1993

Book Reviews

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Staheli, Jan; Low, Janet; Riddle, Ellen; Morris, Carla; Baer, Lisa; Broadway, Marsha; Evensen, Nancy C.; Newmeyer, Karen; Homer, Kathe C.; Alder, Nancy; and Heil, Lillian (1993) "Book Reviews," Children's Book and Media Review: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 4. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol14/iss2/4

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Book Reviews

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This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol14/iss2/4

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Kevin Spencer is an army brat, and it has never bothered him much that friends, schools, and surroundings were temporary. He has handled the frequent moves, has learned to make new friends, and has compensated for impermanence by being close to his parents and keeping a hamster for a pet. But this last move to a small country town, where his father is in charge of the base Proving Ground, has Kevin puzzled. The people here are not only distant, they’re openly hostile. The army people are expected to stay on the base and out of the local people’s way. Kevin’s biggest problem is Charlie—a beautiful redhead who plays Dungeons and Dragons, carves wonderful figures in wood, and beats up anyone from the military base who gets in her way.

Then Kevin discovers that there is a bigger problem than how to get Charlie to like him. Someone is trying to sabotage the Proving Ground, and if it works the whole town will be in danger.

Elaine Marie Alphin, author of *Ghost Cadet*, a UCBA nominee for 1993, has written another thoughtful novel dealing with the military. She has created three-dimensional characters who experience conflict and uncertainty and who exhibit prejudice and understanding, weakness and great strength. Kevin must reach beyond himself to find the courage to do what must be done. This is a fast-paced coming-of-age story, and I would recommend it to anyone, grades seven and up, who likes a good adventure. I think boys would especially enjoy this book.


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

*Humbug* is the story of eight-year-old Cora, who, with her older brother and sister, is sent to stay with grandparents for six months while her parents are
in Japan. Because her grandmother has just broken her leg and Grandpa will have his hands full with hospital trips and caring for the older children, Cora is farmed out to the next-door neighbors, Sunday Dearheart and her daughter Angelica (who are as hypocritically sweet as their names imply). There, Cora finds out from Angelica’s grandmother, Ma Potter, that “humbug” is when you say one thing and mean another. It also makes you feel better to mumble it when people are stretching the truth for their own benefit. Ma Potter helps Cora understand self-centered Sunday and Angelica, and Cora gives Ma Potter the courage to stand up for herself and live where she can be happy.

*Humbug* is a compelling story of human relationships. It shows how a smart eight year old can begin to learn about self-centered and cruel people; Cora also learns some of the reasons behind their carefully built facades. The children in the story are very believable: they talk and act as children would. The action in the story makes sense, and the climax filled with tension. My objection to the story is not the quality of writing but the moral stance implied by the author. Most of the adults in the story are rather two-faced, and they don’t understand how intelligent children can be. I found it particularly disturbing that the parents of the three children are completely out of touch when it comes to realizing that their children know all the games they are playing. The children see nothing unusual about their parents’ behavior ("Although their parents were not perfect, Alice and William and Cora were used to them and quite fond of them") so Bawden appears to be saying that these children will grow up to be rather condescending adults who don’t think their children know or notice their motives or hypocritical behavior. That’s just the way things are—"Alice and William and Cora lived with their mother and father, who were no better and no worse than most parents.” Granted, parents are not perfect, but it would be much more encouraging if Bawden presented a view of a world in which children see their parents’ weaknesses but also realize that they have good motives and genuine love for their children. Bawden’s *Humbug* didn’t give that kind of assurance.


Brittain has created some interesting characters, from enterprising teenagers and a greedy villain to the dripping Miss Essie (who has never forgotten that her drowning deprived the world of an eighteen-year-old belle of the ball) to Horace, who frequently forgets to have his head on his shoulders (because it was cut off in a Revolutionary War battle). The plot, however, is a disappointment.
The story centers around a poker game that was played just before the sinking of the Titanic. This requires a little knowledge of the game, which the mayor reluctantly agrees he possesses. Midway through the book we are told that the ship’s steward brought a couple of decks of cards, but the mayor only wants to ensure that the cards came from the steward. It never seems to occur to him that cards from both decks might have slipped into the game. Even when the final hand is described in detail in court, the mayor does not grasp the fact that these three hands contain five tens:

Lyle Arbuthnot tossed in 3 tens and quit the game.
Ellsworth had the 7-Jack of hearts (and thought he had won the game).
Addison Flexx won the game with a royal flush (ten, jack, queen, king, ace—all in spades).

Tommy saves the day by counting the tens and showing that the game was not fair. For nonpoker players the final scene will probably not generate much excitement; and I doubt that poker players would believe that the mayor wouldn’t have spotted the problem as soon as he knew two decks were given to the players, or at least when the hands were described in the trial. It’s a clever solution, but not very exciting and perhaps too academic to interest many children. The humorous situations created by the ghosts are entertaining, but this book is not as good as Brittain’s best books.


