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Auch, Mary Jane. *Chickerella*. Illustrated by Mary Jane and Herm Auch. Holiday House, 2005.
ISBN 0823418049. \$16.95. 32 p.

Reviewer: Rita Christensen

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fairy Tales;

Subject: Fairy Tales; Chickens--Juvenile fiction; Book--reviews;

This eggsellent fractured fairy tale is based on the popular Cinderella storyline. Chickerella's stepmother (think Jennifer Coolidge in the movie *A Cinderella Story*) moves into the coop with her daughters, Ovumelda and Cholester. Poor Chickerella is banished to the springhouse and is soon busy with the family's cooking and cleaning. The prince invites all available hens to the Fowl Ball and in the nick of time a Fairy Goosemother appears to create an eggsquisite gown for Chickerella. At the stroke of midnight, Chickerella dashes down the stairs leaving a glass egg behind. You know the rest; however, there is an interesting twist at the end you won't want to miss.

Chickerella is a fun addition to Auch's other poultry-themed picture books. Mary Jane sculpted the chickens out of clay and handmade the fashionable outfits. Herm created the sets, took the pictures, and manipulated the photos on the computer. This collaboration turned out a glitzy, pun-filled story that both children and adults can enjoy. A good companion book to read with the traditional Cinderella story for contrast. Also a hilarious selection to include in a hen-themed story time.

Gogh, Vincent van. *Vincent's Colors*. Edited by William Lach. Illustrated by Vincent van Gogh. Chronicle, 2005. ISBN 0811850994. \$14.95. [48 p.]

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational Books;

Subject: Gogh, Vincent van, 1853-1890--Correspondence--Juvenile literature; Gogh, Theo van, 1857-1891--Correspondence--Juvenile literature; Painters--Netherlands--Correspondence--Juvenile literature; Color in art--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

This book is a collection of sixteen Vincent van Gogh paintings; all showcase his use of bright color and bold brush strokes. The rhyming text is very simple: the double page spread has a line of text on one page and a color reproduction of the referenced painting on the other. The text is taken from letters Vincent wrote to his brother Theo. Editor William Lach has translated the letters from the original French and Dutch. The text begins with a brief introduction to Vincent van Gogh set next to a self-portrait. Credits at the end of the book give reference information for each painting such as title, year painted, and location as well as a citation for the letters. The outstanding color reproductions are of the full painting or a detail. The collection includes the famous paintings "The Starry Night," and "Sunflowers." Produced by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this very basic introduction to the use of color and movement in art would make an excellent addition to a reference library.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Myers, Christopher. *Lies and Other Tall Tales*. Illustrated by Christopher Myers. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060006552. \$15.99. 40 p.

Reviewer: Lara M. Ackerman

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Folklore;

Subject: Tall tales--Gulf States--Juvenile fiction; Folklore--Gulf States--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Tall tales, like all the best lies, are usually passed from hand to hand before they find their way to our ears. This book is no exception. Myers introduces his rendition of Zora Neale Hurston's folklore studies with the explanation, "Way, way back in the day,/Back when George Washington's hair on the one-dollar bill hadn't yet turned white./Back when computers ran on steam power,/Back when cellular phones had rotary dials,.../There were lies,/Real lies." What follows is a rollicking collection of you-nevers and oh-yes-I-haves, full of the bantering rhythm of storytellers trying to one-up the last teller.

The source of most of these jaw-droppers is described on the very first page. They were collected in the 1930's from authoritative sources such as "Robert Bailey, middle age, worker in an orange grove, barely literate, from Georgia" and "Peter Noble, about 22, garage worker, North Alabama." Meyers' lively illustrations juxtapose the simple text with brightly colored illustrations reminiscent of the original sources. With paper and fabric silhouettes he captures the man who "ran so hard he lost his feet" with the same bold ability as the day it was "so cold the words froze up." The stories in this book provide an excellent opportunity to share some age-old whoppers with a new generation of listeners.

Pinkney, Gloria Jean. *Music from Our Lord's Holy Heaven*. Introduction by Troy Pinkney-Ragsdale. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, Brian Pinkney, and Myles C. Pinkney. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060007699. \$18.89. 41 p.

