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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol12/iss1/3
Apple, Margot. Blanket.

Today is wash day and it is time for Blanket to be washed. But when bedtime comes, Blanket is still on the clothes line, too wet to take to bed. The little boy, narrator of this story, is having a very difficult time getting to sleep without the comforting Blanket. Even the stuffed animals and the family kitty can’t make up for his loss. He can see Blanket out on the line—little drops of water dripping from its corners. Even the wind feels sorry for Blanket and the boy, and after some fierce gusts, and some extra effort from the other clothes on the line, Blanket is swept along almost to the window where the child is waiting. Finally, with one last effort from dog and kitty, Blanket is free. Such celebrating!

This is an entertaining, magical book for children, many of whom will identify immediately with the little boy who could not bear to have his blanket taken away, even for a day. The illustrations are mostly done in pastels with dark greens making up the night. The clothes on the clothes line seem to take on personalities of their own as do dog and kitty. An entertaining book that children will want to read again and again.

—Helen Hoopes

Bellairs, John. The Secret of the Underground Room.

I had read other John Bellairs mysteries and been happy to suggest them to young readers as light mysteries . . . . The House With a Clock in Its Walls is one such example. However, having read his latest effort, The Secret of the Underground Room, I’ve decided that I’ll recommend only the ones that I have read. The Secret of the Underground Room has the same look about it, the same cover illustrator, etc., as the other Bellairs Mysteries, but the story does not flow smoothly, nor does it hold together well.

Johnny Dixon and Professor Childermass find that their friend, Father Higgins, has disappeared after warning them that he is being haunted by a ghost. They follow clues left behind, presumably by the ghost, and are led to England where they become embroiled in a
struggle with an evil, long-dead knight who intends to free other evil spirits and take over the world. Sounds like an exciting plot for a light mystery!? However, the characters spread in too many directions and seem to have very little control over their own actions or fate. Too many ideas are brought into the story and never developed, or, in some cases, never resolved.

I will not be recommending this one.

—Kathe C. Homer


Bingo Brown is a boy in long-distance love (to the tune of $54.29) with Melissa, the girl who taught him how meaningful a mixed-sex conversation can be. But Melissa has moved to Bixby, Oklahoma and phone privileges have been discontinued until further notice. The mustache he has so hopefully been cultivating has gone back underground, the enemy agent from next door wants Bingo to tend his dog, and Cici, Melissa’s best friend, has been hanging around and writing Bingo notes with hearts dotting her i’s. Life could definitely be less complicated.

But Bingo has an even bigger surprise coming, one that will make the missing mustache seem tame and leave Bingo telling his intimate life’s details to poodle.

Bingo’s story is told with wry good humor, and just the right touch to make him real. He is trying hard to grow up, but is stuck on the edge of innocence. This is a funny, enjoyable story, bound to be relished by boys and girls from grades 4 to 7.

—Jan Staheli


Betsy Byars has done it again, and Bingo Brown is back—more in love, more experienced in mixed-sexed conversations (he’s had more than a dozen by now), and certainly more confused by life and its burning questions. It is Christmas, and Bingo must find the exact right present for Melissa who is living in Bixby, Oklahoma. This problem is only intensified by Melissa’s letter, telling him how she thinks of him while her sister reads a romance about a dashing gypsy lover. What can a gypsy lover buy his girl for $3.39? And why is a blonde named
Boots following him around the mall? And when will Billy Wentworth quit asking him for advice on his “love life?” And most important, how will things change when his Mom has the new baby?

*Bingo* is funny, light hearted, and best of, all real. Byars has infused the story with just the right amount of humor, worry and puzzlement to make everyone identify with the problems of a boy trying hard to grow up. This would be a delightful read for boys or girls from grades 4 to 7.

—Jan Staheli

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This is the story of a little cricket who is born into a wonderful world. As he moves through the book, he is greeted and welcomed by all kinds of other creatures: a locust, a praying mantis, a worm, a spittlebug, a cicada, a bumblebee, a dragonfly, a mosquito, and a una moth. To each one, he tries to answer—to chirp (by rubbing his legs together)—but no sound comes. Finally, he meets another cricket. “She, too, was a very quiet cricket,” but finally, our little hero is able to express himself!

