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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

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Book Reviews


*All in a Day* introduces children around the world to each other. Mitsumasa Anno, author and illustrator of *Anno's Alphabet, Anno's Journey*, and many other books, has brought together distinguished artists, whose works are as unique as the countries they represent: the USA, England, the USSR, Japan, Brazil, Kenya, China, and Australia.

Readers will discover how much alike people are, no matter where they live or how they look. We all eat and sleep, work and play, think and feel—but we do these things in different places, in different climates, and within different surroundings.

At 3 p.m. on January 1st, Tom is reading an exciting book in the USA, while Aki is still sound asleep in Japan, where it is 6 a.m. the next day. Each of the eight double-page spreads contains eight pictures, like television monitors, showing what the children from the eight countries are doing at the same time.

A sailor named Oliver Smith unites all the children of the pictures through his monologue, delivered from Uninhabited Island. The sailor, drawn by Anno, keeps the reader posted on his efforts to be rescued from the island. He invites each of the children of the world to come and save him.

The illustrations suggest customs, clothing, climate and environment. Young readers can easily imagine themselves joining in the events occurring in each picture. At the end of the book, Anno briefly explains some of the scientific principles that create night and day, the seasons, and the time changes of the world. He leaves the other differences and similarities for the readers to discover for themselves.

—Janice Card


No other illustrator has ever captured my fancy quite like Barklem. Her pictures are always technically correct and intellectually challenging, yet they are filled with tantalizing whimsy. Spinners, dyers, and weavers would find these pictures better than many textbooks, and the outdoor scenes are filled with botanical detail that forces the story to stop while the reader studies the pictures.

In this latest of her Brambly Hedge stories, Wilfred Toadflax has been reading Sir Hogweed Horehound's *Daring Explorers of Old Hedge Days*. When he gets a chance to go into the high hills with Mr. Apple, Lily and Flax (to deliver newly made blankets to the voles), Wilfred, having read Sir Hogweed, knows just what essential gear to take. As the adventure unfolds, all his gear becomes highly useful. And during the adventure, Wilfred discovers something that, to the mice of Brambly Hedge, is more precious than gold.

—Thomas Hinckley


In a small book with five short chapters, Billings has created a solid overview of fiber optics: definition, uses, manufacture, explanation of how they work, and the future.

Billings uses this information to create interest. Alexander G. Bell, for instance, first discovered light would carry messages but his invention worked only during sunny days. The development of the laser was needed to make his "most promising idea" practical. And facts are put into perspective. "A single four-and-a-half-pound spool of optical fiber can carry the same number of messages as two hundred reels of copper wire that weigh over sixteen thousand pounds."

In addition, the photographs, both black-and-white and color, are imaginative and varied. A full index is appended. An excellent introduction to fiber optics. —James Jacobs


Known for years in England, this volume was recently set in large type for easier reading and is now available for the first time in America. The bulk of children's poems in anthologies traditionally are in the public domain. This collection is no different, with many well known British and American poets represented.
Part of its appeal lies in the massive number of poems presented under one cover. Further attraction is in the topical organization: thirteen headings which include two useful for young children: "Nursery Rhymes," and "Poems for the Very Young." The others are subject oriented: "The Seasons," "Flowers and Trees," "Christmas and Easter," and so on.

While the child who has learned to stay away from poetry may be better convinced by contemporary verse, those who have not yet had poetry introduced or those who have already developed a taste for it will find great rewards here. —James Jacobs


Janey is afraid to sleep in the dark. How is she ever going to survive at a sleepover for her sixth-grade reading club? She considers not going at all, but she will still have to explain to her teachers why she isn't going. Finally, when she figures out a way not to have to sleep in the dark, she decides to go.

Yes, the plot is inane. Still, many a child will identify with Janey's fear and in truth, Janey and her friends talk and act exactly like upper-grade-school children. Bunting is to be congratulated for capturing their essence, silly though it may be. —Lovisa Lyman


Sometimes a picture is only worth a single word — of rejection. Seldom does a book illustration replace a thousand words, notwithstanding the cliché. In illustrated books, pictures can reinforce the story line or they can detract from it. Mitchell, the illustrator for the Illustrated Junior Library, certainly does better than average. The cover is appealing and true to the story. The pen-and-ink sketches that head the chapters are good, especially the "Contrary Mary" that heads Chapter One.

