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Laguna, Sofie. *Too Loud Lily*. Illustrated by Argent, Kerry. Scholastic Press, 2004. ISBN 0439579139. \$14.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Preschool

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous Stories; Picture Books;

Subject: Hippopotamus--Juvenile literature; Noise--Juvenile fiction; Behavior modification--Juvenile fiction; Theater--Juvenile fiction; Schools--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Lily Hippo can't do anything quietly no matter how hard she tries. She sings too loudly and wakes her baby brother. She's noisy when she reads. At school, Lily gets her friends Hester and Lou into trouble when she laughs too loudly at the note they pass her. The arrival of a new music and drama teacher, the colorful Miss Loopiola, prompts Lily to try out for the school play. The drama teacher's encouragement is just what Lily needs. Miss Loopiola tells Lily to stomp louder when she dances. She lets her provide the sound effects for the storm scene by crashing cymbals and banging a drum. On opening night, Lily shines, and realizes that the play is the perfect outlet for her boisterous behavior. The premise of the story seems to be that there is a time and a place for everything. The text is minimal, and it is Kerry Argent's colorful and energetic illustrations that move the story along. Argent captures Lily's vibrant personality perfectly. Many of the illustrations are quite funny, for example, Miss Loopiola is a hippo who wears bright red nail polish, a bright red poncho and lots of clunky jewelry. Any child who has ever had trouble keeping quiet will relate to Lily.

Eliassen, Lorena. *The Chameleon and the Dragonfly*. Illustrated by Lorena Eliassen. Orchard Books, 2004. ISBN 0439523206. \$16.95. 22 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Toy and Movable books; Picture books;

Subject: Chameleons--Juvenile Literature; Animals--Juvenile Fiction; Book--Reviews;

This cleverly designed pop-up book tells how Pepe, a green and yellow chameleon, wishes he could change colors in order to hide from a snake. His wish is granted by a glistening silver-winged dragonfly. The large, vivid pop-ups are of Pepe, the snake, and the dragonfly. The dragonfly pop-up is particularly impressive. The insect's multiple body parts are detailed and the total figure measures about 15" wide, 4" deep, and 5" high. In addition to the pop-ups, tabs move leaves to hide Pepe and a spinning color wheel changes Pepe's colors through all the colors of the rainbow. A warning with any pop-up book; you need to be careful that little hands don't grab the intricate pieces of the big pop-ups. I recommend this book to Moms to create a memory with their preschoolers about the wonder of the world of camouflage.

Edwards, Wallace. *Monkey Business*. Illustrated by Wallace Edwards. Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2004. ISBN 1553374622. \$16.95.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous Stories;

Subject: English Language-Idioms--Juvenile Literature;

Edwards offers his interpretation of twenty-six English language idioms in this collection of illustrations. His colorful and detailed watercolor and gouache paintings depict animal characters in humorous situations. For example, the idiom "to play by ear," is depicted by a basset hound playing a one-stringed bass with his ears. The illustrations are quite clever, particularly the facial expressions on some of the animals. The book begins with Edwards' definition of "monkey business," and the observant reader will notice that he has included thereafter, one monkey in each of his paintings. The actual definitions of each idiom Edwards uses are listed at the end of the text. This book is reminiscent of Fred Gwynne's series, *The King who Rained*, and *A Chocolate Moose for Supper*, which also visually define idioms. Due to the clever illustrations and humorous subject matter, this is a very imaginative collection.

Banks, Kate. *The Cat Who Walked Across France*. Illustrated by Georg Hallensleben. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. ISBN 0374399689. \$16.00.

Reviewer: Janet Francis

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction;

Subject: Cats-Juvenile Fiction; Home-Juvenile Fiction; France-Juvenile Fiction;

The story begins as an old woman dies, leaving only her cat. The cat is moved far from the little stone house by the edge of the sea that has always been his home. The homesick feline, inspired by the illuminating sunset in the South of France, determines to find the home he has lost. Through city and country, bad times and good, he is never deserted by that fabled sixth sense which guides animals over strange territory to find their goal. Success is his when he finds one who knows how to stroke his back, just like the old woman did. The glowing illustrations give a travelogue of the French ambience, and in spite of their simple format, will be beneficial in a unit on France for primary age children. The emotional satisfaction of determination and endurance rewarded adds appeal to cat lovers and others.

