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McDonald, Megan. *Beetle McGrady Eats Bugs!* Illustrated by Jane Manning. Greenwillow Books, 2005. ISBN 0060013559. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Hreha

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Food--Juvenile fiction; Insects--Juvenile fiction; Courage--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Mexican stinkbug salsa? Cricket pizza, from Brazil? McDonald's book follows the adventures of Beetle as she becomes a real explorer and a true pioneer. Beetle longs to emulate her heroes and her chance to prove herself comes during Fun with Food Week in Mr. Rigley's science class. Beetle boasts that she would "eat an ant in a second," and when she is dared at recess to prove it, the wriggling ant is too much for Beetle to swallow. Defeated, Beetle fears she will never live up to her dream. A visit from Chef Suzanne and her Chinese chop-suey ants happily provides Beetle a second chance to feast on some unique cuisine and fulfill her dream!

McDonald, best known for the Judy Moody books, uses a variety of words like crunch that make reading the book aloud fun for all involved. Although Beetle is a girl, the bug theme is sure to catch the interest of boys. Manning's water color illustrations are bright and Beetle's facial expressions vividly tell the pre-literate reader about Beetle's character. Manning's use of color allows the reader a peek into Beetle's psyche. One highlight of the book is following the travels of an illustrated ant from "ANTarctica" on the bottom pages of the book. McDonald's Beetle McGrady is a fun character and reading about her ant adventures is entertaining reading for the whole family.

Berenzy, Alix. *Sammy: the Classroom Guinea Pig*. Illustrated by Berenzy, Alix. Illustrated by Berenzy, Alix. Henry Holt and Co., 2005. ISBN 0805040242. \$16.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Hreha

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Picture book

Subject: Guinea pigs--Juvenile fiction; Schools--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

"WHEEP!" Sammy the guinea pig greets Ms. B and her classroom of students each school day. Sammy is happy in his little house with his soft blue sock, his food bowl filled with guinea pig pellets, and water to drink. On one busy Monday morning, a persistent, bothering feeling makes Sammy shriek "WHEEEP!" at the top of his lungs. As Ms. B and her students try to determine what is wrong with Sammy, they rule out Sammy being sick, frightened, and hurt until Maria realizes that what Sammy needs is the attention of Ms. B and her students.

Berenzy, author and illustrator of this title, teaches the reader a variety of facts about guinea pigs through her narrative. The last page ends with a list of five facts about guinea pigs, making this book a good read for a new owner of a guinea pig. Berenzy does not, however, list any documentation of where she found her information on guinea pigs. A bibliography or a "For more information" list would be helpful since it seems that one of Berenzy's goals is to educate the reader on guinea pigs. Berenzy's soft colored pencil illustrations of Sammy's face are full of expression.

O'Malley, Kevin. *Captain Raptor and the Moon Mystery*. Illustrated by Patrick O'Brien. Walker & Company, 2005. ISBN 0802789358. \$16.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Preschool, primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Science fiction; Adventure;

Subject: Dinosaurs--Juvenile fiction; Heroes--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

When a mysterious light streaks across the sky into Jurassica's moon Eon, who better to investigate than Captain Raptor! The captain and his courageous crew blast off in the Megatooth, only to be struck by lightning and then almost crushed by the giant Octocolossus. Each time the author asks: "Could this be the end of Captain Raptor and his fearless crew?" Not to worry. Captain Raptor and his crew triumph over all obstacles and save the lives of the humans from faraway planet Earth.

What could be better to beguile a young boy into reading than a book about dinosaurs in outer space? The text will suck young readers in whole, and charm older folks who are reading it aloud. The illustrations are out of this world. A ripping yarn for young boys.

Mayer, Mercer. *There Are Monsters Everywhere*. Illustrated by Mercer Meyer. Dial, 2005. ISBN 0803706219. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Monsters--Juvenile fiction; Fear--Juvenile fiction; Karate--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

A young boy is certain that monsters inhabit his home. They are in the basement, outside by the garbage cans, in the bathroom and in his bedroom. To conquer these beasts, the boy tells his parents he wants to take a karate class. They agree. The boy uses his scary karate moves and yells to turn the tables on the monsters. He decides to get a black belt and maybe become a monster hunter when he is grown.