But by the time we have reached the first color illustration, we have read well over 5,000 words and have some definite ideas. Mary "had a little, thin face," thin, light yellow hair, a yellow complexion, and a sour expression. The walls of her room "were covered with tapestry with a forest scene." Unfortunately, the first picture does not capture this nor reinforce the story.

Mary at the cabinet of ivory elephants, on the other hand, is extremely evocative, as is the illustration of the children looking at the picture of the snake charmer. Similarly, the representation of Colin's tantrum certainly falls short of a carved four-poster bed and Burnett's description of him lying on his face beating the pillow, whilst Colin watching the buds unsheath is a marvellous picture. But it is Colin with his father that makes the book come alive. This and the cover go well beyond mere illustration.

It is always more pleasant to read a well known story in the Illustrated Junior Library edition than in any other; the illustrations and the more spacious typesetting give the reader a leisurely sense of profound enjoyment. —Thomas Hinckley


This book has all the appearances of having been written to a series formula, which causes some abrupt shifts to get the required story settings in.

The illustration is good, and there are no questions about technical and historical details, but Apollodorus thinks, acts, and talks exactly like a twentieth-century American boy. Did Greek boys hate to work?

I would find this book useful in the classroom, particularly if we could discuss and amplify the text. —Thomas Hinckley
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Tina is a motor-mouth. My first impression was that the whole book was a single, breathless sentence. Actually, periods are used by the gross. But she still rushes you along.

Things started disappearing. Minor things at first. Then major ones. Her mother thinks the linoleum major. Well, there is a kraken (a monster from deep inside the earth) inhabiting and inhibiting the subway. Things are going from worse to worst. But no shrinking — Tina has the key. She also has Joel and Paavo, the street fiddler and wizard. The shoot-out show-down comes at Central Park. Rather spectacular. By the time you finish the book, you are as breathless as Tina.

This book would be excellent for slow readers, to encourage and captivate them. —Thomas Hinckley


This is Chetwin's second book about Meg and her family, transplants to the United States from England. The first, *On All Hallows' Eve* (which I reviewed a year or so ago), was not nearly as well done as this one. Both deal with how Meg uses her gift of the "sight" to rescue souls who have been zapped into another time frame, where their lives are threatened by a dark power. The "sight," which is the ability to see trouble invisible to others, is a gift that runs in Celtic blood and which Meg inherited from her Welsh grandmother.

In this book, Meg, now an eighth grader, must rescue a boy whose spirit has been lured away by a wicked computer genius and whose body lies in a coma. A blend of ancient lore and modem technology, the plot is pleasantly chilling, the denouement fully satisfying. —Lovisa Lyman


Conley, the daughter of Robert C. O'Brien, who died after writing his classic, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, has tried her hand at her father's. Is it as good as her father's? Definitely not! It is a book about characters who are neither believable as animals nor as people. *Mrs. Frisby* is about people disguised as animals — a subtle difference that makes all the difference. We become involved with, identify with and care about the animals in *Mrs. Frisby*. The characters in *Racso*, however, are not nearly as interesting, even though some of them are characters from the first book.

As is the case with many sequels, *Racso* cannot stand alone. *Mrs. Frisby* must be read first in order to understand what is going on. Still, having said this, I must admit that there are many children who will want to read *Racso* and will enjoy it because it will satisfy their curiosity about what happened to characters they loved in the first book.

The plot is quite good. The rats have established themselves in Thorn Valley. Justin is not dead, as we thought when we finished the first book. Neither is Jenner. Like Bobby in "Dallas," his life has been miraculously preserved. All seems to be peace and happiness. Then some dishonest politicians decide to build a dam that will destroy Thorn Valley and the surrounding farms as well. The rats must develop a plan.

Despite its flaws, Conley's book certainly does a better job of carrying on the image of *Mrs. Frisby* than does the cartoon version, and the occasional illustrations by Leonard Lubin are exquisite.

—Lovisa Lyman


Normally the bookshop is "So glad you're spending money; please take two." Thus I was surprised when the manager and two clerks all told me what a mistake it was to buy Cooper. "Surely you're not going to read it?"
The first dozen pages were hard going, but that happens every time one commences reading eighteenth-century dialogue. The book is mainly concerned with the Fort William Henry massacre in 1757 during the French and Indian War. This story could be subtitled "The Perils of Cora and Alice" (the daughters of General Munro). These women, along with Major Heywood, are simply beyond my comprehension, and they and their scenarios drive me to distraction.

