all the challenges that they face as teenagers. The struggles of coming of age are played out on sidewalks and in parks, on farms and in strip malls, landscapes to be revisited in adulthood, if not physically, then in memories and in dreams.

When I say this, there are usually a few who look horrified, unwilling to consider that anything could hold them to the towns in which they currently feel so trapped and misunderstood. They may feel the collective unease our culture expresses toward teenagers in general and associate it with the peculiarities of their hometowns rather than with the larger culture. Perhaps they have already taken on the role of outcast in their schools and their communities, become defiant or reclusive, primed for escape. These students remind me of myself as a teenager, aching to escape a town I couldn't believe had anything to do with my truest self.

I left home at seventeen, and I have no real heirlooms or treasures from my childhood. Nothing survived the journey out, no toys, no mementos. Perhaps this is why writing became so important for me, as a way to connect to my personal history, once I had effectively escaped it.

Yet I remember hoarding things as a girl. In fact, there was constant hoarding in the house I grew up in. We stockpiled and guarded our signature treasures, crucial to our sense of individuality and privacy. I kept a shoebox of Victorian paper dolls hidden at the back of my closet. My siblings had their own collections: one sister bravely stockpiled fashion clippings from old *Mademoiselles*, one brother put Marvel Comics into protective plastic. Toy armies, baseball cards, blown-glass kittens, miniature cars...I now think we were mostly hoarding the *right* to hoard, to keep something unique about ourselves apart from the shifting layers of our household. The task was Olympian. Someone was always invading, borrowing without asking, breaking the thing that one desperately needed to last forever. We marched into battle daily over other issues of privacy: the right to read without interruption, to dress without an audience, to bathe in our only bathroom without someone hammering and pleading at the door. As we entered puberty and became a household of changelings, we hoarded the secrets of our bodies just as passionately.

But I have other, equally vivid memories from my Michigan childhood. I remember a morning expanse of sand, the blue horizon, the white and the blue filtered through a haze of dreamy heat and my own eyelashes. These are summer memories—mornings spent at Lion's Beach, after the dreary school year had ended and the summer had set us free. Both environments shaped me: the overflowing house on Court Street and that empty stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline half a mile away. One was a place where, as the oldest daughter in a family of eleven children, I did not have the words or the power with which to maintain comfortable boundaries; the other was a place without boundaries, a place of no chores, no schedule, no needs, where I could be surrounded by family and still be free.

The beach was my mother's domain. It was she who transported us there, piling all of us into our Chevy van after breakfast on summer mornings, parking in the near-empty lot before the crowds came, checking the

lake for undertow before she waved us in. While we swam, she reigned from a beach blanket, her body shading the most recently born. In contrast to our home, where she was chronically overwhelmed and upset, she was calm at the beach, even happy, in her floral swimsuit, her plastic sunglasses, her floppy hats. Because I had her permission to be as much a child as the others at the beach, this seaside matriarchy held another kind of miracle for me: the promise of being transformed from child-woman back into pure child again.

Sometimes at the noon hour, my father would join us. He could walk to the beach from the Whirlpool plant where he worked, put on his bathing suit at the changing station halfway down the path, and then stroll the rest of the way, carrying his clothes and his shoes. I can still recall the sight of him coming toward us along the water's edge, walking more slowly and deliberately than usual, and I remember being happy, even thrilled, to see him, this man who was so often angry and implacable at home. Here was a different father, calm and tanned and vigorous. There was a kind of alchemy in watching him, first at a distance, then coming closer and closer to us.

As soon as my father arrived, my mother would wave the kids from the water and we would play in the sand while our parents took an adult swim, the two of them moving out to the buoys together, away from us. I was the one left in charge while they escaped, a brief resumption of my responsibilities, but I didn't mind. The sight of their two heads moving away in parallel lines was oddly reassuring. They were both excellent swimmers and I loved seeing the proof of a different, more adventurous side of them. My mother was strong. My father was strong. I was connected to them. I was proud to be connected to them, proud of how much they needed me.

At thirteen, I was already a writer. I wrote stories, poems, and passionate diary entries. As I wrote, I experienced a kind of fugue state, at once stimulating and comforting. Writing was a safe way to channel the adult sadness I carried within me, placed so early into the role of a parent-helper, and witnessing so closely the burdens of my mother's life. Looking back, I see that writing was my most significant act of hoarding, in this case of my hidden self.

When I was a child, I think it was the beach that saved me—its freedom, its beauty, its invitation to all the senses.

When I left home, I kept writing, but for a long time it was a private activity. Writing helped me to remember the lessons as well as the landscape of my childhood. I found that I had stored a rich lode of information about families, about secrecy, about the inner lives of children. In my thirties, after the birth of my daughter, I began to reinvent a more manageable, less chaotic childhood through the characters in my novels. Those characters are mostly girls without siblings, girls with enough time and space and guidance for the hard and confusing work of transforming into women.

When I was a child, I think it was the beach that saved me—its freedom, its beauty, its invitation to all the senses. On the shore of Lake Michigan I learned that the body underneath my Catholic school uniform had another life, another chance, beyond the teeming rooms of my house and the joyless school hallways. At the beach it was possible to be at peace with my body. I could lie in the sand, utterly exposed and utterly alone, backside to the sky, chin on my arms, eyes closed. I did not have to listen to the voices of my siblings. I was free to listen to the rhythm of waves, the low static of wind, the scraping sounds that my belly made against the sand. I could let the sun bake off the drudgery of school, the responsibilities of family, and the tangled emotions I was beginning to feel at the prospect of becoming a woman. At the beach I could just be a girl in the sand and the sun.

In a favorite snapshot from my childhood, I am on the beach, sitting on my heels, wearing a skirted bathing suit. I am nine or ten, and I am trailing my fingers in the sand. Forming a line across the bottom of the photograph is the blurred image of a younger sibling's reaching hand. I treasure this photograph because the fact that I am lost in thought behind someone's outstretched hand expresses one of the great challenges of my early years.

This snapshot has become a reference point for my creative life. Each time I sit down to write, I am celebrating the fact that the girl in the photograph became a writer, but I am also celebrating the fact that she is still back there somewhere, on the beach, taking in the sun and the sand, living in the moment. She is the wave kicker, the sand hugger, the core of the writer I've become—solitary yet connected, perpetually lost in thought, quietly preparing for gathering storms, necessary exile, deep waters.

Margaret Willey is the author of six young adult novels, including The Bigger Book of Lydia *and* Saving Lenny. *Her most recent picture book,* Clever Beatrice, *received the 2002 Charlotte Zolotow Award. She lives in Grand Haven, Michigan.*

This essay originally appeared, in a different form, in the anthology An Intricate Weave: Women Write about Girls and Girlhood, *edited by Marlene Miller (Iris Editions, 1997).*

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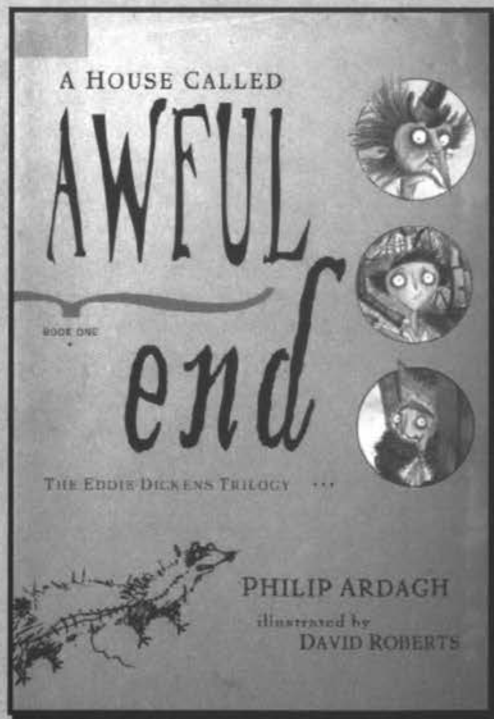

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Not for Children Only

Books for young readers can be useful tools for teachers who work with adult immigrants.

By Sarah B. Davis

When Liliya first came to my English class, she had just arrived in America from St. Petersburg, Russia, with her mother, her husband, and their two young children. They set up life in an apartment near the family center in St. Paul where my husband and I teach English as volunteers. Our students are recent immigrants from all over the world—Mexico, Central and South America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Liliya brought her two children along to the free evening classes. Children are supervised at no charge, one of the center's great services. Liliya was desperate to learn more English. She had taken a job at an airport hotel and was surprised to find that the unofficial language at work was Spanish. I began to tutor her individually, one evening a week. We visited and gradually began to read together. To start with, I chose a children's fairy-tale book.

Teachers of adult ELL (English language learning) students are often warned not to offend those students by using childish materials. It is certainly a factor to consider. A baby book or a book about how to share with others could be off-putting. But children's books, broad in subject matter, clear in graphic layout, and featuring engaging stories rather than rote learning exercises, have proven to be fabulous tools in our teaching.

Our students have been receptive to most of the materials we have presented, unless the materials appeared too difficult to understand. Books that match the level of the student are crucial to success; when the material is too confusing, the comfort level you want to maintain vanishes. For many adult students coming to the center, our class is the first school they've attended in their life. In this situation, the pencil is not already a comfortable tool and, therefore, the teaching tradition in which students rapidly copy what the teacher writes on a board is not only inefficient but also overwhelming for the students. In the same vein, worksheets with blanks to fill in can look like scribbles to the beginner.

A typical tutoring setting may offer a table, chairs, and a whiteboard with some markers. There may also be a shelf with a few textbooks or storybooks. The sum total of the materials available to an ELL tutor can seem meager in relation to the world the students need to decipher. How do you describe the snowy Minnesota winter (when it's still summer) to a newly arrived immigrant from Africa? How to convey a dozen different modes of transportation, clearly differentiate opposites, or offer a woman like Liliya a story she can read with satisfaction?

A close second priority to maintaining the ELL student's comfort level is keeping the learning situation interesting. This isn't easily accomplished through grammar exercises or textbook study alone. It requires establishing a relationship with the students, sharing life experiences, and making sure that what we study has a context in their day-to-day lives. In my particular situation, for both one-on-one tutoring and teaching a weekly ELL class, I have complete freedom in the choice of materials to use. While this could be daunting, I have found the children's section of my community library to be a great, no-cost resource. Children's books provide a wealth of material that can be tailored to the individual teaching situation: the range of subjects allows me to hand-pick books on topics that I know have relevance to my students.

Fairy tales were a perfect beginning for Liliya. The reading level was just right: each page had only a few unfamiliar words, so she could read with cautious fluidity. Initially I would read a paragraph and then she would read it back to me. This way, before attempting it on her own, she heard the complete text, with my pronunciation and intonation. As her confidence grew, we alternated reading paragraphs.

This particular book offered a cultural connection as well. The tales we

were reading had a European origin, and for Liliya, coming from Russia, the stories were familiar. After a long day of making hotel beds, she took great pleasure in identifying the various tales, finding long lost friends in a new country.

Children's dictionaries are another invaluable resource for the ELL tutor, both to reinforce the alphabet and to build students' vocabulary. For beginners, the definitions in college-level dictionaries contain too many unknown words. Maryam, a young woman of twenty, recently moved to St. Paul from Somalia. Her first day at the center was also her first time in school. To start with, I showed her a large, hardcover children's dictionary with numerous colorful photographs on each double-page spread. While some of the pictured objects must have been totally foreign to Maryam (like a marshmallow on a stick, or a plastic triceratops), others—a goat, a couch—were familiar.

Another helpful category of book for adult beginners introduces everyday-world basics such as numbers, seasons, and opposites. A helpful librarian steered me to Tana Hoban's concept picture books, with black-and-white photographs that can be clearly seen by an entire class.

For adult students who have some mastery of the language, interest in longer nonfiction, in stories about real people and events, is common. Abrehet is from Eritrea in East Africa. She, her husband, and their two school-age children immigrated three or four years ago. Abrehet is thirty-eight and works for a food service company. She is eager to learn English and attends classes weekly. I have tutored her for two years. When we started, she was already capable of reading the short texts published for adult English language students. We began with a series that distilled "amazing but true" stories from the newspaper into short pieces that gradually increased in difficulty. She could have read those stories forever, but eventually we completed the series, and once again I turned to children's books for help.

First Abrehet read a children's biography of Helen Keller by Margaret Davidson. Like Liliya's fairy-tale collection, this book had the right amount of text, a comfortable size print, and just enough new words to offer a challenge. Abrehet eagerly made her way through *Helen Keller* and went on to read a biography of Annie Sullivan by the same author. She has now just finished reading Ann McGovern's *If You Lived with the Sioux Indians* with my mother, who is also her tutor. The ample and fascinating illustrations have sparked conversations between them, comparing the customs of the early Sioux with those of the indigenous people of Eritrea.

Some of my ELL tutoring has focused on preparing students for the United States citizenship test. Typically, these students have more English proficiency because they have been here for several years. I tutored one woman from Somalia for this test. I was surprised at the level and number of questions candidates need to master. There were more than ninety civics questions ranging in difficulty from naming the colors in the U.S. flag to listing the names of the original thirteen colonies. Applicants also need to know about specific amendments to the Constitution, enemies of the United States during World War II, and the author of "The Star-Spangled Banner." (For my student, who had an excellent command of the English language, pronouncing *spangled* was far trickier than remembering the name Francis Scott Key!) When she took the test, she was asked only three civics questions, almost a pity, I thought, after all her hard work.

Diana Watters

Sarah Davis working with a student at the Highland Mac-Groveland Family Center

Though it is possible to memorize the necessary facts about the United States by studying the list of questions, no real understanding or meaning comes

automatically with this arduous task. The list of questions is devoid of context. At the beginning of their preparation for the citizenship test, students would benefit from some literature that brings the pages of questions to life. Many of these future citizens have children in school who are becoming familiar with our holidays, learning about famous Americans, and beginning to study the history of the United States. These parents are as curious about the culture as their children are—and they have strong motivation and interest. Many have come to this country specifically to enjoy the freedoms that the questions on the test detail.

There is a wealth of children's literature about America that can engage these adult students—books that describe the country's geography, explore its history and its culture, and clearly explain its system of government. As an ELL teacher I avoid humorous renditions of U.S. history, though they may be great for sparking interest in reluctant young readers, because they tend to confuse the student who is unfamiliar with the original story. And while there is much wonderful history written for middle school and high school students, simpler books are almost always a better choice for the ELL student. For beginning students, a surplus of names, dates, and other details can make it difficult to grasp the basic story.

Through experience, I avoid other features common in some children's books. I stay away from nonsense verse and rhyming books. I avoid books with text in boxes or arranged nonlinearly in different areas of the page. I don't use books that use satire, the basis of which would be foreign to most of my students. Fantasy and science fiction characters are confusing to discuss. Books about careers, seasons, countries, science, and family life are usually of more interest to the students, and they're also helpful in explaining our culture.

Teaching English to adults, I sometimes feel like an ambassador—both of the language and of our culture. Children's books, which illuminate pieces of the world we live in, help my students to become more comfortable in a world and with a language that are new to them.

Sarah B. Davis is an artist and teacher living in St. Paul, Minnesota. She and her husband volunteer as ELL tutors at the Highland Mac-Groveland Family Center.

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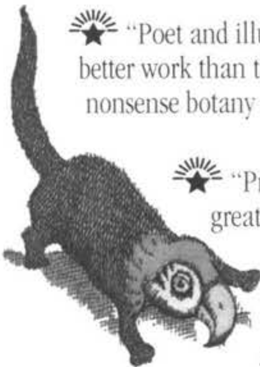

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Elizabeth Partridge

Emotional truth and historical accuracy are equally important to this dedicated biographer.

By Abby McGanney Nolan

With enormous sympathy and a full arsenal of facts, anecdotes, and telling details, Elizabeth Partridge has summoned up two major American artists in biographies for young people. *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange*, published in 1998, is an intimate, suitably photo-rich portrait of the photographer. *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life and Songs of Woody Guthrie* was published last spring, right in the middle of a veritable dust storm of children's books and music inspired by Guthrie. It took three years to complete and has received wide acclaim, including the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award for Nonfiction.

Partridge grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in a large extended family of artists. She is the granddaughter of photographer Imogen Cunningham. Her father, photographer Rondal Partridge, worked as an assistant to both Lange and Ansel Adams in the 1930s. Partridge's own visual acuity is apparent in everything from her engaging, informative Web site (elizabethpartridge.com) to the books she's written and gathered documentary images for. Her other works include a middle-grade novel and several picture books, such as *Oranges on Golden Mountain*, illustrated by Aki Sogabe, and the just-published *Moon Glowing*, illustrated by Joan Paley. (Partridge's biographies have been published by Viking, the above-mentioned picture books by Dutton.)

Last year, Elizabeth Partridge closed, at least temporarily, her twenty-year-old acupuncture practice in order to concentrate on writing. She lives with her husband in Berkeley, California, their two sons having gone off to college. The following interview was conducted by phone in September.

AN: *What made you choose Dorothea Lange as the subject for a biography?*

EP: Dorothea Lange was my godmother. I felt that I could do a good job because I already had a sense of her as a person. I was fourteen when she died. In a sense, writing about her life gave me the chance to continue to have a relationship with her. I had done an adult book on her work with Smithsonian, and then an editor at Viking asked if I would consider doing a children's book about Dorothea.

Had you done children's books before?

I hadn't, but it was what I was really becoming interested in at that time. My kids were about five and seven, and in reading to them I had reactivated my own childhood love of reading. There's a way in which kids' books hook me in more than adult books do.