Reviewer: Lara M. Ackerman

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational; Folklore

Subject: Hymns, English--Juvenile literature; Hymns--Juvenile literature; Spirituals (songs)--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Truly a family effort, the entire Pinkney family contributed their talents to this heart-felt collection of spirituals, including "Wade in the Water," "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" and "This Little Light of Mine." The songs are book-ended with essays written by Gloria Pinkney and Troy Pinkney-Ragsdale which tell of their own introduction to music and the magical, powerful place it can have in the lives of both children and adults. Each song is beautifully accompanied by Brian or Jerry Pinkney's award-winning illustrations or Myles' full color photography. Their artistic interpretations bring to life the jubilation, delight and majesty of the traditional lyrics. Rather than musical scores, the book includes a CD recording of Gloria's rich alto vocal renditions of each song.

Throughout *Music from Our Lord's Holy Heaven*, the unity created through the Pinkney family's diverse artistic styles is reminiscent of the songs themselves, many voices harmonizing for a single purpose. Likewise, the purpose of the Pinkney family is clear: to share the joy of faith, love and music with anyone who will listen.

Leedy, Loreen. *The Great Graph Contest*. Illustrated by Loreen Leedy. Holiday House, 2005. ISBN 0823417107. \$16.95. 32 p.

Reviewer: Sarah Wanlass

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fiction; Informational books;

Subject: Graphic methods--Juvenile fiction; Amphibians--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The toad Gonk's graph-making hobby becomes contagious. Soon he and his lizard friend Beezy are in a battle of wit, creativity and talent as they each strive to create a graph that will win the contest. Chester the snail struggles to decide on a victor. The results of the contest add a twist to the tale.

Lively illustrations, a combination of digital painting and photo collage, depict a variety of graphing methods. The story's fast-paced dialogue is sure to hold the interest of young readers. This concept book superbly introduces graphing techniques such as the Venn diagram, the circle graph or pie chart, the bar graph, and the quantity graph. After completing the story, Leedy devotes the book to explaining these simple methods of data analysis. Readers will want to pull it off the shelf and start graphing!

Clifford, Rowan. *Rodeo Ron and His Milkshake Cows*. Illustrated by Rowan Clifford. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 0375931953. 15.95. 32 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous stories;

Subject: Cowboys--Juvenile fiction; Milkshakes--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Rodeo Ron rides into the town of Cavity with four unusually colored cows. He soon learns how the town earned its name. All the citizens of Cavity drink nothing but soda. As a result they burp all the time and have rotten teeth. The purveyors of the local Soda Bar challenge Rodeo Ron to see who can create the best fruity flavored drink. The challengers mix sugar and chemicals to create fruit flavored sodas. Rodeo Ron's brightly colored cows shake and dance and produce fruit flavored milk shakes. Rodeo Ron wins the "Shake Off" and convinces the town folk to drink milk instead of soda. As a result, the citizens of the town soon have healthier smiles.

The message of this entertaining picture book is well meaning: it is better to drink milk than sodas. However, the inference that milkshakes do not rot teeth while sodas do is tenuous at best. Despite this weakness, this book has much to offer. Clifford's text is lively and well suited for reading aloud. The repeated "SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE" of the cows invites listener participation. Some adults may not be comfortable with the abundance of burps in the book, but children will probably be delighted by the irreverence. Clifford's brightly colored cartoon illustrations add fun to the story. Especially enchanting are the cows that Clifford imbues with a great deal of personality. Both text and illustration are complimented by creative type choice and setting. This book could be a good resource for discussions about dental care if parents or educators will remind children that, whether drinking soda or milk, it is important to brush and floss regularly to prevent tooth decay!

