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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

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Charles Child’s illustrations of the Benets’ poems about famous Americans ranging from Columbus to Woodrow Wilson help the young reader to understand the poems. These sing-song verses, though not good poetry, will help children get a feel for history and, much like nursery rhymes, will introduce the child to words, sounds and rhythm. —Raphael Johstoneaux


As an adult addicted to literate mysteries, I welcome the prospect of well-written mysteries for young people, but seldom find the welcome justified. Gothic novels, adult shoot-em-ups and the ubiquitous drugstore paperbacks all seem to expect to meet that desire. Consequently, Jay Bennett’s mystery novels, designed to appeal to readers not quite ready for top-of-the-line, are an unexpected bonus on the juvenile shelves.

Bennett has a brusque style, incorporates justifiable action into each short chapter, and draws his characters with swift but definitive strokes. The stories often deal (as this one does) with young men who are trying to define their identities in a world bequeathed to them by absent adults. (Raymond Bond of *The Skeleton Man* is given $30,000 for his eighteenth birthday by his uncle, who dies mysteriously the next day.) The heroes deal with their problems alone, in spite of available help from friends and official sources. Unlike many characters in books of this genre, they do finally require an assist to survive. In Raymond’s case, he mistakes the treasury man who is pursuing his uncle’s murderer for one of the bad buys — but the mistake isn’t fatal.

Like others of Bennett’s stories, *The Skeleton Man* is clearly plotted, wastes no time on extraneous details, and has a high interest level. It may not be immortal, but it will circulate. —Janet Francis


*The Baby’s Bedtime Book*, Chorao’s previous volume for very young children, is calm, soothing, and ideal for reading as evening comes on. This companion volume about morning is bright and invigorating, reflecting the feeling of the beginning of day instead of the end. All 26 poems deal with some aspect of morning. Some are traditional poems (nursery rhymes, for example); others come from a variety of poets (like Emily Dickinson, Robert Louis Stevenson and Eleanor Farjeon). All read aloud wonderfully.

While the sound of this poetry offers years of staying power to young ears, Chorao’s attractive openness in format (only one poem to a double-page spread, no matter if it is two lines) and detailed illustrations add immense, immediate appeal to young eyes. And she has provided her usual touches, invisible upon first reading, which add another layer of strength to her art. As the reader progresses through the poems, for instance, the first ones appear in the darker, heavier shades of morning before the sun’s rays hit the earth. The shades lighten gradually until the last poems are bathed in the full light of day, with the result that the full range of poems visually reflects the stages of a day being born. Clever woman. —Jim Jacobs

*Roses* is an interesting book, based on the legend of Beauty and the Beast but with some surprising twists. Izzie (Isabel) is a 17-year-old high school girl with little interest in boys. She wants to go to Europe after she graduates, so her afternoons are spent in trying to get a summer job. Mysteriously, she is hired by a man who runs a flower shop, a man horribly burned in a car accident many years earlier. Since then, Leo has shut himself up in his old family home because he is so badly scarred and deformed.

Isabel (as Leo insists on calling her) is "commanded" to come to Leo's house for dinner, and this becomes a weekly ritual. Every time she tries to leave the house, he asks her to grant him a wish — one that she feels she cannot grant; however, the relationship between Isabel and Leo is unique and becomes very important to both of them. Also of interest is the growing friendship between Izzie and Rob, her young friend from school.

The characterization is rather weak. We see that things are changing in Izzie's life and we know it is because of what she is experiencing with these two new friends, but we are never quite brought to a complete understanding. We see the relationships between Izzie and her stepmother and her father, as well as with her older sister, but we never really become a part of the family. Perhaps part of the distance is caused by Izzie herself. She doesn't know what she is feeling, nor is she able to accept the fact that she is important to both Leo and Rob. Nevertheless, I really like this book. Perhaps it's just the Romantic in me. —Helen Hoopes


Refusing to use magic at Christmas, because "Christmas has a magic of its own," Strega Nona, Tomie de Paola's traditional grandmother witch, keeps her helper, Big Anthony, running and complaining as she prepares the Christmas feast for everyone in the village. When Big Anthony comes home on Christmas Eve without the last touches for the feast, Strega Nona is desolate.