I took this book to a family reunion and it was the hit of the whole week. All of the children (from the little two-year-old to the big 16-year-old) were fascinated, and the younger ones read it again and again. Of course the “multi-sensory” ending played a big part in keeping their attention, but the book itself is fun. Carle has illustrated *The Very Quiet Cricket* with bright, wild colors that look as if they could be scrapped off the page! The creatures all seem to have texture, especially the wings, and several of my young relatives tried to feel the lace-like effective. The illustrations appear to be three-dimensional. The storyline is also significant and reaffirms to the child that all creations have a purpose in life, and if we keep trying, all can achieve our destiny. I highly recommend this book.

—Helen Hoopes

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A child stands spellbound before a picture of a house, a boy rows smiling across a lake, a girl visits a hotel and hears a man in the next room snoring, a woman drives to the store for the last strawberries of autumn. Material for a scary story? Yes!

J. Clarke, an Australian author, has written a book of stories that range from shiveringly sad to deliciously scary to truly frightening. In fact, I would not recommend some of these stories for younger readers. There is no leeway for hope or avenue for escape in those few, and that is what makes them genuinely alarming. But one thing can be said for all of the stories—they are very well written. Ms. Clarke has a deft touch that keeps your attention riveted to the page. I would recommend this book to grades 7 - 12 without question, and perhaps as a read aloud for grades 5-6, if you are sure of your audience and material.

—Jan Staheli


This little piece of pioneer history is wonderfully told through Ellie and her grandmother as Ellie questions Gram about her life as a child on the Nebraska plains. Gram has come to visit on the condition that she be allowed to take the grandchildren, Ellie and Stevie, to the Museum of natural history wherein is housed the dinosaur that was discovered by her brother, Daniel. As they wander through the rooms of the museum leading to the dinosaur exhibit, Gram’s tale of adventure, love, and tragedy unfolds.

*My Daniel* is a beautiful, touching story that reaches for the deepest in us...the feelings a farmer has about being a farmer, even when the land itself is dying after three years of drought, the feelings of a young mother who has lost yet another child to the hard life on the plains, the deep feelings of a young sister for her older brother, the feelings of a young man when he’s searching for a dream, and the feelings of an old woman who needs to pass on a family legacy to her grandchildren.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It is an excellent look at a bit of early pioneer history, and the story is told in such a moving way that it is not easily forgotten.

—Kathe C. Homer
In *Other Bells for Us to Ring*, Cormier communicates the essence of what true religion is—love of God and love of others. Eleven-year-old Darcy and her mother live in the French Catholic section of the small Massachusetts town of Monument near the Fort Delta army base where her father is stationed. The frequent moves of Darcy’s family and her shyness had made it so difficult to make friends that she had given up trying. But in Monument, Darcy finds bold, adventurous, flaming-haired Kathleen Mary O’Hara who takes charge of Darcy’s life and becomes her best friend. From Kathleen, Darcy learns about miracles and Catholicism. On their last visit, before Kathleen disappears from Darcy’s life, she teasingly sprinkles holy water on her and tells her she is a Catholic. Darcy worries about that and finally goes to ask the old nun who had performed the miracles to answer some of the questions she dare not ask her mother when Kathleen doesn’t return. The nun helps Darcy understand that religion is love. Darcy’s own miracle is that her father returns from the war safe and she learns that Kathleen had not deserted her after all.

I found the story a powerful description of loneliness, friendship, love, and the power of religion. Cormier’s descriptions are vivid comparing the French-speaking town to an opera, pushing the reader to think of the rhythmic quality that one always notices in foreign languages or describing Kathleen and her orange hair and green eyes as the inhabitant of a Technicolor movie while Darcy was still in black and white.

The dialogue is brisk and bold for Kathleen: “My name is Kathleen Mary O’Hara,” she said, “what’s yours?” Not asking but demanding. For the little old nun, Sister Angela, the dialogue is quiet and soft: “What about God, dear young Darcy?” she asked gently. “I mean, all this about meat on Friday and the rest, where does God come into it?”

Darcy’s own miracle (her father’s return is announced the same day the kindly nun had said a prayer for him) seems a fitting conclusion for a story about love of people and of God. It is no surprise that Darcy hears “other bells” that no one else can hear ringing on Christmas Eve.