Reviewed by Jan Staheli

This is the story of Asa. At seven he comes home from first grade to find that his whole world has turned upside down. His father has left without saying goodbye, his house is empty, and his mother is taking him to the beach for a few days. At nine, in his eleventh school, Asa meets a new friend who helps him learn about love, loyalty, and the difference between doing your best with your head and giving all you have with all your heart. At eleven, Asa has finally been in one place long enough to learn the intricacies of a finely played baseball game; at the same time he is learning a great deal more about his stepfather and himself.

When he turns twelve, Asa falls in love. Life will never be the same again, and he realizes that his heart may be too wary and overwise. An exceptionally bright child, Asa struggles to work through his problems and to answer some very difficult questions. Being very intelligent can be a handicap.
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in relationships, and Asa must decide where he fits—and how to fit—in relation to other people.

This loosely constructed novel is really four short stories about the same people. Bruce Brooks tells nearly as much by what he leaves out as by what he says. Bruce Brooks' story is beautifully written, thought-provoking, and compelling. It is not so much about head versus heart, as it is about head and heart working together. I would recommend this book for grades five and up, and recommend it highly for grades seven or eight and up.

★★★★


A 3-Adult NF PT Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Each poem in this collection corresponds to one of the thirteen moons of the year as embraced by a different Native American culture. The poems celebrate the character and beauty of each moon.

Each poem is short, clear, and evocative. The luminous illustrations beautifully enhance the text. The book as a whole conveys a clear sense of the respect Native American cultures have for nature; it also reflects their feeling of oneness with the natural world.

This volume is a good alternative to the more generic and diluted versions of Native American tales generally found.

★★★★


A 3+ FI Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

When Bryn's mother dies, Bryn and her father move to a small farming community to live with an aunt and younger cousin that Bryn didn't know she had. Bryn feels lonely and hurt because she is not accepted at school and is unnoticed by her father and Aunt Pearl. The only happy and accepting person around is her cousin, Winnie, who has Down's Syndrome and is treated cruelly by some of the town children. In the end, 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 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.

★★★★


A 4-7 FI

Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Henry Coffin, twelve, was in his father’s detective agency the day the girl came in.

I was still half turned in the chair, and I swear I felt my eyes bug out. This was one gorgeous babe! She stood inside the office door, looking scared. I thought she was maybe sixteen, seventeen tops, which is, of course, way out of a sixth grader’s league, even one who has already graduated . . . . I felt as if I’d seen her somewhere before, but I couldn’t have because surely I’d never forget a girl like this.

The girl, Lily, wanted help finding her mother, who was missing. Henry’s dad was on his way out of town on another case, so he told Lily to see the police. However, she preferred to handle the matter privately. Henry knew he could handle the case, so when she called again, he told her to come pick him up—he couldn’t drive.

Eve Bunting has written a light, funny detective story. Henry, a budding Sam Spade, narrates this humorous account as he and Lily track her missing mother. They find more than they bargained for in the course of the search, and they must rely on each other and quick thinking to solve the case. I would recommend it for a lively, amusing read for boys and girls, grades 5-7. It’s a lot of fun.

★★★★
Taken from Two of Everything. ©1993 by Lily Toy Hong. Reprinted by permission from Albert Whitman & Company, Morton Grove, IL.

Reviewed by Nancy Alder

This very readable text offers a historical overview of whaling. It is interesting and contains lots of anecdotal information and little that is technical. The reader comes away with a good understanding of what life was like for a sailor on a whaling vessel.

The sepia-colored woodcuts are very appropriate for with the text. Photographs would have been jarringly out of step with the flavor of the text. An enjoyable read.


Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

"Space dogs blast off from Earth for the Great Solar System Tour." The dogs start with Mercury and end up on Pluto. Along the way they fly kites on Jupiter, dodge asteroids, play hide-and-seek on the eighteen moons of Saturn, and discover they can still shed hair in zero gravity. But it is lonely, cold, and dark, so they go home.

This delightful book with its quirky drawings exposes children to some basic facts about our solar system. At the end of the book there are some more extensive descriptions of gravity, our sun, and the planets. It is both informative and amusing.


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Coville’s ability to make fantasy come to life is demonstrated in his latest book, Aliens Ate My Homework. This story is an action-packed adventure about Rod Allbright, who is drafted by six aliens. The aliens need his help to find an intergalactic criminal named BKR.
The book is both humorous and exciting—humorous because the aliens are such strange looking and acting creatures. For example, the mechanic for the space ship is a wise-cracking plant called Philrogenous esk Piemondum (Phil for short). Apart from the fast-paced action—trying to repair the miniaturized space ship and capture a full-sized space criminal—Rod learns about compassion and cruelty and loyalty. He is sorry to see the aliens leave after successfully finishing their mission, but relieved to return to a more normal existence. Coville is both entertaining and informative; readers will laugh and learn some things about the human condition.


Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Tommy and his grandfather share not only the same name, but the same sense of humor as well. When Tommy’s grandfather gives him chicken feet and shows him how to open and close them, Tommy plans to play a joke on his friends at school. Unfortunately, neither his friends nor the school principal think the joke is very funny. His grandfather, on the other hand, gives a wink of approval. Other tender experiences are shared between the two. DePaola does a superb job of portraying the warm relationship a child can have with a grandfather. Primary grade teachers, parents, and librarians will find this peek into a family relationship informative and entertaining. DePaola’s illustrations are consistent in their quality, simplicity, and expression. As always, reading DePaola’s book is a delight.


Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

An energetic and slightly eccentric grandma plays arcade games, romps on the beach, and rows an old fishing boat as she plays with her grandchild, who has come for a visit during summer vacation. Grandma succeeds in wearing out the child.

Bright water color and line illustrations complement the text and add a sense of fun and humor to the story. A first picture book for this author and illustrator, *Grandma* is a solid story about positive family relationships.
Although it is unlikely to become a classic, the book, with a colorful carousel scene on the cover, invites prereaders and beginning readers to open its pages and enjoy a satisfying experience.


*Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer*

One cold night the Snow Woman comes to prepare the world for winter. She stills the streams and frosts the fields. But Black Bear isn’t ready for winter, and he refuses to go to his den. Snow Woman must employ several methods before he scrambles for his den. Then she blankets the world with snow.

The text is simple, and the haunting illustrations catch the mystery and magic of approaching winter. One can almost feel the sharpness in the air. This is an excellent book; children are sure to love it.


*Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway*

This well researched, sociopolitical history of the radio in North America concentrates on the era between the 1920s and the 1940s. *Sounds in the Air* recounts the invention of the wireless; the genius of David Sarnoff, the man who brought radio to the public; and the development of radio programming from variety shows and sports to comedy, children’s programs, and news. Programs brought commercial sponsors to the airways and nationwide advertising. Readers are introduced to dozens of radio personalities: the originators of Amos ’n’ Andy, the comedians George Burns and Gracie Allen, singers Eddie Cantor and Rudy Vallee, children’s program stars Irene Wicker and Uncle Bill, and newsman Edward R. Murrow.

The information-packed volume is written in a clear, lively style. Engaging commentary reveals the importance of radio in daily American life. "From 7:00 to 7:15 each weekday evening telephone usage dropped by half and sewer superintendents in major cities reported the highest water pressure of the day—no one visited the bathroom! Even President Calvin Coolidge was said to excuse himself from state dinners to listen to [Amos ’n’ Andy]." Finkelstein
then notes that racial stereotypes such as those portrayed in Amos ‘n’ Andy would not be acceptable in present-day society.

Photographs from the period enhance the text, and an index will help young researchers. American history teachers and librarians will find that Sounds fills an information gap for young adults.


Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

A 4-5 FI

A young girl brings a wounded snow goose to Philip Rhayader, a solitary painter who lives in a lighthouse on the coast of Essex. Misunderstood because of his physical deformity, Philip keeps to himself. Despite her fear, the child brings the wounded goose to Philip because of his healing touch. Thus begins a tender relationship that lasts for many years, ending when Philip dies while rescuing soldiers stranded on the beaches of Dunkirk.

The story of the snow goose has been in print for many years and widely read. This new edition, illustrated by Beth Peck, adds new charm to a beautifully written story. A full-page illustration accompanies each full page of text.


Reviewed by Lisa Baer

A 4+ NF

Plant Science combines the basics of plant identification, plant anatomy, and plant functions in an interesting and easy-to-understand format. Ganeri introduces topics by asking questions that arouse the curiosity of children and parents alike. For example, topics such as pollination and photosynthesis are explained under the headings "Why do plants have flowers?" and "How do plants help you breathe?" Simple plant science experiments are scattered throughout the book; these would make excellent science fair projects. The book also includes a brief glossary and an index to help readers find specific subjects quickly. The photographs and drawings complement the text and make the subject more understandable. The author has written several informational books in the life sciences for children and is knowledgeable about the subject.
I felt that the contents of this book were very well presented. Once I opened the book, I could not put it down. My only criticism is that the cover has nice pictures of plants, but it did not grab my attention as the contents of the book did. I recommend *Plant Science* as an interesting and fun learning experience. Potential readers should not judge the book by its cover.


Reviewed by Carla Morris

This is Michael Garland’s first picture book; his illustrations are an excellent display of vibrant colors in acrylics. The use of light and shadow provides a dramatic circus atmosphere. Alice is a very lucky girl who lives in a trailer and travels from town to town with her circus family. Her mother is an acrobat, her father a clown, her grandfather the announcer, and her grandmother the cook for the crew. Garland has painted Alice so that she looks like her grandmother. Alice not only lucky enough to have a "clown Dad," but one who finds time to read to her at bedtime. The whole story and lifestyle make my five-year-old daughter envious.


Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

Matthew Jackson is very unhappy because he has to move away from his familiar neighborhood and his best friend, Beast, to a city several hours away. However, he is determined to be tough in his new home and to stand up to any town bullies who hassle him. He is really a softy at heart, and being tough does not come easy, especially when his beloved cat Barney disappears, and the child next door starts warning him about "The Wall" (the apparent bully here). Matthew is pleasantly surprised when "The Wall’s" true character is revealed. Patricia Reilly Giff writes contemporary literature for very young readers. She addresses some of the real issues of this age group and handles them well. The relationships among Matthew’s family members are kind and loving. Matthew thinks his baby sister, who adores him, is very cute, and he appreciates it when his older sister doesn’t accept the payment he has offered for doing him a favor. This is a good read for a young reader!
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Taken from *Two of Everything*. ©1993 by Lily Toy Hong. Reprinted by permission from Albert Whitman & Company, Morton Grove, IL.
Windsong is a "bucket" pup (one that should have been drowned at birth because of physical problems). In some ways, Marty is a bucket youngster, not because of physical problems, but because, like Windsong, she's out of step with her environment. Marty works for a greyhound breeder, mostly for a chance to go someplace and do something that makes her feel like a real person, but also because she loves the dogs. When she holds the whimpering pup to her and feels her quiet down, she recognizes the bond between them, and she assumes Windsong's support and defense. This isn't one of those happy ending animal stories or one that requires buckets of tears from its readers. Hall writes about real animals and real people, and Marty and Windsong are very real. Some dogs are not meant to be racers, regardless of their forebears, and some youngsters have to grow up in a hard world. Before the story is through, Marty has learned that sometimes loving means thinking more about someone else than about yourself—maybe even caring more. Not a bad education for a thirteen year old. Particular attention should be paid to the characterization of Orland, the dog breeder. Neither all heart nor all business and not much to look at, he's also a real man (he could live next door!).


As black soldiers marched into battle during the Civil War, they sang a freedom anthem:

"No more auction block for me,
No more, no more!
No more auction block for me,
Many thousand gone."

More than 50,000 Africans were forced to come to America as slaves. At the start of the Civil War, almost 3.5 million men, women, and children were held as slaves. In thirty-four poignant accounts, Hamilton traces the lives of courageous men and women who fought for freedom. A few of these men and
women, such as Nat Turner, Frederick Douglas, and Sojourner Truth, are discussed in American history textbooks, but most of them are not. Tice Davis, who escaped across the Ohio River, inspired the phrase "underground railroad" when his former master noted that "Tice must’ve gone on an underground road." Jackson, the slave of William R. King, the vice-president of the United States in 1852, escaped to freedom by posing as one of the female slaves of his Creole wife. With an olive complexion and straight black hair, Jackson’s wife dressed as a proper white Southern lady, and they sailed to freedom in Ohio.

Written with clarity and passion and enhanced by compelling black and white illustrations, this book should be in every school and public library collection.


Set in Ireland, this is the story of a young peddler who lives where St. Patrick lived many years earlier. Famine comes, and hard times befall the young peddler. Three nights in a row he dreams that St. Patrick tells him to go into the city and stand by a bridge, because "there [he] will hear what [he] must know." He travels to Dublin and waits all day. Finally a nearby butcher closes his shop and asks the peddler what he is doing. The peddler tells the man about his dreams. The butcher tells of his own dreams, in which St. Patrick urged him to "dig under an old iron pot in a poor cabin near Ballymena where I could find treasure." The peddler hurries home to dig under his own iron pot, and there he discovers the foretold treasure.

The artwork in this book is exquisite and has a marvelous texture. All the characters resemble the Irish people of my experience. This is definitely a must-share, especially near Saint Patrick’s Day.


A young girl walks in the woods with her grandfather. She meets a squirrel and shares her lunch with it. She and the squirrel scamper about the
woods together as the grandfather endeavors to keep up. As they leave, the girl extracts from her grandfather a promise to return the next day.

This is a delightful story; half the enchantment lies in the pictures. Simon James certainly knows his audience. There are few enough words to maintain the interest of the smallest children, and adults will enjoy the humor as well. This is a hit!

★★★★


**Pre+ PB** Reviewed by Janet Low

A young girl dreams of being a pilot and writing messages across the sky to her dying uncle. But she is not a skywriter. She is just a young child flying across the country in a 767 airplane to see an uncle who may not even know she has come to say goodbye. Her mother prepares her for what she might see at the hospital and reassures her that it will be all right if she decides not to go in. After all, goodbyes are hard. But she wants to see her uncle, and she knows what she will say. Even if he doesn’t know she is there holding his hand, she will know and remember.

The illustrations are rich, with deep, vibrant hues and wonderful portrayals of light. The contemplative and loving tone of the story is enhanced by the illustrator. The story captures the imaginings of the girl as well as her actions as she prepares to say, and actually says, goodbye to an uncle who has given her the gift of love and wonderful memories that will last her whole lifetime.

★★★★


**8-12 FI** Reviewed by Janet Francis

Somewhere deep in all of us lies a kind of fascination with the impossible and the unknown. Demonic possession must intrigue people, because there are multiple treatments of it in fiction. Kelleher capitalizes on this fascination in his portrayal of an unusually bright seven-year-old boy whose mind becomes possessed first by a messenger of Satan, and then by a space alien, both of whom are incredibly evil. Sam has long been very close to his sister Laura, but then she dies of leukemia; his loneliness is incomprehensible to his family members, all of whom are grieving in their own fashion. The heart cannot
accommodate what the mind can’t bear, and Sam’s contract with his dying sister to protect himself from all pain causes unimaginable anxiety and pain for the other members of the family.