I had also been looking at photographs that Dorothea had taken of children and had remarked to my dad, "Dorothea photographed children beautifully. You could put together a great book of these pictures." Most of the photographs I used in *Restless Spirit* are photographs of children or have children in them. I think kids like to look at photographs of other kids at different times and with different lives. They can relate much more to a kid working in a field than to an adult. They think, "Wow! What if that was me? What if I had to do that?"

How did you come to write about Woody Guthrie?

It was a challenge to come up with a second person who interested both my editor and me. A friend suggested that I look into Woody's life. I read Joe Klein's biography of him, and before I was finished reading it, I was hooked. This guy was so interesting: he was creative, brilliant, and his life was also tragic. There were plenty of things for a biographer to pursue.

How did you begin?

At first I had Joe Klein's overview. Then I started reading everything I

could find, especially primary sources. I immersed myself in things that Woody wrote, that he said, and that those who knew him wrote or said about him. Then I began to do interviews, which are really fun.

Do interviews come later in the process?

Yes, because you don't want to waste people's time. I was able to interview Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger. They're busy people. I don't want to say to them, "So, what year was Woody born again?" I'm not so much asking them "What happened?" as "What did it feel like? What was it like being in a car with Woody?" In interviews, you're looking for some quirky little story that someone's going to tell you. I made sure when I interviewed people that I had read everything that had ever been written about Woody, so I knew the basic stories. I was happy to hear them again, but then I wanted to go a little deeper.

What guides you as you move forward with a book like this? Are you just thinking about the shape of the project, or also about your audience?

The point is to have a strong narrative thread. So many biographies just trot along in sequence: "Born here, went to school here, did this." That's the kiss of death for me. When I'm researching, I'm mostly just trying to find my way into the subject, like getting to know a friend. My husband says I'm an emotional biologist. I'm always trying to get to the heart of a subject. You can't write a biography from your subject's point of view—you don't know his or her point of view about life. With Woody Guthrie, I asked myself, "What drove this man? What was the core issue pushing him through his life?" And I felt that it was Huntington's disease. His mother's getting Huntington's ruined his childhood, and then from a fairly young age he knew—but denied at the same time—that he was getting the disease himself. By his late twenties he was beginning to realize he

Top: Dorothea Lange, 1934, *photographed by Paul S. Taylor. Above:* Dorothea at Dinner, 1961, *photographed by Ron Partridge*

had it. It completely affected how he lived his life. So I watched for his response to Huntington's disease as it wove through his life.

How important are primary sources to your work?

Primary sources are gold. As I am researching, I am always looking for revealing details that could easily be missed. Having known Dorothea, I had a store of memories that provided some of these. I remember exactly how she moved, the limp she had from childhood polio. I know how her eyes would flash when she got angry. These details helped me understand how people related to her. With Woody Guthrie, I was struck by the story he told about meeting his second wife, Marjorie. A few days after he first realized he was in love with her and was out walking with her in the evening, he wrote her a letter about what the experience was like for him, and he wrote about holding her hand. She was wearing gloves because it was a cold night, and he could feel a little patch of her warm skin through a hole in her glove as they walked along together. That little hole in her glove summed up the intensity of his feelings for her.

Woody Guthrie was very prolific, constantly writing things down. How did you get through all of that?

I spent a lot of time at the Woody Guthrie Archives in New York City, run by his daughter Nora. When you go there, you can read his letters, his diaries and journals, all the songs that he wrote. The songs are just the lyrics; he didn't write the music—he just would put down "key of G." At the archives, they nicknamed me the Xerox Queen because I couldn't just sum up a letter. Some people would sit there with a laptop computer and make a note: "Woody Guthrie wrote this letter to so and so; he wanted more money," but I would be saying, "Look at this goofy comment he puts at the end." I gathered up material that gave me a sense of how he was. I knew I'd go back to it and find things I'd want to use.

Because of other things you would learn that would make such details resonate?

Exactly.

What about Guthrie's music?

Much of the feeling I have for Woody came from listening to his music. There is a tender sadness to his music, and a fierce patriotism. I found his lyrical ability incredible. He could take a very complex event, or a person's entire life, and synthesize it into a few verses, as he did in "Deportees" and "Tom Joad." Then there were the interviews that Alan Lomax did with him in the early 1940s. To listen to Woody talking about his sister Clara's death in a fire, to hear him hesitating, swallowing while he's speaking, was pretty amazing. It gave me a feel for his lifelong struggle to deal with the tragedies that kept hitting him.

As part of your research and preparation for writing, have you visited places of importance to your subjects?

Yes. I think it's important to smell and feel with your skin what a place is like. I went to as many sites for both of them as I could. With Dorothea I did some traveling around with my dad, to places where he had traveled with her. He would say, "We photographed right here. This was all cotton when I was photographing with Dorothea." Going back through his memories was an entry for me into Dorothea's life and work. I went to Okemah, Oklahoma, where Woody grew up, and I walked around. Just feeling the air and looking at the tiny shacks gave me a sense of what it might have been like to live there. This kind of exploration involves imagining your way back to a time that's come and gone. It helps you to engage all your senses, and then you can use that in the writing.

Did you see parallels between Dorothea and Woody?

They were both jerks, in a way, to the people who loved them. Both Woody and Dorothea were intensely driven to do their work—just as they had to breathe, they had to work. And they were determined to do that work no matter what the cost. The cost came not only to them, but to the people close to them. Both spent a lot of time away from their families. Dorothea was out photographing or wanted time in her darkroom, so she frequently boarded her children with other families. Woody would literally put a few shirts on, one over the other, and head out the door with no warning. He could be gone days, weeks, or even months. He said songs came best to him when he was walking down the road. I want kids to see that you can live a life like that, but there is a price to be paid. I tried not to draw conclusions about their behavior. I tried to say, "This is the fullness of this person. You decide how you feel about that." I hope it worked.

They both had a feeling for the downtrodden, for people who were not fortunate. They both spent a lot of time in the migrant camps in California, even at the same time.

Yes. In fact, I found one photograph of Dorothea's, of a cotton strike, in which it looks to me as if Woody is in the crowd. He was very involved in singing at the cotton strikes in California, to support the strikers.

Were you drawn to their social consciousness?

I think so. They both were after something bigger. They had social agendas. I'm interested in letting kids know that there is a bigger picture, and that you can be an artist and be concerned with that picture at the same time.

Library of Congress

Guthrie and folk singer Burl Ives in Central Park, New York City, in 1940

I admire how you dealt with Lange's unconventionality, from the way she sometimes skipped school as a student to her difficulties raising children and grappling with her artistic ambitions. Do you think, in general, that we hesitate to offer children portraits of people who have made problematic or unconventional choices?

I do. We're all moaning, "Why don't kids read?" And then we limit what they have access to. We lose them as readers when we don't put certain language in books because it might offend somebody, and yet if they go on the Internet or watch television, it's 180 degrees in the other direction.

Woody and Dorothea did not fit into society—but look what they did. They led interesting lives, made a significant impact on the culture, and became famous.

What do you think of the recent explosion of interest in Woody Guthrie? There have been a number of children's books, and new releases of his music. This wasn't in full swing when you started your project.

One of the real blessings for me, with this book, was that I started it and did most of it in a vacuum. I'm glad it happened that way. There is something going on in relation to Woody right now that I don't fully understand. I can only say that it caught me up as much as it caught other people up. Now there's a lot of material out there on him, and there's going to be even more. An adult biography is in the works, and a big Woody Guthrie concert that's going to be televised nationally.

He seemed to have an affinity for children that still comes through in his songs.

I think he did truly love children. Not that he took good care of his own, but he loved children.

Are there any historians or biographers writing for children who have influenced you?

My absolute hero is Russell Freedman. He's written so many incredible books. Whenever I would get stuck when I was writing about Dorothea, I would get a book of his out of the library and study how he wrote things. He's brilliant at conveying emotion, but doing it in a simple way. He doesn't preach. Another favorite of mine is Milton Meltzer. He chooses such interesting subjects. I struggled with the task of putting Woody's life together—at times the complexity overwhelmed me. An adult biographer named Henry Mayer, who lives here in Berkeley, was very helpful. He said to me, "Make sure you have emotion in every single paragraph." He said that's what a biography needs to stay interesting. That was a revelation to me. When you're writing biographies, you don't get to have a paragraph of just information.

Do you think the new Siebert award reflects an increased interest in nonfiction? Or is it an effort to stimulate that interest?

The Siebert gives us a venue to honor really good nonfiction, because we haven't had a good nonfiction award from the American Library Association. Theoretically the Newbery can go to nonfiction, but how often does it? Almost never. We have brilliant nonfiction being published right now, held to higher standards than ever before—look at Susan Bartolleti's *Black Potatoes*, the Siebert winner for 2001. It's fantastic to have both the Siebert award and honor titles, to draw more people to these incredible books.

> *Both Woody Guthrie and Dorothea Lange were intensely driven to do their work... and they were determined to do that work no matter what the cost. The cost came not only to them, but to the people close to them.*

Do you have any thoughts about how history is taught, or how it should be taught?

I think that a more personal way of viewing history will draw kids in. It's more interesting to study Dorothea Lange's photographs and then to learn the larger story of the Depression than it is to just study the facts of that era.

How did you come to write Oranges on Golden Mountain, *a picture book that takes place in nineteenth-century California?*

A lot of times, important things get left out of what we teach about our country's history. A good example is the fact that several hundred thousand Chinese came to America in the late 1800s, mostly to the West Coast, and settled. A lot of them were legislated out of here, although a number remained. For the most part, that's not in our history books. How the West was won is taught completely from the European point of view—the story of white people going through the Panama Canal or traveling in covered wagons. I wanted to tell a story that touched on the influence we had coming from Asia to this country, and the best way seemed to be to make up the story of one boy, but to put him in a completely true historical context.

What projects are you working on now?

I've got a lot of irons in the fire. One is a photography book, for adults, of my dad's work, called *Quizzical Eye: The Photography of Rondal Partridge*. I'm considering another biography and I've also got a novel I'd like to write. A picture book, *Moon Glowing*, just came out this fall. My editor challenged me to write a picture book with just two words per page. It ended up taking about twenty-five drafts, and I didn't stick to two words per page throughout the whole book. But I tried! Right now I have a number of picture books floating through my mind. The trick is pulling a project out of the ether, sitting down, and getting it onto paper.

Abby McGanney Nolan has reviewed children's books for the New York Times Book Review *and the* Washington Post Book World. *She is a regular contributor to* Riverbank Review.

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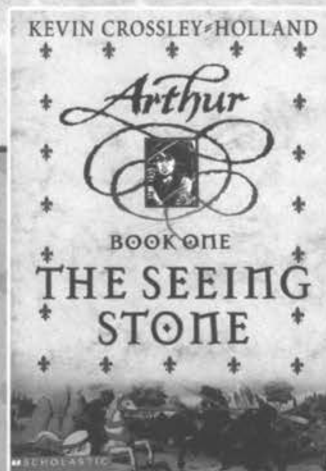

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Eric Hanson

On the Job

In this writer's funny, insightful novels, teenagers discover that the payoff from work extends far beyond the paycheck.

By Joan Bauer

"I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it."
—*Thomas Jefferson*

Work. Say that out loud in some groups and you'll hear groans. Mention hard work and watch the room clear. That bothers me. I am from the Midwest. I grew up among people who believed in hard work—they believed hard work is part of life because it teaches you about the world and about what you can accomplish. It helps you earn a living and be responsible, and it gives you something to do with your hands because idle hands, well, they can get you into all sorts of dark trouble.

Somewhere down the line of my Nordic forebears, hard work got the cows fed and the barn repaired and the twelve-foot snowdrifts cleared and the back forty plowed and ready for planting. The people on my mother's side of the family tell stories like this: "Your grandfather was one of eleven boys and they lived on a farm in Minnesota. He and three of his brothers had to sleep on the screened-in porch in winter. They'd wake up with snow on their faces, *but they never complained.*" Silenced by frostbite, maybe?

"Four of them became dentists. Can you imagine how hard they had to work to make that happen?" I can't. But I try to floss regularly in tribute. I swear.

I write about work in my novels. I try to capture the joy and passion of it because I believe work—even common, everyday work—can have an air of nobility. I believe it's good for young people to have jobs. It certainly was for me.

I got my first real job (baby-sitting aside) at the age of thirteen. I needed that job more than I knew. I'd had an awful time in seventh grade. A few popular girls decided to spread some rumors about me that weren't true. There was no way to stop them, although my mother and one teacher tried. By the end of seventh grade, I'd been hospitalized with an ulcer and had no friends.

Then my homeroom teacher, Mrs. Locker, called me at home and asked if I would be her assistant in summer school. She was teaching a beginning typing class and I was already a very good typist. She offered me $17.50 a week. I grabbed that job like a lifeline.

My first task was to get the students—many of whom were my classmates—to take me seriously. That was the first time in my life I was glad to be tall. I can remember helping some of the kids who had been mean to me. I

remember timing one girl who had to type *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country* over and over, to improve her speed. She began as a truly bleak typist, but by the end of that summer she was up to fifty words a minute. I was part of that victory.

Without this job, I don't think I would have wanted to go to eighth grade at that school. Because of the job, I could handle it.

What is it about work that extends our reach and shakes out our wings?

I distinctly remember the moment when my daughter went from needing a baby-sitter to becoming one. It was a profound transition, and not just because I no longer had to pay sitters. Jean had moved to a new position in the world. Next, she did filing in an office. After that, she was an intern, which led her to a college fellowship working in the archives of the New York Philharmonic. Small steps to maturity, to earning, to learning. When you put small steps together you cover serious ground.

In two of my novels, *Rules of the Road* (Putnam, 1998) and *Hope Was Here* (Putnam, 2000), I wanted to show how a teenager's passion for work could spill out into other areas of her life. For Jenna Boller, knowing how to handle herself in a busy shoe store gave her confidence to handle herself in a high-stakes corporate takeover. For Hope Yancey, the skills she learned as a waitress—serving people, dealing with crazy customers, running from table to table—were skills she could adapt and use when she joined with other local teenagers to back her boss, G. T. Stoop, for mayor.

Skills always transfer. That's why jobs are important.

I was a waitress in high school. I learned valuable life skills: how to approach hungry strangers and convince them to like me, how to smile even when I was irritated, how to deal with the rush and crush of Sunday morning in a pancake house, how to keep going when I was dead on my feet and still had four hours to go on my shift. At the age of fifteen I was thrown into an adult world, and I handled it. I can still balance four big plates on my left arm and pour coffee with my right at the same time. From a cook named Spiro, I learned to swear in Greek. (These days, that's not nearly as useful as plate balancing.)

I believe that the key to enjoying work isn't how much we get paid, or even how stimulating the work might be. The secret to reaping the benefits of work is in how we approach it.

We've all met people who perform what the world considers to be menial tasks with grace and creativity. I think of Leonard, a crossing guard at my daughter's elementary school. Leonard, who knew the name of every child who crossed his intersection. Leonard, who would stop traffic in Stamford, Connecticut, so that a squirrel could cross the street safely. Believe me, at 7:45 a.m. in Stamford, people in cars have only one goal—to get to the train. But people in cars were not Leonard's priority, which is why kids and animals loved him.

I try to write about people like that.

This world of ours seems to celebrate the fastest, the smartest, the richest, and the most successful. But I don't find people like that very interesting—I can't relate to them. Give me an ace shoe-salesperson like Jenna Boller who, like me, needed her job because most of the other things in her life were hard. How can selling shoes be interesting? On the surface, it's not. But Jenna approached her work with heart and humor. "Selling shoes," she quipped in my favorite line of the book, "is the quickest road to humility in all of retail."

In my new novel, *Stand Tall*, when we first meet Leo, a Vietnam vet and grandfather, he's in a veterans' hospital with half a leg gone—a recent amputee. Who could be thinking about work after an experience like that? Leo grins at his hugely tall grandson named Tree who has come to the hospital to visit him:

> "You want to take apart an ugly lamp and make it uglier?"
>
> Tree really wanted to do that.
>
> He got the trunk out from under the bed, opened it to his grandfather's tools of the trade—pliers, wires, sockets, plugs. Grandpa was a master electrician who repaired lamps in his workshop above the garage. He'd brought this to the hospital so he wouldn't go crazy.
>
> They worked for two hours, not counting the time it took to eat the two submarine sandwiches and the two bags of barbecue potato chips Tree had brought with him. They took the lamp apart, laid the pieces on the bed, examined the insides. Talked about how the wires had been broken and the power couldn't get to the bulb.
>
> "When that happens, nothing works," Grandpa said. "Kind of like life."

I believe we learn about life from people who understand that work is intrinsic to living. I love to create characters who have that vision and zeal and share it with others:

Leo Benton, an electrician who knows what happens—in lamps and in life—when connections are broken.

Jenna Boller, who understands that selling shoes isn't just about the sale; it's about doing what's best for her customers.

Madeline Gladstone, an aging business tycoon who holds onto a belief in quality when most of the world around her has settled for mediocrity.

G. T. Stoop, a diner owner battling leukemia who decides there's more work in this world for him to do, so he runs for mayor to stand against the corruption in his town.

"Is it easy to be a writer?" A young

reader asked me this when I was in the middle of a tough book edit. Part of me wanted to expound on the pain of writing—wrestling with uncooperative metaphors, dealing with deadlines, telling characters to do something and having them refuse (oh yes, this happens), struggling with the same paragraph over and over. I bit my lip and drew a little blood. Then I told her that writing is brutally hard work, but that it is also profoundly satisfying.

That is the conundrum in most work—to get to the good part, quite often we have to do things we don't like. But when you are determined to do a job well, when you understand that working hard isn't a curse, but a means to an end, when there is something about the process in which you can find meaning, then you've plugged into the power that keeps you going until the job is done right.

Here we are in an economic downturn. Layoffs abound, jobs for young people are disappearing. Finding work is hard work these days, but it's worth the effort.

