



2009

Full Issue

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Wood, David. *Babe, the Sheep-Pig*. Samuel French, 1997. ISBN 0573051151. \$9.95 / script; \$75 / performance fee. 51 p.

Reviewer: Rebeca Wallin

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool, Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Plays; Humorous plays; Fantasy plays;

Subject: Swine--Juvenile drama; Sheep dog trials--Juvenile drama; Children's plays, English; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: Manners matter

Production Requirements: Sound

Acts: 2

Run Time: 1 hour

Characters: 43

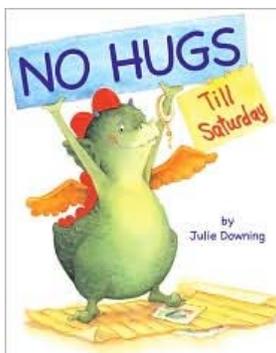
Cast: 10 actors, at least 3 female

Time Period: Present day

The plot for this charming play follows the basic structure of the classic children's book by Dick King-Smith. Farmer Hogget, a sheep farmer, wins a pig at a county fair. He takes it home where his wife plans to fatten it up for Christmas dinner. The sheep-dog Fly adopts the pig, Babe. Eventually Fly convinces Mrs. Hogget to train Babe to be a sheep-pig. Babe excels as a sheep-pig, especially because he speaks politely to the sheep. In the course of the play, the pig saves the sheep from some sheep-rustlers and then some worrier-dogs. In the climax Babe wins the Grand Challenge Sheep-Dog Trials.

This play is extremely well written. The action is quick moving and will keep the attention of young and old audiences alike. The dialogue is free-flowing and easy. Wood successfully captures the animals' characters through interesting speech patterns, especially with the sheep, making it seem perfectly natural that the animals would be speaking. The characters are well developed and interesting. A good mix of humor and heart.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Downing, Julie. *No Hugs Till Saturday*. Illustrated by Julie Downing. Clarion, 2008. ISBN 9780618910786. \$16.00. 31 p.

Reviewer: Meriam Bates

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool, Primary

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Picture books; Fiction; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Hugging--Juvenile fiction; Mothers and sons--Juvenile fiction; Week -- Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Every morning, first thing, Felix gives his mama a special hug. "Do you want a soft snuggle, a super squeeze, or a monster mash?" he asks her. However, when Felix disobeys and gets his toy taken away until "tomorrow," he decides to punish his mama. He declares that there will be, "No hugs till Saturday." After a while, Felix begins to wonder how many days there are until Saturday. When his mama tells him there are six whole days left, he changes the ban on hugs until just Friday, but it still seems like a long time away. When Felix goes to bed, he realizes that he will have to sleep all night long without a hug. He decides to end the "No Hugs" ban and give his mama a goodnight hug; then he gives her six more, one for every day of the week, just to be safe.

Downing's bright water color and colored pencil illustrations add humor and additional insights to the text. Background details, such as little handprints at the bottom corner of a wall, help give the book a three-dimensional feel, but Downing also keeps the illustrations simple enough to focus young readers on the story's action. The repetition of the days of the week helps young children learn the names without distracting from the storyline. Parents and children will laugh together as they read about Felix and his special hugs.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Dorman, Brandon. *Santa's Stowaway*. Illustrated by Brandon Dorman. Candlewick Press, 2009. ISBN 9780061351884. \$16.99. 32 p.

Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Christmas stories;

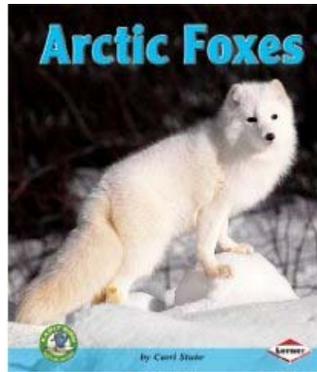
Subject: Christmas--Juvenile fiction; Elves--Juvenile fiction; Santa Claus--Juvenile fiction;

Books--Reviews;

Sam, Santa's newest elf, stows away in the sleigh to discover what makes Christmas special. After hiding under the seat, Sam creeps into Santa's bag and swooshes down the chimney to watch Santa fill stockings and put presents under a tree. When a young girl appears in the doorway, Santa takes gives the doll that Sam has made to the smiling child. As the reindeer turn toward home, Santa asks Sam if he has found his answer. Sam thinks about the hard work and love put into the toys and the girl's smile, and he knows.

Dorman's warm and richly colored digital illustrations enliven the story. The double-page spread of the living room that Sam and Santa visit foreshadows the encounter with the little girl by revealing her shadow cast from the doorway. Abundant details--full moon, stars, bedecked reindeer, cookies and milk, snow-encrusted windows, candlelight, a nativity scene, a cherry-cheeked doll, and matching missing buttons on the doll's dress and the girl's nightgown--give young readers ample Christmas eye-candle to encourage return visits to the story.

Volume 30, no.1 (September/October 2009)



Stuhr, Carri. *Arctic Foxes*. Lerner, 2009. ISBN 9780822594321. \$26.60. 48 p.

Reviewer: Meriam Bates

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

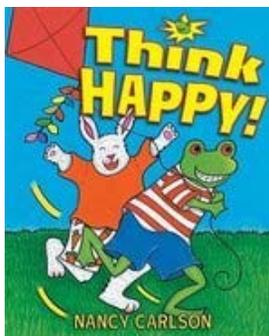
Genre: Informational books; Picture books;

Subject: Arctic fox--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

The Arctic fox lives in the cold and snowy arctic, at the top of the world. In the winter, a heavy white coat protects it from the cold and helps it blend in with the snow. In summer, the fox grows a cooler gray coat so that it blends in with the barren, rocky landscape. Arctic foxes are members of the dog family: they have strong teeth, good hearing, and a good sense of smell. This book also discusses how arctic foxes find food, live in groups, and live with danger.