In his characteristic style and humor, Mayer addresses, with empathy, another childhood fear by creating benign monsters and a character who triumphs over his fear. Illustrations are rendered in cool tones of gouache. Easy-to-read facial expressions of the chunky conquering hero move from apprehension to fear to determination to confidence. The spotted, striped, and scaly monsters, who wear braces, band-aids, earrings, and eyeglass, are more comical than scary. This book will not gain the popularity of *There Is a Nightmare in My Closet* or the *Little Critter*® books, but it is a good choice to quell fears and build confidence for the "under eight" set.

Markes, Julie. *Thanks for Thanksgiving*. Illustrated by Doris Barrette. HarperCollins, 2004. ISBN 006051096X. \$12.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Holiday poetry;

Subject: Thanksgiving Day--Juvenile fiction; Gratitude--Juvenile fiction; Stories in rhyme--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

In iambic verse, Markes enumerates simple joys of everyday life that bring happiness and contentment to children and their families.

Thanks for Thanksgiving for turkey and pie.
Thank you for fall and gold leaves floating by.

From music to art, from play dates to slides, from piggyback rides to cuddles, the rhyme and illustrations produce a cozy appreciation for family life and suggest to the readers the simple things for which they might be grateful.

Bright, whimsical watercolors in a warm fall palette capture the pleasures of childhood and the love of family. A page at the end of the text encourages children to "write their thankful thoughts." This joyful little book would provide families and school classes opportunities to discuss gratitude and how to express it. Families may want to use it as a Thanksgiving Day tradition.

Walton, Rick. *Bunny school: A learning fun-for-all*. Illustrated by Paige Miglio. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060575093. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction;

Subject: Schools--Juvenile fiction; Rabbits--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

This delightful picture book chronicles the activities typical of an elementary school classroom. The bunnies and their teacher enjoy show-and-tell, science, art, field trips, reading time, music time and of course, recess. The rhyming text bounces with the excitement that comes from going to school. The illustrations of bunnies dressed like children and doing the things children do are adorable. This would be a wonderful book to read to a child that is nervous the first day of kindergarten. The illustrations and writing approach the sometimes frightening concept of the classroom with whimsy and delight. After reading this, a young child would be excited about school and older readers will be reminded of the fun they experienced in grade school as well.

Yaccarino, Dan. *The Birthday Fish*. Henry Holt and Company, 2005. ISBN 0805074937. \$16.95.
40 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Hreha

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Birthdays--Juvenile fiction; Goldfish--Juvenile fiction; Pets--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Cynthia loves ponies. She asks for a pony every year for her birthday and has not yet received one. This year, however, she knows will be different. Cynthia knows she will get a pony and will name it Marigold. However, when she opens her birthday present, she discovers not a pony but a goldfish. Disappointed, the only thing that stops Cynthia from dumping the goldfish down the drain is a promise from the fish that if she will take it to the lake and set it free, she will get what she wishes for. On their journey to the lake, Cynthia takes care of the goldfish and once they reach their destination, they watch the sun set together. Now friends, the goldfish (whom Cynthia names Marigold) and Cynthia head home. Cynthia is happy with her new pet even though it was not what she originally expected. Yaccarino's gouache illustrations, with their distinct lines and bold shapes, are the outstanding aspect of this book. They compliment the story, but they can also be used to allow pre-literate readers an opportunity to make up their own story of Cynthia and her goldfish.