A surefire Christmas tale with a surprise ending (is there any other kind?) — not new but a very pleasantly-mounted old, with de Paola's inimitably solid illustrations. —Janet Francis


Marcy is having a hard time growing up. She doesn't seem to fit in with her old friends anymore (whose only interest has suddenly become chasing boys) and her only sibling, an older sister, has gone away to study ballet in the big city. Her mother wants her to become a concert pianist, and though Marcy likes the piano, she is sure there must be something else to life.

When a horse-trainer/artist and her daughter move in over the fence, Marcy decides that what she really wants to do is to have her own horse and become a competition jumper. Since money is no object, a horse is soon purchased — but after a few falls, it looks like Marcy will give up jumping just as she did the piano. Is Marcy a quitter? In the end she amazes her parents as well as herself with her determination.

Basic fare in girl-grows-up books, with a horsey twist. —Lovisa Lyman

Nelda, the twelve-year-old title character, knows that some day she is going to be rich, "not just pinch-penny paid-up-at-the-commissary, thank the Lord — but rich." A talkative, optimistic dreamer, Nelda does not worry about the future. Elberta, a superstitious black woman with the gift of "second sight," has predicted that one day Nelda will be rich — movie-star rich, and when Nelda is given the opportunity to live with the wealthy-but-lonely Miss Mattie May Wynn, she believes herself to be on her long-anticipated way to wealth and fame.

This story transports the reader to Mississippi during the Great Depression. The author's subtle humor and realistic descriptions will appeal to all ages, although the book is perhaps geared for the younger adolescent reader. Nelda's charming innocence and her reputation as an "outrageous conniver" make her a memorable character. Nelda is a sensitive and warm family story. —Annette Evans


The Secret of the Round Beast is the second volume in Forrester's Bestiary trilogy, following Bestiary Mountain. It is, in addition, a trite intermixture of human/non-human interaction in love and war; a story of the survival or destruction of humanity as a race and of love as a process.

Ryland and Tava Langstrom, a brilliant couple, have turned outlaw in the New World to try to save the vanishing animal kinds of Old Earth. Ryland is imprisoned by the Overones, while his wife and twin teenagers, Tamara and Drewyn, escape to Old Earth and to the round beast — a mysterious blend of instrument and instinct, humming away in Bestiary Mountain. Accompanied by various androids, animal-humans and fallen scientists, each side prepares for the final struggle to own the universe (a battle which does not, incidentally, take place in this book).

The conversation is stilted, the characters wooden, the action predictable, as is the reaction: this one is dispensable. —Janet Francis


The ousting of the Shah of Iran in the late 1970s is something that most Americans have forgotten. Kate Gilmore, in Remembrance of the Sun, takes a realistic look at what went on during that time. Ms. Gilmore had the experience of living in Iran at the time, and she understands and has empathy for the Iranian people. They wanted something better than the government they had; they didn't realize the new government would be even worse.

The story focuses on Jill, a young American girl who is in Iran with her family, and on Shaheen Rohani, the son of a wealthy carpet merchant. Shaheen is a revolutionary, an intelligent student who believes in his country and his people. Shaheen and Jill teach each other a lot about life, and they both grow in their understanding of other cultures and people.

This story has value in teaching teenagers about Iran, about the former Shah, and about the Ayatollah Khomeni. The book deals with two teens from different cultures who have surprisingly similar outlooks on life. I recommend it highly. —Shawna Gill


Upon first picking up this book, I expected, as stated in the title, some chilling short horror stories, perhaps some around-the-campfire-under-the-moonlight stuff, but I was disappointed
in that expectation. Only three of the stories would really fall under the heading of "chilling" tales; the others deal more with "Twilight Zone" material and are brain teasers rather than chillers. Some of the stories are even quite humorous, and surely are meant to be. Perhaps, then, a clue in the title, leading the reader to know that there are different kinds of stories in the book rather than just "chilling" ones, would be better.