The information in this book is straightforward and easy to understand, but it still uses specific terms and introduces new vocabulary words. In the back of the book there is an index containing additional print and internet resources. The only problem in this book is the incongruity between the photographs and text. However, these incongruities will probably not be noticeable to a young audience. This book, as well as others in the Early Bird Nature Book series, is great for children who love either looking at pictures of animals or discovering new facts about them.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Carlson, Nancy. *Think Happy*. Illustrated by Carlson, Nancy. Carolrhoda Books, 2009. ISBN 9780822589402. \$13.22. 32 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Toddler, Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

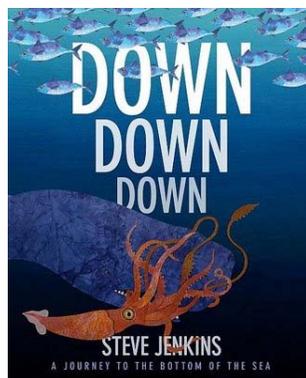
Genre: Informational books; Picture books;

Subject: Happiness--Juvenile literature; Conduct of life--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews.;

Sometimes it is difficult to cheer oneself up when life seems blue. In Carlson's book, *Think Happy*, brightly illustrated characters outline a few ways to self soothe and think positive. Stylized pigs, rabbits, and frogs model everything from asking for help to hosting a party. Not only do the characters in the book make themselves happy, but they make those around them happy as well.

Carlson has written and illustrated nearly 50 children's books. While she has published some narrative works, her major emphasis is books with moral and mental-health related themes. Her expertise shines through in this piece as she hits upon the major elements of self soothing and coping in bright, short sentences. An excellent book for young children and emerging readers, this book teaches valuable life skills that will benefit children for years to come, and it presents them in an attractive way. The book has a loose and familiar style, created entirely in marker, with bold block letters in varying fonts. One item to be careful of is the advice that you can build happiness by looking yourself in the mirror and saying you are "cool." While self-assertion and value are beneficial, non-achievement oriented praise is discouraged by many child psychologists. It should be noted that Carlson includes images of characters finding faith at religious meetings, which may offend secular readers.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Jenkins, Steve. *Down, Down, Down: A Journey to the Bottom of the Sea*. Illustrated by Steve Jenkins. Houghton Mifflin, 2009. ISBN 9780618966363. \$17.00. 40 p.

Reviewer: Ruth-Anne Brown

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Excellent

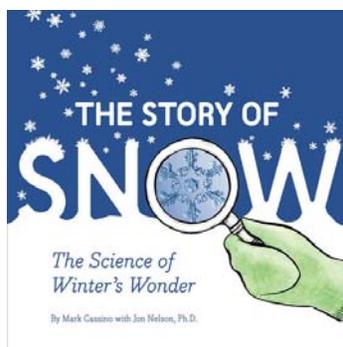
Genre: Picture books; Informational books;

Subject: Marine animals--Juvenile fiction; Deep-sea animals--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

If you were at the deepest part of the sea, there would be seven miles of water over your head. This cool fact is one of many found in Jenkins' latest picture book about the ocean and the creatures that live in it. The book begins by showing the vastness of the earth's water from an outer space view. In comparison, it concludes with a close up look at the bottom of the deep ocean floor, which can only be described as a layer of "ooze." Jenkins includes information about animals, from the world's largest fish, the whale shark, to small krill that travel in schools called swarms. Deep sea shrimp living in the pitch black water will defend themselves by squirting "bright sticky goo" into the face of an attacker. Some hunting animals have stomachs that can stretch so much that they can eat an animal larger than they are! The fascinating and often dark habitats of sea animals are depicted through cut and torn paper collage pictures.

Young children will like this book for the detailed texture of the lifelike art. Older children will enjoy the facts about the unusual animals and their ways to survive. Additional pages at the end of the book provide more information on each animal, including a scale comparing the animal to a human hand or human body. Each page shows the depth and temperature of the water where those particular animals live. All readers will enjoy this view of the wet, and often dangerous, life of a fish.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Cassino, Mark and John Nelson. *The Story of Snow: The Science of Winter's Wonder*. Illustrated by Nora Aoyagi. Chronicle Books, 2009. ISBN 9780811868662. \$11.55. 33 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Preschool, Primary

Rating: Outstanding

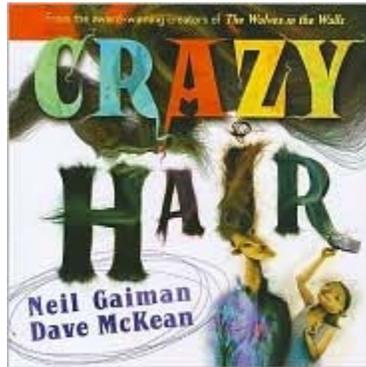
Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Snowflakes; Books--Reviews;

The Story of Snow uses bright language and illustrations to follow a vibrant life story from birth to death. It, however, is not a fairytale. This nonfiction book follows the growth, formation, and eventual demise of frozen ice crystals. Using watercolor, ink, and highly magnified photographs, Cassino works with Nelson, a professor of meteorology, to bring the enchanting, and very scientific, world of snow to an elementary school audience. Beginning with cold, gray clouds, continuing through various possible formations, and ending with a slowly melting flake on a mitten, the paintings and photographs grab the attention of the reader. The print is large, and sparse, considering the depth of material covered. Thankfully, Cassino and Nelson allow their finely-detailed photographs to speak for themselves.

The large images and crisp design of the book should appeal to elementary school children of all ages. *The Story of Snow* can be a valuable tool for teachers in explaining the water cycle, the formation of elements, weather, crystal formation, or even the value of nonfiction. This book stands out amongst other nonfiction of its type due to its informative nature, coupled with a format and illustrations as appealing as a fairytale.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Gaiman, Neil. *Crazy hair*. Illustrated by Dave McKean. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 9780060579081. \$18.99. 40 p. pp.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

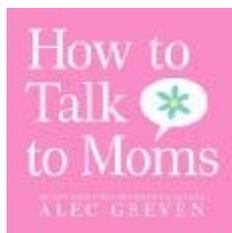
Genre: Humorous stories; Picture books;

Subject: Stories in rhyme--Juvenile literature; Hair--Juvenile literature; Humorous stories--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Young Bonnie points out the “crazy hair” of the man standing next to her - and the man defends himself and explains just how crazy his hair really is. Parrots, pirates, balloons, carnivals, explorers, and wild tigers all roam through his crazy hair - and then Bonnie attempts the unthinkable: she tries combing the crazy hair.

As with *The Day I Swapped by Dad for Two Goldfish*, McKean and Gaiman make a great team. McKean's illustrations are wild and otherworldly. They may appear scary to younger readers with their strange angles and odd colors, but mostly these pictures will fascinate. McKean uses actual hair, pencil, paint, computer graphics, and just about everything in between, resulting in richly textured illustrations readers might fall into. Gaiman's text is simple and wonderfully repetitive, creating a zany Seuss-like rhyme that is satisfying to read aloud.

