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Wallace, Nancy Elizabeth. *Fly, Monarch, Fly*. Illustrated by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace. Marshall Cavendish Corp, 2008. ISBN 9780761454250. \$16.99. 40 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture books;

Subject: Monarch butterfly--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

The awe-inspiring life cycle of the Monarch butterfly will capture the attention of young readers in this picture book. Mom and Dad bunny and their children, Minna and Pip, are going to Butterfly Place. There, Bert, the Butterfly Man, escorts them through the nature reserve while Bert pulls many interesting pictures out of his big blue bag and explains them. The rabbits learn what happens in the egg, larva, pupa, and adult stages of a Monarch butterfly's life.

Wallace's illustrations are vibrantly colored and very detailed. Wallace uniquely uses origami and paper cut illustrations to show the metamorphosis of this beautiful butterfly. Included within the text are funny jokes about butterflies, a tongue-twister, a recipe for butterfly sandwiches, instructions on how to make a Monarch magnet, and instructions on how to plant a butterfly garden.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2009)

Kudlinski, Kathleen V. *Boy, Were We Wrong About the Universe*. Illustrated by John Rocco. Dutton Children's Books, 2008. ISBN 9780525469797. \$15.99. 32 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational books; Picture books;

Subject: Solar system--Juvenile literature; Errors, Scientific--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

The way that humans have understood the Earth and the solar system surrounding it has changed drastically over time. In the beginning, we thought the world was flat and that it was the center of the universe, but since then we have learned differently. Over time, we have learned many things about the solar system, including information about other planets, comets, gravity, and space travel. From all that we have learned in the past, one key thing that we are continually learning is that there is always more to be discovered and understood.

Boy, Were We Wrong About the Solar System is a witty approach to explain all that scientists have found out about the solar system over time. It explains what used to be common beliefs and then expounds on how these ideas have changed. The text is accompanied by vivid, bright pictures that enhance the text. One flaw is that the information often lacks detail. For example, Newton is referred to as, "Another scientist [who] watched an apple fall." Although there is a time line with names and dates included at the end, this book would not be an adequate source for finding detailed information. However, it would be a good introduction for a more detailed study of the solar system.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Stuart, Ellen. *Beauty and the Beast*. New Plays for Children, 1964. ISBN NA. Contact publisher regarding price. 50 p.

Reviewer: Mark Bell

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary, Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Significant shortcomings

Genre: Historical plays; Fantasy plays; Fairy tale plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Fairy Tale--Juvenile drama; Love--Juvenile drama; Monsters--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Love requires sacrifice and overlooking flaws.

Production Requirements: A healthy amount of scene changes, as well as use of sound effects and props, are required. Elaborate period costumes and make-up for the Beast are also required.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 35–45 min

Characters: 10+

Cast: Adults and/or children could perform the roles adequately. 6+ male characters and 3+ female (6 and 3 of each for sure the extras of either depends on the number of servants the beast has).

Time Period: Up to interpretation as with most fairy tales; most likely anywhere from Tudor through Restoration.

The Count has invested a fortune in a ship and leaves his home to check on its fate. He discovers the ship is lost. As he returns home, the Count loses his way and discovers the Beast's castle. While there he eats and takes a rose from the garden, which the Beast equates to stealing (a hanging offense). Beauty agrees to take the Count's place and live at the castle of the Beast, who treats her exceptionally well. The Beast lets her return home to visit her family and when she returns he's nearly dead. She agrees to marry him; the curse that was on him is then broken, and they live happily ever after.

This version of *Beauty and the Beast* has both selling and detracting points. Unfortunately, any show dealing with this subject will be judged against the Disney film and stage show. Overall this play is decent. The characters are a little flat, and there is frequent repetition of lines as if the playwright hoped this would improve reception. Some inconsistencies exist in the plot, for example, a page and a half after the Beast threatens to hang Beauty's father, he tells her that all he wants in to make her happy. While making another happy is a noble goal, the Beast does so by throwing money at her, which may not be the message parents or teachers want to communicate to children in the audience. To its credit, this show does try to do some fairly brave things in the way it is staged. The Beast himself is on stage for the better part of the production, so his makeup needs to be convincing but quick to change at the end of the show. A page-boy/narrator/troubadour is supposed to strum and play the guitar and sing verse before each scene—an interesting device not usually found in children's plays.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Hague, Michael. *Where Fairies Dance*. Illustrated by Michael Hague. Harper Collins, 2004. ISBN 9780061468681. \$16.99. 37 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fantasy poetry; Poetry; Fairy poetry;

Subject: Fairies--Juvenile poetry; Books--Reviews;

Where Fairies Dance is a collection of thirteen fairy poems by various authors selected and illustrated by Michael Hague. In the author's note Hague explains that on a camping trip with his parents when he was young, he saw a little man with a red mushroom hat run through the forest. In contrast to his father's disbelief, his mother responded, "Lucky you!" It is with this belief in the reality of life in other time and space dimensions, that Hague brings to life these poems by Allingham, Shakespeare, Fyleman, DeLaMare, Worth, Milton, Seton, O'Neill, and Wynne. Known for his pen and ink, watercolor and colored pencil illustrations, Hague's fairy drawings include vibrantly colored and carefully detailed flower buds, blossoms, seeds, vines, butterfly and dragonfly wings, animals, and (of course) fairies and elves.

