

AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCILLE CLIFTON



Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

Dinosaurs!

THE TEACHER'S ART:
A River of Words

**Russell
Freedman**
Writing History

**Ten Great
Easy Readers**

**Mary Pope
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Distant Journeys
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PLUS
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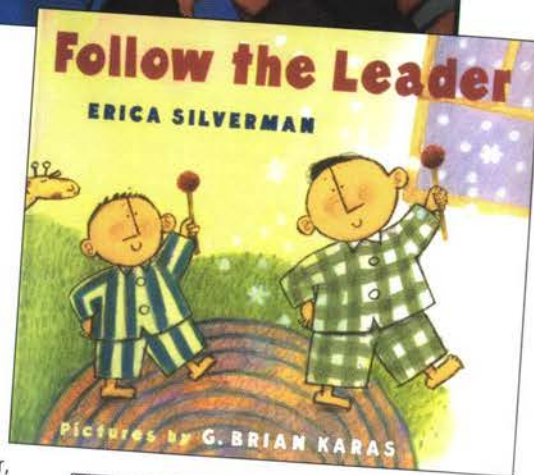
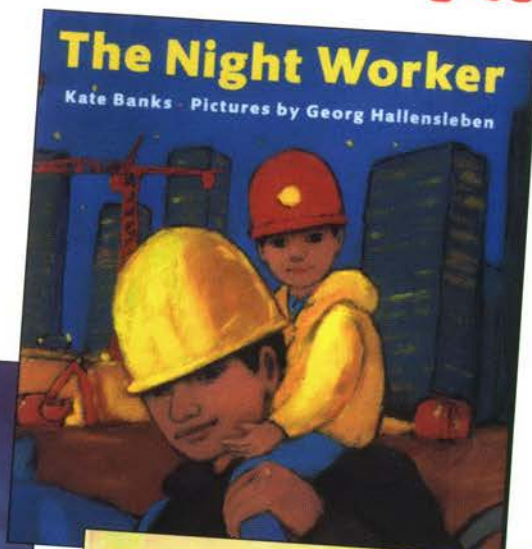


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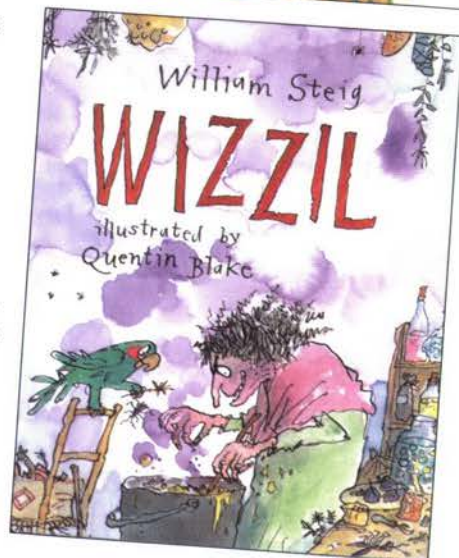
William Steig

Pictures by Quentin Blake

★ "Steig's language is utterly unfettered, with alliteration so thick you could spread it, and packed with savory words and phrases . . . In short, *Wizzil* is literary ambrosia. Blake's pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations, full of energy and humor and movement, are sublime."

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About the Cover Art

Of all my books, I have a special feeling for *Come Out, Muskrats*. It's set in Pickerel Cove, the small backwater near our barn, and it takes place just as the sun is going down... my favorite part of the day. The pictures I painted for that book remain among my very best. I wanted to make the underappreciated muskrats' watery world the most beautiful setting possible. It took me nearly five months to complete the art.

This cover illustration is adapted from one of my favorite pictures in *Come Out, Muskrats*. Only, for this rendition, I've added the trail of bubbles that give a muskrat's underwater progress away. When watching muskrats, you can see where a submerged swimmer is headed by watching for the line of bubbles its breathing out very lightly creates.

In my books, I try to bring the essence of a place and an animal to children. Whether I'm writing and illustrating about sharks and sea turtles in the tropical waters or muskrats in my own backyard, I am submerged in my subject matter for the entire work process. If I am successful, my readers feel as if they are right there with me as the sun goes down, and we whisper together, "Come out, muskrats... come out."

—*Jim Arnosky*

Jim Arnosky's books include the Crinkleroot guides (Simon & Schuster), the All About series (Scholastic), and Arnosky's Ark (National Geographic Society). He can be reached at www.jimarnosky.com.



A new *Young Spirit* book by

Peter Walpole



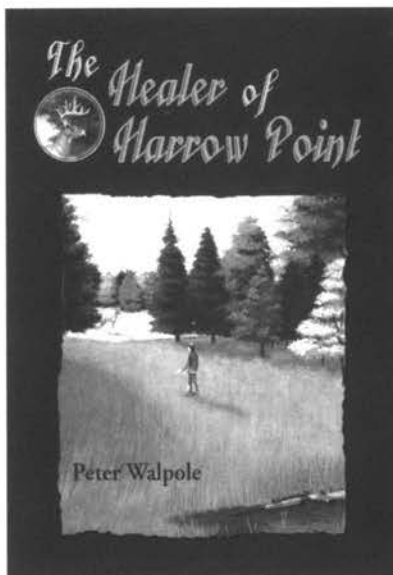
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editor's note

A picture book can shape the way a person looks at the world, not only as a child, but as the adult they become. *Time of Wonder*, by Robert McCloskey, was such a book for me. Twice the length of most picture books, it wouldn't hold the interest of every child—especially as it has another dubious attribute: not much happens in it. Not much, that is, by standard measures of plot. The season of summer arrives on the coast of Maine, and gradually moves toward its end. What “happens,” principally, is *weather*.

In the summer, I'm reminded how worthy of notice weather is. Spending a week on a lake on the Canadian border, my preferred activity is staring at the water and the sky, swimming, it seems, in both. When I first arrive, I notice the lake simply as *the lake*. But in the course of the days that unfold, I become attentive to its many moods. On a quiet morning, it's as dark and smooth as a mirror. That afternoon its waves sparkle like laughter. Sometimes an invisible breeze twirls above the water in patterns that gently mark its surface. On occasion it is wild and choppy, ribboned in gray—then, swimming is an adventure.

When I was a child, the excitements of the year included roaring waterfalls in spring, the thrilling flash and boom of summer storms, drifts of colorful leaves to run through in the fall, and of course, the first, silent snow. Of all the things that seemed bleak about adulthood, at the top of the list was this: how unengaged grown-ups seemed from these central dramas of the earth and sky.

It's no mystery how we *become* unengaged. Life's struggles—and routines—can exert a grip on the mind and senses. But the habit of paying attention to the natural world, even when it is available only in moments, or only through a window, can be learned, at any age, to wonderful effect. *Wherever* you are, “you can watch the time of the world go by, from minute to minute, hour to hour, from day to day, season to season.”

Time of Wonder is a love poem to the weather that reaches the islands in Maine's Penobscot Bay. Written in an intimate, second-person voice, the details it lovingly evokes are those that an attentive child would draw from the scene at hand. Two girls, based on McCloskey's own children, explore the world of their summer island home, focusing their attention on things small (ferns, hummingbirds) and large (the sea and the sky).

McCloskey's paintings are breathtaking. His depiction of

the rain approaching in a soft curtain across the bay amazed me as a child. I had never seen rain move like that, across water. Some time later, when I found myself at a storm-stopped picnic by the edge of a lake, I stood and pointed. “Look: it's just like *Time of Wonder!*”

Even simple occurrences described in a picture book can be new to a child. The picture-book artist's task is not only to create a sense of recognition but to offer up enough of the feeling of a thing that its importance or uniqueness comes through. The artist alerts children to something special that they may not already know about, helping them to recognize it as special when it does enter the sphere of their experience. Sometimes, a child's eyes haven't opened to the magic in an experience that she *does* know. In Taro Yashima's *Umbrella*, the sound of the rain on a child's umbrella makes a distinctive music: “bolo bolo ponpolo... boto boto ponpolo...” I often hear this when I'm out in the rain, thanks to Mr. Yashima.

Recently I traveled with my family to the Blue Hill peninsula on Penobscot Bay, a place I had never been. *Time of Wonder* helped to make me a person who loves wind, fog, starlight, and storms. It seemed time I visited the landscape its author loved and brought to life. While there, I had the eerie experience of recognizing the shapes and hues of the Camden Hills that faced me as they had faced the author and artist when he created this book (published, as it happens, the year I was born). But mostly my attention was caught by details different from those that graced the pages of McCloskey's picture book: lupines in roadside ditches; ospreys atop enormous “seastack” nests; fog that poured, one afternoon, as if from a pitcher, to fill the cove we stood in; the friendly twinkle of lights from the nearest island, at night. What we see is our own... but *how* we see—this is what artists like Robert McCloskey help us with.

—Martha Davis Beck

Acknowledgments



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Dinosaurs!

By John Caddy

Fifty-some years ago I gave my first-ever school report—on dinosaurs, of course. And it was multimedia: I used the new opaque-projector to show line drawings of dinosaurs painstakingly traced from H. G. Wells’s *Short History of the World*.

Today Amazon.com lists over 800 dinosaur books for children.

Apparently, we are insatiable. We have good reason: we have been swept away! The eighties saw the discovery of the Yucatán asteroid, which may have killed off the dinosaurs (and in any case gave us a glut of asteroid books and films). Since then, aided by *Jurassic Park*, we have been immersed in a swelling tide of dinosauria, Disney’s *Dinosaurs* this spring being just the latest cinematic entry in the field. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, American paleontologists have been welcome to hunt dinosaurs in Mongolia’s Gobi Desert for the first time since Roy Chapman Andrews’s famous expeditions in the 1920s. They found marvels. Velociraptor, for one. Also, final proof that dinosaurs brooded their eggs in nests, and actual fossilized dinosaur babies hatching from the egg—now available in fabric at Toys-R-Us. The tide has been driven by such frequent success in “new” dinosaur discoveries that a new something-osaurus is memorized almost weekly by faithful legions of children.

So much has changed in what we know about dinosaurs, and how we view them, that in 1989 Patricia Lauber’s *The News about Dinosaurs* (Bradbury) began a new generation of dinosaur

books in which agile, active dinosaurs are shown in vivid (if speculative) color; in which sauropods (huge plant eaters) moved easily on land and browsed treetops; in which dinosaurs are presented as social animals that lived in small groups and cared for their young. Learning about evolutionary relationships has been central to our recent dinosaur discoveries. Understanding that birds probably descended from one type of dinosaur requires a basic shift in our thinking about both.

All this news about a very different Earth-that-was has quickened our imaginations. The best dinosaur books, I believe, are those that most encourage the play of imagination. One telling illustration (by Gregory S. Paul) from *The News about Dinosaurs* shows a deinonychus (“terrible claw”) casually scratching the back of its neck with its

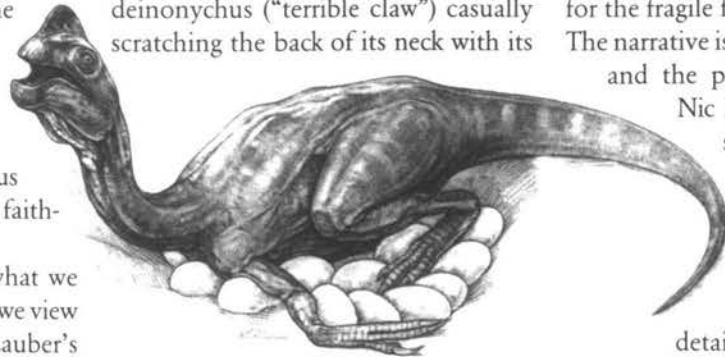


Illustration by Mick Ellison,
from *A Nest of Dinosaurs*

hind foot, like a dog or cat. Suddenly the terrible lizard has become a fleshly being like our itching-scratching selves.

Although this may be heresy, I suggest that memorizing dozens of Latin dinosaur names has little to do with exercising the imagination. This is not to say that there is no room for scientific method in dinosaur books. But the science should engage readers and enlarge understanding. For example, the process of field paleontology—digging fossils—is inherently interesting in a way that lists of names are not. A fossil dig is exploration, adventure travel, diversity training, camping out, and sweat and tears all in one. Two recent “dig” books worth checking out are Nic Bishop’s *Digging for Bird-Dinosaurs: An Expedition to Madagascar* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000) and Mark A. Norell and Lowell Dingus’s *A Nest of Dinosaurs: The Story of Oviraptor* (Doubleday, 1999).

Digging for Bird-Dinosaurs is an excellent in-depth presentation of one dig in Madagascar. It focuses on paleontologist Cathy Forster’s successful search for the fragile fossils of bird-dinosaurs. The narrative is consistently interesting and the photography, by author Nic Bishop, superb. One offshoot of the expedition is building a school for the local children who played soccer with the scientists in the evenings.

A Nest of Dinosaurs details one of the American Museum of Natural History’s recent expeditions to Mongolia, furthering

Roy Andrews's work of the twenties. Among other achievements, the authors rehabilitated the reputation of *Oviraptor* ("egg-plunderer"), which the Andrews expedition had found with a nest of dinosaur eggs, assuming it was eating them. In fact, it was brooding and guarding them as birds (and pythons) do today. Lucid text discusses their discoveries' implications for theories of the descent of birds from dinosaurs like *Oviraptor*. Small but strong color photos nicely augment the text throughout. Both these books refuse to stop with discovery: each follows the plaster-cast fossils back to the lab and details the exacting work of preparation required before study can begin.

I must also mention Dingus and Norell's earlier book, *Searching for Velociraptor* (HarperCollins, 1996), an excellent book about the authors' previous expedition to the Gobi Desert, where they discover the title dinosaur. It's currently out of print, but check your library.

Another must-read book in this genre is *Dinosaur Dig*, by Kathryn Lasky (William Morrow, 1990). This is still the best introduction to fossil digging for children. The book records a Montana dig on which five families, kids included, do the digging. It begins with the dreams and imaginings of the author's



Photograph by Christopher G. Knight, from *Dinosaur Dig*

two kids as the group prepares to travel to the site. Once there, they encounter it all: badlands and buttes, camping, nose-to-ground sniffing for fossils, bagging dirt and then sloshing it through sieves, and, of course, getting covered with plaster of paris. Great photographs and great text combine to make a real dig accessible to children. Unfortunately, this one, too, is out of print.

The last dig book I'll mention is *Dinosaur Ghosts: The Mystery of Coelophysis* (Dial, 1997), by J. Lynette Gillette and Douglas Henderson. This book is both a good mystery story and an exploration of the scientific process. Gillette and Henderson create a wonderful series of plausible scenarios to explain the sudden deaths of hundreds of small *Coelophysis* dinosaurs in a chunk of riverbed 225 million years

ago. The authors bring ancient New Mexico to life for us—Henderson's paintings are stunning—and they show the reader how scientific hypotheses are developed and tested in a series of mind-experiments. I highly recommend this book.

Outside and Inside Dinosaurs, by Sandra Markle (Atheneum, 2000), shows how scientists combine new technologies and fossil evidence to solve dinosaur mysteries. By using scanning X rays and computer modeling, scientists

infer that a long-crested *Parasaurolophus* probably used its bony crest as a bugle, to communicate with sound. Using the electron microscope, scientists have found possible blood chemicals in a T-rex bone. Photos of dinosaur fossils introduce a sequence of questions that demonstrate the process of hypothesis testing, teach about lab research, and provide new information.

A different genre of dinosaur book is the lavishly illustrated large-format survey. Two new releases illuminate the pleasures and the perils of this formula.

Amazing Dinosaurs: The Fiercest, the Tallest, the Toughest, the Smallest, by Dougal Dixon (Boyd's Mills Press, 2000), compiles a lot of visual information and presents it well. He groups the dinosaurs not by the title's adjectives, happily, but by family affiliation. Too

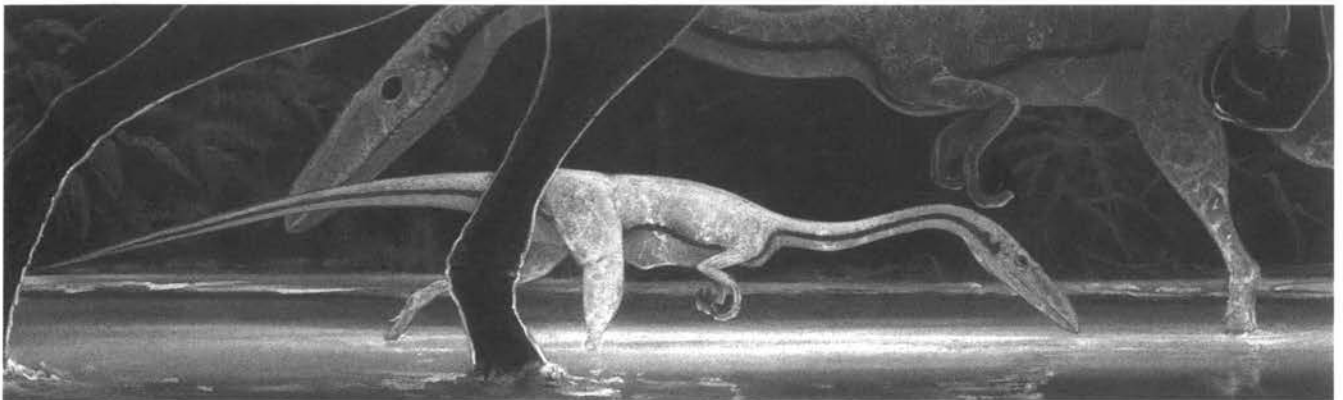


Illustration by Douglas Henderson, from *Dinosaur Ghosts*

many illustrations lack a context, the animal simply plunked on a white background. But some are excellent and informative, such as “Inside a Giant,” a cutaway view of *Seismosaurus*’s bone structure, muscles, and organs. All in all this is a fine book that begs to be browsed.

Dinosaurs! The Biggest, Baddest, Strangest, Fastest, by Howard Zimmerman (Atheneum, 2000), at first glance seems much like Dixon’s, but as I looked more carefully at the profusion of melodramatic illustrations, I was reminded of old *Field & Stream* illustrations that always showed grizzly bears standing, arms and claws extended, every tooth showing as it silently roared. As any careful observer of nature knows, animals of any sort spend most of their time at rest, neither attacking prey nor being attacked. (At any rate, grizzlies live largely on bugs and berries.) On the upside, the illustrations in *Dinosaurs!* have full, often striking backgrounds and showcase the work of a dozen illustrators. Often depictions of a species by more than one artist are shown on the same page. The differences in appearance give readers a lesson in interpretation, and let us recognize how much in dinosaur portrayals is speculation.

I said above that the best dinosaur books may be those which most encourage the play of imagination. Three new picture books for the younger set are fine examples: *Dinosaur!* by Peter Sís (Greenwillow), *The Most Amazing Dinosaur* by James Stevenson (Greenwillow), and *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague (Blue Sky Press).

The child’s imagination is the subject of Sís’s wordless *Dinosaur!* It begins with a boy in the tub with his toy tyrannosaurus. Suddenly toothy snouts appear, and soon enormous thunder lizards are

everywhere. A foldout near the end shows a whole panoply of realistic dinosaurs in a Mesozoic setting, as our hero watches from a pool. Then we’re back in the bathroom. Mom rushes in with a towel as the last dinosaur disappears stage left. An altogether wonderful excursion.

In Stevenson’s *The Most Amazing Dinosaur*, Wilfred the rat escapes a snowstorm and finds shelter and new

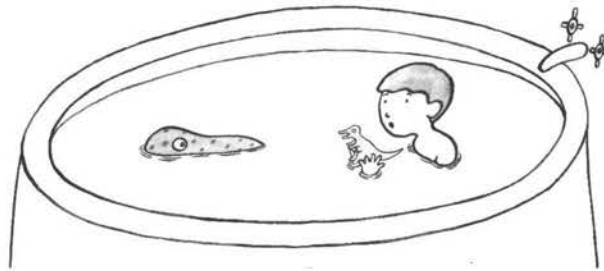


Illustration by Peter Sís, from *Dinosaur!*

friends in the American Museum of Natural History. Wilfred and his new urban-wildlife friends, Harry the snail, Buxton the skunk, and Prichett the owl, explore the museum and have many adventures and one large misadventure when they knock down a large allosaurus. Whimsical watercolors portray the museum behind the scenes to excellent effect. After the friends reassemble the bones of the tumbled skeleton into a wonderfully balletic pose, Wilfred is off to another adventure, with Harry the snail in his pocket.

How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night? is one of those picture books we cherish because it holds up a mirror. Children will recognize themselves as dinosaurs from ankylosaur to T-rex employ every possible strategy to avoid surrender to the awful moment of going to bed.

The imagination is the key to the last two books I’ll discuss: *Living with Dinosaurs*, by Patricia Lauber and Douglas Henderson (Bradbury, 1991), and Henderson’s new solo release, *Asteroid Impact* (Dial, 2000).

