Book Reviews

Authors
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This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol12/iss4/3
Lloyd Alexander’s *Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen* is a fascinating story as well as a series of remarkable characterizations. With his impudent servant Mafoo, the teacher of many names (Wu, Fu, Shu, Chu, and Hu) the irrepressible thief, Moxa, the steadfast General Li Kwang, the flute girl, Voyaging Moon and others Prince Jen suffers the same injustices and problems that are being endured by the people of his kingdom. In his remarkable journey to find T’ienkuo (the legendary kingdom of peace and justice) Prince Jen learns the wisdom he needs to make his kingdom become the dream kingdom he sought.

Besides an engrossing adventure, Alexander has given the reader a tale set in the orient filled with details relating to the Chinese culture. This includes the "guardian" wise scholar (of many names) who magically guides Jen’s path and provides a constant source of wise and witty counsel. At first reading I wasn’t sure I liked the end-of-the-chapter moral summaries and forecast of the next adventure, but I decided they added to the Chinese character of the tale. It was as if Master Hu (Wu, etc.) were providing these statements of sage advice and giving us a transition to the next chapter.

My favorite character was Moxa, the high principled robber who had so many honorable precepts that there was only one man in the entire story bad enough for him to rob. Alexander’s inventive way of spelling out his character was a constant supply of flowery phrases which Moxa used with such glibness that it was laughable. He talked about his Ear of Continual Attentiveness, his Eye of Discerning Perception, Nose of Thoughtful Inhalations, Voice of Solemn Warning, etc. etc. Moxa and the wise cracking Mafoo were perfect companions to the innocently serious Prince Jen.

With characters that included the humorous, the steadfast, the loyal, the wise, the eagerness of a child and the cruel and greedy, Jen’s adventures lead him to wisdom and the reader to entertainment, knowledge and self discovery.

—Lillian Heil
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Jim Arnosky offers us some good illustrations and advice about how to find and notice things while walking in the woods. He includes details about stinging bees and hornets, poison ivy, oak and sumack. He also warns of ticks. There are two noticeable shortcomings though, he does not warn us not to wander in the woods alone, and he does not warn against picking up snakes. It is a good book as far as it goes, but I do think we need the other warnings.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

Booth, David (selected by). *Voices on the Wind, Poems for All Seasons.*
All Illustrated by Michele Lemieux.
PB 48 pp.

This is a very pretty book of seasonal poetry. Ms. Lemieux's paintings are soft, moody and evocative. Even the endpapers are lovely. Some of the poems included are especially wonderful.

Have you ever smelled summer?
Sure you have.
Remember that time
When you were tired of running
Or doing nothing much
And you were hot
And you flopped right down on the ground?
Remember how the warm soil smelled—
And the grass?
That was summer.

Most of the verses are about summer, but there are some on each of the other seasons as well. I would recommend this volume be used for lower grades as the poems are sweet and simple easy to read and to understand.

—Jan Staheli

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https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol12/iss4/3
Bruce Brooks vividly describes the orderly and beautiful constructions of animals—often with materials produced by their own bodies. The author’s fascination with "designs" in nature began when he, as a five-year-old, found a paper wasp nest and assumed it was constructed by a very clever human being. He never forgot his amazement when he discovered that wasps had made the nest. His animal craftsmen cover those whose bodies produce the building materials (such as mollusks, spiders and bees), those who make holes (ants, swallows), and finally those using clay, mud, moss, straw, branches or leaves. He closes his book with a chapter on the difference between the instincts of animals and the human intelligence which allows us the freedom to improvise.

Brooks has given us the benefit of his lifetime love affair with the orderly, beautiful and efficient creations of animals as they work to stay alive and raise families. His fascination with the subject is clearly communicated in his writing as he explains that

"ants are the most self confident of animals; they know what they have to do and they do it without fear or suspiciousness. If someone wants to watch, fine; if the watcher rips up a few tunnels, it's a nuisance, but they'll be repaired."

Besides his passion for his subject Brooks takes clear, beautiful photographs and there are ample illustrations showing the intricate structures built by animal architects. A glossary and brief index add to the usefulness of this readable book about nature’s designs.

—Lillian Heil

Everywhere is the story of a boy’s efforts to save his grandfather’s life when the grandfather suffers a heart attack. Dooley, the nephew of his grandfather’s black nurse, persuades the boy to perform a mysterious ritual for his grandfather called a soul switch. Actually the ritual (of killing another animal—in this case a turtle) is never performed but the grandson gets rid of his fear of death enough to tell his grandfather not to go "everywhere" (not to leave him and die). His
grandfather recognizes the boy's love as it pulls him back to reality, agrees to stay and starts on the road to recovery.

Brooks is a compelling writer who vividly portrays the boy's feelings about killing a turtle, and his concern for his dying grandfather:

"No," I screamed. But the whine of the saw suddenly veered into a shriek that meant it was cutting something hard. . . .

The hands in the starched cotton relaxed and the eyes focused on me.

I met them and I said, "Don't go everywhere."