—Lillian Heil
Retta Caldwell has just moved from the lush greenness of Pennsylvania to the arid desert of southeast California. She is adjusting to new surroundings, a new job on her father's paper, and a new situation with Dallas Dobson. Dallas has come from Pennsylvania to work for the summer on a horse ranch near Retta's home. But so far, things have not turned out as Retta had expected. She'd been hoping for a romantic reunion and a chance to spend the summer together. But Dallas' job keeps them apart most of the time, and his need for a commitment from her begins to put another wedge between them.

Maureen Daly has written a sweet story about two young people who love each other, but are confused about themselves and what their futures hold. Beautifully evoking the California desert, the story carries us along with them as they work to understand each other and their own confusions about life. I would recommend it for light reading to girls from grade 8 or 9 on up.

—Jan Staheli

This is a charming collection of Christmas poems by such authors as Elizabeth Coatsworth, Leslie Norris, and Jane Yolen. But this is a collection with a twist, as the poems are all written from the points of view of animals who observed the birth and glory of the Christ Child. Donkey, oxen, cat, dog, camels, ladybug, rooster, bat, and serpent all visit the stable and tell the story in their own way.

Each double-page spread in this beautiful book is illustrated with the animal of the poem, and bordered to the edge of the page with floral designs inspired by medieval manuscripts. Beverly Duncan used plants which have direct association with Christmas or with other winter solstice celebrations. This is a lovely little Christmas volume and I would recommend it for any special Christmas collection. Children, small and large, will enjoy poring over poetry and art work together.

—Jan Staheli
A- Dyjak, Elisabeth. *I Should Have Listened to Moon.*
FI 132 pp.

Nadine’s best friend, Moon, warned her not to use green rubber bands to hold up her socks. She told Nadine that green rubber bands were unlucky, especially on Thursdays, and she wouldn’t use them for anything. But Nadine hadn’t listened, and now she was sorry. Now, Lyon was moving into her house, and into her room, and into her life—for the whole summer. Lyon, Nadine’s grandmother, had been living alone for a long time and was beginning to forget things—important things like forgetting where she lived when she was out shopping. But she remembered some important things, too, and Nadine began to like having her grandmother around.

Moon was another problem. She kept sending away for things like make-up kits with Cute Tomato fingernail polish and Passionate Plum lipstick, and spending hours looking at bride magazines.

Nadine didn’t want to giggle about boys, or listen to Lyon’s worries, or worry herself about what Lyon was up to now. But she began to learn that growing up was more fun than it looked, and that loving her grandmother was an easier thing to do than she had thought.

This is a nice book about the confusion of growing up. I would recommend it for girls in grades 4 through 6.

—Jan Staheli

B Everitt-Stewart, Andy, illustrated by. *Somebodies in the Attic.*
PB Unpaginated.

The latest in a list of the two most popular genres in juveniles (pop-up and spooky), this item has been outrated in the moving-parts department by others, but certainly not in the gore category. Accompanied by functionally adequate verse (which is unacknowledged by any of the credits), it is illustrated with every form of horror possibility dear to the hearts of the very late-night TV movies and bucket-of-blood technicians. If it scares you, and it isn’t here, you must be more imaginative than most run-of-the-mill fright fans.

Generally, the moving parts are of the pop-up and -out variety with no extraordinary aspects, but the multi-layer Dracula of the end-piece is pretty impressive! This one’s bound to wear out before it’s paid for!

—Janet Francis
Birches is a dream poem, or a poem about dreams, and this is a dream of a book. It is beautifully illustrated, thought by thought, by Ed Young's watercolors in browns and pale greens. It flows naturally, without breaking into the rhythm or sense of the poem, and creates a soft-edged world of forest and frost, birches and boys.

So when you, too are

... weary of considerations,
   And life is too much like a pathless wood
   Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
   Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
   From a twig's having lashed across it open.

I would invite you to read this lovely book, and find what

"One could do worse than be a swinger of birches."

—Jan Staheli

B+ Gerber, Merrill Joan. *Handsome as Anything.*
FI 168 pp.

Rachel Leah Kaminsky has just finished her Junior year in high school. Her Jewish father is anxious for her to find a good Jewish boyfriend, and the rest of her family is always giving her all kinds of advice—about men and everything else. One sister, Erica, is about to get married and thinks Rachel should, too. The other sister, Franny, an ardent feminist, wants nothing to do with men. Rachel’s mother just wants her to act like a lady. There are three men in Rachel’s life: Avram, a rabbinical student—very pious and looking for a wife who will be obedient; Jason, a Zen Buddhist who travels the country on his big black motorcycle and is noncommittal to any long-term relationships; and Karl, the amiable baker apprentice who is so fun to be with but whose parents had emigrated from Germany, the country which terminated the Jews.

