Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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* 7+ FI

Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

The third in a series of books about Felix de Cabezada y Brooke, *The Teeth of the Gale* begins in the 1820's when Felix is eighteen years old. Since I had not read the first two books (*Go Saddle the Sea*, Doubleday, 1977, and *Bridle the Wind*, Delacorte Press, 1983), I thought that I would have a hard time picking up the plot; however, Aiken has made enough allusions to previous events that it was not difficult to follow.

Felix is the only grandson of a Spanish count and an English duke, currently living in Spain. He is asked by the Reverend Mother of a convent (where the young woman he loves, Juana Esparza, is preparing to take her vows as a nun) to accompany Juana and her cousin, Doña Conchita, on a mission to rescue Doña Conchita's children who were kidnapped by their father, an escaped convict. The book is full of mystery, suspense, romance, danger, and hidden treasure.

Aiken tells her story in a way that is reminiscent of novels written a hundred years ago—meticulous and substantial with old fashioned words—but this book has fast-paced adventure. This short description will give you an idea of the flavor of the book:

Next morning, long before cockcrow, I was up and inspecting the open carriage that Don Ignacio had procured for his sister-in-law [Doña Conchita]. It seemed sound enough, though shabby and of rustic design. Old Thomas, who had spent the night with his suffering horses and was up early fomenting them, agreed dourly that he supposed it would do well enough to carry the Doña on a mountain road where nobody could see them.

Aiken also uses lots of dialogue to draw the reader into the world of her characters and helps you feel a part of the adventure. Masterfully written and complete within itself, this book is a treasure. I now want to go back and read the two earlier books.
Kate has gone to Blade, Oregon, to stay with her Aunt Melanie for a couple of weeks—partly to get over Grandfather’s death. Aunt Melanie seems worried, and finally, Kate learns that the loggers are planning to enter an ancient crater and cut down the giant redwoods inside. Because there is usually fog in the crater, no one had known it had trees worth cutting. Recently, a pilot had flown over the crater just as the fog lifted and discovered the treasure. The loggers are angry about the law protecting the owls, which prevents them from supporting their families and cutting down the trees in the crater seem like the solution.

Kate and Aunt Melanie determine to stop the cutting and set off on a fantastic adventure. Aunt Melanie has a walking stick which proves to have magical powers, and through that magic, and an ancient hollow redwood (The Ancient One), Kate is taken back in time to the Halami Indian tribe who lived in the crater. She and Laioni, a Halami girl about Kate’s age, share danger, hardship and adventure to save the magical owls and the trees, and help to restore the balance of nature. They also must find out how Kate can get home again. Kate manages to return in time to save the big redwood and help Aunt Melanie.

Tom Barron’s first book, *Heartlight*, received good reviews. *The Ancient One* is a companion to that book. The story is engrossing, imaginative, and fun to read. Here is a book about saving the environment which we can first read for the story, and then believe in the values the author clearly feels strongly about.


Purrloom Popcorn’s blue ribbon cat-show-days are over, and he is transported to a strange house where the people don’t appreciate him. Even Popcorn doesn’t know how special he really is until he realizes that his gold eye allows him to see normally, while his blue eye allows him to see ghosts! Then it dawns on him that this strange house was where he lived as a kitten, and the lady who lived there with him and all her other cats are still there, but are now ghosts. Gradually, Popcorn realizes that he is lonely and needs someone besides
ghosts for companionship. Now, the trick is to convince the lonely little girl who just moved in that she needs him too. Can he do it?

I enjoyed reading this book because of the simple fact that I have never read anything quite like it before. I think children in the middle grades who like animals will really enjoy it—even though it’s different. The theme is excellent: "being loved by everybody ain’t a whole lot better than being loved by nobody at all."


This is the third in a series of books by Brennan about Shiva: *Shiva: An Adventure of the Ice Age* was reviewed by this reviewer in the *CBR*, Vol. XII, Number 3 (Jan/Feb 1992), pp. 7-8 and *Shiva Accused: An Adventure of the Ice Age*, in the *CRB*, Vol. XIII, Number 4 (Mar/Apr 1993), p. 14. The main character, Shiva, supposedly lived during the time of the "cave men," as a member of the Shingu tribe which is ruled by women. This story begins 19 months after *Shiva Accused* ends. Shiva finds herself facing an ordeal by poison to determine if she is worthy to become the new Crone (spiritual leader) of the Shingu tribe. Although she does choose the only bowl that does not contain poison, she finds herself under the influence of a powerful drug. Shiva awakens to find herself in Mamar’s Kingdom, the frozen world of the north. She must find her way back to her tribe, but must first face many dangers. Hiram (the young hunter who loves Shiva), upon finding her missing, goes in pursuit. Once again, Shiva and Hiram must rely on the help of the Ogre tribe—a tribe governed by men with misshapen heads; heavy, chinless jaws; monstrous bony ridges above both eyes; and a bulge at the back of their skulls—a tribe long hated and misunderstood by Shiva’s tribe.

The story is not as interesting as the other two books, but the reader will move through the book quickly. The conflict is a little more intense, especially among the Ogre tribe members. This is a fantasy, although Brennan’s epilogue, this time, dwells on the initiations shamans had to go through before they could become the spiritual leaders of their tribes. This book creates a look at the life of those supposed to have lived during the Neanderthal period of time. I am sure there will be yet another sequel. If nothing else, these two young people must get together.

Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Reviewed by Susan Broman

As in Brooke's previous book, *A Telling of the Tales*, *Untold Tales* is a collection of strange new twists on favorite old fairy tales. It starts out with the frog prince—what happens next. It seems happily-ever-after is dull for the princess and she misses the romance and adventure of her frog. In the next story, Beauty has had to live all her life being misnamed, and the Beast has his own unique troubles with appearance. A handsome prince kissed a sleeping beauty only to discover she was the wrong one. He comes back years later to correct the mistake, but the author makes an appearance and everything runs amuck.

These "untold" tales are funny and clever; along with Brooke's first book, they could be used for some interesting writing assignments. The stories are intertwined to the point of being tangled at the end which may make it somewhat frustrating for younger readers. Brooke fills the book with puns and allusions and absurd situations—the author becomes a character in his own book, while Prince Charming and Princess Aurora disappear, not into the sunset, exactly, but onto the hard disk of the computer. A fun book, especially for adults, but young adults would enjoy it once they get past the preconceived idea that fairy tales are only for little kids.


Reviewed by Susan Broman

Sidone is confused. Nothing has been normal since her mother died a year ago. Her older sister, Roberta, is trying to take her mother's place, and their father works day and night at his medical practice to hide his own grief. Then, Kieran moves into the house across the street with his own family problems. Sidone finds that she can't ignore him; but neither can she deal with his problems while her own family has problems and waves of memories about her mother wash over her.

The book is set in Canada in the late 1950's and gives a good feel for the era without being dependent on the time period. I don't think kids will be confused if they don't know much about the '50's. Brooks is a talented writer and the book is full of evocative language:

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol13/iss5/4
There were two moons last August—one that was almost full at the beginning when Mom was alive and our lives were normal, and then a big full cheater moon at the end, one that looked down so beautifully on the world when everything was awful and changed and never would be the same again.

The book deals with the death of a loved one and working through a time of mourning; but the novel is full of life—the beauty and wonder and love and pain that makes life worth living.


Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

When Bryn’s mother dies, she and her father move to a small farming community to live with an aunt and younger cousin that Bryn didn’t even know she had. Bryn feels lonely and hurt as she is unaccepted at school and unnoticed by her father and Aunt Pearl. The only happy and accepting person around is her cousin, Winnie, who has Down’s Syndrome. At the climax, Bryn has to find a way to save herself and others from a life threatening situation she has caused.

This book has some good things to say about loving, acceptance, and growing up, and it says them without pushing or preaching. Bryn’s loneliness and frustration with her mother’s death, her father’s closed manner and her lack of acceptance at school are all well portrayed. Winnie’s character is beautifully drawn and the relationship she shares with her mother is great! The book has a very positive message.


Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

When the fifth grade students at Jackson Elementary School in Everett, Washington, decided to reclaim the polluted Pigeon Creek, with the help of fellow students, many adults told them it could not be done. The elementary school students cleared the water of dumped garbage, set up a salmon hatchery,
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raised salmon from eggs, and released them into the creek. Then they waited and watched for two and a half years for the return of the salmon.

Cone creates interest and enthusiasm in reclaiming the environment and packs the book with information about the life cycle of salmon. Young readers will share the excitement of the students who brought back the salmon to Pigeon Creek and will feel empowered to make similar changes. Be careful—readers, young and old, may feel compelled to set up a salmon hatchery.


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Danny is a part-Indian boy living in the California town of San Puerco. He doesn’t remember his mother and now his father is in the hospital. He is trying, at all costs, to remain free of foster care. Even though he finds himself hungry all of the time, he is still independent, with the help of friends. Danny plays on the local soccer team and lives in a trailer in the country where a couple of coyotes live. Because of the poverty in which he lives, he doesn’t understand the rich kid who is overprotected and pampered with all his heart’s desires.

Because of Danny’s trials he learns a lot: (1) how to be proud of what he is, (2) how to make important choices, and (3) that he is a survivor. The character of Danny often appears sullen, but is in keeping with the Indian tradition and independence of mind. This is a companion book to *The Adventures of Boone Barnaby*.


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

"All children draw, but I think illustrators are the ones who keep doing it after fifth grade" may be the common thread running through Pat Cummings’ book about fourteen children’s book illustrators; but the uncommon variations also make this book interesting. Appropriately titled *Talking With Artists*, Pat Cummings got many different answers about questions like, "Do you have any pets?" "What do you do all day?" and "How do you draw those great pictures?" Also included is a useful glossary of art terms and a list of books by each artist.
The variety is shown in answer to the question about a normal day—"wake at 5:30 am, and work from 8 to 2 pm;" "I don’t have any normal days"; "I usually work eight to nine hours a day. Before a deadline . . . fourteen to fifteen hours"; "Work from 9 to noon, have lunch then work till 7." All the artists, however, spend many hours working on their illustrations, often working far into the night when they are in the middle of a book. Some of their favorite subjects (in answer to "What do you enjoy drawing the most?") are: faces; what if? situations; people and their homes; animals—often humanizing those animals; people; nature; if the story excites me, anything; and fantasy. The common thread is the intensity of feeling these artists share about whatever pictures they are creating.

Cummings has created an informal, conversational feeling with her childlike questions. Readers will feel they are sitting down for a chat with each author. The photos of the artist as a child across the page from a current, adult photo will help children to identify with each artist (to help them realize that these adults were once children). The samples of illustrations enable readers to see the variety of style and media from which artists can choose when creating illustrations for each book. Enlightening for children who wish to know more about illustrators, this informational book could also be inspiring for children who love to draw and think they might like to become professional artists. As Pat Cummings observes in the introduction, perhaps this book might give other children a realistic picture of the hard work involved in being an artist (thus saving them the trouble of having unrealistic fantasies about it being an easy job.)