Living with Dinosaurs is itself almost

a fossil in publishing terms, but—Good news! It has just been reissued. It is still, I think, the most evocative dinosaur book around. It gives me the same rush of excitement that I felt when I first saw the Field Museum’s dioramas of Mesozoic Earth. Lauber’s text and Henderson’s paintings evoke the ancient ecology of North America toward the end of the Age of Dinosaurs. As this book shows us the wide variety of creatures who shared the earth with dinosaurs, it brings to life a world of ocean in the present Great Plains, great swamp forests now become coal... another Earth, but still our own. Henderson’s paintings are entirely convincing landscapes filled with daily scenes of Cretaceous reptile life.

Douglas Henderson is our premier dinosaur artist, and in *Asteroid Impact* he turns his brush to the “iridium layer” asteroid strike in the Gulf of Mexico that may well have led to the extinction of the dinosaurs as well as the sea’s plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs, and the pteranodons of the sky—almost all the large reptile fauna of the Mesozoic Era. While the asteroid theory of extinction is still debated, there is no debating that the asteroid did affect Earth. It is a subject that allows for exquisite visual speculation, and Henderson rises to the challenge. His paintings call up our compassion for a world dying as dinosaurs, all unwitting, watch the great boulder streak the sky with flame. In the final paintings we witness a small mammal survivor looking over the destruction, and finally an improbably huge mammal, *Uintatherium*, is shown strolling through a tropical Wyoming forest, telling us that a new world has risen from the old. ~

John Caddy is a poet and naturalist who teaches Earth education at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

A Healing Way

Stories of Three Young Apprentices

By Mary Lou Burket

In the days before medical schools and labor laws, the life of a doctor's apprentice was gritty and hard. An apprentice of twelve might be required to feed the fire and groom the horse as well as diagnose disease. In exchange, a doctor offered room and board and the best of his knowledge to his charge.

This is how things were done in Philadelphia in 1793, the year of a deadly yellow fever epidemic, and this is the setting of *Path of the Pale Horse* (Harper, 1983). The hero of Paul Fleischman's fast and witty, unblinking tale is Lep, who is apprenticed to the pious Dr. Peale. Bright and energetic, Lep undertakes the grinding of herbs and the bleeding of patients with equal zeal.

Following his mentor to the homes of patients stricken with the fever, Lep administers syrups and potions and spirits and baths and expects the best. Alas, as Dr. Peale is forced to admit, the sickness "mocks all medicine." What, then, is the cure? And how can Lep accept that "doing no harm" is the best he can do?

Written in the comic-adventure mode of historical novels by the author's father, Sid Fleischman, this book has elements of mystery and is peopled with fools and scoundrels at every turn. Thus, while racing from page to page, the reader may be unaware of lessons in the essence of science and healing. How, for instance, is a copper ring, for sale from a shady vendor, any better or worse than a doctor's respectable herbs? Neither helps the patient, and in truth,



without knowing the "path" of yellow fever—its transmission by mosquitoes—doctors were helpless to find a preventative or cure.

Despite its subject, Fleischman's book is not an exercise in gloom. Nor is it a warning against the arrogance and greed of the healing class. If Lep and Dr. Peale may be faulted for anything within the eye of the story, it is excessive *virtue*. Lep has an unjustified faith in medicine, and Dr. Peale is comically suspicious of the vanity and pride within his own kind heart. Happily, these foibles

serve them well. Dr. Peale's humility enables him to recognize the limits of his powers. And Lep, though chastened by failures, retains his desire at the end of the book to learn as much as he can learn, to heal as many as he can heal.

Fifty years later, a boy named Lucas buries his mother and wanders away from the farm in Connecticut where, one by one, each member of his family has died. They all had consumption, for which there is no cure, but desperate people speak of removing the heart of someone dead to protect the living.

The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whitaker (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996) traces a boy's development from orphan to apprentice at the home of a country doctor, a tolerant and gentle man of science. Doc Beecher's style of medicine contrasts with the frantic measures of the grieving and the sick. Cynthia DeFelice has based her story on accounts of gruesome nineteenth-century practices. Like Fleischman, she is interested in all the things that underlie belief—appearances, coincidences, customs. "It's our nature to make connections," Doc explains, "to try to understand what happens to us, and to think we can do something about it." But which connections are rational, tested, and true, and which are merely imagined?

Written with restraint, this rather courageous book contains some grisly events—disinterment, amputation, and cauterization, to name a few. Through it all, Lucas is curious and strong as

well as kind. He has, as one man says, “a healing way.”

Lucas could not ask for a better mentor than Doc Beecher. “Doc asked big questions about things that Lucas had wondered about but had never really thought to put into words... Doc’s talk

put Lucas in mind of a world bigger than the farm, bigger than Southwick, a world that was thrilling and mysterious. It made him want to know more.”

Karen Cushman’s *The Midwife’s Apprentice* (Clarion, 1995) is set in the Middle Ages yet has a modern temper.

This novel, too, is about “knowing more” and concerns an orphan, known as Beetle, who is sheltered by a midwife—a necessary member of the village, but no one’s friend: “Because of her sharp nose and sharp glance, Beetle always thought of her as Jane Sharp. Jane Sharp became a midwife because she had given birth to six children (although none of them lived), went Sundays to Mass, and had strong hands and clean fingernails. She did her job with energy and some skill, but without care, compassion, or joy. She was the only midwife in the village.”

Beetle is exploited and abused by Jane, yet learns, by guile and accident, much of the midwife’s gutsy trade. She has no books to study and no ambitions (“she dreamed of nothing, for she hoped for nothing and expected nothing”). Yet this is what gives the novel its modern feeling, for despite the odds against her, Beetle develops a sense of *self*. She adopts a sweeter name, Alyce, and strives to find “a place in this world.”

At first, it’s a cat that elicits compassion from this solitary soul. “I would have you live,” she says to the cat after dragging it out of a pond, where some bullying boys have tossed it. Later, when Jane Sharp abandons a woman whose baby is breech, Alyce steps forward and saves the child.

In those earthy times, midwifery was far from scientific. As Cushman notes in an afterword, “Medieval common sense knew nothing of germs, little of anatomy, and all too much of magic and superstition.” Yet midwifery had its place, and girls grew up, as they always have, with an urge to learn and a capacity to care. That was what midwifery required—learning and caring at times of birth and death. The stuff of life, and the stuff of some extraordinary reading. ~

Mary Lou Burket is a member of the editorial committee of the Riverbank Review.

“Poignant introspection, sly observations, lovely images, and droll commentary on life, school, love, and sports are all here for reflection. Raschka’s calligraphic, gestural drolleries enliven the pages.”
—Kirkus Reviews*

“A great idea has been turned into a great little book.”*

Movin’
edited by Dave Johnson
pictures by Chris Raschka

Teen Poets Take Voice



“An anthology penned by teens who participated in poetry workshops at the New York Public Library or submitted their work to the library’s Web site.... This volume will show readers and aspiring writers that anyone can and should write poetry—and that others will listen.”
—School Library Journal

“Budding poets will be inspired.”
—Booklist

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In her long-awaited new novel, Newbery Medalist Karen Cushman assembles a cast of unforgettable characters in a fascinating and pungent setting: the medical quarter of a medieval English village. Here fourteen-year-old Matilda, pious and learned, finds herself among people she considers unholy and unworthy when she comes to serve outspoken Red Peg the Bonesetter. Filled with



witty dialogue and richly authentic detail, *Matilda Bone* is the compelling novel of a girl who learns to see herself and others clearly, to laugh, and to live contentedly in this world. *Author's note.*

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Becoming the Dark-Blue Bee

Distant Journeys That Lead Us Home

By Mary Pope Osborne

In my novel *Adaline Falling Star* I tell the story of a girl who is the daughter of Kit Carson and an Arapaho woman named Singing Wind. The book is an imagined tale based on an actual historical figure about whom little is known. In the story, Adaline runs away from cruel relatives and survives alone in the American

wilderness of the 1840s. Throughout the book, Adaline wrestles with issues of cultural alienation and racial prejudice. Her background is so different from my own that some might think it audacious for me to claim the authority to speak in her voice. Twenty years ago, I might have agreed with them.

At that time, I was struggling to write my first children's books. I was making the mistakes of many beginning children's book authors, writing in a style that was didactic, condescending, and self-conscious. I was stuck in this mode until I took a job judging a children's writing contest for Scholastic magazines. The children's assignment was to write an essay entitled "Something That Brought My Family Closer Together." I read thousands of entries about family togetherness. The essays that affected me most were not necessarily the most perfectly written ones but those that were honest, simple, and direct, such as that by an eleven-year-old girl: "My father left us but he came home one day and took me to the zoo and we got closer by the bears."

Essays like hers began to draw out a child's voice from within me, a voice stronger and more honest than my

adult "children's book writer" voice. The voice spoke softly at first, then louder, until the child I had been and had forgotten was wailing. I named her Hallie, and her sad story became my first published book, *Run, Run as Fast as You Can*. Though the central tragedy of that novel had not happened in my life, the book was deeply personal, exploring my childhood terror of losing a loved one.

Over the next three years I wrote three more young adult novels, each reflecting the beginning author's cardinal rule: "Write what you know." To paraphrase John Gardner, I placed imagined characters in familiar places and living people in imagined places. I used my apartment, my friends, my memories, conversations overheard on the street. Anything I could pilfer from contemporary American life went into my tales about teenagers wrestling with problems that I myself had struggled with.

In the summer of 1985 I volunteered to teach a writing workshop at a shelter near Times Square for runaway teenagers. I loftily imagined that by getting kids to write about their lives, I might help them get to know themselves better and maybe even find some strength

to deal with their problems. Also, I wanted to immerse myself in the details of life at the shelter so that I could write a novel about the plight of a runaway girl. Filled with a breezy confidence, I asked my constantly shifting group of troubled teenagers to write about their lives. "Be completely honest," I urged. "Tell the truth."

The stories they turned in were horrific, about rats in the kitchen, rape, and incest. I despaired that any hope could come from these tales, and felt depressed about these teenagers' futures as I watched the shelter workers teaching them how to fill out a job application or how to care for their infants. One day a Mexican boy who spoke little English asked me how he could get hold of a biography of John Travolta. "What for?" I asked. "To learn how to make it in America," he answered. A few days later, I heard that the boy was in jail for possessing drugs. That day, I wanted to give up. I began to think there was no realistic way for such troubled kids to break free from their pasts—to "make it in America."

I kept gathering more grim autobiographical writings, and kept listlessly taking notes for my own tale of a runaway, until finally, an unlikely rescuer stepped in. He was a scary-looking kid dressed in black leather with skulls tattooed on his forearms. He told me he wanted to write "something different from my own life." "Like what?" I asked. "Like this," he said, and out of a

dirty folder he took a poem he'd written. It began: "In days of old, when there were knights and castles..." and went on to tell of the adventures of a brave knight. This boy didn't want to write about his own painful life. He wanted to use his imagination to explore another life, one filled with possibilities that he had been denied.

That weekend, I passed a vendor on Sixth Avenue selling old *National Geographic* magazines. Thinking of the boy who'd shown me his poem, I bought all the magazines and cut out a stack of beautiful photographs of faraway places—an African river, a Himalayan village, a South American jungle. At the next class I handed a photo to each kid with the direction that they *not* write about their real lives that day. "Go there. Put yourself in the picture. Have an adventure."

The kids totally "got" the assignment. They instantly moved themselves into these exotic settings, telling adventures about survival. For that morning, their world opened to a larger reality. They were each able to set out on a quest, not unlike those in the worlds of myth and legend.

Hadn't that been their natural inclination in the first place? What is a runaway if not someone who has set out on a quest? The cold reality was this: only in their imaginations could these kids really escape the streets of New York. By imagining a story where they had to hunt for food and shelter in a natural wilderness, they were free to explore their true resourcefulness. Within the terms set by their imagined worlds, they could catch a reflection of their authentic selves, as opposed to the selves which had been forged by urban poverty. As C. S. Lewis observed, "By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we discover it."

By the time the workshop ended, I had put aside the cheerless work-in-

progress about my own runaway and had begun to haunt dusty library shelves filled with fairy tales and books on mythology. This led me into writing books that retold myths, legends, and tall tales from different cultures, picture books inspired by fantasy and mythology, and eventually to the Magic Tree House. In that series, my main characters, Jack and Annie, travel



Mary Pope Osborne

to other times and places around the world. After each adventure, they return home changed by their experience.

Even with all my writing about different cultures, until about five years ago I had never truly inhabited the heart and mind of a character who was racially or culturally different from me. Perhaps I unconsciously steered away from doing so out of fear of reprisal, for there is a vocal minority in the children's book world who maintain that authors should not try to inhabit characters from cultures outside their own.

But what if such a character calls on an author? What if the passion at the heart of that character slowly begins to overtake the author's heart?

Adaline Falling Star first called on me a number of years ago when I was

researching my book *American Tall Tales*. I learned that Kit Carson and an Arapaho woman named Singing Wind had had a daughter named Adaline. Singing Wind died and Carson took five-year-old Adaline to St. Louis to live with relatives. Until then, Adaline had spent her early years living between two worlds—the trading post of Bent's Fort in Colorado and the Arapaho village of her mother's people near the fort.

Little else is known about the real Adaline. As I thought about her life, I realized she must have borne witness to an extraordinary time in American history, a time when a number of different worlds collided. Almost as a hobby, while I worked on my other books I began researching what Adaline's life would have been like. I kept a scrapbook of maps, articles, and old illustrations, and I took many pages of notes on the environment of Bent's Fort as well as that of an Arapaho village.

I gathered a wealth of information. Yet, as I began to tell Adaline's story, I did not strive for the literal truth of her life; rather, for a universal truth. I moved her age to eleven and imagined what might have happened to her after she left Bent's Fort and the Arapaho and found herself thrust into a racist household in St. Louis. I conceived her story as a first-person narrative, and, in the course of my writing, it became a matter not of my claiming the authority to write in Adaline's voice but of responding to the authority of *her* voice as she claimed *me*. The Adaline in my story spoke in a sort of hybrid poetry cobbled together from the voices of the people she must have come into contact with: trappers, missionaries, mountain men, and the Arapaho.

I responded to Adaline with a deep and inexplicable love. In writing her story, I began to recover feelings long buried in myself—a fear of being labeled as "different" and treated as an outcast; a fear of being totally abandoned; a

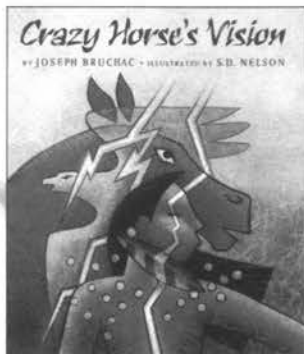
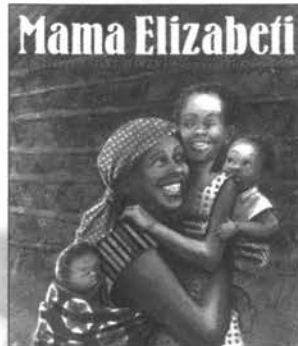
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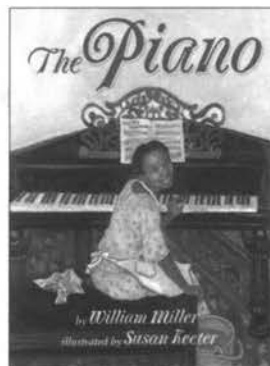
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—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



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fear of being forced to betray a loved one. Through *Adaline* I also found the beginnings of answers to questions that had long bewildered me: how to find unity between vastly disparate cultures, and how to find hope for an alienated runaway. After several years of traveling with *Adaline* through distant, imagined landscapes, I found the truth and meaning I'd searched for fifteen years earlier when trying to write a "real life" story of a runaway adolescent in New York. Empathy and imagination, fueled by research, helped me find my way into a reality that elicited what felt like an authentic voice.

I don't believe that children's book writers—or any writer—should be limited to writing about their own cultures, their own life experience. Even more important, the imaginations of children should not be limited to identifying only with their own culture. Children need to have knowledge of their roots and find joy and meaning in the stories of their ancestors. But if we give them the message that they can only be the thing they are and nothing else, we risk severing the slender thread that ties the act of writing and reading to the miraculous—that state of being in which we can become all things; where "Thou art woman. Thou art man. Thou art the dark-blue bee and the green parrot with red eyes," in the words of the Upanishads. Paradoxically, we can sometimes get more in touch with our true selves by stepping far outside ourselves. And by reaching to connect with a culture different from our own, we may come to understand all of humanity better. The runaway child who is most unlike us might be the one who leads us back home. ~

Mary Pope Osborne is the author of more than fifty books for young people, including One World, Many Religions, an Orbis Pictus Honor book, and the best-selling Magic Tree House series.



Ten Great Easy Readers

The Duck and the Owl

By Hanna Johansen
Illustrated by Käthi Bhend
Translated by
Christopher M. Franceschelli
DUTTON, 1991

Out of print—check your local library

Exquisite nature sketches illustrate this humorous conversation between two very different birds who can't quite comprehend each other's ways.



Emma's Magic Winter

By Jean Little
Illustrated by Jennifer Plecas
HARPERCOLLINS, 1998
hardcover: \$14.89, paperback: \$3.95

In the games she and her new friend play together, Emma's red boots give her the power to become invisible and to climb giant snow mountains, but can they help her conquer her shyness?

Forest

By Laura Godwin
Illustrated by Stacey Schuett
HARPERCOLLINS, 1998
hardcover: \$14.89, paperback: \$3.95

Jeannie has a memorable encounter with nature when she and her parents bring an abandoned fawn into their house for the night.

Fox in Love

And others in the series
by Edward Marshall
Illustrated by James Marshall
VIKING, 1982
hardcover (Econo-clad): \$11.10, paperback (Puffin): \$3.99

Even with his pesky little sister, Louise, tagging along after him, Fox is quite the ladies' man—or so he thinks.

Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Moon

And others in the series
by Cynthia Rylant
Illustrated by Sujie Stevenson
BRADBURY, 1987 / hardcover: \$12.95
paperback (Aladdin): \$3.99

All the things Henry loves about fall, and all the things he doesn't—such as the scary stories his mom tells on Halloween—are made better by having his big affectionate dog at his side.

Mr. Putter and Tabby Pour the Tea

And others in the series
by Cynthia Rylant
Illustrated by Arthur Howard
HARCOURT, 1994 / hardcover: \$13.00, paperback: \$5.95

A lonely old man has much to share—tea and scones, a garden full of tulips, wonderful stories—but no one to share with, until he adopts an elderly cat from the animal shelter.

My Brother, Ant

By Betsy Byars
Illustrated by Marc Simont
VIKING, 1996 / hardcover: \$13.99
paperback (Puffin): \$3.99

When there's a monster to chase out from under the bed or an off-season Santa letter to write, Anthony's big brother is there to help, and "Ant" rewards him by being full of surprises.

Owl at Home

By Arnold Lobel
HARPERCOLLINS, 1975
hardcover: \$15.89, paperback: \$3.95

Befriending the moon and brewing "tear-water tea" are just two of the enchanting adventures of this delightful homebody owl.

Wiley and the Hairy Man

Adapted by Molly Garrett Bang
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 1976
hardcover: \$14.00, paperback (Aladdin): \$3.99

In this suspenseful African American folktale, a boy must fool the Hairy Man of the swamp three times in order to be safe from him for good.

Wizard and Wart at Sea

And others in the series
by Janice Lee Smith
Illustrated by Paul Meisel
HARPERCOLLINS, 1995 / hardcover: \$15.89

Goats on the beach and monkeys in the pool can only mean one thing: it's vacation time for a wizard and his dog apprentice, and their spells, as usual, are going comically awry.



interview

Lucille Clifton

For thirty years, this poet and children's book author has evoked the experience of black children in picture books that readers of all backgrounds have embraced.

By Patricia Kirkpatrick

Lucille Clifton was born in Depew, New York, and grew up in a household where books, poetry, and storytelling were honored. Although her father could not write, he told stories about Clifton's African ancestors, including those who were captured and brought to America as slaves. Her mother wrote poetry

and encouraged her to read and write. Langston Hughes saw some of Clifton's poetry while she was in college and published it in an anthology.

"I am a Black woman poet and I sound like one," Lucille Clifton has said of herself. Her poetry is characterized by brevity, wit, lyricism, vernacular language, and spiritual exploration as well as a sense of history and myth. She has

published many books of poetry, including *The Terrible Stories*, and, most recently, *Blessing the Boats*. She has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, been nominated twice for a Pulitzer Prize, and served as the Poet Laureate of Maryland.

The mother of six children, Clifton also has had a prolific career as a children's book writer. Her first book, *Some of the Days of Everett Anderson* (1970), was followed by five more Everett Anderson books, which portray, in prose and verse, the life of a six-year-old child who lives in the city. Clifton won the 1984 Coretta Scott King Award for *Everett*

Anderson's Goodbye. All of her children's books are distinguished by characters who address profound issues with courage, humor, and tenderness.



