



2004

Full Issue

Children's Book Review

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Review, Children's Book (2004) "Full Issue," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 3 , Article 30.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol25/iss3/30>

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Manushkin, Fran. *The Little Sleepyhead*. Illustrated by Leonid Gore. Dutton Children's Books, 2004. ISBN 0525469567. \$16.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Bedtime stories;

Subject: Bedtime--Juvenile literature; Sleep--Juvenile literature;

"A long time ago, when the world was so young that all the rocks were little pebbles and all the chicks were still in their eggs there lived a Little Sleepyhead." At the end of an exciting day of play, the Little Sleepyhead grows very tired. Noticing his comfortable, sleeping forest friends, he searches for a soft place to sleep. Bug-filled, prickly grass just doesn't work, nor do bumpy branches of trees, slippery lily pads on the pond, or using a soft, but LOUDLY snoring bear for a pillow. Finally, a flock of birds ruffle their feathers, causing the wind to sneeze, and all of the loose feathers to blow around until they land in a soft, high heap. "This is what I need!" said the Little Sleepyhead. "A bed!"

From the very first page of a simple, pleasingly cozy bedtime story, a visual treat begins. Stunning, luminous pastel scenes reach out and wrap the reader in a dream world of rich, vibrant color that is layered with light and texture. The simplicity of the lines complements the dream-like softness and transparency of the surrounding atmosphere and invites the reader, as well as the Little Sleepyhead, to curl up on something soft, find something to hug, and drift off to sleep. Highly recommended bedtime reading for toddlers, preschoolers and their worn-out parents.

Lund, Deb. *Tell Me My Story, Mama*. Illustrated by Hiroe Nakata. Harper Collins, 2004. ISBN 0060288760. \$15.99. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Babies--Juvenile fiction; Parent and child--Juvenile fiction; Birth--Juvenile fiction;

"Tell me the story about when I was inside you, Mama."

What child wouldn't glow at being the star of her/his very own story? Each child has a unique pre-birth tale which parents should remember, tell and re-tell, sharing the variety of feelings awakened during the anticipation and birth of a new baby. The excited, small heroine of this delightful story has obviously heard her story many times and eagerly awaits each personal detail, such as the visible shape of her foot kicking her Mama's belly. The climax of the story or the "special part" is her actual birth, and the "best part" is when Mama and Daddy see her for the first time, and she sees them. Both events carry a sense of wonder at the miracle of a new life.

This charming celebration of love and family is based on actual events during the author's own pregnancy and was partly written as they occurred. Pregnancy details are shared with taste and humor appropriate to a pre-school through kindergarten age range. The gently whimsical and child-like watercolor illustrations are a perfect complement to the text. Pregnant mothers will not only enjoy sharing this delightful book with their young children to prepare them for a new brother or sister, but will also probably experience a greater awareness of each child's pre-birth story and how to share it with each little "star".

Wilson, Karma. *Bear Stays Up for Christmas*. Illustrated by Jane Chapman. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2004. ISBN 0689852789. 17.00. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas stories; Picture books;

Subject: Bears-Juvenile Fiction; Christmas-Juvenile Fiction; Friendship-Juvenile Fiction;

Bear and his friends are at it again. This time the mouse, the badger, the raven, the rabbit, the mole, and the beaver all decide to help Bear stay awake for Christmas rather than slip into hibernation. They chop and trim a tree. They bake and pop corn. They cuddle and sing... and Bear stays awake. But in the end all the friends fall asleep and Bear prepares a Christmas like they've never seen before. There's even a surprise visit from Santa.

Done in wonderful rhyme and charming illustrations, this book feels, smells and reads just like one of the happiest Christmas' ever had.

Fleming, Candace. *Gator Gumbo : A Spicy-Hot Tale*. Illustrated by Sally Anne Lambert. Melanie Kroupa Books / Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004. ISBN 0374380503. \$16.00. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories; Picture books;

Subject: Alligators--Juvenile fiction; Animals--Juvenile fiction; Gumbo (Soup)--Juvenile fiction;

Monsieur Gator is growing old and slow. He can no longer catch his regular food -- skunks, possums, and otters – for lunch and is relegated to a vegetarian diet of leaves, roots, and berries. One day he remembers his maman's gumbo recipe and begins to cook. First he builds the fire, adds a pot, and then asks “Who's going to get some water for the gumbo?” “I ain't,” snicker the possum, otter and skunk. “Then I'll be doin' it myself,” and he does. The other critters won't help with the crawdads, the okra, spices or rice either, but when the gumbo's ready, they all want a taste. “Humph,” says Monsieur Gator, “I'm gonna eat this gumbo all by myself.” The critters beg for just one taste, but when they get too close to the pot and even fall in, Old Man Gator is not at all opposed to eating them too!