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Ben Dagget is about to enter the annual Striped Bass Derby on the island of Martha’s Vineyard. Even though his father is dead, he is still famous for catching the largest bass ever to be reeled in. This year, Ben has hopes of at least equalling, if not surpassing his father’s record. A dishonest fisherman is trying to steal the trophy and win the money with a fish he caught before the contest began, and Ben has to decide if he will let that happen.

The book is well-written and filled with well-developed characters. The situation is one that may be similar to what children may go through every day: whether to be honest, or cheat to win. Several other themes in the book are also interesting. Children sometimes find that the world is not always kind, and they have to learn to make the best of what is given to them. In this story, Ben is
not only trying to make his father proud of him, he is also dealing with his father’s death and his mother’s resulting withdrawal.


A 3+ FI Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

This is, just as the title implies, a treasury of children’s literature. The book is divided as follows: "Traditional stories," "Aesop’s Fables," "Grimm’s Fairy Tales," "Mother Goose’s Nursery Rhymes," "Children’s Classics" (small stories taken from some of the classic children’s novels), "A Child’s Garden of Verse," "American Tales," "The Night Before Christmas," and "Hans Christian Andersen’s Fairy Tales." The surprising thing about the book is the variety of wonderful illustrations; Scott Gustafson, Ruth Sanderson, Michele Wiggins, Robyn Officer, Elizabeth Miles, and Lynn Bywaters, to name a few.

It is hard to find anthologies of children’s stories with really fine illustrations. This is a good one. The only drawback I see is that the book is not geared to the mother who would sit down and read it to her very young children—large illustrations, few words on each page. This is geared more to the older child whose mother might read it to him, or the even older child who can read it himself and enjoy the illustrations.

(How DID the publisher get all these illustrators into one book?)


A All NF Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Two popular children’s magazines and a team of scientists from China and Canada (The Dinosaur Project begun in 1984) joined together to answer children’s questions about dinosaurs. The result of their collaboration is a book entitled *The Dinosaur Question and Answer Book*.

The format is straightforward with questions listed in columns at the top of each page and the concise answer printed below. Both photographs and drawings provide information and add to the attractive appearance of the book.
The questions sound child-like ("Why did huge dinosaurs lay such small eggs?" "Did dinosaurs sit on their eggs to hatch them?" etc.), but in truth, they are the kinds of questions that any scientist or interested adult ought to be asking about a chosen area of study. The number of letters contributed by children (11,000) insure that the authors did have a large enough sample to be able to say these are common questions that any group of children might ask.

Besides the new information offered in this book (with a total of eleven new dinosaurs reported), the authors challenge readers to interact with the book, e.g., a quiz on dinosaur facts, matching games on paleontologists’ tools, dinosaur tracks, and how fast dinosaurs move.

Comparisons are frequently used to provided the reader with a means to visualize the size of various dinosaurs (large and small, e.g., a photograph of a scientist comparing the size of his lower leg to a new Chinese theropod, or a year-old baby compared to a neck bone).

Scientists outside of the Dinosaur Project are mentioned (including Jim Jensen from BYU and the huge dinosaur he discovered in 1979), a fossilized red and black turtle in New Mexico, raising hopes that a well-preserved, colored dinosaur skin might be found); but the focus is on what the Chinese and Canadian team have uncovered. Readers in the West will be interested to know that since the publication of the book (in the fall of 1992) the fossilized skin of a hadrosaur (duck billed dinosaur) was found in southern Utah. It appears that new discoveries will continue to add to the knowledge base available about dinosaurs. The Dinosaur Question and Answer Book is a valuable addition to new dinosaur knowledge available to children (of all ages) whose curiosity is intrigued by these creatures from the past.


Reviewed by Jan Staheli

The idiots at the back of the hall were quiet once Neil Symon started speaking. . . . The old man’s voice, rich and deep, was important. It rang through the darkened room and made everyone feel shivery.

In the Dreamtime, a long ago, a far off time, there was a big darkness all over the land. They came, those Ancestral beings then, the good spirits. They carved the beautiful land, shaping it this way and that as they went . . . .
This is a book of short stories written by sixteen Australian authors, winners of the book of the year Award given by the Australian Children's Book Council. The subject given to each writer was "Dream Time" and it is fascinating to see the diversity of material that came from the theme. The stories vary from spine-tingling science fiction to chuckle-a-minute humor. There is the poignant tale of an aboriginal story teller and his effect on a young school girl ("Up Taree Way" by Libby Hathorn), the bitter-sweet story of a small dog who lived her short life with complete joy and abandon ("You Can't Keep a Unicorn" by Patricia Wrightson), the disturbing story of a river that rises in retribution for a hundred years of abuse ("River Serpent" by Victor Kelleher), the whimsical account of an imaginary aunt who takes on a life of her own ("Aunt Millicent" by Mary Steele), and many others.

I found this collection to be delightful, interesting and eye-opening. It tells a great deal about the Australian culture—sharing their differences as well as their similarities. It also reminded me of how much I have enjoyed reading Australian writers. There is a great deal of wonderful children's literature that we are missing by not paying attention to what is being done in the land of the "Dream Time."


* 3+ NF  Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

This is a very interesting book on flowers—from the definition of a flower, through the reproductive process, and into the whys of color and the "tricks and traps" used by flowers to make sure their pollen "gets around." The photographs are breathtaking and the drawings are simple and clear, helping the reader understand the text. The book even includes instructions for an experiment to show how acidic, or basic soil can affect the color of a flower.