Despite the theme, and the possible problems posed by all these people with such different outlooks on life, the book is full of humor and is enjoyable to read. The struggle is evident, though, as Rachel tries to find out about herself and her place in the world. The book is an easy-to-read, get-involved-with-the-characters kind of book, but
nothing earth shattering. I recommend it to the young reader with an afternoon with nothing to do. A lot of questions are left unanswered, but then I guess that’s the way life really is. And it is funny.

—Helen Hoopes

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A+ Ho, Minfong. *Rice Without Rain.*
FI $12.95. 236 pp.

*Rice Without Rain* is the story of the social problems within Thailand. Minfong Ho grew up in Thailand and participated in incidents that are similar to those discussed in this book. Jinda, the main character, is a young, seventeen-year-old girl growing up in a small village where rice is the primary source of income. No matter how successful or fruitless the harvest, the landlords come and collect one half of the rice as their rent-share. Four university students come to the village to help the people and teach them that there is no law that says they must put up with this outrage—it is only tradition—and that they need to rebel against the landlords. Jinda becomes very close to two of them and puts her trust in them: Sri who has a medical background and is a great help to the village, and Ned who talks of "destiny" and "fighting for personal rights." This year, the rice crop is not even enough to feed the people of Jinda’s village, so when the rent collectors come and try to take half, a rebellion breaks out. The heartache that comes as a result of this action comprises the remainder of the book which takes Jinda to Bangkok and finally, home to her own village.

*Rice Without Rain* is beautifully written with the delicate flavor of the orient. The descriptions of the country of Thailand are painted with beautiful imagery that makes Thailand real. The affections and relationships between the central characters are substantial and honest. These are people whom you really care about and for whom you feel a great kinship. Minfong Ho has helped us look deeply into the problems that have faced her country and with which it is still struggling. I highly recommend *Rice Without Rain.*

—Helen Hoopes

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Sister is a look at some of the harsher aspects of a female’s life in the late 1800’s. The book is well-written and probably reflective of attitudes of the times, I just don’t know to whom I would recommend it.

The main two areas of discussion in the story are the lack of schooling for girls and the lack of information on maturation and childbirth in the late 1800’s. The fact that a girl is not offered the opportunities of education, even if she has a great desire and aptitude for academics, is portrayed as a real tragedy of the times. The fact that no one is allowed to discuss the physical changes that come to a girl as she grows older—nor the realities of childbirth—causes a tremendous amount of terror, guilt, and ineptitude when the heroine of the story has to help her mother with a birth. (The physical aspects of the birth are quite detailed.)

There is another aspect of the story that was handled well and is quite moving. The loss of the baby causes the mother to break down completely. She is unable to care for the rest of the family or for herself until months later when her daughters’ needs finally demand that she come out of her despair and back to the living.

I have been looking for good pieces of historical fiction and, as I said, this piece is well-written and narrowly informative, but I would not feel comfortable recommending it to very many young people.

—Kathe C. Homer

Alena was in the eighth grade and loved school. It was the late 1800’s and Hancock County, Illinois was an interesting place to be growing up. Her first day of school that year was particularly exciting because the new teacher was Johnny Malcolm who had been an eighth grader when Alena was in the first grade. He was so handsome and was as excited about teaching as Alena was about learning. Alena came from a family with a younger sister and two little brothers, and her mother was expecting her fifth child. Suddenly, the baby came early and because of the complications that followed, it became necessary for Alena to drop out of her beloved school and stay home to take care of
the family. Forced to become a woman before she was ready, Alena learned a lot more about life than she had bargained for.

*Sister* is very well-written and the reader can really identify with Alena and the difficulties that she must endure. The birth of the baby is described quite graphically and any reader who is not prepared for the situation should either be warned off or steered away from this book. For the mature young reader, however, it is a profound telling of this miracle of birth. The reader will not soon forget the sights and sounds, the smells and colors. It certainly paints a true picture of the events in the lives of a young girl growing up in the pioneer life of the late 1800's.

