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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol13/iss1/4
The Ghost Cadet, Elaine Alphin’s first novel, offers exciting reading for grades five through seven. The story moves quickly and believably while showing that self esteem is essential to happiness and well being. By keeping his word to Hugh, Benjy learns what it means to grow closer to others, to be responsible, and to see others more objectively. In other words, he finally sees himself as having value. Although Ghost Cadet is fiction, there exists many parallels in the lives of actual people. The author’s end note offers insight into how the book was written.

No inappropriate language or scenes make the book questionable. The qualities of fascinating reading and a good message highly recommend this novel.
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* 4-8 NF PB

Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Gnomes illustrate puzzles, mazes, and games that children can enjoy and from which they can learn. Principles of math and creative thinking are painlessly introduced as the reader works through the puzzles (answers included at the end, of course).

My eight-year-old loved this book. Some puzzles were tough, some were a snap, but none were skipped over as we went through this book. Anno’s whimsical illustrations add greatly to the charm.

◆◆◆◆


A- 4-7 FI

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Perdita was a witch’s daughter. Everyone said so. She wasn’t allowed to go to school, and the children were afraid of her—though they made fun of her when they dared. She lived on the Scottish island of Skua with her old foster mother and a mysterious man named Mr. Smith. She played alone, wishing that she could go to school, and dreamed she could fly with the seagulls. Then one day, the mainland steamer brought a boy and his younger sister to visit the island. Perdita made friends with them and showed them the island. They gave her friendship and, an adventure, complete with stolen jewels, hidden identities, and getting lost in a cave. They also gave her the chance to live a regular life, go to school, and be someone besides “the witch’s daughter.”

This is a nicely written book. Ms. Bawden’s descriptions of place and character draw fine pictures of life on Skua and Perdita’s loneliness there. The children who come to visit, Tim and Jane, are well drawn, and the story is nearly as much theirs as it is Perdita’s. I would recommend this book to both boys and girls from grades 4 through 7.

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**A 1-3 FI**

Reviewed by Janet Francis

Every little girl should have a dad as nice as Susie’s—and every dad should have a Father’s Day like the one Susie’s dad had. Full of all the things Susie loves to do (the crowded park; fast junk food; the merry-go-round; balloons), because, after all, those are Dad’s favorites. Aren’t they? The older readers will chuckle at the subtle joke, but the younger ones are bound to get some ideas for gifts beyond the usual tie for dad; and everybody will get the message that, after all, being with someone you love is the best way to spend a good day.

★★★★


**A 4-7 FI**

Reviewed by Robbin Olsen Major

Susan, 12, knows her parents are keeping something really awful from her; but when she learns the truth, it’s even more terrible than her worst imaginings: she was switched with another baby by the hospital at birth, and now her biological parents want her back.

Bunting has based her tale on a story that made the newspapers a few years ago, with a few creative wrinkles that make the story somewhat less complicated than the event on which it was based. Still, it is complicated enough. Nevertheless, Bunting handles the telling with her usual deft touch, leavening with humor, and the voice of her 12-year-old narrator rings true.

The one thing I question, however, is the overwhelming “pull” each character feels toward his or her biological relation, as if blood calls to blood more strongly than do relationships forged by years of love and living together. Bunting writes so well that her readers are sure to pause and wonder if they, too, were somehow mixed up at the hospital and sent home with the wrong family. *Sharing Susan* is an entertaining read with a tidy ending, and though Susan accepts being shared a little too easily (with only token resistance), still, the book is successful in evoking sympathy for Susan’s plight.

★★★★

B Pre-2 FI PB Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey

Nathan, the elephant, and his friend, Nicholas Alexander, the mouse, are going for a hot-air balloon ride with Nicholas’ cousin, Henri. Henri, however, is not really sure he wants Nathan along. Only when Nathan saves the balloon from crashing into a chicken yard does Henri admit that it was a good idea to bring Nathan.

This would be a good book to read to a preschooler. The drawings are delightful, and there is just enough information about hot-air balloons to keep a child that age interested. Hopefully, the child would understand the message that friends help each other, and we will be happier if we can look for the good in people instead of the bad.