Kessler, Liz. *The Tail of Emily Windsnap*. Illustrated by Sarah Gibb. Candlewick Press, 2004. ISBN 0763624837. \$15.99. 224 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy Fiction;

Subject: Mermaids--Juvenile fiction; Swimming--Juvenile fiction; Houseboats--Juvenile fiction; Neptune (Roman deity)--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

The Tail of Emily Windsnap is a fantastic tale of Emily, who discovers a very important but alarming thing when she goes to her first swimming class in seventh grade. After plunging into the water, she feels something very strange happening to her legs. They grow together and in their place appear a fish-like tail! Emily is a mermaid! Hastily, getting out of the pool, she discovers that she is only a part-time mermaid - on land she is completely human! How did this come to be? Does her father, who left her and her mother when she was a little girl, have anything to do with the mystery? Why does she feel so drawn to water? Emily must find out, and find out she does by secretly leaving the security of their boat, "The King of the Sea," and taking a series of daring romps in the ocean. She meets Shona, a mermaid, who tells her about sirens, mermaid school, sunken ships, and King Neptune. Emily also finds out why strange Mr. Beeston, the lighthouse keeper, always hangs around her mother. The happy ending? You'll want to read it and find it out for yourself.

Except for one superfluous word of profanity early in the book, the text is readable and the story line intriguing. The characters are realistic and the fantasy details are believable. Although this is Kessler's first book, her characters' thoughts and conversations are natural and understandable. The colored book cover and the small black-and-white pen-and-ink illustrations of mermaids, seahorses, and other seascapes throughout the book add to the whimsical nature of the story. I think this would be a fun read-aloud book for grades 4-6 or for a family.

Wheeler, Jan C. *A. A. Milne*. ABDO Publishing Company , 2005. ISBN 1591976073. \$21.35.
24 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Waite

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Biography;

Subject: Winnie-the-Pooh--Juvenile literature; Milne, A.A. 1882-1956--Juvenile Literature;

This short biography highlights the life and works of Milne, the creator of much loved Winnie-the-Pooh, and is filled with the photographs, fast moving narrative, and accurate facts. Wheeler describes Milne's boyhood and early years as a writer, as well as significant events through out his life. The book could be used to introduce primary age children to authors' biographies, to take the concept of research beyond the encyclopedia and to gather information to add to a book report. The vocabulary is simple and when an unknown word is introduced, the reader can easily look it up in the glossary at the end of the book. The photographs make the text all the more interesting. Family photos, personal portraits of Milne and general pictures from the time provide a visual context in which to set Milne's life. This informative biography would be an useful addition to an elementary school or home library.

Wheeler, Jill C. *Gertrude Chandler Warner*. ABDO Publishing Company, 2004. ISBN 159197609X. \$21.35. 24 pp.

Reviewer: Emily E. Johnson

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Biography;

Subject: Warner, Gertrude Chandler, 1890--Juvenile literature; Authors, American--20th century--Biography--Juvenile; Children's stories--Authorship--Juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

This accurate and concise biography discusses Warner's life as a teacher and as an award-winning author. Wheeler outlines Warner's life with written details and photographs that show Warner's depth of character and creativity. Childhood stories of Warner enable young readers to connect with her and to gain inspiration as fellow young writers. Clear black and white photographs of Warner throughout her life are an enhancing attribute of this book. Each photo illustrates a different aspect of her life, from family to writing. Warner's first book, authored and illustrated at age nine, is also pictured. The story of how *The Boxcar Children* series was written is told as well. In order to help children better understand the biography, a glossary of highlighted terms is provided along with an index. A website is included for further referencing. Unfortunately, this website is not easy to navigate and the information is hard to find. Despite the poor website, the actual book is a good source of information. Children who enjoy the *Boxcar Children* will find this author biography an intriguing compliment to their reading.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation*. Illustrated by Shane W. Evans. Candlewick Press, 2004. ISBN 0763614408. \$19.99. 63 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational;

Subject: African Americans--History--1863-1877--Juvenile literature; African Americans--History--1877-1964--Juvenile literature; African Americans--Civil Rights--History--Juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in those states rebelling against the Union. This collection of poems, songs, and stories relates the struggles and the courage of African Americans from 1863 through the 1954 Supreme Court decision that the separation of educational facilities for blacks and whites is unconstitutional. The stories of such familiar figures as Booker T. Washington, Jackie Robinson, and Thurgood Marshall are included; but, the most affecting are those of the unknowns and the unsung. Harriet Postle was seven months pregnant when she fought off a group of Klansmen demanding to know where her husband was. John Solomon Lewis, a former Union soldier, refused to back down when a ship's captain denied his family passage to Kansas. Dramatic, engrossing and thought-provoking, the well researched text makes African American history accessible to young readers. Shane Evans' full-page oil paintings capture the spirit of the text and the dignity of the people who would not be kept down. The collection includes poems by celebrated African American poets Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes and such traditional songs as "Free at Last" and "John Henry." As well, source notes, a detailed chronology, and a lengthy bibliography round out the text.