This selection would be a nice addition for read-aloud poetry-time at home and at school. The story-teller could also turn the readers' attention to details by asking: "Find the fairy Cinderella.", "What is the fairy on the front cover standing on?", "Where is the sleeping fairy mer-baby?" Individual readers will enjoy reading the poems and looking at each page spread's illustration.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Dodge, Abigail Johnson. *Around the World Cookbook*. DK Publishing, 2008. ISBN 9780756637446. \$19.99. 128 p.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Cookery, International--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Multicultural cookbooks are common in children's literature, but this is one of the few directed at a younger audience. The layout is bright and lively, almost to the point of being busy. The author includes a guide to using the book, with a symbol legend and an explanation of the recipes' layouts. Many photos and maps are included, and the recipes are organized by region-of-origin. The most impressive part of the book is its detailed sections on food preparation. There are the usual glossaries of terms and equipment, but there is also a section dedicated to proper ingredient handling and basic knife skills. The standard warnings regarding sharp or hot implements and adult supervision are present, but the text refreshingly assumes the reader will be a full participant in all aspects of the cooking. The index included at the end makes finding a particular region or type of recipe simple. While relatively short compared to other multicultural cookbooks, this would make a wonderful addition to a home, school, or public library.

Volume 29, no.2 (November/December 2008)

Madison, Alan. *100 Days and 99 Nights*. Illustrated by Julia Denos. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2008. ISBN 9780316113540. \$14.99. 137 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction;

Subject: Family Life--Virginia--Fiction; Toys--Fiction; Children of military personnel--Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Seven-year-old Esmerelde Swishback McCarther (Esme), who is three years older than her brother Isaac (Ike), loves stuffed animals. Every morning before she leaves for school, Esme arranges her stuffed animals in alphabetical order on her bed. The story is told from Esme's point of view, and from her description the reader meets her great parents. Following a legacy of news reporters, Esme's mother is a writer for the monthly military newsletter, and Esme's father is a sergeant in the U.S. Army. The McCarther family, along with their pets (a goldfish, a dog, and a lizard), has accompanied their father on his tours of duty in Korea, Kenya, Germany, and now Alexandria, Virginia.

The home life of the McCarthers centers around the kitchen "where," Esme explains, "we do all our most excellent cooking and all our most serious talking." On school days, the family follows a precise morning routine, and Saturdays begin by making "tasty top-dog pancakes" from an old family recipe. The McCarthers love to spend time together, delight over the sounds and meaning of words, and even invent words, such as "fustilugs". Everything is going well until "that Saturday" when Esme's father tells his family that he has to go away for a tour of duty that will keep him away for 100 days and 99 nights. After their father leaves, the weekday routine disappears and they fail at their attempts to make pancakes on Saturday morning, making a trip to the usually shunned Pancake Palace necessary. Despite their challenges, this family copes with being separated while the father goes to war. And it has a happy ending!

100 Days and 99 Nights is a great read-aloud selection. It is a refreshing read about a family with parents actively involved in parenting. There are still the usual brother-sister squabbles, but during the absence of their father, Ike and Esme accept more responsibilities and become each others' friend and protector. This novel emphasizes the importance of a father's role in the home, of using words and not fists to solve problems, and highlights the significance of life's rules and routines. Madison's descriptive narrative captures Esme's positive, inquisitive, and enlightening point of view, describing the weather as "ice-cream cold" and "oatmeal hot," and father's tour of duty as going by at a "hippo's clumping pace." The illustrations of the family and stuffed animals by Denos are perfect, and also included is "August Aloysius McCarther III's Top Secret Rules [recipe] for Top-Dog Tasty Pancakes."