Marsalis, Wynton and Phil Schaap. *Jazz A-B-Z: An A to Z Collection of Jazz Portraits*. Illustrated by Paul Rogers. Candlewick Press, 2005. ISBN 0763621358. \$24.99. 64 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary realistic poetry; Informational books;

Subject: Jazz musicians--Juvenile poetry; Books--Reviews;

The idea for *Jazz ABZ* came to illustrator Rogers as he watched a performance of "Swan Lake." Realizing that he was not really interested in the ballet, Rogers tried to name a major jazz artist for each letter of the alphabet. As he did this, he began to imagine the musicians mixed up with letter forms. Rogers later wrote down his ideas and asked jazz musician Marsalis to be his collaborator on a book. The result of their work is an engaging and creative text that introduces young readers to some of the greatest jazz artists who have ever lived. Marsalis and Rogers list one major jazz artist for each letter of the alphabet, among them Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, the Modern Jazz Quartet, and Sarah Vaughan.

Each poem contains biographical information for the highlighted performer, and is full of words beginning with the letter of the alphabet. For example, of Charles Mingus, Marsalis writes, "Mingus makes mad, majestic, mind-boggling music." The poem for Nat "King" Cole is written in the style of the nursery rhyme, "Old King Cole." Dizzy Gillespie is honored with a poem that reads like hip-hop. One of the most imaginative poems, written for drummer Abdullah ibn Buhaina, reads like a drum score. The alliteration in each poem makes it challenging to read aloud and shows a great imagination in word usage. The illustrations are done in ink and acrylics, and are bright and in-your-face. The book design itself is reminiscent of the books used to store 78 rpm records. Included at the end of the text are short biographies of each artist written by jazz historian Schaap. The authors have included explanations of each of the 27 poetic forms used, like haiku, sonnet, rondeau, and beat poetry. The book works brilliantly as an introduction to jazz and an introduction to poetic forms. Marsalis is considered the most outstanding jazz artist of his generation. Rogers has worked as an illustrator for 25 years and is the recipient of numerous awards. Schaap is curator of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Lewin, Ted and Betsy. *Top to Bottom Down Under*. Illustrated by Ted and Betsy Lewin. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0688141137. \$15.99. 40 p.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational;

Subject: Australia--description and travel--Juvenile literature; Natural history--Australia--juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

Ted and Betsy Lewin continue their travels to exotic places in this new book which describes and illustrates the unique landscape and animals of Australia. A beguiling beginning paragraph describes a land with furry, poisonous, egg-laying mammals, hopping animals with feet the size of skateboards; swimming birds that live in holes and can't fly. Much attention is paid to the "salties," or salt-water crocodiles, who come up from the sea into the freshwater estuaries to become a danger to man and beast. Salties can run on the land at a rate of 15 miles an hour, so the Lewin's recommend either running 16 miles per hour or zigzagging since crocodiles' tails make back and forth running difficult for them.

The Lewins' illustrations are spare yet evocative--one feels the danger incipient in the presence of a nearly invisible crocodile on the riverbank. The duck-billed platypus is surprisingly ominous and one snake swallowing another seems actually quite normal. "Top to Bottom Down Under" is an excellent introduction for middle grade students to the wonders of Australia.

Jeanne Birdsall. *The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits and a Very Interesting Boy*. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 0375831436. \$15.95. 262 p.

Reviewer: Patricia Castelli

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: Single-parent families--Juvenile fiction; Siblings--Juvenile fiction; Vacations--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The family Penderwick, comprising a widowed father, four daughters, and a dog, pack into the car for an August vacation in the Berkshire Mountains near their home in Cameron, Massachusetts. They finally find their rental cottage behind Arundel, an imposing mansion owned by Mrs. Tifton. Mrs. Tifton is more imposing than her house, but the four Penderwick sisters find her son, Jeffrey, very interesting. Soon they are fast friends intent on finding summer adventures. The oldest Penderwick girl is interested in the handsome caretaker, but the youngest Penderwick likes the caretaker's two rabbits.

The book has the feel of days gone by, though the setting is contemporary. The Penderwick family is loving, while Jeffrey is the unhappy son of an unhappy woman. The Penderwick girls help him find a way to tell his mother what he wants, promising him a brighter future. This book won the 2005 National Book Award for Young People.

