Student Reviews

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Student Reviews

Authors
Jennifer Kennedy, Joan Christensen, Rob Cuff, Holly Tripp, Kerry Lynn Smith, Janet F. Thackeray, Lisa Wight, Tracy Clearwater, Jill Jackson, Leslie Anderson, Rebecca Scoresby, Brett Nielson, Katie Northrup-Fox, Amy Larsen, Sandra Burton, Melissa Mergenthalen, Michelle Voyles, Jaime Bingham, and Tambee McKell

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Student Reviews


Reviewed by Jennifer Kennedy

This picture book, Harriet Tubman, is the true story of Harriet Tubman, the slave who ran the underground railroad to free hundreds of her people. The story teaches children a bit of history by using facts and illustrations, at the same time creating sympathy for a brave and famous American.

I enjoy reading nonfiction children’s books—especially those centered around American history. I thought this was a very informative book with lots of facts in a brief amount of words. From reading this book, a child could learn: who Harriet Tubman was and what she did, about the underground railroad, how slaves were treated, what war was fought over slaves, and who the President of the United States was who resolved this conflict. These are all very important things children should know about their country and heritage.

To make it more appealing to the young learner, Adler put it in a picture book format that children would enjoy reading.

The illustrations in Harriet Tubman were very appropriate. They were in color, yet contained a certain roughness to them. This adds to the crude living circumstances of the American slaves and the rough time they had in escaping to the North to gain freedom, to say nothing of remaining alive on a day to day basis. The pictures accurately depicted the lifestyle of these people at this time in history. If the colors were clear and bright, rather than more sketched and muted, I don’t think the illustrations would create the time period as well as they did.

Another strong point in this book is how the author won the readers’ sympathy for Harriet and the slaves. He did this by using phrases such as "the slaves were afraid they were going to be sold," "Harriet almost died," and "they escaped without any food or money." These are all situations children would be scared of, but it was a way of life for these people and Adler conveys this through his language and illustrations. He also stresses how this treatment was severely wrong and that there were people who wanted to hinder this kind of behavior. Adler talks about abolitionists and President Lincoln and their efforts to curb slavery and the harm it was causing. Because Adler brought forth these sympathetic people in the book, I think children will be able to gain an
understanding of the cruelty of slavery and tend to side with Lincoln and his followers.

I enjoyed reading this picture book and would recommend it to teachers in lower grades who want to talk about slavery. I don’t think it’s a book that can just be read and not talked about; but if a teacher wants a discussion from a picture book, this is an excellent book to choose. This book can help children realize that there are other heros in history besides generals, presidents, and baseball players. I enjoyed reading about Harriet Tubman and am interested in reading the other books by Adler about famous men and women in history.


*Reviewed by Tambee McKell*

To learn is to know, and in Jim Arnosky’s book, *Crinkleroot’s Guide to Knowing the Trees*, you are exposed to a whole world of knowledge about trees. Crinkleroot is the narrator who takes you on a guided tour of trees. He very successfully guides you through a tree’s life, the various kinds of trees, how to distinguish one tree from another, and their usefulness in the environment. The scope of information covers a large area of facts without overloading your information processing system.

Arnosky, logically and clearly, tells you about trees. Using no technical terms, he defines the different stages of a seedling, a sapling, and an adult tree. There is a clean flow of information with smooth transitions from one topic to another. Aiding this process are clear illustrations which help in clarifying the terms and show examples of the various trees. Included is an index of leaf/seed shapes which will help the reader use the book in practical application. Jim Arnosky successfully delivers an enjoyable book which also teaches the reader many valuable facts about the subject of trees.


*Reviewed by Jaime Bingham*

This is the story of a young boy who roams the country with his guardian, a preacher. Hambone’s parents have been killed and he looks up to Old Blue
Tilley. They travel by horseback to visit families out in the wilderness. Old Blue Tilley feels obligated to preach and serve the unenlightened folks and many times, Tilley is asked to settle disputes or resolve conflicts among the families. From Tilley, Hambone learns how to get along with people as he grows into manhood.

I somewhat enjoyed this book, but do not know if young readers would find it interesting. There isn’t a definite plot or structure to the book and it isn’t very exciting. I doubt I would use it in the classroom.