A 2-6 NF PB Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Dewey illustrates, and describes in words, the interwoven lives of animals living in the desert. Starting with a pair of coyotes, she describes the bats who feed on insects (a ton in one night— incredible!), the raptors (birds of prey) who feed on bats, the snakes, spiders, rats, rabbits, birds, ringtail cats, and beetles that form a circular food chain for each other. Dewey has focused on animals that provide food for each other so that the reader gets a feel for the ecosystem which makes up the deserts of the Southwest. It is a harsh environment but filled with diverse and surprising kinds of animals. For example, the spade foot toad which lies dormant until a cloudburst when it digs out, mates, and lays eggs before the puddle dries up (a week to ten days).

The limited number of animals followed through a night and day in the desert allows the reader to get a feel for their lives. The illustrations are beautifully done capturing the motion of the running jackrabbit, the howling coyote, the cloud of bats flowing out of their cave at night, or the confrontation between a red kneed tarantula and a kangaroo rat. Dewey’s illustrations convey a sense of caring about these fascinating animals which have adapted to desert living.

**B 1-3 FI PB** Reviewed by Janet Francis

Two sure-fire winning subjects are combined in this brief and predictable sortie into Christmas rescue stories. Rex and his dog, Bones, head out for a bit of pre-holiday sledding only to end up on the tail of a Plateosaurus who transports them, in a twinkling, to the North Pole where Santa’s elves are making—guess what: toy dinosaurs. Rex, being well versed in dino-lore, immediately offers to correct their obvious mistakes. (It’s a good thing elves are patient.) A lovely time is had by all until Santa appears to announce that the reindeer have the flu. It’s not hard to guess who can fill in, with a little help from his friends, and the presents are saved once more. The generous illustrations are brightly colored and verging on cartoons, but there is a brief, scientifically edited glossary (with dinosaur descriptions) which could make up for all other deficiencies if it reaches the right hands. The question is—will a young reader who is fascinated with fossils be that interested in a simple picture book with a predictable ending? Hard to say. On the other hand, what are the two most requested subjects in your library?

✦✦✦✦


* 6+ FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Paul Fleischman skillfully weaves the tale of Georgina Caroline Lott’s life, from beginning to end, based on events in the boring room (a type of guest room—a room in the house that had privacy: Mothers had their babies there; old people died there; guests slept there) of the house her pioneer grandfather built. Each event pulls us forward to live and grow with Georgina. It is a very absorbing book. I read it from beginning to end without putting the book down.

Her quiet, Ohio childhood is contrasted with the Civil War; and she even aids a runaway slave, knowing the law said that she could be put to death.

✦✦✦✦

**Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey**

* Susanna had gone out with practically every popular boy in school, but she realized she had never "known a boy really well." So, Susanna made a bet with her best friend, Cassidy, that she wouldn’t go out with, flirt, or kiss a boy for three months. This became especially difficult for Susanna because, first of all, Cassidy found a boyfriend and did not want Susanna hanging around; and, secondly, Susanna’s parents felt something was wrong when she started spending most of her free time alone. Because of this, Susanna arranged with Ben Green to pretend to be her boyfriend to keep her parents from worrying, and she would tutor Ben in English. The relationship works out quite well, although not exactly what either of them expected. Susanna learns that it’s more satisfying to have a friend than a boyfriend, and Ben learns that he needs to be himself because he wants to, and not because his mother wants him to be.

One of the reasons this story works so well is the depth of each character. They all grow from relating with each other. Any teen-age girl or even boy should enjoy this book.

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**Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner**

* We communicate in a variety of ways. Besides talking to one another we have many ways to make ourselves understood. This is a book about sign language, gestures, body language, signs, and signals. It is a book about the ways people communicate to each other without using words. Each example is captivatingly illustrated to show exactly what is meant. The way the words are placed on the page, one almost expects poetry; however, instead, the reader gets a unique style of prose instead. This book also illustrates how signs and symbols have been used throughout history to convey messages and record events.

You may be amazed, as I was, at the many and varied ways we communicate each day, especially in situations where words just won’t do.