My grandfather looked at me as if I had just given him a very good idea. His mouth opened and in a whisper said, "Okay. Sure. I won't."

Everywhere is a compelling story of a very short but vivid episode in which a boy's love helps give a grandfather a reason to go on living.

—Lillian Heil

A. Cutting, Michael. The Little Crooked Christmas Tree. Illustrated by Ron Broda.


The little tree grew in one of many rows of trees that were of similar size and shape. He knew he was a tree, but the sign at the end of his row told him he was a Christmas tree, and he did not know what that meant. One day an exhausted dove fell into his branches and as he sheltered her and learned to love not only her, but her children, he began to lean to one side so that the birds would have a quiet place safe from weather and dangerous creatures. The tree grew misshapen and when Christmas finally did arrive, he spent the rest of the lonely winter in the field by himself, because he was not chosen. It was not until the tree was dug up and transplanted into a beautiful garden that the little crooked tree finally learned the true meaning of Christmas.

The story is warm and will be one of my personal Christmas favorites—right up there with the Polar Express. And the paper sculptured pictures are not only fascinating, but mind boggling when one realizes the care and time that went into their creation. At our library we purchased a crooked little tree and decorated it with a white dove and a nest and invited families to sit beneath its branches and read the story of one special tree who learned that Christmas is not receiving, but giving. Although the Christmas Season is past, and you may not
have a crooked little tree to sit under, pick up this book and feel the same as you did as a child when you thought about Christmas.

—Vicky M. Turner

A Dana, Barbara. *Young Joan.*

This is the story of Jeanne d'Arc. It is a fictionalized account of her early life, the events which shaped her character and the frequent visitations of Saints Michael, Margaret and Catherine which called her to lead the armies of France against the English. The last chapter ends with her leaving her home forever to go to the aid of the Dauphin. The epilogue deals briefly with her battles and spends most of its ten pages on her trial, ending with the night before her execution and the peace brought to her by her saints.

Joan is portrayed as very sweet and pious, yet bold when led to be so by her visions. The book centers on her struggle to understand what it is she is called to do and to gain the confidence necessary to do as she is instructed. It is a beautifully written story, told in the first person by Joan herself. While the book is fiction, a little research shows that many of the details are accurate.

—Karen Newmeyer

C DeLint, Charles. *The Dreaming Place.* Illustrated by Brian Froud.

This book is based on a legendary Indian earth spirit called a manitou which is seeking rejuvenation. It has claimed Nina, a part Indian girl, to renew its spirit. Nina's cousin/sister Ashly, has unwittingly brought this about. Although Nina and Ashly dislike and distrust each other immensely, Ashly must travel to a dream world to confront the manitou and save Nina.

The story line and legendary basis of this story are fascinating and I hate to give this book such a low rating. Perhaps it is because I feel it could have been so much better. The characters were underdeveloped and the potential for self-exploration untapped. When Ashly is traveling in the dream world, so much could have happened, but doesn't. The climax of the story comes rather abruptly and is quickly dispatched. In short, the potential was there but never fulfilled.

By the way, Mr. DeLint is a little heavy-handed when it comes to environmental issues, which are referred to repeatedly in ways unrelated
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to the story. A series of drawings throughout the book based on a tarot
card reading and done by Brian Froud are fabulous.

—Karen Newmeyer

A Dwyer, Kathleen M. *What Do You Mean I Have a Learning Disability?*

1-4 Illustrated by Barbara Beirne.


PB 48 pp.

As one of the many who have a learning disability and have children
Do You Mean I Have a Learning Disability?* It is the true story of one
boy who learns to work with his specialized teacher to overcome his
difficulty. The book does not go into any depth about the various kinds
of Learning Disabilities nor their various treatments, but it does offer
understanding and encouragement. Having a learning disability is not
something to be ashamed of, rather something to know about yourself
so you can do something about it and quit feeling inferior. Barbara
Beirne nicely illustrates the book with her black and white photographs.

One possible drawback is that, even though the story is told simply,
some children will find it difficult to read the small print. And again,
there are many different kinds of Learning Disabilities and the book
does not really mention this.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

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Eleven is a sensitive age for a girl, especially if she has two
brothers and a new best friend who already looks great in a swimsuit!
When her brothers team up to scare her with a practical joke, Taffy
decides she has had enough. War is declared! A war of practical
jokes, complete with feathers, dye, ice cubes, toothpaste and shaving
cream. The kids only forget their need for revenge when the jokes
backfire and jeopardize the life of Taffy’s cat.

The large print is helpful for second graders just beginning to read
chapter books. Although the story is told from Taffy’s viewpoint, the
brothers (age 9 and 12) are strong enough characters that boys will
enjoy the story as much as girls. It is lighthearted reading but with
some serious thoughts about friendship, truth, family, loyalty, and how
it is much easier to start a war than to end one.