PK: *How did you find your way to writing for young readers?*

LC: Having children and telling them stories. I found it was something I could do, so I did. It's really been two separate careers

going on at the same time; quite often people who know me as a children's book author don't know me as a poet.

Would you like that to change or are you satisfied with two distinct audiences?

I don't think about it, particularly. A lot of poets know I write children's books. It would be nice if the children's book people knew more about the poetry, because it would mean that they had broadened their reading.

Have there been any particular influences on your work as a children's book writer?

If there has been any kind of influence, it might have to do with the fact

that I write stories that, by and large, have a major character who is a child of color. Certainly when my kids were little (in the 1960s and '70s) there weren't any books like that, and that may have influenced how I go about writing children's books and what I write about.

I have a ten-year-old boy—he's white, I'm white, his father's white—and he sat out in our yard one afternoon this summer reading All Us Come Cross the Water out loud. It was a pleasure to hear him take on those black characters' voices, and a black vernacular, with such confidence.

Teachers have a hard time with that but the kids don't. I write books that all children can read. Kids know these are *human* things going on in the books, they're *children* things. I was in a classroom once and a white child was saying, "Everett Anderson, he's just like me." In another classroom a young kid was saying, "Why are all the people brown in your books?" and I said, "Well, look at me, I'm brown. Wouldn't it be odd if I didn't have any people like me?" And he looked at me and said, "That *would* be weird."

I want to talk about naming, which is a theme in your writing. In an interview you told Bill Moyers, "We have the right, as living creatures, to name ourselves." You spoke in that interview about the change of name movement among black people in the 1960s. In your poem, "the making of poems," you say that the giving of true

names is what you do when you make poems. And in your picture book All Us Come Cross the Water, a young boy wants his teacher to call him Ujamaa, the name his parents gave him.

Ujamaa is one of the seven principles that's talked about in the celebration of Kwanza. Naming oneself is elementary. I mean, one has the right to call oneself what one wishes. I tell my students that naming is always interesting. Of course they don't remember when Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali, and the great uproar there was, how people were highly indignant. But what right has someone to feel negative because a man decides to call himself something else? Nobody said anything when Marion Morrison decided to call himself John Wayne.

What about poets? Why are poets always naming things? Is naming a spiritual as well as a political act?

I think poets are always trying to get as close as they can to the true nature of things—it's probably part of the poetic imagination. Trying to get as close as they can to the truth of something, to what it really is, not what someone happens to call it. Naming and labeling are two different things.

What do you hope comes across about race in your books?

I'm not a person who says that people shouldn't see race. Teachers tell me that quite a lot, that they don't see race. Well, that's silly. Of course they see race. Not seeing race, I always say (because I try to be kind), is a first step. The next step is to see race and to realize that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that I'm black and someone else is white or Asian or whatever. Differences in history and culture and things like that—we need to recognize them and see that they make us who we are, and then realize that we are much more alike than different

Have you seen or experienced any resistance to your books when they're written in

From *Some of the Days of Everett Anderson*

Monday Morning Good Morning

Being six
is full of tricks
and Everett Anderson knows it.

Being a boy
is full of joy
and Everett Anderson shows it.

Wednesday Noon Adventure

Who's black
and runs
and loves to hop?
Everett Anderson does.

Who's black
and was lost
in the candy shop?
Everett Anderson was.

Who's black
and noticed the
peppermint flowers?
Everett Anderson did.

Who's black
and was lost for
hours and hours?
Everett Anderson

Hid!



Saturday Night Late

The siren seems so far away
when people live in 14 A,
they can pretend that all the noise
is just some other girls and boys
running and
laughing and
having fun
instead of whatever it is
whispers
Everett Anderson

Sunday Morning Lonely

Daddy's back
is broad and black
and Everett Anderson loves to ride it.

Daddy's side
is black and wide
and Everett Anderson sits beside it.

Daddy's cheek
is black and sleek
and Everett Anderson kisses it.

Daddy's space
is a black empty place
and Everett Anderson misses it.

Sunday Night Goodnight

The stars are so near
to 14 A
that after playing outside
all day
Everett Anderson likes to pretend
that stars are where
apartments end.

Text by Lucille Clifton, illustration by Evaline Ness (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970)

a black idiom or vernacular?

Oh, sure. Many people, black people as well as white, have resented the way I portray black people talking. But if I have people speaking—two intimates—they speak in their casual, at-home language. Nobody speaks in iambic pentameter. A casual language is common to everyone, in America and in other parts of the world, too. The value judgments that we make about language are something else. Those are based on our own histories and cultures and learned stereotypes. But that doesn't mean they're true.

It's what you mean by labeling versus naming?

Absolutely. But Everett Anderson gets praised all the time, nobody ever complains about how he talks.

The thing I love about Everett Anderson is how much of a child's inner life he reveals. How did this character come into being?

I often say, "I never knew a child named Everett." But I have two sons and four daughters, and one of my sons was Everett's age when the first book was written. I watched kids all the time and saw them around. You know, whenever there are a lot of kids in the house they draw in a whole drove of other kids. I wanted to make a book where there were children who looked like my children. I had not had that as a child. I was impressed by something [children's literature scholar] Rudine Sims Bishop once said: children need windows and mirrors. They need mirrors in which they see themselves and windows through which they see the world. Some children in our society have had only windows, and some have had only mirrors, and they're both disadvantaged. So I want to balance that some way. There's



Illustration by E. B. Lewis, from *The Times They Used to Be*

a new Everett Anderson book coming out in 2001. For a while I thought, "Oh, I'm finished with this child." But apparently he wasn't finished with me.

You've said that writing poetry involves being still and waiting for words and poems to come. Is that kind of waiting and listening a part of your process when you're writing for young readers?

Well, for young readers I think that it's more mindful. I want to tell something. I wrote *The Times They Used to Be* because I wanted to tell the story of what it was like living in a poor black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, as I did.

That book is wonderful for the things it takes on: seeing ghosts, being saved through Jesus, a girl's first menstruation. I'm thrilled that it's being reissued [by Delacorte, in December].

I'm really glad, too. I love the new

illustrations by E. B. Lewis. When I wrote it I didn't really think about the fact that menstruation isn't something you talk about.

You address it subtly. In fact, when I've read the book with girls, some pick it up and some don't.

Sure. And the fact that they don't get it today doesn't mean that it's not in there somewhere for them.

You've said, "You cannot play for safety and make art." Is that also true for children's books? Are children's books art for you, or are they something else?

I hope they are art. And I try not to play for safety. I try to be understanding of what is appropriate, but that may not coincide with what someone else thinks is appropriate. The only time when there was a problem was in one of the Everett Anderson books, which has a line about slipping one finger in the foam

of Mama's glass. That foam was at first described as beer foam, but the publisher said, "Beer? You're going to turn everybody into alcoholics."

I was in a classroom reading that book aloud and one of the kids wanted to know, "What is that foam?" Well, I don't lie so I said, "That's beer. How many people in here have ever tasted beer?" Now my experience with my own children, all six of them, was that they liked to taste beer. This doesn't mean that they swigged down a can, but they did like to taste it. And I asked how many people had ever tasted it. Everyone in the room raised their hand but the teacher. So we all sort of looked at her. She was a friend of mine so she was just smiling and she sort of inched her hand up—she had tasted it! So, I said, "I'm sure nobody around here is going to go around drinking beer,



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you're not old enough." But I don't underestimate kids' intelligence. I have a poem, "the lost baby poem," and it's often taught in high school as if it's about a miscarriage instead of an abortion.

I've heard you say that before and I was surprised. I cannot see that poem being about a miscarriage, it seems so clear that the speaker has made a choice.

Well, the teacher has made a choice too: She's decided that I'm nice, therefore I couldn't be writing about an abortion. But Gwendolyn Brooks is nice, too, and she wrote a poem about an abortion.

I usually teach "the lost baby poem," and Gwendolyn Brooks's "the mother" side by side and it's amazing how thoughtfully college students will talk about abortion when the medium is a poem rather than a political editorial. Those are very moving poems.

Well, I could only write my poem because Gwen Brooks wrote hers.

Some of your children's books seem as radical as your poetry with regard to talking about the body, loss, class, mental illness, abuse, and just plain joy.

I guess telling the truth about children's lives is radical.

You've said poetry doesn't just come from the mind and intellect but is a thing of the spirit. I've been struck by how naturally your stories are inhabited by characters who see spirits and other things of wonder. I'm thinking of Uncle Sunny in The Times They Used to Be and especially Big Mama in All Us Come Cross the Water, who sees things "cause she born with a veil over her face." What does it mean to be born with a veil over your face?

That was a sign of somebody who could see spirits. The caul is a membrane that sometimes still covers the face when someone's born and it has to be removed. What old people used to say was that the veil gave you the power to see beyond the obvious.

So, the veil is a natural thing, present at some births...

Yes, it's natural. Whether we recognize it or not is something else.

Another thing I've noticed is how often the characters in your children's books confront, directly or indirectly, an authority figure. Certainly you show that in The Black BC's, which I think is one of the most sophisticated picture books on black history, and I've read a lot of them.

Thank you. That's also going to be reissued.

I'm glad to hear that. I was impressed with how recently Malcolm X had been on the scene when the book was originally published in 1970, and yet how complex your portrait of him was. In The Black BC's you show Malcolm X breaking with the Black Muslims, and Frederick Douglass defying the slavebreaker; in other of your books there are characters like King Shabazz in The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring challenging his teacher and Tassie in The Times They Used to Be struggling with her grandmother's demand that she be saved. Has this been a conscious choice, to portray such power struggles?

I think it just came naturally to who these people were. I have a really clear idea, once a character enters my life, of what they're like and what they might or might not do. *The Black BC's* was written because I was talking to a high school class in Baltimore in a predominantly minority school and I pulled out a map of Africa and asked, "What is this?" They said, "That's the country of Africa." And I thought, "Country?" And then somebody said, "No. That's the Dark Continent." I saw then that it would be interesting to say something about what Africa was really like, as opposed to what the movies show.

Where did the combination of forms used in that book come from: the four-line poem followed by prose?

The verse was natural to me, and I also wanted to give some facts in a pleasurable way. I wanted it to be infor-

Poems by Lucille Clifton

new bones

we will wear
new bones again.
we will leave
these rainy days,
break out through
another mouth
into sun and honey time.
worlds buzz over us like bees,
we be splendid in new bones.
other people think they know
how long life is
how strong life is.
we know.

miss rosie

when i watch you
wrapped up like garbage
sitting, surrounded by the smell
of too old potato peels
or
when i watch you
in your old man's shoes
with the little toe cut out
sitting, waiting for your mind
like next week's grocery
i say
when i watch you
you wet brown bag of a woman
who used to be the best looking gal
in georgia
used to be called the Georgia Rose
i stand up
through your destruction
i stand up

From Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980 (BOA Editions, 1987). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

mative and entertaining. Probably if I think too much I wouldn't do half the stuff I do. I'm very proud of my "X" in that book, because "X" in an alphabet book is always *xylophone* or *X ray*. Mine was Malcolm.

Even in what some people would call

chapter books, it seems to me your books are still really poet's stories. There's a narrative but it makes huge leaps without the kind of transitions we're used to.

There is a narrative but with attention to language and I hope to the music in the language, and attention

to sound, attention to feelings... Sound matters to me in poetry and in prose. But I don't think about it, particularly, I just do what I do. My inclination in both poetry and picture books is to pare it down.

What about the character in Sonora Beautiful, the wonderfully sardonic teenage girl who is chagrined because, among other things, her father is a poet. Did she need to be white?

Yes, because that's who I heard. With children's books, if I can get a feel for what the landscape is like and I can hear the language the characters are speaking there, I tend to be able to know something about their lives. And I knew these were white people, white kids. I called a couple of people to ask, "I'm writing this book and the people are white. What do you think?" And most of them said, "Well, Lucille, who better to do it? If Ezra Jack Keats can do it, so can you." Ezra Jack Keats, of course, was white and wrote about black children often.

Sonora Beautiful is a brief book, but it's in chapters. Who came up with the idea for the form of a "skinny book" for teens?

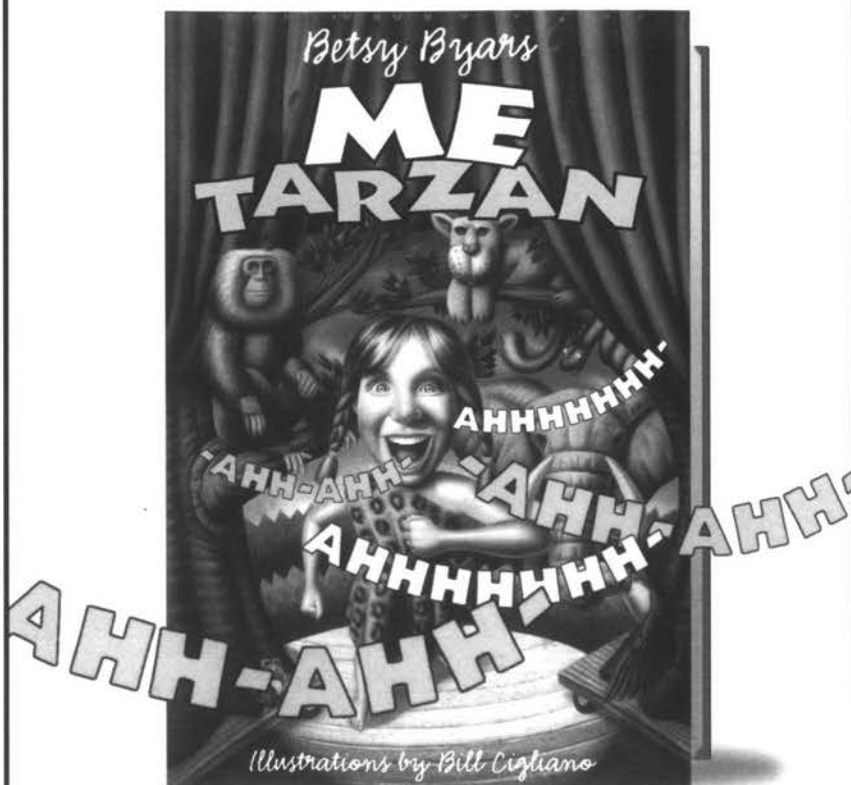
Dutton at one time had a program of books that were low reading level and high content for older readers who did not read well. I don't think the line sold very well. I'd love that book to be redone because I like to read it aloud to audiences. I like the girl's voice. It was not a black voice, but it was a voice that I generally knew.

So that means you're listening. You will pick up anything that comes in on the airwaves?

I'm listening. I'm paying attention. That's what I do. ~

Patricia Kirkpatrick is a poet and the author of Plowie: A Story from the Prairie (Harcourt Brace). She teaches writing and children's literature at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and writes regularly for the Ruminator Review.

From Newbery Medalist Betsy Byars



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Bringing Them Back Alive

Writing History and Biography for Young Audiences

Keynote address by Russell Freedman

I sometimes hear that children today are not really interested in history, that it's one of their least favorite subjects. They look upon history as if it were a strong-tasting medicine—good for you, maybe, but repulsive nonetheless. If that attitude exists, it can only result from the way history is sometimes taught.

I believe that a book of history or a biography can carry within its pages a magical power. It can convey all the vividness and immediacy of great fiction while retaining the authenticity, the additional power, of lived experience. History should wake us up, because it is the story of ourselves, the story of our parents, our grandparents, our ancestors. A knowledge of the past is part of each child's birthright.

Writing history for young readers imposes a special responsibility. Your book may be the first they have ever read on that particular subject. It may linger in their minds and imaginations forever after, coloring their view of the past, influencing their understanding of the present. That's why a deceptively simple book for children can have an impact on the future that few adult best-sellers can.

Historians traditionally have been storytellers. Going way back to Homer and beyond, historians were men and women telling, singing, or reciting epic poems about the past. When I begin a new book, that is the tradition I like to

remember. Whether I'm writing a biography of Abraham Lincoln or an account of child labor, I think of myself first as a storyteller and I do my best to give dramatic shape to my subject, whatever it may be.

Several storytelling techniques commonly associated with fiction can also be used to add drama and a sense of

reality to nonfiction. One of the most effective of these is the creation of vivid, detailed scenes that the reader can visualize. Another familiar storytelling device is the development of character. One way to do this is to point out the telling details that help to define a person. There are

plenty of small, personal details, for example, that provide glimpses of Abraham Lincoln's life in the White House. Lincoln said "Howdy" to visitors, and invited them to "stay a spell." He greeted diplomats while wearing carpet slippers. He called his wife "Mother" at receptions. He told bawdy jokes at cabinet meetings. He mended his gold-rimmed spectacles with a string. One passage in my Lincoln biography that people comment on is the simple



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inventory of the President's pockets after he was assassinated: spectacles, folded in a silver case; a small velvet eyeglass cleaner; a large linen handkerchief with "A. Lincoln" stitched in red; an ivory pocketknife trimmed with silver; a brown leather wallet lined with purple silk, and inside that wallet a Confederate five-dollar bill; and eight newspaper clippings praising the President—clippings that Lincoln himself had cut out and saved.

It's important for the reader to picture people and events, but it's also important to hear those people talking. In real life, the way we get to know people is by observing them, and also by



Russell Freedman

listening to what they say. In a nonfiction book, quotations from diaries, journals, letters, and memoirs can take the place of dialogue in a fictional story.

One of my favorite quotes about Lincoln, and one of the most revealing, comes from his law partner, William Herndon. Now, Lincoln adored his sons. He denied them nothing, and he seemed incapable of disciplining them. He liked to take Willie and Tad to the law office when he worked on Sundays and their wild behavior just about drove his law partner mad. "The boys were absolutely unrestrained in their amusement," Herndon complained. "If they pulled down all the books from the shelves, bent the points of all the pens, overturned the spittoon, it never disturbed the serenity of their father's good nature. I have felt many and many a time that I wanted to wring the necks of those little brats, and pitch them out the windows." But as far as Lincoln was concerned, his boys could do no wrong. His wife Mary remarked, "Mr. Lincoln was very exceedingly indulgent to his children. He always said, 'It is my pleasure that my children are free, happy, and unrestrained by parental tyranny. Love is the chain whereby to bind a child to its parents.'"

Another essential storytelling device is the use of anecdote. The best anecdotes conjure up a compelling picture that illuminates their subject. An example follows, from my recent biography of Babe Didrikson Zaharias, generally considered to be the greatest woman athlete of the twentieth century. As a youngster growing up in Beaumont, Texas, Babe lived only for sports, and she excelled in them all. She could never resist an opportunity to play; for example, a ball game:

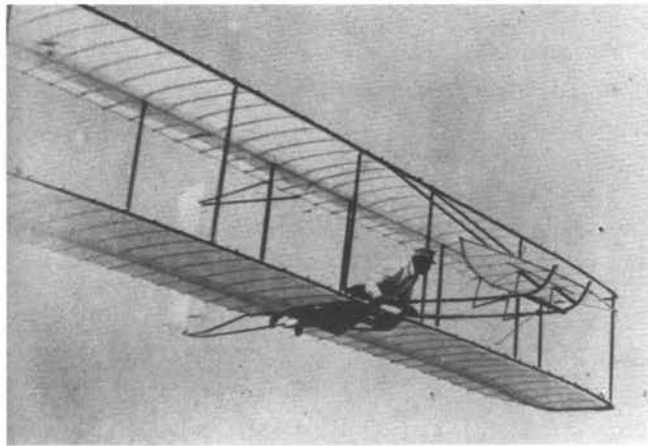
One day her mother sent her to the grocery store to buy some hamburger for supper and told her to hurry. She ran all the way, bought the meat, and headed home. On

the way back, she saw some kids playing baseball in the school yard. "I stopped to watch for a minute, and the next thing I knew I was in there playing myself," she wrote. "I laid the package of meat down on the ground. I was only going to play for a couple of minutes, but they stretched into an hour."

Finally she spotted her mother marching down the street, searching for her. "I got the meat, Momma," she yelled, moving out of the playground fast. "It's right here." She pointed to the spot where she had left the package. A big dog was standing there, lapping up the last of that hamburger.

"Poor Momma! She couldn't quite catch me," Babe recalled...

In addition to these narrative techniques, nonfiction benefits from another powerful ingredient: firsthand, eyewitness research. Whenever possible, I include such research in my work. When



From The Wright Brothers

I was working on my Wright brothers biography I visited Carillon Historical Park in Dayton, Ohio, where one of their earliest airplanes, the 1905 Wright Flyer, is on display.