Volume 30, no.1 (September/October 2009)



Greven, Alec. *How to Talk to Moms*. Illustrated by Kei Acedera. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 9780061710018. \$9.99. 47 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Informational;

Subject: Mothers--Juvenile literature; Mothers--Psychology--Juvenile literature; Mother and child--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

The ten-year old Casanova who taught readers all they needed to know about girls has more wisdom to share. This time his subject is that older woman in a boy's life--his mom. Although the title is *How to Talk to Moms*, there are fewer specific conversation points in this piece than Greven's first. It is also more generic and less wittily original. Nonetheless, there are still a few valuable techniques, such as learning how to avoid "the backfire" when trying to get out of chores. This book works well as a mother-son read along or as a novelty gift for mom. She will especially love the final chapter, "Why I Love My Mom," which praises moms for their unconditional love and devotion.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



DiCamillo, Kate. *The Magician's Elephant*. Illustrated by Yoko Tanaka. Candlewick, 2009. ISBN 9780763644109. \$16.99. 201 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Missing children--Juvenile fiction; Elephants--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

In order to enjoy this book, the reader must suspend all desire for realism. The events of the story are like the events of an old folktale. Just as one does not ask why the miller has a talking cat in the story of *Puss in Boots*, in this story the reader cannot wonder for too long how an elephant could drop out of the air during a magic show. It just does, and the story goes on from there. The elephant's arrival sparks a series of events surrounding a boy searching for his long-lost sister. Other characters are searching for things too: the police inspector is looking for the answer to "what if?", the stone carver is looking for a reason to stop laughing, and the elephant is looking for a way home. As in *The Tale of Despereaux*, all the yearnings are resolved through the compassion and courage of the main character.

DiCamillo weaves this story like a tapestry, with seemingly unconnected events coming together in the end. The characters are not real people; they are emotions incarnate, symbolizing secret desires of the human heart. DiCamillo's language lulls the reader into a dream-like state with its poetic rhythm and even tempo. Tanka's misty, surreal illustrations match the tone and mood of the book. This is a good book for a young readers' circle because DiCamillo gives her audience much to discuss and ponder.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Sky Magic*. Illustrated by Mariusz Stawarski. Dutton Children's Books, 2009. ISBN 9780525478621. \$17.99. 32 p.

Reviewer: Jan Staheli

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Poetry;

Subject: Sun--Juvenile fiction; Moon--Juvenile fiction; Stars--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

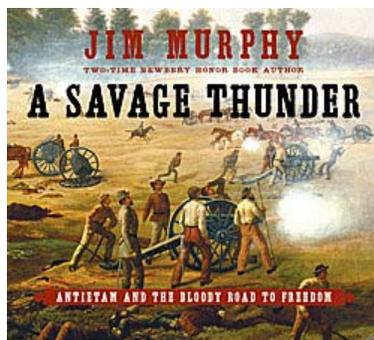
Lee Bennett Hopkins has put together many fine collections of poetry for children, usually focused on a particular theme. In this new volume, *Sky Magic*, he has chosen poems about the sun, the moon and the stars--day and night. And in conjunction with illustrator Mariusz Stawarski, he has produced another quality book of poems, with selections by Alice Schertle, Tennessee Williams, Carl Sandberg, and others. They are short, bright and evocative, leaving clear images and language that is sometimes elegant and often whimsical, but always appealing, like this small gem by Tony Johnston.

Into the great sweep of silence
Into the limitless space
Into the wide loneliness
One by one stars
Come singing.

I
love
stars.

Stawarski's work is simple but intense, with moodily saturated color in combination with quirky, fascinating illustrations that disclose much the poems leave unsaid. This book of poems would be a great way to introduce the imaginative connection between text and pictures. It would be a wonderful addition to anyone's library.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Murphy, Jim. *A Savage Thunder: Antietam and the Bloody Road to Freedom*. Simon & Schuster, 2009. ISBN 9780689876332. \$17.99. 103 p.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational books;

Subject: Antietam, Battle of--Juvenile Literature; Civil War--Juvenile Literature; Books--Reviews;

Not as well known or as well documented as the Battle of Gettysburg, the Battle of Antietam was the bloodiest day in the history of American warfare. North and South battled to a virtual draw that day near the small town of Sharpsburg, Maryland. In the end, the South had to withdraw because the North had more soldiers. Had General McClellan, commander of the Union army, acted more decisively, he might have shortened the War by two years or more. The same might also have been the case had General Robert E. Lee been less skillful. Nevertheless, they were who they were and Murphy does his usual masterful job of outlining the bold elements of the battle without sacrificing the telling personal stories. One such story is that of Private William Brearley—struck by bullets on the top of his head, as well as his finger and thumb—who "concluded they ment [to shoot] me." History for all ages at its finest.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)

Mamet, David. *The Frog Prince*. Samuel French, 1982. ISBN 9780573652202. \$5.50 / script; \$35 / performance fee. 38 p.

Reviewer: Rebeca Wallin

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Plays; Fantasy plays; Humorous plays;

Subject: Fairy tales--Juvenile drama; Princes--Juvenile drama; Medieval times--Juvenile drama; Drama--Reviews;

Theme: Not every story has a happy ending

Production Requirements: Minimal props, forest backdrop

Acts: 1

Run Time: 45-60 minutes

Characters: 4

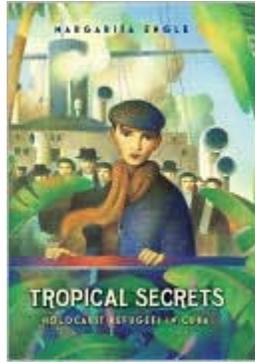
Cast: 2 male, 2 female

Time Period: Medieval

Although the basic facts remain the same—the prince is turned into a frog and needs to be kissed to transform back into his royal self—this retelling is far from the typical fairytale. The play begins in a forest with the prince and his serving man picking flowers for the prince's fiancée. An old woman finds the prince, and after he refuses to give her the bouquet, she turns him into a frog. The prince finds a friendly milkmaid and decides that she should be the one to kiss him. However, she refuses because she is in love with another man. As the prince continues to pursue a kiss from the milkmaid, his fiancée marries another man. The former fiancée and her new husband begin a tyrannical rule, exiling the milkmaid's love. As the milkmaid is leaving to follow her love into exile, she gives the prince a friendly kiss which transforms him. The prince barely notices his transformation and continues his wanderings about the forest.