—Janet Low
Clay Garrity was eleven-years-old, abandoned by both parents and living on the street. When his father lost his advertising job and could not find another one, he kissed Clay and hugged him, and the next morning he was gone. Clay and his mother had to move to an old hotel where Welfare Services would help them. But Mrs. Garrity found she was pregnant and had to quit her job to keep from losing the baby. One day, Clay came home from his new school and his mother was gone. He did not go back to school again. After five days of waiting, he feared the Welfare people would come and take him away and he would never find his mother so he left the hotel, walking in the streets until he was so exhausted that he crawled under a parked van and went to sleep. Living with other homeless people in the streets of New York taught Clay more than an eleven-year-old boy ought to know. To survive, Clay had to give up being a boy for good.

Paula Fox has written a novel about the heartbreak and betrayal of being homeless and a child, while infusing the characters with humanity and compassion. The reader feels confusion, dread and bewilderment right along with Clay, even while he fights to hold his world together and find people he can trust and love. The book ends with Clay and his mother finding each other, but is honest in portraying Clay's reluctance to resume the trusting relationship.

I would recommend this to mature readers, or for a well-supervised classroom (or reading group) reading/discussion project.

—Jan Staheli

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*The Legend of Jimmy Spoon* is an exciting, thought provoking story based on the factual incident of a white boy taken from the Salt Lake Valley by a Shoshone Indian tribe in the early frontier days.

Twelve-year-old Jimmy wants a more exciting life than he leads. He would like to have some brothers instead of his nine sisters and what he most wants is a horse of his own. His father, a storekeeper, wants his son to forget about horses and excitement and learn to keep store so that he can take over as he grows older.

Some Shoshone braves promise Jimmy a horse if he will come with them to their camp. He decides to sneak off with them, thinking that
he will get the horse and come right back home. As it turns out, he spends three years with the Shoshone, goes through many trials, and drastically changes his thinking about whites and Indians. In the end he is forced to go back to the white civilization to prevent a war between the Indians and the whites.

This book is part of a series of historical fiction books under the series title, Great Episodes. I read this one and Jenny of the Tetons, also by Kristiana Gregory. Both are well written and give the reader a very realistic look at life in the early West. The conflicting philosophies of the Indians and the whites—with the good and the bad in each—are well constructed and give the reader much to think about.

There are also other books in the series, by other authors, which I have not read.

—Kathy Homer

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We are fortunate indeed to have this wonderful book by Xavier Hernandez and Pilar Comes translated so aptly into English by Kathleen Leverich. It shows the historical development of a hypothetical Mediterranean city from 400 B.C. to the present, and on into the future. Two-full facing pages of pen and ink drawings of the city at selected points in history are followed by two full-facing pages of explanation and detailed drawings of architectural developments and city layout. Fourteen stages of history are considered. By the second century A.D. the Romans had achieved a high level of civilization which was not approached again (after the fall of the Roman Empire) until the Renaissance of the early 16th century. The details of the drawings by Jordi Ballonga are, in substance, reminiscent of the drawings done of the four seasons on the farm or similar traditional subjects. I could and did spend hours comparing the respective centuries with great fascination and delight.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

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I've never questioned why oxen are the beast of burden in China, but Lily Toy Hong has provided illustrations for an old Chinese tale explaining how they fell from grace in heaven and became the animals that labor day after day in the field.

The appeal of the old tale is enhanced by Hong's rich illustrations. Her style is graphic, but it still evokes an oriental feeling; it focuses attention on the strong blocky shapes of these huge beasts, their curving horns and the calm acceptance in their droopy eyes. The use of color was very well planned. Bright red, usually a prominent part of many oriental picture books is only used for the scenes of the Imperial Palace in Heaven and the rich robes worn by the Ox Stars before they fell from grace.

But on earth with the lowly peasants toiling in the fields, the colors are grayed purples, greens, blues and a lot of black, with just a touch of pale yellow and white. These combinations give an appropriately subdued look to the farmers and their oxen. My favorite pictures were those of the strong Ox Star (who wasn't very smart). He and his heavy lidded fellow oxen looked as accepting of their hard working state on earth as they did of being in constant luxury in heaven. They reminded me of puppies that want to be petted, and I'd like one of my own.

—Lillian Heil

Kipchak Johnson begins Worm's Eye View by showing us exactly what a worm might see! Following are colorfully illustrated pages filled with information about what has happened to our environment and why and what you might do about it. Each page has a well defined header so you can quickly find the information you need or remember what the topic is. Concrete suggestions are given for observing wildlife, always with reminders to put the creatures back. He tells us how to create a habitat in our own gardens for the creatures we may have turned out of their natural habitat. And did you know that some flies lay 3,000 eggs and if one fly begins in April and all the eggs hatched and laid their own eggs by August the whole world would become completely
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covered with a layer of flies almost 45 feet deep!"? Recommended for learning about wildlife, balance of nature and urban ecology.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

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A Kamen, Gloria. Edward Lear, King of Nonsense. Illustrated by Edward Lear and Gloria Kamen.

NF


Most of us know limericks and many know that Edward Lear made that form of humorous poetry popular. Edward was the 20th child of his parents and as a child, knew first plenty and then poverty. His older sisters took him in and trained him in the arts. He wanted very much to be an artist and did some important work in that field. He found though that he loved making children of all ages laugh.