This book is beautiful in its simplicity and yet offers complete coverage of the subject. The photographs are breathtaking: bright colored flowers, rainbows produced by sunlight passing through drops of water on a spider's web, cells of various parts of plants, pollinia attached to the head of a bee, etc. The format is nice, the colors are striking. Everything about it looks crisp and clear. This is one book I would like in my own library.
Scraggly, moth-eaten, woebegone wolf. Taken from *Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf*. Copyright © 1992 by Glen Rounds. Reprinted by permission from Holiday House, New York.


B 3+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Germy (Jeremy Bluett) blew it again. He needs money and figures that if he prints and sells a school newspaper, he will be able to buy some of the things he needs. His plan backfires, however, when the principle and several teachers think his idea is so good that they put him in charge of every aspect of a "free" school paper. From there, Jeremy’s plans deteriorate. The only good thing about working on the paper is missing math class. He turns the typing over to a fourth grade computer whiz, and the final, eight-page paper stuns him—until he reads the final tidbit.
The story is often funny, sometimes sad, and teaches many lessons—the least of which is that daydreaming may not be profitable when hard work is needed.


**A- 5-9 FI**

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Duggy is an almshouse boy, newly apprenticed to the town apothecary, Master Crowe. The old man teaches Duffy much about medicines and herbs; but there is much more to this job. Master Crowe is also an alchemist who wants very much to find a way to make the "Jewel of Life," a marvelous stone which would carry magical powers. Duffy discovers there are magical powers within himself, untapped and unexplained. He is carried to three fantastic places—dreamlike, but nonetheless real—where he meets a serpent, a cockatrice, and a dragon. Each requires him to use his powers and his brains to escape harm. The greatest harm to be escaped, however, is in Duffy's real world—from the superstitious people who live in Elford Town.

Ms. Kirwan-Vogel worked on this book for nineteen years before completion. Her research is evident and enjoyable. The beliefs and myths of the Middle Ages, including the practice and theories of alchemy, are used subtly to further the story and explain the characters. The characters are well-drawn and believable. The story-line is perhaps a bit confusing as it jumps back and forth from fantasy to reality; and it moves along without clear explanation in some places. I would, however, recommend this book as a good fantasy read for grades 5 through 9.


**B+ 5+ FI**

Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Douglas Fairchild is the son of a diplomat and has been kicked out of every school he has so far attended. Thaddeus G. Little Middle school may be his last hope. He soon finds himself on the "Twinkie Squad"—a group of students who meet once a week to discuss their "special needs." When Douglas lands one of the stars of the school's basketball team, "Commando," in the same discussion
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group, and is responsible for his dismissal from the team, he learns that friendship can be a two-way street. Slowly the members of the "Twinkie Squad" develop a friendship for each other, and one by one, they come to the aid of others of their group who are in trouble—TROUBLE in the form of Douglas Fairchild and his outrageous stunts.

The situations in the book are outlandish—fish hidden in the ceiling of the cooking room, attempts to turn George Washington into a real "character," and schemes to get "Commando" back on the basketball squad. I found myself laughing out loud in several places. How in the world can one boy get himself into so much trouble?

★★★★


B+ 10+ NF Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

A very factual account of the armed resistance offered by the Jewish rebels that occurred in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. Lasting 28 days, this supreme effort, by only a relatively few struggling young men and women, is one of the finest acts of armed resistance and bravery of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Determined to kill as many Nazis as possible, and knowing that their fate would be certain death, these brave, untrained young people fought with everything they had to protect themselves and the civilians of the Warsaw Ghetto. The German soldiers treated the Jewish people of the ghetto as if they were animals instead of human beings, and many incidents are told that demonstrate this fact.

Landau has written in a way that is easy to understand and has included many pictures—although I have seen the same pictures in other books which are not so blurry and are more distinct than the reproductions in this book. Some of the written images will disturb the immature reader so caution should be used. I do wish that Landau had been a little more precise as to the time frame. She talked about the first and second days, but after that, it was hard to follow the chronology. Nevertheless, it is a compact little book that would be a good introduction to this horrible event in world history.

★★★★

The author grew up in Europe in the 1940's. This is her story of what it was like. This story is similar to Anne Frank's where her family was always in danger and always in hiding until her family met with the ultimate disaster—being found.

The story is told in very simple language, but does not diminish the tragedy of the people who lived during this era. Many children will be stunned by the related events—marching in snow with no shoes, going hungry, being beaten, and even killed. Our children may need to be reminded of horror of this time. It may even help them understand the problems in South Africa and Europe today.


Nearly-twelve Skye has always traveled with Reanna—who is both mother and best friend. They roam free from town to town, picking places with unusual names—like Zigzag, Browse, and Truth or Consequences—and staying just long enough for Reanna to get tired and want to move on. Then one day, they stop in Sheep Creek, Idaho, where Skye's grandfather lives. Reanna has a surprise—she is getting married and leaving Skye with her grandfather for a year. Filled with shocked disbelief, Skye makes plans to drive the old station wagon and follow them. If she can find them, they will have to take her with them—won't they?

While she is trying to get a new battery for the car, she begins to make connections with neighbors and family. Jermer, who is seven, holds funerals for dead insects, old socks, and worn-out flashlight batteries. Sweetie, a former airline hostess, lives in a log cabin and takes care of anyone needing her love. Aunt Esta, bossy but fair; Cody, the kind cousin; and all the other "cousins by the dozens," begin to teach Skye about her roots, her family history, and who she is because of who they all are together—a family. Especially touching is Grandpa—locked in loneliness and puzzlement over his inability to understand his only child's desire to be free of the family and all that it means.