A few of the stories are enjoyable reading even though they aren't horror stories. One of the particularly good horror stories is "Hookman," while "Family Vacation" and "Time of the Alien" are very creative "Twilight Zone" humor. For a taste of the bizarre, there are "The Notebook" and "The Last Word." Some very disappointing stories, however, are "Will" and "Flawless Beauty." A good moral story exists in "Dr. Eggar's Favorite Dog."

"No Swimming in Dark Pond" itself is a clever, somewhat chilling story, but it doesn't live up to the promise of the book's cover and the title of "chilling tales." — D. Scott Patton

The wonders of nature during a Georgia summer brought music to an old man's soul. This is a story about the love for Georgia and for each other that an old man and his granddaughter find together. But when the old man gets sick and has to go to Baltimore with his daughter, he gets lonelier and quieter until his granddaughter learns how to bring back his Georgia music, and with it, happiness.

This book is a tender but simple story of love. The language is elementary, but supplies rich detail as it describes the grandfather's porch and garden and the way he and the girl spent their days and nights. The illustrations are somewhat abstract in their detail, but they reveal much through Stevenson's use of color. The Georgia scenes are warm with sunlight, but always have some blues and greens to show the cool comfort of the shade. The old man's unhappiness in Baltimore is shown by the darker blues and purples, giving a cold, lonely feeling.

This book is well written and easy for young children to understand, while the messages of love and the needs of older people come through for readers of all ages. — Jean Buchanan

American Indians Today begins with a concise historical overview, which is necessary to the reader's understanding of contemporary Indian issues. American Indians live in a world of contrasts, many of which are difficult to integrate. Indian cultural heritage, traditional values, non-Indian society, illness, and unemployment are a sample of the problems that face Native Americans today.

Land ownership is an issue of great importance to Indians and non-Indians alike. Ninety million acres of Indian land — from Alaska to Arizona and from Maine to California — are involved in political, economic and social questions. Tribal organization and the intricacies of the Indian's legal relationship to state and federal governments affect the lives of Native Americans daily.

Indian issues have always been complex, and they continue to be so. Judith Harlan does a fine job of presenting the issues fairly, resisting the temptation to present them too simplistically. Both Indian and non-Indian viewpoints are explored, giving the reader an honest grasp of the problems involved. It makes very interesting reading. — Carol Lynn McConnell
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The story of the Constitutional Convention makes for captivating reading, and 1987, the bicentennial of the Constitution, is an ideal time to enjoy such reading. Mr. Hauptly has taken advantage of interesting events and people, combined them with a relaxed style, and created a book that will be helpful to young people motivated to learn more about a unique and moving chapter in our nation's history.

The main focus of this book is not on the Constitution itself, although a copy of it can be found in an appendix. What the author chose to emphasize were the individuals who made up the convention, the things they set out to achieve, and their roles in the final product. His style maintains interest in the people and events he is discussing, and the book reads through quickly from beginning to end. There are, however, some problems that more thorough editing might have cleared up; occasional punctuation errors and awkward sentences interrupt the flow of the narrative.

For those interested in the key people who composed the Constitution, and some insights into the unique character of their accomplishment, this is a very good book. —Kristina Eide


One day in paradise, God created the earth. Actually, it takes Him seven days in this lovely picture book, which doesn't officially begin until the morning of the sixth day, when God has "been sawing, hammering and painting, making plans and changing them again ... calculated, written and drawn, measured and weighed."

Accompanied by a very interested puppy, God fetches clay and creates human beings, intended to look like Him "as a child looks like its father."

Simple and profound with its just-right wash illustrations (gentle, but far from insipid; several of them double-page spreads), this interpretation of the creation is a classic "paradise regained"!