In Grace Chetwin’s *Child of the Air*, the two main characters live happily, albeit in poverty, with their grandfather. Upon his death, however, Brevan and Mylanfyndra (the brother and sister) become geth, or slaves, to the townspeople. They soon discover, quite by accident, that they can fly. When the town becomes angry and suspicious toward the children, Myl and Brev begin to wonder if they really are infected with a horrible ailment, or if they belong to a different race of people.

The story is a fantasy story. While the idea of flying is very appealing to many youth, the plot of the story is extremely predictable. There are no unexpected twists or even a definite climax. It seems that the story is unbelievable at times—very weak. Also, even though it is a fantasy story, the names of the objects and people are hard to follow.


*Green Coat and the Swanboy* is a delightful fairytale about a swanherd and his hidden destiny. One day, while Baptiste is watching his swans, a man with a green coat happens by. The man plays a beautiful tune and offers to teach it to the boy, in exchange for his gold band. The swanherd will not give up the band because he has had it since birth and it will not come off. So the man asks
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for the swans and then, when told no, takes them. The search for his swans leads the boy to a wonderful surprise!

This book has all the elements of an excellent fairy tale. The plot itself has the surprise factor—where the main character discovers something unknown about himself. The language is very descriptive, i.e., "... he played a tune so sweet that Baptiste trembled all over." The pictures are wonderful. The drawings shows character and personality. The colors of the main characters are bright and vibrant against the somewhat muted, hazy background—creating a dreamlike effect. This book is one to be include in any children’s library.


Reviewed by Sandra Burton

Children are sitting in a classroom in McKormich School when a girl, looking out the window, exclaims: "Look! Snow!" As the children, the teacher, the bus driver, the parents, and even the animals return home, they seem to anticipate this joyous event. The next morning, when school is cancelled, everyone rushes to participate in a snow day. Sledding, skiing, snow angels, and snowmen are the happy celebrations of such a day. At the close of the day, the children warm themselves with hot chocolate and memories.

This picture book has few words; but from the first excited cry of "Look! Snow!" to the last contented sigh, Kathryn Galbraith conveys all that needs to be said.

It is the wonderful pictures which tell this tale. From the cover, to the final page, illustrator Nina Montezinas manages to evoke magical, childhood memories for adult readers, as well as create tingling anticipation in young readers. The expressions on the children’s faces are poignant. She manages to capture the wistfulness and innocence of youth. She uses vivid colors for clothing and more muted blues for the snow and creates movement with the swirling snow and rushing dog.

This book will be enjoyed by children of all ages.

Reviewed by Amy Larsen

*What Instrument Is This?* is an excellent book. It teaches children about various instruments by allowing them to guess the name of the instruments shown in the book by using a picture and a clue. After guessing, the reader turns the page and finds interesting information about that instrument. The instruments are divided into four categories: wind, keyboard, string, and percussion. The book also includes a glossary, drawings, and names of other instruments not mentioned in the book, and a note to parents which offers helpful suggestions regarding children’s involvement in music.

I recommend this book, not only for the well-written valuable information regarding the instruments, but also for other qualities as well. One of its strongest points is the photographs of children of many nationalities and abilities. For example, there are Black, Asian, White, and Hispanic children as well as a boy in a wheelchair and a girl with Down’s Syndrome. The photographs will be interesting to children because of the variety shown in each picture. Some children have serious, contemplating looks on their faces, while others are shown in humorous settings such as the small girl playing a sousaphone which is nearly twice as big as she is. Children will learn many basic facts about instruments: how to play them, characteristics of each, and some description of how they sound. This book is a valuable tool for introducing children to a variety of instruments.


Reviewed by Katie Northrup-Fox

With this informational book, children can find out about the wild animals living around them. Brief chapters describe animal tracks, the kinds of feathers birds shed, and what kinds of food clues (“dirty dishes”) animals leave behind. How to collect a spider web, an animal tracking game, and an "identify-who-it-came-from" quiz are three of the book’s learning activities. These activities are appropriate to use in a classroom or with a single child.

Making this an especially useful book are the clear, realistic illustrations; the glossary and index; and the browseable format. Kudlinski’s writing is concise, simple, and moves along well. Her explanations are uncomplicated yet factual. She has a biology degree and has taught elementary school science.
For the most part, she avoids cute-animal statements. Her vocabulary-enhancing words include naturally correct terms such as "borer," "gall," and "pellet." Throughout the book, the author cleverly relates what the animals do to what children do—animals leave tracks in the sand while children leave hand prints on the refrigerator. This helps children feel more familiar with the creatures that share our earth.