Why, then, did I keep reading? Because of the Indians. For all the sentimentality and cheap romanticism of the women and the major, the Indians have a nobility and a sense of reality that is compelling. Having read very little about the eastern forest Indians, I was impressed with an author who had witnessed their ways and outlooks, as well as their demise. Uncas and Sagamore make extremely interesting reading, and Hawkeye, the white scout, is fine frontier Americana, principally because the Indians have given him humanity. But the "court manners" of the other principals in the virgin forest seem phony.

Because of my ambivalence — no, polarity is a better word, since I identify with the Indians and dislike the whites — the Wyeth pictures affect me the same way as the Cooper text: what I shall remember from this book is the Indians. —Thomas Hinckley


From daybreak until twilight, and in every season, a child's day is spangled with poetry and art. If you would like to sample the Victorian and Edwardian periods (the 19th and early 20th centuries), pick up *A Child's Treasury of Poems* and read the pleasant verses and feast upon the wonderful art collected to enhance the text.

Where the poetry may lack vibrance, the pictures abound in it. Most of the artwork comes from private collections and has not been seen by the general public. It is time they were enjoyed by readers and art lovers of all ages.

The poetry reflects the period from which it comes. Many notable poets are included in this collection: Tennyson, Dickinson, Stevenson, Kipling, Wordsworth and Rossetti, to name a few. Anon shows up frequently, also. Selections are short and they are grouped by themes like "The Classroom" and "All Creatures Great and Small." But the greatest attraction of this lovely book is the artwork.

Both pictures and poetry set a mood and take today's readers to a quiet time and a quiet place in the past, far from the pressures of our high-speed society. —Janice Card


Written for third or fourth graders, *The Mystery of the Haunted Cabin* gives the reader a fast, exciting plot development. The Harrison kids, Robin and Barry, at first have doubts about any summer adventure. But Mrs. Harrison moves them and their friend Spencer out to Horseshoe Lake, and there the fun begins.

Since Mrs. Harrison cannot reach the kids because of car trouble, they must spend a stormy night alone. A frightening knock at the door and an eerie voice telling them to get off the property add to the mystery. Mrs. Harrison returns, finds them unharmed, and decides to hold a seance to engage the "ghost" further and solve the mystery. But the seance fails to do any more than make the kids laugh, and they decide to search for clues, thus finding all the adventure they could want. —Raphael Jolstoneaux


Erin, fourteen, can hardly wait to get to her grandparents' cottage on Lake Huron for the summer. She expects this summer to be like all the others she's spent there since she became friends with Laurie. They'll be Montana Smith and Denver again and ride the beach on their imaginary ponies in search of rustlers. But Laurie, two years older than Erin, has changed. She has grown out of the imaginary world and into a real world that is centered in her new boyfriend. Erin determines to win her friend back, but instead, ends up making her own first tentative steps into a grown-up relationship.
Fourteen seems a bit old for such devotion to playing cowboys, but the story is well written and the plot interesting. —Lovisa Lyman


This is the true story of the author’s own adolescent years during the Second World War. Written in first person, with fictionalized names, the story describes the war years as seen through the eyes of Anna and her German family, the Singelmanns.

Anna’s father is a high-ranking staff officer in Hitler’s Luftwaffe, but he is opposed to Hitler’s regime. Anna watches and becomes part of the changes that take place during this terrible period of history. These events include the nights spent cowering in the bomb shelter as the air raid alarms scream and the bombs and firestorms rain down, the suicides of her Jewish friend’s entire family, her brother and her boyfriend going off to the Russian front, the arrest of her father and the resulting terror in the face of her mother. The book ends before the war does, and we find ourselves wanting to read more; however, the “Afterword” ties some of the loose ends together so that we are satisfied.

The realities of war, as seen through the eyes of this teenage girl, will become evident to the reader as they follow Anna and her family through these frightening times. Gehrts does not soften the events, but as her perspective is that of an adolescent, it is not offensive to the young reader.