—Janet Francis


This is not a cheerful tale — in fact, it is as surrealistic as the cover illustration. Sitko is an Indian boy who is coerced into denying his heritage so that he will fit more unobtrusively into society. First in a boarding school, and later in the home of his mother's Anglo boyfriend, he is pressed to give up everything Indian about himself — his art, his memories, the language his grandmother taught him. Sitko is mistreated by everyone but his grandmother. Only she is willing to allow him to be himself.

I haven't read Highwater's other books in The Ghost Horse Cycle, but they have been critically acclaimed, and this one should be, also. But it isn't a book for everyone. The reader has to be willing to suffer with Sitko and to live with an ending that is going in a happier direction but is not happy. —Lovisa Lyman


Having lived in Chile, I was looking forward to this one, but I found it basically unsatisfying as a representation of the country. If the author was attempting to show only the diversity of
the climate by featuring Chileans who survive on the driest desert in the world and others who adjust to the perpetual cold of the Antarctic, he has done an adequate job. But if he intended to give a perspective of the whole country, he has failed.

Each two-page spread tells, with color photographs and a brief text, the story of a different Chilean living in a different town. Most of the towns are in the far north or the far south of the country, but since only a small percentage of the population live in those regions, it gives the reader a false impression of the country as a whole.

The photography is pleasing and the people Huber chose to describe were interesting.

—Lovisa Lyman


Full-color illustrations and a brief text tell the traditional story of the Aztecs — where their ancestors came from, what their gods represented, how their civilization came to an end. The book does not deal with alternate theories or possibilities but what it does, it does well. A child with a report due on ancient Mexico would be delighted to find this book in the library.

—Lovisa Lyman


This small volume contains sixty poems divided into five sections, each depicting a particular mood. These brief lyrics, serious stanzas, and Negro blues capture beauty and pain, lamentation and joy — facets of the Black soul's quest.

In these selections, the adolescent reader will find much meaning beyond the literal.

—Raphael Johnstoneaux


Carefully detailed drawings introduce us to a Chinese town from the Han dynasty. Brief texts tell how the rich and poor fared — what they ate, where they lived, what they wore, how they worked. Each drawing is a flattened diorama, to be carefully studied. Some photographs complement the artwork. A glossary of terms and a brief explanation of Chinese writing round out the book.

—Lovisa Lyman


An innovative wizard with illustration, Jonas's artistic specialty is the hidden view. In The Trek, wild animals are camouflaged in the background scenes of a girl walking to school, revealing themselves only to those who pay the price of careful observation. Round Trip chronicles a family's journey from a small town to the city, and when the book is turned upside-down the pictures take them home again. Reflections is a collection of watercolor seaside scenes which follow a similar upside-down pattern. Sailboats on the water, for instance, when turned around, become kites flying in the blue sky. A boatyard by the water's edge, when flipped 180 degrees, is a campground full of tents. And a peach orchard turned upside-down becomes a tree-lined pond with fish.


—Jim Jacobs

Stephen King tells this fairy-tale-type story with all the suspense and intrigue for which he is famous, but without all the blood and gore for which he is also famous. The book is filled with wonderful allusions, metaphors, symbols, and powerful morals.

The story is of an old king and his two sons. The king is murdered by an evil wizard, who successfully blames the murder on the crown prince. The prince is exiled to the top of a tower and the second son (whom the wizard is able to manipulate) becomes king.

During his imprisonment, the rightful king learns a lot about life and about himself. He realizes what is happening to the kingdom and decides that he must escape. After years of planning and preparation, he does escape, and with the help of a secret hidden behind the eyes of the dragon, he exposes the wizard and wins back the throne.

The wizard escapes, determined to destroy the king, while the younger brother apologizes for his part in the wizard's machinations and goes out into the wilderness to find the wizard and destroy him.

Children and adults alike would be fascinated by *The Eyes of the Dragon*. There is some sexual content, but it is presented in a tactful way. —John Baxter


Interflux is a giant corporation that makes insignificant—though—essential parts for other manufacturers: cardboard frames for slides, teeth for zippers, tiny balls for ball-point pens. In short, nothing Interflux makes is useful by itself. That is what most bothers Simon Irving, son of the boss of the newest Interflux installation.