Now, there were no cockpits, no enclosures of any kind on these early experimental aircraft. The pilot would simply lie facedown on the lower wing, hang on to the controls, and fly. The

Wright brothers' great discovery, their breakthrough insight, was the realization that they could control an aircraft in flight by changing the air pressure above each wing. They accomplished this by twisting the wingtips in one direction or another. When I started work on the Wright brothers book, my knowledge of aeronautics was limited to my imperfect ability to fasten a seatbelt, and I had difficulty visualizing just how the wing twisting worked. I mentioned this to Mary Matthews, the director of Carillon Historical Park, as we were standing beside the 1905 Flyer and she said, "Why don't you try it yourself?" She called over the mechanic who was the custodian of that historic airplane and the next thing I knew I was lying facedown on the lower wing in the pilot's position, my hands on the controls, working the wing-twisting mechanism myself. That hands-on experience was quite a thrill, of course, and it helped me to convey to my readers just how the pilot navigated that early airplane.

While I was in Dayton I was invited to stay at Orville Wright's mansion, Hawthorn Hill. Orville and Wilbur planned the house together after they had become wealthy

men, thanks to their invention. Wilbur died before the place was finished, but Orville lived there for about thirty-five years, until his death in 1948. As visiting biographer, I was invited to stay in Orville Wright's spacious corner bedroom on the second floor. I found a photograph of the bedroom taken during the 1930s, and I saw that all the original furnishings were in place. There

was still a wall buzzer above one of the twin beds, a buzzer that had been used at one time to summon the mansion's servants. I figured that that must have been Orville's bed, so that's where I slept, for inspiration.

Being the handy fellow that he was, Orville was always tinkering with the unique and temperamental plumbing, heating, and wiring system that he installed in that house. He outfitted the place with all sorts of strange, labor-saving contrivances: a vacuum-cleaner system built into the walls with a hose outlet in every room; a heating system that could be controlled only from his bedroom; and his famous circular shower-bath, which he designed just for the house. Orville's shower-bath turned out to be an unforgettable adventure.

It's a very large stall shower, with white tile walls circled by pipes that spray out jets of water. Walking into it is like stepping into the middle of a ribcage. You're surrounded by pipes, and there are several faucets to adjust the temperature of the water that comes shooting out at you from all sides, from below, and from the big shower-head above. I took several showers but never managed to master the controls. There would be hot water coming from one direction, cold water from another, and as I danced about, trying to adjust the array of faucets, I felt like an engineer in a Rube Goldberg boiler room. I began to think, "If Orville Wright invented this shower, I'm going back to New York on the bus."

Another of my recent books that involved some memorable on-site research was *Out of Darkness: The Story of Louis Braille*. Braille was born in France nearly 200 years ago, and lost his sight in an accident when he was three years old. At that time it was not possible for a sightless person to read or write in any meaningful way. As a result, blind people could not hope to share fully in



Illustration by Kate Kiesler,
from *Out of Darkness*

life. They were considered ineducable and often were treated as if they were mentally retarded. So, Louis grew up in a world of darkness. More than anything else, he wanted to be able to read. He was a bright, ambitious boy, and he was lucky enough to be sent to the Royal Institute for Blind Youth. At that time it was the only school of its kind in the entire world, and it was in Paris. By the time Louis was fifteen years old he had worked out the braille system of reading and writing for the blind, essentially as it is used today in virtually every language in the world.

When I was working on the book I wanted to visit Braille's home village, a place called Coupvray, about twenty-five miles east of Paris. I knew that the stone cottage where Braille was born in 1809 had been turned into a small municipal museum, and I wanted to see that house for myself. However, when I looked at my map of France I could not find the village. I went out and I bought a big road map of France, but still no luck. Finally I went to the

French Government Tourist Office in Manhattan and I told them that I wanted to visit Louis Braille's house in the village of Coupvray. "Coupvray?" they asked. Was I sure I had the correct name? Was I spelling it right? How did I know there was a museum there? No one in the office had ever heard of the place. At last the director came out to see what all the commotion was about, then disappeared for a moment and returned with a massive atlas of France, each page a detailed map of a very small area, and sure enough, there it was, Coupvray, a village about twenty-five miles east of Paris, and about a half-mile north of Eurodisney. On standard road maps, Coupvray is so overshadowed by Eurodisney that it isn't even shown.

I went to France, rented a car in Paris, and set off with a friend for Coupvray. The highway leading east out of Paris was jammed with cars. Where were they going? To Eurodisney, obviously. Finally we came to the exit that we had been watching for, a narrow two-lane country road, and we alone turned off the highway. We drove through ripening fields of wheat until we came to a fork in the road. There was no sign, and there was nothing whatsoever to indicate that the village where Braille had lived might be near.

Across the way we saw a house and a man working in his garden, so we drove over and asked if he could point the way to Louis Braille's house. "Ah, Louis Braille," he said. He called over a boy about ten or eleven years old, apparently his son. The boy jumped on his bicycle, motioned for us to follow in the car, and started pedaling up the road. We followed that boy up the hill, around a curve, down a hill and around a corner, and finally he pulled up in front of the little stone cottage that we had been searching for. Then he waved to us with a Gallic smile and pedaled off.



Words

In woods are words.
You hear them all,
Winsome, witless or wise,
When the birds call.

In woods are words.
If your ears wake
You hear them, quiet and clear,
When the leaves shake.

In woods are words.
You hear them all
Blown by the wet wind
When raindrops fall.

In woods are words
Kind or unkind;
Birds, leaves and hushing rain
Bring them to mind.

—James Reeves

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We had found the house, but this being France, the custodian of the house was at his own home enjoying a leisurely lunch, which meant that we had to wait for a couple of hours. When he finally returned, Monsieur Pierre Cassagne gave us a wonderful tour of the Braille house, which remains very much the same today as it was when Louis was growing up there. We saw the bed that he was born in, and the garret room that he shared with his brother and two sisters, and we spent some time in his father's workshop out in the courtyard, where Louis blinded himself with a sharp awl at the age of three—you can still see that awl.

We spent two days in the village, exploring the house and the surrounding countryside, and when we were ready to leave, Pierre Cassagne asked us to sign his guest book, which he had been keeping for many years. We discovered we were the first visitors to that house in some time. The last visitors were a group of blind students from Australia. They had been there three months before, and they had come in pilgrimage to the house, as to a shrine.

As we drove back along the country road, through the wheat fields, we could see the gilded spires of Eurodisney half a mile to the south. And as we turned back on the main highway, jammed with traffic traveling to and from the amusement park, I had to wonder, Am I writing the right book? We had visited the real thing, the almost-forgotten home of a boy who changed millions upon millions of lives, but apparently he is no match for Mickey Mouse.

A year or so later I was traveling in Western China with a Mandarin-speaking friend, and we were in the ancient walled city of Lijiang in the foothills of the Himalayas, considered the mythical site of James Hilton's Shangri-La. Now, there's an old tradition in China of blind masseurs. They used to travel on foot from village to village, but now

most often they practice their trade at settled locations in towns and cities. One day in Lijiang we noticed a small hand-painted sign hanging outside an old house in the center of town announcing the services of a masseur. We knocked on the door, and that is how we met Hung Song Weng, a young man in his twenties. After we got to know him, he told us that he had lost his sight as the result of meningitis when he was fourteen years old, and he had been trained as a professional masseur at a special school in Beijing that accepts only sight-impaired students, so that they can go out in the world and make their living in the time-honored and traditional way. He lived with his parents in *this* two-hundred-year-old stone house, which reminded me so much of Louis Braille's home, and he conducted his practice in the front room facing the street. We became friendly with Weng and visited him several times. *Out of Darkness* had recently been published, so naturally I asked him if he had ever heard of Louis Braille and if he knew about the braille system for reading. He smiled and motioned for us to wait. He disappeared into a back room, and when he returned he was holding a very thick book, in braille—a collection of stories by a famous Chinese author—transcribed into the Chinese ideogram. Weng told us that he spent several hours a day reading, thanks to Braille. Meeting him, in what seemed like the ends of the earth, reaffirmed my faith in the written word and in the transforming power of reading. ~

Russell Freedman is the author of the Newbery Award-winning *Lincoln: A Photobiography (Clarion)*. His many other books include *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane (Holiday House)* and *Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery (Clarion)*, both Newbery Honor books, and, most recently, *Give Me Liberty! The Story of the Declaration of Independence (Holiday House)*.



A River of Words

Writing Poetry with Children

By Susan Marie Swanson

I like to write poetry with seven-year-olds. “How do you do it?” people ask me. Lines from the children’s poems begin to answer that question. “I was born with shimmering stars deep inside me,” wrote one seven-year-old. “I carry the roar of Zeus in my brain,” proclaimed another, in the laboriously formed ball-and-stick

printing that children struggle to perfect in the first grade. Usually the first-graders write on brittle newsprint ruled with widely spaced blue lines. One child began her poem like this:

My pencil is a river
of words. One by one they go
down the waterfall.

During more than fifteen years of teaching as a writer-in-residence with COMPAS Writers and Artists in the Schools, I’ve visited hundreds of Minnesota classrooms in order to write poetry with elementary school children and their teachers. When the school year ends and I teach literary arts in St. Paul Academy’s summer arts program for four- to eight-year-olds, I tie a lot of shoes and unwrap Band-Aids while I help children with their poems. For years I’ve been saying that writing with kids has changed my life. At the very least, I’ve learned a few things about helping children with their writing.

First, you need a good night’s sleep. You can’t stay up late cramming for the tests children bring to class with them: responding to their joys and sorrows

calls for alertness and empathy. I stoop, encourage, listen, and exclaim for a living. Reflecting on my teaching, I like to read these lines from a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye:

I want to be famous to shuffling
men
who smile while crossing streets,
sticky children in grocery lines,
famous as the one who smiled
back.

I want to be famous in the way a
pulley is famous,
or a buttonhole, not because it did
anything spectacular,
but because it never forgot what it
could do.

Nye is talking about an equanimity that we can pursue deliberately, a definition of success that invites us to be reflective and centered.

Second, it is good to share and discuss literature with young writers, to fill the air with imaginative language instead of tedious instructions. I recently shared some poetry by Juan Felipe Herrera with a group of first-graders, along with his picture-book memoirs,

Calling the Doves and *The Upside Down Boy*, which tell the story of how he came to love poetry as a child. I asked, “Why does he say ‘I carry the sun in my pocket’ instead of just writing something like ‘I am happy’?”

“Because it’s poetry,” answered a seven-year-old. She continued, “It makes you feel warm inside.” “It really gets your mind moving,” remarked another. When one child said he liked that the family of migrant farmworkers had an old army truck, another interrupted to say, “I liked the part where they camped in the tent and the writer said ‘The sky was my blue spoon.’”

The third thing I know about writing poems with children is that once they’ve started writing, you need to make it your business to support the initiative in each child. Children need help to see that they can *begin* to write with the ideas that they’re bantering about while they horse around with their friends. Once they are sitting down, pencil in hand, it can be a struggle to discern what young writers are trying to do or to really understand their questions. Maybe their handwriting is difficult to read, or the spelling confounds, or the paper is blank and the child, agitated.

At such moments, it doesn’t matter how engaging my lesson was. Say we’re writing letter poems—to the stars, the river, the tree in the backyard. That

promising idea doesn't count for much if I'm not watching for the girl who is sure that her lawn sprinkler is not important enough to write about, or for the boy whose poem to a flower garden is really about how a child, like a garden, needs tender care to thrive. Writing

poetry with children is, above all, about reading poetry children write.

Reading the work of young people, I watch for the same things that I hope they will value in the best literature, and I try to show them what those things are. I hope children will recog-

nize that there are many ways to express truth. I hope they will value hard questions and believe them worth asking. I hope they will be absorbed with the central themes in literature—such as love, loyalty, conflict, our relationship to the planet Earth and to the passing of time. I hope that they will value honesty, clarity, spirit, and good humor in writing. I am teaching best when my response to children's work reflects those hopes.

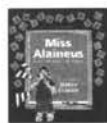
Writing poetry *with* children brought me to poetry written *for* children. When I began working as a poet-in-the-schools, my thinking ran along the same lines as Liz Rosenberg's in the introduction to her fine anthology of contemporary poetry, *The Invisible Ladder*. "Bouncy," she calls poetry for children, bemoaning the fact that "in too many collections of poems for young readers, you never encounter a poem by a living poet who does not write in a children's poetry ghetto." But where, apart from the "children's poetry ghetto," are young children supposed to find poems that they can read and make sense of? That "ghetto" turns out to be a welcoming neighborhood where poets speak in a variety of cadences and from many points of view. Here children can wander freely without anyone holding their hand. I think that it is important to encourage children to discover a favorite poet for themselves, and to show them where to find poetry books in their school so that they can change their minds as often they please. Last month, Jack Prelutsky; this week, Nikki Grimes; next spring, maybe Valerie Worth, Douglas Florian, or Pat Mora.

Then there are advocates of poetry written for children who apparently are suspicious of poetry written *by* children. Take, for example, X. J. and Dorothy Kennedy's afterword to their wonderful anthology *Knock at a Star*: "In feeling their way into poetry, chil-

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dren have much to learn from trying to write it. At least they may discover that good poetry is hard to write, and so may relish all the more what the best poets have accomplished.” Would the anthologists also suggest that children learn from “trying to” draw their own pictures or “trying to” sing songs? Is it important that the child who has written “the dandelions in my yard look just like suns” be told that an adult poet has said it better?

I used to think that there were walls between poetry for adults and poetry for children, and between poetry written by adults and poetry written by children. But I just can't see the barriers anymore. Instead I sense all kinds of vibrant connections, intriguing overlaps, splendid diversity. The house of poetry has many rooms. Dr. Seuss, the psalmists, Mother Goose, John Lennon, and Phillis Wheatley all live there. So do Emily Dickinson, Matsuo Bashō, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Juan Felipe Herrera. Moreover, the sources of poetry—wishes, observations, metaphor, memories, the music of language—are available to everyone, including seven-year-olds.

There are many things that I value in children's poems, but nothing more than the telling detail that evokes a larger, deeper feeling or idea. Writing about his love for a grandfather who died, a fourth-grader wrote “My grandpa got mad / when the wind blew / away his hay.” Describing his confidence in his mother, a sixth-grade boy pictured her baking bread:

When the dough has to sit
under the dishtowel
on the stove,
it looks like a hill
rising to the stars.
My mom moves like a river
flowing from place
to place
knowing where to go
and what to do.



Susan Marie Swanson working with a student at Seward Montessori School in Minneapolis.

A third-grade girl wrote about a frustrated younger sister who, being the last one outside the house, bangs on the door with her fists begging to be let back in “because she is too little / to reach the handle.” A first-grader wrote about his own serenity:

Here I am sitting on
the steps thinking
about the sun.*

Once I met a third-grader who said, “Poems are words that could fascinate people.” That is as good a definition of poetry as I ever hope to find. It describes the difference between “I am happy” and “I carry the sun in my pocket.” Poetry invites us to take time to grow into awareness, to discern what is essential. In our media-saturated, consumerist society, that is not an inconsequential thing. When I approach children with a poem, I sometimes feel as if I'm offer-

ing them a piece of fruit—an imperfect, organically grown orange—when others have been convincing them that what they want is a brightly wrapped and heavily advertised candy bar.

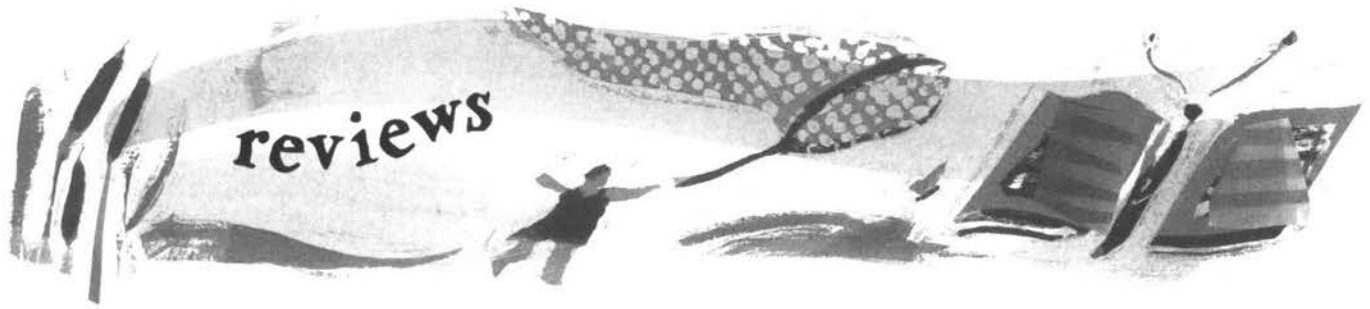
I know that it shouldn't amaze me when they accept the fruit, but it does. Sometimes students send me thank-you notes. Though they are thanking me, it is *poetry* they are celebrating:

“I like what you did for us, that you came just for us.”

“My mind is like a city of thoughts when I see you.” ~

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

* These examples come from poems that have appeared in the anthologies of student writing published annually by the COMPAS Writers and Artists in the Schools program, based in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Picture Books

Big Jabe

By Jerdine Nolen

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD

32 pages, Age 6 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-688-13662-1

In this story of the antebellum South, tall-tale spinner Jerdine Nolen (*Harvey Potter's Balloon Farm*) and illustrator Kadir Nelson (*Brothers of the Knight*) balance uncanny events and a plain rural setting. Nolen's narrator describes extraordinary happenings "A long, long time ago, when young Addy was a house slave on Simon Plenty's plantation." Nelson composes naturalistic images that contrast humble earth and free air. Vast skies soar above low-slung hori-

zons in almost every spread, suggesting rootedness and the space for flight.

This quasi-legend opens with a biblical allusion: One day, while fishing to fill the boss's table, Addy notices a basket floating in the river. Inside, a "little boy 'bout five or six years old just sat there, smilin' up at her." His name is Jabe, and he completes Addy's chore by chanting a rhyme: "Fish, fish, where is you, fish? / Jump to the wagon like Miss Addy wish!" Fish leap out of the water, enough for boss and slaves alike. Jabe also offers Addy a golden pear, then plants its seeds. In a matter of days, the pear tree grows to maturity, forecasting strange things to come. (Curiously, the tree provides an excellent view of the North Star, which guided slaves to freedom.)

That spring, the Plenty Plantation's plants and young animals get big fast;

an illustration shows impossibly tall cornstalks standing over a profusion of cotton plants and baby chickens. "Jabe was growing too... By June he was a full-grown man and had the strength of fifty. He could weed a whole field of soybeans before sunup, hoe the back forty by midday... Life in the Quarters just didn't feel so burdensome with Jabe around." When the overseer begins punishing slaves out of resentment toward Jabe, unusual storms arise and enslaved families miraculously vanish. "Jabe took them to that pear tree," is the whispered explanation.

While Nolen's homespun narration posits Jabe as a combination of Moses and John Henry, Nelson keeps the magic on a practical level. In the earth-tone gouaches, Jabe hefts bushels of cotton, nails a roof with superhuman speed, and ultimately strides across the forest as a giant. He appears in just a few images, always with his head turned, his face half-visible. Nelson devotes greater attention to the changing seasons and to the barrenness of the slaves' wooden shacks. In one subtle spread, he gives a bird's-eye view of the plantation, as if imagining the gaze of a spirit or an escapee. The complex pictures and conversational words encourage a lingering on each moment.

In the end, Jabe remains a mysterious and elusive hero. His powers are never explained, and not every reader will look favorably on his selective mir-



Illustration by Kadir Nelson, from *Big Jabe*

acle-working. For instance, Jabe's magic only works *after* a slave suffers physical harm, and he places himself in bondage rather than delivering all slaves. Yet Nolen and Nelson provide a gripping, well-told story, with ambiguities intact.

—*Nathalie op de Beeck*

Blue Rabbit and Friends

By Christopher Wormell

PHYLLIS FOGELMAN BOOKS

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$14.99

ISBN 0-8037-2499-3

Christopher Robin's animals spent chapters working out their housing arrangements, but—with the exception of Eeyore—they never had the misfortune of starting a story *misplaced*. Piglet did not wake up beneath the nursery curtains; Rabbit's burrow was never behind the toy chest. But to most children, the dilemma that faces Blue Rabbit, Bear, Goose, and Dog will be all too familiar. Many a child might have settled Bear (a svelte Pooh descendant) in a water-filled Frisbee. If Goose caught the child's eye, he could easily forget Bear as he lodged his feathered friend in the doghouse.

This simple story, told in alternating pages of text and linoleum-block prints, is the logical next step for an artist whose previous works include *An Alphabet of Animals*, *A Number of Animals*, *What I Eat*, and *Where I Live*. Those books paired block-printed animals neatly with letters, numbers, foods, and homes or habitats. Here, Blue Rabbit meets three animals sorely in need of sorting.

Blue Rabbit is likewise anxious when we meet him. The doorway of his block cave, set within a weird artificial forest, dwarfs him. But the next illustration proves this rabbit has the makings of a hero. No layabout, he strides off to find something better.