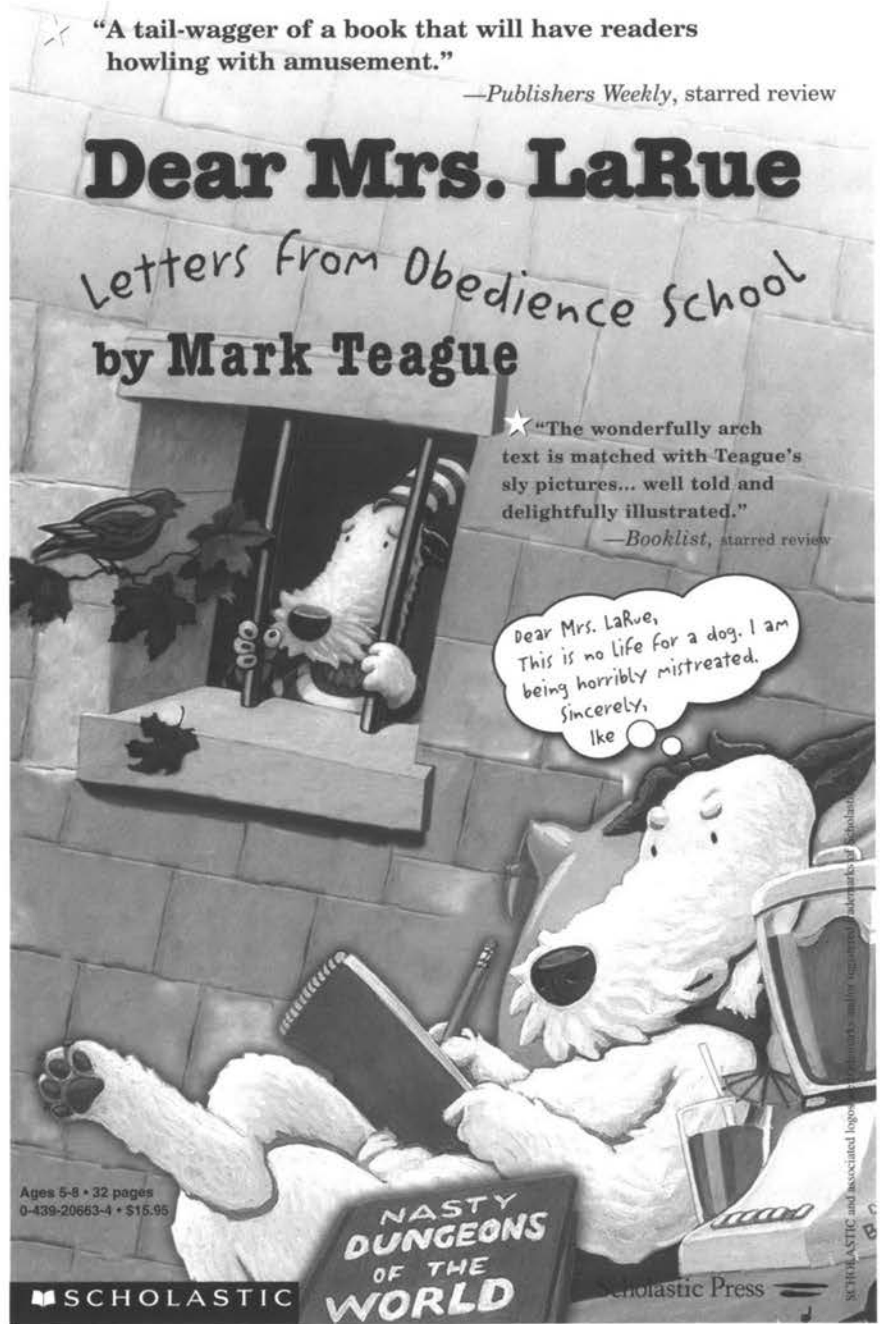
Why should we work? Because it makes us strong. Because it links us to others. Because work, when it is done for the right reasons, can make a colossal difference.

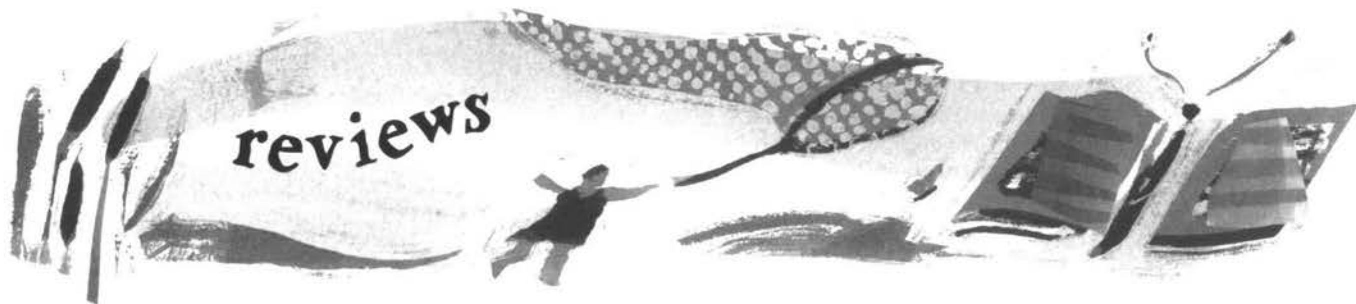
That's swimming upstream, I know. In this crazy world of gross corporate malfeasance, I think we're seeing that the big-time CEOs really don't get it. But when all is said and done, it's the work of the heart that will last.

"When people are serving," John Gardner wrote, "life is no longer meaningless."

Hope Yancey understands this. After a tough but empowering encounter with her gadabout mother, this sixteen-year-old waitress ruminates on what it means to serve. "When you're in food service, you understand that sometimes you're making up for people in your customers' lives who haven't been too nice. A lonely old woman at the counter just lights up when I smile at her; a tired mother with a screaming baby squeezes my hand when I clean up the mess her other child spilled. You know what I like most about waitressing? When I'm doing it, I'm not thinking that much about myself. I'm thinking about other people. I'm learning again and again what it takes to make a difference in people's lives."

Joan Bauer's novels have won numerous awards, including a Newbery Honor, the L.A. Times Book Prize, the Christopher Award, and the Golden Kite Award of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Her most recent novel is Stand Tall *(Putnam, 2002).*





Picture Books

All the Way to Lhasa: A Tale from Tibet
Retold and illustrated by Barbara Helen Berger
Philomel
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.99
ISBN 0-399-23387-3

In the Tibetan tale recounted here, two travelers head for Lhasa: a young man spurring his horse and a boy on foot, leading a yak. Each in turn asks an old woman seated at the roadside how much farther he has to go. She informs both that Lhasa is "very far." To the impatient rider she says, "You'll never make it there before night," while she advises the boy, "You can make it there before night." Like many storied treks, journeys toward the holy city are spiritual, and she sees that the boy has adopted the required pace: slow and steady. The greatest risk is that he might become lost in doubt and give up. But he presses on through mountains, snow, and rushing waters—and past the sidelined, sleeping horse and rider—to reach the holy city.

One thinks of Aesop's "The Hare and the Tortoise," but the emphasis here is on the slow achiever's experience of the journey. No competition is declared; in fact, the rider and the boy never exchange words. When the boy comes upon the sleeping pair, he is not triumphant. Rather, he's tempted to take a rest himself.

In Barbara Helen Berger's musical but unadorned storytelling, every word leads steadily toward the satisfying conclusion. Meanwhile, the paintings illuminate a world of religious objects, open spaces, and swirling mountaintop mists. The Tibetan script for the mantra "Om mani padme hum" is ubiquitous; it has been carved into stones by earlier pilgrims, but it also appears in the boy's footprints as he trudges through fields of snow. When he urges his yak over a threatening stream, prayer flags flutter overhead. The boy's fears are his own to confront, but with the encouragement of those who have passed before him and the silent witness of local animals, he's not exactly alone.

In Berger's paintings, the world appears both real and insubstantial. The distance the boy travels is vast, and the perils are believable, but at the same time the swirlings of water, cloud, and dust suggest mobility and ephemerality. Clouds spill outside the boundaries of the illustration onto the red background of the text. The boy's hazards are not simply terrestrial: when he fears that nightfall will defeat him, the dark clouds show the countenance of a demon. And even the unclouded stretches of the illustrations are softened with subtle variations of tone and a light line that suggest both luminosity and mist. It's as if the high country is literally and figuratively in the clouds.

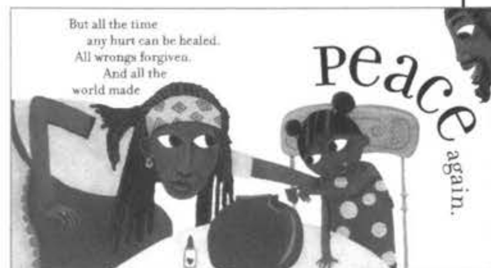
Although the landscape is spiritual, it is never entirely unreal. The faces of humans and animals are beautifully detailed, animate, and soulful.

And when the boy and his yak reach Lhasa before dark, the old woman—along with a host of other celestial bell ringers—is there to celebrate.

—*Jessica Roeder*

Illustration by Barbara Helen Berger, from All the Way to Lhasa

Unconditional Love



Illustrations by Chris Raschka (top) and Shane W. Evans

Be Boy Buzz
By bell hooks
Illustrated by Chris Raschka
JUMP AT THE SUN/HYPERION
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $16.99
ISBN 0-7868-0814-4

Homemade Love
By bell hooks
Illustrated by Shane W. Evans
JUMP AT THE SUN/HYPERION
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $16.99
ISBN 0-7868-0643-5

In her writing for adults, bell hooks has called family life "the original school of love." She reiterates this claim in a bright and celebratory way in two new picture books. Unconditional love for children lies at the heart of each story, enfolding readers in what amounts to a thirty-two-page embrace.

Be Boy Buzz is the second picture-book collaboration of hooks and illustrator Chris Raschka. In *Happy to Be Nappy*, they rebutted the notion that "nappy" hair is difficult and wild, something to be ashamed of or tamed. In this new book, the writer and artist gleefully cast aside the idea that boys are difficult and wild, their gender to be shushed and subdued. Instead, they applaud the spectrum of emotions and qualities that make a boy a boy. A jazzy energy splashes across these pages: spare, variously sized text chases and tags the multitude of young black boys portrayed throughout, declaring their many moods, shouting out their mannerisms, cheering on the characteristics of glorious boyhood.

"I be boy," the book begins, and there across the page, in shorts and tennis shoes, with his hands proud on his hips, stands one sure-of-himself kid. On the next pages, "All bliss boy" leans contentedly against the edge of the page, "All fine beat" grooves to his own music, and "All beau boy" smiles quietly, raising his hand shyly to his mouth. Simple phrases, poetic with straightforward, weighted rhythms, traverse the vast map of boy behavior: one is "talking way too loud"; one lies on the floor reading, "All think and dream time. Alone with myself."

Be Boy Buzz is resplendent with boys, and Raschka visually differentiates them with his swift, thick line. Minimal watercolor brush strokes lend gesture, body language, and telling expression to all. Often, he'll use a geometric design of layered rectangles in pastel colors on the rich cinnamon brown of the page to play off a boy's energy or mood. These doodles tie the book together in an interesting way—on the warmhearted spread depicting a boy ("All boy") held close in the sure embrace of a loving parent's arms sits a stack of these shapes, alike and yet different. "Hug me close. Don't let me down," the text says. Boys are very different from one another, but in essential ways, they, and all children, are alike.

In *Homemade Love*, hooks shines a benevolent spotlight on one little girl and her parents, celebrating a family's habit of bestowing their little one with affectionate nicknames. Mama calls her "Girlpie" or "Sweet Sweet." Daddy prefers "Honey Bun Chocolate Dew Drop" or "Homemade Love." The reassurance that comes with such tender, oft-repeated phrases proves itself when Girlpie breaks a dish: "But everything I do cannot be right. 'Cause there is no all the time right." She is forgiven, of course, but more important, she is redeemed by her parents' solid presence and consistent devotion.

Shane Evans jubilantly expresses the warmth of the family bond through cheerful colors and rounded shapes. In a playful, cartoonish way he captures the intimacies that cement the relationship between child and parent. Remember, when you were a child, how huge adults seemed? On one page, Daddy's long legs, from the knee down, fill the picture while Girlpie twines herself around one to catch a ride. On another, a lively orange apron with scalloped green trim vibrantly sets off the yellow of Mama's dress, which takes up nearly a whole page. Her brown, braceleted arm reaches down and connects securely with Girlpie's. In a joyous family portrait, we see this round-faced little girl with bon-bon pigtails as she throws her arms into the air, Daddy's face near one cheek, Mama's near the other, lips ready to smooch, all of them in eyes-closed bliss. Just two big words sit at the top center of the spread: "Kiss Kiss." *Homemade Love* suggests that the strength and beauty of any family circle is reinforced in lovingly simple and homemade ways.

—*Christine Alfano*

Grandma and Me at the Flea/ Los Meros Meros Remateros

By Juan Felipe Herrera
Illustrated by Anita DeLucio-Brock
Children's Book Press
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.95
ISBN 0-89239-171-5

In *Grandma and Me at the Flea*, young Juanito accompanies his grandmother to the *remate*, a California flea market where their neighbors sell everything from fresh produce to secondhand toys. The *remate* is both a lot of fun and a necessary ritual for the people who set up shop there on Sunday mornings.

As he did in *Calling the Doves*, poet Juan Felipe Herrera offers up a slice of autobiography in an inviting bilingual picture book. Anita DeLucio-Brock's colorful illustrations, inspired by Mexican folk art, are well suited to the story. In a short note preceding the story, Herrera describes the flea markets of his youth as "earthy makeshift stores under big skies." Juanito's parents, like many in the Mexican American community he is growing up in, are farmworkers. At the time of this story they've gone north to pick apples, leaving Juanito in the care of his grandmother. They have left her a store of clothing—"a little worn, but shiny clean"—to sell at the *remate* to help meet expenses.

Juanito's Grandma is a lively woman. The side of the van she and Juanito head off in is brightly decorated. Though it's five o'clock in the morning when they leave, in Juanito's account, she is cheerful: " 'A real *rematero* makes time for songs!' she says in her husky voice, and winks at me. We sing as we drive off into the frosty morning light."

As the story proceeds, it becomes clear that Grandma is also an integral member of the community—in fact, she embodies the generosity and sup-

Illustration by Anita DeLucio-Brock, from Grandma and Me at the Flea

port that bind it together. People's needs are pronounced, and giving is unrestrained. A man selling wool *zarapes* gives Juanito a blanket with a vibrant peacock design on it, explaining that he's grateful for the massage Grandma gave his sister when she hurt her back picking melons. Grandma gives Juanito a letter to deliver to a man selling hardware. As a favor she has written to the man's landlord—in English, a struggle for him—to ask for help fixing his storm-damaged roof. She gives Juanito healing herbs to pass on to Señora Vela, who suffers from headaches. Señora Vela gives Juanito a sampling of her spicy chilis in return. The jewelry man gives Juanito a copper bracelet for Grandma, to help her rheumatism when the weather gets cold. He recalls how Grandma helped him send money orders home to Mexico when he had just come to this country.

The problems answered by thoughtful gestures and gifts at Herrera's flea market are those of people working hard but still living in poverty. Children watching Mexican soap operas on television are at the market to sell broken toys (their sign shows the price reduced to "6 for $1"). But in this community, as in others, what makes the difference is hope. Fittingly, the *remate* is held on the former grounds of the Esperanza Gardens Drive-In Theater. And Esperanza—the Spanish word for *hope*—is Grandma's given name.

—*Martha Davis Beck*

Jethro Byrd, Fairy Child

By Bob Graham
Candlewick
32 pages, Ages 4–7, $15.99
ISBN 0-7636-1772-5

If a child could custom-order his family, he might ask for parents who drive a well-stocked ice cream truck. His father might play the fiddle, his mother might dance after teatime, and both would practice exquisite—but not cloying—politeness toward even his newest friend. Include as bonuses a singing grandmother and a restful baby sister. Jethro Byrd, who falls into the life of a young girl named Annabelle, possesses just such a family.

The Byrds are exactly what Annabelle has sought, because in addition to their personal charms, they're fairies. When their tiny flying ice cream truck crash-lands by the gas station next door, the girl happens to be on her daily fairy watch. Annabelle rights the truck and invites the family to tea. A magical interlude follows, though Jethro's father, Offin, claims his family doesn't make magic, "just...hamburgers." And the fairies fit seamlessly into the unflappable girl's world; she entertains them as delightful friends rather than apparitions. Her levelheaded belief is the sensible reaction to these miniature folk whose magic is perhaps most evident in their simple pleasures and the relaxed pace of their lives.

They are both ordinary and extraordinary. Winged Jethro is an authentic child. Seconds after touching down, he has already "hitched up his jeans...and wiped his nose on the back of his

sleeve." He enjoys flying, and, like a human boy on a skateboard, he's not above hotdoggery. He even begins to sulk when it's time to go. In response, the entire fairy family huddles to work out a compromise.

They decide upon a gift for Annabelle, a fairy-size fairy-time watch. Annabelle, after all, is able to see fairies because fairy time runs parallel to children's time, in which hours and even days can almost stand still. But during the tea party, adult human time has continued apace; Annabelle's mother becomes sunburned and her father clacks away on a laptop computer. Even on the weekend, her parents don't slow enough to perceive their daughter's guests. Here too the fairy family is enviable; they have the advantage of living all together in the same relatively calm stream of time.