This is a wise, warm, wonderful book about family—both blood relations and love relations—and about growing up to understand that freedom means the freedom to choose. Lael Littke has written a number of books for the LDS market, but this book is more broadly based. Published by Scholastic, in a very
nice hard-cover edition, *Blue Skye* is highly recommended for anyone grades 3 through 7. I think girls would especially enjoy this excellent novel.


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Because of his dad’s work, Ivan Zellner is moving to a new city in Nevada called Carmody—bright lights, dancing girls, cheap eats, and a crazy new high school called “Comedy High.” Ivan wants to turn tail and high lope it back to civilization. After an enthusiastic open house, and a spectacular volcano fire, it looks as though going to high school in Carmody will indeed be something unique.

Interesting story line, coupled with some typical teenagers; however, this book has language and innuendos that may be offensive to some.


Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey

Sixteen-year-old Kitty Lee is looking forward to a peaceful summer working at the Dairy Queen and spending time with her best friend, Dottie. But that’s not what happens at all. Kitty Lee becomes involved with the Curtis family who have just moved into town. The Curtises have three children who are left to the father’s care because the mother won’t come out of her bedroom. Mr. Curtis begs Kitty Lee to quit her job at the Dairy Queen and babysit for him, full-time, which she finally consents to do. This leads to innumerable problems, not the least of which is the talk going around town about Kitty Lee and Mr. Curtis.

The main idea this book is trying to convey is that we must face our problems and disappointments and not hide from them. Mrs. Curtis couldn’t handle the loss of both her father, the year before, and a baby, two years previously. Instead of getting help, she started drinking. Kitty Lee’s father was also still grieving for the wife he lost fourteen years earlier in a car accident. No one had ever told Kitty Lee about the circumstances surrounding her mother’s death because it was too painful, and she was afraid to ask her father because it would upset him. Kitty Lee finally realizes she cannot continue
working for Mr. Curtis, because of the feelings they have for each other. She chooses the right course by going back to work at the Dairy Queen.

The book does not go any deeper into what happens between Mr. and Mrs. Curtis. The reader is left to imagine that for herself. We also don’t find out about Dottie and her boyfriend eloping, but it is evident that Kitty Lee thinks Dottie is making the wrong choice.

I enjoyed reading this book because it covers a wide variety of timely topics. I feel that it teaches good values, while at the same time, entertains. I would recommend it to my three teenage girls. Kitty Lee would make a good role model for anyone to follow.

★★★★


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Graham Oakley fans will welcome *The Church Mice and the Ring*. The church mice and their cat, Sampson, are trying to find a home for Percy, a homeless dog, mainly because Percy had stopped at the church, trying to find a home, and his appetite was much bigger than the mice’s food supply. The mice immediately find a dog-loving child (Polly) but her mother doesn’t like Percy. (He and the mice ruined her garden party.) The mice decide to steal her diamond ring and then have Percy "find" it for her and become a hero. That’s when the fun begins.

As usual, the Oakley’s text is an understated, deadpan account of the hilarious events in the pictures, e.g., "With the aid of some talcum powder and some blood curdling words about being the ghosts of mice to come." The picture shows the mice literally bouncing in a box of powder, looking like children playing in their mother’s makeup, and then appearing as spectral mice to the petrified cat sleeping right next to the mother whose ring the mice had to steal.

It’s a marvelous romp as the indefatigable mice improvise when everything goes wrong—and everything does. Leave yourself plenty of time to study the pictures and see how clever they are in this latest, madcap adventure. P. S. Percy does achieve the status of hero—even though not quite as planned—and he thereby earns a happy home with Polly.

★★★★

**B- Pre-2 FI PB**

Reviewed by Marilyn Bailey

When Dizzy, the elephant, finds a lost boy in the jungle, he and his friends return him to his parents in the village. To show their gratitude, the boy’s parents take Dizzy and his friends to the big city to show them their home. While in the city, the tables are turned and Dizzy gets lost. This time, the boy helps to find Dizzy. Dizzy decides that he likes his own home in the jungle better than the big city.

I thought that the best thing about this very British picture book was the illustrations. They are done in black crayon and watercolor, and are truly a visual delight. The theme of getting lost and then found will appeal to young children who have been in that situation, and maybe to some who haven’t, but fear it just the same. This book should be read aloud to four- to six-year-olds. The vocabulary is at least on a third grade level, but I think that by time a child is eight or nine, he will have outgrown this story.


**A 6+ FI BI**

Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Most books about the Holocaust are written from the Jewish point-of-view: a survivor, a scholar, etc. While Orlev is indeed a Jew, living in Israel, the story is retold from the viewpoint of Marek, young fourteen-year-old Polish boy who lived in Warsaw at the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It is a true story told to Orlev by Marek in the late 1980’s, and so it reflects the Polish perspective. The gist of the story is that Marek is persuaded by his stepfather to help him carry supplies through the sewers of Warsaw into the Jewish ghetto to help sustain the people there. Marek is appalled to see the vast difference between the almost-normal life on the Polish side of the wall as opposed to the starvation and deprivation on the Jewish side. Throughout the book, Orlev makes constant use of these two contradictions. One day, Marek participates in the shake-down of a Jewish man who has just escaped from the Ghetto. The boy with Marek takes all of the Jew’s money and leaves the poor man totally helpless. When Marek’s mother discovers what he has done, she feels forced to tell him a secret that will change his life forever. This knowledge compels
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him to take part in an undertaking that almost costs him his life as he finds himself behind the ghetto walls as the Warsaw uprising begins.