What also bothers Simon is that in making these insignificant objects, Interflux is liberally polluting the skies and streams of the town his family has just moved to. Since this bothers other people as well, Simon decides, as he begins the year at his new high school, not to tell anyone who his father is. He hopes to be accepted on the basis of his talent as an artist and to convince his parents that he doesn't need to follow in his father's footsteps.

Then an opportunity comes along that he can't resist: a way to get back at Interflux. A narrow piece of property has been overlooked by the great company in its expansion plans, a strip of land useless by itself, but, since it crosses the only access road to Interflux, essential to the further growth of the company. Simon buys the property with the school's entertainment funds.

The plot is far from compelling, and only slightly believable. But there are some redeeming features. One of them is the character of the art teacher. He is just crazy enough to be believable, and the story perks up whenever he is on the scene. Too bad it wasn't his story instead of Simon's. —Lovisa Lyman


Have you ever been in the locker room with a winning football team — or any football team? I haven't, but Kuskin seems to have captured the flavor, or should I say the forty-five flavors, of a football team. From the helmet (twenty-four with plastic mouth-guards attached) to the shoes — oops, cleats — and everything between, underneath, and over, Kuskin describes (and numbers) the various items of a football uniform.
This book is excellent in that it accurately describes everything football players wear, and is still entertaining to read. For example, after describing the silky gloves ten men wear to help hold the ball, Kuskin tracks down where those gloves land: on the floor, in the laundry, and "three are lost forever."

The names of the players, like Mudd, Mower and Trample, lend a touch of humor, and the illustrations, besides being accurate, lend humor to the players' faces (Trample has missing teeth).

Although many descriptive words are used, there is a constant counting of and accounting for each item, which tends to irritate after thirty-six pages. This book, however, is a must for any person who wants to understand football lingo. —Leslie Neville


Nine-year-old Addie Mills, along with her Mother and Pa and her three younger brothers and baby sister, leave their worn-out farm along the Mississippi River near Sabula, Iowa, to travel nearly five hundred miles to their new homestead in Dakota. Six long, hot weeks of rainless days have passed when suddenly Pa sees smoke across the prairie. He rides off to see where it is coming from, returning a few hours later to take them back to their new neighbor's soddy. The rest of the book tells of Addie's adventures at the Fency homestead, as she awaits the day when her family can go live on their own land.

Addie remembers that Eleanor, her best friend back in Iowa, always called her "Fraidycat," and wonders if she is strong enough to be a "sodbusting pioneer-type." Through her encounters with "real" Indians, staying alone with her little brother Burt on the Fency homestead for two days to care for their farm animals while the Fencys help her parents build their sod house, and courageously surviving a devastating prairie firestorm, Addie finds that she is a strong pioneer. She discovers that the "hatred" she has felt for her teasing eight-year-old brother, George, is insignificant compared to the love she feels for him as he helps her in the end. As George says, "Maybe you were scared, but you did something courageous anyway. I think that's what being brave's all about."

This book offers an excellent glimpse into the world of the prairie pioneers. We learn how sod houses were built, how food was prepared for the long winters, about Indians who were forced to live on reservations, and about the loneliness these brave people had to endure in order to open up the West. We see it all through the eyes of a nine-year-old girl who finds comfort in a tiny china doll and in the future. Addie seems to be a real person, and as the last pages close with the two families traveling to the new Mills homestead, we long for the book to continue. —Helen Hoopes


This is an even-handed treatment of the Vietnam War. Black-and-white photography takes us from the beginning of the conflict to the end. There are no good guys. Mistakes are made on all sides. The only bona fide villain is Madam Nhu, who said of the Buddhist monks who poured kerosene over their bodies and set themselves aflame: "Let them burn and we shall clap our hands."

