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Wilson, Sarah. *A nap in a lap*. Illustrated by Akemi Gutierrez. Henry Holt and Company, 2003. ISBN 0805069763. \$15.95.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar;

Reading Level: Toddler;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Humorous poetry;

Subject: Naps (Sleep)--Fiction; Stories in rhyme; Books--Reviews;

The illustrations are the enticement of this short, endearing book about napping. A little girl and her pet puppy show children where and how baby animals take naps. Baby penguins rest on their parents' feet, securely tucked under their feathers. Bunnies sleep curled up in the field while bats nap upside down. For a little girl and her puppy, however, the best place to nap is in her mom's lap. There is minimal text, usually one line per page, and the poetry sometimes seems awkward. Yet, the illustrations convey the warmth and security of curling up next to a parent for a nap. The colorful and sometimes humorous illustrations really are the book's strength.

Weaver, Katie. *Bill in a China Shop*. Illustrated by Tim Raglin. Bloomsbury, 2003. ISBN 1582348324. \$16.95. NA pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar;
Reading Level: Preschool;
Rating: Excellent;
Genre: Humorous Poetry;
Subject: Bulls--fiction; Rhyming Stories; book—reviews;

Bill is an elegant, Victorian gentleman who has a soft spot for fine china, especially tea cups. Unfortunately, Bill is also a bull. Every china shop he sees has a sign on the door that says, "No Bulls Allowed." Bill is delighted when he finally sees one door with no such sign. Once inside this shop, he sees a delicate tea cup that he simply must have. Getting from the door to the tea cup is not easy for a bull. No matter how careful he tries to be, Bill manages to break almost everything in sight, much to the dismay of the shop clerk who keeps telling him he has no place there. Three ladies enter the shop and, seeing Bill's distress, scold the clerk. They not only buy the tea cup for Bill, they pay for the damage he caused. As a show of thanks Bill invites the three to his house for tea, served in fine porcelain tea cups of course. Bill's story is told in rhyme that flows smoothly and is never forced. The illustrations are the strong point of the story. Bill is endearing with his bulky body in an exquisitely tailored pinstriped suit and top hat. Tim Raglin's humorous and often empathetic ink and watercolor drawings successfully capture Bill's anxiety as he tries not to break any china. The delightful illustrations and the charming character of Bill the Bull are the reason to pick up this book.

Young, Amy. *Belinda the Ballerina*. Illustrated by Amy Young. Viking, 2002. ISBN 0670035491. \$15.99. Unpaginated.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Dance--Juvenile fiction; Ballet--Juvenile fiction;

Belinda loves to dance, but she gives up her dream because of a problem. Or, as Amy Young writes, two problems: her left foot and her right foot. They're huge, so Belinda settles for waitressing. Unexpectedly, Belinda finds a way to do what she loves in a happy ending.

As Amy Young is both author and illustrator, her stronger suit is clearly drawing. The illustrations are wonderful and they carry the text through to a fun and satisfying conclusion.

McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *Who Was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?* Illustrated by Carrie Robbins. Grosset & Dunlap, 2003. ISBN 0448431041. \$4.99. 106 pp.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791--Juvenile literature; Composers--Austria--Biography--Juvenile literature;

Who Was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart? is a brief biography from birth to death of the famous composer and musician. The text is simple and straightforward and contains some interesting facts: Wolfgang had an older sister who was also a quite talented musician. Wolfgang wrote his first opera at twelve years old, which was a flop. Most of the writing, however, is vaguer than this, and generally uninspired. Still, it is well-written for children and has good flow. This much cannot be said for the illustrations, which look like bad photocopies of half-baked pencil and ink sketches. They give the book an unfinished feel.

Lorraine Thompson. *Storyville*. I.E. Clark Publications, 2002. ISBN 0886804949. Contact publisher regarding price. 19 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Humorous Plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Bedtime stories--Juvenile drama; Fables--Juvenile drama; Animals--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Everyone has a great story to tell.

Production Requirements: Few properties, simplistic set.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 20 min

Characters: 7-45

Cast: Very flexible, only 3 characters must be female and 1 must be male.

Time Period: Past and present.

Narrated by the Wise Woman, *Storyville* is about a group of people who have a tale to tell. Each player gets their turn to tell a story, some of which are intermingled and others which involve audience participation. Once their story has been told, the player can become a character in another player's tale. All of the players end in full circle, coming back together as they began and telling us that all lived happily ever after.

The production requirements are minimal with common or simple props and a nearly bare stage. The cast is extremely flexible and can be used as a large group event or to showcase a few actors who will play multiple roles. The audience participation is minimal, but fun and the participation comes at appropriate times. The dialogue is quickly paced and moves the play along well. The drawback to this production is a lack of plot. Each story has a moral, but each one is presented and glossed over so quickly that the audience may soon forget its purpose. It could be used as a fun classroom production, but discussion time should be used afterward to reflect on the morals and lesson presented in the stories.

Cole, Joanna. *Ms. Frizzle's Adventures: Medieval Castle*. Illustrated by Bruce Degen. Scholastic Press, 2002. ISBN 0590108204. \$15.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Fry

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Castles--Juvenile fiction; Civilization, Medieval--Juvenile fiction; Book—Reviews;

Ms. Frizzle's adventures aren't just limited to her magic school bus as Arnold finds out one Saturday morning! Ms. Frizzle sees Arnold going into a model castle shop and decides to follow him in to the store. She then leads Arnold, the store owner, and a seamstress on a merry journey to medieval England. Once there, Ms. Frizzle and Arnold learn all about the parts of a castle, how a castle is run, and even how to defend a castle from siege!

This is a fun book that is filled with historical tidbits that will enthrall children who love history. Each page has a myriad of interesting facts and it takes a while to read all of the little captions on each page. The last page of the book tells the reader that not everything in the book is factual. For example: "A wristwatch cannot take you back in time-no matter how fancy it is." This adds a nice dose of reality to Cole's book about time travel. Ms. Frizzle's adventures in a medieval castle make an excellent book to use if teaching medieval aspects in a classroom. It is also a good addition to any library and will capture the interest of children who love medieval times.

Dubay, Bren. *The Ugly Duckling*. I. E. Clark Publications, 2000. ISBN 0886804833. Contact publisher regarding price. 28 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Fairy Tales;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Love--Juvenile drama; Acceptance--Juvenile drama; Self-esteem--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Life is what you make of it and friendship is worth risking everything for.

Production Requirements: Simplistic set and props. The choice of adding more to the production is left to the discretion of the director.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 25-30 min

Characters: 7-10

Cast: 4 must be female and 2 must be male, the rest are interchangeable.

