What I Learned During the Caldecott Committee Process

or

Picture Book Analysis in Six or Seven Easy Steps

By Gene Nelson
Provo City Library Director

I just concluded a wonderful, enlightening year serving on the Randolph Caldecott 2000 Committee. From March of 1999 to the dramatic conclusion at the Newbery/Caldecott banquet this past July, I spent any "extra" time immersed in the visual language of the picture book. As I entered this fascinating process, I felt quite competent and qualified as a new committee member. I have been very involved in reading and teaching children's literature for more than two decades. My bookshelves are crammed with children's books, folktale collections, criticisms, and a complete collection of Arbuthnot and Sutherland's *Children and Books*. I felt pretty good about myself.

After reading close to seven hundred picture books, most receiving close analysis, and studying many articles and books written by eminent critics about picture books, and after sitting at the feet of three of the nation's top "experts" in the field and after twenty-four hours of intense committee discussion of picture books... 

**Caldecott Rule #1** (Blatant ripoff of Newbery Award winner Christopher Paul Curtis)

*Just when you think you know what you're talking about, SOMETHING will hit you across the face to gently persuade you that you don't.*

My "something" was what I call the Caldecott Experience. In a few short sentences, I hope to toss together a vicarious Caldecott meal, juiced with some authentic Caldecott anecdotes and a side order or two of ideas to help kids make the Caldecott connection. A delicious bibliography of some of the best reference materials to support an ongoing diet of Caldecott titles will wrap up the course.

Dripping with sweat (for it was quite humid in New Orleans in June), I literally slid into a chair in a conference room labeled "Caldecott 2000 Committee," my first meeting with the other members of the Caldecott committee. Eight of us were elected by the membership of the Association for Library Services to Children, and seven were selected by the president-elect of the association. Thirteen women and two men represented a diverse geographic distribution and different minority groups. As we introduced ourselves, I couldn't help but pinch myself as I sat next to some of my heroines in the children's literature community. Barbara Kiefer, the chair, has written many articles on picture books and is the author of an excellent text, *The Potential of*
Picturebooks: From Visual Literacy to Aesthetic Understanding. Barbara Elleman, the creator of Book Links magazine, and author of many articles on picture books, had just completed a biography of artist Tomie dePaola entitled Tomie dePaola: His Art and His Stories. My last heroine is Ginny Moore Kruse, Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She, too, has written many reviews and articles in the field. These experts plus eleven other very knowledgeable folks combined to make quite an illustrious committee.

Caldecott Rule #26

Fifteen heads think better than just one.

Our meetings in New Orleans were short, more to meet each other and be oriented to the selection process. We discussed the terms and criteria of the award and haggled over semantics and other fun stuff (terms and criteria for the Caldecott can be found at www.ala.org/alsc/caldecott.html). The work was just beginning.

For the next six months, it was Christmas every day. Almost without fail, I received at least one box of books each day.

Caldecott Rule #19

You'll never get tired of getting free books in the mail.

By about the three hundredth title, I started to realize I had a lot of work to do. I began by organizing the books into three basic piles: the "Oh Wow!" books, the "I like this book and it is starting to grow on me" books, and the "good try, but no cigar" books. The cigar books went onto my slush-pile shelf and basically lived a quiet life. Now and then I would revisit the shelf, just to make sure I hadn't missed an Oh Wow book and to let the cigar books know that I thought about them. The Oh Wow titles and the Starting to Grow on Me books were closely read and reread. I read not only the text, but also probably more important, the pictures. General and specific thoughts were scribbled down. My critical thought process became more concise and, I think, intelligent as more and more books were read.

As I started this involving process, I remembered an article that Barbara Elleman wrote for the Journal of Children's Literature entitled "Evaluating Illustration." As she says in that article, "The textual orientation of fiction and nonfiction makes them easier to evaluate; picture books, with their integration of word and illustration, demand a more complex approach and response." This is Barbara's five-part method for "approaching and evaluating a picture book."

1. "I flip through the book to get a feel for the tone and approach." At this step, readers could ask themselves what type of picture book is being presented and what type of artistic expression is being used.

2. "I read the text carefully, mentally blocking out the illustrations." No cheating, no pictures. Determine the rhythm and pacing of the storyline, go through a mental list of literary criteria: plot, characters, setting, conflict, and theme.

3. "I page through the book again, this time letting the story unfold through the art."
This time, block out the text and focus on the art and read the pictures. Concentrate on the art and how it complements, expands, or competes with the text. Don't read the text with the illustrations; let the pictures tell what they will tell.

4. "I read through the book again, making a leisurely but thorough perusal of art and narrative." Have fun and enjoy the complete story.

5. "I page through one last time, trying to keep all these thoughts in mind as I mull over my observations and assimilate my impressions." At this stage, Barbara particularly concentrates on design elements and the relative merits of the artist's work.

As I studiously followed these five steps, I found my analysis to be more thoughtful and critically sound. I couldn't just say anymore, "I don't like this book." I discovered how critical thought relates to picture books. My pleasure or displeasure of a specific book could now center on actual reasoned judgment rather than strict emotion. Granted, this process is still relatively subjective. At one point in our deliberations, Barbara and I felt quite different about a book. She said, with a smile in her voice, something to the effect, "Gene, did you read the same book I did?" I replied, "Yep, and I used the five-step process." Well, we had a good laugh, but it did remind me that we all bring different perspectives and different biases to picture book analysis. I strongly recommend Barbara's approach of evaluation. It will lead to greater understandings of the symbiotic relationship of text and illustrations in picture books. Children can also profit from this structured procedure. In October we were presented with perhaps the biggest task to date: each of us had the opportunity to select our top three choices! I spent days narrowing down my favorites to the finalists. These were days of second guessing, rereading, and feeling good about my choices, only to wake up the next morning knowing I had to change a title or two or three. I knew I would have the chance to choose again in December, but that didn't seem to help a lot. Choices were finally made in both months, and we prepared ourselves for the BIG meeting in January.

