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King, Sue. *At the Park: A Magic Picture Book*. Chronicle Books LLC, 2003. ISBN 081184174. \$5.95. unpaginated.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction; Toy and Movable books; Picture books;

Subject: Play--Juvenile Fiction; Parks--Juvenile Fiction; Book-Reviews;

This board book shows children experiencing various activities at the park. The magic comes when you wiggle the pages of the book. Plastic panels allow the reader to see children appear on the other side of a closed door and hiding in a bush. Other images include a kite flying in the sky, bugs scurrying under a stone, a squirrel running down a tree, and a child swinging back and forth on a swing.

This engaging book and the changing images on the pages do seem like magic. The bright water color illustrations are cartoon-like and little smiley mice, birds, and insects appear on every page.

Love, Douglas. *Holiday in the Rainforest*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. ISBN 0060242760. \$ Amateur productions are authorized, provided that it is free of charge. If admission is charged, contact the publishers. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Heidi Schiers

Reading Level: preschool, primary

Rating: shortcomings

Genre: Humorous plays; Plays; Adventure play; Fantasy play

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Rainforest; Environment; Recycling

Theme: Environmental Awareness

Production Requirements: No lighting or sound. The director can probably add this as far as he/she is feeling creative. Basic props are specified on pg. 7.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 25-30 minutes

Characters: 16

Cast: 6 women, 6 men; with role doubling. Some characters can be either

Time Period: Present

The Kane family decides to go on a family vacation in order to outdo their neighbors, the Montroses, who have recently returned from a trip to Central America. They visit the rainforest, and in the course of their vacation, they meet strange characters like Ray the all purpose motel manager, owner, night help and bellboy; Melvin the Alligator; and Rontihowa and Antelo - the stone people. When the Kanes reach the rainforest, they find no trees. They set out over the mountain in search of the trees and help the stone people turn back into people. In the process, they learn to recycle.

Instead of a full, complete play consisting of a developed plot, strong or complex characters, and action rising to a climax, "Holiday in the Rainforest" seems to be a set of loosely constructed, vaguely humorous scenes. This play could be shown to a first or second grade audience, working well in conjunction with a lesson plan or discussion about the environment and recycling. A very young audience, preferably having little or no former knowledge concerning the environment, is recommended, because the moral is forced down the audience's throat in a dumbed-down, nearly condescending manner. Children up to the ages of ten could have an enjoyable time performing in it, perhaps in a classroom setting. The play makes use of ridiculous exaggeration in order to demonstrate the Kane family's lack of awareness concerning the environment and depletion of the rainforest. This is apparent in episodes such as when George Montrose is reading the newspaper, and as he finishes each page, he crumples it up and puts it into a plastic bag. Shortly after, the Kanes discover that vast quantities of trees have been cut or burned down, in order to print newspapers. The heavy moralization also occurs in the dialogue between Frannie and Manny as they throw away various waste products.

"Where does all of the garbage end up, anyway?"

"In the garbage truck!"

Rontihowa and Antelo had turned to stone because they lost their homes and their hope when they saw so many animals become sick due to clear-cutting. Yet when the Kane family arrives, suddenly a butterfly has the bright idea to summon its colorful bird and butterfly friends, and the color immediately revives the stone people. Frannie and Manny are glad to have helped, although they did not do a thing. The obstacle is overcome a little too easily, and the majority of the play consists of the Kanes wandering around the rainforest searching for trees. The characters are weak. Ray does not contribute to moving the plot forward, serving only as a bit of irrelevant entertainment. Manny Kane's motivation is that he wants to "rough it," Frannie wants to impress

her neighbors, and the kids just want to go home. Granted, in the end they do change; they learn that all living things should live together with respect, including plants and animals. Nothing heartwarming or particularly moving occurs in the script which could cause audiences to reflect and ponder upon the message, except perhaps Frannie's astounding discovery, "Pictures and showing off to neighbors, that's silly. What is important is the rainforest and all of its creatures!" Perhaps it will incite some young spectator to action, who will begin to recycle newspapers and become a shining example to everyone around.

Kline, Suzy. *The Herbie Jones Reader's Theater*. Putnam Publishing, 1992. ISBN 0399221204. \$10.95. 177 pp.

Reviewer: Morgan Hagey

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous plays; Plays;

Subject: Children's plays, American; Third grade (Education)--Juvenile drama; Friends--Juvenile drama; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: Friends are the most important thing a kid can have.

Production Requirements: Since this is reader's theater, there simply need to be enough students to read the parts, and enough scripts for everyone.

Acts: N/A

Run Time: Variable, anywhere from 15 minutes to 1.5 hours.

Characters: 3 main, 10-15 secondary characters

Cast: The three main roles of Herbie, Ray, and Annabelle, are their own parts; all the adult roles can be double cast to keep the numbers down.