This creative take-off on the Little Red Hen story combines bayou critters dressed in swampland clothes, a spicy tale, and a not so subtle moral. There is one sort-of French swear word that may offend some readers and the fact that the critters get eaten in the end may bother some children.

Walton, Rick. *Very Hairy Scary Story*. Illustrated by David Clark. Putnam's, 2004. ISBN 0399238581. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction; Humorous stories;

Subject: Monsters--Juvenile fiction; Stories in rhyme--Juvenile fiction; Fathers--Juvenile fiction;

Book--Reviews;

Sarah has stayed at her friend's house much too long. Instead of using the phone to call her father, who will be mad, she decides to run quickly home. On her way she runs into a very hairy, scary spider, bat, skunk, bear, ape, and lion – just before she runs into the arms of her father, who has come to help her get home. Together they walk home through a very hairy, scary night!

Walton always does a superb job rhyming and throwing little hitches into the plot, and this book is no exception. The pictures of the frazzled-hair girl and the very hairy, scary monsters complete a grand story that could be used to jumpstart a discussion on safety with young children.

Patterson, James. *SantaKid*. Illustrated by Michael Garland. Little Brown, 2004. ISBN 03160006122. 19.00. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas stories;

Subject: Christmas-Juvenile Fiction; Santa Claus-Juvenile fiction; Book-reviews;

Christmas almost didn't happen one year. It's TRUE ! Rotten old Warrie Ransom bought out the North Pole and Christmas--lock, stock and barrel! He mass-produced strange and awful toys like Weird Wally Warmunga the Warrior and Princess Pee Pee Poo Poo. Toys no child would ever really want. But then Warrie Ransom's trucks got stuck in the snow, it took a child, Santa's daughter, to save Christmas with a little help from Santa's reindeer and elves.

Absolutely delightful illustrations, and a story to warm any child's heart - who wouldn't want to be the one to save Christmas? Any child who believes in Santa, the North Pole and flying reindeer would love this book!

Walton, Rick. *Bunny Christmas: A Family Celebration*. Illustrated by Paige Miglio. HarperCollins, 2004. ISBN 0060084154. 16.00. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Vicky M. Turner

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Stories in Rhyme; Christmas stories;

Subject: Christmas-Juvenile Fiction; Families-Juvenile Fiction; Book-reviews;

Bunnies are getting ready for Christmas, doing all the traditional bunny stuff: hanging lights, decorating trees, making presents and cards, creating Christmas goodies, and just having a great time with their families.

This wonderful bunny story adds upon the flurry of other bunny family stories, including *So Many Bunnies*, *Bunnies on the Go* and *Bunny Day*. The illustrations are superb; the rhymes, witty and warming; all in all a wonderful Christmas read. Rick Walton, a Utah author, has written dozens and dozens of funny, rhyming, and quirky books.

McCully, Emily Arnold. *Squirrel and John Muir*. Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 2004. ISBN 0374336970. \$16.00. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical Fiction;

Subject: Muir, John, 1838-1914--Juvenile Fiction; Yosemite Valley (Calif.)--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Six year-old Floy, nicknamed Squirrel, met John Muir in Yosemite in 1868, when her father, English journalist James Hutchings, employed Muir to run his sawmill and help improve his hotel. Although the actual events in this story are conjecture, McCully portrays what could have happened as Squirrel, an outspoken and independent tomboy, accompanies Muir, the budding naturalist, as he explores the flora and fauna of the Yosemite Valley. Muir not only sees nature, but feels it, hears it, speaks to it, and experiences it first-hand, as when he climbed up a tall tree and swayed back and forth during a thunderstorm. He encourages Floy to take a second look at what she first considers to be ordinary creatures or objects in nature.

McCully's story is heart-warming. Her life-like water-color illustrations capture the beauty of the Yosemite Valley and the changing expressions of the characters - from Squirrel's pesky wildness to Muir's exhilarating wonder as he listens for the sound of falling snowflakes or contemplates what it feels like to be a river rock. This could be used in the elementary school classroom to introduce a nature unit or in the home during regular story time or before a family's nature walk.

Editors of Yes Mag. *Fantastic Feats and Failures*. Kids Can Press, 2004. ISBN 1553376331.
\$17.95. 52 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational Books;

Subject: Engineering Successes-Juvenile Fiction; Engineering Failures-Juvenile Fiction;

Fantastic Feats and Failures introduces readers to the work of engineers in designing and building amazing structures. The editors of *Yes Mag*, a bimonthly science magazine for school-age youngsters, chose twenty buildings, bridges and other engineered projects and presented them as examples of either successful engineering endeavors or failures. Among these are the Sydney Opera House, the Eiffel Tower, the Panama Canal, the Hubble Space Telescope, and the World Trade Center. The reader sees the problems that the engineers face on each project such as, use of materials, environmental concerns and structural forces. With each success or failure, engineers have learned valuable lessons which have been used to plan and construct other edifices.