Time Period: Long ago

This production follows the basic fable of the swan who is born thinking he is a duck who just can't do anything right. Finally, after many obstacles, he comes to himself and learns his magnificent potential and destiny. As new elements in this production, there are the additional characters of the Princess who is also struggling to fit in, the old duck who serves as the constant reminder of public perception, the cat who tries to exert his dominance, a wild duck who shows the ugly duckling what true love and friendship are and the man who is able to show the princess the same thing.

Because of its short nature, the action in the play happens a bit too quickly, leaving the audience with a bit of misunderstanding, but this is made up for in plot and character. The overall moral of the play is clearly present and the audience sees that it is not only the young duckling who is struggling to fit in, but that all of us are, in some way, fighting the same battle and there is hope that we will win! Though the characters are simplistic, this only adds to their charm and adaptability. There are beautiful moments where we see the importance of friendship, of standing up for what is right and of learning to see the good within every creature. Imagination is embraced in this production as the minimal set and costumes lend to that very prescription. This would make a fantastic traveling show and discussion piece.

Harris, Aurand. *Just So Stories*. Ankorage Press Inc., 1971. \$25.00 per performance. 37 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Folklore; Plays; Fairy Tales; Musicals;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Learning--Juvenile drama; Hard work--Juvenile drama;

Theme: We can learn new things everyday and discoveries come from the imagination.

Production Requirements: Simplistic set, blocks only, few props. Costuming can be more expressive and elaborate or simplistic and suggestive.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 20-25 minutes

Characters: 14, 5 of which can be double cast.

Cast: 5 M / 3 F, rest are interchangeable

Time Period: "When the world was so new and all."

This play is a dramatization of three tales from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. It follows the basic story line from the aforementioned book with a "spirit of magic" Djinn that introduces the story and moves the plot along. We follow Man from his first discoveries on the earth learning to have a family with Wife and Daughter, to work the land, to tame animals (Dog, Horse, Camel, Cat, etc.) and to communicate (Stranger, Cavewoman, and Chief). The play consists of inter-connected stories wherein we learn why the cat acts the way he does, how the camel got its hump and how the first letter was written.

This is a very inventive play. The characters are simplistic, yet dimensional as they discover the new world around them. The play follows the lives of the first man, woman, child, society and animals at the beginning of the world. They are innocent and therefore simplistic, but as their knowledge and understanding grow, so do the dimensions of their perspective characters. They are witty and relate well to a young audience. The character of the Djinn lets us know that this play is really a story, and the audience is encouraged to think and to see the discoveries they can make in their own world. Harris moves the play along nicely, explaining elements and reasoning that may not first be understood. The dialogue is well connected with the exception of a few brief musical numbers that are intended to add spectacle to the plot, but seem disjointed if not done well. The lyrics are provided, but the music is up to the director. That said, the play seems to move along well, including the audience directly and making them a part of the magic. A major benefit of the play is the simplicity of the production and its ability to relate these situations to each of us. It claims to be full of magic and lives up to its promise.

DeFelice, Cynthia. *Old Granny and the Bean Thief*. Illustrated by Smith, Cat Bowman. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. ISBN 0374356149. \$16.00. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; Beans--Juvenile fiction; Robbers and outlaws--Juvenile fiction; Book--Review;

Feisty Old Granny lives alone, far out in the southwest desert. With no one to talk to, Old Granny is lonely, but finds comfort in her love for beans. She keeps a pot soaking in the sink, and another cooking in the oven, ready to eat whenever she feels like it. But late one night, a thief climbs quietly through the window of her cabin, eats the oven beans and all of the soaking beans, and steals away again, only to return on the next two nights to repeat his crime. Old Granny, "madder than a pussycat thrown into a pond," decides to go to town and report the thefts to the sheriff. On the way, she meets several talking plants and animals, and even a fresh talking "cow patty;" and all suggest she put them in her bag on the way home and "you'll be glad you did." Granny is skeptical, but takes them home. How her new friends help trap and rid her of the bean thief results in rollicking good fun for the reader.

In this clever, light-hearted version of an old folktale, DeFelice and Smith have produced a winner. Children will be highly entertained by Old Granny's triumph over the bean thief, with the able assistance of her unusual new friends. Uncomplicated illustrations, in the bright, cheerful colors of the American southwest, provide visual amusement as well as a sense of place. Old Granny's facial expressions and repeated phrases warmly invite giggles and reader or audience participation at home, in the school classroom, or at a library story hour. DeFelice's readers will quickly join Old Granny's circle of new friends!

Cole, Henry. *On the Way to the Beach*. Illustrated by Cole, Henry. Greenwillow Books, 2003. ISBN 0688175155. \$15.99. 20 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Preschool; Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Seashore animals--Juvenile fiction; Nature--Juvenile fiction; Book--Review;

A young nature lover follows a path through the woods, around a salt marsh, near a sand dune, and finally reaches the damp sand at the edge of the ocean. The journey isn't a short one; at each new location, the young wanderer stops awhile to quietly watch and listen. What creatures and plants does she/he see?

At each of the four locations depicted in this quiet, gentle, first-person excursion, a flap is folded out to reveal a wide expanse of vegetation and animal life painted in vibrant acrylics. Each creature is listed on the inside of the flap, allowing the reader to match the list to the scene observed. A numbered key to the four scenes is provided at the end of the book, for an accurate self-check.

Children are natural observers of the world around them. The final suggestion, "Find a place to sit and watch and listen. What do you see?" has the possibility of helping a child see familiar surroundings with new eyes-- and perhaps some adults as well.

Benton, Jim. *Lunch Walks Among Us*. Illustrated by Jim Benton. Simon & Schuster, 2003. ISBN 0689862911. \$14.95. 101 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Monsters--Juvenile fiction; Science--Experiments--Juvenile fiction;

Jim Benton's *Lunch Walks Among Us*, first in the proposed *Franny K. Stein: Mad Scientist* series, introduces us to Franny, who loves bats, snakes, and evil-smelling chemicals, but notices that all her school-mates are afraid of her. In true mad scientist fashion, she makes careful observations of the other children and then transforms herself into a "nice" child. All goes relatively well until the children are threatened by a monster which has arisen from a trash can filled with old sneakers, lunch leftovers, and unstable industrial waste. Franny saves the day by countering with her own monster sewn together out of scraps of school lunch meat, and becomes the hero of her school.

Lunch Walks Among Us may well be one of those books children like and adults don't. It is clearly a Captain Underpants rip-off, but since 99% of Captain Underpants' fans are boys and Franny is a girl, one wonders if an audience will emerge. Noticeably gratuitous potty humor mars an otherwise inoffensive text. The illustrations, by the author, are remarkably Dav Pilkey-like. Amazon.com chose *Lunch Walks Among Us* as one of its best children's books of the year, but someone was smoking something when that decision was made, if you ask me.