Time Period: Contemporary

Kline has taken her popular children's novels about Herbie Jones and turned them into a collection of short scenes in a Reader's Theater style. Herbie gets himself into problem after problem. First, he gets a crush on Annabelle, his least favorite person. Then he stops liking her and can't get rid of her. Then he and Ray spend all the money their class collected for a class gift for the teacher on hamburgers. He has to deal with being bad at baseball, when his uncle is the coach. Herbie gets himself into many problems, but somehow always manages to get out with a little help from his best friend Ray, and sometimes his parents.

This book of plays is a lot of fun. Even adults can enjoy reading this. It is simple to produce because it is reader's theater. Kids can have a great time reading these out loud. The only problem is that there aren't too many venues for children's reader's theater. However, this would be perfect for an elementary school class project. There are lots of parts so everyone can be involved. The words are simple, so an eight year-old would have no problem comprehending the language. Since it is written for children to watch and perform, it is at a perfect reading and comprehension level for elementary aged students.

Llewellyn, Claire. *Saints and Angels*. Kingfisher, 2003. ISBN 0753455889. \$14.95. 64 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Nonfiction

Subject: Christian saints--Biography--Juvenile literature; Angels--Juvenile literature; Saints--Juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

This simple, well-written book is a collection of profiles of 30 saints. What makes it different from similar books is that the author includes an introduction to angels. Each saint fits into one of six categories: the Holy Family, the Followers of Christ, Gospel Writers, Martyrs, Great Thinkers and Evangelists, and Peace and Healing. Some of the names like the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist will be familiar to many readers. Others like St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. Sebastian might not be as well-known. The biographies are brief and include the date of the saint's feast day and which groups count the saint as their patron (i.e. St. Christopher is the patron saint of travelers and sailors). The discussion of angels is centered on guardian angels, archangels, and fallen angels. The artwork is exquisite, featuring reproductions of paintings from the Louvre, the National Gallery in London, and Alte Pinokothek in Munich, Germany.

Martin, Justin McCory. *Rafunzel*. Scholastic, Inc, 2002. ISBN 0439153891. \$11.95. 6 pp.

Reviewer: Morgan Hagey

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fairy Tale; Plays; Parody;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; The story of Rapunzel; Spoofs; Fairy Tales

Theme: Using your intelligence to solve problems will almost always be successful

Production Requirements: This play can be difficult to produce, simply because of the need for a lot of blonde hair. Plus, Rafunzel is supposed to be in a tower. On the way up to the tower, the prince is supposed to encounter all kinds of interesting creatures that live in Rafunzel's hair. You must be able to make it look like all these things live in her hair, and make it so she is on a tower. This can be difficult in a classroom setting.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 15 minutes

Characters: 8-20

Cast: narrator, Rafunzel, Prince, and many people who are willing to be animals and funny characters.

Time Period: Variable, fairy tale times...

A woman named Rafunzel, is the nicest woman in all the land. An evil witch locks her in a tower, and while she stays there, her blond hair grows longer and longer. A brave prince has heard about Rafunzel, and he wants to rescue her. He goes to the tower and asks Rafunzel to let her hair down that he might climb it and come rescue her. She does so, and he begins climbing. Along the way, he gets tangled in a long pink ribbon, meets a mother bird and her chicks, another climber, an old hound dog, and a bumble bee. He finally gets to Rafunzel and proposes marriage. She replies that he is a mess, and that she has no interest in marrying someone who is twisted in pink ribbon, been pecked by a bird, has dog slobber, and who's eye is swollen from a bee sting. He gets mad and tells her that she needs a hair cut. As he is leaving, he has an idea. He tells her that they are perfect for each other because they both are imperfect. He then finds the key for the tower in her hair, and they escape and live happily ever after.

This short play is a delightful spin on the traditional story of Rapunzel. The simple name change from Rapunzel to Rafunzel tells the reader and audience that they are in for a fun twist. The prince encountering interesting people and animals that live in Rafunzel's hair makes his plight quite funny. Finding the key to escape in Rafunzels' hair adds to the hilarious nature of the script. Elementary students would love to both perform and be an audience to this play. The spectacle of a lot of hair, with a prince climbing it is delightful and highly entertaining for children. The thing that could be hard for production purposes is the placement of Rafunzel, so that the prince meeting each of the characters is a surprise. Also, fabricating hair that long could be difficult. However, an innovative director or teacher could find solutions. It could be performed on a stage with a built tower, or stairs in a school, where the audience watches in the hallway. There are many options. Don't give up on this play simply because it is difficult to produce! It's fun and worth it.