This is a typical Mamet play, with unexpected occurrences and an unexpected ending. Because it does not exactly end happily ever after, it is more suitable for an older "young audience." The dialogue is clever and thought provoking, and the characters are well developed and memorable. Most of the exciting action happens offstage and then is discussed onstage, again making it more suitable for an older audience. The set and costumes are minimalistic, making it ideal for a touring production.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Engle, Margarita. *Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba*. Henry Holt, 2009. ISBN 9780805089363. \$16.99. 199 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Excellent

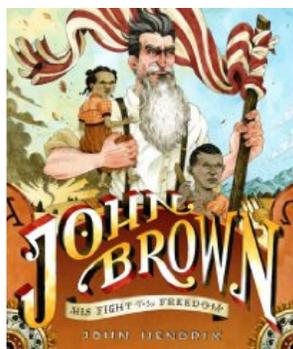
Genre: Historical fiction; Historical poetry;

Subject: Jews--Cuba--20th century--Juvenile fiction; Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Juvenile fiction; Novels in verse; Books--Reviews

Daniel's parents can only afford one trip away from Nazi Germany to safety, and they send him. Rejected at the United States and Canada, Cuba is the last hope for the passengers of Daniel's ship. "El Gordo", a Cuban official, allows them to enter, but only after charging exorbitant fees. His daughter, Paloma, is secretly doing her best to help the refugees feel at home while her father profits off of them. David, an adult who fled from Russia several years ago, offers his wisdom as the two young people, Daniel and Paloma, slowly begin to form a friendship. The three of them unite to help a Christian man stay with his Jewish wife in the midst of religious intolerance. Daniel doesn't want to forget his heritage, but gradually he becomes more open to the Cuban way of life, and takes another young refugee under his wing.

This novel is written in verse, alternating between the voices of the main characters to tell the full story. The poetic style makes for a quick, yet meaningful, read. There are two blended themes, one of preserving identity, and one of putting selfishness aside to serve others. At first, they can seem to be oppositional; but, as Daniel learns throughout his experiences, they can become one in the same. Throughout her writing, Engle emphasizes the importance and symbolism of names. For instance, Paloma is the Spanish word for dove, which represents peace. When Daniel chooses a new refugee to help, he finds a boy who carries his same name. All of these elements combine to create a pleasant, informative, and uplifting historical tale.

Volume 30. no.1 (September/October 2009)



Hendrix, John. *John Brown: His Fight For Freedom*. Illustrated by Hendrix, John. Abrams, 2009. ISBN 9780810937987. \$18.95. 39 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Dependable

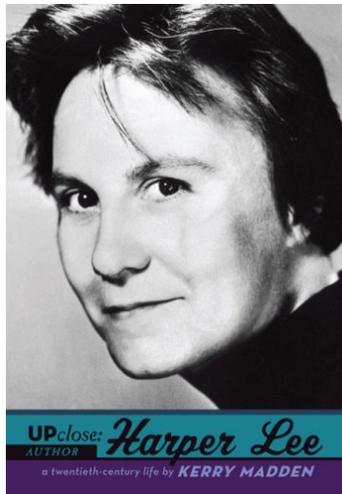
Genre: Biographies;

Subject: Brown, John, 1800-1859--Juvenile literature; Abolitionists--United States--Biography--Juvenile literature; Antislavery movements--United States--History--19th century--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews

John Brown may have been a heroic champion for freedom, or he may have been a homicidal lunatic. Hendrix takes the former stance, portraying Brown as a virtuous leader who had to make tough decisions. He introduces Brown as a polite, genteel fellow who goes out of his way to show respect to his black neighbors. In fact, Brown—a white man—is even more passionate about racial equality than many former slaves at the time, including the legendary Frederick Douglass. Inspired by scripture, Brown designs a plan to take the south by storm, freeing slaves along the way to join his renegade army. In the end, Brown's plan goes horribly wrong and the first man killed in his raid is a free black man. Brown is put to death, but never backs down from his cause.

Hendrix's illustrations, pen and ink with acrylic washes, add character to the story. The drawings create a tall-tale ambience, helping cast Brown as a larger-than-life figure. Hendrix emphasizes biblical passages and memorable quotes from Brown by incorporating them into the pictures. The drawback of this work as an informational book is the contradiction created by Hendrix's continual assertions that Brown "did not believe bloodshed was the answer." This is troubling because the book then relates several incidents which clearly show that violence was indeed Brown's method of choice for bringing about change in the country. This can be a good introduction to a lesser-known historical figure, as long as young readers understand that it may contain some biased interpretations.

Volume 30, no.1 (September/October 2009)



Madden, Kerry. *Harper Lee*. Viking, 2009. ISBN 9780670010950. \$16.99. 224 p.

Reviewer: Alison Cañar

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult,

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Biographies;

Subject: Lee, Harper--Juvenile literature; Authors, American--20th century--Biography--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Much of Harper Lee's childhood is similar to that of her character Scout. Just like Scout, Lee was a tomboy who called her father by his first name. Lee's father, like Atticus, was a lawyer who once represented a black man. Lee's own childhood friend--Truman Capote, who also became a famous author--inspired Scout and Jem's neighborhood friend, Dill. After laying the foundation of Lee's background, the remainder of the biography focuses on key events throughout Lee's adult life. Later topics include: Lee's time at college, the years editing her novel in New York City, researching with Truman for his book *In Cold Blood*, the Hollywood production of *Mockingbird*, and Lee's activities since leaving the public eye.

It might seem that writing a biography of a living person would be simple. Not, it turns out, if the subject is Harper Lee. Ms. Lee has been turning down interview requests since 1964, four years after the publication of her classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Despite the difficulty of her task, Madden succeeds in creating an overview of Lee's life which is both informative and engaging. Due to Lee's intense desire for privacy, many aspects of her life are surrounded by speculation. Is it true that an unknown vault contains a second work by Lee, waiting to be published posthumously? Unfortunately, Madden doesn't have all the answers, but readers will be intrigued by the questions researched in this mysterious, yet always honest and respectful, biography.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Hartnett, Sonya. *The Ghost's Child*. Illustrated by NA. Candlewick, 2008. ISBN 9780763639648. \$16.99. 192 p.