Bob Graham's genial humor brings this story to life. Graham relishes the benign urban setting; the city's possibilities include both graffiti and fairies. The aerial view of Annabelle's neighborhood on the title-page spread displays the city's eccentricity and its joyful precariousness. A man rides a wheeled sailboard in traffic while cars perch half off parking ramps, ready to fall. From overhead—the flying fairy's-eye view—Annabelle and her family are the tiny ones; it's a more fortunate reversal than the circumstance of a small girl who finds that she's too large to travel with her fascinating friends.

—*Jessica Roeder*

Ruby's Wish

By Shirin Yim Bridges

Illustrated by Sophie Blackall

Chronicle

36 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.95

ISBN 0-8118-3490-5

Ruby, one of many grandchildren in a wealthy Chinese patriarch's household, knows her own mind. Her name attests to her quiet willfulness: she's called Ruby because, in defiance of custom, she chooses to wear red—the color of celebration and life—every day. She would rather be educated than married, yet the self-possessed child doesn't scheme, fight, or beg for the right to further her studies. Instead, she simply answers her grandfather's questions about her neatly written poem concerning the relative luck of

Illustration by Sophie Blackall, from Ruby's Wish

boys and girls. In this crucial conversation, she is careful not to hurt her grandfather, but she also lets him know that she wants to study at the university like the boys. Afterwards, she persists in her lessons, even as the time approaches when she presumably will be betrothed.

Ruby takes no "heroic" action, but she is an entirely engaging heroine. Part of her appeal derives from Sophie Blackall's illustrations, delicate and understated but expressive paintings that show red-clad Ruby growing up in her grandfather's intriguing household. And Shirin Yim Bridges skillfully draws the reader along with a storytelling tone in which the "once upon a time" of fairy tale can become a real place and a real time without losing its magic. Yet Ruby remains heroic largely through the force of her character: she's intelligent, she acts with care, and she pursues her hopes tenaciously. At several key moments, her grandfather watches the children thoughtfully, focusing on Ruby. One senses that he, too, is compelled to want her to succeed simply because she is so purely herself and so certain of her dream.

Ruby's triumph, when it arrives, is as quiet as her struggle. During New Year celebrations, her grandfather hands her a thicker-than-usual gift envelope. Her family looks on, and the narrator invites the audience to guess what's inside. On the next page, we learn that Ruby's gift was an admission letter from a university just beginning to enroll female students. But readers also find a real photograph of the author's grandmother, Ruby, in a double picture frame alongside another illustration of the young protagonist. It's a triple pleasure to know that Ruby got her wish, that she is a real person, and that "every day she still wears a little red."

—*Jessica Roeder*

The Village That Vanished

By Ann Grifalconi

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Dial

40 pages, Age 5 and up, $16.99

ISBN 0-8037-2623-6

At the start of this book, five modern-day African children sit casually with a storyteller. "Gather round, my people, gather round!" the griot calls to the children and the reader alike, "And hear the voices of your ancestors / in this tale of courage and of sacrifice." The next spread pictures a blue-green forest in the dimming light of a sunset long ago. A young girl named Abikanile watches from a reedy riverbank while her mother, Njemile, beseeches ancestral spirits. "*She* knew why Njemile was praying so hard: They might have to

leave their homeland—and *soon. / The slavers were coming!*"

Brown clouds, shaped like armed men on horseback, fill the rust-orange sky as Abikanile and Njemile walk to their small village. These foreboding clouds also appear in the dust-jacket image, but the most effective of illustrator Kadir Nelson's splendid pen-and-ink compositions are found inside the book. Nelson crosshatches and details every feature of his characters, who seem to be animated by the dense and curving lines. He gives careful consideration to the batik fabrics, cooking utensils, and farming tools of the villagers.

When Njemile proposes that every-

Illustration by Kadir Nelson, from The Village That Vanished

Loveliest Song

The Nightingale
By Hans Christian Andersen
Adapted and illustrated
by Jerry Pinkney
Phyllis Fogelman Books
40 pages, Age 5 and up, $16.99
ISBN 0-8037-2464-0

The Nightingale
By Hans Christian Andersen
Retold by Stephen Mitchell
Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline
Candlewick
40 pages, Age 5 and up, $17.99
ISBN 0-7636-1521-8

Ensconced in his grand palace, the emperor reads that there is in the wooded reaches of his garden a nightingale, a bird whose song is more lovely that all the wonders of the empire. The servant dispatched to find it returns frustrated: "You shouldn't believe everything you read, Your Majesty. Writers like to tell fairy tales, you know; they'll just make something up and not care whether it's true or not." Finally a little girl in the palace kitchen says, "The nightingale? *I* know her."

Hans Christian Andersen's story of the songbird that astonished the emperor's court, only to be banished for the sake of a bejeweled mechanical bird, was first published in the author's native Denmark nearly 160 years ago. It is a fairy tale, of course, but it was written by an author who cared very much whether his story was true or not. Andersen's story endures because it is amusing, irreverent, tender—and because it rings true. Two extraordinary new picture books offer contemporary readers contrasting interpretations of "The Nightingale."

One has a text (quoted above) by Stephen Mitchell, known for his sensitive versions of texts rich in spiritual content, including the Psalms and the Bhagavad Gita. At its heart, "The Nightingale" is also a spiritual text. When the emperor is deathly ill and his artificial bird lies mute by his bed, the compassionate nightingale perches on a branch outside his window and so charms Death with her singing that he vanishes. When the emperor asks the bird to stay, she answers, "But there are other people that I must fly to: the poor fisherman and the farmer....I will come sing to you because of your heart, not your crown."

Russian-trained artist Bagram Ibatoulline's ink-and-watercolor illustrations draw on the traditional landscape painting of China. The gray bird and the kitchen maid in her plain robe make a striking visual contrast to the elaborate costumes, architecture, and furniture of the court. Ibatoulline's artwork carries its store of technique and research lightly, and the narrative unfolds clearly in the pictures.

Mitchell's adaptation of the text is nimble as well. His interpretation displays a genuine fondness for Andersen's satiric wit. The text is full of comic passages: the ladies of the court fill their mouths with water because

one should "go into the woods...destroying *all traces* of our village, so that the slavers will not know we ever lived here," Nelson shows the villagers dismantling their thatched huts "*stick by stick, stone by stone*" and conveys the regret they feel at leaving their land. Abikanile's elderly grandmother, Chimwala, volunteers to stay behind and misdirect the slavers, who will think she is a hermit. Only her house is left intact: "Soon it seemed Chimwala's hut had always stood alone like that, surrounded only by her vegetable garden and some corn rows." When the men come up the red dirt path to Chimwala's doorstep (Nelson depicts two magnificently dressed African warlords on horseback, with four warriors on foot), they find no evidence of the Yao village.

While Njemile puts the plan in motion and Chimwala plays decoy, young Abikanile guides everyone across the river to safety. After praying to her ancestors in imitation of her mother, Abikanile notices stepping stones in the water. At this and other suspenseful moments, Nelson pictures an orange-and-lavender butterfly fluttering near the girl, a symbol of her faith. The theme of abiding faith is a problematic element in the story, for the narrative could be read as implying that only the unfaithful or timid were captured by opportunistic slave traders. Like *Big Jabe*, another escape fantasy set in the slave era (also illustrated by Nelson), this story neglects the true believers who didn't get away.

On the other hand, Caldecott Honoree Ann Grifalconi (*The Village of Round and Square Houses*) celebrates the strong women who help their tribe survive. At the conclusion, she and Nelson return to the present-day griot, who tells his young audience (now expanded to nine listeners) that "this story came down to us many generations later." In praising the Yao foremothers, Grifalconi and Nelson draw attention to the importance of all family histories.

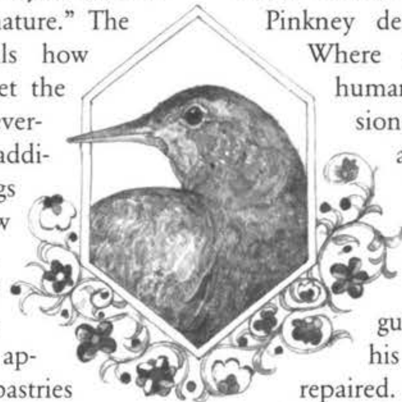
—Nathalie op de Beeck

Illustration by Bagram Ibatoulline. At right, illustration by Jerry Pinkney.

they think that their gurgling sounds like the nightingale; the music master writes "a study of the mechanical bird, in twenty-five volumes."

The nightingale could be a symbol for many things—compassion, music, simplicity, humility, beauty, truth—but neither Andersen nor these twenty-first-century collaborators allow the layers of the story to weigh it down.

The distinguished illustrator Jerry Pinkney, in the eloquent afterword to his bright and beautiful new version of "The Nightingale," says that "in the creation of this adaptation, the plain little bird with a magnificent voice and a big heart became a symbol of the healing power of nature." The afterword also tells how Pinkney came to set the story in Morocco. Several small omissions, additions, and rewordings help establish this new setting in the text. "Emperor" becomes "king," for example, and a *bendir* drum appears along with pastries made with honey and almond milk. But it is Pinkney's watercolors—a swirl of turbans, robes, skin tones, and greenery—that establish the North African setting.



The choice is an inspired one. The book is beautiful and imaginative, and it offers a warm and generous reading of Andersen's story. As it turns out, the shift in setting is not the most substantial alteration that Pinkney and his editors have made to the original story. Though the adaptation of the story reads line for line like a classic translation, much of Andersen's satire of the pompous court has been omitted. Where Andersen satirizes the court, Pinkney describes its splendors. Where Andersen highlights human foibles and pretensions, Pinkney shows great affection for his characters, including the king. The king leans forward, hands clasped, his face full of anguished concern, to watch his artificial bird being repaired. Pinkney is especially tender with the character of the child who helps the king find the nightingale. The text gives her extra notice, and she appears on the book's cover, listening to the plain little bird with the king himself.

—Susan Marie Swanson

Fiction

Hannah, Divided

By Adele Griffin
HYPERION
264 pages, Ages 8–12, $15.99
ISBN 0-7868-0879-9

Hannah has a hard time reading—but she's a whiz at math. For a girl growing up on a Pennsylvania farm in the 1930s, this is not considered a valuable skill. Mrs. Theodora Sweet, a wealthy benefactor from Philadelphia who visits Hannah's country school, sees things differently. Hannah's grandfather, who has nurtured her interest in math, playing number games with her when the farm chores are done, persuades Hannah's parents to let her go to school in the city, boarding with the imperious Mrs. Sweet. There, Hannah competes with other students for a coveted college scholarship.

Separated from her home, thrust into the clamor of the city and the pressures of the competitive, class-conscious Ottley Friends School, Hannah is lonely. Her exceptional ability to calculate and to recognize patterns becomes something of a parlor trick as she is called upon to identify the number of e's or s's on a page of text for the amusement of Mrs. Sweet's guests. It doesn't seem possible that she will find a friend. The girls at school look down their noses at Hannah. The person she has the most contact with is fellow boarder Joe, a spirited boy who at first regards her as a competitor and nicknames her "milkmaid."

For comfort, Hannah turns to private games that soothe her. She uses her fingers or her feet to tap out sequences. She counts randomly, with an intensity she is unable to moderate. Objects in her room are placed just so, in positions that must be maintained. Students who notice her behavior tease her. Her mother remarks, "Your habits have more hold on you than you do on them." Such habits, common among intensely driven individuals, were less well understood in the 1930s, so it isn't surprising that no one is able to address Hannah's impulses in a way that illuminates them for her, easing her burden. But some readers may wish for a clearer understanding of this critical piece of the narrative.

Hannah eloquently describes the mixed blessing of her talent and obsession: "Counting was a bolt of hot, bright lightning in her brain. It was a habit and a comfort, yes, but it also opened her mind to a vastness of numbers that overwhelmed her." The sense in which talent and ambition can cut

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HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Jacket art © 2002 by Peter McCarty

both ways, bringing excitement and instilling pride, but also pulling a young person in a direction she hasn't had time to fully embrace, comes through poignantly in Adele Griffin's absorbing novel.

Hannah's desire to prevail is initially focused on the exam that determines eligibility for college scholarships. The exam turns out to be a proving ground, but not in the way Hannah—or the reader—expects. Hannah's realization that no test has the power to define or limit her future unless she gives it that power signals her growing maturity and sense of self. "I'll find the right doors and I'll push them as hard as I can," she declares. The book's closing scene, in which Hannah climbs her favorite tree in the city and dangles her bare feet in the breeze, provides an unexpectedly powerful ending to this perceptive coming-of-age story.

—*Martha Davis Beck*

Keeper of the Doves

By Betsy Byars

VIKING

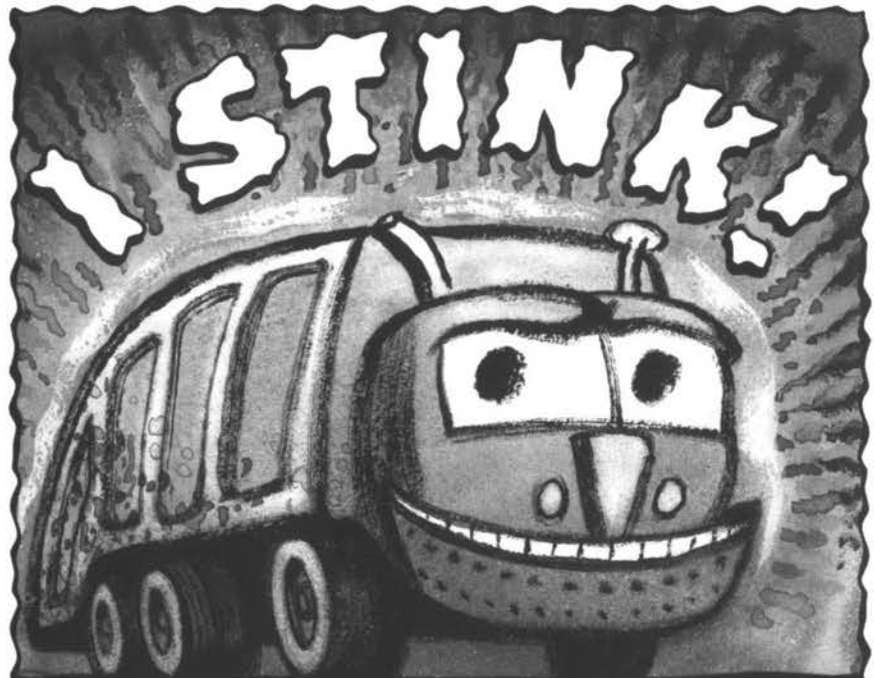
112 pages, Ages 8–12, $14.99

ISBN 0-670-03576-9

The birth of Amen McBee on a stormy night in 1891 is the latest in a string of disappointments for her father—yet another girl to follow Abigail, Augusta, twins Arabella and Annabella (known as the Bellas), and the deceased Anita, who was born with a heart defect and lived only ten days. When Albert McBee, revealing his bitterness, names the baby Amen, he proclaims it "the end of a prayer—a prayer for a son."

Young Amie's serious nature and penchant for writing poetry soon earn favor with her father and her feisty grandmother, who calls the child her "little wordsmith." Often lost in the shadow of the mischievous Bellas—who delight in imitating Papa and their stern caretaker, Aunt Pauline—Amie keeps a watchful eye on the world developing around her. Thanks to a gift from Grandmama (who arrives to help Amie's mother, Lily, as the family awaits the birth of another child), Amie learns to take photographs with a new pocket Kodak camera. This recent invention, according to Grandmama, will be a boon to society, especially to women "who have an eye for beauty and composition."

One of Amie's photo subjects, Mr. Tominski, becomes a focal point of the story. Mr. Tom is an uneducated Polish



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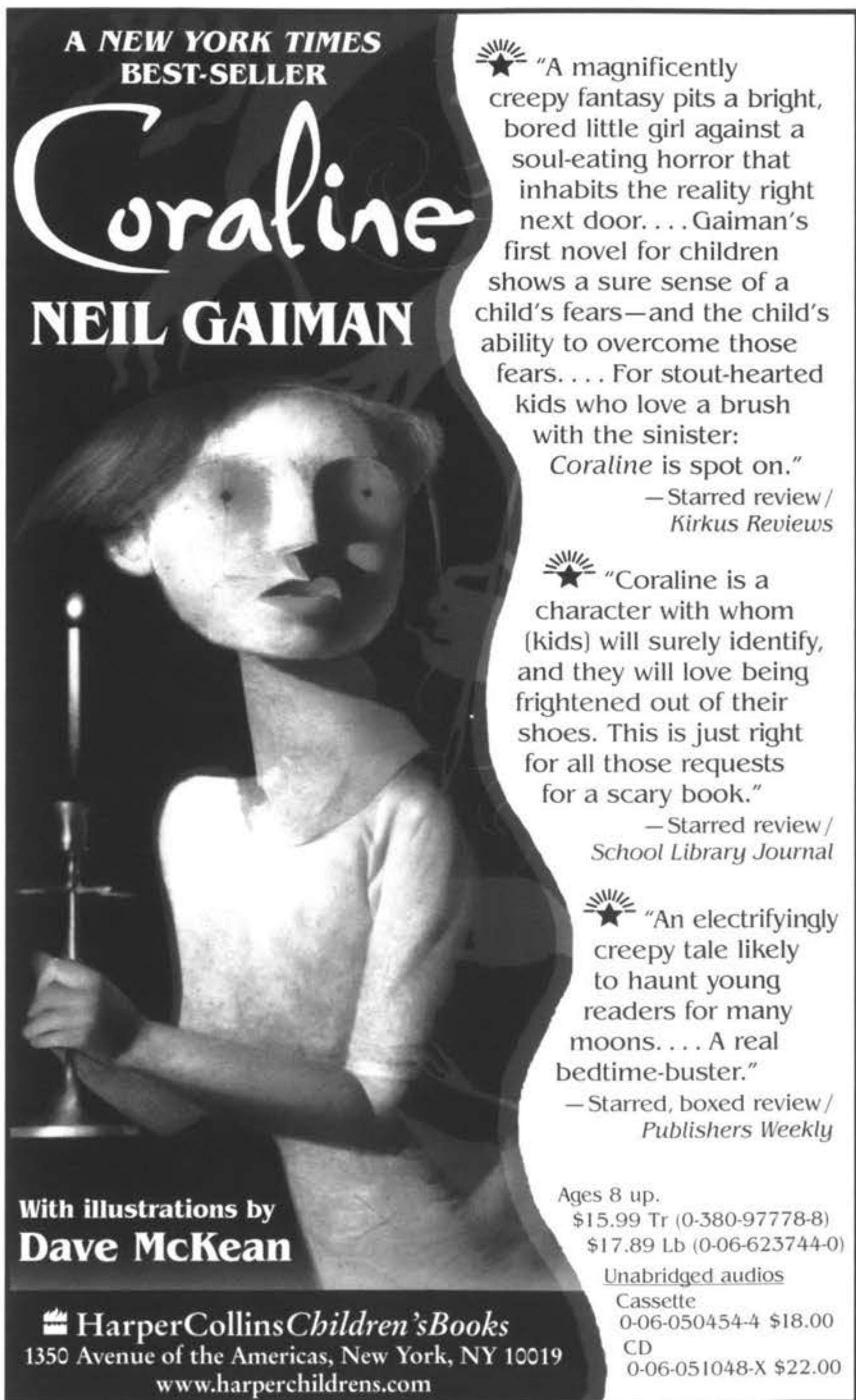
immigrant who once saved Albert McBee's life after a hunting accident. Honoring a deathbed pledge to his own father, Papa provides Mr. Tom with room and board in a small chapel on the grounds of the family homestead. The older gentleman keeps dozens of trained doves in a tree behind the chapel and delights as each one swoops toward him to pick up a flattened copper penny from his hand. Though Amie has been fearful of Mr. Tominski since she was a young child, she honors his request to have his photograph taken and is surprised to find that he seems as harmless as Papa has suggested.