Alcott, Louisa May. *An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving*. Illustrated by Bernardin, James. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060004517. \$16.89. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction; Holiday stories;

Subject: Family life--Juvenile fiction; Thanksgiving Day--Juvenile fiction; New England--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews

Two sisters in a large New England family roll up their sleeves and get to work to make a Thanksgiving dinner when their parents are called away to attend to an ailing grandmother. Culinary mishaps occur, but the children manage to put together a delicious dinner that warms the immediate family as well as arriving aunts, uncles, cousins--an even Grandma. The full-color illustrations capture the abbreviated Alcott text. A feel-good holiday story that transports the reader to another time, yet the situation and go-to attitude of the children is timeless. Includes "Louisa May Alcott's Apple Slump" recipe.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Halloween Howls*. Illustrated by Schuett, Stacey. HarperCollins Publishers, 2005. ISBN 0060080612. \$16.89. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Halloween poetry;

Subject: Halloween--Juvenile poetry; Children's poetry, American; Books--Reviews;

What child can't relate to this observation: "Walk and knock, walk and knock, all the way around the block. Door to door, street to street, happy tongue, tired feet!" This is Michele Krueger's poem "Trick-or-Hopkins" for the kindergarten to grade 3 reader. Full-page illustrations support the sparse, but engaging poems in this reading level 2 (with help) "An I Can Read Book". Includes index of authors and titles.

Brown, Margaret Wise. *The little fir tree*. Illustrated by LaMarche, Jim. HarperCollins Publishers. 2005. ISBN 0060281898. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Christmas stories;

Subject: Christmas--Juvenile fiction; Fathers--Juvenile fiction; Christmas trees--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

A lonely little seven year-old fir tree enjoys a new life when a man comes, just before winter's hard frost, and digs up the tree. He transports the tree to his home where his disabled little boy awaits Christmas. In the spring, the tree is returned to the forest where it grows through the seasons. When the snow begins to fall the next year, the man again comes to the forest and digs up the tree. Again, the tree is decorated for Christmas. In the spring, the man returns the tree to the forest. The tree looks forward to this ritual, but when the snow falls in the third winter, the man doesn't come. The tree feels very small in a vast empty field. But then, one day, the little fir tree hears singing. As the music grows louder the little fir tree is overjoyed when the first caroler across the snow is the little boy--now walking--in whose home the tree has had a place for several winters. This winter though, the little fir tree is not dug up, but is decorated with treats for the birds and is serenaded by the little boy and his family and friends. New illustrations by LaMarche update this treasure of a Christmas story.

DiCamillo, Kate. *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*. Illustrated by Chris van Dusen. Candlewick Press, 2005. ISBN 0763622702. \$12.99. 80 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Pigs--Juvenile fiction; Neighbors--Juvenile fiction; Fire departments--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Mercy, a “porcine wonder,” is adored by Mr. and Mrs. Watson, who sing to her night and morning. These songs make Mercy feel warm and comfy like hot buttered toast. One night after the lights are turned out, Mercy, no longer feeling warm and buttery, leaves her bed to dream with the Watsons. With a BOOM! and CRACK!, the overloaded bed begins to break through the upstairs’ bedroom floor. Afraid to move, the Watsons are delighted when Mercy leaps from the bed and heads out the front door. Mercy has hot buttered toast on her mind, but the Watsons think she is going for help. Mercy’s appetite leads her to the neighbors, who summon the fire department to rid them of Mercy. The ensuing chase brings the neighbors and fire department to answer the Watsons’ call for help, and, of course, Mercy is the hero.

Doting parent-like owners, disgruntled neighbors, and a single-minded pig combine for a merry misadventure in which all is well that ends with hot buttered toast. Illustrations with expressive faces, both human and pig, and a bright color palette add details to the text and heighten the humor. This title is the first in a series featuring the irrepressible Mercy. DiCamillo, author of *Because of Winn-Dixie* and Newbery Medal winner *Tale of Despereaux*, connects with early readers through engaging and humorous storytelling.

Hesse, Karen. *The young Hans Christian Andersen*. Illustrated by Erik Blegvad. Scholastic Press, 2005. ISBN 0439679907. \$16.99. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Andersen, H.C. (Hans Christian), 1805-1875--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Hans Christian Andersen's family was poor. A gangly and homely appearance made him an ugly duckling. His tender heart often met with ridicule and rejection, but his cobbler father loved him and taught him wonderful things and his grandmother doted on him. The old women in the hospital where his grandmother worked told him the folklore of Denmark and he was captivated by the works of playwright Holberg and the Odense Theatre. His father, who idolized Napoleon, became a soldier, contracted tuberculosis, and returned home to die when Andersen was eleven. A pleasant soprano voice gave Hans Christian a position in the wealthy homes of Odense, and he reveled in the attention and riches. The money he earned provided the means to go to Copenhagen to try his talents in the theatre and to fulfill his promise, "I shall be famous."