A remarkable book; a strong young woman meeting tragedy with courage beyond her years. —Helen Hoopes


Feelings, Veronica, Leonard (the outcast) Rosen, Elliot, baseball, science projects, failing algebra — wow — Marvin Berman arrives in seventh grade. Marvin captures the reader as he describes both humorous and sensitive experiences.

For example, his description of the science projects, his flustered feelings for Veronica, his kindness towards Leonard, and his refusal to stay on the baseball team because the other guys gang up on Elliot demonstrate humor, courage, and strength.

Young readers in grades five through eight will quickly realize how good it would be to have a friend like Marvin. —Raphael Johstoneaux


A washing machine delivered by mistake to Molly’s house provides such rhythmic noises that Molly and her animal friends join in a wild dance that reaches a crescendo as suds spread across the floor and the sliding dancers move into spin-drying. When the machine stops, they collapse in a heap, and the rabbits return to reclaim the machine, which was supposed to be delivered to Penelope down the street.

The story is kind of a funny idea, but the language is not rhythmic enough to sustain the dance theme. Before the washing machine starts, the sentences are choppy and short — too reminiscent of the language in controlled vocabulary readers. Some of the sounds the washer makes are dance-like (“pepi pu pepi pu, pu pu pepi pu”), but some are unpronounceable tongue-twisters. Besides that, the washer really doesn’t have a personality. It’s hard to figure out why Molly and her friends got so inspired about dancing. Instead of joining in the celebration, the reader wonders if the characters are crazy.

—Lillian Heil


When the Normans occupied England, they built castles — many of which have endured over the centuries. Goodall depicts the history of a typical castle, from site selection and construction in the twelfth century through major periods of war (fortress, hospital and school) and peace (banquets, lawn
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parties, and wedding receptions) during the past 800 years. Today is has been opened to the public for
tours.

Goodall tells this tale in his familiar watercolors and half-pages. Each scene is transformed by turning
the small half-page to reveal additional activities occurring within the same scene. Norman architects
survey the countryside between two rivers, and then disappear when the half-page is turned to show the
castle under construction. No text intrudes upon the illustrations, but helpful information tracing the
highlights of English history and its effects upon the castle is found at the beginning of the book.

A succinct, clever, and appealing way to gain an overview of English history. While the pages and
colors did not line up with the precision of other Goodall titles using the half-page, the charm is still
there. —James Jacobs


Grindley tells a knock-knock-who's-there story of a little girl who sends away all the wild beasts,
witches, ghosts, dragons, and giants who threaten to harm her, until Daddy arrives with a mug of hot
chocolate. He is joyfully greeted by his daughter, who tells him about all the other creatures who tried to
get in, and ends with the announcement, "I knew it was really you!" This last line is printed under a pair
of bedroom slippers, and the unobservant reader (me) has to go back and see Daddy's slippers on all of
those magical creatures. The little girl was right; they really were Daddy.

Browne's illustrations make all the strange visitors cheerfully real. It's a joke children will enjoy, and
it will probably inspire them to make up more variations on the knock-knock theme. Try it with children
and see. —Lillian Heil


Ms. Jones has designed a light and amusing fairy-tale fantasy in this new book. It is funny, full of
surprises, and delightfully told for the most part: the story of Sophie Hatter, trapped in the sad role of
the eldest of three sisters, who is also a stepdaughter of her father's second wife. Complications result
when she is left the manager of their father's hat shop upon his death and is transformed into an old, old
woman by a wicked witch.

Her new state leads her to leave her home village and limp off into the woods, where she comes upon
a large black castle with black smoke pouring from its chimneys. The castle is moving — sometimes
rapidly, sometimes slowly — around the countryside. Weary and stubborn, Sophie pushes her way into
the castle and stays there, working furiously to clean and improve the living quarters for the Wizard
Howl, who owns the castle; Michael, his apprentice in magic; and Calcifer, the magic fire who keeps the
castle warm and moving.

It's a fascinating and amusing story. Its only weakness is the determined shoving of events that
provides the happy ending — welcome, but rather haphazardly achieved. —Carol V. Oaks

0-531-10111-8. $9.40. 64pp.

The problem with books on this subject — and there have been several over the last year — is that the
author generally chooses to take the premise that the separation clauses of the Constitution are designed
to protect the government from religion, whereas a careful reading convinces me that the separation
clauses were written to protect religion from the encroachments of government. The thing that makes
this so ironical is that we do have a state religion in America: scientific humanism. Were the Supreme
Court to declare it a religion, there would be a massive re-thinking of the whole issue of separation of
church and state.