Following the arrival of their new brother, Adam, the McBee girls' dog, Scout, dies mysteriously, and they begin to question whether Mr. Tominski is what he appears to be. In the course of unraveling the truth, Amie discovers that words, which she loves so much, can have unexpected and potentially devastating power.

Betsy Byars, a 1971 Newbery Medal winner for *The Summer of the Swans*, has crafted a lovely story about family devotion. The vignettes surrounding Amie's private moments with members of her large family—reading alone with her sister Abigail, a rare visit with frail Lily, who is often confined to her room, an enlightening conversation with her serious father—help to define the young protagonist. And while the impish Bellas were once given the charge to educate young Amie, it is Amie's role as older sister to little Adam that will allow her to come into her own and, as Grandmama suggests, turn her face toward the future.

—Julie Pfitzinger



Postcards from No Man's Land

By Aidan Chambers

DUTTON

320 pages, Age 14 and up, $19.99

ISBN 0-525-46863-3

In the course of Jacob Todd's first day in Holland, he's tempted by a seductive stranger, mugged, and left wet, humiliated, and thoroughly lost on the streets of Amsterdam. This is only the beginning of a series of unexpected events that leave the seventeen-year-old protagonist of Aidan Chambers's *Postcards from No Man's Land* permanently changed. The trip he makes to honor his grandfather, a soldier who died in a nearby town during World War II, leaves him questioning his sexuality, his goals, and his identity. "Thirty hours

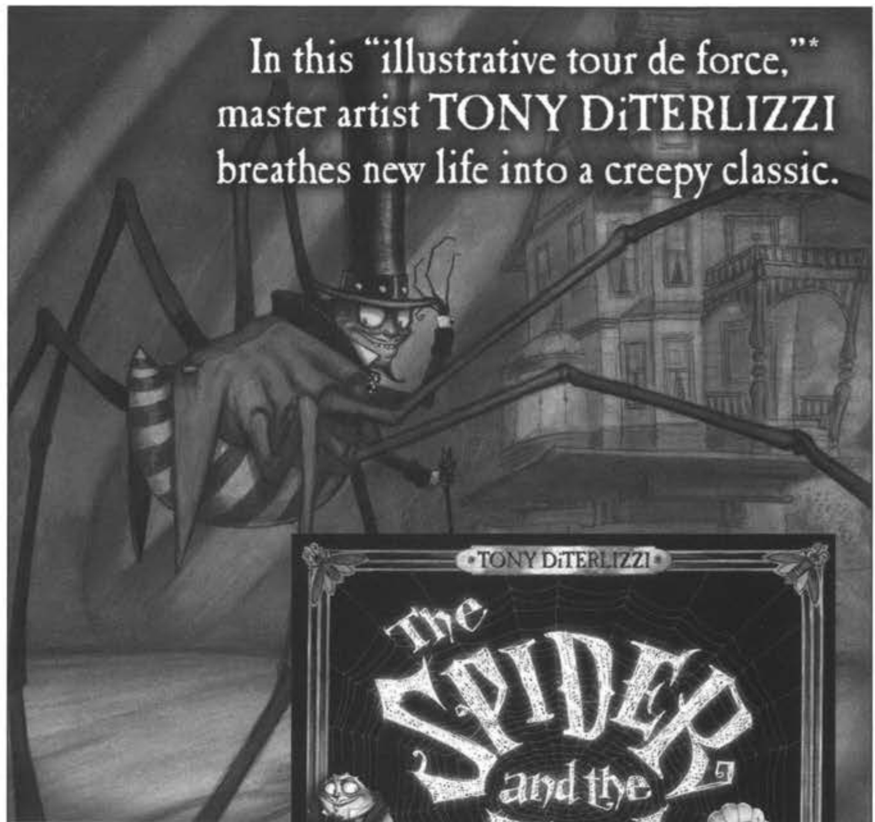
—only thirty!—in this foreign country had begun to strip away from him, like peeling off a protective skin, the few certainties he thought he knew about himself, leaving him disoriented and displaced," Chambers writes.

Jacob isn't the only one who's disoriented. A narrative from World War II, interwoven with Jacob's, tells the story of a different teen's struggle with a world that is being turned upside-down. This is Geertrui's story—of the war that inched its way onto her own front yard, and of her budding romance with another Jacob Todd, a British soldier whom she secretly nursed back to health right under the noses of the Nazis. Despite differences in gender and generation, location and language, the parallels between the two protagonists' stories are numerous, as each character confronts and defies both self-imposed and societally imposed stereotypes and expectations, often to his or her own great surprise.

Although the interweaving of the two narratives is slightly confusing at first, the end result is effective: it allows for two stories, separated by time, to come together to form a single narrative thread. What emerges is a tale that reveals the ongoing effects—and inescapability—of history, and the commonality between two adolescents searching for meaning and identity in an often-confusing world.

Chambers's movement between voices and narratives is flawless. Geertrui never lapses as the wise, occasionally mournful voice of reminiscence. And Jacob is just as believeable as the awkward and self-conscious, thoughtful teen who doesn't know quite what to make of his moods or of the burgeoning new self of which he's just becoming aware. When the two narratives finally come together, they do so effortlessly, with an expected but not predictable harmony.

Postcards from No Man's Land is a



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★ "Howitt's 1829 cautionary poem is realized here in full cinematic fashion. Delightfully ghoulish."—*Kirkus*, starred review

★ "DiTerlizzi's art raises [Howitt's] classic to a new level." —*School Library Journal*, starred review

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richly layered novel, combining elements of history, politics, literary allusion, and linguistic play, and enhanced by Chambers's keen insight into the adolescent mind. Above all, this is a book that urges a multiple-angle view of complex issues, particularly those that a superficial look at history would lead us to misunderstand.

—Jenny Sawyer

Ruby Holler

By Sharon Creech

HARPERCOLLINS

310 pages, Ages 8–12, $16.99

ISBN 0-06-027732-7

Foster homes and the orphanage in the small, "tired" town of Boxton are all that the "trouble twins" Dallas and his sister, Florida, know. For thirteen years they have been unloved and unwanted, and their mistrust of adults is entrenched. They plan to run away from the orphanage and ride a freight train out of town.

Just outside of Boxton in beautiful Ruby Holler live Tiller and his wife Sairy, a little lonesome now that their children are grown and gone. They're also restless, and they're making plans for one last great adventure. They're going separately, though, so they need traveling companions. Dallas and Florida seem perfectly suited to the job.

Needy children, kind but lonely adults, and a beautiful place are a powerful combination, and Dallas and Florida gradually begin to trust Sairy and Tiller, as Sairy and Tiller come to care for the children. Sharon Creech's omniscient narration and generous use of flashbacks allow her to develop parallel stories—the terrible life the twins have had, and Sairy and Tiller's uncertainty in their new roles as older adult guardians.

A third story intertwines with these two as the villainous Mr. Trepid, manager of the orphanage, plots to steal Tiller and Sairy's money (hidden under rocks in Ruby Holler), with the help of the mysterious recluse who lives nearby. The suspense builds as Florida and Tiller begin a practice journey downriver and Sairy and Dallas set off on a long hike out of the valley to test their travel equipment. Back in Boxton, Mr. Trepid is busy spending the money he's poised and ready to steal. Fortunately, things don't always go as planned, especially in a Dickensian novel with quirky heroes and dastardly villains.

Creech's bright humor, vivid characterization, and deft language, combined with the twists and turns of the plot, make reading this novel aloud a rare treat. The story's climax raises just enough questions to make readers wish they could pay a visit to the holler, to see how everyone is doing.

—Lee Galda

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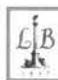

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17

By Liz Rosenberg

CRICKET BOOKS

156 pages, Age 14 and up, $16.95

ISBN 0-8126-4915-X

Seventeen-year-old Stephanie has just embarked on the most challenging journey of her life thus far: the quest to make it through her junior year of high school. She must navigate through emotional highs and lows, an eating disorder, a psychologically crippling relationship, sexual exploration, and family challenges. It's also the year when she begins to sort through the multiple selves within her that are clamoring for acceptance, a sorting alluded to at the beginning of the story in an interaction with her mother:

> "Come see what I've made," the mother says....A sculpted trio of girls holding hands....One girl's

> foot is lifted in midair. Another leans back, her mouth open in laughter. The serious-looking one who seems to be the leader....The mother rests her hand near her daughter's shoulder...."That's you," she says, nodding toward the trio. "Which one?" the girl asks. "All of them," Clarissa answers, smiling that igniting smile.

There's the girl with the lifted foot who can't decide if she's ready to step over the threshold into adulthood. There's the self that finds simple but exquisite pleasure in poetry, in her first love, and in interactions with her younger brother, Justin. And there's the serious Stephanie who fears that the thing she has always dreaded is actually happening: she is becoming "crazy" like her mother. These are the three Stephanies among which Liz Rosenberg's protagonist oscillates throughout this slim novel. But for Stephanie, this indecisive, emotionally draining back-and-forth is more than just an attempt to answer the age-old question of adolescence: Who am I? It's a choice between accepting herself or being consumed by her own emptiness.

Written as a series of prose poems, *17* chronicles a teenager's trip into the underworld of her own psyche and back out again. Rosenberg is deft with language, relying both on her words and on their sparseness to communicate mood and meaning. While the poems work together as a whole, each one also has an individual presence in the novel, creating a photo album effect: the reader is given a series of snapshots of Stephanie's thoughts, actions, and interactions. The result is a well-conceived, thoroughly developed protagonist and a compelling exploration of that character.

Also effective is the third-person omniscient narrator whose strikingly detached tone adds to the novel's intensity by mirroring Stephanie's own growing alienation. The detachment paradoxically adds an element of hope to the story, as though the narrator is refusing to join Stephanie in her emotional abyss and is waiting, instead, for her to emerge.

And emerge she does. Tentatively at first, and with trepidation. But the end of the novel finds Stephanie on her way back to where she belongs. "Finally...she starts eating the popcorn by the handful, just like everybody else, as if she's been doing it all her life,"

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Rosenberg writes. "As if she's always belonged in the land of the living."

—Jenny Sawyer

The Shrouding Woman

By Loretta Ellsworth

HENRY HOLT

151 pages, Ages 9–12, $16.95

ISBN 0-8050-6651-9

Prior to the late 1800s and the establishment of funeral homes after the Civil War, the task of preparing the dead for burial belonged to a respected member of the community known as a shrouding woman. The shrouding woman would "lay the body out," prepare it for viewing by cleansing, scenting, and dressing it, and sit overnight with it prior to a funeral, so as not to leave the dead unattended.

In this tender story by first time novelist Loretta Ellsworth, the shrouding woman in eleven-year-old Evie's life is Aunt Flo, her father's sister, who comes from the West to their small town of Caledonia, Minnesota, to care for the family following the death of Evie's mother. Still bitterly grieving for her mother, Evie makes every effort to be as unwelcoming as possible to this woman, despite Aunt Flo's kindness to her. Evie is further aggravated by her five-year-old sister's acceptance of this stranger: "How could Mae act so happy? Had she already forgotten the delicious taste of Mama's johnnycake or how Mama nursed her back to health after she ate some wild yellow sweet peas and became sick?"

Evie also struggles with her aunt's role as a shrouding woman, a profession she finds strange and troubling. Evie believes that a small wooden box, kept tucked under her aunt's bed, holds the secret to the unsettling tasks she performs. And if, as Aunt Flo explains, the art of shrouding is passed through the generations, Evie wonders whether she too will be expected to become a shrouding woman. As the story unfolds, Evie grows closer to Aunt Flo in spite of herself. She accompanies her aunt on a shrouding and realizes the beauty and dignity of the work the woman does for a grieving family (and, in many ways, has been doing for Evie's family all along).

While some elements of Ellsworth's novel are familiar—a youngster coping with the loss of a parent, the anger and sadness that ensue—Evie's opportunity to confront the physical circumstances surrounding death lends the story unusual depth. The shrouding scenes are described tastefully, while being true to the historical nature of the shrouding woman's work. On an occasion when Aunt Flo is called away, Evie performs a shrouding by herself, preparing a three-year-old girl for burial: "When I was finished, I looked down at her. I didn't fight the tears that filled my eyes."

The Shrouding Woman is a gentle story that gives a voice to women in our country's history who honored life and loss with respect and compassion.

—Julie Pfitzinger

Soul Moon Soup

By Lindsay Lee Johnson

FRONT STREET

134 pages, Age 12 and up, $15.95

ISBN 1-886910-87-1

Phoebe Rose has never had an easy life, but it suddenly gets much more difficult when her father disappears and the disabled van in which she and her mother have been living is towed away. Mama loses her cleaning jobs because she has to take Phoebe with her, she can't get another job because she has no address, and she can't get an apartment because she has no job.

Phoebe and her mother are caught in the vicious cycle of urban poverty. Now they are truly homeless, and life is a constant search—for change left in a telephone, for someone's lost glove or discarded food, for a bed in a shelter, which is not always available. The only stable element in Phoebe's life is the suitcase that Mama insists on carrying with them. Mama is none too stable herself. She cruelly crushes Phoebe's artistic nature and withholds love, so that Phoebe is never sure of where she stands. Finally, when the suitcase is stolen from Phoebe, Mama snaps and Phoebe finds herself on her way to Full Moon Lake to stay with the grandmother she does not know.

Once she's at the lake, Phoebe slowly lets go of her anger, fear, and despair, healing herself with the peaceful atmosphere, with good food, and with friendship. Gram's stories partially explain Mama's erratic behavior, and Ruby, a neighbor just a little older than Phoebe, becomes the big sister she has longed for, a soul mate whose own artistic talent allows Ruby to realize that her art, derided by her mother as doodles, is her way of exploring and expressing important truths.

Phoebe's voice rings basically true throughout the story. The free-verse narration is filled with rich images, revealing her artist's eye and an intriguing mix of childlike fears and increasingly adult insights. We watch Phoebe grow in her understanding of herself and others as the complicated tangles of two mother-daughter relationships are revealed, if not resolved.

—Lee Galda

The Talent Show

By Michelle Edwards

HARCOURT

64 pages, Ages 6–9, $14.00

ISBN 0-15-216403-0

This third installment in Michelle Edwards's Jackson Friends series offers up a slice of life in a contemporary magnet school through the eyes of a young African American girl named

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–*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"[T]he volume is a joy and would work well in a group setting...a visually interesting introduction to a performer about whom little is written for children."
–*School Library Journal*

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Howardina Geraldina Paulina Maxina Gardenia Smith. To her family and friends she's just Howie, which is a lot easier to say—and is also, in Howie's opinion, a good name for a movie star.

Howie's best friends, Pa Lia and Calliope, have each been the focus of an earlier Jackson Friends book (*Pa Lia's First Day* and *Zero Grandparents*). Now Howie gets center stage. The problem is, she has stage fright. Filled with excitement over singing in the Jackson School talent show, she is struck with fear and unable to make a sound at the practice performance the day of the show. How she gets her gumption back is the thoroughly believable—and suspenseful—story at the heart of this little book.

Though the world of school is the setting for *The Talent Show*, home provides an important counterpoint. Howie draws encouragement from her friends, but it is her loving grandmother and the familiar environment of her house, with its warm cooking smells, that give Howie comfort and then courage to give the performance another try. In a memorable scene, Howie gathers her resolve, puts on her parka, and goes out into the backyard, where she sings her piece, "Simple Gifts," to a squirrel, a crow, the fence—and her grandmother, who emerges in the doorway to listen and applaud.

Edwards provides a satisfying amount of texture in all three of her books about these young school friends. Each story is notable for honestly acknowledging children's anxieties without losing its essential good cheer. The black-and-white illustrations are warm and playful, and the multicultural cast of characters reflects the school environment Edwards tenderly describes.