Kraske, Robert. *Marooned: The Strange but True Adventures of Alexander Selkirk, the Real Robinson Crusoe*. Illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker. Clarion, 2005. ISBN 0618568433. \$15.00. 120 p.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Selkirk, Alexander, 1676-1721--Juvenile literature; Defoe, Daniel, 1661?-1731--Juvenile literature. Robinson Crusoe--Sources--Juvenile literature; Survival after airplane accidents, shipwrecks, etc.--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Left on a strange island by his obstinate captain, a young sailor must learn to survive aching loneliness and keep himself alive--all without knowing if his ship will ever return, or if the island that he now calls home is inhabited by savage creatures more fierce than the goats he encounters. This is not an account of Robinson Crusoe, but of Defoe's inspiration for his classic character--a Scotsman named Alexander Selkirk.

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is famous, but would not exist were it not for the real-life marooning of Alexander Selkirk. *Marooned* takes Selkirk's experience from first-hand interviews and texts, condenses it, and puts it into a story-like format that young readers can enjoy. It accounts his experience from the time he is first marooned, to his survival and eventual enjoyment of his island home, to his return to civilization and meeting with Defoe. Kraske portrays Selkirk as an honest and level-headed man who, later in life, pined for the peace and solitude he found on his island. The wavering watercolor illustrations are simple and have a wistful feeling to them, as though readers take a trip through time to join Selkirk himself.

Reinhart, Matthew. *The Ark : a pop-up*. Illustrated by Matthew Reinhart. Little Simon, 2005.
ISBN 0689859090. \$16.95. 12 p.

Reviewer: Jessica Farmer

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture books; Toy and movable books;

Subject: Noah's Ark--Juvenile literature; Bible stories--Juvenile literature; Book--

Reviews;

Reinhart has created a spectacular pop-up that would be a grand addition to any collection. He tells the classic Biblical story of Noah, his Ark and how God helped him and his family to survive the flood that covered the world. The engineering and illustrations are truly spectacular. The illustrations have a primitive angular style that is appropriate to the subject and the text. Reinhart uses bright colors in depicting the animals that give the text life and energy. Similar to Robert Sabuda's style, the pop-ups are amazingly constructed and come off the page in a way that will delight and astonish its readers. Like most pop-up books, *The Ark* is delicate and parents of small children should take care and supervise any viewing of it. Overall, this magnificent book will surely become a classic in the movable book genre.

Abrahams, Peter. *Down the Rabbit Hole: An Echo Falls Mystery*. Laura Geringer Books, 2005. ISBN 0060737018. \$16.89. 375 p.

Reviewer: Pat Frade

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Significant Shortcomings

Genre: Detective and mystery stories;

Subject: Murder -- Juvenile fiction; Book--reviews;

Ingrid Levin-Hill, a typical 13 year-old, lives in the quiet little town of Echo Falls, which has no crimes and no excitement. She reads a lot of Sherlock Holmes and imagines herself as a sleuth. One day, as she waits for her parents to pick her up and take her to soccer practice, after her orthodontist appointment, Ingrid makes the decision to walk (so she isn't late for practice). She gets lost and ends up in the worst neighborhood in town where she meets "Cracked-up Katie" (a former movie star) who calls a cab for her. The next day Cracked-up Katie is found murdered. Ingrid had accidentally left her red cleats at Cracked-up Katie's house; she breaks in (to the crime scene) to retrieve her cleats at the same time someone else is breaking in. Ingrid is in over her head with no other choice than to tell a heap of lies and solve the mystery.

It is an average plot. Ingrid is not very bright and continually makes dumb choices. She is irresponsible: she runs around town in the middle of the night, puts herself in danger, and does not confide in her parents. Even for readers who figure out who the murderer must be, the multi-layered story will keep them interested. Ingrid's character is so compelling; readers will want to see how she will get out of trouble.

Okorafor-Mbachu, Nnedi. *Zarah the Windseeker*. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0618340904. \$16.00. 320 p.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Coming of age--Juvenile fiction; Jungles--Juvenile fiction; Best friends--Juvenile fiction; Book-Reviews;

In a society that values style, civilization, and sticking close to what is known, Zahrah and her friend Dari stand out: Zahrah for her dada hair and Dari for his fascination with the Forbidden Greeny Forest. Zahrah soon realizes she is different in more than just her wild, vine-filled hair--one night she discovers that she can float through the air. This ability terrifies Zahrah, who wants only to blend in with others in her hometown. Dari and a mysterious woman from the Dark Market encourage her to practice her talent, but the only place out of view of the superstitious townspeople is the Forbidden Jungle itself! Dari is excited to enter the Jungle and explore while Zahrah clings to the common belief that "if you enter the jungle, even your ghost won't come out." When Dari's life is threatened, Zahrah must overcome her fears and set out for the heart of the jungle to save her best friend.