Echoing the lyrical, descriptive style of Andersen, Hesse has created story-like vignettes of the life of young Hans Christian Andersen that engage the reader's senses and imagination. The brief text is packed with insightful details about Andersen's personality and determination, and chapter headings suggest connections between childhood events and his fairy tales. Illustrator Blegvad, who previously illustrated and translated some of Andersen's tales into English, has used pen and ink with watercolors that capture the mood, time, and place. Hesse's research is documented in the bibliography that includes selected works of Andersen, several scholarly biographies and one of Andersen's own autobiographies, *The Fairly Tale of My Life*. An afterword encapsulates Andersen's career and the realization of his celebrity aspirations. A noteworthy biography for public and school library collections and for Andersen fans young and old.

Fleming, Candace. *Westward Ho, Carlotta!*. Illustrated by Catrow, David. Antheum Books for Young Readers, 1998. ISBN 9780689810633. \$16.00. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Western Stories;

Subject: Opera--Juvenile fiction; West (U.S.)--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

World famous opera singer, Carlotta Carusa, is bored with the everyday life of touring and singing to sold-out audiences. Carlotta decides to travel to the American West and share her talent there. On the stagecoach journey, she encounters many dangers of the Wild West such as a pack of hungry wolves, drought, and the meanest 'hombre' in the Dakota Territory, Skullneck Sam. In each situation she uses her voice and the magical power of music to save the day. She even helps Skullneck Sam realize his own talent as a singer. After turning down an offer to be the town Sheriff, Carlotta leaves Sam to continue her journey west to help others appreciate to power of music.

This delightful and whimsical tale expresses, albeit in exaggeration, the power of music.

Although, it doesn't really have the power to command the elements, music can change people. The illustrations are perfect for the story with lots of detail and characterization. The vivid colors bring life to the desert landscape of the American West. Humor is incorporated with fun colloquialisms such as "Jumpin' jackrabbits!" and "Dancin' dingoes." These and other details really capture the spirit of the typical Western story.

Sawyer, Ruth. *The Wee Christmas Cabin of Carn-na-ween*. Illustrated by Max Grafe. Candlewick, 2005. ISBN 04636625531. \$14.99. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas stories;

Subject: Fairies--Juvenile fiction; Magic--Juvenile fiction; Ireland--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Waif Oona Hegarty, who grows up to be both kind and clever, has one wish—to have her own little cabin. But her lowly status prevents her from marrying, and she spends her life caring for other people's children and for the sick and old. Now herself old and abandoned, Oona is homeless and hungry on a snowy Christmas Eve. With her earthly possession in a bundle she climbs the hill to the bogland where she finds shelter under a blackthorn and sleeps, waiting for death. The Gentle People come to her and grant her wish. Ten hundred fairy men carry her bundle and arrange her new home. Now on snowy Christmas Eves, Oona Hegarty keeps a hot griddle and a warm kettle to welcome a hungry stranger.

This redemptive story of kindness returned for kindness is from Sawyer's retelling of *The Long Christmas* and was originally published in 1941. Grafe's mixed media illustrations are dreamlike and poignant—cold, hunger, loneliness, humble endurance, and reward are portrayed through color and impressionistic strokes. This tender story will linger after the covers of the book are closed.

Duey, Kathleen. *Lara and the Silent Place*. Dutton Childrens Books/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005. ISBN 0525473416. \$15.99. 140 pp.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Horses--Juvenile fiction; Trust--Juvenile fiction; Ireland--History--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

In the Ireland of long ago, Lara raises a horse that is much sought after. In the *Hoofbeats* series, consisting of four books, Lara's life, as a horse loving and determined young girl, is laid out. In this book, Lara and her pony are kidnapped by another clan. Lara struggles and as she and her horse, Danssair, endure and then escape their masters. Finally, Lara must decide where she and Danssair will find peace at last.