Kimmel, Eric. *Don Quixote and the Windmills*. Illustrated by Leonard Everett Fisher. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. ISBN 0374318255. \$16.00. 32 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure stories; Humorous stories; Picture Books;

Subject: Don Quixote--Juvenile literature; Knights and Knighthood--Juvenile fiction; Spain--Juvenile fiction; Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Eric Kimmel's latest book is a retelling of the windmill episode in Cervantes' literary masterpiece, *Don Quixote*. Senor Quexada is a woeful man who is so obsessed with books about knights and their exploits that his mind snaps. He announces to his household that he is now "the renowned knight and champion Don Quixote de la Mancha." He dons a rusty suit of armor, saddles up his old nag, Rocinante, and recruits a neighbor, a farmer named Sancho Panza, to be his squire. The two men set out on their adventure with Don Quixote on the look out for ogres and giants. Seeing windmills in the distance, the well-meaning knight errant mistakes them for giants who are threatening the countryside. While Sancho tries to convince his master that the windmills are just that, Don Quixote rushes towards them in an attempt to bring the "giants" to their knees. Kimmel does a fine job of catching the humor of Cervantes' original episode. Fisher's bold, colorful drawings are energetic and make a fine complement to Kimmel's text. Kimmel includes an author's note explaining the origin of Cervantes' novel.

Krull, Kathleen. *The Boy on Fairfield Street: How Ted Geisel Grew Up to Become Dr. Seuss*. Illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. Random House, 2004. ISBN 0375822984. \$16.95. 43 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Biographies; Picture books;

Subject: Authors--American--20th century--Biography--Juvenile literature; Artists; Children's literature -- Authorship -- Juvenile literature; Dr. Seuss--Childhood and Youth--Juvenile literature; Illustrators -- United States -- Biography -- Juvenile literature; Poets--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

How did the little German boy, Ted Geisel, come to be the internationally known author and illustrator of children's books Dr. Seuss? What did his mother do when he drew on his bedrooms walls with crayon? Did his high school art teacher recognize and encourage his talent? Which magazine first wanted to publish one of Ted's illustrations? Which of his boyhood toys accompanied him when he moved to a tiny apartment in New York's Greenwich Village to pursue his writing career? *The Boy on Fairfield Street* will answer this and other interesting biographical questions about Ted Geisel. 74 Fairfield Street, author Kathleen Krull explains, was just three blocks from the Springfield Massachusetts public library and six blocks from the zoo! Ted Geisel was always fooling around, loved practical jokes, loved doodling, and was voted "Least Likely to Succeed" by his college classmates. This picture-book biography explains the unique creative lens through which Ted viewed, drew, and wrote verse to describe his world, and his courage and positive attitude to pursue his career.

This interesting and warm account of Dr. Seuss's life describes how he found his niche as a writer and illustrator of books for children. It captures the attention of adults and young children alike. Johnson and Fancher's paintings portray the emotion in each aspect of Ted's growing up in the early 1900s amidst anti-German-American feelings. The book is peppered with Dr. Seuss illustrations, all of which are cited in the back of the book. It makes a reader thankful for publishers who were willing to take a chance on an author/illustrator who thought outside the traditionally accepted view for children's books. As the afterward of the book points out, thirteen years after Ted Geisel passed away in 1991, every one of his books are still available to read in libraries and are all still in print.

Sturgis, Alexander. *Dan's Angel: A Detective's Guide to the Language of Paintings*. Illustrated by Lauren Child. Kane/Miller, 2003. ISBN 1929132476. \$16.95. 38 pp.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture Book;

Subject: Museums—Juvenile fiction; Art appreciation--Juvenile fiction; Angels--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Dan wants to be a detective. He visits a museum of fine art hoping to find clues. As he looks at Fra Angelico's "Annunciation," Gabriel, the angel from the painting, pops out. He suggests to Dan that if he uses his detective skills to examine the paintings he will find visual clues to their meaning. As Dan and Gabriel go from one famous painting to the next, Dan learns to recognize and interpret the symbolism in the paintings. When the museum guard comes looking for the missing angel, Gabriel pops back into his painting and the friends say good-bye.

Snappy text and bright cartoon illustrations make what could be a dry topic into a lot of fun. Dan and the other museum patrons are cartoons, but the paintings they consider are sharp color photographs of the originals. When Gabriel leaves his painting he retains his late medieval appearance, but his long robe does not keep him from wanting to try Dan's skateboard. Even though the conversation between the angel and Dan is casual, it deals with some sophisticated concepts. They identify objects and colors as symbols that add meaning to the pictures. "You give flowers to someone you love, so maybe flowers are symbols of love," he [Dan] said... "You really are a detective," said Gabriel." The paintings they consider are from a variety of time periods and styles. Each painting has a caption box that tells its title, artist, and date with an interesting fact about the painting. This is an inviting and accessible introduction to art appreciation that is conceptually more sophisticated than the *How to Look at Art* series (Gareth Stevens, 2000). It is a kid-friendly resource for parents or educators who are planning a trip to a museum or who just enjoy art.