First and foremost, *Zarah the Windseeker* is a unique story, set on the jungle-covered planet of Ginen where people live inside large plants, grow computers, and spend flower petals as money. In spite of the imaginative setting and story line, there are some flaws in its structure and pacing. The author will sometimes tell rather than describe situations to the reader. The pacing is slow in the middle when Zahrah is lost and scared in the jungle; she spends more time being scared than the reader's sympathies can last. The book picks up again and has a satisfying conclusion, but in parts feels like a draft rather than a finished story.

Lynch, Chris. *Me, dead dad, and Alcatraz*. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0060597097. \$15.99.
240 pp.

Reviewer: Lara M. Ackerman

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Humorous stories; Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Uncles--Juvenile fiction; Self-perception--Juvenile fiction; Family problems-- Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Following up on characters introduced in *Slot Machine* and *Extreme Elvin*, this book continues the account of fourteen-year-old Elvin Bishop and his dryly predictable life with two semi-supportive friends, a mother, a dog, and a tuba for company. So far, this arrangement has suited him fine -- as he doesn't expect too much out of life, that is. And, prudently enough, Elvin hasn't -- until his uncle, who was supposed to have died in a plane crash, shows up on the living room couch and starts challenging the status quo. Readers will cringe and chuckle as Elvin cannon-balls his way through the typical adolescent male experience: identity crisis, puberty, weight issues, and just about everything else. Lynch's pell-mell wordplay brings Elvin's struggles to life as he maneuvers around obstacles both in and out of his head. While at times this book is painfully honest about some struggles being easier to overlook than to overcome, readers-- especially those in Elvin's shoes--will enjoy this mostly optimistic glimpse into the adolescent experience.

Wyatt, Leslie J. *Poor Is Just a Starting Place*. Holiday House, 2005. ISBN 0823418847. \$16.95. 196 pp.

Reviewer: Sarah Wanlass

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Depressions 1929--Juvenile fiction; Poverty--Juvenile fiction; Family life--Kentucky--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

At a glance, *Poor Is Just a Starting Place* appears to be another doleful tale about life during the Great Depression. Instead, it is a story of family and friendship, joy and despair, hard work and determination.

Artesia May Wilson, or "Artie", is twelve years old. She goes to school (when she is not helping out on the family farm) in a one-room schoolhouse; she comes home to a small cottage in the hills of central Kentucky, just down the street from Sarah Jane Bratcher's large, white, comfortable home. Life is hard work and Artie hopes for a future far beyond the harsh realities of farm life and a dysfunctional family. She longs to finish her schooling one day and go to college. This prospect in mind, Artie enters a state-wide essay contest with a twenty-five-dollar savings bond offered for the first place winner; the topic: heritage. As she contemplates her family's strength, we see a change in the way she views her life experiences. As Artie struggles to understand her family and reconcile her frustration with an overbearing father, push-over mother, and poor circumstances, readers will see her begin to understand the value of determination, persistence, and humility.

Wyatt's writing is very descriptive; she paints a detailed picture of life for poor, backwoods, farming families during the financial and agricultural disasters of the late-twenties and early-thirties. There is plenty of dialogue, through which readers become familiar with the vernacular of Artie and her small-town Kentucky clan. *Poor Is Just a Starting Place* is a good read that gives insights into the low quality of life for many during the Great Depression, yet uplifts readers with a theme of hope for the future.