Orlev uses this episode of the Holocaust to point out that there were a few people during the time of the Holocaust who remained true to their values and did whatever they could to help the people whom Hitler had singled out for mass extermination. It is also a little lighter reading than some of the other books on the Holocaust and would be a good introduction to the novice reader although there is some rough language.


* 3-6 NF Reviewed by Jan Staheli

This is the story of the Pilgrims, simply told through an examination of their food and manners. It tells about their trip across the ocean, what they ate, and how they managed to live in so little space.

What *did* the Pilgrims eat during their long voyage? Most of the food on the *Mayflower* was cold and dry. There were moldy cheese and dried peas. Salty beef and dried fish. And there were ship’s biscuits—as hard as rocks . . . made of wheat flour, pea flour, and water. They were flat and round, the size of dinner plates.

When they reached America, the Pilgrims had to work so hard, just to live, that they often didn’t even sit down for a meal—they ate on the run. Children were not always allowed to sit for a meal, even if there was time. The trenchers they ate from were shared by at least two people each, and never washed because they never had any food left on them. Their napkins were huge affairs because they ate most of their food with their fingers and needed to wipe them often. They rarely washed the napkins either, just folded them up ready for the next meal.

This is an outstanding book. The story is simply told, yet it is surprisingly complete. It is an entirely new look at this familiar subject, and gives us an eye-opening glance at the trials of life in early America. It is illustrated in black and white with selected woodcuts, photographs, and oil paintings which all enhance the text. The type face is large and easy to read. I would highly recommend this book for teachers to use in class, or for children to read on their own. Either way, it will be an absorbing, unique look at our Pilgrim predecessors.

**A- 2-6 NF**

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

This biography of the great Renaissance sculptor and artist is illustrated entirely with reproductions of his works and works of the period. The text is brief but informative, with each page covering a period of his life and containing beautiful details from his larger paintings and photographs of his sculpture.

The book is large in size with big type and lavish illustrations. The color is very good and the book is well-bound. It is definitely an introduction, giving only cursory information, but it is presented in such a manner to be interesting to both children and adults.

★★★★


**6+ FI**

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Summer was in the seventh grade the year May died—out in her garden tending the young shoots. Ob didn’t seem to know how to go on living without her, and Summer felt if she didn’t find him a reason to get up in the morning she might just lose the last person in her life who loved her.

She had come home with May and Ob when she was eight. These two old people had come from West Virginia to visit relatives. When they saw Summer, "they knew an angel when they saw her and they took [her] on home." May was always a "big barrel of nothing but love," and Ob was an artist who made whirligigs—not of birds and cartoon characters but with names like "Fire" and "Love" and "Dreams" and "Death." And now Ob had been visited by May’s spirit and he and crazy Cletus Underwood, from her school class, were off to see The Reverend Miriam B. Conklin, "Small Medium at Large." And Summer was about to have her answer, too. An answer from May for Summer alone, and it was all she needed.

*Missing May* has just won the 1992 Newbery Award for Children’s Literature. In 89 short pages, Cynthia Rylant has spoken plainly of love and death and consolation. This book is gentle and lyrical—a sweet journey through the West Virginia hills and into the minds and hearts of four unique and wonderful people. I heartily recommend it to all—ages 11 and beyond. It will renew soul and being with it’s simple wisdom and manifest love.

★★★★

Reviewed by Donna Jorgensen

Valentine was a physician in ancient Rome who treated his patients with herbs, powders, and prayer. Because he was Christian, he was much hated by the Romans and was always in danger. A Roman jailor brought his blind daughter to Valentine to see if her sight could be restored and a friendship developed among the three of them over the long weeks of unsuccessful treatment. One day, Valentine was taken to prison by the Roman guards for something he did not do and the jailor watched helplessly while Valentine was taken to his death on February 14, 270. Before he died, Valentine asked for some papyrus to write a note to the jailor’s daughter.

"What does it say, Father?" asked the child as a yellow crocus fell from the small scroll into her hand. "From your Valentine," her father read. Slowly the child held up the blossom before her face and for the first time watched its color dazzle like the rays of the afternoon sun.

Robert Sabuda has illustrated this traditional story with mosaics which he created from hand-painted paper, cut into small rectangles. Many of the pages are highlighted with mosaic boarders as well. Primary grade children were fascinated with the little bits of color as we talked about how the pictures were created, and they listened, almost reverently, to the story as Sabuda told it. A remarkable book visually, and a compelling story in the bargain. End notes tell the historical facts connected with Valentine’s death and the celebration of St. Valentine’s Day.


Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Ruth Minsky Sender—a young girl during the Holocaust and a prisoner in the Nazi death camps—was a Holocaust survivor. Leaving Poland with her husband and small children, she arrived in America in the early 1950’s (after years of pain and anguish) and decided that she must tell the world of the fate of the Holocaust victims. As she so clearly states in this novel:
As a Holocaust survivor, I carry a heavy burden, a painful duty. The burden of remembering. The duty of passing on the agonizing memories so that the world will learn from them. It should not happen again. It cannot happen again.