Hoofbeats is an engaging and believable historical fiction series that will appeal, on many levels, to young and old alike. The Irish countryside is described in delicious detail and Lara is a believable protagonist. Lara and her horse mature through the course of the four books. Each book stands on its own or in concert with the others. The titles of the other books in the series are: *Lara and the Gray Mare*, *Lara and the Moon-Colored Filly*, and *Lara at Athenry Castle*.

Clark, Clara Gillow. *Hattie on Her Way*. Candlewick Press, 2005. ISBN 0763622869. \$15.99.
177 pp.

Reviewer: Mary Chapman

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Historical Fiction; Detective and Mystery Stories;

Subject: Family Relationships--Juvenile Fiction; Mental Illness--Juvenile Fiction; 19th Century--United States--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Hattie on Her Way is a sequel to *Hill Hawk Hattie*. Written in first person, we find eleven-year-old Hattie “plunked” down in Kingston by her widowed father at her grandmother’s house. Hattie is used to living in the woods in a cabin, dressed in overalls and rafting with her pa and best friend Jasper. Now she’s expected to live in the city, acclimate to polite society and get an education. It takes some strength to adjust to Grandmother and her “buzzard” cook, Rose, not to mention the prissy, well-to-do, nosy neighbors. But Hattie is no chicken and she’ll face the challenge. In the process she discovers there are some mysteries surrounding her mother’s family. What happened to her grandfather? Was he murdered? Why did her mother run away from home with her pa and never return?

Hattie on Her Way has a compelling plot. Surprises are in store for Hattie as she uncovers the mystery of her grandfather’s death. Revelations about Hattie’s dead mother’s past are touching as is the developing relationship between Hattie and her grandmother. Although Clark uses Hattie as the narrator, we don’t get the intimate look at Hattie’s personality and emotions that is expected from first person narration. Hattie wasn’t that interesting and engaging as the narrator and it became somewhat slow reading. Despite some shortcomings, the book offers an interesting mystery, a look at 19th century life in the United States, and thought provoking ideas about relationships, responsibility, and family loyalties that make the book worth reading.

Wiles, Deborah. *Each Little Bird That Sings*. Harcourt, Inc., 2005. ISBN 0152051139. \$16.00. 247 pp.

Reviewer: Sharon Kuttler

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;

Subject: Grief--Juvenile fiction; Family--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Ten-year-old Comfort Snowberger has attended 247 funerals at her family's funeral home. Comfort writes and submits "life notices," humorous descriptions of the deceased person's life, to the local small-town Mississippi newspaper. Co-author of *Fantastic (and Fun) Funeral Food for Families and Friends*, Comfort is an expert on death and funerals. Her expertise fails her, however, when her beloved pet and "funeral dog extraordinaire" perishes in a flash flood that nearly kills Comfort and her cousin as well.

This coming-of-age novel with lots of southern flair is about family, friends, potato chip casseroles, and coping with death. Both humor and heartbreak combine to illustrate that life is full of surprises, some good and some bad. Although this book is outstanding, parts of it are almost overwhelmingly sad and could be too distressing for some children. It is a 2005 National Book Awards Finalist for Young People's Literature.

Hiaasen, Carl. *Flush*. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 0375821821. 16.95. 263 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Humorous stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Environmental protection--Juvenile fiction; Florida--Juvenile fiction; Fathers--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Noah's dad is in jail for sinking the Coral Queen casino boat, because the boat was dumping raw sewage after dark into the water off the Florida Keys. Unfortunately the Coral Queen is soon back in business and Mr. Underwood is under strict court order to stay away. So Noah and his sister Abbey decide to vindicate their father and stop the dumping by proving the Coral Queen is violating the law. Add to this mix some really smarmy bullies, a disgruntled former employee named Lice Peeking and his tough-as-nails girlfriend Shelly, the mystery of Noah's missing grandfather, and a dangerous plan to nail the Coral Queen and you have a laugh-out-loud adventure with a deeply satisfying (though a tad too tidy) conclusion.