Burleigh, Robert. *Seurat and La Grande Jatte: Connecting the Dots*. Harry N. Abrams, 2004. ISBN 0810948117. \$17.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational;

Subject: Art Appreciation--Juvenile literature; Seurat, Georges, 1859-1891--Juvenile literature; Seurat, Georges, 1859-1891. Sunday afternoon on the island of la Grande Jatte--Juvenile literature; Seurat, Georges, 1859-1891. Grand Jatte; Book--Reviews;

Georges Seurat's "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte" (1884) is one of the most famous paintings in the world, yet little is known about the painter himself. Rather than write a biography of Seurat, Burleigh offers young readers the opportunity to become acquainted with him through "La Grande Jatte." The text asks the question, "Can a painting tell a story, if you look at it long enough?" Burleigh's answer is affirmative. References to sketches the artist made in preparation for the final painting offer some insight into what Seurat's life and work habits might have been like. He explains Seurat's use of color, shape, and pointillism (the technique of painting with small dots). Since "La Grande Jatte" measures 7 feet by 10 feet, the reproductions of the smaller sketches form the painting point out details that might be easily overlooked.

The text is engaging and easy to read thanks to Burleigh's lively, conversational style of writing. He does not use technical terms nor does he talk down to his reader. The illustrations consist of reproductions of the actual painting as well as enlarged, detailed excerpts, all of which are clear and crisp. The author includes a glossary of art terms, a selected bibliography, and a note explaining why he wrote the book. A time-line highlights some important dates in Seurat's life. What Burleigh teaches about art appreciation is helpful not only in understanding the work of Georges Seurat, but of other artists as well. *Seurat and La Grande Jatte* was published in cooperation with the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ardagh, Philip. *A House Called Awful End*. Illustrated by David Roberts. Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 2000. ISBN 0805068287. \$14.95. 119 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Great-uncles--Juvenile fiction; Great-aunts--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Eddie Dickens' parents have decided to send him away for his own good. They've both caught a disease that has made them "turn yellow, go a bit crinkly around the edges, and smell of old hot-water bottles," and lest he catch the terrible malady, they've decided to ask Mad Uncle Jack and Mad Aunt Maud to have him live at Awful End, their home. Thus begins a series of highly improbable misfortunes, culminating in an escape from an orphanage inside a giant metal cow.

A House Called Awful End positively drips with silliness. Ardagh frequently takes common phrases and twists them delightfully by taking them quite literally. For instance, when Eddie gets into the carriage with Mad Aunt Maud, he notices that she is, well, mad and takes a seat opposite her. She screams at him to put the seat back, at which point the reader realizes that Eddie has literally picked up the seat. The plot, characters, and setting are not terribly developed, but mainly serve as props for the clever writing. If you're looking for a serious and engaging story, don't read *Awful End*. However, if you're interested in a book that will make you guffaw out loud this might be just the one you're looking for.

Kerr, M.E.. *Snakes Don't Miss Their Mothers*. HarperCollins, 2003. ISBN 0060526246. \$16.89. 195 pp.

Reviewer: Janet O. Francis

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Shortcomings

Genre: Christmas stories;

Subject: Animal shelters; Animal rescue; Book—Reviews;

Placido, Irving, Marshall, Catherine--these are some of the animal inhabitants of Critters, a compassionate animal shelter. Mrs. Splinter, Ginny Tintree, Jimmie Twilight, Quentin Quick--these are some of the inhabitants of the outside world that interact with the inmates during the Christmas season. And even the author has to give the reader a score card. Told from the point-of-view of the animals in the shelter, who long to be adopted, this is a kind of animal shelter promotion dressed up with lots of action and very unusual human characters including an aspiring young actress who lives on a houseboat, a stuttering CEO, a wicked animal catcher, ad infinitum. Somehow none of the interesting and unusual behavior, background and feelings of any of the above seems real enough to provoke answering feelings in the reader, just confusion! A worthy aim, but unlikely to relieve many animals' sufferings or hard times.

Pratchett, Terry. *The Bromeliad Trilogy*. HarperCollins, 2003. ISBN 0060094931. \$18.89. 502 pp.

Reviewer: Janet Francis

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories; Science fiction;

Subject: Department stores--Fiction; Computers--Fiction; Quarries and quarrying--Fiction;

Book--Reviews;

Shades of *The Borrowers* restored and enhanced! Pratchett's work contains the same fascination with a world coexisting, unseen, peopled with human characters that really aren't. His immeasurable imagination extends from Nomish life in a department store defined and described by a canon of scripture--Arnold Bros. (est. 1905) through a narrow escape to a stone quarry and finally return to the mother ship which has been waiting dormant for them. Or some of them. The subtitles of the trilogy (*Truckers*, *Diggers*, *Wings*) name the traveling but only hint at the solidity of the characters and their very reasonable world.

Masklin, who says "I was born in a hole -- how can I ever be prepared for anything" is the on and off leader of the core group aided by the Black Box, a sort of computer-dressed inspiration. He is accompanied by a prophet, an extremely practical young woman, a mechanical genius (on a small scale), etc., etc., etc.