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Reviewed by Michael O. Tunnell

In the continuing saga of Redwall Abbey, Mariel seeks revenge against the pirate, Gabool, a vicious rat who killed her father, Joseph the Bellmaker. The dauntless she-mouse, along with companions from Redwall Abbey, hunt down the villain and destroy him and his ruthless hordes, shortly before they would have destroyed Redwall. Happily, Mariel discovers her father still alive.

Jacques maintains a speedy pace in this lengthy novel. As with the others in the Redwall series (*Mossflower, Redwall, Mattimeo*), the archetypal characters representing good and evil are clearly drawn. With uncompromising honesty, Jacques describes the horrors of war, never glorifying it yet showing that even a peaceful people may need to rise in their own defense. An endearing feature of this and all the Redwall books is the author’s intricate development of the "multicultural" world of the forest and the field. The habits and peculiar speech patterns of moles or hedgehogs or badgers, mice or rats, eagles or owls, lends a strange yet powerful credence to the writing. Note this wonderful snippet of molespeech: "Oi luvs a woodland stew, oi do; oi do loik apple tart." If you like food, as Jacques obviously does, you will shake your head in wonderment at the endless concoction and consumption of the tastiest dishes by the creatures of Redwall Abbey. This book cannot be read without munchies near at hand.


Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Where do those Thanksgiving dinner cranberries come from? Plastic-wrapped supermarket cranberries end this photo-essay which starts the cranberry on its journey from June blossom to October, red-ripe, tart fruit.

Cranberry bogs, harvesting techniques, and modern market preparations are clearly depicted in color photographs and accompanying text. Informative and easy-to-read, albeit minus an index, photographs and text complement each other. A few photographs appear to be underexposed, but do not detract from the overall quality of this book and its delicious looking cover. A lot of information about one of North America’s native fruits.

**A 6-9 FI**

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Tanith was the daughter of a beautiful, powerful sorceress, Jaive. They lived in a huge, crumbling fortress far out in the desert, with magic leaking out of the very keyholes. Tanith, having no talent for magic, was often fit-to-be-tied at living such a life. All she could do was fix things—she was a whiz at mending broken bits of machinery. One day, an animal called a peeve brought in an astonishing thing—a bone of such color and consistency as to only have belonged to something wonderful and magical. Tanith followed the peeve and found the rest of the skeleton and brought it back to her room. She devised a way to put it together and suspend it from her ceiling; but that evening, the skeleton appeared at dinner and rampaged through the hall. Enraged, Jaive struck it with a powerful bolt of sorcery, and suddenly, a magnificent, black unicorn appeared from the smoke. Tanith felt drawn to follow the creature and it led her to an adventure that would change her life forever.

This is a well-written book of fantasy. Orson Scott Card says Ms. Lee writes "so naturally that you begin to wonder why nobody else seems to remember what real English sounds like." The heroine is genuine, with frustrations and faults. She meets adversity time and again with poise and ingenuity and the reader is immediately drawn to cheer her on toward the ultimate adventure that awaits her. I would recommend this book to girls who love fantasy in the 6th to 9th grade levels.

★★★★


**A K-3 FI**

Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Vic Bear moves next door to well-meaning, but slightly airheaded, Arlo Gopher. Moving day catastrophes and their resolutions comprise the first of three short and fast-paced stories.

Hilarious text and accompanying expressive, colored illustrations portray Vic and Arlo as neighbors who, mishap by mishap, learn to adjust to each other.

★★★★

Reviewed by Raphael Johstoneaux

Set in Ireland during the potato famine of 1846, *The Coldest Winter* chronicles Eamonn and his family's desperate struggle to survive. As if having no food were not enough to endure, they must also suffer eviction from their home at the whim of the English landlords. They make their way against cruel English soldiers, bitter cold, and little hope of finding food and work to sustain themselves. Providence leads them to Kate Burke, a young girl Eamonn's age, who befriends them with food from her grandfather's farm. Though sickness and death continue to plague the family, Eamonn and those who survive set sail for America because of Kate's unselfishness.