Like any hero, or seeker of housing, he asks for tips. His polite inquiry, "Do you know of a good place to live?" snaps each new animal out of a passive stupor. He befriends first Bear, unhappy in his Frisbee bath; then Goose, who dislikes her house's stale-bone funk; and finally Dog, a no-nonsense beast troubled by his cave's pretty pattern of daisies. These animal friends, in turn, offer Blue Rabbit their dwellings, but Blue Rabbit demurs. (Who would blame him? These unsavvy creatures advertise their houses with complaints.)

Solid black lines define the prints' shapes, but within the foreground color-layering and shadow add charac-



Illustration by Christopher Wormell,
from *Blue Rabbit and Friends*

ter and emotion. Blue Rabbit has a glint in his eyes, which grow large with thought as the pages progress. Repetition and variation in text and illustrations, as well as mild suspense, draw the reader along. When will Blue Rabbit say, "Aha!"?

The ending balances comfort with fresh possibility: Blue Rabbit doesn't quite sort everyone. Instead, having arranged his friends to their contentment, he settles upon a less settled life. Even homebody animals might want

to cheer as Blue Rabbit pedals his red bicycle toward fresh adventure.

—*Jessica Roeder*

Buzz

By Janet S. Wong

Illustrated by
Margaret Chodos-Irvine

HARCOURT

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$15.00

ISBN 0-15-201923-5

A bee buzzes past a boy's window, while inside a buzzing alarm starts the day. The buzz of snoring stops. The buzz of Daddy's shaver starts—then the blender, the coffee grinder, the hair dryer, the doorbell, the little boy's toy at the breakfast table. *Buzz* hums with words and pictures as comforting as the routine of this city family.

Janet S. Wong's happy, unaffected text has a music that matches the rhythm of the morning, a rhythm that wakes up relaxed, evenly paced, then begins to "buzz" more steadily until finally the world is awake.

Margaret Chodos-Irvine's illustrations, achieved (we are told) through a variety of printmaking techniques, reveal a clear, perceptive design sense. Forms are sweetly distilled: flat expanses of color are defined by eloquent outlines and complemented by rare, telling detail. On an evenly toned head, seven dollops create an expressive

face: two eyes, two eyebrows, two lips, and one nose.

When the colors of flower petals overlap, the look is that of tissue-paper collage. Sometimes, lacy one-tone textures overlay another color. Always, the colors are expressive and bold—gold sun rushes past the boy's gray silhouette when he enters his sleeping parents' room; a delicious yellow seeps in the blue garage as the big door buzzes open. Color temperatures speak of early-morning lawns and electric kitchen

lights. Chodos-Irvine's pictures offer a range of perspectives that is almost cinematic: high and low angles of view, long shots and close-ups, montages of smaller pictures that pick up the pace and build tension.

What matters most in this book is the lovingly realistic family. The boy "shaves" with his little car next to Daddy at the sink; they share the same blue eyes. Later, Mommy blow-dries her black hair while her son styles his black locks behind her.

Likewise, the words and illustrations in this book are unmistakably kin; they have a brightness and a brevity that make readers feel happily at home. At book's end, the sky and grass seem warmed by Mommy's bee-striped stockings as she "flies" off to work. Her son, still pajama-clad, waves from the door with Grandma. The buzzing bee from the book's beginning flies by in farewell.

—Diana Star Helmer

First Friends

By Lenore Blegvad

Illustrated by Erik Blegvad

HARPER

24 pages, Ages 2–6, \$9.95

ISBN 0-694-01273-4

Looking at a large group of young children can be like walking past a pet-store cage filled with parakeets. In the blur of chatter and bright color, it's hard to distinguish one from another unless you stop and pay attention. This gentle picture book (part of the Harper Growing Tree line for babies and toddlers) clears a space for each child within a busy nursery school setting, inviting us to meet them one by one before it brings them together in gracefully choreographed pairs. Although the children go unnamed, they are befittingly identified by the objects absorbing their attention. For instance, "We see a little boy who has a drum. And a little girl who has a thumb." Erik Bleg-



Illustration by Eric Blegvad,
from *First Friends*

vad arranges his charming ink-and-watercolor figures two to a page with nothing but white space between them. This gives the impression that the busy classroom really has faded away, which is how it must seem for the preschooler enthralled by the block or clock or toy plane in hand. Adult readers might be happy to note that the Blegvads have resisted gender stereotypes in their depictions. Lenore Blegvad's lilting singsong text introduces girls playing with trucks and trains, while Erik Blegvad shows us a little boy sweetly kissing his rubber duck on the beak.

Once *First Friends* finishes presenting every child in the room, it embarks on the happy task of watching them get to know one another. The different objects play a vital role here as well. "Want to see my thumb?" says one little girl as she approaches the boy with the toy town; and he reciprocates a few pages later with "Want to see my town?" This final section of the book is a spirited chorus of such invitations:

"You can push my truck. Want to float my duck? Come sit on my chair! You can taste my pear." Suddenly there are no longer two lone children per page, but two sets of new friends, contentedly playing together. While *First Friends* could be viewed as a lesson in sharing, it never feels didactic, nor does it resort to flashy gimmicks à la the glittery *Rainbow Fish* to get its points across. It is simply warm and welcoming from the first page, where a little boy asks us to "open the door and come with me," to the last, where the children are putting away the toys, gathering their coats to go home, and smiling because "each of them has made a friend." Is there any better way to end the day?

—Renée Victor

Follow the Leader

By Erica Silverman

Illustrated by G. Brian Karas

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

32 pages, Ages 3–6, \$15.00

ISBN 0-374-32423-9

Two young snowbound brothers entertain themselves indoors in this cheerful rhyming book. Erica Silverman has a keen eye for the simple actions that delight small children:

Follow me walking
Hop when I hop.
Skip when I'm skipping.
Stop when I stop.

She also knows about siblinghood: as the rhyme progresses, the leader interrupts his instructions with attempts to maintain order:

Crawl to that tunnel, and follow
me through.
Hey!
Don't go off that way!
Just do what I do!

Beautifully amplifying the text, G. Brian Karas's pictures start out in medium-sized boxes, echoing the little broth-

er's attempt to mentally organize the changing rules of this new game. As both boys become absorbed in their play, the boxes vanish, colors spread out, and the boys' figures fill the pages. When little brother's attention wanders, the background becomes white again, reflecting his shift in concentration. When big brother regains control, the pages are boxed again, and the pattern repeats.

Karas's colors are welcoming here, unlike the stark desert tones of his famous *Saving Sweetness*, but he keeps his trademark, childlike style of drawing what is *there* instead of what is seen: a rug on the floor appears as a circle; hands and feet show all five digits, no matter what position the body is in. It's an exuberant style well-suited to the subject.

Adults sharing *Follow the Leader* may want to read the brief text once or twice beforehand, as the rhythm

shifts, stanza to stanza. For example,

Pretend you're an eagle: flap,
swoop, and land.
Turn upside down, and stand on
your hands.

is followed by

Yes, I'm still the leader.
Run around in a loop.
Somersault backwards.
Now hula a hoop.

As snow falls outside the windows, the round rug inside becomes a three-ring circus. The younger boy amiably apes the older as blue pillows are imagined into a cool pond (big brother exhales the water like a whale). Finally, a blue-spotted bedspread becomes snow inside the house, as little brother's wordless mutiny convinces his sibling to let someone else have a chance to lead.

—Diana Star Helmer

Just Enough

By Teri Daniels

Illustrated by Harley Jessup

VIKING

32 pages, Ages 2-5, \$15.99

ISBN 0-670-88873-7

The true charm of Teri Daniels and Harley Jessup's *Just Enough* emerges when the text is read aloud. Daniels follows an activity-filled day of one red-haired little boy, and the infectious rhythm in her descriptions makes the boy's delight irresistible. The boy is

SMALL

enough to see [his] shoes
below the bed
very red
shoes

and

BOLD

enough to hold a worm
a slimy wet,
garden pet
worm.

Whether **GLAD** enough to sing a song, or **WILD** enough to splash the bath, this child takes pleasure in the simple events of his day, and in his diverse capabilities.

Jessup's palette isn't extensive, but he employs his colors well. His variety of perspectives (straight on, under the bed, up close, from above) lends interest to mundane activities. The style reflects Jessup's experience designing animated segments for *Sesame Street*; his bold and colorful shapes support the liveliness of the rhymes. In one spread, an enormous, pink-and-brown garden worm exuberantly wriggles across the page, sporting an innocent grin. As the day winds down, we're treated to a gorgeous purple-and-blue view of the boy's backyard, the night sky dotted with stars and fireflies.

Like all good books for the very young, *Just Enough* provides romping



Illustration by G. Brian Karas, from *Follow the Leader*

excitement at the climax but winds down toward the end, allowing listeners to wind down, too. Even the rhyme lengthens, spreading out from five lines to seven, creating a quiet tone that is very satisfying. Toward the end, the little boy shares his mom's lap (and a bedtime story) with a sleepy cat. That is just how *this* book should be enjoyed.

—Kathryne Beebe

Lucky Pennies and Hot Chocolate

By Carol Diggory Shields
Illustrated by Hiroe Nakata
DUTTON

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$13.99
ISBN 0-525-46450-6

What could be better than a crisp November day shared with your favorite person in the world, hot chocolate, and brand-new knock-knock jokes? In friendly, matter-of-fact prose, Carol Diggory Shields's *Lucky Pennies and Hot Chocolate* follows a boy and his grandfather as they indulge in a weekend of finding lucky pennies, making peanut-butter sandwiches, and other happy activities. The only things missing are bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens. However, Shields delivers the survey of her characters' favorite (and un-favorite) things with a twist at the end that makes the story fresh and charming.

Hiroe Nakata's loose watercolor washes are whimsical, with a playful energy that goes beyond their curvy lines and multicolored pastels. Subtle music notes drift among soap bubbles when the two best buddies do the dishes; banana slices, raisins, and marshmallows from their super-scrumptious banana-raisin-marshmallow-surprise pancakes fly into the air (along with the pancakes). Two bouncing pooches follow the duo wherever they go, licking up any scraps they find.

This picture book has the sort of readability and kid-appeal that might require parents to read it at hundreds

of bedtimes. (The four knock-knock jokes in the book will be very popular with children of a certain age.) While it may prove too sweet for some palates, *Lucky Pennies and Hot Chocolate* offers a winning portrait of a relationship between grandfather and grandson.

—Kathryne Beebe

Madlenka

By Peter Sis

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

44 pages, Age 5 and up, \$17.00

ISBN 0-374-39969-7

Take a simple walk around the block with Peter Sis and you wind up having traveled round the world. His newest book, *Madlenka*, celebrates the span of cultures that can exist on one city block in immigrant-rich New York City. As usual, Sis artfully blurs the boundary between the real and the imagined: in

the course of a story about a little girl with a loose tooth, his spectacular illustrations explore what we carry inside us when we travel from one land to another.

At the start, Sis telescopes in, from a hazy picture of a small blue planet in an immense dark sky (note the small red dot) to a recognizable Earth, to an overhead layout of a city block, and then—whoosh, the perspective shifts and we are looking up at an entire block of brownstone buildings. Within this block, Madlenka looks out the window of the building she lives in. She has discovered that her tooth wiggles (what a momentous time in a child's life—that first time for casting away a bit of childhood!) and “has to tell everyone.”

Sis invites us to focus on the small, the particular, the everyday: we walk around the block with Madlenka and our eyes too must traverse the block, as text and smaller illustrations wind their



Illustration by Hiroe Nakata, from *Lucky Pennies and Hot Chocolate*

way around the perfect square of the page. Madlenka shares her joyous news with each of seven neighbors from different countries. At every stop we peek through the book's die-cut windows and glimpse much more than the interiors of their shops and homes—Sís offers the reader views of the larger, more intricate landscapes of the imagination.

Mr. Singh's newsstand opens up to a sumptuous dream of India. A radiant wash of warm red and purple provides the backdrop to fine pen-and-ink drawings of a jewel-laden, flying elephant, a Hindu god, a woman in a sari, and more. Step into Mrs. Grimm's and visit the two-page spread of a vast scratch-board stage, toned in deep green, peopled with characters from Grimm's fairy tales and German opera.

When Madlenka tells her friend Mrs. Kham that her tooth is loose, she replies, "Tashi delek, Mandala." (Every neighbor gives her a different nickname.) "That's a lucky sign." Inside *her* shop is a swirl of red ferocious dragon, a fantastic terrain of land and sea and mountain. A boy on a white yak flies a whimsical kite.

The imagery in *Madlenka*, the scope of the project, and the opulent beauty of Sís's illustrations set this book apart. Sís promises the story of a little girl whose tooth is loose. What he gives us is the world.

—Christine Alfano

My Very Own Room (Mi propio cuartito)

By Amada Irma Pérez

Illustrated by

Maya Christina Gonzalez

CHILDREN'S BOOK PRESS

32 pages, Ages 6–10, \$15.95

ISBN 0-89239-164-2

Virginia Woolf had one. A small pig named Poinsettia in Felicia Bond's *Poinsettia and Her Family* wanted one. And now a girl with five young broth-



Illustration by Maya Christina Gonzalez,
from *My Very Own Room*

ers wants one, too. What is it? A place to be alone.

"A little space was all I wanted, but there wasn't much of it. Our tiny house was shared by eight of us, and sometimes more when our friends and relatives came from Mexico and stayed with us until they found jobs and places to live."

For someone "almost nine," a corner behind a curtain would be the perfect place to read, write, and dream. A place for solitude. But lots of things are stored there—a sewing machine and garden tools and furniture and clothes! However, "like a mighty team of powerful ants," the family pitches in to clear the space. Paint goes up, a bed is found, a crate becomes a table.

That night, two little brothers—former bedmates—hesitate outside. Their sister asks them in and reads them a story before they say good-night and leave. No one feels put out by the change of arrangements.

It's a simple tale—no miracles, no twists—told bilingually, with glowing illustrations of a family "making do" and filling every inch of life with love,

security, and joy. At the edge of things, a thoughtful mother notices her daughter's changing needs and lends an all-important hand.

—Mary Lou Burket

Some Babies

By Amy Schwartz

ORCHARD

32 pages, Ages 2–5, \$15.95

ISBN 0-531-30287-3

Amy Schwartz captured her early adventures in motherhood in 1994's endearing *A Teeny Tiny Baby*. That baby, along with Schwartz's alter-ego Mommy, are back in *Some Babies*. Back, too, are Schwartz's bright, gentle gouache montages.

The action of *Some Babies* begins with Mommy tucking Baby into bed. Baby rejects the blanket, bottle, and bear that are offered, demanding instead that "Mommy talk." Mommy obliges with descriptions of "some babies in the park." The book's opening pages contain small interior scenes against a white background, the park peeking through Baby's window all the while. When the word "park" is spoken, the window view enlarges, occupying the center of a deep blue swirl surrounding Baby in his crib. As Mommy talks, scenes of the park's activity share the page with Baby's bedroom. Turn the page, and the park takes over. Scenes of bedroom and park alternate and overlap in a pleasant, energetic rhythm until a tired Mommy closes the bedroom curtain. The park itself no longer appears, but its inhabitants continue to race through Baby's thoughts.

Schwartz's "babies in the park" play with trucks and mud (girls and boys alike), are held or chased by caregivers (both women and men), and are drawn with lively lines that perfectly capture the joy of chubby, energetic toddlers.

The scenario in *Some Babies* reflects the passage of time since *A Teeny Tiny*

Baby. The earlier book also starred a demanding baby and an illustrated litany of sweet, familiar activities—but in that book, Schwartz’s *Baby* could not speak. This made his ability to control adults humorous and somehow equalizing. In *Some Babies* the scales are further tipped in *Baby*’s favor. *Baby* voices bedtime demands; Mommy patiently complies, even after protesting that her “mouth is fuzzy.” When Mommy finally falls asleep herself, *Baby* is old enough to know that her story is over. Cheerful and adaptable, he lets Mommy be—calling out for Daddy instead.

—Diana Star Helmer

Fiction

The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer

By Gary Paulsen

DELACORTE

176 pages, Age 12 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-32647-5

Like a hybrid of Ernest Hemingway and Stephen King, Gary Paulsen writes about the unpredictable danger of the wilderness and the violence of male coming-of-age. He pounds his readers with spiky gut-punch sentences about blood, physical exhaustion, and hunger pangs. *Hatchet* memorably depicts such wilderness trials as gnat bites on a sunburned face; *Soldier’s Heart* graphically imagines the horrors of a Civil War battlefield. Yet *The Beet Fields*, set in 1955, promises a greater-than-usual dose of verisimilitude and shock—much of it supplied by coarse, sharp sexual content. “[S]mall portions of this book appeared in softer forms, shadowed and changed and sketched into gentler fiction, over twenty years ago,” Paulsen writes in an introduction. “But here it is now as real as I can write it.”

The novel opens with a queasy variation on the author’s autobiographical writings (e.g., *My Life in Dog Years*), which so often condemn his parents’ drinking. The sixteen-year-old protagonist, known only as “the boy,” awakens to his inebriated mother: “She had come to his bed many times drunk, to sleep... But tonight, even half dreaming, he knew something was different, wrong, about her need for him.”

Confronted with his mother’s incontinent desire, the boy runs away from home. He finds work thinning beet crops under a hot North Dakota sun: “It was like standing in the center of an enormous bowl that went green to the sky and then yellow blue into the gold-hot sun, the color mixing with the heat in some way to press down on him, pressing, pushing, bending, driving him back to the hoe.” Paulsen expertly describes the boy’s blisters, empty stomach, and deep satisfaction after an unexpected hot meal; the author further shows how the boy earns the friendship of his fellow laborers, generous Mexican migrant workers, who share their food in return for pigeons the boy kills.

The boy follows the migrants to another beet field, where he earns a few dollars a day. Paulsen conveys the boy’s sense of accomplishment as the money slowly adds up, then destroys that hard-won optimism in a heartbeat. After a wrenching disappointment, the boy goes on the lam again and hooks up with a carnival. In the “carny” chapters, he learns crude slang from a sideshow geek and falls for a Hootchy-Kootchy dancer. The story rushes headlong toward a tense first-sex scene, which holds out one sort of manhood, then skips abruptly to its ironic denouement, which finds the still-boyish protagonist enlisting in the Army (unwary of the “pimp smile” of a recruiter).

Paulsen has titled his book *The Beet Fields* because those fields are the center of the narrative. When the boy leaves

the farm, the novel loses some of its focus, though not its driving force. By the conclusion, even that energy—the boy’s pent-up lust—is expended; with survival comes the disillusionment of adulthood. Once again, Paulsen weaves a gripping tale of a loner. Readers will stay up late to finish it.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

Being with Henry

By Martha Brooks

DK INK

216 pages, Age 12 and up, \$17.95

ISBN 0-7894-2588-2

What do you *see* when your eyes glance away from the young man standing on the street corner begging for change? Is he someone who must have done something wrong to deserve his plight, or is he an unfortunate in need of kindness? Martha Brooks has taken part of her story “The Kindness of Strangers,” from *Traveling on into the Light and Other Stories*, and expanded it into a novel that explores how a sixteen-year-old boy, adrift and unloved, and an eighty-three-year-old man come together to help each other.

Though he has a hot temper, Laker is basically a good kid—responsible, a good student, and an avid reader (he works in the library). He has taken care of his helpless, immature mother for years. Following a fight with his stepfather, Laker is kicked out of the house. Because the first available bus takes him to Bemidji, Minnesota, he ends up standing under the canopy of Thriftway Drugs when Henry arrives to do his shopping.

Henry, whose beloved wife died two years ago, is struggling to maintain his independence and dignity despite the efforts of a devoted but overbearing daughter. The two decide to take a chance on each other and Laker moves in with Henry. They make a good pair. Henry is patient and wise; Laker is kind

Riverbank Review

Ten Great Easy Readers

The Duck and the Owl

By Hanna Johansen

Illustrated by Käthi Bhend

Translated by Christopher M. Franceschelli

DUTTON, 1991

Out of print—check your local library

Exquisite nature sketches illustrate this humorous conversation between two very different birds who can't comprehend each other's ways.

Emma's Magic Winter

By Jean Little, illustrated by Jennifer Plecas

HARPERCOLLINS, 1998

hardcover: \$14.89, paperback: \$3.95

In the games Emma plays, her red boots give her the power to become invisible and to climb giant snow mountains. Can they help her conquer her shyness?

Forest

By Laura Godwin

Illustrated by Stacey Schuett

HARPERCOLLINS, 1998

hardcover: \$14.89, paperback: \$3.95

Jeannie has a memorable encounter with nature when she and her parents bring an abandoned fawn into their house for the night.

Fox in Love

And others in the series by Edward Marshall, illustrated by James Marshall

VIKING, 1982

hardcover (Econo-clad): \$11.10, paperback (Puffin): \$3.99

Even with his pesky little sister, Louise, tagging along after him, Fox is quite the ladies' man—or so he thinks.

Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Moon

And others in the series by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Suçie Stevenson

BRADBURY, 1987 / *hardcover: \$12.95*

paperback (Aladdin): \$3.99

All the things Henry loves about fall, and all the things he doesn't—such as the scary stories his mom tells on Halloween—are made better by having his big affectionate dog at his side.

Detach
bookmark
here. →



Riverbank Review

of books for young readers

**Mr. Putter and Tabby
Pour the Tea**

And others in the series by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Arthur Howard

HARCOURT, 1994 / *hardcover*: \$13.00, *paperback*: \$5.95

A lonely old man has much to share—tea and scones, a garden full of tulips, wonderful stories—but no one to share with, until he adopts an elderly cat from the animal shelter.

My Brother, Ant

By Betsy Byars

Illustrated by Marc Simont

VIKING, 1996 / *hardcover*: \$13.99

paperback (Puffin): \$3.99

When there's a monster to chase out from under the bed or an off-season Santa letter to write, Anthony's big brother is there to help, and "Ant" rewards him by being full of surprises.

Owl at Home

By Arnold Lobel

HARPERCOLLINS, 1975

hardcover: \$15.89, *paperback*: \$3.95

Befriending the moon and brewing "tear-water tea" are just two of the enchanting adventures of this delightful homebody owl.

Wiley and the Hairy Man

Adapted by Molly Garrett Bang

SIMON & SCHUSTER, 1976

hardcover: \$14.00, *paperback (Aladdin)*: \$3.99

In this suspenseful African American folktale, a boy must fool the Hairy Man of the swamp three times in order to be safe from him for good.

Wizard and Wart at Sea

And others in the series

by Janice Lee Smith

Illustrated by Paul Meisel

HARPERCOLLINS, 1995 / *hardcover*: \$15.89

Goats on the beach and monkeys in the pool can only mean one thing: it's vacation time for a wizard and his dog apprentice, and their spells, as usual, are going comically awry.

and hardworking. Together they form a new family, one that has highs and lows but always a core of respect and genuine caring. After a year they journey to Henry's lake house in Manitoba, where Laker unexpectedly reconnects with the old woman who cared for him when he was very young. What she reveals about his past enables him to understand why his mother told him to move out, and this knowledge allows him to choose his future.

Brooks develops her characters fully; even the novel's minor players are intriguing. Her use of journal entries, scattered sporadically throughout the first two parts of the book, sets up the ending quite nicely, as they all concern Laker's fragmented memories of his infancy. His reunion with his early childhood caregiver at the novel's end might seem an unlikely coincidence, but in the context of the story it expresses two of Brooks's central themes: the interdependence of human beings and the role that chance encounters play in life. The person who becomes a catalyst for change in your life is often someone you'd never expect to play that part.

—Lee Galda

A Dance for Three

By Louise Plummer

DELACORTE

230 pages, Age 14 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-385-32511-8

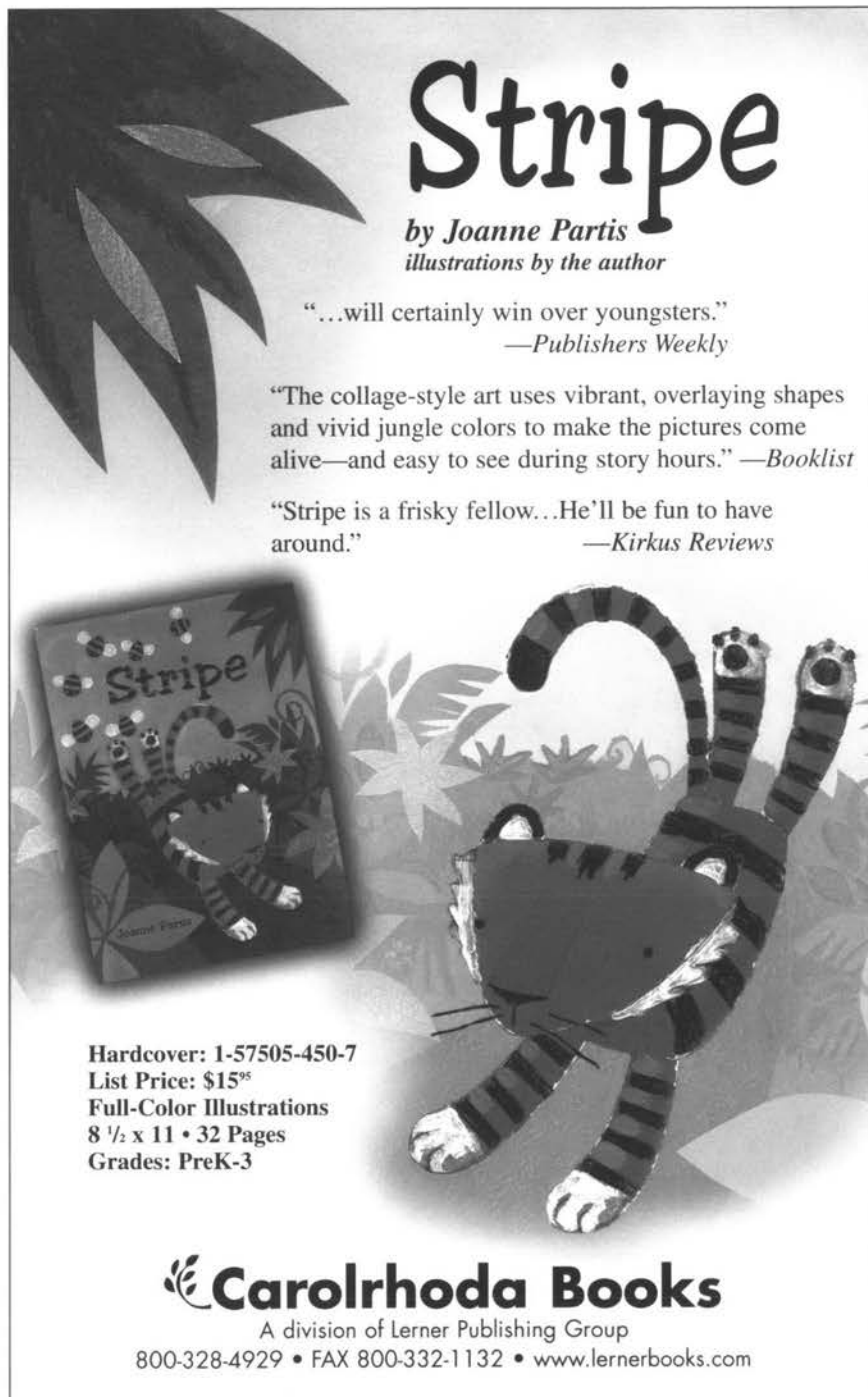
Fifteen-year-old Hannah Ziebarth steals roses and hangs them in bunches from her bedroom ceiling to dry. Dried roses are her passion, but she has no desire for them unless they are taken illicitly, usually from reviled neighbors who almost catch her. All those gorgeous flowers, clipped and stolen before their full blossoming, tell us much about Hannah. Here is a smart and funny and rebellious girl, cut down by circumstance.

Two years earlier, Hannah's father died of respiratory failure ("of a burp,"

she says), and the event sent Hannah's mother into a debilitating depression, forcing the fifteen-year-old to shoulder all family responsibility. Hannah not only goes to school and cleans the house: she works at the Burger Shack, shops (and pays) for all groceries, pre-

pare every meal, and, to calm her easily agitated mother, makes sure that the place-mats are well-ironed. What could add to her burden? At the novel's beginning we learn that Hannah is pregnant.

In *A Dance for Three*, Louise Plummer sensitively explores the reasons a



Stripe
by Joanne Partis
illustrations by the author

"...will certainly win over youngsters."
—Publishers Weekly

"The collage-style art uses vibrant, overlaying shapes and vivid jungle colors to make the pictures come alive—and easy to see during story hours." —Booklist

"Stripe is a frisky fellow...He'll be fun to have around."
—Kirkus Reviews

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good kid is nudged into making bad choices. In a world that readily lays blame on a single doorstep, Plummer would show us that Hannah's pregnancy and ultimate breakdown are pressed along by much more than her own actions.

Though the plot of *A Dance for Three* feels somewhat worn (teen pregnancy, a girl coping with a parent's mental illness), Plummer moves outside the claustrophobic range of Hannah and her ill mother, vitalizing the novel with the strong, intriguing presence of a number of characters. Milo is drawn with more texture than the usual "bad boyfriend" stereotype—readers respond to his charm and his forceful personality before they encounter his sadism and narcissism. Milo's quiet younger brother, Roman, emerges as one of the most interesting characters in the book: it's a pleasure to see him wrest himself from the shadow of his older, adored brother and grow beyond his family's blindered success ethic.

The interval that Hannah spends in a psychiatric ward after an all but inevitable breakdown is realistically portrayed—Plummer never romanticizes the young patients or their illnesses.

By novel's end, Hannah is still making her own difficult choices—but they are better choices. She also accepts help from friends, something she has needed to do for a long time. No longer stealing flowers, Hannah and her neighbor plant a *living* rosebush in memory of the baby that she finally chooses to give away.

—Christine Alfano

Gathering Blue

By Lois Lowry
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

215 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.00

ISBN 0-618-05581-9

In a note from the author at the front of *Gathering Blue*, Lois Lowry suggests that this new novel is a companion to her

Newbery-winning *The Giver*, an alternate view of what the future might turn out to be. As she says, "... it seems possible to me that other kinds of worlds might evolve. How about a society with no technology at all? How about a community of disorder, savagery, and self-interest?"

Such a community sounds like the exact opposite of the one depicted in *The Giver*, which was organized around security, comfort, and equality. And at first glance, *Gathering Blue* is the opposite of *The Giver*. The central character is a girl rather than a boy, an orphan rather than the member of a happy family. Kira's world is primitive rather than technologically advanced, agricultural rather than urban, and her life is physically and emotionally harsh rather than comfortable.

But a second glance reveals as many similarities as differences. Like Jonas in *The Giver*, Kira is singled out for being different from everyone else, and as a result, she discovers a startling secret about her community that is hidden to most of its members. The secret involves her as a preserver and transmitter of communal memories, a role she feels increasing discomfort with. Also like Jonas, Kira learns there is another place beyond the only community she has known thus far, and ultimately she aspires to move beyond her home, toward this other place. Whether or not she succeeds is unclear, although the ending of *Gathering Blue* has a more hopeful feeling than did *The Giver*. In her author's note, Lowry says, "I like endings that contain such hope." This might be a way of telling readers that the much-discussed ending of *The Giver* contains hope, too.

There is another significant similarity between the two books. Like *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue* is an excellent novel, carefully plotted, clearly written, and, for all the deep questions about the ethics of power and the

social obligations of artists that it raises, always believable and entertaining. Lowry makes use of basic conventions in children's fiction—the orphan protagonist, the family constructed of friends, the theme of innocence confronting wider knowledge, the focus on questions of where and what a home is—weaving the elements together with such artistry that it all seems fresh and new. Despite, or even perhaps because of its familiarity, *Gathering Blue* should be a compelling experience for readers of all ages who enjoy the special pleasures of children's fiction.

—Perry Nodelman

Good-bye for Today: The Diary of a Young Girl at Sea

By Peter and Connie Roop
Illustrated by Thomas B. Allen

ATHENEUM

48 pages, Ages 7–10, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-82222-7

Their excellent work as editors of journals by explorers (Columbus, Audubon, Lewis and Clark) has prepared the team of Peter and Connie Roop for their latest project, an absorbing and convincing fictional journal based on the voyages of nineteenth-century New England whaling families.

As the Roops have shown, the journal can be an obliging form for teaching about the past and telling a story. It has inherent credibility and structure, with each day inevitably dawning on the one that came before. Yet the fictional journal must, above all, be interesting to read.

Good-bye for Today is a fine example of the form. The year is 1871 and Laura, nine, is sailing aboard the *Monticello* with her father (the captain), her mother, her younger brother William, and the crew. She isn't fond of writing, but her sketches in trembly ink—provided by Thomas B. Allen—of birds and whales, a treasured doll, a chamber pot, and other things observed aboard the

ship, adorn the pages. They give the book the air of something tenderly recorded, something a child might actually have made.

Though Laura feels at home at sea and chafes at all restrictions (“Absolutely not” is one of her mother’s recurrent commands), a storm in which a sailor drowns is frightening. “Papa called the storm a typhoon,” Laura writes. “I call it a horrible, terrible monster that I never want to see again. Papa says we might have more. I pray we do not. For the first time I look forward to being on dry land, at school with the proper young ladies.”

There’s more to come, however. Weevils in the hardtack, the killing and “cutting in” of whales, dangerous cold and drifting ice. Laura’s story never loses its alacrity or force. And the Roops have kept it short—just right for restless readers in early grades.

—Mary Lou Burket

The Little Prince

By Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Translated by Richard Howard
HARCOURT

96 pages, All ages, \$18.00

ISBN 0-15-202398-4

Since its publication in 1943, the beloved French story of *Le Petit Prince* has been known to American readers through the able translation of Katherine Woods. The occasion of the centennial of the author’s birth (June 29, 2000) prompted the publisher to commission a new translation, and to restore the subtlety of the original watercolor illustrations by the author. While it is immediately clear that the restored art is true to the original (in a 1982 printing the colors have gone garish, with the prince’s cloak rendered turquoise and fuchsia rather than the original green

and orange; his planet is lavender rather than gray), the need for a new translation is more difficult to assess.

Fortunately, the new translator is Richard Howard, a formidable literary translator as well as a celebrated poet. His translations are noteworthy for moving beyond his mastery of French to an intimacy with the nuances of language and style. How-

ard’s approach to *The Little Prince* is sensitive and measured, adding fluidity and vividness to the tale while maintaining the inherently peculiar nature of its characters and scenes.

The Little Prince is a twentieth-century fable told by an adult, a pilot who has crash-landed in the desert where he meets an unusual man-child, a prince from a faraway asteroid. During their brief sojourn, the Little Prince teaches the narrator some essential lessons of love and life. Woods gave the Little Prince the voice of an adult speaking a foreign language, and it would be tempting for a contemporary translator to turn his voice into that of a contemporary child. But Howard recognizes that the Little Prince must speak with serious yet childlike wisdom, laced with a note of self-importance. This requires great subtlety, and Howard meets his chal-

lenge splendidly. While his version is more natural and graceful than Woods’s, he never turns Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s extraordinary tale into an ordinary one.

Howard’s poetic sensibility brings new life to the story’s language. For example, he replaces “accident” with the more immediately visual “crash landing.” Where Woods wrote, “There before me, facing the little prince, was one of those yellow snakes that take just thirty seconds to bring your life to an end,” Howard offers: “There, coiled in front of the little prince, was one of those yellow snakes that can kill you in thirty seconds.” Richard Howard gives the lie to the famous epigram, “Translation is like a woman. If she’s faithful she’s not beautiful. If she’s beautiful, she’s not faithful.” Howard’s faithful *and* beautiful translation enhances and deepens our appreciation of this modern-day classic.

—Krystyna Poray Goddu

Memories of Summer

By Ruth White

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

135 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-374-34945-2

Ruth White brings the Virginia hills to life at the opening of *Memories of Summer*, creating a world of creeks, coal miners, wildflowers, and two mother-



Illustration by Thomas B. Allen,
from *Good-bye for Today*



Illustration by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, from *The Little Prince*

less sisters so close that once they even dreamed the same dream. But the “memories of summer” of the title are not memories of fireflies and Kool-Aid served in jelly jars. They are memories about a girl named Summer. The novel is the chronicle of sixteen-year-old Summer’s year-long descent into schizophrenia, as seen through the eyes of her thirteen-year-old sister, Lyric.

Lyric tells the story of how their father announced at Summer’s sixteenth birthday party that he was ready to move from the Virginia hollow they called home to the booming city of Flint, Michigan. It is August 1955. The sisters, especially Summer, are thrilled, though in retrospect Lyric wonders, “Why did we dream about going somewhere else and making more money and having more stuff? It’s a mystery.” The two go to bed “dreaming of things we would buy in Michigan—like lavender dresses and lace curtains.”

When the family moves north, into squalid rooms in a crowded house, two things disappear: the Virginia hills, which gradually recede in Lyric’s memory, and the dreamy, loving girl that Summer once was, lost to mental illness. The narrative moves relentlessly toward the moment in the penultimate

chapter when Papa and Lyric drive Summer to Pontiac State Hospital. A doctor says to Lyric, “You won’t ever again see that pretty, vivacious teenager who *was* your sister. She is gone.”

White’s deceptively simple prose is carefully crafted, rich in patterns of repeating images. Every detail is woven into the whole. Papa, who has brought his daughters into a new world of factories and television sets, bolts rearview mirrors onto cars for his paycheck. Just before a crisis when Summer enters the room with bloody scratches across her face—and bloody fingernails—Lyric is at the kitchen table studying her music theory homework: the minor keys. The most vivid images are of Summer. She curls up tightly on the bed; she crouches over a candle and revels at the sight of her shadow; she speaks gibberish; she smears lipstick over her ruined face.

When Lyric puts on nail polish in the novel’s closing vignette, it’s from the bottle she gave Summer for her birthday, back in Virginia. She goes downtown to a street dance, on a street the sisters visited when they first arrived in Flint. When a boy flirts, Lyric proudly tosses off a “feisty” remark she once heard Summer make. Lyric isn’t able to make

sense of Summer’s suffering. Her life, shadowed by her sister’s pain, goes on.

—Susan Marie Swanson

A Perfect Friend

By Reynolds Price

ATHENEUM

168 pages, Ages 9–12, \$17.00

ISBN 0-689-83029-7

The highly respected Southern novelist Reynolds Price, known for such rich and moving adult novels as *The Source of Light* and *Kate Vaiden*, has written his first book for young readers. *A Perfect Friend* is an unusual, introspective tale of faith, intuition, and bonds that extend beyond normal understanding.

Eleven-year-old Ben Laughinghouse Barks loves elephants more than anything. This love was passed on to him by his mother, who died when he was ten years old, and whom Ben misses profoundly. Price effectively depicts the nurturing of the young boy’s passion for elephants, and its growth after his mother’s death. From the time Ben was three, his mother taught him to draw elephants and led him to books and magazines that taught him about the animals’ strength, intelligence, and gentle dignity. After suffering through his mother’s painful illness and death, Ben finds that he can ease his sorrow only by thinking about elephants.

In the midst of Ben’s attempts to deal with his mother’s absence a traveling circus, featuring one elephant, comes to town. Ben, who has an extraordinary talent for communicating silently with animals, is ultimately able to befriend the elephant, Sala (whose name means “Sacred Tree”), and, through doing so, to come to terms with his mother’s death and to recognize his own wishes and dreams for his future.

The story’s strength lies in Ben’s emotional complexity and his bond both with his mother and with Sala. Price’s rendering of the depth of Ben’s

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pain, and of his understanding that it will always be with him, is strong and true. Early passages in the book poignantly express the reach of Ben's grief. "Ben knew his prayers were probably useless. They gave him hope, though—the kind of hope that lucky people have and everybody strongly needs. It helped Ben believe he would grow up someday and find the necessary time and money to bring the things he loved closer to him where he could guard them, day and night, from enemies, sickness, and unfair punishment." Ben's is an adult prayer; *A Perfect Friend* is the story of an unusually gifted eleven-year-old boy learning to cope with an adult-sized grief.

What could be a deeply affecting novel, however, is weighed down by seemingly arbitrary details and hints of significance that are never pursued. The other major characters—Ben's father, his cousin and best friend Robin, and his friend Duncan—promise to be multifaceted but are never fully developed. Price's layered style, effective in adult novels covering more time and territory, dilutes, rather than enhances, this intriguing children's story.

—*Krystyna Poray Goddu*

Playing without the Ball

By Rich Wallace

KNOPF

224 pages, Age 14 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-679-88672-9

As Oprah and every aspiring beauty contestant constantly remind us—and as sports novel after sports novel reiterates—in America you can be anything you want to be. You just have to believe in yourself and try. Unfortunately, it isn't true. In order for there to be winners, in beauty contests, in sports, and elsewhere in life, there have to be others who wanted just as desperately to win but don't. Rich Wallace's novels



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PLAYING SOLITAIRE

by Nancy Antle

0-8037-2406-3 / \$16.99 / grades 7 up
Dial Books

"...no teen will be able to put the book down..."—*VOYA*

"...with its clean, clear writing, depth of character development, and fast-moving plot [*Playing Solitaire*] will be accessible to reluctant readers, yet still hold the attention of those just looking for a good story."—*School Library Journal*

"Ellie is adjusting to new life at her grandfather's after a sequence of family tragedies...the brevity and dramatic subject will commend this to reluctant readers as well as those just looking for the satisfying triumph of a girl who's had it rough."—*The Bulletin*



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Bluestem

by Francis Arrington

0-399-23564-7 / \$16.99 / grades 4-6
Philomel Books

"A well-characterized and beautifully written historical novel...A powerful tale of desolation and survival."