Caldecott Rule #50

The weather person in the sky always knows when you'll be sequestered in a hotel conference room for days.
It'll be beautiful outside.

I left Salt Lake City on January 13 and flew to drop-dead gorgeous downtown San Antonio, Texas. Ah, the Riverwalk, the mouth-watering Mexican food, the 70 degree weather, the romantic walks (yes, my wife was with me)! In this beautiful city, my lot was in a hotel conference room down the hall from the Newbery committee. Early on, we bet each other on which committee would finish their deliberations first. We won. After reintroducing ourselves, we got right to work and began discussing our top books. We winnowed the approximate seven hundred books to a more manageable list of somewhere between forty and sixty titles. The committee members are sworn to secrecy on many of decision-making aspects, so the actual number will die with me. By mutual agreement, some books were dismissed from the list, and then the discussions got really interesting. Understand that most of these books had probably been collectively read, oh, 75 times as a minimum. We all had favorites that someone else disliked intensely.
Many favorites fell by the wayside as the official balloting began. By Caldecott rules, each individual ballot consists of a first, second, and third choice. The ballots are collected and tabulated. Three of our group were asked to be Official Tabulators. As they officially tabulated, the rest of us paced, drank favorite sodas, started or gave up smoking, and otherwise made ourselves obnoxious. After the Official Tabulators completed their tabulating, the results were announced by the chair. The winning book would have to receive eight of the fifteen first-place votes and be eight total points ahead of the second place book. Our winner wasn't selected on the first ballot, or the second, or the third. Sandwiched between the official ballots was more, sometimes heated, discussion. Details of illustrations and text were discovered and advanced as the deliberations continued. Many good titles didn't make the final ballot because of inconsistencies that hurt the overall presentation of the book.

Caldecott Rule #9

If you think the Honor books are just "runner-ups," you're dead wrong.

Caldecott Rule #66

You'd think that after 22 hours of talking about picture books you'd be realllll sick of it. You aren't.

Finally, we reached that magical point at which all the points are tabulated, and enough first-place votes have been cast, and a winner is announced. Barbara Kiefer, our chair, immediately burst into tears following the announcement, and hugs and kisses were spread all around. Simms Taback's *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* would be our Caldecott winner. But our task was far from over. Remember Caldecott Rule #9? Honor books do not have to be chosen, but our committee quickly chose four titles that had also risen to the top: David Wiesner's *Sector 7*; Mollie Bang's *When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really, Angry*; Jerry Pinkney's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*; and Trina Schart Hyman's *A Child's Calendar*.

I had previously been of the attitude that honor books, both Newbery and Caldecott, were second-rate, runners up. Never again. I know that on a different day, our award winner could have been one of the honor books. Remember Caldecott Rule #9.

Was our work done? Nope, press releases were awaiting. We separated into groups to write the releases, and each of us had an opportunity to contribute. Early the next morning, we called the illustrators and happily announced their award. All the artists were delighted with our choices, as were their publishers. The BIG announcements were made at 9 A.M., along with the other awards, and our work was completed. All that remained to be done was to attend the wonderful award banquet in July in Chicago.

Caldecott Rule #101

Have fun.

The evening was glorious, full of smiles and well wishes. Our committee realized a bonding that was sweet and touching. Lifelong friends had been made. Tears were shed as we said goodbye that night. I had the opportunity to sit with Molly Bang during the dinner and thoroughly enjoyed myself. I floated back to my hotel with little
mementoes and eternal memories, believing that my Caldecott Experience was over. Since then I have found that the experience is never over. My numerous opportunities to speak of the Experience have kept the Experience alive, but the most enduring factor of the Experience is my ongoing discovery of the joy and wonder found in picture books.

So what else did I learn? I learned and relearned, among many things, that an artist chooses style, composition, color, line, and texture with reason and intent. For example, in Taback's *Joseph*, the folk-art style and technique are used with conscious deliberation. The scraps of fabric and old photographs used in collage further the design elements of the book. Clearly, the reader has encountered an optimistic tailor in an old-world time. How can we not taste the flavor of this timeless tale and exult with Joseph as he makes lemonade from lemons?

Or examine Bang's *Sophie* getting really, really angry. As her anger reaches its zenith, the colors themselves become angry! Bright reds and yellows flood the page as Sophie's anger spills over all in her path. Did Bang purposefully choose those colors? Absolutely.

Each of this year's award winners exhibit different strengths, yet in each one, after careful analysis, we see the result of amazing choices and deliberate intent. Now whenever I examine a new picture book (using of course Elleman's five-step process), I consciously attend to the small details and nuances of the art. The position of characters, the juxtaposition of white spaces, the careful leading of the reader to the next page via the delicate use of lines, and many other artistic "tricks of the trade" can all contribute to the overall success of the picture book.

**Caldecott Rule #34**

Caldecott books are supposed to be for kids, but good books will be attractive to adults too.

How can we help children understand the secrets of the picture book? We can start by teaching them how to read a book (see Elleman). We can teach them about art. We can teach them the elements of art, which include line, color, shape, texture, and composition.

We can introduce them to the artist. Younger children, in particular, don't often understand that a real human person painted the pictures used in a picture book. Let's talk to them about the artist and how she makes her art. Then let's get our hands dirty with clay or watercolors or gouache. Let's get our scissors out and try our hand at collage and cut-paper art. Go to an art supply store and buy little squares of scratch board to let the kids try their hand at Brian Pinkney's artistic technique. The possibilities are unlimited.