The editors have developed detail-filled text, used various text font sizes, and added numerous colored illustrations to keep the interest of the young reader. A detailed index and a glossary add to the usefulness of this book as a learning tool for the budding engineer. Easy-to-follow science projects are also included such as the "Goodie-Goodie Gumdrop Dome" and "Build a Bridge" that will interest older children as well.

Raven, Margot Theis. *Circle Unbroken*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003. ISBN 0374312893. \$16.00. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Sandy Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Sweetgrass baskets--Juvenile fiction; Gullahs--Juvenile fiction; Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; African Americans--Juvenile fiction; Family history--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Grandma takes her granddaughter in her lap and, as she teaches her granddaughter the ancient craft of sweetgrass basket weaving, tells her the history of their family. Her ancestors originated in Africa and were brought to America as slaves to the Sea Islands off the Southern Carolina coast. Grandma emphasizes that the basket represents a circle of unbroken family loyalty and love. The basket's reeds are overlapped and weaved with amazing expertise; when the dexterous "fingers talked just right" "the basket held the rain." The skillfully woven baskets not only held physical rain, but they held the despair and pain experienced by the family through slavery, war, and cultural change.

This is a tender story of love and family set in a unique place. At the end of the book, Raven provides detailed paragraphs of the origin of sweetgrass baskets and a selected bibliography for further reading about the ancient Gullah culture and the art of basketry. The illustrations by Lewis are realistic and very expressive; his research the subject of the book so that the text and pictures would complement each other. If you're a writer interested in telling your own family story, this book gives a good example of how even a small amount of information about one's ancestry can be used to create a beautiful family story.

Rascol, Sabina I. *The Impudent Rooster*. Illustrated by Holly Berry. Dutton Children's Books, 2004. ISBN 0525471790. \$16.99.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Folklore;

Subject: Folklore - Romania; Roosters - Folklore; Book-Reviews;

The Impudent Rooster is a Romanian folktale adapted by Rascol from the story by Ion Creanga entitled "Punguta cu doi bani," "The Pouch with Two Coins." The story was originally published in 1876 in *Convorbiri Literare* (Literary Conversations), a Romanian literary journal. The Rooster, the chief character in the story, is the only friend of an old, very poor and hungry man. The man's neighbor, an old woman, advises the old man to beat his rooster, for that is the way she was able to get her hen to lay eggs. Although he can't think of physically hurting his beloved rooster, the old man angrily "snapped at the rooster, 'I wish you were a hen and could lay eggs! I'm tired of being hungry!'" Dejected, the rooster leaves the old man. Soon, while pecking in the dirt, the rooster finds a little purse containing a few pennies. Before he can return to the old man with the money, a rich and greedy nobleman steals the purse from the rooster. From that day on, the rooster follows the nobleman shouting "Cucurigu, my great lord! Give back the pennies you stole!" To the nobleman, the rooster is impudent, bold and disrespectful even though the rooster is only telling the truth. The nobleman tries to drown, burn, starve, and trample the rooster, but the undaunted rooster performs amazing feats to overcome the obstacles. The rooster returns to the old man, bringing a full complement of farm animals to fill the man's fields, stables, and pens and more money than the old man has every seen.

Rascol was born in Romania and knew this folktale from her youth. She wanted English-speaking children to also know the story of this amazing rooster. This is a story of courage in spite of danger, determination in spite of repeated challenges, and forgiveness in spite of unkindness. The water-color folk-like illustrations by Holly Berry have brilliant colors, and simple lines. Children will enjoy the repetition of the rooster's nagging chant to the nobleman and the recurring "What could the rooster do?" as this story is read aloud.

Klise, Kate. *Shall I Knit You a Hat?* Illustrated by Sarah M. Klise. Henry Holt, 2004. ISBN 0805073183. \$16.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas stories; Picture books;

Subject: Rabbits--Juvenile fiction; Knitting--Juvenile fiction; Christmas--Juvenile fiction;

A mother rabbit and her child prepare for a Christmas blizzard by secretly designing and making knitted hats to keep their friends warm. The gifts are delivered just in time for the blizzard, and rabbits and friends alike are warmed through the spirit of giving. Although there is no actual plot beyond the theme of giving, this simply written story is a gentle and pleasant read, suitable for a holiday bedtime story. The illustrations are the main draw of the book: the indoor pictures are bright, child-like, and have a cozy holiday feel to them that contrasts with the cool ones used for the blizzard. A simple delight for the holiday season.