The book is long and dense, qualities which can only make it better for young fantasy devotees, but this one doesn't need to be made better. The reader may even learn a couple of things like: "The important thing about being a leader is not being right or wrong, but being certain", or "...the more you found out, the less you really knew". Highly recommended.

Hirsch, Odo. *Hazel Green*. Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, New York, 2003. ISBN 1582348200. \$15.95. 190 pp.

Reviewer: Mary Chapman

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction; Humorous Stories;

Subject: Friendship – Juvenile Fiction; Parades – Juvenile Fiction;

Everyone is anticipating the Frogg Day parade but Hazel Green thinks it's unfair that children are not allowed to participate. At one time, children did march in the parade but for some reason they are no longer allowed. After all, the building she and many other children live in is the birth place and childhood home of Victor Frogg, the man the parade celebrates. Doesn't it make sense that children should represent their building in the parade? Hazel and her friends set out to convince the parade committee to change the rules and must come up with a design for a float in time for the parade. In the mean time more problems come Hazel's way when she is accused of giving out her friend's, the local baker, secret recipe, and she must prove her friendship to a young boy whom she used to tease.

Written by Australian author Odo Hirsch, *Hazel Green* is an entertaining, sweet story of a spunky young girl who won't take no for an answer. Most characters are well drawn and there are only a few stereotypes. Hazel isn't a perfect child but, for the most part, learns from her mistakes. She learns a lesson when she discovers that the math genius, Yakov, whom she used to call "the Yak," is really a nice boy after all and someone she'd like to call a friend. This little girl is a born leader, who makes friends with adults as well as children and who can negotiate her way around other leaders like Leon Davis, whom lots of people listened to "almost as many as listened to Hazel herself."

Anderson, M. T.. *The Game of Sunken Places*. Scholastic, 2004. ISBN 0439416604. 16.95. 260 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy; Adventure Stories;

Subject: Fantasy-Juvenile fiction; Games-Juvenile fiction; Vermont-Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

When Gregory Buchanan receives an invitation from his Uncle Max in Gothic lettering inviting him and a "companion . . . of solid reputation and respectful and unspotted demeanor" to visit him at his creaky old house in Vermont, the boys sense adventure and decide to go. When they arrive, Uncle Max makes them exchange their Levis and T-shirts for knickers and starched collars after which they are immediately plunged into adventures galore as they are more or less forced to play a spooky old game, *The Game of Sunken Places* with a game board not unlike the one that caused so much trouble in *Jumanji*. The boys must meet and somehow vanquish trolls, Gelt the Winnower, the stomach flu, and the ghostly and ghastly Thusser Hordes.

The Game of Sunken Places is a very funny book, which is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. The book is never very scary because the jokes are so good that the reader knows that the truly terrible possibilities are unlikely to eventuate. The surprise ending is truly surprising, but is so quick and ill-prepared for that it seems like kind of a throwaway. Still, *The Game of Sunken Places* makes for compelling reading and will probably be a great hit with 5th and 6th grade boys especially, who may not be diverted by the funny bits from the action and suspense.

Edwards, Julie Andrews and Emma Walton Hamilton. *Simeon's Gift*. Illustrated by Gennady Spirin. Harper Collins Publishers, 2003. ISBN 0060089148. \$17.89. 34 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fairy Tales;

Subject: Musicians--Juvenile fiction; Self-Realization--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Simeon, who has a deeply ingrained love of music, is in love with the beautiful Sorrel. Feeling that he doesn't have the rich possessions which would keep Sorrel's love for him vibrant, he decides to travel the world, with his lute as his only companion. He hopes to better himself, find riches, and discover new songs to add to his repertoire. In the course of his journeys, he meets soldiers, monks, and city folk before he despairs of ever finding the riches he needs to please Sorrel. Although he hears lots of melodies and sounds, new songs also elude him. Simeon sells his lute for a canoe, fruits and vegetables, and a little grain and heads homeward. On the way home, his selfless acts attract a beautiful bird, a pink-and-golden fish, and a beautiful fawn that follow him home and are declared "wonderful gifts" by his beloved Sorrel. "In his joy, Simeon suddenly heard the entire song in his head and in his heart. He picked up his flute, and all the music that had been building within him for so long poured forth in one complete and perfect melody."

This beautiful fairy tale has an uplifting message of courage and sacrifice. Spirin's delicately detailed watercolor illustrations depict the magical time of castles, knights, and minstrels. The story begins with a beautifully decorated letter A, in keeping with the medieval time setting. A CD is also included with the book with the reading by Julie Andrews Edwards. Her beautiful English accent and the musical backgrounds would make this an extra special reading experience for upper elementary school-age readers.