—Helen Hoopes

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This little series of books takes a close look at the different large environments of our earth. The titles include, *Rivers, Deserts, Temperate Forest, Tropical Forests, Mountains,* and *Polar Regions.*

The format is large. The pictures and illustrations are very well done—beautiful photographs and precise, informative illustrations. It is surprising that books of this brevity can so ably cover the subject—and then some!

The books begin by identifying the areas of the world with a particular environment, then discussing in detail the circumstances and conditions that make the environment what it is. There is a discussion of how such an area can come to be and how it could be changed to be more beneficial to mankind. How the region may be used and by which species is covered in another section. The information is concise, but very interesting and informative.

I was delighted to find that the books also include a fact file, a good project section, suggestions for further reading, addresses to write to for more information, and places to go to experience life in a particular region.

These books would provide an excellent introduction to the different regions of the earth. I would highly recommend the series.

—Kathe C. Homer

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<td>NF</td>
<td>The title of this book comes from a Florida folk saying: “I been in Sorrow’s kitchen and I done licked the pots clean.” This combination biography/selected works backs up the emotional context of that saying with bare bone descriptions of a life that stretched from New York to Haiti geographically and from Voodoo to Columbia University intellectually. Zora Neale Hurston recorded and preserved the cadence of the black voices of her childhood, right along with the midnight mysteries of African religions, cherished and practiced since slave times. She was independent when it was insulting for a black person to be independent, sassy where women were meant to be seen only, and stubborn when it came to portraying the tragedy of her race. Almost as though she intended to balance out the accurate and bitter portrayals of black life being written by her contemporaries (Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Alain Locke) she insisted on writing joyful and emotionally charged accounts of the good times that were also there. She pursued southern black folklore and recorded it with such accuracy that Alan Lomax, renowned American folklorist, once said she “was the best informed person today on Negro folklore.” Hurston’s life span went from 1901-1960, but the body of work she left (novels, folklore, anthropological [and terrifyingly descriptive] accounts of voodoo, and even audio recorded accounts of card games and story exchanges) is vital and pertinent. She also has the double advantage of being black and female in this minority conscious decade—but in spite of all these virtues, <em>Sorrow’s Kitchen</em> is fascinating reading and a must for the biography shelf of any junior high/high school library. The text is well documented, indexed and illustrated with candid, interesting photographs.</td>
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<td>—Janet Francis</td>
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<td>$12.89. 32 pp.</td>
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<td>NF</td>
<td>Since the day I found a tiny octopus hiding in a piece of coral on the beach, I have been interested in these odd-looking sea creatures. Patricia Lauber has written a book for young children about these strange, eight-armed animals that range in size from the giant-sized 17 footer to the poisonous blue ringed one that is only 1 1/2 to 3 inches</td>
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long (measurements made from the tip of the bag [or head] to the tip of the arm). Octopi live alone in rocks, can change color (an angry one turns dark red; a frightened one is pale), eat crabs, and can move like a jet by drawing in water and shooting it out through a tube. It is also more intelligent than some animals—it even solves problems like how to get a crab out of a glass jar. (It takes the top off the jar.) In aquariums octopi seem to like people they know. They will play tug of war with people and a person who annoys them may get squirted.

Lauber's text is direct and easy to understand, and filled with interesting facts. Holly Keller's illustrations are graphically simple to show the parts or characteristics being described. I have never noticed the tube or siphon on the side of the bag used for squirting water. I shall know where to look the next time I see one in an aquarium. If children are as intrigued by octopi (or octopuses) as I am, they will enjoy this book.

—Lillian Heil

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*Underground Man* is part of the Great Episodes Series of historical fiction books published by Gulliver Books, a division of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers. Having already read several of the books from this series, and knowing Milton Meltzer by reputation, I was excited to begin this book. I was not disappointed.