MacLachlan, Patricia. *More Perfect than the Moon*. Joanna Cotler Books, 2004. ISBN 0060275596. \$15.89. 80 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Babies--Juvenile Fiction; Mothers and daughters--Juvenile Fiction; Frontier and pioneer life--Juvenile Fiction; Book--Reviews;

Life is never without change on the Witting family farm, home of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Baby Cassie, now 8 years old, is given the responsibility of keeping the family journal. She follows family members around, observing what they do, secretly listening to conversations, and often embellishing their activities with creative fiction. As she listens and watches, Cassie begins to be afraid for Mama. She follows her constantly, sensing that something is different--something is wrong with Mama. Her fears seem to be confirmed one morning when Mama faints and Papa hurriedly takes her to Dr. Sam in town. However, when the "something wrong" turns out to be the expectation of a new baby, Cassie is most unhappy! She tells Papa that she will not speak to or look at the baby. She writes mean things about the "terrible baby" in the journal. Soon a new fear begins to grow inside of Cassie; the fear that Mama will die giving birth just like Anna and Caleb's mother did. When the time actually arrives, Papa is in town and Cassie is able to assist Mama until the neighbor's wife arrives to take over. Cassie is surprised by her own feelings as she is allowed to be the first to hold the "terrible baby," her tiny, new brother, a gift "more perfect than the moon."

An invitation to spend time once again with the Witting family is most welcome. As with the other three *Sarah* novels, day-to-day realities of rural family life in earlier times are portrayed with gentleness, warmth and wisdom. Universal human feelings are respected and honored whether experienced by adults or children. MacLachlan's poetic style and flowing dialogue find honest and often humorous expression through the thoughts and journal entries of the creative and unique Cassie, surrounding the reader in the love of the Witting family.

Park, Linda Sue. *The Firekeeper's Son*. Illustrated by Downing, Julie. Clarion Books, 2004. ISBN 0618133372. \$16.00. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary; Intermediate;

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Signals and signaling--Juvenile Fiction; Fire--Juvenile Fiction; Korea--History--19th century--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Sang-hee lives in an important coastal village in 19th century Korea. "Our part of Korea is like a dragon with many humps," his father says. "The humps are the mountains--the first hump facing the sea, the last hump facing the king's palace. Our mountain is the first hump. Our fire is the first fire." Sang-hee's father must climb the mountain every evening and light the first signal fire, so that the other firekeepers may light their fires to notify the king that all is well in the land. Yet, as he plays with his army of toy soldiers, Sang-hee wishes that just once, the fires would not be lit so the king would know there was trouble in the land and send his tall, brave soldiers with shining swords. When evening comes, Sang-hee glances at the mountain. No fire. His father is late. He continues his chores, checking the mountain often. Still no fire. He finally calls his mother, who sends him up the mountain path to see what is wrong. Sang-hee finds his father groaning with a broken ankle at the side of the path, unable to walk. Sang-hee must carry the heavy brass pot with the live coals and tongs up to the mountain top and light the fire. Once there, he is tempted to leave the fire unlit so the soldiers will come and he can see them and talk to them. However, he makes the right choice and lights the fire, imagining a great battle in the flames as they mount to consume the brush. Until his father's ankle heals, Sang-hee is the keeper of the first fire in Korea.

Short, poetic sentences in a flowing, folk-like style will be understood and enjoyed by early to middle elementary age children. Skillful watercolor and pastel illustrations bring a softness to the village and the mountain trek as evening advances. The contrast of the brightly glowing flames of Sang-hee's fire to the twilight purples are a visual as well as imaginative treat, perfectly complementing the text. Though useful as an illustration of Korean village life and culture, the more powerful theme of personal responsibility in making decisions that affect others emerges naturally from a simple, yet powerful story.

O'Connor, Barbara. *Taking Care of Moses*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004. ISBN 0374380384. \$16.00. 144 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Secrets--Juvenile fiction; Conduct of life--Juvenile fiction; Interpersonal relations--Juvenile fiction; Church--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Possessing a secret can often be fun and exciting, but sometimes it is like a "hot, heavy blanket" of worry. Randall Mackey's secret is so heavy, that he finds it difficult to behave normally, even around his best friend Jaybird. He knows which woman left the baby in the cardboard box on the front steps of the Rock of Ages Baptist Church because he saw her. But, he is afraid to tell anyone, because Queenie Avery, a senile elderly woman, who was out wandering, saw the woman, too. If townspeople discovered that Queenie had gotten away from her husband's watchful care again, they would insist that she be taken from him and institutionalized for her own safety. Randall just couldn't let that happen to kindly Mr. Avery.