To Kleeberg's credit, this is the least objectionable treatment I have read. There are no glaring errors,
just the scientific humanists trying to defend their indefensible turf. —Thomas Hinckley

On May 18, 1980, the Mount St. Helens eruption blew the top off the mountain, killing 57 people and countless plants and animals. About half of this 60-page book explains the history of the mountain and describes the spectacular events of May 18th. The remaining pages show what scientists learned about the return of life to an area that looked as barren as a moonscape. Words and photographs describe how, for example, a plant grew; insects fed on it; ladybugs and spiders ate the insects. Mice fed on seeds and insects. Gophers ate roots and bulbs and dug dirt, making it possible for more plants to grow. Each island of life spread more life.

Lauber's clear explanations and excellent photographs communicate the beauty and frightening destructiveness of the volcano, a force of nature seldom witnessed in the United States. In fact, the 1980 eruption was the most destructive in U.S. history. Equally awesome is the power of nature to heal itself, and the quiet beauty of this force is also seen in the pictures of tiny plants, insects and animals who survived the eruption or began to colonize the barren mountainside. Lauber's book is a photographic essay which teaches a great deal about the unity of nature and is a testimonial to the power of even the smallest forms of life. —Lillian Heil


This is not a new book but it is worth reading. Edward Gorey's ink sketches on pale gold paper don't show the green heads and blue hands that Jumblyes have, but he certainly shows their blase ability to ignore everyone's advice about going to sea in a sieve. *The Jumblyes* is Edward Lear's marvelous nonsense poem about these unique individuals (Gorey shows ten — five women and five men), who were equal to leaky boats, enjoyed moony songs, sailed the Western Sea, the Torrible Zone, "the hills of the Chaukly Bore, and came back in twenty years or more." Lear chooses his nonsense well. Expressions like the Torrible Zone and the hills of Chaukly Bore are going to stay in my memory and add a few chuckles to my life. —Lillian Heil


For years children have loved Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking stories; here she is speaking to them in a different mode: that of a literary fairy tale. It tells of the plight of little Maria, whose mother and father have died of consumption and who must go to the poorhouse because consumption is a bad disease and contagious; nobody wants to take her in for the work she could do. The poorhouse is filled with old and poor people who must get their food by begging. It is bossed by big, rough Pomadella, who takes Maria out begging with her because she thinks Maria might win more sympathy and therefore more food from the people they visit. A linden tree and a singing nightingale become part of the magic. I find the story a little artificial, but the pictures are lovely. —Carol V. Oaks


This biography is kind to Elvis, and maybe he deserves a little kindness. Robert Love tells the poor-boy-makes-good story in such a way that we can identify with Elvis during his childhood and young manhood and wish him well. He then describes the blending of gospel with black rhythm and blues that became Elvis's trademark, and explains why so many conservative white listeners were offended by the new sound and why the younger generation was not. In fact, John Lennon said of him, "Before Elvis, there was nothing." Love deals tastefully with the excesses of Elvis's last years, but does not soft-pedal the part drugs played in his death. —Lovisa Lyman

Going from the coast to the Andes to the jungle, Peru resembles a "mountain sandwich." Lyle gives an amazingly detailed picture of the components of the sandwich in his brief book. He begins with a review of Peru's history, then moves to the practical, day-to-day aspects such as earning a living. Finally he gives additional details about each of the three major regions. Did you know that the Inca ruling class benefited from all three regions? They lived in Andean fortresses but could send runners to the ocean for fresh fish or to the jungle for tropical fruit, coca leaves, and bright feathers.

The book's only drawback is the binding, typical of the Burke series, which can be easily broken. Photographs are generous and of good quality. —Lovisa Lyman


McGovern gives us another version of the hungry wanderer who teaches a stingy lady how to make soup out of stones (plus a few onions, carrots, beef bones, and some salt, pepper, butter, and barley). Pels's illustrations make the clever boy appropriately ragged, the old lady with a mop of white hair, a hood, lace petticoat, purple gloves and a bustle like a fat, round pincushion (complete with pins, no less). The pictures show the boy juggling onions and balancing carrots on his nose as the old lady pulls vegetables from the garden and beef bones from the dog house. (Her dog looks on sadly, with a tear on his cheek.)