Mrs. Sender begins this, her third book, as she stands before a group of young, grade-school aged children and tries to share with them her story. The book covers her arrival in America and her struggle to become a part of this country. She relives those years as she adjusted to living in a free land. Trying to understand her past, she wonders why she and her mother and younger brothers and sisters didn’t leave Poland when her older sisters and brother smuggled their way over the Russian border to escape the Nazis. "Even if we had been told what evil awaited us, we would never have believed it. How could anyone believe such things?" And even when the Nazis invaded, her Mama still believed that "soon this will be over and you will come back to us. My children will come back. We will be a family again." Of course, this did not happen and only Ruth and the older sisters and brother who had escaped to Russia survived. As Ruth continued to tell her story to those in her new country, she constantly told people: "I do not want pity. None of the survivors want pity. We want you to learn from our painful past so that it can never happen again. You must never forget." And the eyes and voices of those she met confirmed that they would never forget. After Mrs. Sender published her first book, The Cage, teachers throughout the country used the book as a textbook to teach their elementary-aged students about the Holocaust because the school’s textbooks contained very little information. One teacher in California said: "We teach values, issues, caring, prejudice, family relationships, and so much more surrounding your book." And Holocaust survivors bought her books to share with their children because the books speak for all the survivors. Your story is our story. The names, the places change. The pain, the horrors remain the same. . . . I bought the books for my children. I could never speak to them about it.

This is truly a book to be read by all people, to insure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten and never repeated. Mrs. Sender’s style blends the past and the present in such a moving way that the reader will be able to experience a small portion of the sufferings and torment that the Holocaust survivor has had to endure—both during the war and for all the years since. Her book is filled with dialogue, and though touching and moving, it never becomes drippingly sentimental. When the reader has finished, they will never be able to forget. And as Ruth’s mother always told her, which became the theme of Ruth Minsky Sender’s life, "As long as there is life, there is hope" that this will never happen again.
Russell is a cute little kitten who wants to have an important job on the farm. But each day, a little girl dresses Russell up in baby clothes and plays house with him. One day, tired of being treated like a baby, Russell sets off to find himself a real job. He asks the horse, the cow, the hen, the pig, and the goat if he could help them. He is always too small or just can't do what they do for the farmer. The next day, the farmer stops to talk with the little girl and remarks that her fine playmate is "the luckiest critter on the farm." Perhaps Russell has an important job after all!

Young children will recognize Russell's impatience and his yearnings to be big and important. Children will enjoy the sharp, bright watercolors showing the farmer, the little girl, and all the farm animals from a very little kitten's viewpoint. A fun story of big and little, and of growing up.


* All NF Reviewed by Lillian Heil

*Children of the Dust Bowl* by Jerry Stanley is the true life story of some "Okies" (poor farmers who moved to California because of the drought in Oklahoma during the late 1930's). This was the era of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and this book is the history of one group of people (at Weedpatch Camp near Bakersfield, California), who, when ostracized by the town, built their own school with the help of school superintendent Leo Hart.

Hart begged supplies from local business people, and recruited dedicated teachers who made life their curriculum. These children and their parents worked hard to learn and to build a school and other community buildings for Weedpatch Camp. They learned mechanics, how to care for animals, and even built a community swimming pool. In a few years, they were so successful that the community who had refused to let "Okies" in their schools now asked to come to the "Okie" school. After five years, they were incorporated into the Kern County School, and Weedpatch School became history.

Quotes from interviews with Leo Hart and his wife, plus interviews with migrant families, provide a real understanding of the feelings and determination of the families who traveled from Oklahoma to find work and a new life, only to be called names and labeled as too dumb to learn. Stanley's account is a
readable and powerful description of what poor, unlearned people can do with a little help from dedicated teachers. Starting on page 73, Stanley tells what happened to this group of children who created the Weedpatch School. They became professors, business men, mine owners, educators, owners of construction companies, etc.—not bad for children who were considered "too stupid to learn the alphabet, too dumb to master math, and too retarded to learn much of anything" (p. 39). Actual photographs of the families at Weedpatch Camp help the reader to grasp the grit and determination which made it possible for a down-and-out group of people to create a model school and community with the help of concerned Californians.

This book is an exciting account of human achievement and makes me proud to be part of a profession that includes men like Superintendent Leo Hart and his corps of teachers.


**B+ 7+ BI** Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Stephen Crane died when he was only twenty-eight years old and his life was filled with illness and suffering. Knowing that his life was near its end, he wrote "I'm just a dry twig on the edge of a bonfire" (p. 145). and according to Ernest Hemingway, "He was dying from the start" (p. 7). His early life was spent in and out of school and during his late teens, he lived in the roughest sections of town, eking out a living as a free-lance writer. While still in his early twenties, Crane was commissioned as a newspaper reporter to go to the rugged West and, later, he spent time on the battlefields of Cuba, Greece, and Turkey writing reports of the conflicts. He was constantly in debt, especially after Cora Stewart Taylor (seven years his senior) entered his life. Although they never married, they lived together until his death. Neither of them knew how to handle money and both spent lavishly. They were constantly borrowing from friends, publishers, and family, and this burden was a constant worry to Crane. Most of the works of his later life were written simply to get cash to pay off his debts, all while suffering from chronic tuberculosis. Crane is best known for his *Red Badge of Courage*, a story of a young man during the Civil War; however, at the time he was writing, he had never seen any actual battles. The emotions described in *Red Badge* were based on Crane's experiences on the football field while at school! Although not very popular during his lifetime, his works have experienced a renaissance since the early 1950's.