Reviewer: Kate Reynolds

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Romantic fiction;

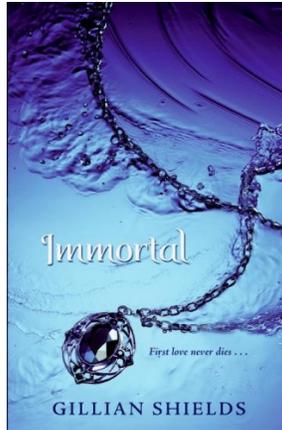
Subject: Ghosts--Juvenile fiction; Voyages and travels--Juvenile fiction; Self-acceptance--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

As a young woman, Maddy falls in love with Feather, who is as restless in a conventional lifestyle as the sea for which he continually longs. When Feather leaves one day, Maddy sets sail to find him and get an answer to the most important question of all: How do you live with loss? Upon returning home, Maddy learns to live with the pain of Feather's leaving, and makes a life and career for herself.

An unconventional romance to be sure, *The Ghost's Child* is yet intriguing. Unlike many teen love stories this one does not end with the lovers reuniting in bliss, but instead addresses the pain of not being able to remain together even though they love each other. Maddy's ability to find the strength within herself to continue living an active and full life is a worthy message as well. The language is vivid and the details are rich.

The greatest difficulty with this book, though, is in pegging an appropriate audience. The frame of the narrative, a woman telling the story to a child, would suggest younger audiences. However, the plot addresses more mature themes including Maddy's depression after a miscarriage and subsequent suicide attempt. As it is neither a normal fantasy nor romance, teen fans of those genres may also be turned off. However, mature teens may recognize its value and message.

Volume 30 no.1 (September/October 2009)



Shields, Gillian. *Immortal*. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 9780061375804. \$16.99. 360 p.

Reviewer: McMillan, Tessa

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

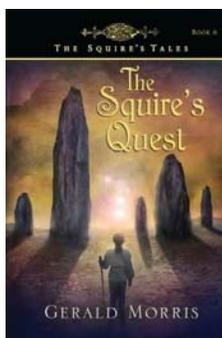
Genre: Fantasy fiction; Ghost stories;

Subject: Boarding schools--Juvenile fiction; Supernatural--Juvenile fiction; Love--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Evie Johnson's life is falling apart. Evie's mother was drowned, her grandmother is dieing in a nursing home, and her father is off at sea. Where is Evie to go? On her grandmother's request, Evie is taken to Wyldcliffe Abbey Boarding School for girls. Once Evie arrives, she is not accepted by her peers and she begins to see ghosts. To help her forget her problems at school, Evie begins a forbidden relationship with the mysterious Sebastian. Their meetings end abruptly when Sebastian reveals that he has killed a girl, performed evil magic to keep him alive for over 100 years, and that he is slowly becoming a demon. With the help of her two classmates and the ghost of Evie's ancestor, Evie discovers her gift for good magic. Only through the magical forces of earth, wind, water, and fire can Evie stop the evil forces that are making Sebastian fade into a demon.

Shields writes an intricately detailed story. But those details get in the way of understanding the full measure of the plot. Evie's character can be hard to identify with because of the decisions she makes in the story. This book is only appropriate for older readers because of the references to sex and occult behaviors.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Morris, Gerald. *The Squire's Quest*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009. ISBN 9780547144245. \$16.00. 275 p.

Reviewer: Janice Card

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

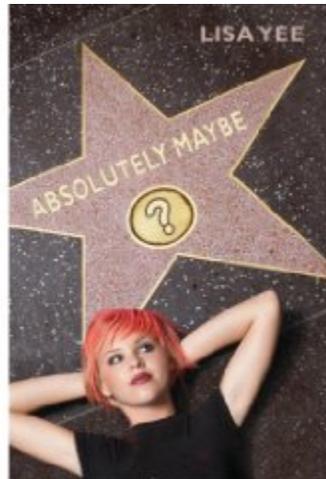
Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction; Adventure stories;

Subject: Arthur, King--Juvenile fiction; Knights and knighthood--Juvenile fiction; Fairies--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

The Squire's Quest is the ninth, eagerly anticipated, book in Morris' series of Arthurian tales. Squire Terence is half human and half faery, capable of passing from one world to the other. He has been Sir Gawain's squire throughout the series, although in some of the books he plays only a cameo role. This installment follows Terence's adventures surrounding Mordred's appearance in King Arthur's court. Everyone seems immensely impressed with Mordred, a young man who claims that he wants to become a knight of the round table. However, Terence is suspicious and watches him closely. Death and destruction follow in Mordred's wake, but no blame can be pinned on him. Terence is determined to help King Arthur maintain his kingdom and make all things right. To do this, he travels far, builds friendships, and seeks wisdom from the Oracle at Delphi.

This story is a treatise on the greed for power and the drama of courtly love affairs. These obsessive romances appear rather ridiculous, especially since they cause heartache and death. Morris based this adventure story on Arthurian tales told by Chrétien de Troyes, who lived and wrote in the twelfth century. Overall, Morris has created a wonderfully involving read.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Yee, Lisa. *Absolutely Maybe*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2009. ISBN 9780439838443. \$16.99. 274 p.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Mothers and daughters--Juvenile fiction; Runaways--Juvenile fiction; Los Angeles (Calif.)--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

When the man that her mother is going to make her seventh husband tries to rape her, Maybelline joins her diminutive Asian friend Ted and their buddy Hollywood when he moves to California to start film school. There Maybelline, who is named for her mother's favorite mascara brand and is called Maybe, hopes to connect with her biological father whom she has never known. Even though she soon runs out of money and hope, things change drastically when Ted gets a job as an assistant to a movie star and Hollywood makes a documentary based on Maybe's life. She even finds a home with one of her former stepfathers and his girlfriend. Though it all Maybe, with the help of her friends, is able to come to terms with her feelings about her mother, as she crafts a new identity which is different from the one of dyed hair and baggy T-shirts that she had created as an act of rebellion.