Schaefer, Lola M.. *Pick, Pull, Snap! : Where Once a Flower Bloomed*. Illustrated by George, Lindsay Barrett. Greenwillow Books, 2003. ISBN 0688178340. \$15.99. 20 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday;

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Plants--Reproduction--Juvenile literature; Flowers--Juvenile literature; Fruit--Juvenile literature; Book--Review;

"The spring sun shines bright. At the trellis, a cool breeze chills noses and shakes free the pollen inside early, white flowers. Deep in the flowers, seeds the size of freckles grow inside a thin, green skin. Rains wash the dried flower petals away, and the seeds plump. On a spring day, pick... [opening the folded cut-away portion of the page] handfuls of pea pods from the vines where once a flower bloomed." The scientific "magic" that transforms a lovely flower into a tasty fruit or vegetable is celebrated in *Pick, Pull, Snap! : Where Once a Flower Bloomed*. Author Lola M. Schaefer is not only an experienced writer of science books for children, but is also an experienced home gardener in rural Indiana. Her excited interest in the blossoming, pollinating, ripening and harvesting phases of plants infuses the almost poetic text. The wide outdoor world of the garden is brought indoors with Lindsay Barrett George's bright, colorful, sometimes larger-than-life guache illustrations, on pages which fold out to reveal each fruit or vegetable ready for harvest. The size and clarity of its art, coupled with an engaging text, make this book a perfect choice for a gardening or science read-aloud for school classroom or library story hour. At home, parents could use it to build excitement for spring planting and summer or fall harvest.

To accommodate the folding and unfolding of pages, the paper is a little more sturdy. A glossary and planting instructions for each fruit or vegetable discussed, along with an illustrated seasonal calendar further enhance the text and illustrations.

Bates, Katharine Lee. *America the Beautiful*. Illustrated by Minor, Wendell. G.P. Putman's Sons, 2003. ISBN 0399238859. \$16.99. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Historical poetry;

Subject: United States--Juvenile poetry; Patriotic music--United States--Juvenile poetry; Books--Reviews;

In an American culture where sophistication, cynicism and excessive preoccupation with "political correctness" run rampant, how refreshing to open the covers of a book that celebrates America with unabashed patriotism. Katharine Lee Bates' stirring poem, which has captured the hearts of Americans for generations, is fittingly adorned with beautiful double-page watercolor and gouache paintings by one of America's premier artists, Wendell Minor. Not only do the paintings celebrate memorable locales from coast to coast and border to border, but they capture historical moments along the way, from an early pilgrim settlement through westward expansion by wagon train along the Oregon trail, to the "alabaster cities gleam" of New York City with twin beams of light memorializing the twin towers destroyed on September 11, 2001.

Enhancing the color-filled presentation of the text is an index of locations painted, with brief information about each, illustrated by a colorful vignette from the larger painting. A double-page map of the United States that follows pinpoints each location by number. Biographical sketches of Bates and Samuel A. Ward, composer of the music, along with a facsimile of one of Bates' handwritten copies of her poem add further interest. Young readers with piano training will enjoy playing the song from a reproduction of an early church hymnal edition.

"America the Beautiful" is a fitting tribute to the grandeur of a great country and to those earlier Americans who have left the legacy we so enjoy today. Young readers' hearts will be stirred as they turn its pages and inevitably sing the patriotic song that is America's favorite.

d'Harcourt, Claire. *Art Up Close: From Ancient to Modern*. Chronicle Books LLC, 2003. ISBN 2020596946. \$19.95. 64 pp.

Reviewer: Hamar, AnnMarie

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books

Subject: Art appreciation--Juvenile literature; Picture puzzles--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

This oversized picture book takes young readers on a unique journey through art history. Rather than following the standard text-illustration format of so many books, author Claire d'Harcourt has compiled a kind of "I Spy" book featuring twenty-three works of art. Each selection is framed by ten to twelve enlargements of details that children and adults can search for within the artwork. Every illustration covers a two-page spread and is a clear, crisp reproduction.

d'Harcourt covers a wide variety of styles and media from early Christian mosaics to tapestries, Impressionism, and the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock. She also includes art of other cultures--an Egyptian papyrus, Japanese wood block print, Arabic manuscript, and Aztec codex. Information at the end of the text features the key to finding the highlighted details in each painting as well as information on the artist and the artwork itself. Without doubt, this is one of the best art books for children that I have seen.

Shapiro, Karen Jo. *Because I could not stop my bike: and other poems*. Illustrated by Matt Faulkner. Charlesbridge, 2003. ISBN 1580890350. \$15.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon;

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Poetry;

Subject: Children's poetry; Humorous poetry; Book--Reviews;

This is a collection of twenty-six light-hearted poems that are silly imitations, with apologies to the original authors, of well known poems. Some of the imitations follow the rhyme scheme and meter of the original poem fairly closely, like "I Never Saw a Talking Hat" which imitates "I Never Saw a Moor" by Dickinson. Many of the poems are shorter than the originals. The title and first line sound like the originals, but after that they take on a life of their own, like "Oh Mommy, My Mommy" which recalls "Oh Captain, My Captain" by Whitman. All the poems are illustrated with brightly colored and action packed watercolor cartoons.

This is a book that can be enjoyed on two levels. Children will enjoy the well crafted and silly poems and the equally silly illustrations. Adults will chuckle at the clever spoofs of poetic classics. It is unlikely that children will appreciate the parody of the poems because they are unlikely to be familiar with the originals. One would wish that the author had included the original poems in an appendix for easy comparison. Perhaps she did not because almost all the poems imitated are not children's poems, and some deal with mature themes, like, "To His Coy Mistress" by Marvell. Because the poems are unlikely to be familiar to kids, this book will not be as popular with kids as *Take Me Out of the Bathtub* (McElderry 2001). It will be popular with grown-up-literary-types and their kids will be happy to come along for the ride.

Lessem, Don. *Dinosaurs A to Z The Ultimate Dinosaur Encyclopedia*. Illustrated by Jan Sovak. Scholastic, Inc., 2003. ISBN 0439165911. \$22.95. 223 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar;

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Outstanding;

Genre: Non-fiction;

Subject: Dinosaurs--dictionaries; book--reviews;

This engrossing reference book is a wonderful starting point for young readers interested in learning more about dinosaurs. The first seven chapters discuss what a dinosaur is, when they lived, what happened to them, how paleontologists excavate fossils, and how dinosaurs are classified. The actual alphabetical listings include correct pronunciation of the dinosaur's name as well as who or what it is named after. Other information in each entry includes the dinosaur's classification, it's length, the time period in which it lived, where it lived, and it's diet. Each entry is rounded out with some additional information on the dinosaur's size, how it received it's name, or some other interesting trivia. There is a chapter devoted to recent discoveries, a glossary, and a reference section listing books, videos, and web sites. The text is well-research, concise, and easy to read. Don Lessem has written more than 30 books about dinosaurs for children and adults, and has also founded the largest charitable organization for dinosaur research. Illustrator Jan Sovak's works have appeared in such prestigious magazines as National Geographic.