The author’s grasp of the format is impressive. Some incidents in the story rival such classic horrors as "The Exorcist," and the character of Beth (the older sister who tells the story) is believable and solid. There is no dearth of action and interest here, but the ending seems somewhat contrived: all the threats and horror are attributed to the power of Sam’s mind and the contract he made with Laura before she died. On the other hand, what is more frightening than the unexplored power of the mind or more unpredictable than grief? Whether you can believe it or not, you won’t be bored by this book.


When Duffy, an orphan, is apprenticed to Master Crowe, the local apothecary, he begins learning about prejudice and superstition. The local people both fear and respect Master Crowe. But through a series of events, culminating in a total eclipse of the sun, the people blame him for all their calamities and turn on him. Duffy, who in a short time comes to love and respect his master, stays by his side despite physical threats.

Although this book held my attention, when I finished reading it, I felt rather dissatisfied. The storyline is somewhat predictable, and the characters aren’t very well-developed. Some parts of the story left me baffled as to what they had to do with the anything—they are never explained. The flyleaf says that the author worked on this book for nineteen years. Despite all that effort, I found the story disappointing.


Witchcraft, modesty in dress, demonstrations, and punishment for being a heretic are central issues in Konigsburg’s latest book (T-Backs, T-Shirts, Coat
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and Suit) for young people. Chloe, the heroine, goes to spend the summer with her Aunt Bernadette in order to escape peer pressure from her "best friends." While helping her aunt with her "Meals on Wheels" job, Chloe meets Tyler, the know-it-all son of one of the other women truck drivers. Chloe entertains herself and makes herself feel superior by leading the gullible Tyler into believing that her rather eccentric aunt is a witch. All of this backfires on her when the boy's mother and his aunt start wearing T-back bathing suits (a one-piece string suit) to work and her aunt's business starts to fail. The local minister and his following try to ban T-backs. Bernadette is caught between the T-back side (which she refuses to join) and the irate local minister (whom she refuses to support because she believes that drivers have a right to wear whatever they wish). Chloe learns about pressure groups, demonstrations, and heretics.

In this book, Konigsburg takes a compelling look at pressure groups and what motivates them. She shows the thoughtlessness of mob psychology, which promotes unity at the expense of morality. Chloe learns a valuable lesson as she sees her aunt (who has already learned of the destructive nature of mob unity) refuse to make the same mistake twice. Konigsburg's knowledge and understanding of history make her one of the few authors who can connect present-day mob action with book burning and important heretic trials of our past. If young people read and understand this book, maybe we won't repeat the mistakes of the past.

★★★★


A 4+ FI Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

When Kate is fourteen years old, her mother dies, leaving her an orphan. She feels she has no choice but to go and live with her very demanding Aunt Mildred; but then she overhears someone at the funeral mention a grandfather, her father's father. She runs away to live with him and is surprised to find that he is a Cherokee Indian living by himself in a cabin in the mountains. They get off to a very prickly start, because her grandfather wants nothing to do with her. In time, he finds that they have much in common, and they end up working together to save the eagles of Snowbird Mountain from ruthless poachers.

Readers will be drawn into this book by the characters. The fight against the poachers that draws Kate and her grandfather together makes for an exciting adventure. Another interesting aspect of the book is the comparison of cultures and the choices we make.
Three silly sisters, Doily, Lacey, and Thimblethreads, set out to find a darning egg and some socks that have been blown away by a strong wind. They enter a town that has been destroyed by a dragon, amuse a melancholy king with their silliness, and travel to a smelly cave to confront the dragon, who has their property. They conquer the beast by throwing socks, one of which lands in his throat. After days of darning the socks, they continue their journey, haul away the dragon's gold, finance the rebuilding of the town, and return to their cottage as wealthy sock darners.

As a trained librarian and editor of children's books, the author is well acquainted with the components of books for young audiences—humor, rhyme, and nonsense. These elements appear in the book, but they are contrived, and the book does not flow naturally. Thimblethreads speaks in rhyme, but it's more repetition than rhyme. The king belly laughs at the sisters' bland account of the stolen eggs and socks, and the dragon chokes to death on a sock: these incidents may be nonsense, but they are not particularly funny. The best feature of the book is the brightly colored watercolor illustrations. The animated faces and costumes give the sisters amusing personalities.

Leave this book to libraries and collectors whose coffers are running over unless there is a compelling need to teach the use of a darning egg.


A 1-4 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

A lonely old man who lives by the sea watches and waits each year for the first appearance of the orcas. He gardens, digs clams, and walks in the nearby woods. One spring his daughter and new granddaughter arrive to stay. Although at first he grumbles about his infant granddaughter, he begins to teach her about the whales, the seashore, the garden, and the forest. One day the old man is too tired to garden, so the mother and daughter till and plant. When the orcas come that summer, the old man dies. The little girl cries, and her mother consoles, "Don't be sad, sweet girl. Your grandfather's spirit has gone to leap and swim with the whales." Through the winter, mother and daughter wait for the orcas to return. In July, the girl spots the returning orcas. Among the group is a new calf.
Beautifully detailed color pencil illustrations accompany the gentle text. Lightburn’s understated artwork is reminiscent of Van Alberg’s style. A first-time children’s book for both author and illustrator, it has already won the prestigious I.O.D.E. Canadian National Book Award and the Amelia Francis Howard-Gibbon Award for Illustration. With themes of respect for nature and love of family, this book should be a high priority for libraries and families.