Despite the seemingly unsurmountable odds facing the principal characters, they manage to learn about endurance and the strength of family. Kate, because of her concern for others, is able to see her stepmother much more favorably. This short, easy-to-read novel offers more to the serious reader as the emphasis is more on the values one learns from living, rather than on the adventuresome twists in plot and the flamboyant characters.


Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

June Otani's illustrations for *Oh Snow* are excellent. The children are cheerful, lively, and colorful in an interesting and rich environment. The words are lyrical and poetic, but may be a little obscure for preschoolers. The little boy sees it has snowed and runs outside to play. He makes snow angels and footprints in untouched fields. He romps with his dog and the neighbor dog and pretends he is a tree waiting for spring. But the pictures are the best part!
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**Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey**

In this "slice of life" story, fourteen-year-old Emily has a hard time accepting her parents’ divorce, and an even harder time accepting her mother’s new boyfriend, Mr. Linaberry. Then, too, there’s Robertson Reo, the seventh-grader who decides Emily is going to be his girlfriend. Emily likes the attention he gives her, but can’t stand the way he manhandles her. She and her best friend, Bunny, decide to teach him a lesson by showing him how it feels to be "womanhandled;" however, this backfires. Now, Robertson is in love with Bunny, too. You’ll have to read the book to find out how they solve their dilemma. Most junior-high-age girls will enjoy reading about Emily and her problems.

★★★★


**Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner**

From bananas to strawberry pie, Bruce McMillan has divided up appetizing fare for us to look at, figure out, and finally, eat. Although the book is practically wordless, we (those of us who do and those who do not) begin to understand simple fractions. Using full-color photographs to illustrate the concept, Mr. McMillan gives us everything from whole to quarter portions, and two friends (and their dog) who work and together share the sumptuous food. Mr. McMillan includes the recipes for the "tried and true" menu at the end of the book. He also includes cooking tips he’s picked up.

This is an excellent book to use as an introduction to fractions; but it is also valuable for any student who is having trouble with fractions. I tried it on my sixth-grade son who was having trouble realizing the relationship between fractions and percentages. It worked wonders.

★★★★
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* All levels  FI  Reviewed by Jeaneen Anderson

*The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* is one of Edna St. Vincent Millay’s most wonderful poems. It was written for her own mother, and is a tender story of a mother’s love for her young son. On a magic Christmas Eve, the harp-weaver makes the love become tangible.

I recommend this book very highly. The illustrations are heart-felt. The poem itself was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and what a tender way to teach children about a great poet, besides giving them an opportunity to feel of a mother’s love and concern for her child. In a world that is filled with so much that is negative, I feel this book is filled with light and hope and can give children that added assurance that there is much good in the world they live in.

★★★★


* 7+  FI  Reviewed by Tracy A. Gittins

Jim Henson’s name is obviously the hook for this book; but there is plenty of substance here to sink that hook deeply into the story lover in all of us. Based on the television series, *Jim Henson’s: The Story Teller* entrances the reader and listeners with nine, traditional European folk- and fairy-tales.

These stories are fully-spun tales, rich with language, not shrink-to-fit reading exercises. They are about good and evil, heaven and hell, and life and death. They are at times violent—trolls beat children, giants crack men’s skulls like walnuts—but it is always good and virtue that win in the end. Plan on spending from twenty to thirty minutes on each read-aloud. The reader is rewarded for the investment of time, being drawn into each tale from the outset. Minghella jumpstarts "Fearnot" thusly: "Snakes for some, spiders for others. Or the dark: black cold pitch, full of secrets. There are those for whom it is small rooms, no windows, the walls squeezing out the air."

The final tale, "A Story Short," is not a story of abbreviated length, but rather of a story teller forgetting his story at a crucial spot—that is, *being* a story short. It is the only one of the tales told in the first person, a quasi-autobiographical account of the adventures of a vagabond story teller.
Minghella's stories could stand entirely on their own, but sprinkle in May's 41 glowing, full-color illustrations on luxurious high-quality paper, and the sturdy cloth binding, and you have the look and feel of a family heirloom.


Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Red headed, Irish Maggie Callahan sets off across the Pennsylvanian wilderness to find her Aunt Franny. Nearly there, she is caught by a Seneca raiding party and taken back to the village. Expecting mud huts and dirty surroundings, Maggie is astonished to find a community of hewn log houses with shake shingles and glass windows, people dressed in a combination of colonial and native clothing, and acres and acres of cornfields, grasslands and expansive fruit orchards. She is adopted by the Senecas, and married to a young French boy who has been with the tribe since infancy. She learns to be very happy in her new life, but it doesn't last long. All too soon, her new world collapses and she must find her own way again.

This book begins well. Ms. Moore keeps interest high throughout the abduction and arrival at the Seneca village. After that, however, her writing loses clarity, and the story is rushed along to a sad, but not unexpected conclusion. Much could have been made with the idea, but very little character development occurred and the conclusion was rather unsatisfying because there was so much more that I wanted to know about the people and their lives and culture.

This book would be good to use when studying the Senecas, because it talks about their beliefs and their way of life with good detail. Beyond that, it is a light-weight historical romance. I would recommend it be used with discretion.


Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

Blonde, thirteen-year-old Henrietta (Henri) Rich goes with her parents to spend a year in Beijing where her father is a "Foreign Expert" at the University. One way of life ends and another begins—one without telephones, television,
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public school, or pizza. She learns a new way of thinking about things and makes one new special friend, Minyuan. When Henri’s family leaves abruptly, she is no longer able to return to her previous way of life. She has been inalterably changed.

This is a great book for someone wanting to know more about the People’s Republic of China. As Henri explores Beijing, so do we. But more importantly, I think this book captures many of the differences between cultures. It does so without making either appear wrong, but rather explores the consequences of such differences. Henri leaves Beijing a few months before the Tienanmen Square massacre. Having been in China with Henri, the massacre becomes more personal to the reader.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦


A 2-5 NF PB

Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Tony and his new sled are waiting for snow. So far, it is only raining or cloudy or foggy or other things which water is. The story traces water from the ocean to clouds and fog, to rain, then to frost, ice, and snow. With each change in the weather outside, the same kind of changes are happening to the water inside Tony’s house. The steam from the soup is condensing on the window, fogging it up and then dripping down onto the windowsill.

This book, a story with facts, would be good jumping off point or accompaniment to a study of the water system of Earth. Ted Rand’s rich watercolors fill the entire page—the inside of Tony’s house shown in a large square. Beautiful to look at with accurate information.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦


C 6-7 FI

Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

This is the story of seven kids living in an idyllic Bronx neighborhood. Although surrounded by the ghetto on all sides, the neighborhood association has reclaimed their block, fixed it up, and set down very strict rules about the children leaving the block except to go to school. However, these seven kids make some strange discoveries when all the cats of the neighborhood begin to disappear. For example, they discover that the old witch woman is really a
young, attractive actress who dresses as a witch to safely travel the subways at night (somehow I think such a ploy would attract unwanted attention rather than discourage it). They also set out to investigate who the boy is who goes through the garbage cans at night.

I found this to be a rather annoying story, mainly because of the unceasing "clever" banter of the children. It really distracts from the story and gets old quickly. The neighborhood is too idyllic with everyone working together to fix up the apartments which are purchased from the neighborhood association with money they earned by helping to fix up other apartments. Maybe I am just too cynical to believe you can get that many people working together in complete harmony. There is the "Window Brigade of the Neighborhood Watch"—old folks who have nothing to do but watch out the windows and yell at any kids who are getting into trouble. And of course, there is the perfectly happy ending wherein all problems are neatly disposed. The book was full of too much goodness and light—at least more than I could handle.


Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Harriet Hemings is being raised to leave behind her a world of servitude at Monticello. There is no mystery in that, except Harriet, daughter of Thomas Jefferson’s black servant, Betty Hemings, could pass for a beautiful, young, educated, white woman. This historical fiction novel suggests that Harriet’s father could actually be the great Thomas Jefferson, master of Monticello.

Set in the environs of turn-of-the-century Monticello, this is a story of a young woman’s coming of age. Harriet not only passes from slavehood to servitude (a social step-up), but is also launched, by her suspected parentage, into a free world.