—*School Library Journal*

"A vivid slice of life from another era, this novel offers a gritty, but believable view of life on the prairie...A promising first novel."—*Booklist* (boxed review)

"...a gripping story of courage and survival. [With] prose as clean and spare as the prairie landscape...The narrative reflects the story's bleak, harsh setting, but it also captures Polly's connection to the prairie and the beauty she sees in her surroundings."—*Horn Book*

Wemberly Worried



by **KEVIN HENKES**

★ “Wemberly, a quiet and introverted mouse, spends all of her time worrying about big things (will her parents disappear in the middle of the night?), little things (spilling juice at the table), and things in between (will she shrink in the bath?). As if she doesn’t have enough to stew about, the anticipated beginning of nursery school opens a whole new world of woe. Happily, the first-day jitters are soon diminished with the help of an understanding teacher and a new friend. Henkes once again puts his finger on the pulse of young children, combining good storytelling, careful characterization, and wonderfully expressive artwork to create an entertaining and reassuring picture book.”

—Starred review / *School Library Journal*

★ “This young heroine speaks to the worrywart in everyone.” —Starred review / *Publishers Weekly*



“In many ways, Wemberly is the flip side of Henkes’ sassy Lilly. As much as little ones love Lilly, the ‘fraidy cats of the world will see themselves in this winsome worrywart.”—*ALA Booklist*

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— Also by Kevin Henkes —

Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse

Ages 4 up. \$15.95 Tr 0-688-12897-1; \$14.89 Lb 0-688-12898-X



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stand out from most other sports novels for young people by focusing on some of those *others*. The boys he writes about are would-be winners facing up to the fact that, no matter how hard they try, they haven't quite got what it takes to be what they so desperately want to be.

In Wallace's fine first novel, *Wrestling Sturbridge*, Ben is an excellent wrestler—but, despite every effort, not quite as good as his friends on the team. In Wallace's second novel, *Shots on Goal*, Bones is equally committed to soccer, but not so good as his best friend Joey. For Jay in *Playing without the Ball*, things are even worse. No matter how much he loves basketball and devotes his time and energy to it, he doesn't even make his school team.

In all three books Wallace parallels his characters' sports problems with difficulties in other parts of their lives. Ben has to learn that a girl who likes him matters more than a woman he admires from afar, and the girl Bones admires prefers the inescapable Joey. When *Playing without the Ball* begins, Jay is not only off the basketball team, he is parentless and without friends, living a solitary existence in his first apartment.

All three boys find ways of turning losing into winning. Ben does it by seeing beyond the competitive striving of his teammates, understanding his own value as someone who gives his best even as he loses, and discovering the joy of the relationship he already has. Bones does it by seeing beyond Joey's self-involved wish to excel, instead becoming a team player, onfield and off. Jay joins a church league in which he can use his basketball skills to the best advantage, and he exchanges an impossible dream of success on the court for a new team of unlikely friends. All three books suggest that not being what you thought you wanted to be is not necessarily a reason for despair. You

just have to learn to want to be what you are already.

Playing without the Ball isn't as precise as the elegant *Wrestling Sturbridge*, nor as spare as the efficient *Shots on Goal*. In addition to his basketball woes, Jay contends with the trauma of his parents' willingness to detach themselves from him, with confusion about a female friend with whom he has his first sexual experience (at the same time that he develops romantic feelings for another girl), and with his growing awareness of issues of race, class, and the intricate power structures of his high school and his town. It's a messy novel filled with many plots and subplots and an unwieldy cast of characters. The strength of *Playing without the Ball* emerges from the messiness: a sense of the complexity of being alive. Like its main character, it's a novel that wins by seeming to lose—by doing all the supposedly wrong things that turn out to be right, after all.

—Perry Nodelman

River Boy

By Tim Bowler

MCELDERRY

155 pages, Age 12 and up, \$16.00

ISBN 0-689-82908-6

First published in England, where it won the 1998 Carnegie Medal, *River Boy* explores a classic theme: the beauty and impermanence of life. Tim Bowler crafts a compelling story, making use of graceful description, elements of mysticism, and sensitive characterization.

Fifteen-year-old Jess loves her grandfather, a gifted and successful artist, and it pains her to adjust to the fact that he is dying. This adjustment is made more difficult by her grandfather's irascible personality; often Jess is the only person he is civil to, especially when he's painting. We learn this and other information about Grandpa

through Jess's reminiscences. The novel opens with his heart attack, witnessed by Jess, a long-distance swimmer, as she works out at the local pool. Following this crisis, the whole family journeys from the city to the remote part of coastal England where Grandpa grew up. A man who expressed disdain for memories throughout his life, refusing to recall either his own or his son's childhood, Grandpa has now asked to return to the river on which he spent his first fifteen years.

As the pieces of the narrative fall into place, we begin to see the shape of Grandpa's life: a long journey, filled more with art than with other people. Living out his last days, he is frantic to finish a painting that he has named *River Boy*, although no one can see a boy in its landscape.

As Grandpa tries to paint, the river beckons to Jess. Something impels her to find its source, to plumb its depths. She feels watched, and catches glimpses of someone *she* calls the "river boy," a young man clad in black shorts who's an even better swimmer than she is. Ultimately, Jess enters the river to swim to its source with the boy who, she comes to understand, embodies the spirit of her grandfather as a fifteen-year-old. He, too, had been a long-distance swimmer, and once wanted to swim to the sea. Now Jess does it for him. It is a powerful metaphor for a life lived to completion and continuing on in the experience of another.

—Lee Galda

The Wanderer

By Sharon Creech

HARPERCOLLINS

305 pages, Age 10 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-027730-0

Those who enjoyed Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* or *Chasing Redbird* will not be disappointed by *The Wanderer*. The story opens with a lyrical des-

cription of the lure of the sea. Thirteen-year-old Sophie isn't quite sure why, but she is intensely drawn to the ocean. Sophie badgers her three uncles into taking her along as they set out, with her two cousins, across the Atlantic in the *Wanderer*, bound for England and her grandfather Bompie. Yet she has recurring nightmares in which she is overwhelmed by a huge black wave.

Where does this primal longing come from? And just who, exactly, is Sophie? Her cousin Brian calls her "the orphan," and her uncles won't talk about her "real" parents, yet Sophie steadfastly maintains that her grandfather (whom she has never met) told her stories, which she relates to her companions as they sail. She deftly avoids Brian's cruel comments to the effect that her parents aren't her "real" parents, yet she has flashes of memory that she can't account for. What is her story? Along with Sophie and her cousins, we gradually discover it as *The Wanderer* unfolds.

Creech tells Sophie's story, and the story of the voyage to England, in entries from journals kept by Sophie and her cousin Cody. The two voices are very different. Sophie's is dreamy, chatty, and revealing of her deep feelings for the people around her and her private struggle with her past. Cody's entries are brief, almost cryptic, but it is through him that we learn how Sophie appears to others. These two voices also illuminate the journeys, private and communal, of all on board. Sophie is searching for her lost memories. Brian and Cody, each a young adolescent awkward in his own way, are trying to discover where they belong. The uncles, seemingly successful and settled, turn out to be searching as well—for lost love, meaningful work, and that elusive state called hap-



Illustration by David Diaz, from *The Wanderer*

piness. As the *Wanderer* sails into a terrible storm, these individual journeys merge to become a mighty struggle for survival.

Creech combines high adventure, forceful characters, and fervent introspection in a story that asks many questions but answers only a few. Striking geometric drawings by David Diaz begin the chapters. Beautifully written, *The Wanderer* is likely to keep readers spellbound to its finish.

—Lee Galda

Nonfiction

Author Talk

Compiled and edited by

Leonard S. Marcus

SIMON & SCHUSTER

103 pages, Ages 8–14, \$19.95

ISBN 0-689-81383-X

In his introduction to this first-rate collection of interviews with fifteen authors of acclaimed and popular books for young people, Leonard Marcus offers a helpful description of his interviewing process. He stresses the importance of *listening*: "by listening well, the interviewer will know when to ask the next question, and what to ask." He describes how an interview is revised, explaining that he "listened to the tapes over and

over again before deciding which bits of conversation to keep," then gave them to the authors to rework, if they chose, "just as if they were writing—and rewriting—a manuscript."

The majority of Marcus's subjects are authors of fiction (including Karen Cushman, Lois Lowry, and Laurence Yep), but he also talks with writers of nonfiction (Russell Freedman and Seymour Simon) and poetry (Lee Bennett Hopkins). The interviews are illustrated with photos of the authors as children and as adults. Many segments include pictures of authors' work spaces and reproductions of manuscript pages with comments scrawled across them. There are also lists of books by each author.

Author Talk differs from Pat Cummings's *Talking with Artists* series, in which picture-book illustrators answer an identical sequence of questions. The writers treated in *Author Talk* create books for older children—for children old enough to read and enjoy the interviews—in contrast to the illustrators in *Talking with Artists*, whose books generally appeal to younger children. As such, *Author Talk* already seems indispensable. How have children and adults gotten along without it?

Some of Marcus's questions are general; for example, "Do you have a daily work routine?" or "What do you tell children who want to write?" Others are particular to their subject. When Gary Paulsen describes his difficult childhood, Marcus asks, "How *did* you survive?" He invites Seymour Simon to talk about a photograph from one of his books showing the Moon's view of Earth. He asks E. L. Konigsburg why she didn't become a scientist and Ann M. Martin what she has learned from the thousands of letters she has received from children about her Baby-sitters Club books.

The interviews reveal the writers' distinct personalities as well as different ways of thinking about writing. Asked, "What is the best thing about being a writer?" Russell Freedman observes, "Being a writer means that I can explore myself: It's impossible to write well about any subject without examining your own deepest feelings about it." Johanna Hurwitz reflects on connections with readers: "my stories can touch children I'll never meet in places I'll never go." Jon Scieszka explains that "being a writer is fun, but it's also torture," while Judy Blume—looking at the flip side of the coin—says, "I get to play pretend all the time."

—Susan Marie Swanson

Frank O. Gehry: Outside In

By Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan

DK INK

48 pages, Ages 8–14, \$19.95

ISBN 0-7894-2677-3

The large, slick pages of this book, splashed with bold typography and dynamic photographs, might suggest the design of a chic magazine; but the presentation provides plenty of clearly presented background information for young readers who don't know their way around the art and business of architecture. The result is sophisticated yet welcoming—like the architecture of its subject, Frank O. Gehry.

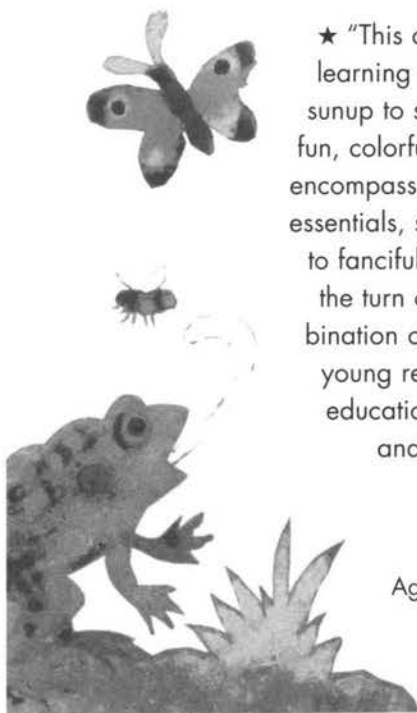
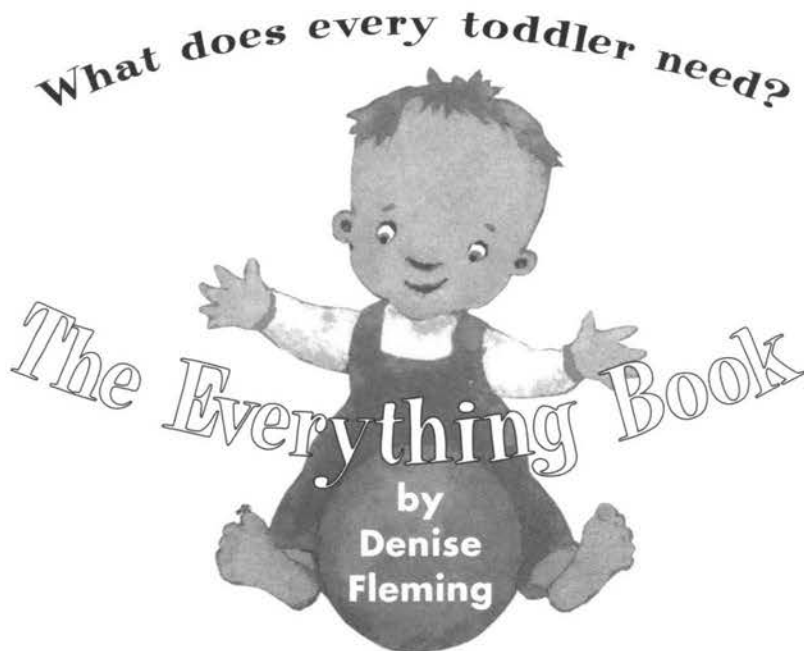
Frank O. Gehry: Outside In opens with a brief overview of Gehry's current fame and success but turns quickly to his beginnings. The child playing blocks with his beloved grandmother and watching carp in the bathtub became a teen who read *Popular Mechanics* and worked to help support his family when they fell on hard times and relocated from Toronto to Los Angeles.

Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan, authors of several books about art for young people—most recently *Chuck Close: Up Close*—focus on key building

projects that delineate Gehry's path as an architect. When he transformed an ordinary pink bungalow into an unorthodox, sculptural dwelling for his young family, the public stir caused by this break from architectural norms led Gehry to stop compromising himself

in his commissioned work. No more shopping centers!

The chapter "Every Building Has a Story" is devoted to descriptions of four key projects, including Loyola University Law School (influenced by Roman architecture), a luxury resi-

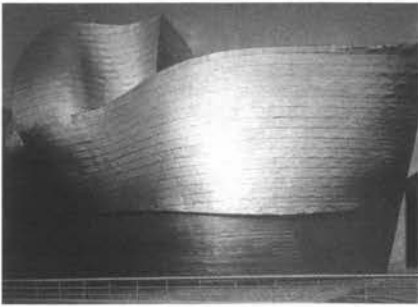


★ "This compilation of rhymes, games, and learning will keep young readers busy from sunup to sundown. Fleming makes learning a fun, colorful experience. This eclectic collection encompasses virtually everything from preschool essentials, such as colors, shapes, and numbers, to fanciful nursery rhymes. . . . Surprises await the turn of every page. . . . This unique combination of playfulness and learning will keep young readers enthralled. Entertaining and educational, this is sure to please old fans and new. It truly has everything."

—Kirkus, starred review

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**Henry Holt
Books for Young Readers**



Photograph by Erika Barahona Ede, from Frank O. Gehry: Outside In

dence (with a fanciful dome, echoing the observatory the client remembered from her childhood), an office building in Venice, California (“the Binoculars Building”), and another in Prague. The last is the famous “Fred and Ginger” building, here presented with a vintage photo of Astaire and Rogers to explain the building’s nickname.

A fifth project is the focus of an entire chapter: the Guggenheim Building in Bilbao, Spain. Greenberg and Jordan infuse their discussion of the planning and design process with real excitement. They’ve given us enough information about an architect’s job that descriptions of clients, sites, and building materials are actually fun to read. The explanation of computer modeling and how it makes buildings like the Bilbao Guggenheim possible is fascinating. At the back of the book are a glossary, bibliography, and a list of Gehry buildings.

Though it has a bold and flashy appearance, this book is essentially about the creative process and about ways to look at new buildings with an open and educated mind. Architecture is about *ideas*, insist the authors as well as the architect who is their subject. “The difficulty is facing the unknown of the next project,” says Gehry. “Searching for the unknown is scary. And the fear fuels creativity, fuels going forward.”

—Susan Marie Swanson

John Blair and the Great Hinckley Fire

By Josephine Nobisso
Illustrated by Ted Rose

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

32 pages, Ages 6–10, \$16.00

ISBN 0-618-01560-4

You have to drive right past Toby’s, the huge freeway-side restaurant with its loud billboard lure of STICKY BUNS and PETTING ZOO, and tool around the periphery of this small town before you’ll find the Hinckley Fire Museum. Inside the two-story, nondescript building, a series of humble dioramas and salvaged mementos (pots melted together, charred logging camp dishware) remind visitors of one of the worst catastrophes in Minnesota history: the 1894 firestorm that laid waste to six towns, consumed 350,000 acres of forest, and claimed 413 lives. Josephine Nobisso has rescued this near-forgotten event, powerfully framing the awful day with the actions of one man—a black porter named John Blair.

At the start of a taut and suspense-

ful narrative, Nobisso smartly puts us on board The Limited, Train No. 4, among the unlucky passengers traveling from Duluth to St. Paul, via Hinckley. We learn that timber fires were common in early autumn, and yet Ted Rose’s watercolor illustrations cast an eerie, foreboding glow. The effect is unsettling: pages that at first seem merely smudged by cinders grow red-hot as Rose recreates the terrible scenarios within the train (passengers’ clothing bursting into flames, licks of fire coming in through the train’s sides) and the hellish vistas outside its windows (“a wall of fire, sky-high, and as dense as a sea, barreled toward them”).

Nobisso’s prose is precise and strong: the day she describes is horrific, but she alternates descriptions of calamity with John Blair’s controlled and calming point of view. As readers, we experience the influence of his levelheaded command. The story enthralls—from the first intimations of true danger to the maelstrom of fire and the last-ditch attempt of the train’s crew to save passengers by racing backward, away from



Illustration by Ted Rose, from John Blair and the Great Hinckley Fire

Hinckley to the muddy, foul Skunk Lake on the outskirts of town. The dazed, wounded aftershock felt by those who survived the fire resonates in the book's final pages.

From the cold ashes of a faded disaster comes the story of a man who responded to catastrophe with great courage. John Blair emerges as a quiet hero—not the kind of a man who sought recognition through risk but, rather, a man who simply behaved the way we all hope we might, were we to face such awful danger.

—Christine Alfano

Malcolm X:

A Fire Burning Brightly

By Walter Dean Myers

Illustrated by Leonard Jenkins

HARPERCOLLINS

36 pages, Age 8 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-06-027707-6

Incendiary quotations from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, printed like placards in uppercase type, dot this brief, polemical biography. Twice, readers confront the slogan, "You don't have a peaceful revolution." Elsewhere, Malcolm X states, "The white man *wants* black men to stay immoral, unclean and ignorant... We never can win freedom and justice and equality until we are doing something for ourselves!" Following a shorthand account of his 1965 death at age thirty-nine (which flatly states, "Three members of the Nation of Islam were later convicted of his murder"), Malcolm presciently lists the reasons "which make it just about impossible for me to die of old age."

Walter Dean Myers, who wrote *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary* for adolescents, addresses a broader, presumably younger audience in this picture book. The author is making a bold—and questionable—move. By briskly tracing Malcolm's transformations from educated teenager to street

tough to convict to religious-political leader, Myers sends multiple messages about life choices. He allows readers to make their own analyses of Malcolm's shifting personae, yet the illustrated, large-print format limits his delving into Malcolm's complexity.

Although the dust jacket calls for "ages 5–8," the ideal audience for this book is much older, due to the racially charged content and the difficult terminology. For example, when Malcolm contends "that blacks should demand justice 'using arms if necessary'... [Nation of Islam leader] Elijah Muhammad told him that he needed permission before he could issue any more public statements... Malcolm was frustrated, because he felt that the Nation of Islam's policy of noninvolvement wasn't in keeping with the times." Neither the "policy of noninvolvement" nor "the times" are adequately explained. The text preaches to the converted, assuming mature attitudes about race and justice and a basic knowledge of the events of the 1950s and '60s on the part of its readers.

Leonard Jenkins provides somber portraits of Malcolm from childhood to adulthood. Other strained faces—of Malcolm's widowed mother, of a mustached white English teacher who tells young Malcolm to "be realistic about being a Negro," and of Elijah Muhammad at a podium—stand out against loosely rendered bodies and shadowy, abstract backgrounds. Like the text, the grim paintings are not self-explanatory, but they might be fruitfully discussed among those who already admire Malcolm X.

Thirty-five years after Malcolm's death, bigotry is still a fact in American life. Activist accounts like this one belong on bookshelves. Yet such condensed works demand supplementary information, spoken and written, about civil rights history and contemporary events.