★★★★


A 2-6 PB Reviewed by Carla Morris

Those who read this book will gain an understanding of the injustice of the Japanese American internment camps of World War II. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Shorty and his family are moved to a camp. “We weren’t in a camp that was fun, like summer camp,” he explains. The camp is dusty, with long lines for food and the bathroom. Babies cry in the night. When Shorty’s older brother snaps at his father, the father decides that it is time to make a baseball diamond. Everyone works toward a common goal; even the mothers take apart mattress covers to make baseball uniforms. Balls, bats, and gloves are sent by friends. Shorty was never wanted by any team before the camp. But with practice and determination to impress the ever-present guards, he hits a home run one day. These baseball skills earn Shorty respect and admiration from peers, who call him “Jap” long after the internment baseball camp has ended. Illustrations for this story were inspired by Ansel Adam’s photos of the Manzanar internment camp in 1943. A good historical fiction treatment of a little-talked-about part of American history.

★★★★


B 3+ FI Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

When a small green female frog comes upon a heap of soft "stuff" on the path with a great big green male frog sitting on it, she warns him to get out of the path before the hag gets him. Too late! The frog is really a prince turned frog by the hag herself. The frog, who calls himself Pin, does not do "frog things" well at all. He can’t talk, hop, croak, or breathe underwater, and eating
bugs seems out of the question! When he finally realizes that Jade, the female frog, would really miss him if he died, he starts eating bugs and learning to be a frog. Or does he? Somehow, the things "The Fawg Pin" teaches the frogs are as important as those the frogs teach him.

This is a cute story about doing your best with what life throws at you. The characters are fun, especially Pin, who is determined to remain human . . . or is it humane? However, I felt that Napoli could have been less repetitive. Jade repeats all the great things that Pin has done. I don't believe the reader needs to be constantly reminded. Aside from that, the book is fun to read and the ending is sad, but tender.


Reviewed by Janet Low

Willie, just four and a half years old, is excited to spend a night at grandmother's house, but he is warned by his mother that if there is any trouble he "won't go overnight for a year." Nothing could possibly go wrong—his grandmother is just too much fun. She pastes stars on the ceiling of his room, gives him orange construction paper and scissors (great for making cheerful orange circles to put on his cheeks), and lets him go to the fruit stand next door all by himself! But he gets into trouble when he imagines he is a businessman and makes important business marks on the walls. After the initial shock, Willie's grandmother shares a cry and a hug with Willie. Then they work together to fix the marks on the walls.

Jay O'Callahan, a gifted professional storyteller, has performed across the nation and in Scotland. He has written a touching story about thoughtless accidents and deciding what is most important in relationships. However, the book has some flaws. In the story Willie skillfully nails a tablecloth to the wall. Managing a hammer, a nail and a tablecloth while balancing on a chair is quite a feat for a four year old. But more disruptive to the story is O'Callahan's attempt to include his performance voice in the story: "grandma" is spelled out "grand-ma-a-a-ah," "way" is "waaaaay," and "trouble" is "trouble-l-l-lllle." This draws the reader's attention away from the story to the author, who does not distinguish between being a performer and an author.

The illustrations successfully capture the warmth of the story. Because the background features are soft, attention is drawn to the detailed and expressive faces of the characters.

**B 2-3 FI PB**  
Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

Prince Raphael is rich and handsome, but he is also arrogant and vain. The wise old king fears that his son would rule unwisely after his death, so he decrees that Prince Raphael can not wear the crown until he marries a woman equal to him in beauty, intelligence, and wealth. Rosamund, a poor girl from the country, appears and claims to be the king's equal. She is equally beautiful, she is intelligent (she knows something about the Prince that no one else knows), and she is superior to the Prince in wealth, since there is nothing she desires that she does not already possess. But then the prince must prove that he is her equal.

The story is charming, and the pictures are well done. While not outstanding, it is dependable and easily recommended.

★★★★★


**B 4+ FI**  
Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

This is the first in a new fantasy series, a follow-up on the author's Lioness Rampant series.

Thirteen-year-old Daine is left an orphan when robbers pillage her farm, killing all of her relatives and most of her beloved animals. She gets a job as assistant to the horse mistress of Tortall, and those around her begin to realize that she has a magical gift of dealing with the animals. Not only that, but she can also sense the presence of dangerous immortal creatures that have returned to the realm. The mage Numair insists that she has gifts and that she must learn to control and direct them in order to help fight the enemies that are attacking Tortall.

Having read the Lioness Rampant series, I was glad to meet some of the characters from that series again. The characters in Pierce's stories are well-developed and very likeable. The world she creates, with its gifts of magic and its mythical creatures, is fun to explore. Anyone who enjoys a good fantasy will appreciate this one.

★★★★★
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* 2+ PB  Reviewed by Jan Staheli

This is the classic Grimm fairy tale, *wonderfully* retold. Full of marvelous language and imagery, this book is satisfying to hear as well as to read.

The king's "new bride was very young, and very beautiful: everybody said she was the most beautiful lady in the whole world. Nobody told him that she had a proud heart and a greedy, jealous temper. Nobody mentioned that.