Perry, Andrea. *Here's what you do if you can't find your shoe*. Illustrated by Alan Snow. Atheneum Books, 2003. ISBN 0698983067. \$16.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous poetry;

Subject: Children's poetry; Inventions--Juvenile fiction

A dozen wacky poems make up this fun poetry collection. Each poem advertises a silly "invention" or service to solve some kind of problem. Some of the pesky problems are common, like finding a lost shoe. Others are more outlandish, like finding a leash to fit a giraffe. "Veggie-be-gone" helps kids keep vegetables out of their parent's shopping cart and "footsie floss" cleans lint from between toes. The poems range in length from two to five stanzas and all rhyme. The colored, cartoon-like illustrations of the inventions and their enthusiastic users are wonderfully charming. End papers sport schematics of many of the contraptions. The rhyme and meter of the poems have a Seuss-like quality. "We Stink Stoppers come with lotions and hoses/ and extra tight clothespins to wear on our noses." Perry delights in his verbal acrobatics throughout the book. The mood of the poems is accented by informal font that mimics handwriting. Snow's kid-pleasing illustrations frame the poems, surrounding them with lighthearted humor that perfectly compliments the text. One could wish that he had included more cultural variety among the invention users who are almost all white. Nonetheless, educators will enjoy reading the poems aloud, and then challenging their students to come up with their own inventions. Kids will enjoy reading the poems alone and looking at the detail of the illustrations. Fans of Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic*, and *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Harper Collins, 1981 and 1974) will want to add this to their poetry collection.

DuTemple, Leslie A. *The Great Wall of China*. Lerner Publications Company, 2003. ISBN 0822503778. \$27.93. 80 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Non-fiction;

Subject: Emperors--China; Great Wall of China—History—Juvenile literature; Books—Reviews;

The Great Wall of China stretches more than 4,000 miles across the Chinese countryside. The wall is actually made up of several smaller walls dating from the Warring States Period, 425-221 BC, originally built to keep foreign invaders out and ordinary Chinese citizens in. It was erected entirely by hand, using a method the Chinese call "hang tu," a technique of constructing walls out of packed earth. Over the course of several centuries, various emperors added towers, guard posts and several miles more of wall, creating what would eventually become the most visited and famous site in China.

DuTemple's engaging book describes the process of building the wall and offers a brief glimpse into Chinese history. The obsession with constructing such a massive wall led to the deaths of over one million workers and brought the government to the verge of bankruptcy. Sidebars offer information on Chinese history and culture, illustrations consist of color and black-and-white photographs, and a glossary is included.

Dyville, Jack. *Gulliver's Travels in the Land of Lilliput*. I. E. Clark Publications, 2000. ISBN 0886804868. Contact publisher regarding price. 39 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Fantasy Plays; Adventure Plays; Fairy Tales;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Classical literature--Juvenile drama; Discovery--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Compromise brings peace and love in any difficult situation, and the tongue is better than the sword.

Production Requirements: Some specific props; sound and lighting special effects necessary; three costume changes for several members of the cast. Musical numbers to be played by Gulliver or someone off stage.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 50-60 minutes

Characters: 24, 4 of the women's roles could be doubled.

Cast: 12 F, 12 M. It is suggested that Gulliver be an adult and know how to play the guitar or piano.

Time Period: A long time ago.

This play is based on a brief excerpt of Jonathan Swift's novel of the same name and put into the form of a light musical with Gulliver singing the majority of the songs and other characters having the option of joining in. Lone traveler Gulliver washes up unconscious onto the shore of a kingdom of tiny people. He is not their big problem, but rather the solution to it. The kingdom is in a state of anticipation for the upcoming "wedding of the century" which will join the kingdoms of Lilliput and Blefescu with the marriage of Princess Glory and Prince David. But the two feuding kings can't come to terms about the minute details of the ceremony, especially about which country's national anthem will accompany the nuptials. They call the wedding off and King Little hopes to use Gulliver as his weapon of mass destruction to combat the thugs of the kingdom of Blefescu. Instead though, Gulliver comes up with a combination of the two songs that pleases everyone for the time being and he sails off once again to encounter more adventures.

This story is a fairly accurate adaptation of Jonathan Swift's tale and full of lessons on the importance of talking and trying to work things out. Peace is a major motivating factor in this production. The characters tend to be one-dimensional and predictable, but at the same time, they are much too overly complicated for their perspective purposes. Primary examples of this can be found in the secondary characters of the ladies-in-waiting whose sole responsibilities are to ridicule the king with vaguely witty complaints about how he rules and his personality and the king's henchmen who bumble around and are actually referred to as the three stooges. They detract from the progression of the plot and theme. Real time in the play seems to move unimaginably slow as the citizens are able to perform massive feats like dragging the giant Gulliver down to the castle, all bound up and then completely rebuilding his wrecked ship, preparing for a wedding and getting adequate sleep all in the few hours of one night. The musical numbers are a fun addition, but they inhibit the natural story from flowing out by having awkward transitions into Gulliver's songs attempting to tell some forgotten piece of the story. Instead of adding a magical quality to the story, they seem disjointed and stop the action mechanically as though it's time for the characters to sing in that moment and then move on to something else. The production could be simplified as far as production requirements are concerned and the set could be suggestive instead of detailed and complicated.

Stephenson, R. Rex. *The Three Old Women's Bet*. I.E. Clark Publications, 2002. ISBN 886804906.
Contact publisher regarding price. 16 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Shortcomings;

Genre: Humorous Plays; Plays; Western Plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Marriage--Juvenile drama; Friendship--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Competition is fun, if you are the one that wins.

Production Requirements: Moderately simplistic properties and set. Production could be done with a bare stage.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 25-30 min

Characters: 9

Cast: 4 male / 4 female, 1 character could be of either gender.

Time Period: The turn of the century

Three women, friends it may seem, though they are constantly in arguments, live with their husbands in a backwards town in the Blue Ridge Mountains. They are always in complaining competitions: whose life is harder, whose house and cooking are better, whose husband is the stupidest. And it is with this last argument that we begin the play. Assisted by the narrator, these women set out to prove that they have the stupidest husband by playing numerous pranks on their spouses (convincing one to act like a dog and protect his house, another that he is wearing a fine suit when he is running around in his long johns and the final that he has passed away and can't move on until after his funeral). The winner's house will be cleaned for a month by the other two. At the end, one wins, but all three women go off together, leaving their husbands to clean the houses.