"Mock" Caldecott's are tons of fun. ALA produces a publication entitled *The Newbery & Caldecott Mock Election Kit*. It walks you through the process of setting up a mock Caldecott. (Call me if you need help!) I led this election for a number of school classes before and after the actual Caldecott announcement. The kids have fun, learn about artists, see new books, and learn how these awards are actually determined. At Joaquin Elementary School in Provo, one-fifth grade boy, Javier, selected not one, not two, but three of the final five books. Unbelievable! I was so overwhelmed that I gave him a copy of one of the award winners.
I hope these experiences and ideas will give you a little nudge to include a Caldecott Connection in your classroom or library. The next Keats or Fleming or Sendak or Wisniewski or Zelinsky or Taback just might be waiting for us to show them the way.

The following bibliography is far from exhaustive, but the titles are guaranteed to make you think and help children make the Caldecott connection.


Spitz, Ellen. *Inside Picture Books.* Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1999. Still reading this one, but fascinating as Spitz analyzes picture books from a psychological and psychoanalytical perspective.


Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway  
Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: Fantasy fiction;  
Subject: Hunger--Juvenile Fiction; Animals--Juvenile Fiction; Monsters--Juvenile Fiction; Books—Reviews;  

Hungry animals from mouse to elephant describe their hunger and what they will eat. Nibble! Gnaw! Gulp! Slurp! Munch! Squish! Squash! They eat until the Ravenous Beast GOBBLES them up and SWALLOWS them down.

This not-too-frightening scary story with bold illustrations, silly words, and comic repetitions will keep young ones asking for it to be read again and again. An excellent choice for beginning storytellers.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak  
Reading Level: Toddler; Preschool; Primary;  
Rating: Outstanding;  
Genre: Fantasy fiction;  
Subject: Pumpkin--Juvenile fiction; Halloween--Juvenile fiction; Jack-o-lanterns--Juvenile fiction;  

A "fat little, round little, yellow little pumpkin in a great big field" dreams of making a fierce and ferocious face to scare away the field mice just like the scarecrow does. As the weather turns, the little pumpkin feels a "crisp tingle that tickle[s]," and he grows and turns orange, but try as he might, he can't make a terrible face. His dreams come true when three children take him home and use a saw knife to make his mouth "zigzag up and zigzag down." The pumpkin repeats his refrain: "Ho, ho, ho!/He, he, he!/Mice will run/when they see me." The youngsters dance around him singing a song to the "terrific, terrible pumpkin."

Egielski's illustrations are wonderfully fun and moody and Margaret Brown's prose is more like poetry. It's rhythmic and repetitive in just the right way for a great bedtime read. Overall *The Fierce Yellow Pumpkin* is a Halloween treat.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner  
Reading Level: Preschool  
Rating: Dependable  
Genre: Contemporary Realistic fiction;  
Subject: Hair—Juvenile fiction; Birds--Juvenile fiction; family reunions--Juvenile fiction;  
Books—Reviews;  

Franny B. Kranny has long fuzzy hair and the longer and fuzzier it gets the better she likes it -- until one day a bird comes to build it's nest and begins to live in her hair.  
The pictures by Helen Oxenbury are delightful, and although the ending of the story is a little disappointing, it is a fun book to read -- especially great to read to a child that is having trouble making his or her hair behave.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway  
Reading Level: Preschool, Primary  
Rating: Dependable  
Genre: Holiday stories;  
Subject: Halloween--Juvenile Fiction; Friendship--Juvenile Fiction; Monsters--Juvenile Fiction; Books—Reviews;

Dracula and Frankenstein are neighbors, living side-by-side in spooky houses. Their friendship is challenged when both decide to have Halloween parties. Dracula, in a moment of rivalry, makes Frankenstein's invitations disappear and his own invitations to appear in his own mailbox. The next week, Dracula's party is rocking, with friends dressed up as their favorite dead person, but Frankenstein is sitting alone at home. Dracula's party begins to wane, and feeling some remorse, he decides to take the party next door, telling his guests that the best is yet to be.

A Halloween palate with more humor than horror and a monstrous friendship make this a solid choice for holiday collections in public and school libraries. Simple vocabulary will encourage even first graders to read this one alone.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway  
Reading Level: Preschool, Primary  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: non-fiction;  
Subject: Animals--Juvenile literature; Eye--Juvenile literature; Nature--Juvenile Literature;  

Whatever your surroundings, you are never alone. Although they may not be seen, animals from owls to lizards to mice share the environment with humans.  

This book is intended to inspire young people to look more closely at the natural world. On the left side of a double-page spread, Wiesmüller uses tempera paints to illustrate a huge close-up of an eye. The text below each eye describes the action of the creature who is watching the environment; the right side of the spreads pictures humans enjoying the setting. Spectacular illustrations and thoughtful text make this book appealing for the adult reader as well as the child. A key to the "Animals in the Book" will help those who cannot guess the animals' identities.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner
Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Adventure stories;
Subject: Bears--Juvenile fiction; Mice--Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction;

Mouse and Mole are two wee friends who enjoy their wee little home, their wee little meals and their wee little friendship. But one dark night they venture out into the dark and moonless night. Through the forest they travel, through the swamp they squish, and through the sharp thistles they squeeze until they get to the BIG GIANT glen. At the same time, a BIG GIANT bear who lives in his BIG GIANT lair is pacing and craving something new and juicy to eat. Finally he can wait no more; baring BIG GIANT teeth he stomps out into the dark night to find just the right something to munch on. Mouse and Mole fear for their lives as the stomping, growling, and grumbling bear comes closer…and closer…and closer… Will Mouse and Mole survive to eat their tiny wee feasts? Will Mouse and Mole make it back to their tiny wee home? Will BIG GIANT bear eat them on sight??? Or, will all three go skipping hand in hand through the glen for a BIG GIANT feast in the lair of their friend BIG bear?