Balliett, Blue. *Chasing Vermeer*. Illustrated by Brett Helquist. Scholastic Press, 2004. ISBN 0439372941. \$16.95. 254 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction; Detective and mystery stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Art--Juvenile fiction; Vermeer, Johannes, 1623-1675--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Chasing Vermeer is the story of Petra Andalee and Calder Pillay, students at the University of Chicago Laboratory, who get involved in a school art project that turns into a mystery involving the theft of Vermeer's *A Lady Writing*. Petra and Calder meet a cranky old lady who is both unpleasant and intriguing. Calder communicates with his friend Tommy in a secret code (which the reader must decode to follow the story line). A boy named Frog is kidnapped, and Calder fiddles endlessly with a set of pentominoes, plastic geometric shapes used by mathematicians, to solve the mystery of who took the painting and why.

Chasing Vermeer begins bright with promise – the text is highly interactive and the various mathematical constructs are intriguing to children gifted with numbers. Balliett stuffs the narrative with clues, red herrings, and artistic and mathematical references, helped by illustrator Brett Helquist who incorporates clues into his pictures. One expects all this complexity to be resolved in the end; instead, Balliett finishes the story in a couple pages of solutions using characters previously tangential to the main story line.

Rylant, Cynthia. *God Went to Beauty School*. Illustrated by N/A. HarperTempest, 2003. ISBN 0060094338. \$15.89. 56 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers
Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult
Rating: Outstanding
Genre: Occult poetry; Humorous poetry;
Subject: God--Juvenile fiction;

What if God is a lot more like us than we admit? What if He takes a break once in a while? If He went to beauty school, what would he love most about it? In this collection of free verse poems, Cynthia Rylant explores such questions as what God would do if He caught a cold, climbed Mount Everest, or got cable, along with a myriad of other subjects. It ends, as it begins, with how God went to beauty school "to learn how / to give a good perm," (56) but stayed on because He loved the hands.

What at first glance might be mistakenly taken for an irreverent treatment of God is actually a marvelously loving, humor-filled text, studded with little gems of insight and wisdom. While Rylant's views of God may not fit everyone's perceptions, no one can doubt her genuine affection and respect for her subject. Numerous bits of humor will have readers chuckling to themselves, as they imagine a God who decides to simply have faith that his spaghetti is al dente because it vaporizes when he tries to make it stick to Jupiter. At other points there are flashes of powerful reflection as God climbs Mount Everest, (hating the snow), and then "at the top / He turned around / and His heart just broke. / Suddenly the whole world / was plain as day, / and still. / It was so still." (33) In the end, the book is not so much about God's understanding of the world as it is about our own perceptions of ourselves and our relationship to others. Teens and adult readers will benefit significantly from reading and pondering this powerful text.

Rowling, J. K.. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Illustrated by Mary GrandPré. A. A. Levine Books/Scholastic Press, 1999. ISBN 0439064864. \$17.95. 341 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Adventure stories; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Wizards--Juvenile fiction; Magic--Juvenile fiction; Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Imaginary place)--Juvenile fiction;

After completing his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter thought his life would be different. But his new friends haven't written to him all summer, and his relatives, the Dursleys, are as nasty to him as ever. When a house-elf named Dobby appears in his room and warns him not to return to Hogwarts, Harry begins a series of adventures that all seem connected to the opening of the Chamber of Secrets. Legend speaks of it as a hidden room in Hogwarts where a dreadful monster lurks, just waiting to kill muggle-born witches and wizards.

The second installment in the Harry Potter series is just as enthralling as the first. Rowling deftly guides readers' exploration of Potter's world at Hogwarts and in the general magical community, as well as skillfully developing old characters while introducing hilarious or disturbing new ones. Any fan of the first book will find *The Chamber of Secrets* an entertaining and satisfying read.

Rees, Celia. *Pirates!: the True and Remarkable Adventures of Minerva Sharpe and Nancy Kington, female pirates*. Bloomsbury USA, 2003. ISBN 1582348162. \$16.95. 340 pp.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Adventure stories; Historical fiction;

Subject: Pirates--Juvenile fiction; Slavery--Juvenile fiction; Blacks--Jamaica--Juvenile fiction;

Individuality--Juvenile fiction; Jamaica--History--Juvenile fiction; Adventure stories--Juvenile fiction; Sea stories--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

After the death of her father, Nancy Kington is forced from the arms of her first love into an arranged marriage with an evil Brazilian plantation owner. Nancy and a plantation slave, Minerva Sharpe, escape Jamaica and their fates, after an accidental murder, by becoming pirates. Sailing the high seas, Nancy and Minerva find freedom and many adventures in their new life as they confront the gender and race barriers of the eighteenth century. Even on the sea, they cannot escape their fates as Nancy must deal with the evil Brazilian and ultimately find her first true love.