—Martha Davis Beck

Tales from the Odyssey
The One-Eyed Giant
The Land of the Dead

Retold by Mary Pope Osborne
HYPERION
105 pages, Ages 8–11, $9.99 each
ISBN 078680770-9 (Book One)
ISBN 078680771-7 (Book Two)

Gods and goddesses. A one-eyed giant. An evil enchantress. Mary Pope Osborne brings together these elements and more to retell Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* in clear, compelling prose accessible to middle-grade readers.

Books One and Two—*The One-Eyed Giant* and *The Land of the Dead* —set the stage for Odysseus's long journey home from the Trojan War and find him battling a cyclops, asking favors of the wrathful gods, and traveling to the underworld to receive the advice of a blind prophet. Along the way, he must confront fate, watch as his crew is slowly destroyed, and suffer terribly as he longs for home, his wife, and his young son.

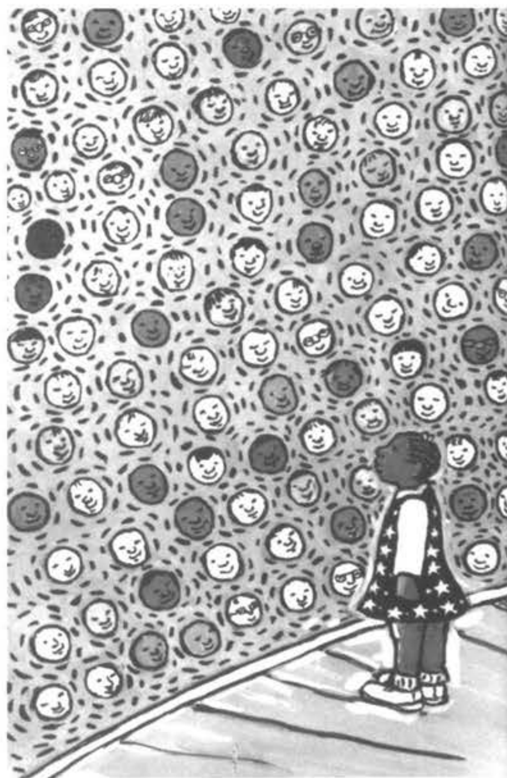

Illustration by Michelle Edwards, from The Talent Show

Osborne is a skilled storyteller, best known as the author of the popular Magic Tree House series. She relates Odysseus's adventures and misadventures in simple, straightforward language, at the same time engaging the reader with a fast-paced, suspenseful narrative. Well-placed chapter breaks and creative chapter headings add to the books' readability and appeal.

The first two volumes of the series have enough battle and bloodshed to satisfy those with a taste for guts and glory. For readers less interested in exploits of war, Homer's story has other strands that are developed in satisfying ways. Odysseus's longing for home is pushed to the foreground of both tales, and Osborne uses this element of his character to shape a convincing protagonist. The other characters serve mainly as foils for Odysseus, who emerges readily as leader and hero. The final section of each book offers information about Homer, an overview of major mythological figures, and a note on sources. The supporting details enhance the stories without feeling blatantly didactic.

—Jenny Sawyer

Together Apart

By Dianne E. Gray
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
193 pages, Age 10 and up, $16.00
ISBN 0-618-18721-9

A richly detailed Midwestern setting and interesting, engaging characters mark Dianne Gray's second novel, *Together Apart*, just as they did her first, *Holding Up the Earth*. In the summer after the deadly blizzard of 1888, fifteen-year-old Isaac runs from his abusive stepfather to the temporary haven of a job working for the widow Eliza

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Moore, an early suffragist and the town eccentric in Prairie Hill, Nebraska. At the same time, fourteen-year-old Hannah, seeking to escape her father's withdrawal and the sorrow that has permeated her family's sod house since two of her younger brothers died in the blizzard, arrives at Eliza's doorstep seeking the same job. Eliza takes them both in, and they help her print the *Women's Gazette* and establish a "resting room" where farm women can wait comfortably while their husbands do their business, or their drinking, in town.

Isaac and Hannah alternate as narrators of their own—and each other's—stories. As we learn about each of them, we also learn of their ordeal during the blizzard, how they saved each other's lives, and their growing fondness for one another. The development of their tender love stands in stark contrast to the harshness of both the landscape and pioneer life on the prairie.

Gray draws her background characters with broad brush strokes. Hannah's father is taciturn and withdrawn, unable to show affection, always working. Hannah's mother loves her, but is busy with farm life and her six other children. Isaac's mother, destitute after the death of his father, remarries in haste and suffers from the repression exerted by both her husband and the property laws of that time. Dru, who becomes Hannah's best friend, is the warmhearted, spunky daughter of the town busybody, a woman whose self-important attitude clouds her judgment. Eliza Moore, who provides an opportunity for Isaac and Hannah to grow and move on, is representative of those strong women who began the fight for equality that continues today. A vivid setting, two well-developed protagonists, interesting background characters, and a gentle love story make *Together Apart* a pleasure to read.

—*Lee Galda*

Nonfiction

The Adventurous Chef: Alexis Soyer
By Ann Arnold
FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX
40 pages, Ages 5–8, $17.00
ISBN 0-374-31665-1

In this era of celebrity chefs, it's a treat to learn about one from long ago who was as flamboyant as anyone on today's Food Network, but who used his culinary talents in the service of the poor, the rich, and those in between. "I will help everyone to eat well," nineteenth-century French chef Alexis Soyer reportedly declared. According to this impeccably designed and illustrated picture-book biography, he did just that.

As Ann Arnold tells it, arrogance and the love of a challenge, in addition to a big heart, drove Soyer to take time away from his duties at London's exclusive Reform Club to design soup kitchens. An inventor by nature, Soyer excelled at figuring out how to make the best food for the greatest number of people. His portable stoves helped provide soup for the masses in Dublin during the potato famine, as well as for British soldiers at war in the Crimea in the 1850s. It seemed that whatever food-related problem existed on the Crimean battlefields—poorly cooked meat, ill-tasting tea, unsavory vegetables—Soyer could come up with an invention or new procedure to fix it. Even non-food-related problems apparently didn't give him pause. He designed such oddities as the "Presto-Change-O Suit," an outfit "that changed from daytime to evening wear with the pull of a string," and when the grass at the site for an outdoor dinner party was dry and brown, Soyer advised his helpers, "Paint it green!"

Arnold's refined watercolor-and-ink artwork nicely fleshes out the text and gives a strong feel for the time period. Although she doesn't devote many words to describing the feasts Soyer cooked for aristocrats and military men, her pictures reveal mouthwatering dishes laid out on elaborately decorated platters. One ambitious double-page spread shows a detailed map of the Reform Club kitchens, which look to be about the size of a football field, or at least several times larger than any modern restaurant kitchen.

Illustration by Ann Arnold, from The Adventurous Chef: Alexis Soyer

Soyer contracted Crimean fever, as did his friend and colleague Florence Nightingale, and, though he recovered, his health was delicate from then on. Still, his passion for his work remained unbroken. Not long before his death in 1858, he cooked a delicious meal for three hundred, using only army rations for ingredients. Time and again throughout his life he demonstrated that good food is everyone's right, not a luxury for the wealthy.

—*Renée Victor*

Confucius:
The Golden Rule
By Russell Freedman
Illustrated by Frédéric Clément
ARTHUR A. LEVINE/SCHOLASTIC
48 pages, Ages 8–12, $15.95
ISBN 0-439-13957-0

Every September 28, people gather in the Chinese city of Qufu, in Shandong Province, to celebrate the birthday of Confucius, who shared his philosophies with students and government officials alike. In 2000, Newbery Medalist Russell Freedman (*Lincoln: A Photobiography*) took part in this celebration, honoring the venerable man's 2,551st birthday while researching this informative and restrained volume. Freedman puts Chinese history in clear perspective while arguing that Confucius was a more respectable scholar and controversial public figure than fortune cookies lead us to believe.

Before the violent Qin Dynasty founded the Chinese empire in 221 B.C., Qufu was the thriving capital of the independent state of Lu. Confucius was born to a poor family in Lu, in about 551 B.C. His original name was Kong Qiu, and his devoted pupils called him "Kongfuzi" or "Master Kong." "He has been described as a homely giant with warts on his nose, two long front teeth that protruded over his lower lip, and a wispy beard," Freedman writes, then adds that Confucius had "undeniable charm" and intelligence that led to his success as a police commissioner. Confucius was not content maintaining the status quo, however, and he argued for a populist, merit-based government as opposed to inflexible monarchical rule.

Freedman establishes that Confucius believed in equality and welcomed youthful students from all social classes. Yet while he calls Confucius's adherents "disciples," he writes that Confucianism is not a religion. He draws a parallel between Confucius's secular doctrine ("Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself") and the Christian Golden Rule ("In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you"). This helps readers account for Confucius's Latin name, given by Jesuit missionaries who read his teachings during the sixteenth century: "A large number of European philosophers, statesmen, and writers discovered...that more than 2,000 years earlier, in the 'mysterious Orient,' a Chinese sage had been thinking some of the same thoughts they were thinking," Freedman writes, noting that Confucius's progressive ideals have been reinterpreted (and sometimes misinterpreted) all over the world.

Frédéric Clément (*The Merchant of Marvels and the Peddler of Dreams*) complements Freedman's lucid text with stylized ink drawings of Chinese settings. These drawings, which appear to be discolored with age and flaking at the edges, resemble illuminated pages from a crumbling manuscript. Clément sprinkles the images with flower buds, berries, and peppers that suggest the ephemeral quality of time. Acknowledging Confucius's unusual appearance, Clément depicts him with two rabbity but not comical front teeth. The two white rectangles become a recurrent motif throughout the illustrations: when Confucius sets off on a journey, two white sails drift along a river; when rival groups go to war, two white flags fly; and when Confucius sits in his garden, two white paper lamps hang side by side on a branch. These odd but reverential images pay homage to a philosopher whose influence is felt twenty-five centuries after his death.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

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Dr. Jenner and the Speckled Monster: The Search for the Smallpox Vaccine
By Albert Marrin
DUTTON
96 pages, Ages 9–12, $17.99
ISBN 0-525-46922-2

Who would guess that the common cold originated in horses? Or that the first case of flu most likely occurred in a pig or a duck? That animals are the origin of familiar human diseases is just a sample of the amazing information found in this engrossing medical history, which profiles the most feared virus of all time and the English surgeon who, in the late 1700s, took a crucial step toward eradicating it.

Smallpox has been in the news lately as a horrific potential weapon for terrorists. Albert Marrin points out that, in fact, it was unwittingly spread in war centuries ago, when Europeans carried the disease with them into battle against the Aztecs and other native tribes. With the help of striking archival illustrations, Marrin conveys the almost inconceivable devastation wreaked by what was widely known as the Speckled Monster. He also gives readers a chilling picture of its former prevalence. Supposedly, any sixteenth-century European woman who did not have pockmarks on her face was considered beautiful.

Back then no one knew for sure how smallpox spread. (The smallpox, or variola, virus would not be viewed under a microscope until 1947.) As Marrin explains, "People blamed it on God's anger, poisonous gases seeping from the earth, and 'imbalances' in victims' body fluids." Knowing what scientists now understand about the complex nature of viruses, which Marrin lays out in precise, manageable detail, makes it all the more remarkable that an unknown individual in tenth-century China discovered a viable

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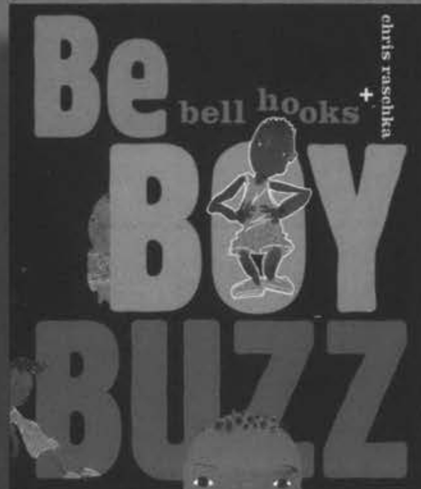

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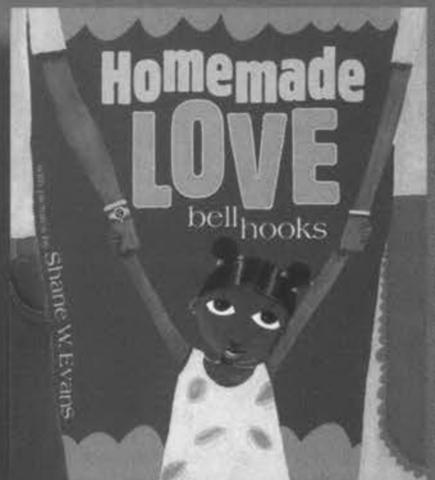

Illustration © 2002 by Shane W. Evans from *Homemade Love*

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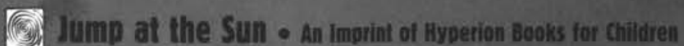

defense against them. This defense was the first inoculation, or instance of someone being deliberately given a mild case of smallpox in order to ensure future immunity to it. Dr. Jenner's achievement so many centuries later was to take this practice and figure out a way to make it even safer, creating the first vaccine.

Dr. Jenner and the Speckled Monster allows readers to track Jenner's fascinating progress toward his all-important medical breakthrough. "The annihilation of smallpox, the most dreadful scourge of the human species, must be the final result of this practice," Jenner declared. Eventually, in the 1970s, it was. While Marrin ends with the looming presence of smallpox vials still lying dormant in laboratory freezers, his book engenders more optimism than panic. The work of one man went a long way toward conquering a "monster" that killed millions. Who knows what future victories await?

–Renée Victor

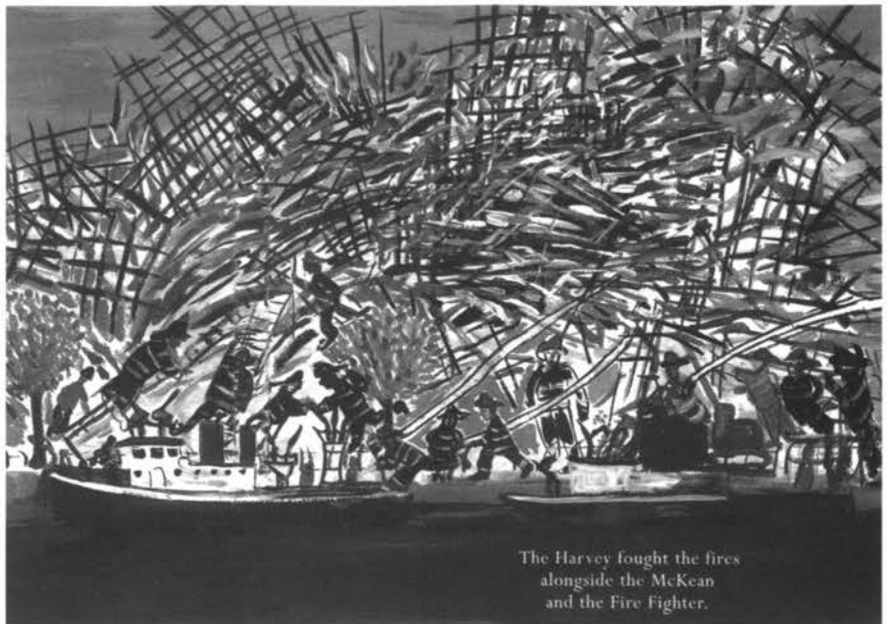

Illustration by Maira Kalman, from Fireboat

Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey

By Maira Kalman

Putnam

48 pages, Ages 4–8, $16.99

ISBN 0-399-23953-7

Riotous color forms the backdrop for the water-spraying boat on the cover of *Fireboat*. Do the intense magenta water and the deeply saturated orange sky inspire alarm or convey a cheerful appeal? Kalman brilliantly combines both moods in this masterful picture book, and offers young readers two distinct yet intertwined stories. *Fireboat* is the redemptive tale of a rescued and restored boat, and, when tragedy intrudes, it is a story about the quietly heroic crew members of the *John J. Harvey* and what they did to help when the Twin Towers fell on September 11, 2001.

The first part of this book, rendered in vivid oil paint, with playful graphics and a casual, upbeat text, is a joyful ode to New York City and its inhabitants. The author creates historical context for the launch of the fireboat *Harvey* by relating concurrent, kid-friendly events: "New York City. 1931. Amazing things were happening, big and small. Babe Ruth hit his 611th home run in Yankee Stadium. The tasty candy treat Snickers hit the stores."

Admiring attention is given to the well-made watercraft, its fascinating features, and its original crew, as well as the important jobs it performed as it trolled up and down the city's waterfront for so many years. Kalman also humorously divulges the less serious side of a fireboat: "Sometimes the *Harvey* just went out to shoot water in celebration."

The story makes a leap through time to 1995, when the deteriorating boat is set to be sold for scrap. A group of friends hear of the *Harvey*'s imminent destruction and band together to save the boat. Readers come right on board with the modern crew as they work through various repairs: in one picture, the assistant engineer confidently turns to look at us from her post at the control panels, as if to welcome the landlubbers. All goes swimmingly for the proudly relaunched *Harvey*, despite the admission (and ironic foreshadowing) that "she could never be used to fight a fire."

In grim, fitting contrast to Kalman's striking palette of bright color and energetic brush stroke, a flat, dark gray page is an abrupt warning of what's to come. For adults who have seen, too many times, the videos and photos of the September 11 calamity, or for children who may never have gotten a visual sense of the events, Kalman's interpretation is simple and stunning: a clear blue sky, two tall white towers, and two black jets heading toward them. Kalman insists on finding the human scale in this tragedy—she offers portraits of various helpers in New York, and even shows what each of the *Harvey* crew members was doing when the planes hit. Needless to say, The *John J. Harvey* and its crew spring into action on the waterfront, fighting the towers' fires alongside other boats. *Fireboat* confronts a harsh reality, but ultimate-

ly it soothes and uplifts, through the story of ordinary people working together: "Everyone on the boat had never seen anything so terrible. And they had never felt so proud."