A very interesting tale of a man's life. Biographies should give us interesting tidbits as well as essential facts and this one does!

—Donna J. Jorgensen

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NF


This handsome book, written by Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, contains many of the Maori legends and myths she has been hearing from family members since she was a small child. We know they are a part of her heart and her life because they are so beautifully and lovingly told. Each story is a small gem, not only skillfully told but wonderfully illustrated by Michael Foreman in blues and greens that evoke a lovely, mystical New Zealand. I would recommend this book for anyone who loves folk tales and loves to share them.

—Jan Staheli

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* Kaye, Marilyn. The Real Tooth Fairy. Illustrated by Helen Cogancherry.

PB


When she loses her first tooth, Elise decides to stay awake and see what the tooth fairy really looks like. She is surprised and delighted to find that HER very own mother is the tooth fairy, and she imagines her
mother going to all of her friends houses to take away teeth and leave shiny, new quarters. She can't wait to tell her best friend, Ben.

Now, when Ben’s tooth falls out he decides to find out if Elise was telling the truth. The next day he reports to her that she was NOT telling the truth. It is HIS father who is the tooth fairy. In her confusion, Elise asks her mother for an explanation. Her mother’s explanation is really cute and very logical. The adult reader, at this point, thinks, "Oh, that’s really fun!" There is, however, one more twist at the very end of the story that makes it even more fun and surprising!

Beautiful watercolor illustrations enhance the story line and the expressions on the characters faces are great! At one point the illustrator indulges in delightfully whimsical drawings of various people who might possibly be the tooth fairy.

—Kathy Homer

Kerr, M.E. *Night Kites.*


Whenever there is a trend, you can count on finding Kerr in the groundbreaking ranks whether we are talking about bulimia, adolescent marriage, emotional abuse, or any of the other shadowed paths young adult literature is choosing to highlight. *Night Kites* is true to form and manages to touch homosexuality and AIDS among other older but still sensitive issues. It also focuses a clear, small point of light on relationships—brother to brother, boy to girl (or, in this case, girls), friend to friend and even, though more slightly, parent to parent. The glue that supports these relationships and keeps the ship afloat (to drown a metaphor) is seventeen-year-old Erick Rudd. Somehow, he is the one who can deal with his brother’s newly discovered homosexuality and developing AIDS, his parents’ crumbling relationship, his own treacherous but innocent betrayal of a lifelong friend and his first love. Well, maybe not first love. Nicki from *The Kingdom by the Sea* is quite a lot to deal with!

Erick’s place is an ordinary town, his coordinates are ordinary people, but Kerr’s treatment explores, with extraordinary perception, the complicated and devastating results of interpersonal acts and mindsets. With delicate irony she chronicles a girl who can’t stand to be part of the sheep but cannot accept an abnormal she didn’t define and a Thanksgiving dinner for a dying son who toasts to: "Friendship, sweet resting place of the soul." There are a few spots that ring false (I’ve yet to see a seventeen-year-old whose hair is "mussed" by the people
who care for him)—but not many. And the tapestry, once seen, brings tears.

Now about the ratings: I cannot, in good conscience, recommend the book for local libraries on open shelves, although all of your young adult readers are daily seeing and hearing things much worse in their own living rooms. I do think the material and its treatment warrant reading and will be among the better handling of the questions. Erick, Nicki, Dill, Jack and Pete will not fade from memory in a hurry, nor will the world they move in. It is a world very much like the young adult reader's own.

—Janet Francis

B+ Kwitz, Mary DeBall. *Bell Tolls at Mousehaven Manor*. Illustrated by Stella Ormai. 

This is the second story in a series of books about Mousehaven Manor. The stories are simple tales similar to the more complicated Redwall/Mossflower tales. Miss Minabell Mouse receives a very mysterious package from her old friend, Wendell Weasel of the Illinois State Ski Patrol and along with the package comes Cousin Violet Mae, both are to be kept safe. The package is very cold and leaves Minabell very tired after she hides it in the fireplace. The package contains a box with an old fashioned silver clasp, filled with sand, a small bottle full of water and a map written in Spanish and signed Juan de Raton. Soon Mousehaven Manor has a visitor in the person of Count Von Flittermouse, a strange creature who leaves a gray dust behind when he walks or sits. Even stranger things begin to happen when the Manor catches fire, and mysterious shapes begin to fly through and around the Manor. Minabell decides that she must solve the mystery of the small box and figure out how Count Flittermouse fits into the problem.

The story as stated is simple and predictable. You know immediately from the description of the Count and from a picture on the accompanying page that he is a vampire bat. The idea of a vampire will definitely appeal to the children for whom this book was written. He is scary, but not a horror figure. And children will love his oily character and know what his plans are for the plucky mice in the story. Also in the story can be found a gorgeous southern bell (Violet Mae), and a knight in shining amour (Rhinestone Rodent), as well as the characters familiar (Minabell, Aunt Pitty Pat, and Percy Bat) to those who read the first volume.