This is the story of Joshua Bowen, a young white abolitionist. Based on the real life adventures of Calvin Fairbank, this is the story of a young white man who repeatedly risked his life to venture into the South (Kentucky, mostly) to bring black slaves into freedom. *Underground Man* begins when Joshua is 19-years-old. Estranged from his father, he leaves home and enters the world trying to find himself. He becomes an itinerant Methodist preacher but finds that he is not cut out for that job. Rafting down the Mississippi, he meets a black man, Sam, who joins him and together they work as loggers. Only later does he discover that Sam is a slave. Subsequently, Joshua witnesses the separation of a black family because the mother becomes violent at the prospects of being whipped. Unable to help her, Joshua finally realizes that he must do something to help these people. The remainder of the story focuses on his struggles to help a down-trodden people escape to freedom: constant danger, imprisonment, but at the same time, self-

Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1991
Meltzer has done a remarkable job in helping us get into the mind and heart of both the slave and the abolitionist. The characters are real, the prison is gruesome, the desperateness of the situations is vivid. This new edition of Meltzer’s book contains an added chapter, “Afterward: On History and Fiction,” that gives a detailed accounting of the real history behind this work of fiction. I highly recommend this book to all readers—both young and old. It is a fascinating look into a dark period of our American History.

—Helen Hoopes

Frances Miller’s Cutting Loose is the story of teenaged Matt McKendrick and his closet friends as they come to terms with almost being adults. Matt is not an ordinary teenager. He has already lived through his parents’ death and his sister’s murder. The book begins as he tries to decide whether or not to return to the ranch town where he grew up, to work with his friends on a dude ranch. His concern is about whether the town blames him for carelessness in preventing his sister’s murder and whether he can handle memories of his parents that he has avoided.

The writing is uneven. It was dramatic and gripping at times as adults confronted teenagers, or a stepmother tried to find her place in the family or two teenagers resolved some of their past differences; but at other times, the story was far too predictable and even boring. Halfway through, I arrived at a possible reason for the unevenness of plot tension. It seemed that each problem was solved too quickly so there was no tension that carried through to the end of the book. Each teenager had his own particular problem and the problem would be well described as he or she saw it. Too soon the author let us in on the feelings and motivations of the other person involved, and both the reader and the teenager realized he had misjudged the antagonist. It was like being on a roller coaster with no real high point of excitement. There was enough plot tension to keep me reading, but not enough to really make me lose myself in the story.

—Lillian Heil
If you've been concerned about the dangers of killer bees, read this short informative book by Lawrence Pringle. Originally published in 1986, now that the bees have reached the United States, Pringle has written a revision. He explains how the warm climate of Africa has made it unnecessary for bees to store honey for winter survival, or build a nest to protect themselves from the cold. Instead, they have learned to be fierce and easily provoked because their nests, which are out in the open, are very vulnerable to attack. He points out that the stinger and venom of an individual bee are no more dangerous than other varieties. The African (killer) bees, on the other hand, are more aggressive and stay excited longer so one must never forget these characteristics. Being stung several hundred times by any kind of a bee seems to cause heart or kidney failure, but African bees will stay in an angry swarm longer so the risk from them is greater.

According to Pringle, there have been an estimated 700-1,000 people die from bee stings in South America between 1957 and 1985. That amounts to less than 40 fatalities a year. European honeybees in the United States kill about that many people annually. Most of these people are allergic to bee venom and may die from just one sting. The African bees cause fewer deaths, but send more people to the hospital, for each fatality, since the bees are so aggressive for so long in each case where they are disturbed.

Actually the economic impact is more serious because the aggressive African bees often drive out the less aggressive European bees. Because of all the bad publicity, the bee industry will be upset and bee keepers fear the public will panic about having bees around. No one knows how far north they will be able to survive. Pringle warns that killer bees will reach their peak numbers between 1992-1995 and many researchers are alarmed because so little money has been allocated to research that could better prepare us to deal with the arrival of the African bees.

This is a short, well-written book about the problems and possible solutions to the arrival of this very aggressive type of bee. Also included is reading list for further information.

—Lillian Heil
Since Jerry Spinelli's book, *Maniac Magee*, had just been named the Newbery award winner for 1991, and I didn't have access to it, I decided to try one of his others, *The Bathwater Gang*. This is a very simple, light comedy, geared to the very young reader.

Bertie is a young girl with a tremendous amount of energy who is *BORED* with a capital *B!* (and it's only the first day of summer.) Both of her parents work, but luckily, she has a delightful, high energy grandmother who is full of ideas—if Bertie can just carry them off. As Bertie tries to establish a "gang" of girls (whom she can boss around!) she runs into several problems. Number one, her best friend can't join because her mom thinks gangs just make war on other gangs. Number two, the boys are angry because they aren't allowed into the gang. When the boys start their own gang, the war *IS* on and is renewed day after day.