Absolutely adorable pictures of Mouse, Mole and Bear make this story a treat for the eyes. Likewise, clever rhyming chants make it a feast for the ears, and just a touch of fear makes it a thriller for the emotions. This story is a great read on any dark night!

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner
Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Humorous stories;
Subject: Dachshunds--Juvenile fiction;

At his back, Apollo has a cute little bottom, in his middle he has a long thin body, and his delightful little sausage nose is at his front-most part. Whether from the top, bottom or side Apollo is adorable. From above and below Apollo is still adorable. But what about horizontally, diagonally, vertically, or even from right to left -- is he still adorable? You betcha! Even cut in half front to back he is adorable. He's also adorable cut in half top to bottom. In pieces or as a whole Apollo is most assuredly adorable. How many more ways can Apollo be adorable -- read the book and find out!!!

First published in Germany in 1999. The first American edition appeared in 2002. Even though the copyright is older, this book is not to be missed.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner
Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Historical fiction;
Subject: Noah’s ark--Juvenile fiction; Animal stories--Juvenile fiction; Bible--Juvenile fiction;

A young boy’s grandfather says it is going to rain -- so much so that he is building an ark to save his family and all of the animals. While the boy plays, the animals begin to come. "Big animals thump and bump onto the ark. Middle-sized animals clip-clop by. Small animals squeeze in." Some of the animals live in the rafters, some find a place swimming beneath. The rains continue. It's very crowded on the ark and the boy tries to help the animals find places where they can be comfortable, sometimes he manages, but other time's it chaos. For forty days and nights the boy lives among the animals and then one day the sun is shining. The dove returns with a green branch and finally -- two by two -- the animals leave the ark to settle into the new land.

Once again, Brett has traveled to the ends of the earth -- well, to Botswana, Africa -- to find her beloved animals living naturally in their native habitat. Once again, the animals are realistically portrayed in glorious loving fashion. And once again, the story draws the reader in with dynamically visual sensations and a simply told story.
A great Japanese volcano has erupted, burning down the home of Michi (roadway) and her Aunt Tsuru (crane). Since Aunt Tsuru has an injured leg and the two have little money, Michi is apprenticed to Mistress Shinyo (needle) to learn the art of making fine clothing for rich and powerful ladies. Mistress Shinyo's hands are old and gnarled and she is looking for just the right apprentice to sew the fine clothes like she did in her youth. She already has three other girls working for her, Taki (waterfall), Kaoru (aroma) and Hana (flower). Taki specializes in the care of the gardens and her hands are always stained. Kaoru loves to cook and the meals she prepares are very delicious. Hana has a magical way with flower arranging. But none of the three girls displays a real talent with a needle and thread. Michi seems to be born with the gift of small, tight stitches and quickly is given more projects, on better fabric, until the three other apprentices vow to get even with her. Their jealousy nearly ruins Mistress Shinyo's business when they give Michi red thread to sew a white kimono.

A first children's book for author Andy William Frew. A first book for illustrator Jun Matsuoka. A first joy for the reader. This tale is based on a true event in the life of Frew's great-grandmother-in-law. The story, painted with soft color washed watercolors, makes this first attempt at illustrating children's books a book that readers will want to look at at first time, a second time, and even a third time. The last page of the book gives the meaning of the names of the characters and also mentions a website, www.moonmountainpub.com, for readers to go to for more information about lesson plans and related sources.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner  
Reading Level: Preschool, Primary, Intermediate  
Rating: Outstanding  
Genre: Humorous stories;  
Subject: Dogs—Juvenile fiction; Flying—Juvenile fiction; Self-perception—Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;  

Pup is going to school and he is so filled with joy that he rises up and flies. At school no one believes his tale. He is ridiculed and called a liar. Sadly he goes home thinking he lost all of his happiness. Then Dad restores his happiness and more when Pup learns that both Mom and Dad can fly. Not all Dogs fly -- but some do!  

Another winner by the author illustrator of *Where's My Teddy?* and *It's the Bear!* Jez Alborough's love of life comes through loud and clear -- or should I say light and joyful!

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner
Reading Level: Preschool; Primary; Intermediate;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Fairy tales; Humorous stories;
Subject: Wolves--Juvenile fiction; Food habits--Juvenile fiction; Cub Scouts--Juvenile fiction;

Wolf is tired of lamburgers, sloppy does, chocolate moose and three-pig salad. He wants a new and different taste—he wants BOY! He craves Boy chops, Baked Boytatos and Boys-n-Berry pie. His parents tell him not to get his hopes up because there aren't many boys around. Wolf decides to play a trick on his parents and runs home shouting, "Boy! Boy! I've seen a boy in the woods!" Of course, his parents go racing out—they want Boy chops too—but although they look high and low, inside and out, they cannot find any boy. Well, you know how the story goes: when Wolf finally sees a boy, (a whole scout troop of them), no one believes him. That's why they—the boys at least—live happily ever after.

This book has delightful pictures and a story with enough twists in it to satisfy even the most unwilling reader. I just read this with my six-year-old grandson and he laughed so hard I had to review it, even though the copyright date is a little older.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner  
Reading Level: Preschool; Primary; Intermediate;  
Rating: Excellent;  
Genre: Fairy tales;  
Subject: Mice--Juvenile fiction; Winter--Juvenile fiction; Work--Juvenile fiction;

Moses the mouse is very like the grasshopper in the famous tale by Aesop. Moses would rather dance, sing and juggle than gather food or warm things for the nest. Old leaves twirling give Moses the inspiration to dance, the soft wind in the cornstalks give Moses a tune to sing, and shiny pebbles by the brook instill in Moses the urge to toss and catch. Inevitably, the snow comes, and thanks to Mama there is food in the house. Thanks to Papa there are old rags to snuggle in for warmth, and thanks to Moses’ sister Missy there are sweet raisins for treats on special days. Long before winter is through, however, everyone is bored and wishes for something exciting to do—and, of course, Moses has all the answers.