—Vicky M. Turner

They're back! The ruckus-raising trio from Lester and Munsinger's previous collaboration are again embroiled (with apologies to the Magic Chicken) in their wand-waving one-upmanship. Who of these three is truly the greatest? And why is an Enormous Elephant sitting in a tree just above them?

Lester and Munsinger have, in *The Revenge of the Magic Chicken,* recreated the zany dynamics of three unique master magicians. The story is a good read-aloud and the pictures are humorous and lively.

—Robbin Olsen Major


Skye's blue eyes have earned her the nick name of "Blue Skye" at least in the eyes of her mother's current boy friend. Skye and her mother have always traveled here and there never staying in one place very long. Skye's mother values her freedom and refuses to stay anywhere as soon as she begins to feel tied down. All of a sudden her mother surprises Skye with a trip to see her grandfather. She only gradually realizes that her mother plans for her to stay more or less indefinitely while she and her new husband travel researching information for a book he is writing. Skye is first shocked that her mother is getting married, then astounded when she learns that she is being left behind. She believes that it is just a trick and her mother will return in a day or two.

As the days drag on Skye begins to think of ways to escape her grandfather and the little hick town where her mother has abandoned her. Only, gradually and without realizing it, Skye is becoming attached to the people, the place, and the idea of a home.

Skye's story is a sad commentary on our society. Children need a place to call home, whether they realize it or not. Those who are homeless—whether by choice or misfortune—miss the feeling of security. Maybe reading this book will bring a realization of how lucky the most fortunate are, or else at least console those in the same situation and help them know that they are not alone.

—Vicky M. Turner
The end of the world comes for Jane when her best (and only) friend moves, right before the beginning of her first year in junior high. Her mother, furiously dieting in preparation for an upcoming high school reunion, nevertheless manages to arrange for Jane to take her grandfather on an outing (ostensibly to cheer him up, for he is still so despondent over the death of his wife that he refuses even to bother wearing his false teeth). The excursion leads Jane and Gramps across the path of a senior citizen’s dance where a boy with a skateboard just happens to be in attendance along with his vivacious grandmother. Before the diverse generations fox trot (and skateboard) off into the sunset, however, there are misunderstandings, a healthy dose of awkwardness, and opportunities for Jane and Gramps both to gain a new measure of confidence and independence.

Though the presence of skate-boarding Brady is almost too coincidentally tidy to be believed, still Take a Chance, Gramps! has a number of good things to say about friendship and self-confidence. Written with a light touch and pleasant humor, Take a Chance, Gramps! is easily read and digested.

—Robbin Olsen Major

This is the story of chubby Fanny whose divorced parents cause her emotional stress by announcing their divorce to her but say it’s a secret to everyone else. They will continue to live in the same house and run their business together. Fanny’s best friend Bertha and her triplet brothers are scrimping to stay alive since their pilot father was lost in the Bermuda triangle. Fanny tries to help Bertha by teaching the triplets to tap dance, get on television and become rich. By the end of the book Fanny has become a good dancer but has given up on the boys. Bertha’s father has returned and Fanny’s parents have made their divorce public.

I found this to be one of the most boring stories I’ve read because there is no chance to identify with the feelings of the characters. Everything that happens is stated so matter of factly and resolved so quickly. For example, after hearing about their secret divorce, Fanny’s
response is that it’s an easy plan for her parents because they are in show business and they act all the time; but she’s afraid every time she opens her mouth she’ll tell so she eats all the time. That’s that—the problem and the solution and that’s the way it goes with every other thing that happens.

It is also written in a tongue in cheek manner that didn’t come across to me as funny—just detached. For example, when the two girls decide to teach the triplets to dance, Bertha agrees because Fanny is so happy with the idea and by that time the boys learn their father may be back. "Of course each girl may have been talking to the wrong person. Someone probably should have asked the triplets first." And so it goes. "Fanny told Bertha the dance floor was being sanded. She meant smoothed. There are dancers who tap on sand (which is news to this reviewer) but Fanny is not planning to be one of them. Neither are the boys. They’re not even planning to be dancers."

This unemotional, detached style left me feeling unemotional and detached about the whole story. The quick solutions to every problem left the plot without any tension. I didn’t consider it worth the time I spent reading it.

—Lillian Heil

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If you liked *New Kid On the Block*, you will fall in love with this new volume of Jack Prelutsky’s. (If you haven’t read either, you are in for a real treat!) Silly and simple, alliterative and alarmingly funny, Prelutsky’s poems run the gamut from delightful to I-can’t-get enough. James Stevenson’s black and white line drawings are wonderful and the perfect, whimsical complement to the poetry.

I would recommend both of these volumes for personal, classroom and school libraries. They are bound to be enjoyed wherever they are.

—Jan Staheli

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This is a retelling of Verdi’s opera by Leontyne Price, who has played the part of Aida many times. The story tells of an Ethiopian
princess who is captured by Egyptian soldiers and made a slave to the Egyptian princess, Amneris. Aida falls in love with Radames, a young captain in the Egyptian army. Amneris becomes very jealous, as she too, loves Radames. When Radames, as head of the Egyptian army, returns victorious from a war with Ethiopia, choices are made that end in tragedy for all concerned.