Mark Sufrin has written a detailed, event by event description of the life of Stephen Crane. Although not exceptional in his narrative, Sufrin has included
many details that are probably unknown to the average reader of Crane's works. Actual photographs of Crane and his associates are included, and portray a suffering man. A bibliography is included.


Charlie Kenny is around twelve years old, and an only child. Only, that is, until his parents break it to him that he is not going to be an only child any longer. When Charlie’s friend, Alice Pepper, finds out that Charlie’s Mom is expecting, she bets Charlie all of her collections that he can’t knit the baby a sweater. So Charlie asks his schoolteacher to teach him how to knit. It has to be a secret though, so his Mom won’t find out, or anyone else for that matter. Now Charlie has to find secret places to knit while enduring merciless teasing from Alice. Will he ever get the sweater done in time?

I thought this book was quite humorous. However, I’m not sure I would recommend it to my children. The author uses a lot of New Zealand slang which was crude and offensive to me. I’m sure my fourth grader would learn some things about the birth process which I would rather have explained to her in a more genteel manner. This book might appeal to some children from rough backgrounds who wouldn’t find it offensive; however, I would prefer it if my children would read something not quite so crude. They get enough of that in the halls at school.


A 4-9 FI Reviewed by Lillian Heil

A dragon helping a damsel he is supposed to eat? That’s the undragon-like plot that Vivian Vande Velde has given in her tale of *Dragon’s Bait*. Alys accepts the dragon’s help to get even with the townspeople who had unjustly accused and condemned her as a witch. In the process of receiving help, Alys learns the price of revenge and perhaps the dragon does, too.

Vande Velde is a masterful storyteller and this book is no exception. The characters are well-drawn. Alys grows from a hurt, angry girl, blind with rage at her unjust accusers, to a woman who says about revenge: "I didn’t like it."
I felt worse after than before." She learns that the villagers are both good and bad—just as she has been throughout the course of the story.

Vande Velde humanizes dragons by giving her dragon the ability to transform himself into any creature he wishes. Selendrile, our dragon hero, spends most of his time transformed to a handsome, seventeen-year-old boy with golden hair. Definitely an appealing form to Alys who has a hard time deciding what she thinks of him. There is wry humor in the details of his transformation. Selendrile never wears clothes as a dragon so whatever he wears as a boy falls off if the change is unpremeditated—and you guessed it—he always transforms as a nude seventeen-year-old until he has time to put on some clothes. He doesn’t always have time so Alys soon learns to turn her back fast.

And what does the dragon/boy learn about revenge? One isn’t sure. Selendrile doesn’t reveal his feelings; but there is some indication, at the end, that Alys’ compassion and concern for others has rubbed off on him. I won’t say more. I don’t want to ruin a good story with lots of surprises in it.

★★★★★


A 4+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Rob has a problem—his family. Rob wants to be just a normal, average teenager starting seventh grade; but his family is weird! His mother drives a big, pink van with characters from Winnie-the-Pooh drawn all over it! His little sister Winnie is a genuine genius and has designed a game that will make her a millionaire by the time she’s eight! Rob is tired of the publicity from both his sister’s game and his Mom’s children’s book business; but no matter how hard he tries, his family is always around at the most embarrassing times.

I enjoyed reading the book because Rob is just an average, ordinary teenager, whatever he may think. Most teens think their family is weird and try to have as little to do with them as possible. It will be hard to convince Rob that his family is pretty close to being normal, that parents must work, and all little sisters can be a pain sometimes.

★★★★★

Reviewed by Janet Low

Grandma has died and the farmhouse is to be sold. Aunts, uncles, and cousins come from all over with trucks, trailers, and even an old school bus to divide up Grandma’s belongings. While the cousins play, the adults make five huge piles. Everyone enjoys a pot-luck lunch complete with family stories. Then Grandma’s sons and daughters draw lots to see which pile is theirs and the trading begins! The important items are those that invoke the strongest memories of special times with Grandma. When everything is packed and everyone kissed and hugged, they all take "the farmhouse home."

Gloria Whelan has written a warm story of a family dealing successfully with the task of dividing up their parents’ belongings after the last parent had died. The pace and rhythm of the story, along with the energetic watercolor illustrations create the feelings of a family reunion, not a family’s end. Grandchildren, as well as the children participate in the day’s events, cementing their memories with a last, loving day at Grandma’s house which will now exist—in part—in each one of their homes.


Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

Henry, an orphan, has been sent away from his foster home for the summer and hired to work for Sarah Morrison on her farm. Sarah seems cold and gruff, but Henry begins to like her and wants to protect her when he discovers that someone is stealing timber from her farm. Other complications arise as the town bully tells Henry a terrible secret from Sarah’s past.

This book is really about relationships. Henry has had a tough life, yet he maintains a positive attitude toward this new life he has started and all of the varied personalities in it. The book has some really exciting moments, and the developing relationship between Sarah and Henry is very touching.

* 8+ FI  Reviewed by Janet Low

How do you find the words to describe a book whose reading fills you with wordless awe? When an author uses her tools—words—with such authority, the only way to share that captured beauty is to read it word for word—not just an excerpt, but the entire story. In *The Leaving*, Budge Wilson has written nine short stories of girls and women growing up and finding their place in an imperfect world. The strength of each story lies not only in its vivid imagery and melodic language, but in Wilson’s portrayal of the wonder of self-discovery. Though the settings and times may be foreign to readers, the struggles, relationships, and growing pains are familiar and leave the reader with an overwhelming sense of hope.

*The Leaving* is the recipient of the 1991 Canadian Library Association’s Young Adult Book Award.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
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