Some of the photos may be disquieting to the young reader. An excellent introduction for the mature young reader. —Lovisa Lyman

Eleven-year-old Zannah McFee and her mother, whom she calls Patty, live in modern-day Washington, D.C. Patty is generally unorganized but still manages to run the "Tiny Fingers Pre-School Play Group." On the morning of Patty's 31st birthday, all she wants is a quart of milk and *The Washington Post*, so at six a.m. Zannah tries to find a store open to get milk.

She spies an old-fashioned horse and milk wagon. When she climbs into the back to get a quart of milk she is magically transported to the Hunky-Dory Dairy, where she meets a "quaintly dressed" group of people, including Utopia Graybeal, a girl her age; Utopia's brother, Loyal; their father, Hector; and Marigold Rudge and her sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth. Zannah learns from the driver of the wagon, Peter Pratt, that these people were magically transported from 1881 to modern times and are confined to the boundaries of the dairy. Peter, a modern-day lawyer, found them five years earlier and has been helping them ever since.

For some reason, Peter, Patty and Zannah are the only ones who are able to see the path to the dairy, which is surrounded by woods and not visible to modern-day people. Zannah and Patty introduce modern conveniences — much to the chagrin of stern Hector Graybeal, whom both Zannah and Utopia hope will marry Patty. As Patty eats and drinks the dairy products, she blossoms and becomes more organized. Many humorous things happen, including thirteen-year-old Shem's mixed feelings about Zannah. Zannah is not too disappointed when Patty decides to marry Peter, even though Patty's new name will be Patty Pratt.

I found this book "udderly" delightful. Anne Lindberg's characters are well developed and the plot is satisfying without being predictable. Both young people and adults will identify with the characters and experiences. —Dianne Breinholt


In this day of anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders, teenage girls can use a book like this, that teaches how to control your weight without letting it become an obsession. It is a guide to good eating habits and not a fad diet book.

Bonnie Lukes understands the teenage struggle with weight control, since she had a problem with her weight as a teenager and speaks from experience.

This book not only explains the how-to's of reasonable dieting in simple terms, but also includes several hints to nutrition and a calorie-counter section listing particular foods and their caloric value. —Shawna Gill


Everything is going remarkably well for the O'Hara family. Both mother and father have excellent jobs. The four children are happy and healthy. The family lives in a spacious old home in a good neighborhood. Thanksgiving is approaching and the O'Haras have much to be thankful for. Then they discover that Mr. O'Hara has an untreatable form of heart disease and that he has only months to live. They determine to make those months the happiest they have ever had.
Each child gets his or her dream for Christmas. The sixteen-year-old boy gets a car. Mother gets a diamond bracelet. By the following Thanksgiving, the father is dead, the spacious house has been sold and the family has moved to a smaller place. Liza, the twelve-year-old narrator, chronicles the transition with particular emphasis on her own suffering. She assumes that her pain is much more intense than that of the other children because she refuses to have fun anymore. She feels that if she enjoys herself she is in some way hurting her father, who can no longer enjoy himself.

Overall the writing is good but it is particularly poignant as Liza describes the death and funeral. Recommended especially for a young reader who has had a death in the family.

—Lovisa Lyman


As the title indicates, this volume chronicles the Black man's tragedy and triumph, from Africa to America. Practically all dialect has been polished into standard prose to enable easy reading. The excerpts give first-hand accounts of prejudice, mistreatment, hopes, fears, and occasional humor.

Accurate historical information, coupled with drawings and photographs, brings Black history alive. The index and section on sources will help students as they prepare papers and reports. This book not only contains good source material but also offers fascinating reading.

—Raphael Johnstoneaux


Ever since her parents' divorce, Carole has shunned the spotlight, preferring to simply be a mirror for her vibrant, daring friend Marty, who dances to the beat of a different drummer. But, in spite of the fun and feeling of acceptance that Marty's friendship brings, Carole is not entirely content. When Marty suggests a suicide pact, Carole realizes that everyone's life has problems and that she, too, has contributions to make.