Though the story is told simply, it still holds on to some of the drama and emotion of the original. There is a "storyteller's note" at the end of the story, wherein Leontyne Price explains her love for this particular opera and the closeness she feels to the character, Aida. I think these feelings show in her telling of the story.

The illustrations are striking and very cleverly done. The main illustrations are done in brilliant acrylics—predominantly blues, purples, golds, and greens. The facing pages of text are framed and the top of each frame is a miniature picture version of the text on the page. (The Dillons have won two Caldecotts for past efforts.)

This is a very classy book which would be a beautiful addition to one's collection.

—Kathy Homer

Quackenbush, Robert. *Pass the Quill, I'll Write a Draft.*


Thomas Jefferson was a remarkable man with broad interests and abundant talents. Not only was he the third president of the United States, but he wrote the Declaration of Independence, served as the first ambassador to France, built Monticello, and established the University of Virginia, to name just a few of his accomplishments. He was an inventor, a fine violinist, and was the founder of the first American political party. He is considered to be the Father of American Science, the Father of American Architecture, and the Father of the University of Virginia.

This is an interesting book. It tells Jefferson's story briefly, from his childhood to his death, with extra bits of information tucked into the bottom of each page and into every illustration. I would recommend it for any child who enjoys books about real people, and especially for elementary school libraries where there is always a need for interesting, concise material on the American founding fathers and/or presidents of the United States. It is an excellent tool for class reports.

—Jan Staheli

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At the Sound of the Beep.


Mathew and Mathilda Green, 11 year old twins, are to be separated at the end of the fifth grade as a result of their parent’s divorce. Unable to accept such a fate, they decide to run away to Uncle Ben’s in San Francisco. Unfortunately, they find only his answering machine to greet them and they take refuge in Golden Gate Park where someone is poisoning the homeless, one by one. During their stay they become part of the homeless community and help to solve the mystery.

Marilyn Sachs is, as usual, able to give us considerable insight into the lives of those with less traditional life styles. And she weaves a compelling mystery into the bargain.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

Giraffes, the Sentinels of the Savannas.


Did you know that giraffes have a prehensile upper lip which they use like a finger to pick tender leaves from the tops of trees? Or that giraffes have a special hinge at the base of their head which lets them raise their heads in a straight line with their necks, giving them another two feet of reach? Did you know that a giraffe’s spots are like fingerprints, no two animals having the same markings? Or that a baby giraffe weighs 120 pounds or more and drops five feet to the ground at the moment of its birth?

This is a fascinating book full of historical, current and scientific information about giraffes. It is very well written, and will be useful for a broad age range because it is so interesting it will capture the fancy of young students, and has a great deal of skillfully researched material to help out older students. It contains an extensive illustrated glossary, a geological timetable, a giraffe classification table, suggestions for further reading, and an index. I would highly recommend this book as a valuable addition to any school library, particularly in the lower and middle grades.

—Jan Staheli
Adam Joshua gets really excited about the play his class is going to put on for Thanksgiving. That is, until he finds out that instead of getting to be Miles Standish or Chief Massasoit, Mrs. Cutwell has chosen him to be a turkey. Being a turkey turns out to be extremely embarrassing to Adam Joshua. So embarrassing, in fact, that he decides that if the audience is going to laugh at him anyway, he would rather make them laugh in the first place. So when it comes time for all the foods to "dip and glide" around the stage, Adam Joshua starts doing the "turkey boogie." All of the other students join in, and the entire audience loves it, except, of course, for Mrs. Cutwell.

The main reason I enjoyed this book is that I think it fills a void in children's literature. Children in first and second grade have many good books to read on their level, but when it comes time to graduate from the "easy readers," many children are overwhelmed by a book with one hundred or more pages. This book is a perfect "in-between" for those children too advanced for easy-to-read books, but not quite ready for the longer ones. I read it together with my third-grader, and she loved it. I could see her identifying with that poor turkey, and she practically fell off the couch when he started dancing. I'm sure she will ask the librarian for more stories about Adam Joshua. Keep them coming, Janice Lee Smith. (I especially enjoyed Angie's comments on women's rights).

—Marilyn Bailey

* Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee.*


Jeffrey Lionel Magee, just an ordinary white-bread brand of boy, becomes the stuff of neighborhood legend after his parents die and he runs away from the home of his aunt and uncle.

No brief summary, however, can capture the poignancy of this book, which is really about a resourceful boy who is colorblind--a boy who wants home and family.

("For the life of him, he couldn't figure out why these East Enders called themselves black. He kept looking and looking, and the colors he found were gingersnap and light fudge and dark fudge and..."
acorn and butter rum and cinnamon and burnt orange. But never licorice, which, to him, was real black."--a boy who wants love and family.

I approached Maniac Magee, winner of the John Newberry Award and the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, with reservations (not having, heretofore, been a rabid Spinelli fan). Once I got past the first few pages, however, I was hooked. I chuckled. I wept. I chuckled again. I wept some more. Hats off to the awards-givers! This time they really picked a winner!