This play would be fairly easy to produce and has characters who are distinct and diverse. This adds to the development of the story and moves the play along smoothly. Nevertheless, the overall theme of the play is unclear. The women are terrible to each other and treat their husbands even worse, and in the end, they triumph with their wits, but most likely have not learned anything from the experience. Though select parts are humorous, the overall feeling is that these women are selfish and self-absorbed. The characters and plot lack significant dimension and depth. The husbands are portrayed so foolishly that they don't realize even after the play is done what has happened and no one leaves a changed or affected person.

Farish, Terry. *The Cat who liked Potato Soup*. Illustrated by Root, Barry. Candlewick Press, 2003. ISBN 0763608343. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Cats--Juvenile fiction; Pets--Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Book--Review;

"To appreciate a cat requires a certain amount of abstraction, I think--and a sense of humor," says Barry Root, illustrator of *The Cat Who Liked Potato Soup*. Root and author Terry Farish have created an uppity old cat with an attitude, who "never killed nothin'", preferring homemade potato soup served by her owner, "an old man, an ol' Texas boy, country raised, don't you know." The two share a wizened old place on a dirt road called Chatterpie, way out in the country. Nearby is a good fishing lake where the old man catches freshwater bass; "the cat never caught nothin'." Deep down, the old man loves his cat, "but not so's you'd notice."

When the cat seems to prefer a long, winter nap on the new electric blanket to a fishing excursion, the old man goes out without her, something he's never done before. At home, the cat awaits her morning soup. No soup. No old man. Tired of waiting, she slips out the window and disappears for 3 days, leaving her owner grumpily lonely and sorrowful. When she angrily returns with a large fish, the old man is awestruck. His cat has finally caught something! The cat doesn't care that he is impressed; she puts her paw on the fish and her eyes dare him to touch it. The two curmudgeons come to a gradual truce and peace is restored.

Farish's colorful, "countrified" text is perfectly complemented by Root's water color and gouache illustrations that evoke the strong feeling of a simple life in an earlier time. The old blue Studebaker pickup, the well-worn wood rocker on the corrugated aluminum covered wood porch, the oval metal and formica kitchen table and chairs, the big black coal stove and the old iron bed add authenticity to the rural atmosphere. But what makes this simple tale memorable is the feeling of friendship and mutual need between the old man and his cat. They love each other in spite of occasional resentments and crotchety personalities. Children will recognize this and be glad.

Roberts, Dan. *Down in the Dumps*. I.E. Clark Publications, 2002. ISBN 0886804698. Contact publisher regarding price. 17 pp.

Reviewer: Mindy Nelsen

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Shortcomings;

Genre: Musicals; Plays; Contemporary Realistic Plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Service--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Kindness brings people together.

Production Requirements: Very complicated and specific props, costumes, set and lighting and sound effects are suggested.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 30-40 min

Characters: 6-14

Cast: 2 must be male, 1 must be female, the rest are flexible.

Time Period: Present

When the owner of a local junkyard, old Mr. Pink, goes to bed, his junk yard becomes a magical playground for numerous neighborhood children. Their imaginations go wild as they sneak in to play every night. But their play time is interrupted when the city council threatens to shut Mr. Pink down because his junkyard doesn't comply with the city beautification act. Worried about not only their play space, but the old man who acts like he is bothered by their play, the children decide to sneak in one night and clean up the place. When Mr. Pink sees what they have done, initially he is upset and scares them all away, but after some thought, he is grateful and renames his junkyard the neighborhood playground.

The premise is sweet and uplifting. The cast is highly flexible with lots of potential, especially for Mr. Pink and the ringleader of the children's group, Patch. The characters are likeable, but they (for lack of time) develop and change too quickly to be considered moderately realistic. The dialogue consists of mostly predictable lyrics (this being a musical) that seem to get monotonous after a while. Though claimed to be an easy play to produce, the production requirements call for trash cans with wheels, paint, as well as specific lighting and set suggestions. This production could be simplified, but at the expense of the playwright's suggestions and vision. It proves to be unnecessarily complicated and specific for its intended value as a stage production.

Morpurgo, Michael. *Kensuke's Kingdom*. Scholastic Press, 2003. ISBN 0439382025. \$16.95. 164 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday;

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Adventure stories;

Subject: Castaways--Fiction; Survival--Fiction; Islands--Fiction; Book--Reviews;

Michael is having the type of adventure other boys only dream about living on board the family yacht, the *Peggy Sue*, with his parents as they sail around the world. Ten months have passed since their departure from England, all filled with the excitement of discovery and achievement. But Michael's idyllic life is soon to change. On the night before his twelfth birthday, Michael is swept from the deck of the *Peggy Sue* into the vast waters of the south Pacific, accompanied by his dog, Stella, and a soccer ball, to which he clings as a flotation device. His parents are below deck unable to hear his frantic cries for help.

When Michael awakens the next morning, he is lying on a sandy beach surrounding what he later discovers to be a small desert island. Stella has also survived and is playing in the shallows. Michael knows he must find food and water, but is unsuccessful in all of his attempts. Just as he is ready to give up in despair, a bowl of water for Stella and one for him appear on a flat rock, along with strips of fish on palm leaves covered by an upside-down tin. As grateful as he is, Michael now knows that he is not alone and begins to search, with some trepidation, for his benefactor.

Following a hesitant, and sometimes stormy beginning to their relationship, Michael learns that his fellow castaway, Kensuke, has lived on the island for forty-three years, since the bombing of his native Nagasaki. How their initial inability to communicate with and trust in each other slowly evolves makes fascinating reading. They develop something stronger than even friendship as they teach and learn from each other. Michael's eventual rescue, though satisfying, is bittersweet because of what he must leave behind.

Not only is *Kensuke's Kingdom* an engrossing survival tale, but it illustrates, through the natural events of the story, the importance of intergenerational and interracial respect and understanding. It was the winner of the Federation of Children's Book Groups' Book Award in England, where it was first published in 1999; it has also been adapted for the stage. Children from mid-elementary school age through junior high age will identify with Michael and vicariously become a part of *Kensuke's Kingdom*.

Sepulveda, Luis. *The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly*. Illustrated by Chris Sheban. Arthur Levine, 2003. ISBN 0439401860. \$15.95. 126 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate;

Rating: Outstanding;

Genre: Adventure stories; Humorous stories;

Subject: Seagulls--Juvenile fiction; Cats--Juvenile fiction; Book--Review;

Kengah, a female gull, and Zorba, a tomcat, run afoul of each other (you'll excuse the expression) when Kengah is caught in an oil slick and uses the last of her energy to land on Zorba's roof. Zorba tries to help the stricken gull, but it is too late for everything except for Kengah to lay an egg before she perishes and to extract three promises from Zorba: 1. Don't eat the egg; 2. Protect the egg until the chick hatches; 3. Teach the chick to fly. Zorba promises with the expectation that Kengah will live, but she does not, so with the help of three friends—Einstein, Secretario, and the Colonel—Zorba keeps his promises.