The language is like a song, with the oft-repeated list of soup ingredients growing with each verse, and always ending with: "'Soup from a stone,' said the little old lady. 'Fancy that.'" The boy fills up on soup, takes the stone and muses about the fine supper he will have tomorrow as he says, "Soup from a stone. Fancy that."

*Stone soup* is a rhythmically told and well illustrated folk tale that youngsters will enjoy.

—Lillian Heil


Marston's book on snowplows describes the functions and shows photographs of more kinds of snowplows than I ever knew existed. She shows the difference between a one-way blade, a reversible one and a V-plow. Plows range in size from the sidewalk snow-thrower to the 13-foot-tall, 85-foot-wide Oshkosh snowblower that can chew through fifty tons of snow per minute. The airport runway sweeper is even bigger, at 30 feet long, a weight of sixteen tons and 495 horsepower, for sweeping a path 12 to 15 feet wide.

There are ice melters, plows on trains and ships that break up ice, as well as dump trucks to haul away snow in big cities. Marston has not left out the lowly snow shovel, with drawings of five different kinds, including a "back-saver" with a gooseneck in the handle, which I think I need to avoid fatigue shoveling our sidewalks that seem to be longer in the winter.

Marston writes clear, concise descriptions of functions of the machines and accompanies each with photographs. Anyone convinced by the book that snow removal is interesting and exciting may want to contact the school for snow-fighters in New York. (That's another thing I didn't know existed.) You won't be surprised to learn that Marston lives in a town where 108 inches of snow fell last December.

—Lillian Heil


Sam is a latch-key child in Washington, D.C. His parents are divorced and he lives with his father, who works long hours on projects for low-income housing and cooks only health food. It doesn't often occur to Sam to be anything but obedient. He calls his father for permission to do anything not on the schedule or dutifully leaves notes on the refrigerator. He eats what his father cooks, though most of it has yogurt on top, and he cleans his room when told to. He has few friends. Strangely enough, he begins to feel an affinity with drunks, bag people and garbage-can-pickers in the streets. He follows

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them, talks to them, and finally gets into a car with a woman he meets in the park. She feeds him doughnuts and soft drinks and drives wildly, and he enjoys it. But when he's ready to go home, she refuses to let him go.

Sam is a real person. His plight, a common one, is that of the overprotected-yet-neglected child, and thus the story will appeal to many children. —Lovisa Lyman


During the summer of her seventeenth year, Kate finds herself back at her parents' home on an island off the coast of Massachusetts. Mononucleosis has made it impossible for her to get a job on Long Island with her boarding-school roommate, Leah, as they had originally planned. Now, at home, she must deal with the antagonism that she has long felt toward her father, the famous artist Marcus Brewer, and also decide if it is possible for her to begin painting again.

Into her summer comes Ian Jackson, a graduate student assigned to catalog all her father's paintings in preparation for his retrospective exhibit. Ian is 25 years old, too old for Kate according to her mother, but slowly, over the summer, Kate falls in love with him. He is kind and gentle, and helps her better understand her relationship with her father and her own artistic talents.

This book is not your typical summer romance novel. Kate's growth, the insights into the world of the artist, the imagery of the water and rocks and meadows, all give an added depth to the book. We feel what Kate is feeling as she experiences the sleepiness of mono and explores her lazy summer world. (O'Neal must have had mono herself to let us feel so lacking in energy.) A good book for the teen reader who wants a little more from a summer romance story. —Helen Hoopes


Dinah Moskowitz, age eighteen, is deeply in love with Graham Dawson and determined to dump her schooling and go with him to Florida, where he will be working. She responds without enthusiasm to the insistent request of her father, whose apartment has been her home during the eight years since her parents' divorce; he wants her to take time for some therapy with Dr. Schneck before she takes a step that will change her life.

Her visits with Dr. Schneck, very interesting in themselves, move skillfully toward more understanding of the hurts and difficulties of the past, and the ability to "risk love." Her growth in that self-understanding is presented very effectively, making an absorbing and enlightening story for young adults who are not disturbed by frank treatment of illicit love. —Carol V. Oaks


Animals in nature use colors in a variety of ways: to warn predators that an attack could be dangerous, to startle predators, and to fool an enemy either by mimicking the colors of another animal or by giving false clues. The four-eye butterfly fish, for example, is almost round and has a large false eye near its tail. Predators usually attack the head of their prey, aiming at the eye. When striking the four-eye butterfly fish, an attacker is mistakenly drawn to the fake eye at the tail, allowing the fish to escape.