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Warner, Sally. *It's Only Temporary*. Illustrated by Warner, Sally. Viking, 2008. ISBN 9780670061112. \$15.99. 182 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Middle schools--Juvenile fiction; Friendship--Juvenile fiction; Bullying--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Being part of a family and community is complicated, and no one knows this better than Skye McPhee. Her brother Scott used to be her best friend. Now they are teenagers, and he was recently in a bad car accident that was his fault. The accident has turned their family upside down. Her parents decide that Skye should go live with her grandmother in California until Scott is better. The whole time Skye is in California, she gets through tough situations by telling herself that "it's only temporary." However, Skye learns that most things in life are temporary, and life is about finding the joy in the relationships and time that is available. She learns to make new friends, to stand up for herself against bullies, and to be understanding of others.

It's Only Temporary is a somber story with a comical feel. There are many difficult situations that Skye must face, but her quirky personality keeps the narrative feeling hopeful. Qualities similar to *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh are evident throughout this book, and both books share similar situations. Both girls pour their every thought and feeling into a journal that they would prefer to remain hidden from the world, but which someone comes to be public. *It's Only Temporary* is an honest look at how a girl feels about the situations she must face in her life, and it shows how time can teach someone to be graceful in their actions and reactions.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Mayer, Lauren. *Cool Suit*. Meriwether Publishing Ltd, 2002. ISBN NA. Contact publisher regarding price. 30 p.

Reviewer: Mark Bell

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Cannot recommend

Genre: Musicals; Fairy tale plays; Humorous plays;

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Peer pressure--Juvenile drama; Fairy tales--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Don't follow the crowd; think for yourself.

Production Requirements: The stage can be a simple/black box. All costume pieces should come from a single large trunk in the center of the stage. The play is a musical requiring a sound system/boom box if not full accompaniment.

Acts: 1

Run Time: 25–45 min (Song lengths unknown)

Characters: 6+

Cast: One Male and One Female required, the rest are universal

Time Period: Contemporary

An imbecilic emperor is supposed to be ruling a nation but is instead obsessed with clothing. Rebels plot to discredit and humiliate him by convincing him to hold a parade to show off a new set of clothes they make. Only the smartest and best people in the land can see these clothes. The emperor falls for it, walking about the town nearly naked (save for his crown and teddy bear print boxers). He flees the country once a child points out how he's wearing almost nothing at all.

This version of Hans Christenson's classic tale has a positive theme; however, compared to the masterful original, this play falls short. There is some low brow humor that detracts from its appropriateness in all settings, but overall there is little to be offended about, as far as content. To its credit, this piece could be performed with ease: the music is provided so with a group of actors, a place to perform, and an electrical outlet, the show can go on.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Funke, Cornelia. *Igraine the Brave*. Illustrated by Cornelia Funke. Chicken House, 2007. ISBN 9780439903790. \$16.99. 212 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Knights and knighthood--Juvenile fiction; Magic--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Igraine comes from a magical family, but she wants to change things the "old fashioned way" as a knight. Her family thinks it is unusual that she would not want to follow in their footsteps as a magician, especially because she is a girl. However, her family loves and supports her, which becomes essential when an evil, although not incredibly skilled, magician from another kingdom comes to take away their magic singing books. The evil magician could not have shown up at a worse time, since Igraine's parents have accidentally turned themselves into pigs and cannot help protect the castle. Igraine and her brother must learn to use their talents in a predicament to save their parents, the castle, and the singing books. Through it all, Igraine earns her name as a knight-- Igraine the Brave.

Igraine the Brave is an entertaining story for pre-teens and young teenagers. The novel's theme focuses on believing in one's self and leaning on friends and family in times of need. Funke does an exceptional job in keeping the reader interested in what will happen with Igraine next, and through Igraine, she shows how challenges can be handled in a confident, capable manner.

Volume 29, no.2 (November/December 2008)

Grace, N.B. *Disney's High School Musical: Stories from East High #4: Crunch Time*. Spotlight, 2009. ISBN 9781599615196. \$4.99. 126 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: High school--Juvenile fiction; SAT testing--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Senior year of high school is always a stressful time; the SAT, college applications, and choices on what to study must be seriously considered. As they try to enjoy their last year together in high school, Troy, Gabriella, Sharpay, and the rest of the High School Musical cast must find a way to balance academics with extra curricular activities. Gabriella is studying to do her best on the SAT while at the same time tutoring other students. Sharpay is learning to play the part of a "geek" to learn how to study. And Troy, who has always been so sure of what the future holds for him, is having second thoughts about what to do for college and a career. Together, these friends learn that if they work hard they will be successful in whatever they choose to do.