Full of the high swashbuckling adventure that one would expect from a piratical story, *Pirates!* lives up to the exclamation point at the end of the title. The exciting plot is engaging and fun as varied plot twists and the sometimes striking accounts of violence portray these girls' adventures. Nancy and Minerva are bold and are engaging characters who, while maintaining their personality as girls from the 1700s, will appeal to modern readers. The themes of gender, rights of women, slavery, and class distinctions are all wonderfully intertwined so you never feel as if you are getting a moral with the story. This tale of the life of two women pirates is so filled with adventure, love, and mystery it is sure to appeal to a wide audience.

Bunting, Eve. *The Presence*. Clarion Books, 2003. ISBN 0618269193. \$15.00. 195 pp.

Reviewer: Janet Francis

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Ghost stories;

Subject: Ghost--Juvenile Fiction; Guilt--Juvenile Fiction;

Catherine has no idea what lies in store for her when she comes to visit her grandmother during the Christmas season. Struggling with the guilt she feels because of a close friend's death, she is particularly vulnerable to the powerful approach of a 'presence' in St. Matthew's church who seeks to make her his companion in his no-life, no-death existence. The ambience of the story is particularly poignant with all the trappings of Christmas (carols, presents, parties) set in warm and sunny California where the poinsettias are growing and dates with cheerful, normal Collin are for swimming and bike riding. The feelings of disappointment that often accompany a spooky ghost story (especially when it contains some romance) are not to be found in this story. The reasons for the ghost's wretched condition are made clear and function as a vital part of the modern story. The danger to Catherine is real, the requisite old woman who helps her solve the mystery is satisfactory and the flaming finale a more than adequate expiation. This one should be a popular selection for junior high and upper grade readers (especially girls).

Agell, Charlotte. *Welcome Home or Someplace Like It*. Illustrated by Charlotte Agell. Henry Hold and Company, 2003. ISBN 0805070834. \$16.95. 230 pp.

Reviewer: Mary Chapman

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;

Subject: Maine--Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Family--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Aggie B. Wing wants to be an artist when she grows up. Right now she's thirteen and starting on "Notebook #27" of her diaries where she tells us that she and her sixteen-year-old brother Thorne have been dropped off by their romance novelist mother in Ludwig, Maine (population 159) to spend the summer with their quirky ninety-one-year-old grandfather. Their mother is leaving them on their own yet again, while she goes off to Niagara Falls or where ever to do "research" for her next novel. While Thorne sticks to his room listening to "techno-rock", Aggie tries to make the best of her situation and writes in her notebook about what it's like to live in a tiny town with only a Quickstop, an unusual church called Our Lady of the Wilderness, and a mysterious island named Cat Island. Aggie makes a best friend, learns some secrets about the island and about her mother, and discovers she has a special way with chickens.

On the one hand, this is a typical young adult novel about teens who are victims of divorce. Thorne and Aggie's father left the family long ago and doesn't keep in touch, and their mother doesn't seem to be able to provide a stable home life. Thorne of course is moody, smokes, and gives his sister a hard time. Aggie of course is developing into a young woman, and we must have the typical mention of her developing body compared to others of her age. On the other hand, Agell makes the story fun to read by sharing Aggie's point of view through her numbered notebooks/diaries. Aggie is a charming, humorous writer as well as artist and delights in describing her surroundings and experiences in word and picture. Her perspective of small town Maine, making new friendships, trying to support and love her mother, and her attempts to understand Thorne and convince him to stop smoking is touching. This book is recommended for children twelve and older.

Watts, Leander. *Wild Ride to Heaven*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003. ISBN 0618268057. \$16.00. 169 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Significant Shortcomings

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Frontier and pioneer life--Juvenile fiction; Disfigured persons--Juvenile fiction; Fathers and daughters--Juvenile fiction; Albinos and albinism--Juvenile fiction; Brothers--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

A girl, Hannah, with one green eye and the other a milky white is sold by her money-hungry father to two coarse, uneducated brothers as a servant for a year. The story is set in about 1835 downriver from Lake Ontario.

Watts' writing holds the readers interest but there are too many logical and psychological problems for supposed realistic fiction. The heroine, Hannah, meets an albino boy who is protected by two huge wild boars. Such a friendship would only work in a nonfiction account or in a fantasy story where animals frequently have human characteristics. Second, the rattlesnake battle is not logical. Rattlers do not go after humans. They use their rattlers as a warning but would never stalk a person as the large snake stalks Hannah. Third, Hannah's mother is supposed to have left her family to join the Mormons when Hannah was about two or three. Hannah was told her mother became one of Joseph Smith's wives. Polygamy became part of the church around 1835 but by that time Hannah is about fourteen and her mother must have left the family in about 1822 or 1823. The Mormon Church did not exist until 1830. Finally, at the conclusion of the story Hannah's father saves her from the brutish brothers, which is a sudden change for a man who has been going off on wild goose chases for money as long as Hannah can remember. His return to sanity is unbelievable because no reasons are given for the change. Hopefully such a fluent writer will check his facts more carefully in his next book.