The strength of this book is in the stunning color photographs which allow the reader to see clearly how some creatures are favored and protected by the clever use of color nature gives them. The scant text and picture-book format may signal to a reader of upper elementary age that this is a book only for the lower grades. Gross error. —James Jacobs


When the Bates youngsters return home one afternoon, they find their stepmother gone, leaving them only twenty dollars on the counter. Soon a policeman comes to arrest Dave for stealing a television. To avoid the inevitable difficulties stemming from no available guardian, Dave's involvement with the stolen television set, and their separation from each other, they launch out on their own, as their irresponsible father pans for gold in Alaska.
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They seek refuge in the mountains, but instead they find more danger. They become involved in a fight with cocaine smugglers and nearly lose their lives. Entangled in this cocaine affair by the young fellow they try to befriend, and pursued by him and his pursuers as well, Annie, David and Jeff fight for their lives, almost reaching the limit of their physical and emotional stamina.

From this conflict emerges Annie's strength of character that once again shows how courage and a determination to live give meaning and focus to a young adult novel.

The characters are believable and the plot moves quickly, though at times it's an improbable one. Teenage readers will find no reason to stop turning the pages to discover what happens next. For young readers who like suspense, I recommend that they "go for the big one." —Raphael Johnstoneaux


Rahn's unlikely choices of animals that changed history — the horse, the black rat and the beaver — show the reader how increased workpower and mobility, devastating disease, and the desire for bodily adornment changed human history.

Use of the horse made both food acquisition and war easier, and man — not known for his wisdom — exploited the horse for both purposes. Rahn graphically explains how the armor-clad "great horse" (no idle term — the warhorse had to carry 400 pounds of his own as well as his rider's armor) helped give rise to the feudal system. While the serf was under the protection of the lord on his warhorse, he could use the great horse to plow more land and harvest more crops.

Interestingly, the feudal system's demise was hastened by the next animals Rahn describes: the black rat and his fleas. They spread Bubonic Plague because, when the infected rats died, the next most preferred hosts for the fleas were humans. Among other effects, the Plague decreased people's confidence in physicians, who could do nothing to stop people from dying. The soul-searching of these doctors started medicine on the long road towards reform and scientific advancement, while the number of deaths raised the number of wills. But with few lawyers alive, the survivors waited longer periods — and often inherited more. (One girl in Scandinavia inherited a whole town because she was the sole survivor.) Because more peasants died than lords, the surviving peasants were more valuable and the feudal overlords had to make more concessions to get serfs to work their land. The serfs thus became richer and more independent, eventually weakening the whole system.

The last example Rahn gives is the beaver, hunted almost to extinction for its fur and therefore responsible for the exploration of most of the North American continent. Trappers overkilled the beaver population and had to keep looking for fresh territory to keep their business going. When unexplored land ran out, the trapping business weakened, and people moved in to settle what is now the northern part of the United States and Canada.

Rahn has given ample evidence that the horse, the rat (with the aid of fleas) and the beaver changed history. This book would be a valuable resource in the study of medieval history or of the exploration of North America. —Lillian Heil


Sarah lives in Maine in the late 1800s. She isn't pretty, and she isn't docile, and her father and maiden aunt with whom she lives have despaired of getting her married. On a whim, she answers an ad in the newspaper for a mail-order bride. Alex T. Proud, a rancher in Montana, wants a wife, and on the basis of her letter he decides she will suit. So off goes Sarah to high adventure in Montana, or so she thinks.

Alex turns out to be sixty years old, three times her age. But at least the ranch itself isn't a disappointment. Though she hates married life, she loves her horse and the wide open spaces, and resigns herself to a loveless relationship. How the situation that Turner has spent most of the book setting up is going to be resolved in the few remaining pages boggles the mind. Then poor old Alex falls off a cliff and dies. The book ends with Sarah resolving to run the ranch herself and show the world that there is a type of woman somewhere between the dutiful housewife and the barmaid.

The plot has possibilities, but not without a more likeable and believable heroine. —Lovisa Lyman