*Dancer in the Mirror* recognizes the fallibility in each of us and the difficulty inherent in life. Characterizations are nicely done. Although nothing momentous happens, the plot holds the reader's attention easily. The message of self-reliance would make Emerson proud. Worth reading. —Joell Goodey


Cicely goes to spend the summer with her mother's eccentric cousin, Millicent, to help with the housekeeping on the old family estate, Odin's Eye. Millicent's grandfather's name was Odin, and he had a large window in the second story fitted with a telescope. Thus the name.

Millicent is not too pleased about this arrangement, but she agrees. She tells Cicely that long ago her grandfather died there — of a heart attack, after an argument with her fiancé — and the next day her grandfather's friend was discovered shot dead. The murder was never solved.

Along with a friend she has met in the area, Cicely sets out to solve the mystery. They decide to try to find the telescope, since it is not in the house. Millicent is furious and tells them they cannot bring the telescope back.
This is an intriguing story. It has a well-conceived plot, and characters that are well developed. I would recommend it for all young readers who enjoy a good mystery with a rather surprising ending. —Elaine Taylor


*Jump!* is an extraordinary edition of the Brer Rabbit stories which every home should have for the pictures alone. The text is a near-match for the illustrations, the famous tales being told by the folk character of the Trickster, who has lost children to Brer Wolf and Brer Fox and whose revenge is therefore sweeter for having been dearly bought.

The stories are sparely, beautifully told, and the pictures are as evocative and telling as you will find anywhere in children's literature. Buy this book. —Laura Wadley


Melinda is looking forward to a wonderful birthday, but it appears her two younger siblings might ruin it for her. They're two-year-old twins and cause problems from the start, always getting into trouble. Melinda decides to run away rather than keep living with those two. The Care Bears come to save her birthday and to keep her in the family, as well.

This story paints a terrible picture of how two-year-olds behave. We all know it can be a difficult age to handle, but who says two-year-olds should be allowed to get away with all that mischief? These two were never even encouraged to act better, let alone given some kind of punishment for their actions, and the last page of the book says "the twins were still terrible."

The illustrations add color to the story but aren't overly exciting. All the children have round, freckled faces — typical of the "perfect child." They look too much like comic-book characters.

Though the Care Bears succeed in keeping Melinda from running off to join the circus (how trite can you get?), it seems they should be more concerned with straightening out the "terrible" two-year-olds. —Kathryn Brown


Twelve-year-old Kit Malloy, her older brother, Derek, and her younger sister, Margo, have just arrived at Plymouth Island to spend another summer with their grandmother, Edna, who runs the Red Barn theatre. Kit can't wait for the arrival of her summer friend, Phoebe Wilson, so they can keep up all their summer traditions. This year they will be old enough to sleep out at their "secret place." Kit has even saved all her money to buy Phoebe a sleeping bag for the occasion.

Since Phoebe is a week late in arriving, Kit, after moping a day or two, makes friends with Pink Cunningham, a boy who lives on the island all year long. When Phoebe, who has spent the winter in Paris, finally arrives, all she wants to talk about is clothes and boys and she has no interest in sleeping out. To make matters worse, Phoebe asks Pink to the country club dance. Kit becomes hurt, jealous and angry, and thinks that Phoebe has gone crazy. She tells her, "You've changed, Phoebe. That's your problem." Phoebe answers with: "You haven't changed and you're making it everyone's problem." Kit decides to get even but the consequences are more than she can handle. In the end, both girls realize they need to accept people for who they are.
Stephen Roos has created two believable characters in Kit and Phoebe. Readers will easily relate to the changes that occur in friendships when one friend changes or matures faster than the other. The author's adult characters are equally believable and the advice they give is helpful without being preachy.

This is the first in a series of four books about the Molloy family's summers on Plymouth Island. I hope the rest are as fun to read as this one. —Dianne Breinholt


"You Nincompoop!" Have you ever been called a nincompoop? If so, what is one? Lazy Jack isn't only a nincompoop but also a feather-brained airhead, a bubble-headed fleabrain, and a nitwitted pinhead. The funny part about all this is that he ends up marrying a beautiful princess and lives happily ever after. Who ever heard of prince with the name of Nincompoop? Reading this book will introduce you to one.