After only a few days, the small, southern town of Foley, South Carolina, becomes a hotbed of debate over who should take care of baby Moses, so named by Charlotte Jennings, the preacher's childless wife, who is caring for the baby. Many folks feel that Miss Frieda, the licensed foster care person for Foley, should be caring for Moses and don't hesitate to say so. The feud becomes so warm, that some people refuse to come to the Rock of Ages Church again, driving clear to the next town for their church-going. Neighbors break off relationships with neighbors, and the whole town is in turmoil. Randall wants it all to stop and to make things right, but how can he do it when he is afraid for Mr. Avery and Queenie?

O'Connor once again tells a story filled with imperfect but genuinely good people, who really care about each other as they share their lives in a small town. The humorous, frustrating and poignant moments awaken our compassion and the desire for an outcome that will satisfy the needs of all concerned. How refreshing that age, race, and economic status, though present in the story, are complete non-issues as people struggle to bring about "the right thing" for baby Moses. Characters are allowed to be upset with each other, to encourage each other, to overcome friction, and to grow and improve as the story progresses. Children and adults will recognize themselves and their feelings as they read, and perhaps learn to be a little more understanding and kind.

Hall, Bruce Edward. *Henry and the Kite Dragon*. Illustrated by Low, William. Philomel Books, 2004. ISBN 0399237275. \$15.99. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Kites--Juvenile Fiction; Prejudices--Juvenile Fiction; Chinatown (New York, N.Y.)--History--20th century--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Chinatown and Little Italy are side by side in New York City, but the kids from Chinatown never play in the park when the kids from Little Italy are there. Although they've never made any effort to get acquainted, they've decided they don't like each other.

Eight-year-old Henry Chu lives in a tall apartment building in Chinatown, where elderly Mr. Chin also lives. Grandfather Chin made beautiful kites in China when he was a boy. His kites flew the highest, were the biggest and prettiest, and always won first prize in all the contests. Henry and his friends help Grandfather Chin make huge kites out of packing crates, cardboard, rice paper and bright, colorful paints. After finishing, everyone goes up on the roof to watch Grandfather Chin fly their creations and chase the pigeons, who are frightened of the butterfly, caterpillar, and bird shaped kites. The excitement, however, doesn't last because the Italian kids in the park begin throwing rocks at the kites, tearing through the paper and making them sink to the ground. The Chinese kids want to go fight them, but Grandfather Chin has a better idea; they will make an enormous dragon kite that the Italians won't destroy. "Everyone respects dragons," he says. When it is finished, all of the kids help carry the huge dragon to the roof, but before it is even in the air, the Italians begin throwing rocks. Henry and his friends head for the park to fight the Italians, but before a fight begins, the sun is darkened by the giant dragon, launched by Grandfather Chin. All the kids are transfixed by the magnificent kite, which begins to chase a lone, frightened pigeon. To everyone's amazement, the big leader of the Italians screams, "Stop it! That's my pigeon!" and begins to cry. The Chinese kids begin to understand that the Italian kids keep homing pigeons for pets and that is why they throw rocks at the kites, to protect their birds. The children yell for Grandfather Chin to stop the dragon from scaring the pet pigeons. Now that they understand each other, the children can come to a compromise, and everyone can enjoy the pigeons, the park, and the wonderful kites.

Based on true events in the 1920s experienced by the author's father, this well-told story is illustrated with impressive paintings by a first generation Chinese American who grew up in New York. The texture of the canvas adds depth and character to the backgrounds of buildings, streets and sky, the skillfully executed people, and the brilliant colors of the magnificent kites. The plea for inter-cultural understanding grows naturally out of a fine story. Highly recommended!

Hermes, Patricia. *Sweet by and by*. HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 0380974525. \$15.99. 208 pp.

Reviewer: Sandy Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Grandmothers--Juvenile fiction; Children and death--Juvenile fiction;

Eleven-year-old girl, Blessing and her grandmother, Monnie, live in a small house on Star Mountain, Tennessee. Her grandfather and her father died on the same day: before Blessing was born. Blessing's mother died when she was two years old. Now Monnie is sick with a troubling cough that isn't getting better, and Blessing is worried that her grandmother might also die and leave her all alone. Monnie and Blessing share a love of music: Monnie plays the fiddle and Blessing sings. When she picked up the fiddle for the first time, Monnie recalls to Blessing "...music just poured out...It just happened. And that's how I know that music is like a sweet child, bow it, and... it sings itself out." After a trip to town to see Dr. Harkins, Monnie tells Blessing that they need to talk about what Blessing will do when she's not around to care for her anymore. Blessing still has lots of music stored up inside her and sharing it will be one of the ways that will heal the feelings of anger, denial, and despair when she realizes that she will have to go on without Monnie.