Reviewed by Brett Nielsen

Having left the Indian Reservation for the streets of New York, seventeen-year-old boxer Sonny Bear tries to harness his inner rage by training with Alfred Brooks who has left the sport to become a policeman.

This is an exciting book that could be used to motivate reluctant young men to read. The book is also effective in teaching that maintaining control is a key to obtaining success and fulfillment in one’s life.

Sonny Bear is a character with whom many young people can relate. Native American students, and other minorities, will find the book especially good because it deals with the problems and frustrations that many of them face. The book shows that although a person may be discriminated against, and not have all the privileges that he or she might like, striking out with anger and violence is not the best alternative. It is better to learn to control one’s feelings and use them for constructive purposes and to help achieve success.

The book is filled with action and excitement. It shows that using self-discipline and knowing how to choose the right friends are keys to success. This is an excellent example of questionable subjects (sex, drugs, prostitution, and violence) being handled by suggestion rather than in graphic detail. No one could take offense to this well-written sequel to the very fine 1967 novel, *The Contender.*

Reviewed by Rebecca Scoresby

"It’s been a mighty long time since fish tales have been so appealing!" In *A Million Fish... More or Less*, Patricia C. McKissack’s readers travel to the deep south to follow the young boy, Hugh Thomas, on his outlandish adventure through the Bayou Clapateaux. Hugh learns that tall tales accompany trips through the Bayou and is pleased to stretch the truth about his trip when he returns home.

McKissack has constructed a story that can be read for pure enjoyment; but this book also portrays the early twentieth century South in a realistic, yet lighthearted manner. The "deep South" accent found in the dialogue is quite catchy and rhythmic. It almost becomes difficult to not begin speaking the same way. Even without the dialogue, McKissack’s tale sustains the reader’s attention until the very last page.

Dena Schutzer has also created warm and vivacious illustrations to accompany the text. Before beginning to read this book, the reader knows that this story takes place on a lazy, hot, summer afternoon—possibly on the banks of the Mississippi River. The "oil-on-canvas-like" pictures that puts color on top of color also creates a sense of movement—never has an alligator jumped out of a river so fast!

Although the dialogue and vocabulary may be difficult for young children to read by themselves, this book is a marvelous opportunity for a teacher to read out loud. How fun for a child to hear the "deep-South" accent along with seeing vivid illustrations!


Reviewed by Leslie Anderson

Boldly colored, full-page illustrations and large printed words depict the All-American love for baseball. *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* is written by Jack Norworth and illustrated by Alec Gillman. Although Norworth never attended a major league baseball game, he wrote the lyrics to "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Alec Gillman, a former ballplayer himself, added the realistic ball park atmosphere through the use of his watercolor pictures. The text and
illustrations are dependent upon each other to bring out the nature and characteristics of the 1947 World Series. Although the book consists of mostly pictures, together with the song itself, added history about the author and the World Series are highlighted at the end.

The worth of this book is valid and will be appreciated by many, whether it be the author, ball players, students, or teachers. It uses strong language that is factual and supportive of the theme. References from the Baseball Encyclopedia allow a brief history of the 1947 World Series to be added near the end of the book. In my opinion, this book communicated the pleasure that can be experienced at a major league baseball game. For all you baseball lovers out there, grab hold of this book and cherish it for the American value it is worth. Take Me Out to the Ballgame is a priceless and cherished song in baseball today.


A K-2 PB FI Reviewed by Jill Jackson

It’s teatime, and Ben must go and find his sister Emmy. As he trudges through the garden, Ben encounters many of his toy friends. No one has seen Emmy, but each toy offers to come to tea, and to bring his or her own contribution. When Ben hears Emmy’s voice coming from the lair of Hot Cross Dragon, the reader expects danger. Instead, he discovers that the dragon is cooking sausages for Emmy and has just singed his fingers! Ben then returns home, accompanied by his sister and all their friends.

Matthew Price’s style in this book is so simple and straightforward that most any child could follow it. The dialogue is basically the repetition of the same few sentences, altered only slightly as Ben meets each new character.

"Hello, Arthur," said Ben. "Have you seen my sister? It’s time for tea."

"No, I haven’t," said Arthur, "But I’ll come to tea if you like. I’ve got some chocolate cookies." "Okay," said Ben.

And off they go, looking for Ben’s sister and meeting new friends.