Banks, Lynne Reid. *Tiger, Tiger*. Delacorte, 2005. ISBN 0385732406. \$15.95. 195 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical Fiction;

Subject: Tigers--Juvenile fiction; Rome--Juvenile fiction; Animals, treatment-- Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Aurelia is the daughter of the Emperor of Rome and Boots is her pet tiger. The emperor is proud of the way his young daughter handles the beautiful beast without fear. Julius, the tiger's handsome young handler, knows that even though Boots has had his fangs removed and wears leather covers on his claws he is still a wild beast and potentially dangerous to the young princess. He knows that he must be ever vigilant while Boots and Aurelia are together to keep the princess safe. Yet that is not the only reason he watches the beautiful princess. When Julius recognizes the growing affection between Aurelia and her younger cousin Marcus, he begins to feel jealous. He lets his guard down just long enough for the cousins to play a "harmless" trick on him. When Aurelia's and Marcus' trick goes terribly wrong, Julius is sentenced to face Boots' fierce brother, Brute, in the Coliseum.

This is the latest in a recent trend of books set in Imperial Rome. Like the Roman Mysteries series by Caroline Lawrence (e.g. *Thieves of Ostia*, Puffin 2004) it includes interesting historical detail about life as a Roman aristocrat. This book also includes graphic descriptions of the brutality of the Roman gladiatorial games. One passage describes the attack of the vicious tiger, Brute, "One (of the slaves) had his stomach ripped open and its contents spilled onto the sand...the disemboweled one was screaming" (p 90-91). This scene may be too violent for some young readers. Although this scene is graphic it is not gratuitous. The cruelty of the games plays an important part in the plot and helps to motivate the relationships between the characters in the story. The main characters, Aurelia, Julius, the Emperor and Marcus, are all fully developed and believable. The two tigers, which are also important characters, are intelligent but retain their animal nature. Banks weaves the human and animal characters into an interesting and plausible plot that leaves the reader pondering the true meaning and value of freedom.

Crutcher, Chris. *The Sledding Hill*. Greenwillow, 2005. ISBN 0060502436.
\$15.99. 240 p.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Censorship--Juvenile Fiction; Death--Juvenile Fiction; Book--Reviews;

Eddie Profitt loses his father and his best friend Billy in the same terrible year, so he stops speaking. Luckily Billy is still hanging around in the sweet, pain-free, very cool place where we go after we die. He postpones exploring the galaxies to help Eddie learn to live again. Billy helps Eddie stand up to a fundamentalist English teacher/pastor who wants to ban a book which is required reading in his school's "Really Modern Literature" class.

Eddie and Billy are deeply sympathetic, well-developed characters--funny, bright, thoughtful, and intelligent. One comes to care very deeply for both of them--Eddie, in particular--during the course of the narrative. Unfortunately, the characters Crutcher doesn't like in this story are not much more than cardboard cutouts dancing around on popsicle sticks in a tediously predictable puppet show: Mr. Tarter lives up to his name by tormenting his students physically and spiritually; Eddie's mom has so little personality she is practically transparent; a self-righteous jock is also the leader of the Christian Student association.

The Sledding Hill could have been an extraordinary consideration of the difficulties of nurturing young people without denying them knowledge by encouraging them to read widely and outside what may be comfortable for them or their parents. Instead, we have two marvelous characters in a tract that equates all conservative religious belief with abuse and weakness. Crutcher's appearance as a character in his own book, rather than being clever, comes across as condescending and almost childish: "See--I can write a controversial book without bad language, sex, or violence. Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah-nah." Opportunity lost.

Slonim, David. *He Came with the Couch*. Illustrated by David Slonim. Chronicle, 2005. ISBN 0811844307. \$15.95. 32 p.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: All

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture book; Humorous stories;

Subject: Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Sofas--Juvenile fiction; Furniture--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Slonim's combination of whimsical oil illustrations and a short, playful story is irresistibly fun. A family buying a new couch from a rummage sale gets saddled with its "tenant"--a blue-skinned, yellow-nosed, purple-haired fellow referred to as "he." First they try to get rid of him, they try again, and finally they decide to get used to him. When the daughter in the family is in danger, they realize he might be good to have around after all.

This story is very short and the illustrations are vital to the story, making it suitable for adults to read with young children. The text is written from the straight-forward perspective of the family's daughter. Readers will laugh out loud when they compare her simple statement that her family "needed a new couch" with the illustrated fact of what happened to the old couch. The gently zany humor is appealing and the character that comes with the couch may remind the reader of a Muppet. A delight for readers of all ages.