While the Los Angeles setting and themes of personal discovery despite family difficulties in this novel are nothing new; it is the vivid characters that make it shine. While the adults remain fairly stereotypical, the three main teen characters have distinct personalities with just the right amount of quirks that will connect with readers. The characters' emotional ups and downs are true to life, even though Maybe's reconciliation with her mother may come too easily and some of the other characters' emotional issues are not completely resolved. With an introspective character who deals with her life's troubles with courage this is surely a title that will appeal to older teen girls.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Crowley, Suzanne. *The Stolen One*. Greenwillow Books, 2009. ISBN 9780061232008. \$17.99. 416 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

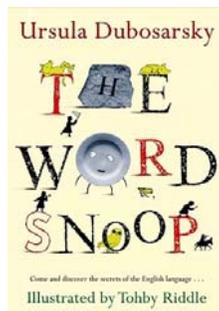
Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Identity--Juvenile fiction; Great Britain--History--Elizabeth, 1558-1603--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Katherine Bab has never felt that she really belonged in her tiny village. Living in Elizabethan England, "Kat" spends her days staring up at Sudeley Castle. After the woman who has always claimed to be her mother dies, Kat and her deaf sister Anna run away to London disguised in royal clothes. Taken in by the kindly Catholic, Lady Ludmore, the two girls are summoned to the most intimate circles of Queen Elizabeth. Rumors abound that Kat is the long-lost daughter of the Queen herself. Meanwhile, the court brings further complication when the affections of the nobles Rafael and Nicholas challenge Kat's love for the devoted shepherd, Christian, whom she left back at her village. Using clues and inquiries, Kat discovers that she is actually the daughter of the former queen, Katherine Parr. After facing death when a pox epidemic spreads through London, Kat realizes that she loves her simple village life and Christian, and returns there to marry him.

With powerful themes of love, death, and self discovery, this historical fiction is an exciting read for young adults. Historical accuracy is carefully adhered to, with interesting details about court and culture during that period. High emotion and mystery throughout the novel encourage the reader forward. These very traits can seem ridiculous however, with nearly every male character attempting to seduce the protagonist, and frustratingly unclear motivations for character behavior. Nevertheless, this book is an appealing read for young adults, and is a great segue for teachers into discussion of Elizabethan History.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Dubosarsky, Ursula. *The Word Snoop*. Illustrated by Tohby Riddle. Dial, 2009. ISBN 9780803734067. \$16.99. 272 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

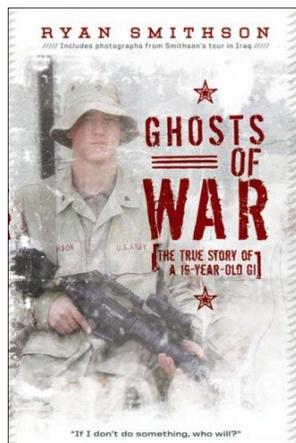
Genre: Informational books;

Subject: English language--History--Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

Few have ever heard of a mondegreen, portmanteau, or malapropism—but Dubosarsky's clever "Word Snoop" has. Delightfully illustrated by the Australian cartoonist Tohby Riddle, the mysterious "Snoop" wittily and candidly explains the history and interesting elements of the English language. Snoop explores everything from runes to texting. Each chapter opens with an explanatory letter prepping the readers for what they will learn. Following each chapter is a coded message for the readers to decipher using the knowledge they've gained. A glossary and code key appear in the back of the book as a quick reference for frustrated code-breakers.

Dubosarsky graduated from Sydney University with a degree in English and languages, including Old Icelandic and Latin. Widely recognized as an excellent children's book author in both Australia and the United States, she blends her technical knowledge with her whimsical and witty children's book style to create a delightfully readable book for young adults. Like its Australian counterpart *The Word Spy*, this American publication uses fresh illustrations and a relaxed first-person perspective to convert a traditionally tedious study of history and grammar into a personal exploration of the words we use to build our lives.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Smithson, Ryan. *Ghosts of War: The True Story of a 19-Year-Old GI*. HarperCollins, 2009. ISBN 9780061664687. \$16.99. 322 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Biographies; Informational;

Subject: Iraq War, 2003-- Personal narratives--American--Juvenile literature; Smithson, Ryan--Juvenile literature; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder --Juvenile literature; Books--Reviews;

When Ryan Simpson, a junior in high school, watched the horrors of the September 11, 2001, attack on New York, he instinctively knew it was his duty to enter the armed services and do his part to protect America. *Ghosts of War: The True Story of a 19-year old GI* is Ryan's account from that day in his history class to coming home after serving in Iraq in the EQ (equipment) platoon as an Army engineer. The book is arranged into three sections with a total of a nine week Basic Combat Training: Red Phase; White Phase; Blue Phase. Although he did not serve on combat missions, Army Reservist Simpson did experience work "outside the wire" and was vulnerable, even inside the wire, to bombs and the reality of unexpected death or injury.

This book shows the Iraqi War experience from an enlisted person's point of view. It adds to the information portrayed through television and newspaper coverage of the war. An added perspective of the good feelings the oppressed common people of Iraq have for the U.S. military's presence in Iraq is gained. Writing this book became a major part of Ryan's therapy for PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and being able to finally escape the unexplained and unannounced onset of fear of death. A helpful ten-page glossary is at the back of the book, consisting mostly of meanings of military abbreviations. Language and content may be unsuitable for some readers..



James, Brian. *The Heights*. Macmillan, 2009. ISBN 9780312368531. \$16.99. 246 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

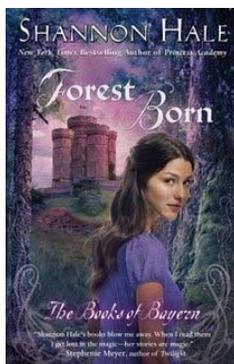
Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Brothers and sisters--Juvenile fiction; Prejudices--Juvenile fiction; Family problems--Juvenile fiction;

A contemporary re-telling of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Heights* explores the twisted romance between Henry--the modernized Heathcliff--and his beloved Catherine. Raised as brother and sister, Henry and Catherine share a deep connection, but not the same blood. Henry is a Mexican orphan, and Catherine is a wealthy Caucasian. Nonetheless, Mr. Earnshaw loved them equally since bringing Henry into his home years ago. In fact, he seemed to favor Henry over his own biological son, Hindley. When Mr. Earnshaw passes away, Hindley becomes Catherine and Henry's legal guardian. Hindley is filled with bitterness and hatred towards Henry; he does everything in his power to tear Henry down and separate him from Catherine. Without Catherine, Henry spirals into destruction. Catherine is sorry to lose Henry, but she begins to turn her affections towards her new boyfriend, Edgar. Finally, in a desperate attempt to win back the love of his life, Henry ends up losing her forever.