—*Christine Alfano*

If the World Were a Village: A Book about the World's People
By David J. Smith
Illustrated by Shelagh Armstrong
Kids Can Press
32 pages, Age 8 and up, $15.95
ISBN 1-55074-779-7

Well-organized numerical data can help us understand the world we live in. David J. Smith invites us to imagine the people of the world (all 6.2 billion of us) as a village of 100 inhabitants, each of whom represents 62 million people. In this village, seventy-six of the villagers have electricity, ten are children under age five, and six are Buddhists. There are fifteen pigs in the village, three camels, and 189 chickens. The author, an experienced educator, is known for his geography curriculum, "Mapping the World by Heart," which engages students and teachers in drawing world maps from memory. His goal is to foster what he calls "world-mindedness," an approach to life that reflects awareness of people, cultures, and countries around the globe.

This book is a series of two-page spreads on a variety of topics, including "Nationalities" (of the 100 people in the village, twenty-one are from China, seventeen from India, five from the United States), "Air and water" (seventy-five people have easy access to safe water), and "Schooling and literacy" (of the eighty-eight people who are old enough to read, seventy-one can read at least a little). Each category is illustrated with a bold painting. Shelagh Armstrong's panoramic compositions feature strong black outlines, simple shapes, bright colors, and limited shading, incorporating a measure of abstraction into her realistic rendering of this imaginary place.

Each reader is likely to find particular facts especially surprising or essential. Only twenty-four villagers always have enough to eat, and sixty are always hungry. Because of pollution, thirty-two breathe air that is unhealthy. There are fourteen telephones in the village. The population will double within fifty years. Smith includes a number of essential details that expand on the information conveyed through

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this simple format. For example, of the seventy-six who have electricity, "most use it only for light at night."

Some information about the world's people resists being presented in the format of a small imagined community. For example, in this village of 100, there are 6,000 languages. The villagers experience different levels of air quality. One person is Jewish. When the village metaphor is strained, the reader is left reading lists of percentages. While the book is vibrant and appealing, it takes the form of a traditional picture book, lacking the sophisticated visual design elements that might help readers get a better understanding of the statistics it presents.

The list of sources includes government documents and publications of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the Worldwatch Institute, as well as reference books like almanacs and atlases. In a section titled "Teaching children about the global village," Smith suggests an array of activities to encourage world-mindedness—and reminds us that this worthy book is part of a larger exploration. In addition to facts, he says, we need "a way of looking at the world that tells the story truthfully."

—Susan Marie Swanson

Life on Earth: The Story of Evolution

By Steve Jenkins

Houghton Mifflin

40 pages, Ages 6–10, $16.00

ISBN 0-618-16476-6

Intricate paper collages of animals and plants set against fields of clean white illustrate this condensed account of the earth's history. Where typical science volumes make use of subheadings, sidebars, and naturalistic landscapes crowded with megafauna, this effort floats concise sentences in an airy layout.

Steve Jenkins, whose *Slap, Squeak, and Scatter: How Animals Communicate* likewise balances information and uncluttered visuals, opens the volume with an array of flora and fauna, all "descendants of simple, single-celled organisms that lived more than 3 1/2 billion years ago." They include a magnified flea, a small-scale black rhinoceros and ostrich, the pink-tailed skink of Mexico, and extinct creatures like the seagoing *Basilosaurus* and the *Macrauchenia*, a long-nosed land mammal. Later, Jenkins meticulously assembles nineteen beetles from minuscule snips of watercolored, marbled, and handmade papers. The insects line up in neat rows, like specimens in a collection. He simulates frog eggs by sprinkling a cloudy, fibrous paper with black flecks and mimes a turtle's leathery skin with a creased gray-brown stock.

The crisp text offers an overview of how life forms developed and humans came to discover fossils and species, summarizes relevant time periods ("Dragonflies have been here for the past 250 million years"), and explains key terms like "natural selection."

Jenkins couples the instructional text with diverting, helpful illustrations. To define "variation," for instance, he creates a family tree indicating how a beige mouse and a gray one might produce variegated offspring. In particular, the author admirably distills Charles Darwin's findings on Galapagos finches. Profiles of four birds' heads show their different beaks, while Jenkins explains: "Darwin believed that small changes in the birds over many generations had resulted in fourteen different species, each with a beak adapted to a particular diet."

After noting the propitious conditions for these finches, and the "successful, long-lasting anatomical designs" that help the cockroach and the shark to

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flourish, Jenkins explains how organisms die out. He notes that "about twenty" mass extinctions have taken place in 1 billion years, then cautions that one is going on right now: "Because of human activity, the earth has lost hundreds of thousands of species in the last fifty years and may lose half of all the species alive now in the next hundred years." This apt, simply stated warning could make an impact. Yet, in picturing a stegosaurus, a woolly mammoth, and a dodo bird, Jenkins misses the chance to draw attention to feared-extinct and distressingly local creatures of the present, like the ivory-billed woodpecker currently being sought in Louisiana woodlands. Young readers could use such examples as a springboard for projects on evolution and extinction today.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Illustration by Robert Andrew Parker, from To Fly

To Fly:
The Story of the Wright Brothers
By Wendie Old
Illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker
CLARION
48 pages, Ages 8–12, $16.00
ISBN 0-618-13347-X

"Watching buzzards, / Flying kites, / Lazy, crazy boys / The Wrights." This opening stanza of a short poem, "Crazy Boys," is the preface to a new picture-book biography for middle readers about aviation pioneers Orville and Wilbur Wright. Crazy? In 1900, when they made their first flights in a two-winged glider on the Outer Banks of North Carolina near Kitty Hawk, they were considered to be just that by locals who found the brothers strange but entertaining. Lazy? For all the research, planning, and determination required to achieve their dreams of flight, the Wright brothers were clearly anything but lazy as they literally devoted their lives to realizing those "crazy" dreams.

The author's emphasis in this version of the Wright brothers' story is clearly on the veritable wind beneath their wings of invention: vision, perseverance, and camaraderie. From young Orville's "fiddling with pieces of wood at his desk instead of doing classwork" in second grade to his later reputation as the best kite builder in Dayton, Ohio, Wendie Old demonstrates how the brothers—whether they were operating a printing press or a bicycle shop—always kept their goal in sight. In one instance, Wilbur, who continually puzzled over how to approximate the flying techniques of birds, twisted a long rectangular box that had contained a bicycle inner tube. "All at once he realized what he was doing," the author writes. "The twisted box looked like a pair of bird's wings circling in the air. He ran to show Orville. If they could make the wings of a two-winged glider flex like this, they could control its flight!"

The book conveys a sense of the brothers' friendship and their working relationship. Prior to their historic flight at Kitty Hawk on December 17, 1903, one of the "surfmen," John Daniels, who rallied to assist Orville and Wilbur with the Flyer's launching, describes how the brothers stepped apart from the group to shake hands and held on to each other "sort o' like they hated to let go; like two folks parting who weren't sure they'd ever see each other again." In the epilogue, Old describes characteristics that helped the brothers to succeed: "It was [Wilbur's] idea to find out how to control flight in the air and create a practical airplane," and it was Orville's "optimistic attitude, his way of always looking on the bright side, that kept the two of them working on the Flyer despite the setbacks."

With a straightforward text, Old's use of detail in describing the brothers' experimentation and construction of the Flyer is easily accessible to the book's target audience. Anecdotes, such as Orville drinking seven glasses

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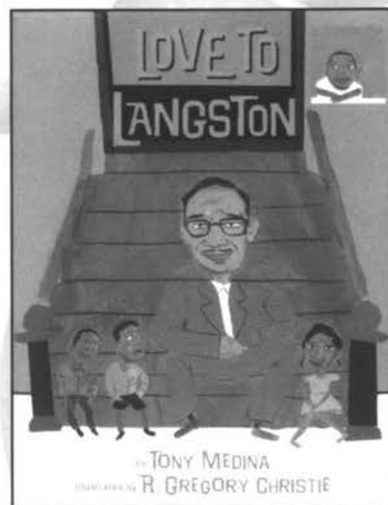

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of milk at one sitting after the successful Kitty Hawk flight, personalize the lives of the inventors.

The watercolor and pen-and-ink illustrations by Robert Andrew Parker are splendid. Many of the drawings are imbued with a subtle sense of whimsy, such as the illustration of the brothers' bicycle shop, in which a commotion of tires and spokes nearly dwarfs the two inventors. Parker's soft hues of peach and blue in the vast skies behind the Wrights' flying machines add a dreamlike quality to the story.

—*Julie Pfitzinger*

Illustration by Brian Selznick, from When Marian Sang

**When Marian Sang:
The True Recital of Marian Anderson
The Voice of a Century**

By Pam Muñoz Ryan
Illustrated by Brian Selznick
Scholastic
40 pages, Ages 6–10, $16.95
ISBN 0-439-26967-9

On Easter Sunday 1939, as millions of people listened on the radio, Marian Anderson sang to a crowd of 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial. The Daughters of the American Revolution had denied her permission to appear in Constitution Hall because of her race, prompting First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to resign from the DAR. The outdoor concert was an all-inclusive venue. In this stirring biography, readers learn how Anderson (1897–1993) became an internationally known performer of spirituals and arias, in a career extending long before and after her most famous gig.

Even as a child, Marian has a "distinct [voice]—strong and velvety and able to climb more than twenty-four notes," Pam Muñoz Ryan writes. In a three-spread sequence, the ten-year-old Anderson always occupies a central position on the right-hand page. Each time the page turns, we see the girl with her eyes softly closed, singing at home, with a friend, or among adults in the People's Chorus church choir (she "had to stand on a chair so those in the back could see the pride of South Philadelphia"). Brian Selznick's copper-and-mahogany-tinged portraits of Anderson and her fellow singers have a sculptural quality, as if the figures were molded in terra-cotta.

As Anderson strives to become a professional singer, Muñoz Ryan and Selznick matter-of-factly depict her experiences with racism. At eighteen, the young woman tries to enroll in voice lessons, only to be told, "We don't take colored!" She travels throughout the United States by train, "seated in the dirty and crowded Jim Crow car reserved for Negroes. When she arrived at her destination, she often sang the same program twice, to separate audiences—one white and one black—or to segregated groups, whites in the best seats and blacks in the balcony." Selznick's sepia-tinted illustration of a train station features a prominent "Colored Waiting Room" sign, under which Anderson calmly stands. Stanzas from spirituals like "Let My People Go" set the solemn mood for these episodes; an afterword calls Anderson "an uncomfortable activist" and, as if to convey the singer's modesty, Selznick never pictures her with her eyes open looking toward the reader.

Eventually Anderson finds a top-caliber voice coach ("Marian's devoted church community raised money for the lessons") and tours Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, and the United States from 1927 through the 1930s. Selznick frames her in a champagne-colored aura, gazing out at a clapping (white) audience, then offers a larger-than-life close-up of her face during the Lincoln Memorial concert. He creates the illusion that Anderson really is singing—with a subtle tension in her eyebrows, forehead, and pursed lips—and follows it with a wordless spread of a mixed-race crowd, quietly listening.

This triumphant account of Anderson's milestones lacks the crackling electricity of Ryan and Selznick's earlier *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride*. It takes a leisurely stroll through the singer's youth, then hastily compresses the years between 1939 and Anderson's 1955 performance at the Metropolitan Opera. Yet the formidable visuals and political undercurrent make this a must for anyone interested in civil rights and American history, and in allowing all voices to be heard.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

Poetry

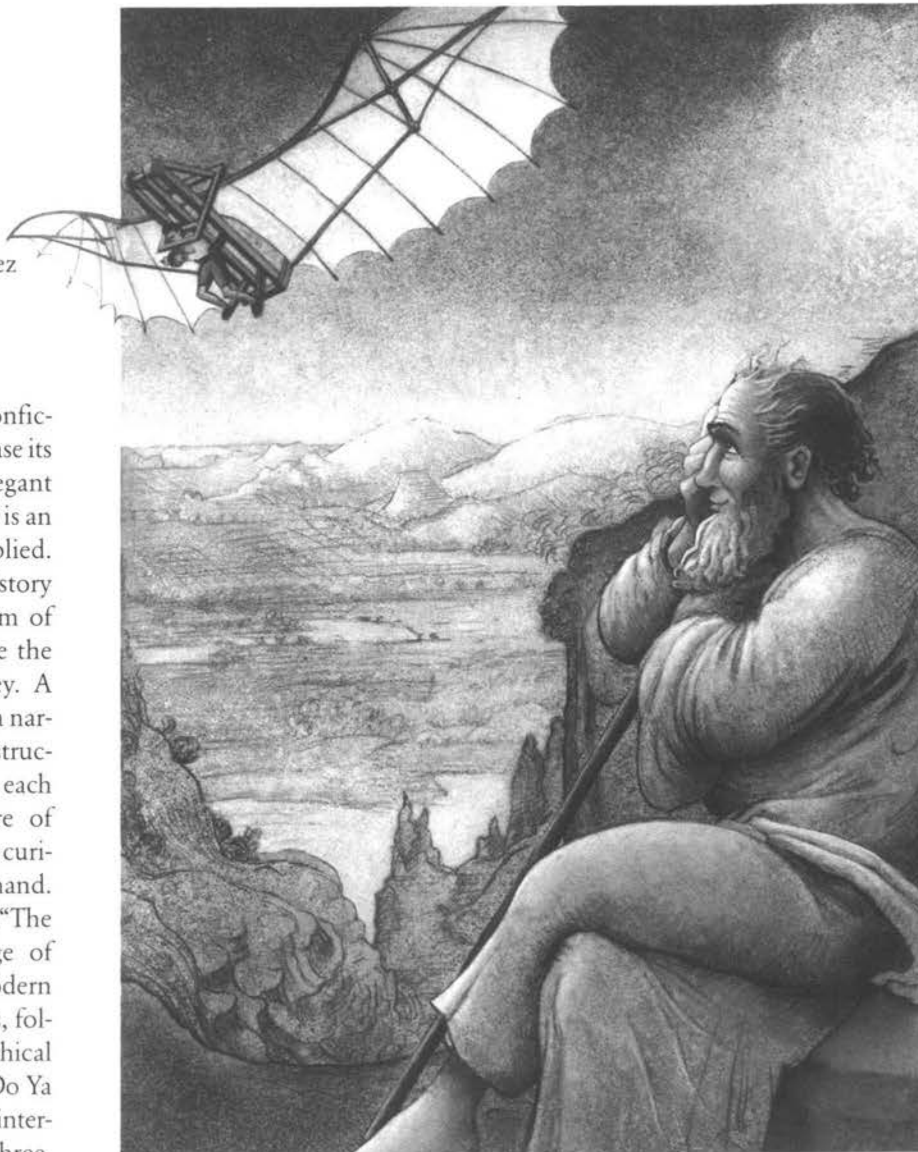

Illustration by K. Bennett Chavez, from Eureka!

Eureka!
Poems about Inventors

By Joyce Sidman
Illustrated by K. Bennett Chavez
MILLBROOK
48 pages, Ages 10–14, $24.90
ISBN 0-7613-1665-5

These days, authors approach nonfiction in many creative ways to increase its appeal to young readers. This elegant volume of poems about inventors is an example of that creativity well applied.

Authors of biography and history for children confront the problem of condensing and making palatable the information they wish to convey. A surplus of facts can easily burden a narrative. Joyce Sidman has wisely structured *Eureka!* in such a way that each poem claims a particular sphere of focus, but the broader context a curious reader might seek is close at hand. Each main section in the book ("The Tapestry of the Past," "The Age of Invention," and "Dawn of the Modern Age") offers a short series of poems, followed by a page of brief biographical entries. A humorous verse titled "Do Ya Know 'Em?" provides "a light interlude" between sections two and three, quizzing readers on inventors' names that have become household words associated with their inventions.

Each poem invites readers inside the head of an individual who, through imagining, laboring, investigating, testing, and persevering, in some way transformed the world for generations to come. Sidman's choice of inventors includes "big guns" like Johann Gutenberg, Leonardo da Vinci, and Marie Curie, but also some surprises. The book's opening poem invites readers to witness an anonymous woman picking berries by a river, as she notices the odd texture of the earth that has dried on her children's legs. The discovery of clay, its moldability and potential use to fashion vessels for carrying things, must indeed have revolutionized daily life for early humans. The joy and energy of this discovery are palpable in Sidman's poem:

> Suddenly she dives, breathless,
> toward the river and its mud,
> to seize the bright, dripping shape
> of an idea.

Invention springs from need, Sidman shows, whether that need originates in society (blindness and other health problems suffered by infants in the slums of New York City, addressed by the efforts of Dr. Sara Josephine Baker) or in the imagination of the inventor (Leonardo da Vinci's impulse to pocket "things of little value, / knowing I can create from them wonders / such as the world has never seen"). She celebrates discoveries in many spheres, including home (the first automatic dishwasher), science (radiation), engineering (machine self-lubrication), recreation (the Frisbee),

and modern communications (the World Wide Web).

A common trait of inventors seems to be a capacity to dream. Yet to make something new happen requires real-world trials, failures, and retrials—doggedness is as important as daring, practical plans as key as far-fetched schemes. Often, wild and fanciful experiments have paved the way for revolutionary change, as was the case with the French Montgolfier brothers' hot-air balloon stunts in the late eighteenth century. "Those Fabulous Frenchmen," a lovely poem that pays tribute to the potential import of what seemed, in its day, to be just a silly fad, ends with this observation:

> Balloons? They've gone the
> way of horses:
> cumbersome and rather rare,
> but they were first to lift us up
> into the bright, enchanted air.