LeCain’s illustrations are lifelike and believable. Ben and the cat have enough expression and animation to seem real. The toys are adorable and show enough emotion to fit Ben’s living imagination of them. Yet, it is still obvious that the toys are toys and not real people and animals. Each scene spreads across the entire length of the open book, and contains many interesting details,
such as insects, model ships, and candy-filled jars. The most unique aspect of this book, however, is the cut-out windows, which allow the reader to see from one scene into another. These windows add depth and a new sense of perspective to the pictures. The coloring is vivid, but not unrealistically bright. By watching the colors of the sky, the reader can even notice the time of day passing, as the colors become dull and the sun sets.

This fun, believable book has many appealing aspects, and Ben's imagination, which brings the toys to life, may be the greatest of all. Every child will be able to relate to talking, stuffed animals and to dolls that can bake. What little girl has never sat down to a tea party with her toys and dolls as guests?


Reviewed by Tracy Clearwater

Sixteen-year-old Patty is pleased when her Aunt Ruth, a vibrant actress who encourages Patty's interest in theater, comes to visit. However, serious complications in Aunt Ruth's diabetes threaten her health and her ability to walk. When Aunt Ruth has to have first her left and then her right leg amputated, Patty feels sorry for her; but through her Aunt Ruth, Patty discovers there is more to life than just acting. Patty begins to write her feelings and express herself in poetry and suddenly, she is no longer sure she wants to be an actress. Patty wonders if her parents will object to her desire to be a writer—as strongly as they objected to her desire to be a career actress. Patty doesn’t want to entirely forsake acting;, however, she is so confused and is as uncertain of her future as her Aunt Ruth is.

*My Aunt Ruth* is a story of two people struggling for identity. Patty is young and energetic and is continually learning more about herself and her tastes. Ruth is older and wiser, yet she must learn again to establish herself as a person—a person with no legs. Through Ruth, Patty learns that no matter what happens, life has hope and you need to make the most of it. If the reader wants to learn more about themselves, then *My Aunt Ruth* is an excellent book. Iris Rosofsky uses Ruth and Patty to portray the indomitable human spirit as each "remain true to [herself] and [her] dreams and aspirations."

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Reviewed by Lisa Wight

The book, Hillbilly Choir, is the story of fifteen-year-old Laurie who returns to her small hometown of Guthrie, Arkansas. Surrounded by family members who dream of leaving Guthrie someday, Laurie and her Grandmother seem to be the only ones to appreciate their simple hillbilly life. The only thing that seems to pull Laurie toward going back out into the world is her desire to sing and her ability to do so beautifully. Laurie is faced with the decision of leaving her family and friends (who are so familiar) to try for a singing career, or staying with her simple life.

Hillbilly Choir is an enjoyable book that deals with growing up and change. This book is especially enjoyable for those who are sentimental. Reading it is about as easy as the style of life in Guthrie, Arkansas. I highly recommend it!


Reviewed by Janet F. Thackeray

In Skymaze, a sequel to her novel Space Demons, Gillian Rubinstein has created yet another video adventure for her four young characters: Ben, Andrew, Mario, and Elaine. These adolescents are caught up, again, in a most mysterious, intriguing, even addicting, video game which pulls them into its realm and then attempts to control and destroy them. Where the last game ended, in Space Demons, this new game begins. Yet, in this novel, the adventure story becomes a quest in which each child must conquer not only the maze, but his or her own personal fears and insecurities.

Although he realizes that he is too easily manipulated by people, Ben agrees to involve himself in another video game with his friends. Indeed, his reservations are well-founded as the four kids find themselves involved in an exciting, but dangerous, fourth dimension. As they master the game, using the computer’s joystick, they advance through the various levels of play. Just as in Space Demons, the kids must use their skills to stay alive when the game enters their reality. Although the players realize there is some danger in each run of the game, they are uninformed about the exact rules of the game and the potentially fatal result from losing a third life. Yet, they are all drawn into the game by some unexplainable power. Even Ben goes against his better judgment and plays. To add to the danger, two new characters are introduced into the
equation who alter the play by making strategic mistakes. Together, the kids fight the forces of darkness in order to survive.

Skymaze is a gripping novel. With vivid descriptions of the transformation of earth into the star-filled Skymaze, Rubinstein leads the reader through a maze which becomes as real to the reader as it does to the characters in the novel. Furthermore, her characters are realistic and have some genuine concerns and problems—similar to those with which most adolescents, at one time or another, must deal. Simply, this book is better than any video game.