This tender story is told from Blessing's perspective and Hermes reveals Blessing's thoughts through italics in the text. The reader will come to love the mountain people and the simple ways they care for each other, as well as the townspeople's efforts to help Blessing when her grandmother dies. The reader sees public welfare, social class distinctions, sickness, and death from a child's point of view.

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.

Kurtz, Jane. *The Feverbird's Claw*. Greenwillow Books, 2004. ISBN 0-06-000821-0. \$16.89.
295 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Shortcomings

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Fantasy--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Moralin, an adventuresome girl on the verge of womanhood, has discovered how to get outside the protective walls of Delegua city. She leads a few inquisitive girls through a secret tunnel into the excitement of the outside world and into danger as they are captured by the fierce Arкера people. This book follows Moralin's journey through adventure, peril and eventually back home. When confronted with challenges, she struggles to remember the lessons she has learned in the fighting yards from her grandfather, and to hear the voice of Cora Linga, the Great One, regretting all the while how she took for granted her life at home.

This fantasy is difficult to follow and at times depressing. The author's use of incomplete sentences was distracting and, although, they helped to create an uncertain mood of impending danger, it made the storyline hard to understand. A few illustrations and more descriptive writing would have helped in visualizing the imaginary places and beasts. Also Moralin's continual fight to defend herself in life threatening situations was depressing and tiresome. She is always 'looking death in the eye' and just when Moralin is going to be saved and delivered safely back to Delegua, she is plunged into even worse circumstances. In addition, at the conclusion, the significance of the title *the Feverbird's Claw* is still unclear.

Edwards, Julie Andrew and Hamilton, Emma Walton. *Dragon: Hound of Honor*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2004. ISBN 0060571195. \$17.89. 179 pp.

Reviewer: Mary Chapman

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Detective and mystery stories; Historical fiction; Folklore;

Subject: Knights and knighthood--Juvenile fiction; Middle Ages--Juvenile fiction; Dogs--Juvenile fiction;

Thirteen year-old Thierry, ward of Count Montargis in medieval France, wishes to become the squire to a brave knight named Guy Sieur DeNarsac, the Captain of the Count's Men-at Arms. DeNarsac is part of a tight group of friends who reunite at a tournament held at the Count's estate. The friends include Aubrey de Montidier, Captain of King Charles V's guards, along with his trusted wolfhound Dragon; Chevalier Richard Macaire, a King's knight; and Isabelle, Count Martargis' daughter and Aubrey's fiancée. Aubrey disappears on the day of the tournament and his hound turns up three days later wounded and exhausted. Dragon leads Thierry and DeNarsac to Aubrey's murdered body and the two determine that Dragon is their only clue to the killer.

Edwards and Hamilton retell "The Legend of the Dog of Montargis" very well. They draw a vivid picture of medieval France and life in Charles V's court. The mystery is full of exciting moments as Thierry and DeNarsac try to learn from Dragon who the murderer is. Included with the story is a family tree and glossary of French-English and medieval words so that the reader can make sense of the French names as well as French and medieval terminology. This book would appeal to 4th and 5th grade readers.

MacLeod, Elizabeth. *Marie Curie: A Brilliant Life*. Kids Can Press, 2004. ISBN 155337570X. \$14.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Betsy Spackman

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational Books;

Subject: Curie, Marie, 1867-1934-Juvenile literature; Chemists-Poland-Biography-Juvenile literature; Book-Reviews;

After a brief introduction, this engaging book outlines the major events and scientific discoveries in the life of Marie Curie. MacLeod chronicles Marie's life as she grew up in Poland and worked her way to the Sorbonne in Paris where she received her university education. The text includes information about Marie's health and personal life as well as her scientific work on radioactivity and radium. The author concludes by describing Marie's long-term contributions to science and medicine, including a timeline of Marie's life. The book features a variety of photographs of Marie and her family, the Curies' laboratories, and Marie's lab notebooks.

This biography about one of the world's greatest scientists is well-written and understandable, and reaches a satisfying balance between describing Marie's life and her science. Quotes and photographs help the reader become acquainted with Marie Curie as a person, not just a scientist. For example, readers learn that Marie ate mostly radishes and bread while attending the Sorbonne, because everything else was too expensive. This engrossing book will inspire the scientists of the future.

Lowry, Lois. *Messenger*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. ISBN 0618404414. \$16.00. 169 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fantasy Fiction; Adventure Stories;

Subject: Utopian Societies--Juvenile Fiction; Community life--Juvenile Fiction;

Matty lives with Seer in Village, a utopian society situated at the edge of Forest. Matty is anxious for his "true" name to be given him, for everyone in Village is given a "true name", a description of the job they perform, and a gift. He thinks his name will be Messenger because he already serves as Leader's messenger to the people who live in and beyond Village. He has only recently discovered his gift of healing. Village, however, is changing. The Trade Mart, which facilitates the trading of objects in a kind of swap-meet like manner, is changing, as well. Village people are trading inner moral values, such as kindness, for selfish objects and desires. When the majority of the Village people decide that they want to close the Village to all outsiders, Leader sends Matty through Forest to convince Kira, Seer's gifted daughter, to come before Village's borders close forever. In the dangerous journeys through Forest, Matty sacrifices his gift and is granted his "true name". Through Matty's sacrifice, Village and its people become once again a nurturing and caring society.