Simmonds, Rae. *The Shamrock Road*. Anchorage Press, Inc., 1998. ISBN 0876023626. \$35.00 for each performance. 45 pp.

Reviewer: Hilary Barnett

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Significant Shortcomings

Genre: Adventure Plays--Juvenile Drama; Folklore--Juvenile Drama; Musical

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Ireland--Juvenile Drama;

Theme: Never give up.

Production Requirements: A piano player or recorded music is needed. There are about 9 set changes. With many props needed (included in script) and the production calls for Irish folk and gipsy dances.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Characters: 9 and Choruses (10 extra) total-19

Cast: Cast for Children by Adults and Children

Time Period: Late 1800's: Rural Ireland

Jimmy McDonough, his mother and sister are poor, but happy travelers. When a stroke of bad luck and "illegal-like" dealings happen upon this family, Jimmy begins a quest to retrieve the family's mare, Dolly. Jimmy encounters peddlers who teach him how to read and Leprechauns who fulfill Jimmy's wish to find his family and give those "illegal-like" gentlemen a taste of their own medicine by taking his mare back. Through song and Irish folk dance the plot is moved along to a grand finale of exuberant celebration.

The main element of this play is action. The audience will enjoy non-stop encounters with new characters. The show is continuously finding, discovering and moving. Stage combat will need to be practiced. The scene has the potential to be exciting. There are puppets, gypsies, and leprechauns. This spectacle requires a plethora of color and magnificence to enthrall the children's attention. Some magical elements may be difficult but are do-able. The tempo is up-beat. However, the music is over-written. Some songs are important to the show, but others distract from the story and they are the reason for the low rating. They aren't very imaginative and the audience might get a little lost. The few good songs are not enough to counter the "sub-par" ones.

This engaging show breaks the fourth wall which draws the audience in and helps clarify the time, place, and people. It has the potential to be a very entertaining show but lacks the characterization that it needs to reach the enchantment level it strives for.

Stockdale, Marina. *William's Window*. I.E. Clark, Inc., 1983. ISBN 0886802091. \$ contact publisher for price. 31 pp.

Reviewer: Krista Beaman

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Adventure Plays; Contemporary Realistic Plays; Fantasy Plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616--Adaptations--Juvenile drama; Witches--Juvenile Drama; Imagination--Juvenile Drama

Theme: Imagination and an introduction to Shakespearean plays.

Production Requirements: Costumes, even Elizabethan ones, can be simple because they are suggestive rather than historically accurate. A donkey's head can be a Halloween mask or a paper-mache creation, and the witches' cauldron for *Macbeth* can use dry ice as a neat effect, but isn't required. Music and Elizabethan dancing can be used if desired.

Estimated Runtime: 80-90 mins, but many scenes could, by written allowance in the script by the playwright, be deleted to shorten the production.

Characters: Up to 50, but can be done most easily by doubling with perhaps 15, about 7M and 8F (several parts are either gender)

Cast requirements: All parts can be done by children. If desired, adults and children may be mixed, so that the adults perform the Shakespearean scenes.

Period: Mostly Shakespearean, though set in modern-day

Taylor, Andy, Mollie and Elizabeth are playing in the backyard, but they start to argue. In an attempt to distract them, Sandy begins telling them about the Shakespearean plays that she has been reading. She helps them use their imagination to "see" scenes from Shakespeare's plays, such as *Macbeth*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This is written specifically to introduce Shakespeare to young audiences. As such, it is immensely successful in the scene choices and character diversity which portray excitement, romance, mystery, darkness, humor, and life lessons. The audience is also encouraged to use their imaginations without being didactic. The children are well-characterized and distinct: Taylor is bossy, Andy is unimaginative, Sandy is the smart one and Mollie and Elizabeth are very romantic and excited about everything.

The main children characters fight among themselves and then make up. Their personalities are interesting as they react to each other while learning about the plays. The scenes from Shakespeare are well-known in the adult world and well-chosen for intrigue and interest to a child. The play doesn't drag. Actors are constantly coming off and on, creating an entirely new place on the stage every few minutes. Small stage skirmishes, bets, brewing cauldrons, etc. keep the interest of the audience well. The ending is the only disappointment concluding with the final scene of *Taming of the Shrew*, and at the last Shakespearean line, it's over. The audience receives no further information about any of the children through which we've been viewing these scenes, and it seems the story has been cut off. Overall, this is an outstanding play and worth the effort to produce.