★★★★★


A Pre-K PT  Reviewed by Kerry Lynn Smith

Upon venturing out for a bite to eat at "Tiddley Wink Tea Shop," the five sheep seem quite innocent; but from the moment they enter the quaint, little tea shop, the pleasant atmosphere turns into sheer chaos.

Table tips, Teacups smash, Tea drips, Dishes crash.
Dishes break. Waiters Stare. Tea and cake are everywhere.

The patient waiters finally ask the sheep to leave, and as they exit, they discover a much more suitable dining environment—right on the front lawn! In this sheepish adventure, Shaw uses sharp, pulsing rhymes, laced with alliterations that are perfectly coupled with Apple’s delightfully expressive illustrations. This frivolously enjoyable story has a rhythm that bounces across the pages leaving you up and ready to follow the sheep wherever their havoc-laying paths may lead you.

★★★★★


A All FI PB  Reviewed by Holly Tripp

One day across the lake where echoes come now an animal that needed sound came down. He gazed enormously, and instead of making any, he took away from sound: the lake and all the land went dumb.
So begins the poetic tale of sound and silence, life and death, and winter's freedom from spring. The moon's sound-eater brings a silence—a winter—which is only broken by a forgotten cricket's small chirp. The binding and deadly stillness is snapped in that instant. Winter breaks its bonds. Sound remains protected from the wild moon as the cricket, in watchful readiness, practices its chirp at night.

_The Animal That Drank Up Sound_ is an excellent example of the power that language and illustration have to take a reader away from this world into another. The "silence" of this tale comes forcefully to us with phrases like: "he buried—thousands of autumns deep—the noise that used to come there," and "...began to drink toads, and all the little shiny noise grass blades make." Even the sound-eater dies because no sound remains. The author then powerfully reintroduces sound with "first whisperings," "the water splashed," and "a big night bird screamed." The silence brought by the sound-eater is reinforced by the animal itself. Black, and almost formless, this faceless creature emphasizes the lack of vitality and life silence can have. The illustrator uses autumn leaves, and then snowflakes to signal the animal's passing and presence. This underscores the coming of winter and silence. Finally, the bold lines of the scenery, with their color and contrast, seem so separate and motionless that we feel the profoundness of their silencing. This book is excellent for all ages, but older children, especially, would pick up on the sound/silence, winter/spring symbolism. The tale is marvelous on its own or as a read-aloud.

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A 4-9 NF Reviewed by Rob Cuff

 Who invented the game of basketball? Where? When? What are the major differences between professional, college, and high school basketball? Basketball is booming, not only as a professional sport, but also in high schools and colleges as well. The rule changes of the eighties have made the game even faster and more exciting. This book provides an up-to-the-minute account of basketball—its history, rules, and methods of scoring. Shots, tactics, skills, and equipment are described, and explanations are given of basketball terms. Profiles of some of the leading players both past and present are also given.

The title, _All About Basketball_, certainly speaks for itself. The book provides thousands of interesting facts surrounding the game of basketball; however, because rules, regulations, and records often change from year to year, this book could quickly become outdated. Except for that shortcoming, _All About Basketball_ provides an excellent source of information to the person.
wanting to know more about the game. The specific player profiles—including Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, and Magic Johnson—are exceptional. Excellent illustrations, easy reading, definitions of basketball words and terms, and an outstanding, in-depth index provide the reader with the potential to become well-acquainted with the game of basketball.


Reviewed by Joan Christensen

Audrey Wood has followed *Piggies* with another zany illustrated tale—*Silly Sally.* With bold and bright watercolor illustrations, Audrey Wood tells a story about "Silly Sally that went to town, walking backwards, upside down." With the turning of each page, Silly Sally meets other silly companions: "On the way she met a pig, a silly pig, they danced a jig. Silly Sally went to town, dancing backwards, upside down." Preschoolers will be happy to join Silly Sally in her travels and anticipate who her other companions will be. The answer to how Silly Sally gets to town will delight the young reader.

With its repetitious and simple, nonsense rhymes, children will enjoy having the book read aloud to them, and reciting the verse—reminiscent of some of Dr. Suess’s rhymes. Wood’s use of the full page for illustrations allows the child’s eye to easily follow the story. Clean, simple illustrations give clues to other possible companions that the child will enjoy guessing. This humorous story should become a favorite.

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