The novel feels authentic and is consistent with actual history. Never lagging in tempo, Harriet’s life involves mystery, romance, and heart-wrenching moments that, for the history buff, invite further examination. A Glossary of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century terms, and a bibliography are included. The jacket painting is consistent with Harriet’s textual description.

A 8-9 FI Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

Percinet, a half mortal prince of Faerie, falls in love with Graciosa, a mortal. However, raised in 12th century France, she is frightened of magic and fears the fires of hell for those who practice the forbidden arts. Furthermore, Graciosa is under the guardianship of her "evil stepmother" who hates her for her beauty and simple charms. This story reads much like "Cinderella and Rumpelstiltskin." Graciosa is given various tests, much like spinning straw into hay, with her faerie friend to help her. In the end she, must save Persinet from the evil powers of her stepmother.

This book takes you into both realms of faerie and earth, with Percinet trying to convince Graciosa to choose happiness. It isn’t until she reaches the point of death that she is able to reach out to the happiness available to her. It explores the extent that fear plays in preventing us from choosing happiness.


A Pre-2 NF PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

A little girl, her father, and Major, the family dog, take a listening walk. On the listening walk, no member of the walking party talks. All participants listen to the noises of the world around them as they unhurriedly tour the neighborhood. Paradoxically, even as they move about, absorbed in thought (the Dad), listening (the little girl), and leisurely enjoying (Major, the dog, who is old and can’t walk fast) their surroundings, they are contributing to the different sounds attentive listening makes note of.

Vibrant water, pen, ink, and crayon illustrations are true to the accompanying text. Major’s toes are clearly depicted when the little girl describes the sound his toes made as they make contact with the sidewalk. Short, concise sentences explain the pictures and try to imitate everyday noises. After the walk is over, listening continues as the little girl sits still in her room and the text suggests the reader close the book and count the noises all around the reader’s immediate environs.

**Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner**

Mary Francis Shura has done an excellent job of recreating the Civil War in this fictionalized biography of one of the few women to participate in that war. Annie signed up as a laundress, but when her abilities as a nurse became known (along with her compassionate nature), she was pressed into service at the front lines and in hospitals where she could help the wounded.

Many of today’s children may not realize what would have taken place in a hand-to-hand war of this kind. They are used to missiles fired from many miles away making the death and pain seem unreal. This story will vividly illustrate the pain, fear, and heroism that took place during the Civil War.

Although the story is partly fictionalized, the actual events are real. Anna B. Etheridge enlisted in her home state of Michigan against the advice of those she loved. She soon learned of the hard work and sorrow that awaited her. She watched her best friend’s fiancé die in her arms. She went tired and hungry and dirty to be where men needed her, staying until the surrender of the Confederate troops at Appomattox. Soldiers praised her in their journals and newspaper reporters recorded her deeds under the special name of "Gentle Annie."

This is a wonderful commentary to go along with any history unit on the Civil War—a great read-aloud, as well as an excellent reading assignment.


**Reviewed by Lillian Heil**

Skurzynski traces the history of simulators, from the wind tunnel built by the Wright brothers, to the present virtual reality programs which allow its users to enter and interact with a computer generated image.

Photographs and text show the dramatic difference between the Wright’s sixteen-foot-long wind tunnel, and the world’s largest wind tunnel located in Mountain View, California, which creates winds up to 350 miles per hour. The six drive fans create 100 decibels of deep rumbling noise that rocks the area all around the wind tunnel. The reader will discover that there are many uses for wind tunnels, not the least of which are speed skiers who used it to experiment with reducing body wind resistance atop speeding cars. That’s the whole idea of simulators. They allow scientists to test and study without danger—earthquakes, car crashes, astronaut’s work in space, flying, weather,
electronics, and bacteria. There seems to be no limit to the uses of computer simulation, and at present, we probably cannot guess what problems of the future simulation will help us to solve. Join author Gloria Skurzynski in looking to the future of the high tech world in her book *Almost the Real Thing*.


* 6-9 FI

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Maisie thinks she’s going crazy. She has always enjoyed participating in sports; but when Eric smiles at her in the swimming pool, she suddenly finds she can’t think of anything else. Now, she is actually trying out for the wrestling team. Is it really because she wants a new challenge, or will she do anything to get close to Eric?