The author has the understanding that work and play go together, and the illustrator, thanks to Beatrix Potter and a wild mouse the cat might’ve drug in, gives the mouse family an unexpected insight on winter—and spring.

Reviewer: Annette Van Wagenen
Reading Level: Primary
Rating: Excellent
Genre: Contemporary realistic poetry;
Subject: Children's poetry--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Take a journey around the world with 94 pages of imaginative poems from the Arctic Circle to England, by way of such places as Russia, Kenya, and Australia. The author has selected poetry that can be seriously dramatic or comically lighthearted. In these pages "a bull gored the sun with its horns," "caps fly off the scented blossoms," and "the wind wandering in the night rocks the fields of wheat."

With brilliant water-colored illustrations, these poems from more than 50 different countries invite children to share in the richness of cultures around the globe.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner
Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;
Rating: Excellent;
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;
Subject: Sharks--Juvenile literature;

If you are a human swimming in the ocean--the last word you want to hear is--SHARK! But there are all kinds of sharks, from sharks the size of a candy bar to the giant whale shark. Each shark has its own characteristics--from sharks that have magical lights, to sharks that puff up like puffer fishes, to sharks that come in the shape of tools. You will learn much from this picture book which actually has two texts: one large bolded easy and fun to read, the other is more in-depth and gives some fascinating information about sharks. Humans kill about 100 million sharks each year. So if you're a shark swimming in the ocean--the last word you want to hear is--HUMAN!

Bright simple pictures illustrate both the easy to read text and the more in-depth information. The book also contains an index and a fact sheet about sharks. The author is a zoologist and a lover of the ocean. Since sharks have been on the earth a lot longer than humans he feels that sharks deserve our respect and protection.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner  
Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: Contemporary Realistic Stories; Humorous Stories;  
Subject: Family—Juvenile fiction; Nature—Juvenile fiction; Growing up—Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Auntie Zep's house always holds marvelous things. Lolly only wishes she could stay with Auntie Zep without the rest of the family. One year her parents decide that she may stay for one whole month, but after the family has left, Lolly begins to feel a little homesick. Of course, Auntie Zep has just the thing: a "Secret Remedy Book" -- a book that has seen deserts and oceans. A book that is covered with old wall paper and splotched with spills and splatters. A book that contains dried flowers and leaves. A book that is written in a wonderful spidery hand that looks as if it wants Lolly to hurry up and feel better. The book contains a warning that all seven things must be done before the first hoot of the owl or the spell will not work. A book that keeps Lolly and Auntie Zep much too busy to be homesick.

What a wonderful way to spend a vacation, learning to love your family and the earth around you.

Reviewer: Annette Van Wagenen
Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Non-fiction;
Subject: Science experiments--Juvenile literature; Books—Reviews;

Grab a lab coat, this book, and your favorite foods. You are about to embark on some fizzy, gooey, and bubbling experiments. Whether making zapped snacks, temperamental cookies, or rubber pizza, this book will teach some amazing science concepts while having fun in the kitchen.

Any kitchen can become an official research lab. New foods, cooking methods, and even kitchen gadgets are often the result of curious scientist at play. A kitchen has many of the same tools and equipment as a science lab. While messing around in the kitchen, any experiment will help one learn something new. That's the great thing about experiments...and this book is full of them. Learn if a grape will explode in a microwave or find out what yeast will do when mixed with salt and sugar. Or experiment with different kinds of detergent. Whatever the exploration, the kitchen scientist who wants to have fun needs this book. Have a sizzling good time!

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers  
Reading Level: Intermediate;  
Rating: Excellent;  
Genre: Historical fiction;  
Subject: Polish Americans--Juvenile fiction; Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Orphan trains--Juvenile fiction;

Bundled onto a train with numerous other orphans, Rodzina is convinced that she and the others are being sent out west to be sold as slaves. She resents being on the train, resents the younger orphans who keep demanding things from her, but most of all resents the rude and loud Mr. Szprot and the cold, unfeeling "Miss Doctor," the two adults accompanying them. She doesn't want to be placed with someone-she just wants her dead parents back. As the train moves through the sparsely settled territories, Rodzina slowly comes to realize the importance of human connections, and that even the coldest person can have a loving heart.

Cushman's latest novel is a fascinating, personal look at the practice of orphan placing during the mid to late 19th Century. Her characterization of Rodzina is especially effective, following her own precedent in *The Midwife's Apprentice*. Rodzina is bristly and, at times harsh, but it's clear she's also a young girl in search of something to call a family. While the ending was somewhat expected, and the overall plot rather episodic, Rodzina succeeds where it really counts, in deep and meaningful exploration of human relationships.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner  
Reading Level: Intermediate  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: Historical fiction;  
Subject: School—Juvenile fiction; Teachers—Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Ida Bidson is in eighth grade at the Elk Valley Schoolhouse. It is a one room school for eight children. Ida is fourteen and her seatmate, Tom, is the same age. Both are counting on a certificate of completion so that they can attend High School next year. With only six weeks left in the school year, their regular teacher, Miss Fletcher, is called home because of an ailing mother and the school is closed. Tome comes up with the only solution -- Ida will become the teacher in a secret school -- a school that no adult will know about -- least of all the school board.