This story is in an easy chapter book format that uses the well known characters of *High School Musical* as its focus. Although *Crunch Time* deals with the SAT and preparing for college, its simple writing and tone are geared toward a younger audience. *Crunch Time* is one of five short chapter books based loosely on the *High School Musical* movies from the Disney Channel.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Grab, Daphne. *Alive and Well in Prague, New York*. HarperTeen, 2008. ISBN 9780061256707. \$16.99. 247 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Parkinson's disease--Juvenile fiction; Fathers and daughters--Juvenile fiction; High school--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Matisse Osgood grew up in New York City, and she loves it there! However, after her father learns that he has Parkinson's Disease, and his condition starts to worsen, her parents decide that a slower life in the country might be more appropriate for their family. They move to Prague, New York, but things are not quite as simple as they hoped. Matisse, along with her parents, tries to ignore the changes that have come into her life. It becomes clear, that ignoring the situation is not effective, and so each member of the family finds his/her own way of coping. Matisse learns that emotions must be understood rather than discarded and how to truly be happy instead of wearing a façade to cope with difficult changes.

Alive and Well in Prague, New York is a poignant story about the realities of life. The writing is simple and easy to follow. The book is told only from Matisse's point of view, but each of the characters is well developed and represented. Parts of the story seem to drag as Matisse works through her problems, but the foreshadowing and hope of resolution keep the plot flowing. This is an uplifting example for adolescents of how to deal with sickness, moving to a new place, and discovering one's self.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Grant, Michael. *Gone*. HarperTeen, 2008. ISBN 9780061448768. \$17.99. 558 p.

Reviewer: Larysa Bordner

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Significant shortcomings

Genre: Adventure stories; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Supernatural--Juvenile fiction; Good and evil--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The whole world is turned upside down when everyone fifteen years old and older in Perdido Beach, California suddenly disappears. They are there one minute, and gone the next. If that is not strange enough, the teenagers, children, and animals who are still around develop paranormal powers. The teenagers struggle to kept things operating as much as they can, but not everyone has the same ideas about how this should be done, and chaos breaks out. Meanwhile, everyone is wondering if they will be the next to disappear and what exactly disappearing entails--the world they knew has disappeared with the adults and may never be coming back.

Gone is a frustrating novel with no clear conclusion since Grant intends to write a sequel. The story jumps around and is told from a different person's perspective every couple of pages, leaving the reader feeling perplexed and overwhelmed. Violence is a common theme throughout the story giving it a sinister feeling. Some characters step-up to the challenge of finding a solution, while other characters give an excellent example of what not to do in a time of crisis. Even the ending of the book does not leave a hopeful mood for what will happen to the characters next, and the reader is left feeling torn between following the series to see if things ever improve or tossing the book aside along with any sequels that might come next.

Volume 29, no. 2 (November/December 2008)

Coburn, Ann. *Alex and the Warrior*. Oberon Books Ltd., 2004. ISBN 1840025026. \$14.95. 78 p.

Reviewer: Mark Bell

Reading Level: All

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas plays; Plays; Humorous plays; Adventure plays

Subject: Drama--Reviews; Christmas--Juvenile drama; Video Games; Adventure--Juvenile drama;

Theme: Christmas is where family is.

Production Requirements: The requirements for this play are fairly complicated. The monsters and the warrior require many costume changes/pieces as well as weapons, armor etc. A full body costume for the role of the cat and a fair amount of scene changes may take considerable creativity from the designers or substantial audience imagination. Music and sound effects are also needed.

Acts: 2

Run Time: 55–75 min

Characters: 5+

Cast: 1 adult/late teen male, 1 8-12 old male, 1 female 12+, 2+ universals

Time Period: Contemporary

Young Alex is getting ready to enjoy Christmas when he learns his grandfather has been sent to the hospital. Alex hates hospitals because, as is revealed later in the play, his father went to one and died. Alex wishes that a video game character, "The Warrior", could leave the game and help him save his grandfather from the hospital. His wish is granted, and the two of them have an adventure in the town, as the warrior learns about the real world and the value of love. Two of the game's monsters follow the warrior and hunt him throughout the play. Alex realizes the best way to have a good Christmas would be to take it to his grandfather, and the only way he and his family will be safe is to wish the warrior and the monsters back into the video game.

In *Alex and the Warrior*, the title characters go on an adventure in a non-descript English town. The warrior begins the story as a stereotypical "super hero" but is revealed to be much more as the story progresses. He and Alex develop an interesting dual mentoring relationship. The Warrior becomes a father figure for Alex, and Alex becomes a mentor to the Warrior as he explains the world to him.

The production requirements can be somewhat challenging. The costumes for the Warrior and the Skarg may be difficult. The Warrior is armed and armored, while the Skarg transform from human, to insects, to cats, etc. Design creativity and imagination are necessary to pull this off. Scene changes might also be a problem. There are changes from a little boy's bedroom, to a sewer, an ice skating pond, and more. The script calls for using the television screen the Warrior and Skarg come through as a transition from place to place, so different backdrops might be all that is needed to create the scene changes.

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