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Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

Authors
Kim M. Fong, Suzanne Olsen, Dina Wyatt, Helene G. Richardson, Stacy Waddoups, and Marilyn Ott

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**Reviewed by Kim M. Fong**

Two teenage runaways—one white and one black—escape slavery in 1855. Susannah is recently orphaned and goes to live with her Southern relatives who own slaves—and even give her a slave as a gift although she is secretly appalled to be a "slave owner." The slave given to Susannah is named Bethlehem and Bethlehem dreams of freedom. Together, the two girls take a dangerous journey North. Forty-one years later, Susannah and Bethlehem reunite to tell their story to two other teenage girls—one white and one black.

The point of view in this book often shifts but it does so in an intriguing and understandable way. The story is actually being told by Mary, Susannah’s granddaughter, while she is taking dictation from Susannah and Bethlehem as they take turns narrating the story. This retelling by both Susannah and Bethlehem reveals the wide difference between each teenager’s background which adds spice to their friendship and their journey.

Another fascinating element is the parallel stories that are taking place. The obvious story of the escape is interesting and exciting. The more subtle story of the friendship between the two young women is also interesting. Neither story is of idyllic friendship—and both show how friends can let each other down—but in the end, the conflict is resolved.

Overall, the book is a satisfying look at friendship; but it also offers a fascinating glimpse of slavery and this time in American history.

Note: Some references are made to the young master’s attempts to seduce the slave girl, but nothing physical actually ever happens.

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**Reviewed by Marilyn Ott**

Have you ever had a pet snake that was forever getting lost around the house? They are hard to find, especially when they seem to blend in with familiar household items. Keith Baker has written and illustrated this delightful
hide-and-seek picturebook about a colorful, mischievous snake that is always lost in matching, colorful surroundings.

The searching begins among yarn and hats, then goes on thorough presents and cats, frosting and clocks, and ice cream and socks. This rhyming pattern follows the snake through bright acrylic illustrations. The first time through, the reading is surprisingly slow, and at the end, the need to share the thorough search with another is strong. The recommended age group is three to eight years, but the appeal reaches out to everyone who likes the looks of a hunt.


* All ages  NF  PB  Reviewed by Stacy Waddoups

Charles Lindbergh and I are good friends. At least that is the way I felt when I finished reading Robert Burleigh's book *Flight*. It was almost like reading Charles' journal as I poured through the pages of this book and traveled with him on his historical, non-stop flight from New York to Paris.

Reading the picturebook *Flight* made me proud to be an American. Lucky Lindy (Charles Lindbergh) shows Yankee valor through his willingness to conquer amazing odds. Staying awake, running out of fuel if he travels even slightly off his course, facing the peril of storms, loneliness, and uncertainty are just a few of the tests that his flight would bring. The pride of humanity's courage was felt by the reader when the European crowds cheered Lindy's descent as he found the safety of the ground.

This book has strong appeal because almost everyone, at one point in life or another, fantasizes about the freedom of flight and the uncertainty of adventure. The story chronicles all the events that make this a perilous journey—from the weight of the plane being too great to take off safely, to the treachery of trying to stay awake for sixty hours.

The story is intense with moments of concern about the safety of Charles Lindbergh and his plane, "The Spirit of St. Louis." For example, because the plane was too heavy, Charles left behind his radio and parachute (two important pieces of equipment, don't you think?). The reader was also plagued with the concern over Charles being able to stay awake and alert over the long trip. Despite all of his efforts—such as poking his head out an open window, holding his eyelids open with his fingers, and dreaming of other flying adventures—at times Charles would drowse and jerk himself awake.

The language of the story is full of captivating similes and metaphors. Lindy refers to the icebergs that he sees as white pyramids, and the dark night sky as an additional ocean to cross.
The illustrations by Mike Wimmer are praiseworthy. The artistic value of this book is evident with such techniques as differing points of view, the use of motion, and several hues of the sea which come together and make this story bigger than life. The sweeping clouds, rushing waves, or the blitz of a storm are samples of pictures that show action. The image of the open cockpit window reveals the enormous distance of the flight. The loneliness of the dark night and the vast ocean is depicted by making the plane and Lindy seem small in comparison.