This fantasy novel is considered to be a companion title to *The Giver* (1993) and *Gathering Blue* (2000), as *Messenger* reintroduces such characters as Jonas, Matty, and Kira, however it can stand alone. Lowry's writing is masterful, making the characters real and understandable without laborious descriptive text or illustrations. Lowry skillfully weaves characterization and other descriptive information into the plot so the reader can easily visualize the characters, events, and setting. Like other Lowry novels, *Messenger* can serve as a starting-off point for current social issues such as immigration and materialism in a class discussion.

Campbell, Kumari. *Cuba in Pictures*. Lerner, 2005. ISBN 0822511673. \$19.93. 80 pp.

Reviewer: Emily E. Johnson

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Cuba--Juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

Cuba in Pictures is laid out in a computer-style format. Highlighted words and arrows direct the reader's attention to key points and additional information found outside the body of the text. This format emphasizes Campbell's desire for readers to do further research on websites listed throughout the book. Each section includes detailed accurate write-ups, pictures, and fun facts that give a solid background to enable additional researching. There are six main sections of this book: land, history and government, people, cultural life, economy, and 'more information.' Unlike some informational books that lack information in some of these sections, *Cuba in Pictures* gives events and facts needed to have a complete view of life in Cuba.

Campbell shifts his focus from his past informational books on Canada to Cuba. Though thorough information is given in the book, a slightly romanticized perspective is implied since greater depth is not specified on some political and economical issues. However, the facts given are accurate; the book is a wealth of compiled information that is easily searchable due to the glossary, index, timeline, multiple maps, list of famous people, and list of current facts.

Peck, Richard. *Past Perfect, Present Tense: New and Collected Stories*. Dial Books, 2004. ISBN 0803729987. \$16.99. 177 pp.

Reviewer: Betsy Spackman

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction; Historical fiction; Occult fiction;

Subject: Children's stories-American;

This delightful compilation brings together thirteen stories, including two that have not been previously published. Peck, a well-loved and prolific author, discusses the craft of writing short stories and uses stories to illustrate his suggestions. Peck begins the collection with his well-known story "Priscilla and the Wimps." He uses the concept of time to divide the remaining stories into three sections: the Past, the Supernatural (in which time is not always as it seems), and the Present. Peck suggests that in order to write well, authors must read, rewrite, develop voices, and consider the question of change.

Peck's stories illustrate his statement that short stories are about change. His suggestions on writing are perfectly demonstrated in his stories. Plots involve a variety of intriguing changes in characters and their environments. Peck's succinct writing and choice of topics will charm young adult readers because of stories about issues important to teenagers such as coming of age, school, and rebelling against parents. Those who love *A Long Way from Chicago* and *A Year Down Yonder* will enjoy old favorites and new stories that show another side of Richard Peck.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Airborn*. Eos, 2004. ISBN 0060531800. \$16.99. 368 pp.

Reviewer: Mary Chapman

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Adventure stories; Fantasy fiction; Science fiction;

Subject: Airships--Juvenile fiction; Pirates--Juvenile fiction; Imaginary creatures--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Airborn is set sometime in the past when airships, rather than jets, would have been the mode of transportation for carrying passengers in the air across oceans. Fifteen-year-old Matt Cruse, born on an airship and happiest when he is floating in the air, is a cabin boy on the Aurora, a luxury airship. Matt plays a key role in the daring rescue of a stranded balloon and its dying pilot while crossing the ocean. Before he dies, the elderly balloonist tells Matt about fantastic, beautiful creatures he encountered during his ill-fated flight. Matt dismisses the balloonist's story as ravings of a dying man until a year later when he meets the man's beautiful, head-strong, granddaughter Kate. Matt finds himself as Kate's accomplice while she tries to prove her grandfather was not mad by finding the creatures he discovered before dying.

Oppel's novel is full of adventures and thrills including air pirates, threatening fantastical flying creatures never seen by humans, flying contraptions of many varieties and, of course, the airships themselves. There's even a bit of romance. The story keeps you on the edge of your seat and flows almost like a movie. Matt, Kate, Captain Walken, the pirates, and crew are well written characters. *Airborn* would appeal to both boys and girls in the 6th through 8th grades.

Browne, N. M. *Basilisk*. Bloomsbury, 2004. ISBN 1582348766. \$17.95. 300 pp.