—Robbin Olsen Major

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Lucy, 16 and new in town, feels it less than a blessing to have second sight occasionally. The story makes some use of this second sight to juxtapose the danger of a nuclear dump and the horror of the Black Death of the 14th Century.

I do not know how accessible this British publication would be to American youngsters. Some editing has been done to change British expressions and terms to American (made obvious by a typo on page 80) but it somehow clashes with the vernacular quite capably represented by Robert Swindells. The chapters are very short, some less than two pages. The combination made the book seem tediously long.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

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If you’ve read Mildred D. Taylor’s Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry and/or Let the Circle Be Unbroken you will want to read The Road to Memphis. If you haven’t, read it anyway. As in any good series, this book can stand on its own. Casey Logan is in high school now (we first met her as an elementary school student.) Big brother Stacey has bought a fine used car and Clarence, Little Willy, Moe and Stacey are soon on their way to Jackson, Miss. to go back to work/school. Life, however, has a way of taking its own turns. A series of events unwind which will permanently change all their lives.
This complex, compelling book is full of hope and tragedy, growth and understanding. It draws me into a world where I've never been and never will be and teaches me to care.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

Fourteen-year-old Ellie is sent to a farm to escape World War II London. Also on the farm is a young and handsome Austrian refugee. She falls in love with him but must struggle to reconcile their affection for each other with their political differences.

Many who lived through World War II as children seem to be telling their stories in some form of fiction. We need to listen to their experiences and insights and this book enlightens us.

—Donna J. Jorgensen

Eric Carle's DRAGONS DRAGONS is actually about all sorts of fantastic mythological creatures—certainly not limited to dragons. I found it more appealing and powerful visually than ANIMALS ANIMALS (a collection of animal poems illustrated by Eric Carle). Perhaps it's because Carle's colorful stylized images look unreal and thus lend themselves more to impossible creatures than to realistic animals. His dragons have multi-colored bodies and black wings shimmering with color or polka-dot wings and bodies with green scales on top and bright yellow underbellies. The climax is the Chinese dragon in the centerfold covering four pages (two foldout ones) with a flame colored, spiky tail, brilliant green upper body, bright blue ridge, mottled red underbelly and fire engine red claws. Who wouldn't want to ride that dragon (as the Chinese Mother Goose Rhyme proclaims). His Phoenix takes off in a wavy orange, yellow, black cloud. His unicorn is silver gray against a mysteriously scribbled blue, brown and black sky. His dramatic use of colors and shapes gives life to all kinds of ancient birds and beasts.
Aside from the brightly creative illustrations, the book contains poems about twenty mythological creatures I had heard of and some I had not. It's a celebration of the fantastic by an artist whose tissue collage and paint combinations add a special mood to the words of well known poets.

—Lillian Heil

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B

Whitmore, Arvella. *The Bread Winner.*

3-6


During the year 1932, the Great Depression, 12-year-old Sarah's family is separated as her father looks for work. Mother earns barely enough to keep them alive. Sarah has learned to bake good bread and word gets round. Sarah's skills and enterprising nature provide the way for her family to be reunited. This book about life during the depression glimpses a world most of our children have not known. Well worth reading.

—Donna Jorgensen

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NR

Williams, Barbara. *The Crazy Gang Next Door.*

3-7


When Kim and her mom drop off their neighbor, Mrs. Overfield, at the airport, they never dreamed that the next few weeks would be so wacky. Kim was supposed to take care of Mrs. Overfield's cats and plants while she was out of town, but on the way home from the airport Mrs. Overfield's purse is stolen, containing keys to her home and car, plus instructions about how to take care of the plants and animals. When Kim and her mom finally return home, they find four red-headed demons have taken over Mrs. Overfield's duplex, claiming they are her nieces and nephews, and are taking care of the apartment until she returns. It's Kim’s job to figure out what to do.

I did enjoy reading this book because I had to find out where those four red-heads came from. However, I believe a better description than outrageous would be far-fetched. I certainly hope something like this could never happen, even though it was humorous. Having four children take over someone's home even for a little while is not something I would want my children reading about.

—Marilyn Bailey

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The holiday season is usually a carefree, joy-filled time of year, but from the time Nancy Emerson disappears, Rose Potter's life becomes a round of bad experiences. Rose begins to have dreams—dreams about Nancy and then about other girls. And after each dream the girl is found dead. Rose began to wish she didn't have to sleep. She finally decides to go to the police and try to help them at least find the girls who are dead, but the police do not believe her, at least to begin with. As time goes by and she can identify one grave after another, the police began to seek her help to find the killer.

From my viewpoint, the book was more depressing, (especially the last chapter) than it was scary. Those who like Stephen King will probably find this book tame. I would recommend it to anyone seeking scary or horror stories, but not as a book to read if you are just in the mood for a good mystery. I guess I just like happy endings with everything tied up neat and tidy—and all the crooks in jail.