—Martha Davis Beck

Outside the Lines: Poetry at Play
By Brad Burg
Illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon
PUTNAM
32 pages, Ages 4–8, $15.99
ISBN 0-399-23446-2

For anyone who considers poetry to be a sedate art, here are twenty-two poems that just won't sit still. The titles alone suggest motion—"Swing," "Slide," "Tag," "Rolling Downhill"—and the poems' ingenious positioning on pages bursting with dynamic, vibrantly colored illustrations keep the momentum going from cover to cover.

Part of the fun is figuring out where each poem begins. On a double-page spread of four poems about kites, for instance, the first lines appear down by the children flying the kites, with the verses following their strings upward into the "sky-blue sea." This effective tactic allows readers to experience the rush, after "running. And trying. And wishing," of finally getting the wind to cooperate. It's a little more challenging to discern the starting point of "Frisbee," where the words arc all the way around an expansive golden beach, growing smaller the farther away they sail. But here again the pattern invites readers into the action. Rebecca Gibbon doesn't need to show a Frisbee in her illustration because it's already there, riding the air currents, in each curving line of text.

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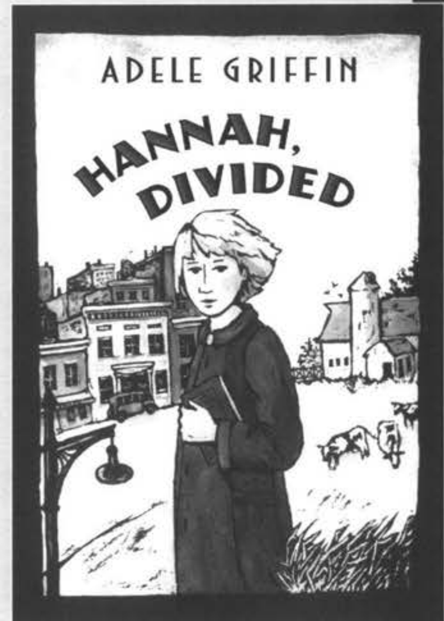

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HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Another kind of movement Brad Burg injects into his poems is the deft shift between different characters' perspectives. In "Softball," he succinctly voices the individual concerns of the batter and all nine players in the field:

Batting first! It
makes me proud.
(But does Dad have
to cheer so loud?)

The game in "Tag" dashes back and forth between participants; and "Jungle Gym" provides captions describing various children's approaches to a rocket-shaped structure, from Tommy, who's "leaning / way, way / out," to Samantha, who's "stretched out low and flat." Burg's language is consistently simple and accessible, infused with the childlike exhilaration of the moment at hand.

Outside the Lines is an enthusiastic celebration of play. Its energy is as hard to resist as the enticing red, gold, and orange mound in "Leaf Pile," which can't be ignored despite Dad's order to "keep things neat." The children try to hold back, but, as they say,

when we see
them piled up high, our legs tell us
it's time to
fly.

Likewise, Burg's poems make it impossible to stand off to the side and observe. Readers are compelled to jump in.

—*Renée Victor*

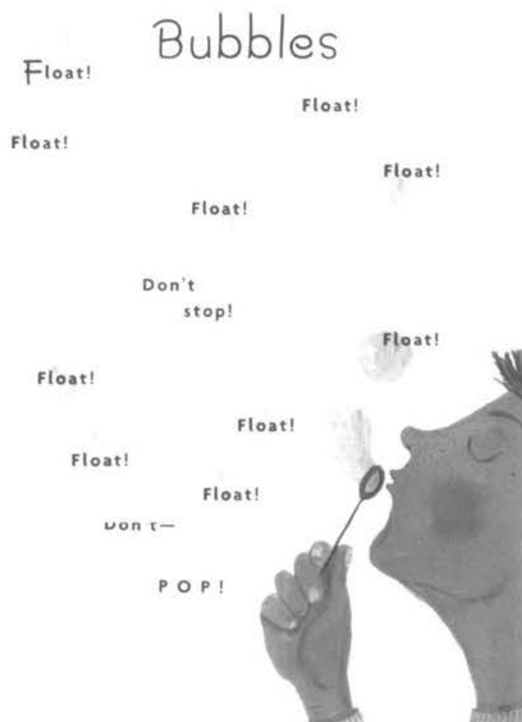

Illustration by Rebecca Gibbon, from Outside the Lines

**Seeing the Blue Between:
Advice and Inspiration
for Young Poets**
Compiled by Paul B. Janeczko
Candlewick
144 pages, Ages 10–15, $17.99
ISBN 0-7636-0881-5

Paul Janeczko's poetry anthologies are notable for their quality and their variety. He has explored themes (friendship in *Very Best [almost] Friends*) and forms (concrete poems in *A Poke in the I*). Some of his most intriguing projects are collections of poems and accompanying prose created especially to guide and encourage young writers. *The Place My Words Are Looking For* and *Poetry from A to Z* are now joined by *Seeing the Blue Between*, which presents thirty-two poets, offering a poem or two and a thoughtful letter of advice from each.

Most of the poets here will be familiar to readers of contemporary American poetry for children. While poets from other continents and poets who write for adults are peppered in, the substance of the soup comes from writers like Kristine O'Connell George, Nikki Grimes, Jack Prelutsky, Marilyn Singer, and Janet Wong. Janeczko explains in a short introduction that he generally advises young writers to "write a lot of poetry and read a lot of poetry," suggesting that this new book offers a third option: "listen to the advice of poets who have spent years practicing their craft."

Janeczko could be giving such advice on his own—he is a poet, after all, and an experienced teacher. His aim in *Seeing the Blue Between* is to give young people a taste of what it means to be aware of and open to writers who are making poems now. Read, revise, read your work aloud—that's what these mentors say. What makes this book special are the tones of encouragement in these many different voices, and their witness to the disciplined work, exploration, play, and study that go with writing good poems.

Thumbnail photos of the contributors appear at the back of the book, along with biographical notes, which sometimes pass up opportunities to list books by the authors that might especially appeal to readers of *Seeing the Blue Between*. X. J. Kennedy's *Knock at a Star* and George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm From* are not mentioned, for example, and books of prose by Jane Yolen are listed, but no poetry.

Still, this book offers good guidance for reading poetry. Ralph Fletcher's gentle account of the way he searches for the "mystery" in his subjects includes the story of how he came to write a poem about an old man with a metal detector whom he saw at the beach. When Douglas Florian jokes that "I used my poetic license so much I almost got it suspended!" he's having fun, but also reminding young readers that poets can play with words. Accompanying poems by both authors effectively reinforce their points.

—*Susan Marie Swanson*

Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems

By Kristine O'Connell George
Illustrated by Debbie Tilley
CLARION
80 pages, Ages 9–12, $14.00
ISBN 0-618-15250-4

Kristine O'Connell George can do more with a small handful of words than most any poet around. In her two books of haiku about Little Dog, something special happens on each page. Here she stretches out a bit, bringing her wit and perception to bear on a girl's first year of middle school. But there are plenty of opportunities in *Swimming Upstream* to admire George's command of her craft and her insights into young people's lives.

"Middle school" can mean a variety of things; this volume seems focused on the sixth grade. The girl whose voice the poems express is fiercely attached to her friends, smitten by a yearlong crush, and subject to the unavoidable ups and downs of the first year in a new school and the touchy transition from childhood into adolescence.

Friendship is a recurring theme, approached from different angles. On the first day of school, the narrator spots the familiar faces of friends from elementary school in an otherwise overwhelming crowd:

> Sumako got braces!
> Ryan is so much taller.
> Zach looks just the same.
>
> The warning bell rings,
> everyone scatters,
> each of us going
> our separate ways.

Connections have to be made and maintained more consciously at this age, and sometimes they fail. A friend who had difficulty learning things in elementary school is now "at the edge of a crowd, / looking more than lost." The narrator remembers helping this girl fit in and now realizes that their paths won't naturally cross:

> I'm going places
> Margo can't find.
> Margo. Margo
> falling farther
> and farther
> behind.

A happy counterweight comes in a reunion with a long-lost friend. Each girl recognizes something in the other, intact from early childhood, that brings forth questions:

> You had a frog umbrella?
>
> You could hang a spoon
> from your nose?

A poem titled "Gossip" deftly captures the chilly feeling of being talked about:

> Whispers,
> sly looks,
> notes slipped
> into books.
>
> I look away—
> don't need
> to see
> to know
> those notes
> are all
> about me.

The poems in *Swimming Upstream* relate to one another in satisfying ways; characters are established and developed across the book, and the narrator grows and becomes surer of herself as the year rolls along. Some of the poems examine her own experience; some reveal sensitive perceptions about others. In the school office, she overhears a conversation about "the boy who's so tough / the one who scares us so much," who, it turns out, "is coming to school hungry, / sleeping in the garage to hide / from his dad." In "Pole Song," the narrator observes a young boy standing with his ear next to the metal pole of a streetlight near the bus stop. When other kids laugh at him, she doesn't:

> I'm remembering the sharp smell
> of cold metal as he taps a nickel
> against the hollow pole, listening
> to what only he can hear—
> those long, old air songs
> as his tall steel bell rings
> with the secret music
> a metal pole sings.

The poems in *Swimming Upstream* are an encouragement to readers of all ages to continue to listen to that music.

—*Martha Davis Beck*

Reviewers in This Issue

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

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

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

Nathalie op de Beeck *is an assistant professor of children's literature at Illinois State University. Her reviews frequently appear in* Publishers Weekly *and other publications.*

Julie Pfitzinger *is a freelance writer who lives with her family in West St. Paul, Minnesota.*

Jessica Roeder'*s fiction appeared most recently in* The Threepenny Review.

Jenny Sawyer *is an editor and freelance writer living in Boston.*

Susan Marie Swanson *is a poet and picture-book author who works in school classrooms across Minnesota. She is a 2002 McKnight Fellow.*

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

one for the shelf

Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories
By Isaac Bashevis Singer
Translated from the Yiddish by the author and Elizabeth Shub
Illustrated by Maurice Sendak
HARPER 1966, HARPERCOLLINS REISSUE 1994
90 pages, ages 9–12, $15.95
ISBN 0-06-028477-3

Isaac Bashevis Singer is well acquainted with human folly. In this warm and wholly engaging collection of short tales for children, Singer writes almost exclusively about fools—as if the world were peopled with idiots.

"The Mixed-up Feet and the Silly Bridegroom" tells of four sisters who wake up one morning unable to get out of bed because their feet are intertwined, and they cannot tell which belong to whom. "Fool's Paradise" features a young man who wastes his days yearning for a glorious, carefree afterlife. Later, he is cunningly tricked into thinking he has died and gained entrance to a rather disappointing paradise. In "The First Schlemiel," Mr. Schlemiel, hailing from the schlemiel-filled town of Chelm, is given three easy-to-follow instructions and proceeds to louse up one after another. His dim-witted reasoning is both comical and confounding. But wait, here is a man who likes staying home while his wife works, taking naps, singing songs to the baby, satisfying his sweet tooth. His slothful tendencies sound more than a little appealing, and we laugh at his foibles with affectionate recognition, not derision. Singer's superb storytelling doesn't allow a cool distance from human predicaments. To read his stories is to be transported to a far-fetched, faraway place and to gradually recognize its inhabitants. Fools R Us.

Seven stories conjure Jewish village life in pre-World War I Poland as Singer leads us into shabby huts and elegant drawing rooms, into communities peopled with furriers, farmers, rabbis, and sometimes devils (who else is so adept at bringing out the fool in people?). No one stands beyond the author's wry imaginings: men and women, young and old, all are prone to behave in ridiculous, utterly human ways. Even the respected village elders, those wise men relied upon to untangle any kind of dilemma, are caught in Singer's tenderhearted net. They stroke their long white beards knowingly and declare that the sparkling moonlit snow, which looks just like diamonds and silver, is thus the answer to their economic woes. (Gathering these delicate riches proves to be troublesome.)

Potent love and regret for a lost way of life pulse just beneath the skin of these stories. When the book was published in 1966, Singer wrote in his foreword:

> I dedicate this book to the many children who had no chance to grow up because of stupid wars and cruel persecutions which devastated cities and destroyed innocent families. I hope that when the readers of these stories become men and women they will love not only their own children but all good children everywhere.

And it is children that Singer portrays most carefully and respectfully. This collection's most poignant story tells about a young boy named Aaron and his dear goat Zlateh. Poverty forces Aaron's family to sell the animal, and he is chosen to take her to the market. An awful blizzard forces them to seek shelter in the warmth of a huge haystack. Days pass. The goat happily chews on the hay, Aaron enjoys the gift of her rich milk, and all along they converse: Aaron tells stories to pass the time, or tries to make sense of what has happened, and his patient, attentive goat always answers "Maaa." Somehow Aaron discerns different meanings in Zlateh's bleatings. "Now she was saying, 'we must accept all that God gives us–heat, cold, hunger, satisfaction, light, and darkness.' " Is Aaron a fool for believing a goat could say such a thing? Or would we be the fools for only hearing "Maaa"?

—Christine Alfano

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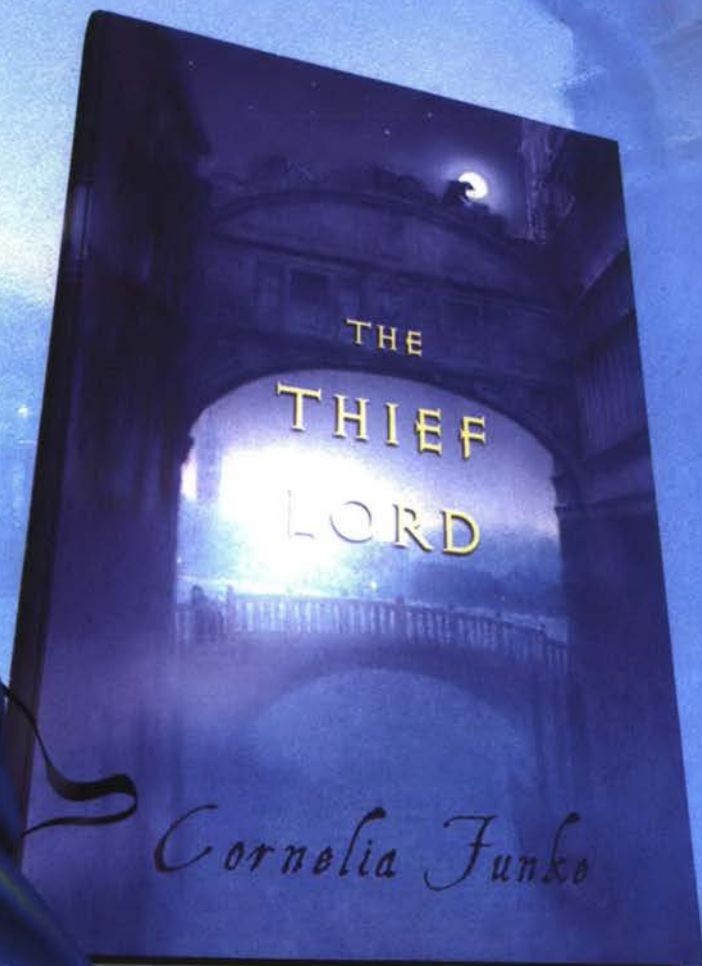
"Wacky characters bring energy to this translation of an entertaining German novel about thieving children, a disguise-obsessed detective, and a magical merry-go-round."
—Publishers Weekly



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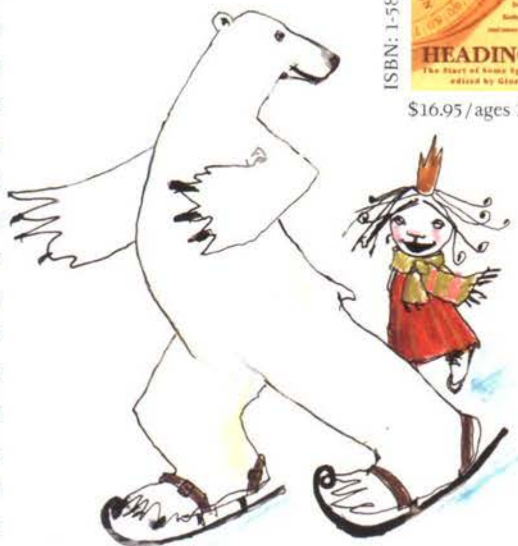

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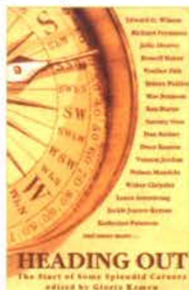

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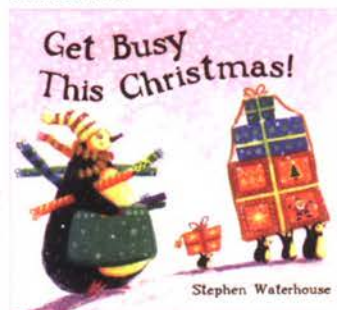

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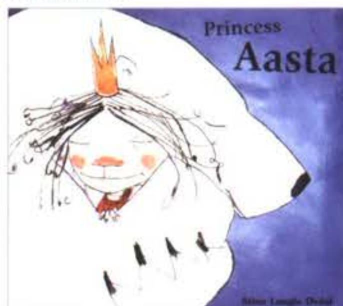

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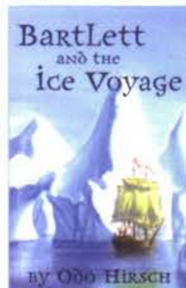

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