The Heights only follows the first half of *Wuthering Heights*, but it captures the most famous story arch. Most of the original characters are here, but with roles more familiar to young adults. For example, the Nelly character transforms from a maid into Catherine's best friend. While the story of Heathcliff and Catherine was told second-hand, *The Heights* switches between Henry and Catherine's voices as they tell their own story. Despite the change of ethnicity and name, Henry's character is remarkably faithful to Heathcliff. On the other hand, Catherine's character is more noticeably changed. James' Catherine lacks the headstrong devotion to her "soulmate" that Brontë's Catherine displayed. For this reason, the novel is a good introduction to studying *Wuthering Heights*, but won't tell quite the same story. Teens should enjoy the modern version and find it much more accessible than the original.

Volume 30, no.1 (September/October 2009)



Hale, Shannon. *Forest Born*. Bloomsbury, 2009. ISBN 9781599901671. \$17.99. 389 p.

Reviewer: Brown, Ruth-Anne

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

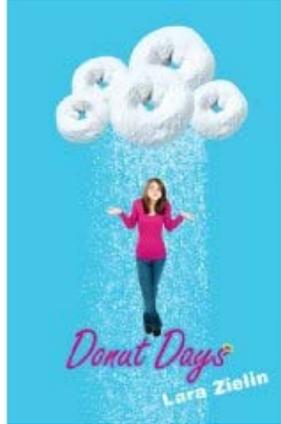
Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction; Fairy tales;

Subject: Fairy tales; Human-plant relationships--Juvenile fiction; Self-esteem--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Rinna was born in the forest and can understand the trees. She can read a feeling or a lie by looking someone in the face. However, she keeps something inside, afraid that if she lets her secret out, she will become a monster. Rinna has the power of people-speaking, and after using this power to talk a boy into kissing her, Rinna feels wrong. She goes with her older brother Razo to the palace of Bayern to serve Queen Isi as a nursery maid. Rinna is suspicious of one of the other maids, and it turns out this maid was trying to kidnap the prince, Tusken. The maid was working for Selia, a powerful people-speaker and old enemy of Queen Isi, who is determined to take Isi's crown, child, and life. Rinna allows herself to use her gifts in order to overthrow Selia.

The theme of confidence in yourself is woven through the story. Rinna is afraid of what she will become through people-speaking, so she emulates those around her. She shuts up her true self deep inside. Eventually, Rinna forgives herself for past mistakes and strives to use her talents for good. She realizes her power, but chooses self-control. She seeks out the boy she hurt and makes things right. Rinna uses persuasion and her gift of reading people to build up the confidence and strength of others in need. This story will inspire readers to be their best selves.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Zielin, Lara. *Donut Days*. Penguin Group, 2009. ISBN 9780399250668. \$16.99. 256 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Faith--Fiction; Clergy--Fiction; Friendship--Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Emma's baptism is interrupted by the richest member of the congregation, Mr. O'Conner, who claims to have a message from God. His message, that women should not preach, has huge consequences for Emma, because the pastors are her parents and because Emma is in love with Mr. O'Conner's son. Emma's best friends then turn on her in favor of Mr. O'Conner's daughter, Molly. Communication breaks down further in Emma's home when Emma refuses to attend a religious university, but prefers a secular one. When her parents refuse to fund her college dreams, Emma decides to enter a journalism contest requiring her to camp out at the opening of a popular donut shop. While there, she meets a reformed biker gang whose members help her to understand the true nature of religious repentance. After getting framed by Molly for theft in the camp, Emma is sent to jail on the eve of her mother's removal as co-pastor. Emma's old friends reveal Molly's plot and release her from jail. Mr. O'Connor's son brings forth evidence of his father's plot to take over the pastor-ship for monetary gain. After awakening to the importance of freedom and religious interpretation, Emma's parents allow her to apply to a secular school.

Zielin's debut novel approaches many dark themes with a lightness provided by approachable characters and unique settings. Young adult readers may relate to Emma's feelings of isolation and awkwardness as she attempts to navigate the adult world springing up around her. *Donut Days* is an excellent novel for teens struggling with religious, social, and parental issues.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Pike, Aprilynne. *Wings*. HarperTeen, 2009. ISBN 9780061668036. \$16.99. 294 p.

Reviewer: Ruth-Anne Brown

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

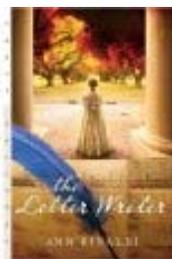
Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Fairies--Fiction; Trolls--Fiction; Plants--Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Fifteen year old Laurel only eats fruits and vegetables and drinks Sprite as a treat. She prefers to wear light tank tops and shorts even in cold weather. She begins to worry when she feels a bump growing between her shoulder blades. It gets to be the size of a softball, but she tells no one. She awakes the next morning to find a huge flower growing out of her spine and painfully discovers it will not come off. While walking in the woods, Laurel runs into Tamani, a faerie. He tells her that she is also a faerie and in bloom, but that it will wilt away. Laurel becomes involved in the battle between faerie and troll. While fighting for her life and land, Laurel is torn between her human best friend David and the faerie soldier Tamani. After saving her land and her adopted father's life, Laurel decides to stay with her family and live out her human life for the present.

Pike creates a fantastic world of natural faeries contrasted with the gruesome, bloodthirsty trolls. The new definition of a faerie makes *Wings* a page turner from start to finish. Laurel discovers both sides of herself; her human side and her newly discovered plant (faerie) side. She becomes more courageous as she stands up against troll villains in order to save her adopted parents and her unknown people. The end leaves the reader wanting more. Luckily there are three more books to come. Disney has also optioned film rights to *Wings*, and there are reports Miley Cyrus will play the lead faerie. For more information visit www.aprilynnepike.com.

Volume 30, no1 (September/October 2009)



Rinaldi, Ann. *The Letter Writer*. Harcourt, 2008. ISBN 9780152064020. \$17.00. 217 p.