Now, this queen had a magic mirror, which hung on her bedroom wall. Sometimes, when she was alone, she would unveil it and look at herself—this way, that way—and oh! she was superlatively beautiful. After that she would whisper into the glass, sweetly, pleasantly, 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is the fairest of us all?'

The illustrations are dark and beautiful with elongated figures and faces, and the shadowy surroundings lend an air of menace and foreboding to the story. I relished this book and recommend it to anyone who likes to savor each page with eyes, ears, and heart.


A  6-9 NF  Reviewed by Janet Francis

In this day and age, horror is more visual than it was in the past, and children are well supplied by the all-too-available "gore and more" of visual media. It's heartening to realize that many of the antecedents of their enjoyment were in fact literary.

Mr. Rainey has explored the backgrounds, author's biographies, and plots of Frankenstein, Dracula, the Headless Horseman, the Invisible Man, Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and the Phantom of the Opera. Oddly enough, many of the creator's stories are even more interesting than those of the creatures. Occasionally brief quotations from the original are used, but since the intended audience of this book is somewhat younger, the stories are usually paraphrased with careful accuracy.
Portraits of each author are included, along with rather cartoonish illustrations. The illustrations are not very good in my estimation, but perhaps they are appropriate for the grade level addressed. A complete index and a brief bibliography of each author’s works complete the volume. This would be a useful addition to any upper elementary or junior high school library.


Reviewed by nancy C. Evensen

What young child is not intrigued with the idea of a monster for a mamma? Patrick Edward’s unusual mother teaches him how to roar, jump, climb, and she even teaches him a spell to put almost anyone to sleep. When bullies pick on Patrick, he is unsuccessful in defeating them, that is, until they begin to criticize his mother. He then finds that there is a bit of monster in him as well. Monster Mamma hears her son’s roar and emerges from her cave to set things right. After righting their wrongs, the bullies are treated to dessert at Patrick’s home. The boys leave, impressed with Patrick’s mother; Patrick is impressed with himself. Parents, teachers, and children will appreciate what Monster Mamma lovingly relates to her son:

No matter where you go, or what you do . . . I will be there. Because I am your mother, even if I am a monster—and I love you.

This tender story is enhanced by unusual watercolor illustrations, which succeed in capturing the high emotion in the book. Paint is splattered, dripped, and blown to create truly remarkable pictures. All mothers are not the same; however, they do share one attribute—they love their children.


Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

This fun book shows parts of the car and explains how they work. Movable parts show how the steering and brakes work. The pictures are not fancy, but they’re detailed enough for a small child who is learning about how
things work. It is not, however, very durable, and care should be taken to protect it from very small children.


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

*Wren's Quest* is the second in the series about the orphan girl Wren, her friend Princess Teressa, Tyron the young magician, and Prince Connor, who can communicate with animals. Accompanied by Prince Connor, Wren searches for her relatives; she is also hoping to help the king of Cantirmoor discover who is causing trouble and dissension in his land.

Smith is an excellent fantasy writer. His characters are convincing, and the logic of his fantasy world makes readers feel they are a part of it. But this book is not as gripping as was the first book. The difficulty stems from the plot construction. At the end of *Wren to the Rescue*, Smith's first book, it is hard to guess how the princess will be rescued (which creates a lot of plot tension and excitement), but when the rescue is accomplished, it is ingenious; it requires the use of both Wren's dog shape and Connor's ability to communicate with animals. In this book there is also a lot of action and confusion because none of the characters can figure out who the enemy is. But it was rather obvious to me who the enemy is because the obnoxious son and daughter of Duke Fortian show up with a new friend, Hawk, who in the first chapter of the book is a "tall sharpfaced boy with long black hair." At the end it also was obvious that Wren and Connor would rescue Tyron and then the princess (in the nick of time) because Smith keeps readers apprised of the two teams of separated "good guys" by alternatively reporting on Wren and Connor and then Teresa and Tyron.

This book demands another sequel because of the way it is written. Prince Connor's skill at communicating with animals is expanded to a broader form of wild magic that he is just beginning to learn to control. Wren continues to be a feisty, loyal little fighter who finds ways to assist in every battle, but another kind of adventure is implied when Prince Connor tells her, "I have a feeling it means that you, too, have talents of a different kind. But you haven't found them yet." Sequels are hard to write, but Smith is a talented spinner of fantasy. We'll look forward to his next book.


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A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

Remember the Tresselt stories—the ones with the old-fashioned illustrations done with just a few harsh colors? Well, some of Tresselt’s lovely, comfortable stories have been redone with beautiful, up-to-date illustrations. The soft, warm colors and light make you feel you are there in the heat of a summer day or racing to the barn to beat the thunderstorm.

*Sun Up* offers readers an opportunity to spend a day on the farm with a father and his son—to watch the cows in the shade of the sycamore tree, to fish with the boy in the shadowy woods, and to gather the "sweet smelling hay into neat bales" to the sound of the hay baler.

I’m glad to see that the illustrations for this story have been updated so that a new generation of children can enjoy the story’s universal appeal.