Mr. Sepulveda is a Chilean who now lives in Germany so this delightful story has a cosmopolitan air—cats with Italian accents, a highly atmospheric Hamburg setting, and all the characters you might expect to find in a port city. Though the book is short, the characterizations are rich and full, the story filled with gentle lessons about art, caring for the earth, loyalty and honor.

Witty illustrations by Chris Sheban accompany this text which as near as I can tell is exquisitely translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden.

Brennan, Herbie. *Faerie Wars*. Bloomsbury, 2003. ISBN 1582348103. \$17.95. 368 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Not recommended

Genre: Fantasy Fiction;

Subject: Fantasy; Family problems; Book--reviews;

Faerie Wars is a well written, fast moving suspense tale of the war between the faeries of light and the faeries of night. Portals exist between the faerie world and earth. A boy from earth, Henry Atherton, saves Pyrgus, prince of light, from earth and helps him win the war against the faeries of night that are allied with the demons of hell.

The poor rating is due to the significant shortcomings of the book's moral stance and to gratuitous and detailed gory descriptions. Henry's dad's secretary and his mom are having an affair. Mom pushes to have her husband move out so her lover can move in with her and her two children. They would then be a "family unit." Another character is Fogaty, a less-than-reputable physicist, who can build anything but becomes a bank robber because physicists don't make enough money. The second objection is to the detailed description of how the villains kill their victims for fun. Grant it, villains may enjoy killing people, but it is not necessary to have details of how the torture is done. Despite the excellent writing, *Faerie Wars* is not recommended as a book to build positive values.

Dickinson, Peter. *The Kin*. Illustrated by Ian Andrew. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2003. ISBN 0399240225. \$24.99. 628 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil;

Reading Level: Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Prehistoric peoples--Fiction; Survival--Fiction; Books--Reviews;

The Kin, originally published as four books, is a fascinating novel. It is set in Africa 200,000 years ago when, according to scientists, the first humans lived. Humans with and without language live during this time and intermarry. The book follows a group of children who are abandoned by adults since they travel too slowly. The children are likable and have different strengths. Suth is a leader, Noli has a keen sense of danger, Ko is impulsive, and Mana searches for peace. Together these children work to survive, find their tribe, and grow-up. "Oldtales," stories the children make up to explain the world, are interspersed throughout their adventure.

The story is well told with detailed descriptions of the food Nomadic people find in inhospitable deserts. Characterizations of the tribes are also vivid. The tribes are illustrated by the differences in non-language and language communication, as well as, the differences in women's behavior. The moral stance is best explained by Ko, who does not want his marsh friends hurt, and by Mana, who struggles with the realization that she killed a man in defense of her tribe. Resolution occurs when she adopts a baby of the enemy tribe and he is accepted by her kin. Mana sees this as a step towards peace, and in the last "Oldtale," all tribes swear-off the war oath.

Park, Linda Sue. *When My Name Was Keoko: a novel of Korea in World War II*. Clarion Books, 2002. ISBN 0618133356. \$16.00. 199 pp.

Reviewer: Peggy Robertson

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Patriotism—Juvenile fiction; Family life—Korea—Juvenile fiction; Military occupation—Juvenile fiction; Korea—History—1910-1945—Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Between 1935 and 1945 the Japanese occupied Korea. Besides being forced to study Japanese history and language and bow to the Japanese emperor, Koreans were forced to take a Japanese name. *When my name was Keoko* is a fictionalized account of one family's resistance against Japanese control. The story is told by the two children in the family Sun-hee (Keoko) and her brother Tae-yul (Nobuo). In alternating chapters the children describe the every day events of living under the control of the Japanese. They describe their school life, the family's printing business, the raids by Japanese soldiers to commandeer supplies for the war effort, and most importantly the underground resistance movement by their uncle and neighbors to make sure that Korean culture, language, and identity were never completely snuffed out by the Japanese.

Although this book is a work of fiction, Park takes pieces of the story from events in her own parents' lives. As the daughter of Korean immigrants, she displays a superb knowledge of Korea's involvement in World War II. Her research is thorough, and yet the book is quite readable without sounding preachy or vindictive. Her portrayals of anger by the Koreans against the Japanese are believable and well written.

Above all, she writes about the will to succeed and the desire to maintain a cultural heritage. Her characters, each in their own way, discover what it means to be Korean and how to take the best in themselves and use it for the good of the country.

Hannigan, Katherine. *Ida B: and her plans to maximize fun, avoid disaster, and*. Greenwillow, 2004. ISBN 0060730242. \$15.99. 256 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Family life--Wisconsin--Juvenile Fiction; Schools--Juvenile Fiction; Nature--Juvenile Fiction;

Fourth grader and only child, Ida B Applewood enjoys living on the family farm, being homeschooled, and embracing nature--even chatting with the trees and brook. This happy life is disrupted when her mother is diagnosed with breast cancer. Ida B must go to public school, and part of the apple orchard must be sold. A bad kindergarten experience makes Ida B resistant to school and to kind Mrs. W, the teacher. When Mrs. W asks her to help Ronnie with his math, Ida reluctantly accepts and a friendship begins to develop, but when classmate Claire's parents buy part of the family farm, Ida B wages a one-person campaign to drive the family away.

A clever book jacket with brilliant red font and a glossy apple hanging from a branch hints at Ida B's personality, environmental interests, and surname. Ida B's universal and kid-friendly theme, "There is never enough time for fun," announces that this novel is a sassy romp through the perks and perils of childhood. The conversational first-person storytelling, filled with run-on sentences, sensory descriptions and metaphors, hyperboles, alliteration, sentence fragments, and grammatical flubs, perfectly captures Ida B's character – irrepressible, non-conforming, imaginative, sensitive, observant, and self-possessed. Parents, teachers, classmates and even the trees, mountain, and brook are as Ida B judges them. Mother's cancer, the selling of part of the farm, and Ida's relationships with Mrs. W., Ronnie, and Claire are minor subplots but provide the impetus for conflict and change. Ida B loves her life and doesn't want change. She moves through the grief process for her family, the trees, and herself - sadness, anger, resentment, destructive behavior, and a gradual change of heart, but change takes time, and Hannigan gives Ida B time to change. Ida B will capture the imaginations of young readers who sometimes experience similar bewilderment and conflict as change sweeps into their lives.

