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Book Pair

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By Sarah Olson

The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Folktalke Versions

Fitchett, Gordon. *The Twelve Princesses*. Illustrated by Gordon Fitchett. Phyllis Fogelman, 2000. ISBN 0-803-72474-8. 32 pp. All.

Allen, Debbie. *Brothers of the Knight*. Illustrated by Kadir Nelson. Dial, 1999. ISBN 0-803-72488-8. 40 pp. All.

The Twelve Princesses and *Brothers of the Knight* are both retellings of the Brothers Grimm classic *The Twelve Princesses*. The storyline of the first runs much as it generally does—twelve princess sisters are locked in their room every night, but every morning their shoes are mysteriously worn out. The king offers the hand of one of his daughters as a reward to the man who can discover what is happening each night; if unsuccessful, however, the penalty is death. An old soldier decides he wants to accept the challenge and, armed with a cloak to make him invisible, he is able to discover the princesses' secret—they disappear through a trap door in their room to go dancing in an enchanted land! He informs the king, wins a princess's hand, and lives wealthily ever after.

Brothers of the Knight turns the story with a hip twist; the princesses are actually twelve boys living with their preacher father, Brother Knight. When they go off dancing, they swing the night away at the Big Band Ballroom. In this tale, the old soldier is replaced by Sunday, a spunky housekeeper determined to discover the boys' secret. Sunday confronts the boys about their dancing, and they confess; they hid it from their father for fear he would disapprove. Sunday blames the father for their secrecy, and in turn he confesses that he used to cut the rug, too. They all

dance the funky chicken and live happily ever after.

What makes these two works unbelievable—what makes them worth your going out of your way to find them—are the playful illustrations. Fitchett's add a new angle to *The Twelve Princesses* tale. The main characters in his story aren't merely beautiful princesses, they are beautiful *duck* princesses. Their hair, their clothing, their regal poses—all reflect the rich attention paid by Fitchett to the illustrations. They tell a beautiful and enchanting story in their own right. Never have fowl looked less foul. The rich figures in Nelson's illustrations in *Brothers of the Knight* almost dance off the page, inspiring the reader to boogie with them. The Big Band Ballroom scene will take your breath away!

Individually, these books are amazing. Presented together, they are model examples of what life and humor can still be added to our traditional fairy tales.