Avi always spins a good tale and -- in my opinion -- this is one of his best. Well written, plausible situations, and great characters. Ida and Tom, of course, steal the show. Even Herbert Bixler (the only student to not attend regularly) finds a way to defy his father, who thinks that book learnin' is not important.
How many people know that George W. Bush had a little sister who died when she was only 3 and that he called his father Poppy? These and other facts about President Bush's childhood are waiting for children in this interesting biography. After a brief chapter about President Bush's response to the 9-11 terrorist attacks, this biography begins before George W. Bush was born and recounts how his parents met. It spends 2/3rds of the text on the years before President Bush left college. Readers learn that he spent his earliest years living in a small apartment. As his father's wealth grew "Georgie's" life changed. He moved from a small town to a bigger city, and then to a private boarding school. He was not as studious as his father and more of a socialite. His people skills helped propel him into the White House.

The engaging text is full of well chosen quotes. The author has resisted the temptation to fictionalize dialog. Though emphasizing Bush's strengths, the author also mentions his struggle with alcohol abuse. The pages have nice type set and are illustrated with both color and black and white photographs. This is a great resource for children who want to get to know their president a little more. It is not as good of a resource for reports because it only mentions in passing the President's accomplishments as an adult. It does include a useful Chronology, Glossary, Further Readings, and Internet Resources section. Others in the series are also well done.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers  
Reading Level: Intermediate  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: Fantasy fiction; Fairy tales;  
Subject: Magic--Juvenile fiction; Cats--Juvenile fiction; Trees--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Lillian spends most of her time exploring the woods around her Aunt’s farm, searching for the fairies she’s convinced are just out of sight. One day, after running with a deer into parts of the wood she’s never seen before, Lillian falls asleep beneath an ancient beech tree. When a snake bites her while she sleeps, a gathering of cats decides to save her by turning her into a form that isn’t on the verge of dying: a cat. While Lillian is grateful not to be dead, she wants to become a girl again. It will take the wits of the old Apple Tree Man and the Father of Cats to transform her back, and along the way, Lillian discovers just how to see fairies.

De Lint’s book has a pleasant mythical feel, although some relatively unnecessary plot points (i.e., Lillian’s fascination with fairies) tend to diffuse the drive of the story. Nevertheless, the book has some beautiful moments, especially when coupled with Vess’s gorgeous illustrations. The point where Lillian meets the Apple Tree Man is especially effective; the pictures of him are beautifully tree-like, and De Lint delightfully describes his emergence from the apple tree. De Lint fans will find this an enjoyable, non-hefty tale.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon  
Reading Level: Intermediate;  
Rating: Outstanding;  
Genre: Historical fiction;  
Subject: Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft--Juvenile fiction; Authors, English--Juvenile fiction;  

Though this book contains some biographical information, this is not a biography of Mary Shelley. It is a highly fictionalized story about two years that Mary, then Godwin, spent visiting the Baxter family in Scotland. Mary, with her friends, Robert and Isabel Baxter, would wander the beach during the day and tell stories by the fireplace at night. Some of the stories are ghost tales. One of the stories that Mary tells is about her own birth, her mother's death and her estrangement from her father and stepmother. After the summer with the Baxters, Mary is called home and resumes an uneasy relationship with her family. In a lengthy afterward, Darrrow tells of Mary's controversial marriage to Percy Bysshe Shelley and of her creation of the Frankenstein story. Darrow includes a selected bibliography at the end.

This is a melancholy introduction to a melancholy figure. The tone of the text is a little sad and brooding. The muted and often dark tones of Barrett's beautiful painterly illustrations heighten the somber mood. Darrow tries--not very successfully--to make a case that Shelley started forming the Frankenstein story while at the Baxter's home. However, in the afterward she mentions Shelley's own claim that the idea for the story came to her as a dream after an evening of telling spooky stories at the home of Lord Byron. Despite this inconsistency, this is an intriguing introduction to the life of Mary Shelley. It is also an attractive resource for educators who want to introduce the genre of horror stories.
Did you know that the "B.B." in B.B. King's name stands for "Blues Boy?" Or that Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman in the United States to receive a medical degree?

Sheila Keenan's outstanding book profiles 450 famous Americans who made contributions to every field from anthropology and politics, to sports and film. Her subjects include artists, businessmen, poets, educators, and rock musicians. The majority of the profiles are brief, a half a page, and include a photograph. A few of her subjects, including John F. Kennedy, Bob Dylan, and Eleanor Roosevelt, receive a full page spread. Each profile is concise and well-written, and manages to contain enough information to spark an interest in further reading and research.

Reviewer: Annette Van Wagenen  
Reading Level: Intermediate  
Rating: Excellent  
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;  
Subject: Brazil--Pictoral Works--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

This highly acclaimed, information book on Brazil examines the history, culture, geography, and economic conditions of the largest country in South America. The introductory pages reveal that people of Brazil take great pride in their country's high rank in Latin America, despite the country's social and economical difficulties. While recognizing their country's problems, the people of Brazil also benefit from a spirit of improvisation and adaptation that allows them to cope with their many challenges.

The lovely full-colored photography enhances the interesting facts throughout the book. Pictures of the land masses, forest and rivers, and the Amazon Rainforest, give a flavor of the landscape. There are historical accounts of past and present rulers and their influence on the Brazilian government. The foods of Brazil sound delightful and there's even a recipe for a very Brazilian bean dish. Enjoy the food and enjoy the book!
Charlie Bone is back for his second semester at Bloor's Academy and this semester has Charlie meeting his great-great-uncle, Henry Yewbeam. Henry was twisted through time from 1916 to Charlie's present day by his evil cousin Ezekiel Bloor. Ezekiel will do anything to finish off Henry once and for all and so it is up to Charlie and his friends (Olivia, Tancred, Lysander, Gabriel, Emma, Fidelio, and Benjamin) to keep Henry from becoming victim again to Ezekiel.