Creech, Sharon. *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*. Illustrated by Chris Raschka. Joanna Cotler Books, 2003. ISBN 0060292911. \$16.89. 141 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Fry

Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult;

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; Best friends--Juvenile fiction; Cookery--Juvenile fiction;

Rosie and Bailey have been best friends since before they can remember. They were born within weeks of each other, have always lived next door to each other, and have always been there for each other. However, with all great relationships there are ups and downs, and when Rosie declares: "that Bailey, that Bailey I am so mad at right now, that Bailey, I hate him today" it is a definite down day for the duo. It seems that nothing can repair Rosie and Bailey's relationship until Granny Torrelli comes to make soup with Rosie. Granny Torrelli dishes out steaming bowls of soup as well as delectable tidbits of homemade wisdom that help Rosie remember why her friendship with Bailey is so special.

This is a wonderful book from Newberry Medal winner Sharon Creech. Even though the book is a quick read, don't be fooled—it is stuffed full of insights and wisdom. Granny Torrelli's stories have a profound effect upon Rosie, Bailey, and the reader. *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* will make a great addition to themed units on friendship as well as family. This is a book that holds a lot of potential for the classroom, especially as a model for how students can play with language in their own writing, just as Sharon Creech does with this story.

Henkes, Kevin. *Olive's Ocean*. Greenwillow Books, 2003. ISBN 0060535431. \$16.89. 217 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult;

Rating: Outstanding;

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; Family life--Juvenile fiction; Self-perception--Juvenile fiction; Books--Review;

Martha Boyle never thought much about Olive Barstow, even after finding out Olive had been killed in a car accident. Oh, there was the initial shock, but nothing afterwards. Then, a page from Olive's journal (delivered by her mother) reveals the same secret hopes and dreams Martha has, along with the knowledge that Olive thought Martha Boyle was the nicest girl in her class. Deeply affected by the coincidences and unable to talk about her feelings, Martha sets off with her family to spend a few weeks with her grandmother on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. As Martha struggles through family ups and downs, the pangs of first love, and a close brush with death herself, her connection to Olive grows deeper, and she rediscovers all the beautiful things life has to offer.

Olive's Ocean is as deeply moving and layered as the sea. Detailing on the most superficial level an account of a girl spending the summer with her family, the novel braves the deeper (as well as universal) story of Martha's efforts to cope with the problem of mortality. Young readers, especially those who have experienced the death of a friend or acquaintance, will find this novel helpful and insightful.

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Conch bearer*. Roaring Brook Press, 2003. ISBN 0761319352. \$16.95. 265 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley;

Reading Level: Intermediate; Young Adult;

Rating: Dependable;

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: India-Juvenile fiction; Voyages and travels-Juvenile fiction; Magic-Juvenile fiction;

Book--Reviews;

The Conch Bearer begins in Kolkata, India, where Anand works long hours in a tea shop for a harsh master. Anand with his mother and sister in a shack instead of in the nice apartment where his family lived before his father mysteriously disappeared. When Anand helps an old man, Abhaydatta, who was abused by the shop's owner, his adventures begin. Abhaydatta is a member of the Brotherhood of Healers. The Brotherhood sent him forth from a sacred and secret valley to retrieve the conch, an object of power, which a renegade member of the order stole. Abhaydatta, Anand, and Nisha, a child from the streets, set out on a perilous journey, pursued by the evil dogged Surabhanu who wants the conch for himself and uses many wicked means to wrest it from the children and their guide.

Divakaruni's story begins with great vigor. Anand and his family are sympathetic, well-drawn characters, and the dirty, busy, exotic streets of Kolkata are realistic. As the story progresses, it flattens out. The mystical world of the Silver Valley is not as real and attractive as the real world Anand comes from. At the end of the tale, when Anand is faced by a classic decision, the reader may be surprised and disappointed with his choice. Still, the fantasy is imaginative, and the setting is extraordinary and unusual. One would wish for just a little more zip to an otherwise fine addition to children's quest literature.

McCaffrey, Laura Williams. *Alia Waking*. Clarion Books Houghton Mifflin Imprint, 2003. ISBN 0618194614. \$15.00. 224 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy Fiction;

Subject: Sex role—Juvenile fiction; Friendship—Juvenile fiction; Magic; Books—Reviews;

Alia wants desperately to be chosen by the Keentens, the elite group of women warriors in her community. When she and her best friend, Kay, capture two teenagers from an enemy tribe, they will likely be selected. But Alia feels the call of an ancient magic which does not approve of her friend Kay's attitude toward the captives. Kay and the Keentens seem to be motivated by the glory and honor they receive and not by a desire to discover the dark secret of their head magician. Alia discovers that she no longer wants to be a member of such a sisterhood. She chooses to align herself with the healers in the village, one of whom recognizes that Alia is a speaker—that is, she can speak to the magical trees and receive help from them.

McCaffrey's story makes the reader feel the mighty conflict Alia faces as she struggles to make a decision between the Keenten's approval and her own feelings of what is right. She has always wanted to be a Keenten, but they are not warriors devoted to defending the right, as she thought. The story implies that these Keentens have strayed from their original purpose and are filled with pride—a classic description of how power can corrupt. It is good to have a story in which the heroine struggles and chooses justice over glory and power.

Myracle, Lauren. *Kissing Kate*. Dutton Children's Books, 2003. ISBN 0525469176. \$16.99. 198 pp.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Homosexuality--Juvenile fiction; Identity--Juvenile fiction;

Lissa has been best friends with Kate for years, but that all changes when they kiss each other. Kate starts ignoring Lissa and pretends nothing has happened. Lissa is confused and lonely, and additionally has no parental guidance (her parents died in a plane crash) to rely on. Lissa wishes she could go back in time and is left floundering, but she starts to make sense of her feelings through the help of some new friends in unexpected places, along with a book on lucid dreaming.

Lissa's voice is engaging and consistent, as are her relationships with minor but colorful characters throughout the book. The friendship between Lissa and Kate, however, is unpersuasive. Their dialogue seems unnatural, and their relationship as old friends feels stiff. Still, the book has a redeeming plot and a likeable protagonist. The moral implications of homosexuality are not explored in this book—it seems to be beside the author's point or agenda. It is merely the story of one girl's experience in dealing with it. This would be a good book for teens who might benefit from seeing different perspectives in a compassionate way.

Crutcher, Chris. *King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-advised Autobiography*. Greenwillow Books, 2003. ISBN 0060502509. \$17.89. 260 pp.

Reviewer: Margaret Manchak

Reading Level: Young adult;

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Authors, American--20th Century--Biography--Juvenile literature; Crutcher, Chris--Juvenile literature; Idaho--Social life and customs--Juvenile literature;

This autobiography has undeniable appeal. *King of the Mild Frontier* chronicles Chris Crutcher's life growing up in the 1950's from toddler to teenager. The author portrays himself in a charmingly self-effacing way, first as a young "bawlbaby," and later an athletic misfit, an academic oddball, and an utter klutz with girls.