Reviewer: Lillian Heil

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Not recommended

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Monsters--Juvenile fiction; Dragons--Juvenile fiction; Dreams--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Basilisk is the story of how two young people, Donna and Rej, bring an end to the cruel dictatorship that has enslaved two worlds – the Combers, who live underground, and the Abovers, who inhabit a once beautiful city above ground. After Donna and Rej discover that the evil dictator is trying to make a basilisk that can actually scare people to death, they are left to carry out Browne's compelling story.

The objection to this story is that it contains a great deal of violence with the blood and gore described in graphic detail. It is true that evil people murder and torture others, but it doesn't have to be spelled out in such vivid terms for the reader to know it happened. The other objection is Browne's pessimistic view of the results so heroically achieved by Donna and Rej. One of the characters philosophically sums up the situation in these words, "Barba will rule for a time. He wants the power and is used to it and his henchmen will enforce things for him, at least until the army returns- and then, who knows?" Browne's moral stance is that not much has changed – one dictator has been replaced by another. She is entitled to her own pessimistic view of mankind but it is not one that will help young people.

Castellucci, Cecil. *Boy Proof*. Candlewick Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7636-2333-4. \$15.99. 208 pp.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Science Fiction Fans-Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Teenage girls--Juvenile fiction;

High school senior Victoria Jurgen is fully in control of her life. Dressing and talking like her favorite Sci-Fi heroine, Egg, Victoria has isolated herself from everyone, especially boys. Keeping busy being a straight 'A' student, a photographer for the school paper, a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Club, and chatting online with other Sci-Fi fans, Victoria sees very little need for more human interaction. But her worldview is shattered when a new boy, Max Carter, comes to school. Max is smart, confident, artistic, in control, and handsome. With their developing friendship, Victoria begins to see through Max's eyes a wider world where she is not as smart as she thought and other people are truly important. As startling new realities impact her life, Egg's hard shell cracks and a new more self-actualized Victoria emerges.

First time novelist Cecil Castellucci has expertly captured the complex identity struggles that face teenage girls. Victoria is a strong character. Her voice rings true and many will find it echoing to their own lives. At the same time, Max's character is not as satisfactorily drawn and it is hard at times to see why Victoria resonates so strongly with him. Though not unique, the extended journal style provides the reader with just enough insight into Victoria's experiences, thoughts and dreams to make the novel real and satisfying. With its universal theme of finding and making ones life unique this is a novel that will truly resonate with teenage girls.

Karim, Roberta. *Faraway Grandpa*. Illustrated by Ted Rand. Henry Holt & Company, 2004. ISBN 080506785X. \$16.95. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary, All

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Grandfathers--Juvenile fiction; Old age--Juvenile fiction; Memory loss--Juvenile fiction;

Kathleen has an especially close relationship with her personable and happy Grandpa Danny. They regularly correspond with each other and Kathleen's summer visits to Grandpa's farm are yearly highlights for both. Sitting on the porch swing and singing songs together is one of their heart-binding ties. This picture book tells of Kathleen's visit in the summer of 1916, and how Kathleen notices that Grandpa has grown very forgetful and does not remember their usual teasing games and dialogue. When Grandpa comes to live with Kathleen and her family, Kathleen discovers that their favorite song, the Irish tune "Danny Boy," can magically, if briefly, bring back Grandpa Danny's wit and cleverness. As Kathleen explained, it is because "my Grandpa Danny [listens] with his heart."

Karim's text and Rand's water color and acrylic enhanced pencil illustrations blend to present a warm inspiring story of a curious youngster who calmly and lovingly deals with a grandparent with memory loss. Although recommended for grades K-3, this title will pull at the reader's heartstrings regardless of age. Included at the end of the book are the words and music for "Danny Boy."

Connor, Leslie. *Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel*. Illustrated by Mary Azarian. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. ISBN 0618305645. \$16.00. 30 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: All

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Self-Reliance-Juvenile fiction; Shovels-Juvenile fiction;

Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel is reminiscent of Barbara Cooney's *Miss Rumphius* and the Buehners' *Fanny* in the romance of Miss Bridie's practicality and certitude. Miss Bridie "could have picked a chiming clock or a porcelain figurine" when she left her home for America, but she chose a shovel instead. She used the shovel to make her fortune spading out a garden and selling seedlings, digging out a path to the skating pond where she met her husband, and shoveling coal into the cook stove to bake bread for her family. Miss Bridie shapes her American dream one shovelful at a time, and a beautiful dream it is, illustrated in Azarian's signature American pastoral mode. *Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel* is a beautiful book in both text and pictures, a compact but powerful example of Edgar Lee Masters' *Lucinda Matlock*: "It takes life to love life."