"Flush" is reminiscent of Hiaasen's Newbery Honor-winning "Hoot," only it is even funnier and more engaging. Noah and Abbey are likeable protagonists, and the family dynamics in this upper elementary/middle school tale are refreshingly loving. The dialogue is snappy and the descriptions of the environment--and its befoulment--are spot on. A bit of language towards the end of the story may disqualify this book for elementary library collections--parents and school librarians may wish to read the book before deciding whether or not to shelve it.

Sandler, Martin W.. *America Through the Lens: Photographers Who Changed the Nation*. Henry Holt & Company, LLC, 2005. ISBN 0805073671. \$19.95. 182 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational Books;

Subject: Photography, Artistic--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

From ". . . the first, I regarded myself as under obligation to my country to preserve the faces of its historic men and mothers," says Matthew Brady, the photographer who went from taking daguerreotypes to chronicling the Civil War. Brady is one of the eleven photographers whose works are featured in this book. Sandler devotes one chapter to each photographer, offering brief biographical profiles with information on how his or her work changed the way people looked at some aspect of American life. The photographs of Jacob Riis depicted the tenement neighborhoods of immigrants in New York City. Lewis Hines' work called public attention to the exploitation of child laborers and was instrumental in pressuring Congress to create child labor laws. Edward Curtis spent thirty years compiling a comprehensive photographic record of the customs and traditions of over 80 Native American tribes. Dorothea Lange documented the life of the dispossessed of the Great Depression. The final chapter showcases NASA's images of the universe and NOAA's images of ocean life. While the text is well-researched and accessible, it is the plentiful black-and-white photographs that are most affecting and draw the reader in. Martin Sandler is a television producer who has won five Emmy awards and been nominated twice for a Pulitzer Prize.

Smith, Sherwood. *The Emerald Wand of Oz*. Illustrated by Stout, William. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060296070. \$16.99. 272 pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Oz--Juvenile fiction; Books-Reviews;

Smith, author of *Wren to the Rescue*, has created a new adventure in Oz for sisters Em and Dori (named for Dorothy Gale and her Aunt Emma). When a Kansas tornado drops the two sisters in the middle of a strange land, Dori decides they must be somewhere in Oz and are going to have wonderful adventures, just like Dorothy Gale. The younger, more practical sister Em, is more skeptical. After meeting unicorns and mermaids however, she must admit that they simply aren't anywhere familiar – certainly not Kansas.

This fantasy is based on L. Frank Baum's Oz stories and officially licensed by the L. Frank Baum Family Trust. It is a quick and simple read, introducing familiar characters (like Jack Pumpkinhead, the Lion, and the Scarecrow) and new (Bastinda, niece and replacement of the Wicked Witch of the West, and Rik, a mysterious boy with gray skin and a fear of eggs). The story ends openly, which suggests that this book may be the first in a series. Highly recommended for upper elementary age readers and older.

Hale, Shannon. *Princess Academy*. Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2005. ISBN 1582349932. \$16.95. 314 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fairy tales;

Subject: Princesses--Juvenile fiction; Self-confidence--Juvenile fiction;

Little Miri's life on the mountain is simple but pleasant. She and the rest of her village live in a secluded village in a far-off territory of the kingdom of Danland. Her only sadness is that her father, for some reason she can only guess, will not allow her to work in the linder quarry with the rest of the villagers. She struggles to feel like she belongs. Then, one day, the quarrying is disrupted by a royal delegate's announcement that the bride of Prince Steffan is to be found in their little village! All of the eligible girls are summoned to the Princess Academy to undergo training in preparation for the day when they will meet the Prince and he will choose his bride.

Miri and her friends go to the Academy and learn how to read and understand all the aspects of 'lowlander' life such as Commerce and Poise. Miri quickly takes her place at the top of the class and leads to rest of the girls against their tyrannical tutor and some evil bandits that hold them hostage. Through these adventures and the things she has learned, Miri finds power within herself that she never knew she had and finally sees herself as a member of her community.