While the book is very entertaining to read, no subject, however taboo, is off-limits here. He writes about all the sinister adolescent games, all the hormones, and all the body functions, with very colorful language to boot. (Read: This could very well offend more sensitive readers.) Chris Crutcher is a successful Young Adult Novelist. His books have all been selected as ALA Best Books for Young Adults, and he has won two lifetime achievement awards. He is also a family therapist and a child protection specialist. On the face this book is all comedy, but Crutcher is a serious writer, and he approaches important adolescent topics such as rejection, loneliness, and competition in an honest and constructive way.

Banks, Lynne Reid. *The Dungeon*. HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0066237823. \$17.89. 279 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure stories; Historical fiction;

Subject: Revenge--Juvenile fiction; Chinese--Scotland--Juvenile fiction; Voyages and travels--Juvenile fiction; Book—Reviews;

After losing everyone he loved to a bitter feud between himself and a nearby Scottish laird, Bruce MacLennan is set on revenge. He orders his men to build him a massive castle-one that sports marvelous defenses...along with a fearsome dungeon intended to hold only one man. While the castle is being constructed, MacLennan, sick of the land he once loved, seeks for adventure in exotic places. He spends most of the time in China, making his living by fighting in petty battles between warlords. On an impulse, MacLennan buys a little Chinese girl to serve him, and as they journey throughout China, she almost begins to replace his own dead children, a fact MacLennan denies vehemently to himself. When they return to Scotland and MacLennan's plan for revenge goes horribly awry, he turns in anger and blame to the one person he's come to care about, and only realizes too late what his impulse for revenge has cost him.

There's no doubt that Lynne Reid Banks's descriptions of medieval Scotland and China are well written. However, the real meat of the book is her exploration of the consequences faced by a person blinded by rage and pain. Watching MacLennan verbally and even physically abuse the loyal Peony (the Chinese girl) is often distressing, and the ending is more grueling than cathartic, but mature readers will appreciate the message of warning, along with the hint that, in the end, love just might be able to heal all wounds.

Lee, Tanith. *Wolf Wing*. Dutton Children's Books, 2002. ISBN 0525471626. \$16.99. 229 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: Marriage--Juvenile fiction; Voyages and travels--Juvenile fiction; Claidi (Fictitious character: Lee)--Juvenile fiction; Book—Reviews;

Since her escape from the house in which she was enslaved, Claidi has had numerous encounters with the powerful Towers, almost all of them unpleasant. The families that rule the Towers seem to delight in power, not to mention manipulation. Now, after she's finally married to the man she loves, Claidi and her husband Argul must answer the imperious summons of the Wolf Tower. There, they discover that, despite her funeral and burial, Argul's mother, the brilliant Ustareth, is still alive. This information leads them on a journey into a strange and wondrous world, and into a deeper knowledge of their own destinies.

As the fourth book in a series, *Wolf Wing* had a bit of a struggle to keep the same sense of conflict going. Although realistic in its understanding that even after 'happily ever after' things can still go wrong, some of the tension generated in the novel seemed a little forced. For instance, much of Claidi's anxiety during the book results from her misunderstanding of events or people. However, many readers would be able to pick up that she's just being dense, and experience significant frustration. Despite all this, the novel is enjoyable. Lee's grasp of the weirdly fantastic is beautifully realized in the text, particularly when the characters arrive at a country created entirely by Ustareth. Fans of the previous Claidi books will not be disappointed.

Nix, Garth. *Abhorsen*. HarperCollins, 2003. ISBN 0060278269. \$18.89. 358 pp.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: Magic--Juvenile fiction; Good and evil--Juvenile fiction; Death--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

The gripping Old Kingdom Trilogy, which started with *Sabriel* and continued with *Lirael*, now concludes with *Abhorsen*. Nicholas Sayre, an old friend of Prince Sameth, son of Sabriel and Touchstone, has been tricked by an evil necromancer named Hedge. Their quest is to assist in the exhumation of the Destroyer, who will annihilate all life if released from the divided hemispheres where he is trapped. Lirael, Sameth, Mogget, and their magical companions the Disreputable Dog and the White Cat, try to save Nick and prevent the Destroyers resurrection.

Meanwhile, Sabriel and Touchstone are in Ancelstierre where they are trying to prevent thousands of refugees from crossing the wall into the Old Kingdom. The refugees think the Old Kingdom will offer them free land but in truth they will only find death and enslavement by Hedge. When Lirael and Sameth's attempts to stop the Destroyer are thwarted by Hedge and his dead minions, it is up to Lirael to travel into the past to discover how the Destroyer was first defeated and try to recreate that event.

Starting this action-packed adventure trilogy at the beginning is imperative since without the previous background readers will not be able to understand the revelations about the history of the Old Kingdom and the Charter magic that are contained in *Abhorsen*. But even if you have to start at the beginning readers will be greatly rewarded in reading these outstanding works by Australian Garth Nix. Dark and often violent, the Old Kingdom Trilogy is fast paced, heart pumping reading. The character of Lirael is especially endearing as she grows from a reclusive Second Assistant Librarian of the Clayr to a strong Abhorsen-in-Waiting. The magic is wonderful and the world believably drawn.

Established fans and fantasy lovers who have not yet discovered the Old Kingdom will be very pleased by the conclusion to this dazzling trilogy.

Aliki. *Ah, Music*. Illustrated by Aliki. Harper Collins, 2003. ISBN 0060287276. \$17.89. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: All;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction

Subject: Music--History and criticism--Juvenile fiction; Book--Review;

"Music not only unites people, it connects our own selves with our feelings," says Aliki, author and illustrator of *Ah, Music*, a many-layered compendium for children about what has often been described as the "universal language." Each page presents a kaleidoscope of action and color surrounding explanatory material presented in many forms: as conventional text, captions for illustrations, conversation bubbles, diagrams, lists and humorous asides by various small animals. Though full of information, the light-hearted, interested and interesting tone promotes informal learning and awakens Aliki's obvious enthusiasm for her subject in the reader. She discusses the basic components that make music what it is (sound, rhythm, melody, pitch and tone, volume, feeling) in a simple, child-friendly manner, referring to tunes, activities and life experiences universally familiar to children.

Though her focus is on the Western music tradition as she moves through creating (composing), performing, dance, and music history from prehistoric time to the present, Aliki doesn't forget to include a two-page spread featuring the diversity of world music, filled with eye-catching illustrations.

Fittingly, the joy of making music and performing is the final topic treated. "Making music is hard fun," says Aliki, who then proceeds to show children the satisfaction that comes from practicing and performing themselves. Music "is for anyone who wants to hear the sound, dance to the rhythm, clap to the beat, sing along, or be still to imagine." And Aliki's *Ah, Music* is to be enjoyed by children and adults at home, in the classroom or at the library.