Klass, David. *Home of the Braves*. Illustrated by N/A. Frances Foster Books, 2002. ISBN 0374399638. \$18.00. 312 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Soccer--Juvenile fiction; High schools--Juvenile fiction; Schools--Juvenile fiction;

High school soccer captain Joe Brickman has waited for years to tell his best friend Kris just how much he cares for her. Now, with the arrival of the Brazilian soccer "phenom" Antonio Silva, Joe finds himself fighting feelings of jealousy as it becomes apparent that he's waited too long with Kris, even as the Phenom saves his team from a crushing season. But romantic troubles aren't the only thing going on in Joe's life. The school has recently cracked down on violence with a zero tolerance policy, and when brutal acts still erupt, Joe struggles to decide whether it's better to let it go on, or try to stop it once and for all.

In essence, *Home of the Braves* is a coming-of-age story that details how Joe ponders the consequences of his and others' actions. Klass handles Joe's soul-searching sensitively and realistically; Joe himself admits when he's less than a nice guy, especially when dealing with his feelings about Kris and Antonio. However, at a crucial point in the book, he makes a decision that shows his growing maturity, and actually makes him more of an adult than his father. While various accounts of violence and crude language may turn some off to the book, *Home of the Braves* would be an excellent read for teens who are just about to push out into the adult world.

Juby, Susan. *Alice, I Think*. Illustrated by NA. HarperTempest, 2003. ISBN 0060515430. \$16.89. 290 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories; Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Coming of age--Juvenile fiction; Self-perception--Juvenile fiction; Family life--British Columbia--Juvenile fiction;

Alice began school a little later in life than most children. Her first day of school was in first grade, but her problems didn't really stem from that. Before she started school, Alice was convinced she was a hobbit, and, to the general destruction of her social life, she dressed like one on the first day of school. Now fifteen and convinced that she's scarred for life from the treatment she received from the other kids in her first grade class, Alice has spent her years since then being homeschooled and trying very hard not to be noticed. But when Death Lord Bob, her counselor/therapist, suggests she goes back to public school, Alice takes on a string of changes (like getting a job and acquiring a 'new look') that, while calculated to make her more suited to the real world, end up seeming to push her farther and farther away, in very, very funny ways.

Susan Juby's wry first-person narrative creates a protagonist that is at once profoundly pessimistic yet still somehow likeable. While readers may at times be frustrated with Alice's sometimes apathetic and rather negative attitude, they will more often than not find themselves connecting to her as she struggles through the humorous and painful realities of not fitting in. *Alice, I Think* would be an especially entertaining read for teens who have gone through the homeschool experience, or for those who have felt, at any time, that they were just a little bit different.

Kennedy, Richard. *Hans Christian Andersen's the Snow Queen: a Christmas Pageant*. HarperCollins, 1996. ISBN 0060271159. Contact publisher regarding price. 85 pp.

Reviewer: Joseph Craven

Reading Level: All

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fantasy Play; Plays; Christmas Play;

Subject: Children's plays, American; Fairy tales--Juvenile drama; Andersen, Hans Christian; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: The greatest power is love.

Production Requirements: Simple to moderate sets, costumes, etc. There are set changes.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 1 hour

Characters: 23+

Cast: Adults and children

Time Period: 100 years ago

Gerda loves Kay, and these two children are to get married when they are older. Grandmother tells Gerda and Kay stories about the Snow Queen but Kay does not believe these stories. Then, the Snow Queen takes Kay. She casts a curse that freezes him. Gerda goes after Kay to try and find him. She goes through many trials and meets many people along her way. Gerda's love for Kay motivates her. When she finds Kay her love for him melts the Snow Queen's curse. Now Kay's love for Gerda can be perfect and eternal.

This play is enjoyable and is an easy read. It is well written. The descriptions create scenes in the reader's head that bring the play to life. This play helps kids learn that someone always loves them but to be careful of those who try to buy their love as the Snow Queen does. It is also a good adventure. Kay did not believe Grandmother's stories about the Snow Queen, and then the Snow Queen comes and takes him to her palace. Also, the adventure Gerda has while trying to find and rescue Kay adds more excitement and conflict. I would encourage others to read or produce this play.

Jolivet, Joelle. *Zoo-ology*. Illustrated by Joelle Jolivet. Roaring Brook Press, 2003. ISBN 0761327800. \$17.95. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Janet Francis

Reading Level: All

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational books; Picture Book;

Subject: Animals--Miscellaneous; Zoology--Juvenile literature;

Although this volume is oversize (18 inches tall) and awkward to handle, it should prove invaluable in an elementary classroom – even in older grades, as a visual reference tool. Each tall page is chock-full of brilliantly colored inhabitants of the animal kingdom accompanied by their names (in rather small type, but clearly connected to the relevant drawing) with a one or two word comment at the bottom of each page. The illustrations are not scientific in detail but clear and true enough to life to be discernable to the non-reader who can often read their names. What success! The book is a translation from French so there are a few differences in name, but nothing serious.