Kraft, Erik P. *Lenny and Mel: After-School Confidential*. Illustrated by Erik P. Kraft. Simon & Schuster, 2004. ISBN 068985109X. \$14.95. 64 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Brothers--Juvenile fiction; Journalism--Juvenile fiction; Clubs--Juvenile fiction; Twins--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Lenny and Mel are back and are not happy about the school year soon to begin. Their father suggests they join a club so school will be more enjoyable. When they go to the school newspaper room to get a list of clubs, they find their old nemesis, Ms. Handsaw, newspaper adviser. In order to get rid of them, she assigns them to report on the clubs in the school. That's when the fun begins. Lenny and Mel report on the Glee Club ("What does 'glee' mean?"), the Informal After-School Art Class (Where, if you miss the bus, you can carve soap into food shapes for when someone has to wash his or her mouth out with soap), and many others, too funny to mention.

This is the third in Kraft's *Lenny and Mel* series but is just as hilarious as the first. Lenny and Mel do seem to be funnier to adults than to kids, but why should kids have all the fun?

Romanek, Trudee. *Aha! The Most Interesting Book You'll Ever Read About Intelligence*.
Illustrated by Rose Cowles. Kids Can Press, 2004. ISBN 1553374851. \$14.95. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Betsy Spackman

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational;

Subject: Intellect--Juvenile literature; Learning--Psychology of--Juvenile literature; Brain--
Juvenile literature; Book Reviews;

A new addition to the Mysterious You series, this interesting and informative book discusses the concept of intelligence. The main text covers a variety of topics, including brain anatomy, human brain development, right and left-brain dominance, learning, learning disabilities, IQ, geniuses, and intelligence in animals and computers. "You Try It" sections offer quizzes and exercises that allow the reader to explore and apply concepts related in the text. Throughout the book, inset panels highlight fun facts.

Overall, this book is well-written, and covers an intriguing topic in an engaging way. The author uses examples and stories to maintain the reader's interest, and the "You Try It" panels encourage active learning. There are a few minor inconsistencies; for example, after including basic brain anatomy in the beginning of the book, the author introduces the idea of multiple intelligences without mentioning that physical, spatial, and linguistic intelligences correlate to different parts of the brain. However, Romanek's treatment of multiple intelligences does emphasize that we are all smart in our own ways. Colorful illustrations complement the text in this excellent book that will engage young readers interested in intelligence.

Daugherty, Linda. *Bless Cricket, Crest Toothpaste, and Tommy Tune*. Anchorage Press Plays, 1998. ISBN 0876024118. Amateur royalty fee, contact Anchorage Press Plays. 72 pp.

Reviewer: Hilary Barnett

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction; Science fiction plays; Fantasy plays;

Subject: Down syndrome--Juvenile drama; Family--Juvenile drama; Imagination--Juvenile drama; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: The importance of family and accepting the inevitable.

Production Requirements: Musical selections contained in stage directions are suggestions only. Set moves between science classroom (overhead or slide projector is needed), the living room, Tom's room, and Tom's imaginary world which requires space for Tom and Tommy to dance. Lighting for Tom's imagination should be different and creative, opposed to the ordinary classroom and living room settings. Costumes are modern day apparel. Tom's specialized costume: tap shoes, top hat, and tuxedo tails.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 1 1/2 hours

Characters: 6-9 roles (3M (ages15-17), 2F (one 65 and one 15-16), 1 either with doubling/ OR 5M, 3F, 1

Cast: Children and adults

Time Period: Modern

A young girl, Cricket, struggles with Tom, her older and imaginative brother, having Down syndrome. Tom and Cricket have a desirable bond as brother and sister, but Cricket becomes caught up in embarrassment and hurts her family's feelings. However, Tom is constant and never wavering in his love for his sister. Cricket finds herself in a world of confusion when it becomes clear that family and love, and not being embarrassed, are most important.

Schedules can easily be worked around in this cast of six. The cast is required to partake in some doubling, but it can be handled stress-free. Tom and Tommy Tune annoy the family; but, they are fun to imagine and are easily brought to life through Tom's lines, stage instructions, and tap dancing to Fred Astaire. Students will find it easy to relate to Cricket and her feelings of embarrassment since she is a dynamic protagonist who changes and rediscovers her love for her brother. The play is fast-paced because of Cricket's rapid-fire one-liners, Tom's obnoxious and constant tap dancing, and Reese's persistent behavior. The upbeat dialogue flows well and is genuinely entertaining. Stage directions are clear, and if done accurately, promote the proper and respectful effect of this touching play. Though the script is weak and uneven near the end, ample character work by cast and director can make up for it. These characters do not sit idly. They help educate about Down syndrome and help students understand it is necessary to accept everyone.