••••


* PB All Ages Reviewed by Ellen Riddle

This is another fractured fairy tale on the three little pigs; however, do not miss this one. It is as refreshing as *The true story of the three little pigs* was when it was new. In this version the big bad pig is truly that. The wolves move together from house to house until they come to a satisfying conclusion with the pig.

The artwork is charming: the wolves engage in many favorite activities such as croquet, badminton, and hopscotch. The story has wonderful language. This book was a treat to read, and I was still laughing twenty minutes later.

••••


B 5-9 FI Reviewed by Janet Low

Medieval fears and customs, dragons, witchcraft, church inquisitors, greed, and revenge converge in this romantic adventure. Alys is accused of witchcraft
by a greedy neighbor after her ailing father refuses to sell his land. The trial
is swift, and fear and ignorance prevent any defense. Though the normal
punishment for witchcraft is burning at the stake, Alys is instead tied to a stake
and left to appease the appetite of the local marauding dragon. Hungry and
cold, Alys is dismayed when the dragon passes over her. She has no place to
escape to and decides that she prefers a quick death by dragon fire to the slow
death the howling wolves would provide, so she screams at the dragon to
return—definitely a new experience for the dragon! Curiosity piqued, the
dragon returns, changes to his handsome human form (though nude, to Alys’
discomfort), and listens to Alys’s story. He isn’t hungry enough to eat her at
the moment, so he offers to help her. Together they plan revenge upon the
inquisitor and her accusers.

Though Alys has always been a sweet child, she now can think only of
revenge—except when she is thinking about the dragon. Their plans work well
until the dragon kills the Inquisitor and almost dies himself. Alys saves the
dragon just in time, forgives her accusers, and flies off to live happily ever after
with the dragon, whose eyes and heart have softened with the loss of Alys’ need
for revenge. The slight problem of the dragon’s appetite is never resolved.

Despite the corny, romantic ending, the emphasis on and exploration of
revenge makes this novel most appropriate for older junior readers and teens.
Though not as convincing as the author’s earlier work, A Hidden Magic, this
book is a fun, quick read that can initiate discussion on the worthlessness of
revenge.

Williams, Tad & Hoffman, Nina Kiriki. Child of an Ancient City. Illustrated
137 pp.

C College FI Reviewed by Karen Newmeyer

After a soldiers’ expedition to the Armenites (beyond the Caucasian
Mountains) falls under attack and most of the soldiers are killed, the few
survivors begin the long journey back to their mid-eastern home. But one by
one the members of the caravan fall prey to a ravenous beast and die horrible
deaths. Masrur and Ibn Fahad, the leaders of the group, come to believe that
a vampyr is the culprit. Their only hope is storytelling. Legend has it that a
vampyr will stop and listen to stories. So the group travels by day and tells
stories by night. One night, the vampyr steps out of the shadows and challenges
the members of the group to a storytelling duel. Whoever can tell the saddest
story will win. If it is one of them, the group will pass unharmed. But if the
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vampyr wins, he will take one of them as his prize. And they are to be the judges.

This is an intriguing book, although I have some doubts about the accuracy of the authors' portrayal of mid-eastern culture. The stories told are an added bonus. Greg Hildebrandt's artwork is remarkable. My greatest concern is the level of violence in the book. Perhaps children see more violence than this in one evening of TV, but I would have serious reservations about recommending this book to anyone under sixteen.

This is not a book for children. There is one young boy in the story, but he is not the narrator, nor does he play any significant part. The "Child of the Ancient City" refers to the vampyr himself. It causes one to reflect on what constitutes a children's book.

★★★★


B+ 7+ FI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Originally written in Russian in 1983, Scarecrow was translated into English in 1990. It is the story of teenagers who live in a remote part of Russia. Vladimir Zheleznikov states in his introduction; "The mystery of the soul has always been of great interest to me. In my book Scarecrow I write about teenagers trying to discover that mystery." The story opens with Lena coming to live with her grandfather when she is thirteen years old. She is awkward and scrawny, with long legs and arms and a smile that seems to reach to both ears.

The story revolves around Lena and her classmates. One of her teachers, Margarita Ivanovna, plans a trip to Moscow to show the students the sights. The day before the departure, the class skips school to go to the movies. When Margarita Ivanovna finds out, she cancels the trip. Dimka, the boy Lena likes best, is the one who told the teacher, but when the class tries to find out who's to blame, Dimka plays innocent. Knowing that Dimka informed the teacher, and thinking that everyone will find out and disgrace him, Lena confesses. Thinking that Dimka cares enough for her to jump right in and confess, Lena is extremely disappointed when he does not. The entire class turns against the new student, Lena, and some pretty terrible events occur. Eventually the class realizes that Lena was innocent, but by then it is too late.

This story will stay with the reader for a long time. The characters are rich, especially Lena. The relationship between Lena and her grandfather strengthens as the novel progresses—each gives to the other what neither can secure by themselves. The relationships among the students become a little
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confusing because there are so many students, and the Russian names are
difficult to pronounce and remember. Everyone seems to have a nickname as
well; however, the growth that comes to them is significant. Scarecrow will
help young people as they struggle to find their own identity and deal with peer
pressure.

☆☆☆☆☆