It isn’t long before Maisie begins to enjoy meeting the physical trials presented by wrestling, and she finds that she might even be adequate in the sport. Outside the wrestling room, however, things are getting harder all the time. As for Eric, "Lizard Liz" Lampley makes sure Maisie doesn’t get close anywhere except on the mat. Maisie must make some grown-up decisions about what it takes to be a winner, and whether or not it’s worth all the distress and difficulty.

I really enjoyed this book! Right from the beginning, Maisie was someone I liked and appreciated. She goes headfirst at life with great verve, style, and spirit. She doesn’t let difficulties stop her from forging toward her goal—even when that goal ultimately changes. Boys should get a kick out of the wrestling scenes and understand the reactions of the fellows who don’t want a girl on their wrestling team. As for girls—a great read, and not a bad role model. Recommended for grades 6-9.


B 2-4 FI PB

Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey

Elmo doesn’t want to do a book report on *Frog Medicine*, so he procrastinates until the day before it’s due. When he finds out he’s starting to turn into a frog, he calls the book’s author who tells him to read the book and
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write the report. He actually enjoys reading the book and finds when he has finished, he’s not part frog anymore.

Young readers will enjoy the fantasy in this book, and also the wacky illustrations. I think the theme of "procrastination doesn’t pay" is put over in an enjoyable way, and even older people would profit from reading it.

★★★★


A 2 FI PB Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

I am assuming that this story is fiction. Despite that fantastical narrative, it begins with the statement: "Excerpts from the log of the Rita Anne, Randall Ethan Hope, Captain." The ship, *Rita Anne*, must have been created by the author Chris Van Allsburg who also created the tale that the log tells. After sailing for many days, the Captain and crew find an uncharted island upon which they find a glowing stone. They take the stone back on board where, over a period of several days, the crew is transformed into apes. The crew eventually recover, but no explanation is given.

The illustrations, as usual for Chris Van Allsburg, are wonderfully refreshing and I would recommend this book for the illustrations alone. The story line, however unique, is intriguing and children should like it. My three-year-old thought it was "funny."

★★★★


A Pic. FI PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

This is the retelling of a traditional tale. A creature, like you’ve never seen before, crawls into an old man’s cabin and the old man chops off its tail and eats it up. As darkness falls, the creature comes looking to get his taily po back.

Marvelous illustrations enhance this tale which is a delight to read or tell.

★★★★

B 3+ NF Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Having recently visited the White House, I was interested to learn more about the building, and not surprisingly, I did. First of all, I learned that I had been one of over one million sightseers to visit each year. The book gives a history of not only the White House, but also of Washington D.C. as well. The White House has many interesting stories in its history—did you know that Abigail Adams, the wife of the second President, hung up her laundry to dry in the East Room because she felt it was bad manners to hang the President’s underwear outside? Did you know that White House is called the White House because after it was burned by the British in the War of 1812, it was painted white to cover the smoke marks?

When you tour the White House as a visitor, you only see seven of the 132 rooms, but each of these rooms contains precious old furniture and objects because the White House is also a museum. One last snippet of information: the East room is a large room where the President usually has his parties; however, while President Carter was in the White House, Amy, his daughter, used it for a roller skating rink.

The book is well done and combines many historic photographs as well as current ones to give the reader a complete picture of what the White House was like in the beginning, and what it has since become.

At the end of the book are several pages of "Fun Facts" that are interesting to read. There are also portraits of the Presidents and the wives. There is also a bibliography for children on other books about Washington, our Presidents, and the White House. Lastly, there is a handy index to the information in this book.

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* 7-10 FI Reviewed by Raphael Johnstoneaux

Set in a quiet English village, where apparently nothing out of the ordinary would ever happen, *Death Knell* strikes an unsettling cord. An old abandoned church, a sealed crypt, a bell that mysteriously rings, and a murder (or is it?), create for Tim and Jamie their most harrowing experience. Although too rational and brave, at first, to believe an old priest’s record of an evil force lurking beneath the ground, they learn, very quickly, that the people of
Lychwood have concluded otherwise. Their skepticism gives way to doubt and compels them to find out for sure. Tim and Jamie encounter several strange old people, dark storms, and similar Gothic trappings in their search to uncover who or what smashed in old Mr. Jefford's skull.