—Vicky M. Turner

This is a problematic book. It is the third in a series about Scott Childres (First The Antrian Messenger, and second The Seer), who is not an Earther, but an orphan of travelers from the Antrian System adopted as an infant and kept ignorant of the strange way he was found. He knows he is smarter than anyone else in his class, and he often feels different and uncomfortable. Then he is contacted by Tiaf, an older Antrian who takes him away to teach him about his full range of powers and how to help Earthers with them. The first two books are not very
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interesting, and reminded me of a television series, with flimsy characters and quick-fix episodes.

This third book, however, was much more interesting—better thought through and better written. This book took one situation from start to finish instead of serializing similar events. The problem was sufficiently threatening and absorbing, and the solution was appropriate and satisfying. BUT—there is not enough review at the beginning of the book to explain who Scott really is or what he has learned in the previous two books. In order to figure out what is going on, the reader would need to wade through the first two volumes, which are not worth the time.

So, I would only recommend this book for science fiction fanatics, and for libraries that have large science fiction collections and readership.

—Jan Staheli

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B+ Wright, Betty Ren. A Ghost in the House.


Sarah Prescott is excited to be moving from a cramped apartment into her great aunt’s old spacious house because she will get her own large bedroom. But Sarah feels frustrated when her great aunt moves out of the nursing home and into her own bedroom, bumping Sarah into the storeroom. And then, to make matters worse, unexplainable things start to happen, like Aunt Margaret’s porcelain shepherd getting broken; and the house becoming cold, and footsteps upstairs where no one is. Of course, these happenings only occur when Sarah is left alone with Aunt Margaret. Sarah tries, without success to convince her mother that something is awfully wrong. Aunt Margaret finally confides to Sarah that she thinks the trouble is being caused by the ghost of her childhood friend’s father who blamed Margaret for his daughter’s death. Comforting each other, Sarah and Aunt Margaret await the outcome of the terrible situation together.

The growth in this story occurs when Sarah stops thinking of her great aunt as the old lady who took over her bedroom, and realizes that Margaret has no one else to whom she can communicate her fears. I felt sad when I found out that Sarah’s mother would believe neither Sarah nor Aunt Margaret, but that is how today’s society is; the old and the young are treated similarly. This book was good in that it showed that children and old people can have good relationships with each other.

—Marilyn Bailey
Ten-year-old Matt and his friends have started an adventure club where the members read about one historical adventure at each meeting. The first meeting is an overnight campout where the club members talk about George Washington crossing the Delaware. They decide to take a hike along the lake shore, and Tony tells them the legend of Lake Levart, and about a mysterious rowboat that people have disappeared in. Suddenly, this rowboat appears, and all the club members, plus Matt’s seven-year-old sister Katie, have an overwhelming desire to get in the rowboat. Seconds later, the children find they have been transported to the Delaware River in 1776, and they become involved with General Washington and his troops on that stormy Christmas Eve before the battle of Trenton.

My first thought when discovering this book was about time travel was, You’ve got to be kidding. But the more I read, the more I enjoyed it. I think Elvira Woodruff has done an excellent job showing the many differences between life then and now which she wouldn’t have been able to do if she had written a straight historical novel. This book will appeal to some youngsters that would shy away from reading about the past, especially children in fifth grade who have been studying the Revolutionary War.

Matt learns about the horrors of war when his friend Israel freezes to death because he is too weak to move, and when the rebels shoot their friend Gustav (a Hessian) in the back. Matt concludes,

"I thought this was supposed to be one of the good wars. The rebels were supposed to be the good guys, but maybe there’s no such thing as just good guys fighting bad guys. It seems like there’s good and bad on both sides . . . I hate war."

Hopefully readers of this book will come to the same conclusion.

—Marilyn Bailey

Sky Dogs recounts the legend of how horses--the "sky dogs" of the title--came to the Blackfoot Indians.
Told in first person, in a strong Native American voice (which storyteller Yolen has captured masterfully), the book is illustrated with earth-toned gold/rust/orange pictures as beautiful and distinctive as all of Moser's past efforts have been. *Sky Dogs* is the very successful joint effort of two gifted artists, each enhancing the other's craft with their own unique contribution to the whole.

—Robbin Olsen Major

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**A**


FI 133 pp.

Young Henry, while trying to decide what he will be one day, mentions to his mother that he might want to be a wizard. His mother is so delighted that she packs him up and sends him off that very day. She gives him three kisses—one on each cheek for love, and one on the forehead for wisdom—and a piece of advice, "It only matters that you try."

When Henry arrives at Wizard's Hall, his name is changed to Thornmallow, because he is judged to be prickly on the outside and squishy on the inside. At Wizard's Hall, names really matter and they should truly describe the person named. Thornmallow makes friends, has some trouble adjusting, and finds that he has come just as Wizard's Hall is about to be destroyed by an evil wizard named Nettle. Thorny and his friends decide they must try to help and ultimately it is his decision to try hard that saves the hall from being demolished.

I must admit that I am a Jane Yolen fan. Happily, this hook lives up to my expectations. It is thoughtful and well written, and has characters that are immediately and joyfully appealing. Yolen is a master at creating fantasy situations that remind children of real life. This book will charm readers from third to seventh grade (and even beyond—it surely charmed me).

—Jan Staheli

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