After a couple of days of pouring rain, all the kids in town head for "the Mud Hole" where they can romp, sling mud, and even slide down hills of mud. What fun!! As the hoses come out and bodies become recognizable once more, the war begins anew—until the biggest body is hosed down and turns out to be grandma, herself!! She sets the kids straight and gets them to work together as they should.

For the young reader this is a funny, contemporary story. The style is concise with lots of dialogue. The language is quite "witty" (sarcastic), but maybe too much so for the very young. My youngster thought it was great.

—Kathe C. Homer

Ten-year-old Rebecca had been living with her father in a wonderful warm world. It was almost like a fairy tale. Upon his death, she is sent to live with Rachel, Rebecca's mother who lives in Vermont. All Rebecca knows is that Rachel ran away from her and Dad when Rebecca was only two. From that time on, they had never heard from Rachel—not once in the last eight years. In Vermont, Rebecca finds that nothing is like it was in California. Rachel doesn't even seem glad to see her. After a period of time, Rebecca finds friendship with a puppy, with Rachel's horses, with Patty, and with Bill, a troubled foster
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child. Her experiences with these friends bring Rebecca and Rachel together as Rebecca learns truths that were kept hidden by her father. She discovers that she can lived “happily after all” in Vermont.

This book deals sensitively with real-life issues: divorce, foster care, and fantasy vs. real life. Some young readers may be coming face to face with some of these issues. Emotions expressed by the characters are very true-to-life and the situations can be related to very easily. It shows that sometimes, real life can be scary; but that finally, things will be alright and you find that you can live “happily after all!”

—Sheena Parker

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What child wouldn’t like Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child's Garden of Verses*? This little book has been a favorite with children for almost 100 years—five generations! What adult does not have a favorite poem that he learned as a child and can still remember the words today. Mine was “The Swing.” The first verse follows:

How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

I remember sitting in the swing at the park repeating that poem over and over again. “Up in the air I go flying again, —Up in the air and down” What memories!

This particular edition is the perfect size for young people: 6 1/2 inches high and 8 inches wide. The cover is dark green fabric with gold lettering and the pages are white with a picture for almost every poem. Henriette Willebeek Le Mair (a renowned dutch artist) originally created the illustration for a 1926 edition. This updated edition contains a number of additional drawings. The children are delightful and typical of 1920’s. The colors are pastels and the illustrations effectively reflect the actions of the poems. Any child would love to have this little treasure for their very own.

—Helen Hoopes

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Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1991
Kate of Still Waters vividly portrays both the joy and despair in farming. Seen through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Kate Chidden, sheep farming has many hazards and Kate’s not sure she’s up to the terrible tasks sometimes demanded of farmers: puncturing bloated animals or dealing with the dead ewes when dogs attack. She’s also worried about the future of their farm because the drought may make it impossible for her father to make his payments to the bank. Martha Stiles has captured the everyday rhythm of life on a Kentucky farm and of Kate’s growth in her ability to cope with the unpredictable, risky nature of farming and to understand other people.

The farming crises (bloating animals, sheep that give up wanting to live, excited horses doing dumb things, drought and mid west tornadoes) are very much a part of the real farming world, and Stiles’ descriptions make readers feel as if they were there at Kate’s elbows as she describes a tornado as if you were looking up at a “storming ocean from its very bottom” or saying that the bloated cow was as “stiff-legged as a corpse” or describing the watermelon that is “sweet as honey and red as cranberry juice.” Whether the family is star gazing, having a birthday party, or staying up all night to supervise the birth of lambs, life is interesting and challenging for this farm girl. I only have one small complaint to make about the author’s use of foreshadowing coming dramatic events. Because I became aware of the technique as I read, I decided to count the times that this technique was used. There were at least eleven situations—perhaps a few too many. Their overuse can jar the reader out of the story.

The story, however, rings true in so many ways as it related to the risks and joy of farming, the portrayal of young people growing up, and the ever-changing relationship between a mother and father as they raise their two girls to take over the family farm. The reader ends the story with a steady sureness that Kate and her family will be able to meet problems and find solutions to them.