The illustrations are just as ridiculous as the plot. Seeing a cat as a footstool and seeing a cat chasing after a mouse carrying a hot dog are just a few of the absurd-yet-humorous pictures that accompany this way-out fairy tale.

The outlandish play on Lazy Jack's literal interpretations of his mother's instructions will make young readers remember when they, too, did exactly what their mother asked them to — at least according to a child's understanding. —Kerrie Nebeker


Set in 1942-45, *The Cage* tells the story of Nazi brutality and terrorism against Jews generally and against the Minsky family particularly. Trapped behind the barbed wire in the Lodz ghetto, Poland, and torn from their mother's arms, the Minsky children fight against starvation, bitter cold, fear and despair. Sixteen-year-old Riva and her younger brothers' self-sacrificing love for each other offer their only hope.

Riva accepts custody of her siblings and together they fight savagery and the terror of separation, only to find themselves separated and sent to Auschwitz. There Riva's narrative further outlines the mental and physical suffering and the eventual death of many.

Riva often avoids despair by repeating her mother's last words: "As long as there is life, there is hope." Her survival comes, however, largely because the female commandant for women allows her to leave temporarily to receive treatment for blood poisoning. This merciful action on the part of the commandant seems contrived and out of character, however, as she ruthlessly punishes everyone else and expects nothing from Riva in return for her mercy.

This book will be absorbing to adolescent readers and compel them to finish Riva's uplifting saga, the saga of all who survived those gruesome years. —Raphael Johnstoneaux


With his 6'7" frame, endless curiosity, and inexhaustible energy, Peter the Great was an imposing force who almost singlehandedly brought Russia into the modern world. At the age of ten he was crowned tsar, and from early on, believed he should have whatever he wanted. As he matured, what he wanted was what Europe had: new ideas, new skills, new architecture, and new customs. Disguised as a commoner, he traveled west for eighteen months, listening, learning and gathering. What he collected filled ten ships for the return trip. With his hefty booty and
new vision, Peter spent fourteen hours a day until his death pushing and changing Russia into a modern land.

Stanley presents the complex personality of this unusual and influential man in very readable prose. Her writing is informative yet smooth and easy, presenting the results of solid research without interrupting or distorting the story itself. The illustrations? Full of a lovely folk-art feeling which seems to belong to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. —Jim Jacobs


Mufaro loves both his daughters, unaware that Manyara is obedient and good only in his presence. Out of his sight, she is mean-spirited, selfish and rude. When the king announces he is seeking a wife, Mufaro decides both his daughters should appear before the monarch. Only the ruler himself should choose between such desirable women. Manyara leaves early for the city to make sure it is she who is chosen, but Mufaro suspects no selfish motive. Her trip to the city reveals Manyara's pride and greed even further. Her scheming plans are thwarted, and the honor of queen comes to her kind and deserving sister.

The source for Steptoe's satisfying story is a folktale recently collected from the people living near the Zimbabwe ruins, believed by archaeologists to be the site of an early African city of prosperity and consequence. While the ancient elements of good folktale undergird this rewarding story, Steptoe keeps it distinctly African with accurate names (each has a meaning consistent with the character, explained in a foreword) and splendid illustrations which reflect the ruins and geography of Zimbabwe. The story pleases the heart, the language pleases the ear, and the art pleases the eye: unqualified success. —Jim Jacobs


$12.95. 117pp.

If you want to build an authentic pueblo-style house, this is the book for you. Every aspect of the construction is detailed in picture and prose. The pen-and-ink drawings are precise, pleasing to the eye, and plentiful. What is lacking is more detail about the people who lived in the structures. Perhaps the authors didn't want to speculate or fictionalize, but for me the detail about how walls, roofs, windows and kivas were built was not enough. —Lovisa Lyman