Reviewer: Alison Canar

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

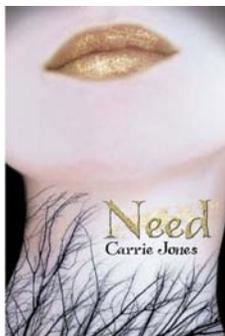
Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Southampton Insurrection, 1831--Juvenile fiction; Turner, Nat, 1800?-1831--Juvenile fiction; Slavery--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

For an illegitimate child in the antebellum south, Harriet enjoys a comfortable lifestyle. She lives with her father's widow, who treats Harriet with compassion despite her origins. Mother Whitehead runs the plantation with grace while allowing her oldest son, Richard, to deal with the unsavory elements. A stern young minister, Richard believes in a vengeful, punishing god. Meanwhile, Harriet becomes fascinated with another young preacher in the area, a slave named Nat Turner. Harriet befriends Nat and he asks her to lend him a map. Harriet feels uneasy, but complies after Nat assures her that he only wants to use it for preaching. Unfortunately, Nat's version of preaching to the slave owners turns out to be a bloody massacre which takes the lives of her entire family and many others. Harriet prepares to take over as the mistress of the plantation on her own, until the uncle she has been writing to returns and reveals himself as her father.

While the basic plot of this novel is compelling, the story suffers from convoluted subplots and a long, drawn-out conclusion. In addition, the motives of Nat Turner's rebellion are overlooked. Although the story is written from the perspective of a young white girl whose family and friends are needlessly slain, the just elements of Turner's cause-fighting for freedom could still have been addressed. Instead, Rinaldi chooses to focus the remainder of the novel on replaying the narrator's vision of the violent events and untangling complicated issues with her father.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Jones, Carrie. *Need*. Bloomsbury, 2009. ISBN 9781599903385. \$16.99. 306 p.

Reviewer: Anna Swenson

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

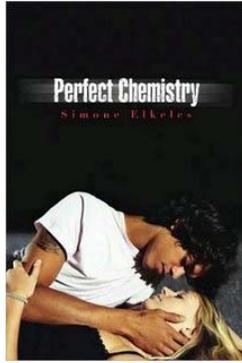
Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Pixies--Juvenile fiction; Supernatural--Juvenile fiction; Grief--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Zara Jones moves in with her grandmother after her stepfather dies. Zara doesn't know, but there is a secret world hidden within the little town of Bedford, Maine. As the book progresses, she learns about the world of pixies and shifters. She discovers that unless she gives herself to the Pixie King, he will continue to kill young men to fill his need. Zara decides she has to do something and struggles to save not only herself, but her family, friends, and community as well.

This story is a great combination of romance, adventure and sacrifice. The characters are somewhat lacking in depth, but overall the book is a great, exciting read. Young adults who enjoyed the *Twilight* series will find *Need* satisfying.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Elkeles, Simone. *Perfect Chemistry*. Walker, 2009. ISBN 9780802798220. \$9.99. 369 p.

Reviewer: Megan Harris

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Social classes--Juvenile fiction; Dating (Social customs)--Juvenile fiction; Gangs--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

When Brittany and Alex are forced to sit together in chemistry class, they have no idea how upside-down they will make each other's worlds. Brittany attempts to maintain her flawless image as head cheerleader. Alex has a roughened gangster image, which he uses to protect his family after his father is killed. Both teenagers hate each other at first. So much so that Alex takes a bet offering him a new car if he can get Brittany to sleep with him. As he gets to know Brittany throughout the year, his feelings soften. Brittany also finds in Alex a sincere confidant and a loyal friend. While trying to visit Brittany, Alex is arrested. His release puts him in debt to the leader of his gang, who forces him to deal drugs. Ashamed, Alex breaks up with Brittany. In an effort to gain him back, Brittany sleeps with him. After sleeping with Brittany, Alex goes to finish the drug deal and finds his friend Paco shot dead by his gang leader, who then shoots Alex. This experience leads Alex to leave his gang, a process which requires violent beating and branding. Later, Alex and Brittany attend the same University, marry, and become successful chemists.

Elkeles' take on the challenges of two high school teenagers alternates back-and-forth between the perspectives of Alex and Brittany. While it is fast-paced and includes positive messages of tolerance and perseverance, *Chemistry* also includes large amounts of profanity and sexual content. Images of unprotected teen sex, violence, and the favorable portrayal of sex as a way of securing affection make this book a questionable choice for younger readers.

Volume 30, no. 1 (September/October 2009)



Libby, Alisa M.. *The King's Rose*. Dutton Books, 2009. ISBN 9780525479703. \$17.99. 293 p.

Reviewer: Tessa McMillan

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Historical fiction; Fiction;

Subject: Catharine Howard, Queen, consort of Henry VIII, King of England, d. 1542--Juvenile fiction.; Henry VIII, King of England, 1491-1547--Juvenile fiction.; Great Britain --History --Henry VIII, 1509-1547 --Juvenile fiction.; Books--Reviews;

Young Catherine Howard is placed as a lady-in-waiting to the new queen, Anne of Cleves. Soon after, rumors circulate that King Henry VIII is dissatisfied by Anne and is looking for another. The Howards hope Catherine will catch the king's roving eye. Henry does notice and lusts after her. To amend the situation, Henry divorces Anne of Cleves and proposes to Catherine. He is fifty and she is fifteen. But history is repeating itself for the Howards, because several years before Catherine's cousin, Anne Boleyn, also enchanted the and became his wife. But unlike Anne, Henry wants Catherine to be a virgin queen, like his past wife Jane Seymour. The Howards swear to Catherine's intact virtue, even though they all know it is a lie. Catherine never wanted this life, but she cannot refuse the king's will. Once married, Catherine tries to be a good wife by becoming pregnant with his heir. But she sees signs that Henry is becoming impotent. To save her life and keep her standing, Catherine tries to become pregnant through a relationship with her cousin, Thomas Culpepper, whom she loves. But her efforts fail when her seedy past and her secret affair are revealed to the king. Even though she confesses to some of the charges, she is condemned to death by the Privy Council and is executed as a traitor at the age of sixteen: the same fate as her cousin, Anne Boleyn.

Libby creates a vivid and realistic world around the character of Catherine Howard. Readers can tell Libby must have done extensive research into Catherine's life to make this story so believable and to make Catherine's character so well-rounded and strong. But a major topic of this book is centered on sexual behavior. The adult themes in *The King's Rose* may be too mature for many middle school and even some high school readers.

Volume 30, no.1 (September/October 2009)