This is a fun fairy tale very similar in style to Hale's *Goose Girl* and *Enna Burning*. All of these books speak essentially about young girls finding themselves as they are called upon to perform extraordinary tasks. This story speaks particularly of the power of education, friendship, love and self-confidence. Miri is a smart, strong character who sees something better for herself, while still harboring self-doubt and insecurities. Hale creates a character readers can identify with but also wish to emulate. Her writing is imaginative and sweet as she describes Miri's rise to power, so to speak. This would be a wonderful book for those who like Hale's other books and other fairy tale variations, such as McKinley's *Beauty*. Definitely a great read with a heart-warming ending.

Yan, Ma and Haski, Pierre. *The Diary of Ma Yan : The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl*. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060764961. \$15.99. 176 pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Girls--China--Diaries--Juvenile literature; Books--reviews;

This book consists of the plans and insights of a China schoolgirl and the explanatory inserts of the photographers and journalists who created the book. Ma Yan and her family live in Ningxia, a part of China so drought ridden that it has been declared uninhabitable by the Chinese government. Uninhabitable or not, three million people live there and the only escape is through education. The extreme pressure Ma Yan feels to succeed in school as well as her family's poverty are painfully recorded on every page.

Pierre Haski, a French photographer and journalist, compiled the Ma Yan's journals given to him by her mother as he visited the Ningxia region. The journal entries span 2000 and 2001, with a slight gap as some of the entries were destroyed. The words are simple but thoughtful, honest and open. Part of the proceeds from this book are sent to The Association for the Children of Ningxia, an organization formed as a result of the book's publication in France. This book is a wonderful insight into the difficulties in other parts of the world, and a bold advocate for education.

Bruchac, Joseph. *Code Talker: a novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two*. Dial Books, 2005. ISBN 0803729219. \$16.99. 231 pp.

Reviewer: Pat Frade

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: World War, 1939-1945--Juvenile fiction; Navajo language--Juvenile fiction;

Cryptography--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Six-year-old Ned Begay is a scared little boy who leaves his Navajo home for boarding school where he learns the English language. Ned, along with the other Navajo boys, struggles at first in his new environment. His love for learning fuels his studies and he becomes a very good student. After Pearl Harbor is attacked, Ned enlists in the U.S. Marines and is trained as a Code Talker. He uses his native language to radio battlefield information and commands in code. The book, addressed to Ned's grandchildren, tells of his experiences in Hawaii, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Bruchac's writing presents a clear historical picture of young men in wartime, digging fox holes, sending radio messages amidst bombs exploding, and watching friends die. Straightforward and accurate, Bruchac's tale is inspiring. It reads like an autobiography instead of a novel. The reader is propelled into the world of WWII as the scenes, impressions, and feelings build to create a memorable portrayal of Ned Begay, a Navajo code talker.

Paolini, Christopher. *Eldest*. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 037582670X. \$21.00. 704 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Adventure Stories; Fantasy Fiction;

Subject: Dragons--Juvenile fiction; Elves--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews:

The second installment in the Inheritance series continues with Eragon and Saphira as they fight with the Varden to bring down the evil Galbatorix and restore Alagaesia to its former glory. The story resumes when the Kull kill the leader of the Varden, leaving the rebel band in turmoil. Eragon must help them pick up the pieces and elect a new leader. Eragon and Saphira then venture with Arya to the forest home of the elves of Du Weldenvarden where he will complete his training as a Dragon Rider. Meanwhile, Eragon's cousin Roran faces his own adventures in Carvahall. The Ra-zac, destroying anything in their path, pursue him to get information about Eragon. Roran fights to save his village and most importantly, his fiancé. He quickly becomes the young leader of the beaten villagers as they journey through the mountains to join the Varden in the neighboring country of Surda. Eragon finishes his training with the elves and rushes to the defense of the Varden as they fight an epic battle against the mounting army of Galbatorix. The Varden are far outnumbered and Eragon as a full Rider is their only hope for success. Victory proves harder than they originally thought, however, when Eragon comes face to face with another Rider.