For the sheer pleasure of a spine tingling, well-written mystery, don't miss Death Knell. If you're able to put it down, it's simply because you don't want the story to end—you want to keep yourself in suspense. Exciting from beginning to end, Wilde weaves an unforgettable story with realistic characters and events. Death Knell presents a refreshing picture of believable fourteen-year-olds who give themselves to thinking and mystery solving rather than engaging in sex and drugs.

★★★★


A 4+ FI Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Wrede's unorthodox heroine, princess Cimorene, crosses paths with the unorthodox hero, King Mendanbar of the enchanted forest. Together they embark on a search for Kazul, the King of the Dragons (who happens to be a female). The horrible wizards are responsible, and with help from a giant, a dwarf, and an analytical magician, the evil spell on the dragon king is broken, and King Mendanbar and Cimorene discover that they have fallen in love with each other. If there’s a part III, I wonder what mischief the wizards can come up with this time.

Wrede makes clever use of fairy tale traditions as she makes fun of empty-headed-but-beautiful princesses waiting to be rescued, and bold-and-handsome princes running around trying to rescue them; or a dwarf who teaches girls how to spin straw into gold, but when they can't name his name (even when he changed it from Rumpelstiltskin to Herman), he ends up with lots of babies to raise. The magic carpets don't always work, and so on as Wrede adds imaginative twists to well-known fairy tales. Lovers of fantasy will enjoy this unorthodox treatment of the stereotyped characters found in folktales.

★★★★

Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

The three mole sisters, Eeny, Meeny, and Miney, live in a deep dark hole where "dark is light and day is night and summer and winter seem the same." Eeny is curious about "Up Above." While her sisters are content to sleep, eat, and play checkers, Eeny is slowly getting up the courage to venture out to see if light spreads "from corner to corner like a blanket," or "if day [is] sharp like hunger."

This is a book that begs to be read out-loud. It is the sort of book that, after reading, makes you wonder why you had never thought of it yourself. The words seem to flow together so sweetly and logically. It is the sort of book I wish I had written myself. But I didn’t and Jane Yolen did. The illustrations by Kathryn Brown go with the story so well. They are a perfect combination.


Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Henry's dear ma packs him off to Wizard's Hall to learn magic almost the minute he suggests that maybe he should learn to be a wizard. He hasn't even decided if he really wants to do it, but he never disappoints his ma if he can help it. Upon being examined at Wizard Hall, Henry is renamed Thornmallow by a white bird known as Dr. Mo and admitted to the school as the 113th student. Thornmallow is not very talented at any of the wizardry skills. He can't sing on pitch, (which is very important for getting the spell right). The one thing he is good at is trying. That quality proves to be the saving of Wizard Hall.

Jane Yolen gives us "every-kid" in the unremarkable Henry/Thornmallow, and endows him with the one quality we all have access to, the determination to do our best. I like the message that if we will work hard at whatever task is given us, we can probably succeed. Her story is humorous, touching, quick-paced, scary, and exciting. I recommend it.

Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

This book chronicles the amazing talent of young Wang Yani. Her earliest communications were pictures she drew to convey her feelings; and later, as she grew up, amid the beauty of the rugged Guilin mountains, this young artist demonstrates an intuitive understanding of people and nature. At first, she painted mostly playful monkeys—once she drew 112 in four hours. Now, she paints people and landscapes. Her paintings are done from memory and display the emotions and ideas that she has. One look at even her earliest drawings shows her outstanding talent, and today, at age 16, she is even painting murals. To date, she has over ten thousand pictures to her credit.

Share the story of this astonishing child with children you know, give them paints and a brush, and let them try their hand at interpreting the world around them. Another idea that comes to mind is to show a fascinating video called "The Chinese Word for Horse." In this cartoon rendition, written Chinese characters are adapted to tell the story of a horse in ancient China.