—Nathalie op de Beeck

**The Nazi Olympics:
Berlin 1936**

By Susan D. Bachrach

LITTLE, BROWN

136 pages, Age 10 and up, \$14.95

ISBN 0-316-07087-4

Based on an exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *The Nazi Olympics* describes the 1936 Olympics in Berlin in the context of the previous history of the games and of the political situation at the time in Germany, the rest of Europe, and America. Through words and photographs, it outlines the ways in which Nazi politics influenced the nature of the Olympic Games and the attitudes of governments, athletes, and the public toward this international event.

Indeed, the book gives so much attention to these matters that surprisingly little space is left for the athletic events themselves. After fifteen sections on what led up to the games, only three sections—about fifteen of the 136 pages in the book—address what actually happened during them. One of these sections is about the opening ceremonies, and the other two are about the experiences of black and Jewish athletes. About the efforts and experiences of other athletes there is nothing. And while there are detailed discussions of those black and Jewish athletes who boycotted the games or were not allowed to compete, there is only a quick overview of what participating athletes like the great track-and-field star Jesse Owens actually did accomplish in their events. *The Nazi Olympics* is a book about a sporting event that is only minimally interested in sports. That's a pity. Sports fans especially need to know about the ways in which Olympic (and other) sports become intertwined with and affected by politics. It's something they won't find out if the lack of focus on the sports themselves causes them to lose

interest in the book altogether.

Moreover, *The Nazi Olympics* doesn't do justice to the complexity of the politics it focuses on. A highly committed book, it expresses horror at the racism of the Nazi government and of many Americans in the 1930s. That's as it should be. But the book offers readers little sense of how Nazis could justify their views or gain such credence and such power. They appear here as cardboard villains. It's hard to understand how so many people could have been attracted to the Nazi movement or so willing to accommodate its subversion of Olympic ideals. These Nazis are too thoroughly monstrous to be believable, too dehumanized for the horrifyingly human dimension of their flaws to emerge. As a result, *The Nazi Olympics* is less compelling, less unsettling, and less thought-provoking than it should be.

—Perry Nodelman

Once Upon a Time in Chicago: The Story of Benny Goodman

By Jonah Winter

Illustrated by Jeanette Winter

HYPERION

32 pages, Ages 3–7, \$14.99

ISBN 078680462-9

If Benny Goodman had been the eldest child, he might never have played the clarinet. At a pivotal moment in this picture-book biography, David Goodman sends Benny and his two older brothers for music instruction with the synagogue's youth band. The leader assigns an instrument to suit each boy's size. Jeanette Winter arranges the brothers across the page from tallest to shortest. Each holds his assigned wind instrument. The choice has been made. Eyes closed, Benny smiles, ecstatic with his clarinet.

An artist's development is part talent, part work, part luck. What if the King of Swing started with a ponderous tuba? Benny's father had an ambi-

tious wish: that musical training would help his children escape Chicago's rough Maxwell Street (a cozy, vibrant place in Winter's paintings). For Benny, however, the clarinet was more than a tool of upward mobility. It became the shy boy's voice.

Once introduced, the clarinet appears in nearly every illustration. Together the Winters (son and mother) demonstrate the boy's devotion without hyperbole. He simply plays as often as he can. (To placate his eleven music-weary siblings, he sometimes practices on the fire escape.) The clarinet's appeal is obvious: it is beautiful, it belongs to him, and it allows him to carve a space for himself. When need and talent dovetail, every opportunity seems to reveal Fate. Benny knows he wants to play clarinet, and as he becomes more adept he discovers *how* he wants to play—in the jazz tradition, of course. In this biography, with its overtones of legend, readers will learn about a boy who works hard because he loves to play the clarinet and finds the direction of his own talent by listening.

Yet what will young readers make of the following sequence? The boy earns money playing in bands and persuades his father to take an easier job downtown—where the father is promptly struck and killed by a car. Though the change of jobs did not kill David Goodman, a young child might think it did. Wisely, the Winters do not attempt to explain this troubling chain of events. Instead, they show Benny using music both to express his grief and to survive it. In the book's most touching illustration, we look out the window to the fire escape, where Benny plays his clarinet in the moonlight, a single tear glowing on his cheek. The book's familiar visual rhythms—brick-wall grids and the soft repeated curves of clothing and wavy hair—contrast with Benny's smooth skin and the starless night sky.

In the next three illustrations, the

adult Benny Goodman plays snakelike waves of colorful music from the clarinet “until everyone in the world” dances along. Music bridges the gap between mourning and living, between the diligent child and the celebrated adult.

—Jessica Roeder

Sir Walter Raleigh and the Quest for El Dorado

By Marc Aronson

CLARION

222 pages, Age 11 and up, \$20.00

ISBN 0-395-84827-X

Near the end of *Sir Walter Raleigh and the Quest for El Dorado*, Marc Aronson writes: “If [Raleigh] never found his El Dorado, his writings described the force of his yearning for that conquest and the counterforce of the beauty of the new land. Perhaps it is fitting that he never succeeded in creating a settlement here, for he was poised precisely between one world and the other.” It is fitting, too, that this excellent account of Raleigh's life (his name spelled as he wrote it—without the *i*) is also poised between two worlds—the uncertain questioning of 1990s historical inquiry and the theatrical narrative of traditional biography.

Arranged like a play, complete with a cast of characters, several acts, and even a play-within-a-play, Aronson's biography of Raleigh crackles with dramatic tension. In the rising action, we watch our hero of humble beginnings make a name for himself, then take to the sea to make his fortune. We see his triumph as one of Elizabeth's courtiers, and we watch Raleigh fall—ensnared in the intrigues of James I's politics. The elusive El Dorado provides Aronson's theme and countertheme: the exciting Age of Exploration balanced against the systematic destruction of the peoples of an entire continent.

Aronson excels when he presents the complications and contradictions

found in his characters. Quoting Raleigh's own writings as well as other contemporary sonnets, personal letters, and public prose, he delves into the motives of men who write about the New World as a virginal Eden, a lover to be ravished. Aronson also compellingly connects the literature and politics of the time. He points out that the first royal performance of *Hamlet* was for King James VI and his consort, Queen Anne... of Denmark.

Beginning scholars will benefit from the bibliography and footnotes, where each source cited is described in terms of reading level and potential usefulness. Scholarly authorities such as Stephen Greenblatt and concepts such as New Historicism (a school of criticism that examines works of art to uncover larger societal themes) appear in this section as well. This information may remain a bit beyond the book's younger readers, but it will prepare precocious high schoolers for ideas often not encountered until college.

My only objection to Aronson's work, however, has to do with his approach to history. In writing a biography that arranges a person's life in the form of a play, you must necessarily have a hero and a villain. The structure demands it. Therefore, toward the end, James VI becomes little more than a scheming Claudius, and Raleigh, a complicated Hamlet who Aronson claims had more influence on later events than he likely did have. Aronson declares that Raleigh's eloquent defense at his trial for treason "so challenged the treason laws of his time that our rights are protected to this day." Sweeping statements like this are far-fetched, and Aronson presents no *direct* correlation between Raleigh and the Bill of Rights.

That reservation aside, *Sir Walter Raleigh and the Quest for El Dorado* makes for informative, fascinating reading. It teaches as it entertains and ultimately

presents an engaging portrait of a complicated man formed in a complicated age. In this biography, we see "America [emerging] out of legend into fact. Raleigh leads the way. He pushes forward into the blank spaces, bringing his own lore and legends with him." Aronson's writing is such that you will want to follow him into the life and legend of Sir Walter Raleigh.

—Kathryne Beebe

Sitting Bull and His World

By Albert Marrin

DUTTON

246 pages, Age 12 and up, \$27.50

ISBN 0-525-45944-8

This is a big book about a major figure: Sitting Bull, perhaps the most recognized Native American leader in history. Sitting Bull was the Lakota who defeated George Custer at the Battle of the Greasy Grass—known to whites as the Little Bighorn River—in 1876. "These soldiers have come shooting," Sitting Bull declared that year. "They want war. All right, we'll give it to them!"

Anyone writing the life and times of Sitting Bull must contend, as Albert Marrin does, with the quality of records. Lakotas didn't write their history down, and whites who interviewed them spoke a different language. Marrin makes up for the sketchiness of primary records by drawing on reams of background information concerning Lakota life, the Great Plains, and the history of the continent. Young Sitting Bull himself is all but incidental to the early chapters.

Sitting Bull grew up to be a famously daring warrior who, on one occasion, donned a bright red shirt so that the enemy could see him in a crowd. Like all good chiefs, he led by brave example, as when he sat down *in the midst* of a battle and smoked a pipe to end the fight. "A chief did not rule his people," Marrin explains. "At most, he gave advice, which anyone could ignore."



From *Sitting Bull and His World*

All the more remarkable, then, that Sitting Bull convened an army of thousands at the Greasy Grass River.

Marrin has an occasional tendency to inject himself into the narrative; fortunately, more often he lets the witnesses—and facts—reveal a complicated story. Several sections are notable for their straightforwardness, including one that acknowledges the wide range of traits which made Plains Indians and whites so very different—from bodily odors to attitudes toward children, God, and the Earth.

Abundantly researched (favored sources are historians Stanley Vestal and Robert Utley), Marrin's book is also beautifully designed and replete with photographs, maps, and drawings. While one might wish for more concision, *Sitting Bull and His World* is a work of impressive scope.

At the time of his death in 1890, though stripped of his freedom and his gun, Sitting Bull was still officially perceived to be a threat. James Morrow Walsh, who had known Sitting Bull during his four years of Canadian exile, felt otherwise: "This man, that so many look upon as a bloodthirsty villain... was kind of heart. He was not dishonest. He was truthful. He loved his people."

—Mary Lou Burket



Illustration by Virginia Lee Burton, from *The Song of Robin Hood*

The Song of Robin Hood

Selected and edited by
Anne Malcolmson

Designed and illustrated by
Virginia Lee Burton

Music arranged by Grace Castagnetta
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

128 pages, Age 8 and up, \$20.00

ISBN 0-618-07186-5

A reissue from 1947, this Caldecott Honor book collects eighteen ballads that tell the story of Robin Hood's adventures. It was an important collaborative undertaking between Anne Malcolmson, who uncovered, selected, and edited the ballads, Grace Castagnetta, who adapted the music to modern arrangements, and—the name most familiar to today's readers—Virginia Lee Burton, who illustrated every ballad and designed the book. Each of these contributors played her part with great thoroughness and creativity, but it is the design and illustration that truly stand out.

Lovers of Burton's well-known *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* will be surprised at this artist's versatility. Working in pen and ink and scratchboard, Burton achieves a beautifully appropriate appearance of a much earlier era. Her tiny, meticulous illustrations evoke the woodcuts used to illustrate books in pre-photography days. Each verse is partnered by an illustra-

tion, resulting in a scene-by-scene rendering of the action, enhanced by frequent full-page images. Burton writes in her preface that she referred to a book on English wildflowers for selecting the different plants that make up the stylized decoration accompanying each ballad. She explains her particular floral choices; for instance, the last ballad, "Robin Hood's Death," begins somberly, with no illustrations, just a spread of sheet music, bordered by yew trees and branches. Burton explains that the yew "was a consecrated tree, planted in every churchyard and used in funeral processions. Being an evergreen it was symbolic of the immortality of man."

Like a good short-story collection, the ballads can be read individually, or one after the other as an ongoing narrative. The rhyme scheme makes reading aloud fun; the musically inclined will be tempted to play the ballads and sing along. Familiar characters recur: Robin Hood's sidekicks Little John and Will Scarlet and his archenemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Adults who plan to read these ballads to a child should be reminded that although Robin Hood was good-hearted and well-principled, *The Song of Robin Hood* is not for the fainthearted child or the pacifist parent. These are violent tales, filled with danger and death, from the shooting of dogs to

decapitations and hangings. As in Shakespeare's comedies there is much assuming of false identities, culminating in revelation and reunion.

The book as a whole, in fact, is attuned to an adult sensibility. It is the rare child who will have the inclination, interest, and patience to pursue its subtle delights. Its presentation is that of an elegant reference work, and this impression is reinforced by the thoughtful prefaces by Malcolmson and Burton and by the inclusion of a seven-page illustrated glossary (for which I found myself grateful). The republication of this beautiful book is laudatory, even if those most excited by its reappearance will be scholars and collectors of fine-art children's books.

—Krystyna Poray Goddu

Poetry

Come with Me: Poems for a Journey

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Illustrated by Dan Yaccarino

GREENWILLOW

32 pages, Age 5 and up, \$15.95

ISBN 0-688-15946-X

Devotees of *This Same Sky*, Naomi Shihab Nye's anthology of worldwide poetry, will recall an unassuming sense

of adventure through which the seemingly exotic becomes familiar and the familiar contains a measure of ineffability. Even that book's endpapers—decorated with a collage of envelope corners, canceled international stamps, and poets' signatures—provided evidence of the poems' travels. In the new collection, which despite its picture-book format deserves space on *This Same Sky's* shelf, Nye's own poems take up the timeless literary theme of the journey.

The travelers progress via observation, anger, growth, familial connection, a silver string, and the change of seasons—but they're also versed in conventional tools such as maps and airplanes. One poem anticipates a trip to the city; the next poem traces the journey from infancy to second grade; another praises the spoken word, which must "travel through / a tongue and teeth / and wide air / to get there." A poem's point of view might be child-like or adult. Yet essential qualities remain: the musical, unshowy verse and the intimate, respectful tone.

The empathy and musicality will entrance even those readers (or listeners) who do not comprehend precisely. Some readers thrill first to the sound and emotional tenor of a poem and learn more about it later. With repeated acquaintance, the poem teaches itself to the reader. Comprehension surfaces. Nye's poems are rhythmic, tuneful, inventive, and intelligent. Rhyme is sparing and well-placed. This book rewards multiple rereadings as well as multiple reading levels.

Nye acknowledges tricky emotions with sincerity and wit. "When You Come to a Corner" is composed almost entirely of questions; the overriding question is "What if you have to move?" The speaker consoles, "You still know your feet." This plain statement lightens the mood and might provoke a giggle of recognition. The child, starting

with her familiar, grounded feet, *can* come to know the new place.

Older readers, to whom Nye's poetry offers much, might ignore this volume because of its picture-book format; and the stick-figure images of children with large round heads and dancing postures suggest the very young. Because Dan Yaccarino's accomplished mixed-media illustrations highlight the poems' playfulness, a casual reader might fail to discern the intelligence and emotion here. Yet, given more than a glance, the illustrations' deep colors, varied textures, and careful construction could also appeal to a slightly older crowd.

The poems themselves are typeset

to become part of the illustrations. Words about Tío Pete shift left to make room for his portliness; in crescent-moon-shaped "Mad" an angry child watches from the moon as her mother searches for her and eventually wins her back.

Both journeying and growing up require cycles of separation and connection; older children can understand the pain and the joy of all this. The book's final poem, "Torn Map" plays with the possibility that a map torn and repaired could alter the lay of the land. Then the longing behind the conceit makes itself known: "Wouldn't that be nice / if it were true? / I'd tear a map / and be right next / to you."

—Jessica Roeder

Reviewers in This Issue

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

Kathryne Beebe graduated from Carleton College with a B.A. in English literature. She works as a publicity assistant for *W. W. Norton & Company* in New York City.

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

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

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

Diana Star Helmer is the author of forty books for children. Her recent series

of historical fiction chapter books includes *The Secret Soldier* and *Give Me Liberty* (Perfection Learning).

Perry Nodelman's most recent novel for young adults is *A Meeting of Minds*, fourth in a series of fantasies written in collaboration with Carol Matas.

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

Jessica Roeder's writing has appeared in the *The Threepenny Review* and *The Pushcart Prize*. She lives with her husband and two rabbits in an apartment with ivy-covered windows.

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

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



one for the shelf

Oh, for the halcyon days of arm's-length parenting. Remember when children and adults lived on separate planes, and their lives intersected only at mealtime? There were no organized soccer leagues with sideline coaches (and parents) barking out commands. The scheduled afternoon activities at latchkey programs had yet to be drawn up. Mother-daughter book clubs? *Hah*. Back then, when school let out for the day, the world was reclaimed. All those hours of unsupervised activity. All that time for children to devise their own amusements, their own interests, their own lives.

The Shrinking of Treehorn harkens back to that time. Written in the early seventies, the book reconstructs the wall between adults and children, and slyly pokes fun at the inability of adults to comprehend a child's point of view. Something weird and magical is happening in this story, but the grown-ups are too dense to get it. Young Treehorn is shrinking. He knows it, readers know it. But every adult that he turns to for help either ignores his plight or is too self-involved to notice:

"My trousers are all stretching or something," said Treehorn to his mother. "I'm tripping on them all the time."

"That's too bad dear," said his mother, looking into the oven. "I do hope this cake isn't going to fall."



The Shrinking of Treehorn

By Florence Parry Heide

Illustrated by Edward Gorey

64 pages, Ages 6–10

HOLIDAY HOUSE / paperback: \$6.95

ISBN 0-8234-0975-9

At dinner, Treehorn's irritated father snaps: "Nobody shrinks," while Treehorn peers at him over the table's edge.

Throughout the strange ordeal, Treehorn remains undaunted, despite the obtuseness of those around him. The school bus driver insists that this smaller Treehorn must actually be Treehorn's little brother.

A stern teacher sends him to the principal's office for jumping up to reach the drinking fountain. "What if all the children in the *school* started jumping up and down in the halls?" After providing no help at all, the principal lamely offers: "Well, I want you to know I'm right here when you need me, Treehorn... and I'm glad I was here to help you." Even peers are unreliable. Treehorn explains to his friend Moshie that he's shrinking, but Moshie fails to sympathize: "You're *always* doing stupid things, but that's the *stupidest*."

Edward Gorey, who passed away earlier this year, is well-known for his grim, slightly creepy pen-and-ink drawings, often accompanying darkly comic mysteries. Here he proves to be a witty interpreter of the early seventies, a time when garishness was widely mistaken for individuality. Fabrics and floor-coverings are bold—too bold. Busy patterns on clothing obscure the wearer. Anything human or natural is rendered with a lighter touch. Droll visual commentary surfaces on every page: when Treehorn is sent to the principal, he signs in with the secretary, who has a small abstract painting on her wall. The principal's office has one too, almost the same, only much, much bigger.

Despite his odd name, Treehorn is just an ordinary boy to whom extraordinary things happen. He emerges as a stoic hero, the kind of character who might fade into the background if we didn't look carefully. He maintains an unassuming confidence while watching one of his favorite TV programs (he has fifty-six favorites) or dreaming of the next marvelous item he might send in for from a cereal box. Treehorn has almost resigned himself to his diminishing stature when he finally happens upon the antidote. By then, even we dim adults know that Treehorn had to get out of this jam by himself. The magic of shrinking could never have occurred in the realm of the grown-up. Our world is too rational and orderly; there is no room for such odd, fabulous occurrences. "Nobody shrinks..."

—Christine Alfano

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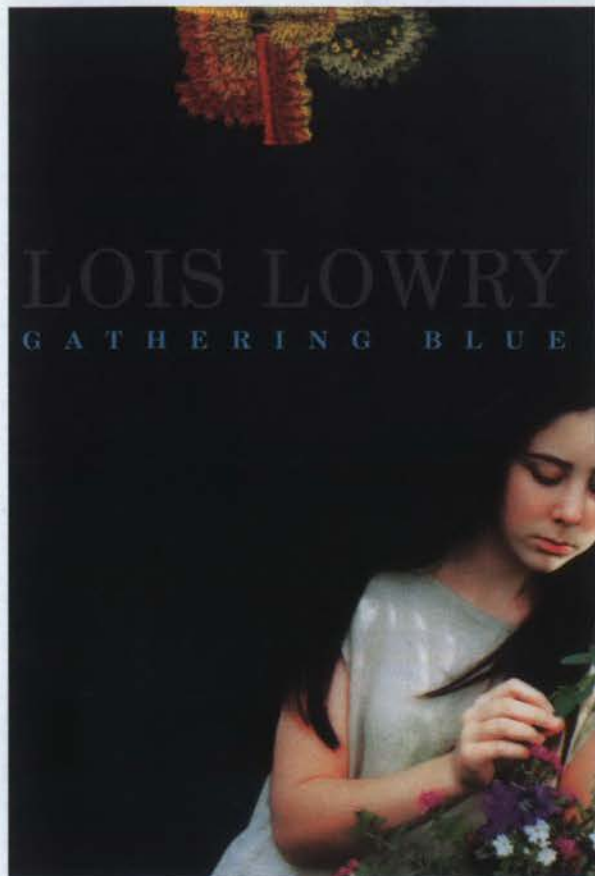
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GATHERING BLUE

by LOIS LOWRY

◆ “Lowry returns to the metaphorical future world of her Newbery-winning *The Giver*. . . Plenty of material for thought and discussion here, plus a touch of magic and a tantalizing hint about the previous book’s famously ambiguous ending.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, pointer*

★ “Lowry is a master at creating worlds, both real and imagined, and this incarnation of our civilization some time in the future is one of her strongest creations.” —*Booklist*, starred review

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