One reading of *Flight* yielded the feeling of holding a treasure in my hands. The book is an excellent choice for both children and adults with its detail, poetic wording, and splendid illustrations.

★★★★


Reviewed by Helene G. Richardson

Bootles, the cat, has lost his purr. He looks in the bathroom and in the fridge. He looks everywhere. Will he find it?

The strength of the book lies in its illustrations. The colors are bright and appealing. The drawings are finely detailed. The confusion of the cat and the boldness of his search for his purr is shown by the cluttered details on each page and enhanced by the glossy paper. The title page shows the cat’s head breaking through paper. The last page shows the cat’s hind quarters and tail leaving through the broken paper. The cat’s contentment at finding his unfurry friends is illustrated by the boy and the cat centered on the page and encircled by a ring.

The language is simple, including the onomatopoetic sounds of drip, drop, tick, tock, crack, etc. The thrill of finding his two-legged unfurry friends is shown by the rush of words "My openers of cans." "My pourers of cream." "My strokers of fur."

The book first published in England will be enjoyed by small children and lovers of cats.

★★★★
What is a family? Who is a family? These questions introduce the collection of Mary Ann Hoberman’s poems about families. The poems’ topics cover individual family members, feelings, and family events—both common and uncommon. The poems display a wide variety of feeling and tone. Some are mainly descriptive, some thoughtful, and some just plain funny. However, the quality of the poems varies considerably. A number of them realistically present family members and situations with a good sense of the child’s perspective. The rest set out to realize the same purpose, but fail for varying reasons. In some, the rhythm overwhelms the flow of the words. Occasionally, the need to rhyme obscures the message. A few are confusing and hard to understand.

The final poem in the book, "Our Family Comes from 'round the World," is perhaps the best example of the failure to convey meaning. From the title one would suspect that Hoberman is referring to the human family, but the words of her poem do not clearly communicate that message. The poem also contains three different refrain-type verses made up partly of nonsense syllables ("Tra la tra la, Tra la tra lee, We’re one big happy family."). These refrains seem corny and out of place. Not only do they fail to enhance understanding of the words of the poem, but they spoil any true emotion the poem does convey. As a result, the poem is trite and phony.

In some cases it is Marylin Hafner’s illustrations that salvage the meaning of a poem. Hafner shows a wonderful ability to suit the moods of her pictures to the tone of the poems, whether they are comic or contemplative. The muted watercolor illustrations portray a wide variety of families, animal members included. Interest is enhanced by the diversity of page designs. Expressive faces and meaningful details make for pictures worth poring over.

Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers is a mixture of delightful illustrations and inconsistent poems. This book doesn’t quite live up to the promise of the collaboration of these two artists.

Reviewed by Suzanne Olsen

Loreen Leedy has set her whimsical book in a cartoon layout that is enticing. There is a schoolroom populated with children and fantastic animal classmates. The teacher is an alligator!

Mrs. Gator shows her class how to write all sorts of letters and cards, how to address an envelope, and teaches about the mail system. The information is presented clearly with examples that children could likely have written or would be interested in: a letter to grandma, letters on homemade stationary, letters with secrets written in invisible ink, party invitations, letters to toy companies, and much, much more. This is a fun book that would appeal to a wide range of readers.

One drawback needs to be mentioned. In spite of the lack of pagination, two different pages refer the reader to page 10 for instructions on addressing an envelope. This will hopefully be corrected in future editions. In spite of this flaw, the book performs well in interesting the reader in letter writing and teaching the skills needed to communicate in writing and the illustrations truly make it a fun book.

★★★★

Taken from *Ben's Dream*.  