This latest installation to the Children of the Red King series is much better than the first as Jenny Nimmo slowly reveals dark secrets and lets the characters shine. Charlie Bone and the Time Twister has the Red King taking a larger role in the action and the reader is coming to know more about him just as Charlie is learning more about him. The action is quick and the reader has to be careful while reading or he/she will miss important details. Obviously, there are still parts that Nimmo does not fully explain and the reader is left wanting to know more, especially when it comes to Skarpo the Sorcerer. Harry Potter fans will enjoy this series while waiting for the sixth Harry Potter book to be published.

Reviewer: Emily Fry
Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Fantasy fiction;
Subject: Fairies--Juvenile fiction; Computers--Juvenile fiction; Criminals--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Artemis Fowl is back in his third adventure as the world's greatest criminal mastermind. Artemis' father has been rescued from the Russian mafia and he has decided that the Artemis empire will turn legitimate, even if it means making less money. Artemis decides to pull one last criminal heist before he goes legal, but he becomes entangled in a situation that is beyond his capabilities. He not only puts his life in danger, but the fairies are on the verge of being discovered because of his mistake. Once again Artemis and the fairies form an uneasy alliance in an effort to make things right.

In this third edition of the Artemis Fowl adventures, Artemis is a character that every young adult can like as he shows his true feelings for his family and for gold. Here is a protagonist that is smarter than any other adult, richer than most adults, and has adventures that rival James Bond. This book introduces a new twist in the Fowl saga, as the reader is able to read parts of Artemis's secret journal, which shows the inner workings of Artemis. The end of the book raises a lot of questions and makes the reader antsy for the fourth book to come out.

Reviewer: Emily Fry  
Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult  
Rating: Dependable  
Genre: Adventure stories; Fantasy fiction;  
Subject: Magic--Juvenile fiction; Schools--Juvenile fiction; England--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;  

Life is seemingly normal for Charlie until the day he hears a photograph speaking to him. His mother is shocked to find out that he is endowed with a magical power, while his Grandmother Bone is delighted and can't wait to ship Charlie off to Bloor's Academy for the magically endowed. Once at Bloor's Academy, Charlie must find a kidnapped baby (who would now be near his own age) and survive the attacks made on his life. Charlie finds help in a trio of cats and in his own quiet uncle.

More questions are raised than answered by this book. This may be because it is the first in a series of books (Children of the Red King), but the questions left unanswered may leave the reader feeling empty. The action moves along quickly in the book, but everything is very mysterious and the author quickly moves on to other situations, leaving the reader grasping for understanding. This series could be a good place for Harry Potter fans to turn after finishing the fifth Harry Potter book. Hopefully the second book in the Children of the Red King series will answer the lingering questions from this first book.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley
Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Historical Fiction; Adventure Stories; Humorous Stories;
Subject: Frontier and pioneer life--Oklahoma--Juvenile fiction; Oklahoma--History--Land Rush, 1893--Juvenile Fiction;

Stop the Train is a fictional version of historical events in Enid, Oklahoma. In McCaughrean's renamed Florence, Oklahoma, the railroad, as a corporate entity, is not allowed to stake claims during the 1893 Land Rush, so they try to buy out the claimants of Florence, who refuse.

Consequently, the owner of the Red Rock Runner Railroad swears in his wrath never to allow the train to stop in Florence, dooming its residents to go bust. The remainder of the book devotes itself to stories of how the Florentians (who elect a "doge" rather than a mayor), try to get the train to stop in Florence, including taking potshots at it from the water tower, and a snow hedge in a blizzard. Characterizations are even more important than plot in Ms. McCaughrean’s delightful tale: the Swedish baker chooses between two prospects for his new wife based on the coolness of her hands (better for pastry); Herman the Mormon quotes a relevant scripture on each of the signs he paints for local business; and the undertaker's son fills the town with satin-lined furniture. How the British born and bred McCaughrean so totally captures the charm and syntax of frontier speech is a mystery, but her remarkable characters, and this story of loyalty, determination, charming idiosyncrasies, and love is a delight.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak
Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult;
Rating: Dependable;
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;
Subject: Brothers and Sisters--Juvenile fiction; Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Stalking--Juvenile fiction;

Twelve-year-old Kevin and his older sister Holly have a stalker they have nicknamed "The Toad". That's why they flee their home in New Mexico for California and disguise themselves as street performers: Kevin becomes a beachside fortune-teller, and Holly tries to make it as an opera star. They make good money and good progress on overcoming the grief of their mother's recent death, but have they really eluded The Toad? Will they ever be safe? What does he want from them? It will take a bit of luck and a few of Kevin and Holly's new street-skills to outdo their dangerous shadow.

Fleischman is a good writer, so the dialogue is natural and the story flows easily. The plot, however, is found wanting when compared to some of the great young-adult-mystery novels, and the anticipated twists at the end are underwhelming. Still, it's an entertaining read and the characters that Kevin and Holly meet are fun and believable.

Reviewer: Sharon Kuttler  
Reading Level: Intermediate, All  
Rating: Outstanding  
Genre: Nonfiction;  
Subject: Lewis and Clark Expedition—Juvenile literature; Animals—Juvenile literature; U.S. History—Juvenile literature; Books—Reviews;

As the bicentennial of the expedition of Lewis and Clark (1804-1806) approaches, readers will gain knowledge and appreciation of this historic event by reading Patent's intriguing account. President Jefferson sent the Corps of Discovery, headed by Lewis and Clark, west to discover a route to the Pacific and to document animal and plant species new to science. This well-written book is both informative and enjoyable. Stunning photographs, reproductions of period paintings, and maps enhance nearly every page. A "Chronology of Animal Discoveries New to Science" lists the 121 species and subspecies of vertebrate animals discovered, and indicates when and where the explorers first encountered them. Also useful are the author's notes, an index, and a list of suggested reading and websites.