—Lillian Heil

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https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol12/iss1/3
Spike Russell and his brother Bob work their way up from the minor baseball league to the Brooklyn Dodgers because of their skill at the difficult keystone combination of shortstop and second base. They think as one and have perfected the skills needed to make this combination so vital to the ball team’s success. Spike is asked to become manager of the team when the Dodgers are on a dangerous downward slide in the league standings and team unity is almost non-existent. To top it all off, a rookie catcher who is a Jew, joins the club. Spike must struggle, not only to help his team overcome dissention and prejudice, but also to win back his brother’s faith and understanding so they can once again work together as the “Keystone Kids.”

This book realistically deals with sportsmanship, team work, and prejudice. The baseball jargon is best understood by one involved with the sport, although the theme comes through anyway. This story is a great example of how building one another can help build the whole.

—Sheena Parker

David Wiesner. *Hurricane.* Illustrated by David Wiesner.

The night of the hurricane was one of excitement as well as fear for David and George. Safe inside the house, they listen to the wind, watch the rain, and wonder what it will be like when the hurricane hits. When the power fails, they know the hurricane is here; however, they are safe inside with Mom and Dad and Hannibal, the cat. As the boys go to bed, they wonder what they will find in the morning. The next day they find an elm tree blown down in their neighbor’s yard. What a source of adventure! David and George climb into the tree and embark on a jungle safari, a sea voyage, and an expedition into space. When the tree is sawed up and taken away, they are miserable about their loss; but a new storm threat holds the promise that perhaps the second elm tree will fall and land in their yard!

The story is great! Full of imagination and yet so true-to-life as we see the delight children can find in an old fallen tree. The illustrations are vivid and contrast the dark fearsomeness of the storm with the bright excitement of the boy’s imaginary voyages. A delightful book.

—Sheena Parker
Goldie is baby-sitting Baby Bear. Before he goes to sleep, he wants one story, then one more, then one more, then just one more. Goldie stretches her imagination and meets Baby Bear’s requests for stories that are silly, sad, scary, angry, funny, and adventure. At the end of both her patience and imagination, Goldie begins her last story—a true one—only to find that Baby Bear is not listening. He has fallen asleep! The characters in the stories, Milly the Mole, Arnold Alligator, and the herd of sheep all named Sam, are all favorite toys belong to Baby Bear.

The illustrations are delightful! The colors are soft and soothing to the eye. The stories are imaginative and appealing to children. This book would be very useful at bedtime when a child wants one story, then one more story, then just one more story.

—Sheena Parker

Have you ever wondered what a witch eats on pizza (how about amanita mushrooms?), or what she buys at the drugstore (do you need dragon’s blood or Dramamine?), or how she chooses a new flying carpet (equipped with seat belts!)? Jane Yolen will answer these pressing questions for you, in this engaging picture book of Halloween poems. The verses are funny, scary, quirky, sweet, and always entertaining.

But the show in this little volume is really stolen by illustrator Elise Primavera whose full-color pictures are imaginative and clever. They show us that a witch’s drugstore is open from midnight to dawn, and that it’s no picnic being stuck for an eternity with a ghost who likes clutter and calls you “Mausoleum Breath,” and that it must be pure, sheer fun to ride a broomstick.

This book is thoroughly enjoyable, for children and adults alike, and I would recommend it for anyone who loves Halloween. It’s a delight.

—Jan Staheli

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Susan can’t go to sleep in her own bed. She wants to sleep in Mommy’s and Daddy’s bed, even though she knows the parakeet and the dog and the baby are all sleeping in their own beds.

The situation is familiar to every child (not to mention every parent). The book is appealing in its simplicity. The text is brief and to the point. The pictures are brightly colored and broadly drawn. And best of all, Susan solves her own problem after her parents make it clear that everyone sleeps in their own bed.

My reaction to this book was slightly reserved until two of my children read it and loved it. It opened the door to some wonderful talks about similar remembered experiences. “When I was little,” is a favorite subject at our house and this was a lovely way to jog some memories. I should think it would be as efficacious for very young children, as well.

—Jan Staheli

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Father is perplexed. Animals like Mother. Animals do not like Father. Father is bitten by dogs, scratched by cats and kicked by horses. So, Father goes off to Africa hoping to find at least one animal that will like him. The letters he writes home indicate that he is not having any success. He returns home thankful that, at least, his family still loves him. And then, poor Father is given another surprise.

The situations in which “poor Father” finds himself are all humorous, and the illustrations are comical and yet evoke a sense of sympathy for “poor Father.” The ending is indeed a humorous surprise.

—Sheena Parker

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