Yolen, Jane and Harris, Robert J. *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood*. HarperCollins, 2004. ISBN 006029453. \$15.99. 246 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian H. Heil

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy Fiction; Folklore;

Subject: Adventure and Adventurers--Fiction; Jason (Greek Mythology)--Juvenile Fiction; Heroes--Fiction; Book--Reviews;

Yolen and Harris have provided an imaginative story about the young Greek hero, Jason. As the book begins, this scrawny orphan suffers from the taunts of his five, noble-born classmates and the trials of becoming a hero. As the final test of their training, Chiron, their centaur trainer, sends them on a quest to retrieve the deadly poisonous and the life giving Blood of the Gorgon. Before they set out, Chiron tells Jason his true identity, the rightful prince of Iolcus and the son of the usurped king. This information makes Jason's journey especially dangerous. As Prince, Jason is a threat his classmate and current Prince of Iolcus, Acastus.

Their journey continues and the five would-be heroes cross a wide chasm, battle deadly harpies and finally navigate the dangerous rapids taking them into the kingdom of Iolcus to collect the blood. Each of the boys has unique skills, bringing the characters to life in the mind of the reader. Jason and Acastus are the most dynamic characters, changing so that when their quest is finished, they see each other as friends rather than enemies. This is a fast paced, adventure story about the coming of age of two young warriors.

Haseley, Dennis. *Trick of the Eye*. Dial Books, 2004. ISBN 0803728565. \$16.99. 199 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Science fiction; Occult fiction;

Subject: Emotional problems--Juvenile fiction; Memory--Juvenile fiction; Painters--Juvenile fiction; Art--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Richard is a twelve-year-old boy who can talk with people in paintings and can enter the paintings to interact with the people in their “world.” In this science fiction environment, human and animal characters within a work of art can look out into the regular world from the locations they are displayed. This is indeed a strange set of affairs. Richard, from whose perspective these curious events unfold, discovers that the characters within a particular painting in his home have previously viewed a disturbing event. What causes them to be so frightened? Where did the picture hang when they witnessed it? How long ago did it happen? Richard slowly unravels the mystery, which involves the altering of paintings, and uncovers part of his own forgotten childhood.

This book is not for young children. Besides being very complex, the plot culminates in a gruesome domestic abuse case. It is no wonder the reader questions the mental state of the youngster from the beginning of the work. Italicized text, which indicates Richard's thoughts and conversations between him and characters in the paintings, is confusing, but is a unique way to set these elements off from normal quoted conversations. The plot is compelling, and after concluding the book, you will want to go back and reread for earlier clues to the outcome. This book also makes you curious about seeing the paintings referred to in the story. In the book's end papers, the author includes a listing of these paintings and where they are found today.

Stone, David Lee. *The Illmoor Chronicles: The Ratastrophe Catastrophe*. Hyperion, 2004. ISBN 0786851287. \$16.99. 288 pp.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Rats--Juvenile fiction; Magic--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

When the unremarkable shepherd boy Diek Wustapha is invaded by an evil spirit that gives him the power to charm living things with his flute, he finds the perfect test of his powers in the town of Illmoor which has been infested by a plague of giant rats. In true fairy tale form, Diek leads the rats to their death but is ultimately left unrewarded by the town's ineffective leader, the Duke of Illmoor, who has no money in the coffers to pay. Seeking revenge, Diek is persuaded by the evil spirit to kidnap the town's children. With angry parents snapping at his heels, the Duke commissions misfit mercenaries, Groan the Giant, Gordo the dwarf, Tambor the would-be sorcerer, and Jimmy an aspiring thief, to find the children and destroy Diek, which they do in their own bumbling style.

The Ratastrophe Catastrophe is a wonderful nontraditional take on the traditional story of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Diek and the outrageous cast of characters add spice to this intermittently dark story. The plot is fun and vigorous but is not evenly paced with scenes jumping back and forth between characters in an irregular pattern. Purists will find no real theme or moral to this story, but the humorous situations and language provide great entertainment value in the novel. Teen fans of Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams will enjoy this book and anticipate the next installment of the Illmoor Chronicles.