This beautiful, interesting book will appeal to enthusiasts of both nature and history, and promote appreciation of the historic and scientific contributions of Lewis and Clark.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers
Reading Level: Young adult
Rating: Excellent
Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;
Subject: Space and time--Juvenile fiction; Good and evil--Juvenile fiction; Teenage girls--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Whether she's with her dysfunctional family or in class with her depressingly prosaic schoolteacher, Candy has always felt that she doesn't quite fit in the incredibly dull Chickentown, Minnesota. Then, in a single afternoon, Candy is suddenly whisked off to a strange place known as the Abarat, an archipelago where each island stands at a particular hour of the day. This is a place where everyone seems to have a hidden agenda, and the battle between good and evil is frighteningly real. The Abarat is overwhelmingly different, and strangest of all, Candy feels like she actually belongs here.

Barker does a superb job of blending text and illustration, although the fantastic and abstract tone of the paintings does, at times, keep the book itself from feeling quite real. In addition, some readers may feel frustration with Candy as she blunders through various experiences, or accepts wildly weird occurrences quite calmly, while the rest of us would break out screaming. However, there is evidence that her acceptance of the Abarat is essential to the series as a whole, and will be explained in full later on. In short, Abarat is strange, and should be read with that strangeness in mind. Once readers get past that, they'll find that it contains an engaging storyline, and that the characters, though at times grossly different, are disturbingly similar to themselves.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak
Reading Level: Young adult;
Rating: Excellent;
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;
Subject: Friends--Juvenile fiction; Weight--Juvenile fiction; Family--Juvenile fiction;

Virginia Shreves is the plump protagonist in this coming-of-age story. She struggles with her feelings about her weight, about her restrictive, picture-perfect family, and about her boyfriend Froggy, who is really only her boyfriend on Monday afternoons in her bedroom. All aspects of her life fall apart when her big brother runs afoul of the law, but it seems to be only the beginning of putting things back together in a very satisfying way. While she doesn't figure everything out, Virginia does make real progress in realistic and constructive ways. She makes new friends after months of moping because her best friend has moved, she takes the initiative to try out her own personal style and not her moms, and she communicates her feelings and frustrations to those around her instead of hurting herself.

*The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* is really a constructive self-help book for teens with body and self-image issues, disguised as a light weight, chick novel. Carolyn Mackler deals with hefty topics in a way that that many girls could relate to and benefit from.

Reviewer: Mindy M. Nelsen
Reading Level: Young adult;
Rating: Outstanding;
Genre: Historical Plays; Plays; Contemporary Realistic Plays;
Subject: Drama--Reviews; World War II, 1939-1945--Juvenile drama; Family--Juvenile drama;
Theme: It’s always worth the price you pay to stand up for what you believe in and do what’s inherently right.
Production Requirements: Simplistic set, slide projector is essential, ready with several quotes (provided) and pictures.
Acts: 2
Run Time: 90 minutes
Characters: 26+ with possibility of double casting, production could be done with as few as 12 actors.
Cast: 6 must be women, 18 must be men; the rest are flexible
Time Period: 1940’s, World War II

This is a fictional dramatization based on the true story of Sophie Scholl. As a young girl, growing up in Nazi Germany, Sophie and her brother Hans have been taught what is right and wrong by their open-minded parents. Six years pass and they mature into young adults and are confronted with what stance they will take regarding the current war and rumors of the mistreatment and subsequent deaths of Nazi prisoners. While attending a university, they and a select group of their friends, start a resistance group against the Nazi party and publish a pamphlet called “The White Rose” wherein they expose the truth about the Nazi party and its leader. They eventually get caught and are put to death for their efforts, but are remembered as some of the few who dared to do the right thing.

The play is fast paced and compacted with important issues and decisions. The characters are given the opportunity to develop and become men and women of integrity, based on their determination to get the truth out into public. The playwright has included an outside character of Else who never quite communicates with the other characters, but is, in part, the narrator expressing how the people of Germany react to the war. This adds another dimension to the play and its possibilities. It has elements of high tension and moments of love and honesty. A huge focus is the slide projector which helps to tell the truth from the lies, filled with quotes from Hitler and resistance leaders. The audience is swept up, questioning themselves about what is right and wrong and how they would react in such a situation. The play does have a large portion of semi-vulgar language and intense themes that question its appropriateness for a younger audience. It is not recommended for the primary interest level for this reason. The deaths of three characters are portrayed as they stand, valiantly facing the audience (the world) and their spot light goes out. The play is intense with projected images (director’s choosing) and well-worded dialogue, but no violence is actually shown on stage. Light complications emerge from its use of production equipment, costumes and lighting. This play is nonetheless recommended because of its power and message.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak
Reading Level: All;
Rating: Excellent;
Genre: Nonfiction;
Subject: Art --Juvenile literature; Technique -- Juvenile literature;

The *Jumbo Book of Art* is filled with fun craft ideas for kids. Some particularly excellent ideas include “Artistic Assemblage,” which consists of taking household objects and arranging them in an artistic way. Part of the creative spark is in the great example Illustrations: what can you do with an old cigar box, a light bulb, some magazine cut-outs, and paint? There are many clever and easy projects for children and parents will be inspired by fun possibilities. Having said this, *The Jumbo Book of Art* would be more aptly titled *The Jumbo Book of Crafts*, because that is the vast majority of the content. When the book does foray into more traditional art projects, it is at its weakest. It does not (and cannot within the scope of the book) adequately teach vanishing points, dimensions, shading, or portraiture; and a child given these particular tasks will be quickly frustrated or disappointed. And although the format and layout design indicates that this is a book to be read and executed by children, it is more accurately a book for adults to use in creating fun projects for children.

Overall, Luxbacher has assembled a large number of high quality and truly fresh ideas for children’s projects.