This exciting story is filled with action and adventure. Similar to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Paolini draws on the epic fantasy style, with success. The plot moves along quickly so the reader doesn't get bogged down in the fantastic elements. Eragon is maturing and growing as a character--he has believable faults and strengths. Although his formal training is complete, he still has much room to grow in the final book of the trilogy. Recommended for young adults because the battle scenes are graphic and vocabulary may be difficult for a younger audience to understand. Overall, this is a fun read even for those who aren't fantasy lovers.

Nix, Garth. *Across the Wall*. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060747145. \$16.99. 320 pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Occult fiction; Fantasy fiction;

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

Nix is best known for his *Old Kingdom* books, namely *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen*. While readers of the short stories contained in *Across the Wall* will see Nix's signature gothic style, they will also be pleasantly surprised by the humorous "My Really Epic New Fantasy Series" and touched by the gentle sentimentality of "Three Roses." The *Old Kingdom* makes an appearance in "Nicholas Sayre and the Creature in the Case," but this novella-length short story reads more like a Hitchcock spy film than a fantasy piece. Each story in the collection is preceded by a short introduction, written by Nix, which gives the story's background. This book is recommended for high school aged readers only, as some of the content would frighten and upset younger readers. A must-read for fantasy readers, and a thoughtful insight into Nix as an author.

Zenatti, Valérie. *When I was a Soldier*. Bloomsbury USA, 2005. ISBN 1582349789. \$16.95.
250 pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Autobiographies;

Subject: Women soldiers--Israel--Juvenile biography; Israel--Armed Forces--Juvenile biography;
Jews, French--Israel--Juvenile biography; Books--Reviews;

Zenatti, a former member of the intelligence branch of the Israeli national service, shares her early experiences of becoming a soldier. In Israel, citizens are required to give two years of military service starting at age 18. She describes her personal challenges and worries, her thoughts about her place as a French-Israeli, and her insights to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This memoir is compiled of journal entries, remembrances, and even excerpts of published works that influenced the author. Zenatti's perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is interesting, as she is both an insider and an outsider in the conflict. The biography provides a fascinating window into the military structure in Israel. Recommended for high school age readers due to language that may offend younger readers and their parents.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Oh, no! Where are my pants? and other disasters: poems*. Illustrated by Wolf Erlbruch. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0688178618. \$15.99. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: All

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic poetry;

Subject: Conduct of life--Juvenile poetry; Book--Reviews;

This collection of poems is bound to brighten a terrible day right up as the authors share some bad days of their own. These poems speak about experiences that everyone has (sometimes in nightmares) and to which we can relate. Some of the situations will make readers giggle, such as losing a bathing suit in the ocean after a fantastic wave. Some situations will make readers' hearts break, such as a best friend moving away. Each poem characterizes situations that seem disastrous to the eyes of a child.

This witty collection is filled with simple illustrations that are clever and fun. Reading these poems will help to get the reader's mind off the hard things of life and to find the humor in terrible situations.

Sabuda, Robert and Matthew Reinhart. *Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Dinosaurs*. Candlewick, 2005. ISBN 0763622281. \$26.99. 12 pp.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Primary, All

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Toy and movable books;

Subject: Dinosaurs--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Sabuda and Reinhart have almost brought dinosaurs back to life in their eye-popping movable book of prehistoric proportions. A label on the cover of what resembles an old encyclopedia declares the book to be "The DEFINITIVE POP-UP!" Well-said. Combine Sabuda's meticulous paper engineering with Reinhart's bold color and the reader gets six double page spreads, each with a detailed movable dinosaur springing from the page and two to four smaller additional fold-out pop-ups. Each pop-up is exquisite though somewhat fragile. Many prototypes were constructed to ensure the mechanisms worked, but gentle hands are needed to handle these dinosaurs.

As the title suggests, brief text accompanies each illustration and contains engaging facts about some 50 creatures of the Mesozoic Era. The information will pique readers' interests but is not intended to support science reports, even on an elementary level. However, the movable masterpieces of *Encyclopedia Prehistorica* will fascinate both young and old. Unfortunately, this book will not survive in public or school libraries, but with proper care, it will make a treasured addition to a home library.