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Student Reviews

E. Anne Boren
Wendy Duffin
Anne Hendricks
Stacey E. Spencer
Jennifer McEntire

See next page for additional authors

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Student Reviews

Authors
E. Anne Boren, Wendy Duffin, Anne Hendricks, Stacey E. Spencer, Jennifer McEntire, Heather Lynn Kunz, Camille Andersen, Nancy N. Johnson, Kari Richardson, and Kristin Empey

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Student Reviews


Reviewed by E. Anne Boren

We all know that in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but how did he know where that ocean would take him? The fact is, he didn’t, but he knew he was going west and that was his goal. Anne Blanchard’s pop-up book discusses the navigational tools and techniques used by people in Columbus’s day. Then it describes the instruments and technology used in navigation today, from stars to satellites. The book’s pop-out figures and moveable parts include instruments like sextants, hourglasses, compasses, and even a log on a rope tied up in knots. Trade winds, ocean currents, and star patterns are also displayed. Some historical facts of early and modern explorers are also provided.

Blanchard and Peacock successfully combine text and artwork to create an appealing nonfiction book. The pop-up format allows readers to make the tradewinds blow and to find their way around a farm with a compass. The book is rather durable, but it should not be left out for small children to enjoy alone because of the moveable parts and the fragile pop-up figures.

The artwork is accurate, informative, detailed, and inviting. The pictures invite the reader to step into the book and participate in the exploring.

This book would be helpful to a class that is focusing on Columbus Day, explorers, geography, or longitude and latitude.

Overall, the book presents navigation in an exciting, informative, colorful way.

★★★★


Reviewed by Kristin Empey

This is a thrilling story about an eighteen-year-old British boy, Alan, who returns home to Africa after a year in England at school to find that things are
not the same. His good friend Kimathi, with whom he grew up, disappears, he finds a message written in blood, and at night he hears the drums of African warriors in the forest. Alan climbs Kilimanjaro to find his friend and finds himself caught up in a dangerous tribal ritual. The story leading up to the climax and ending is full of suspense.

I recommend this book because it takes the reader on a frightening journey up the face of Kilimanjaro. I got lost in the deep and beautiful parts of Africa. I also learned along with Alan and Kimathi that it is hard to grow up and feel obligated to family and community and still make your own choices. The symbolism and magic of the tribal rituals in the book are enchanting.


Reviewed by Kari Richardson

*First Wedding, Once Removed* is the story of Poky, a young girl who learns to appreciate others for who they are and to accept new people. She has one brother who means everything to her; they share a deep interest in airplanes. The summer before he goes away to college they spend many afternoons together on top of their car outside the gates of the community airport, watching the airplanes take off and land and talking about life. They even meet one of the pilot instructors, who offers to teach them to fly someday. They dream of the day when they can take flying lessons together. Their fun ends when Poky’s brother leaves to attend school in Missouri; she is left to face high school alone. During this time, Poky’s best childhood friend, who is still in junior high, begins to bother her, and she feels too grown-up for his silliness. She feels very alone, and this loneliness intensifies when her brother brings Nell home and tells Poky of his plans to marry Nell. Poky feels that if her brother marries, he will never fulfill his dream of becoming a pilot. By accepting Nell and realizing that her brother still loves her, Poky has compassion for her friend, who has felt neglected, and she realizes his need to be accepted by her.

Many teens are faced with mothers, fathers, and siblings who marry, and they need to learn to accept these new people. This book can help them do this realistically.
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A 10-12 FI Reviewed by Nancy N. Johnson

The romance of the English and French landscapes contrasts with the reality of an unwanted pregnancy and the unknown future of two talented high school seniors, Helen and Christopher. Future dreams of college are reevaluated when Helen's pregnancy is announced. Helen struggles with her new identity and her poor relationship with her parents. She decides to go through her pregnancy alone, and she shuts Chris out. Every day she writes to her unborn child, "nobody," and her innermost thoughts are revealed. Chris not only struggles with the desire to be a part of Helen's life, but he also grapples with the new relationship he has developed with his mountain climbing mother (who left his family years ago). Chris and Helen each struggle with their own problems, but individually and together they learn that having a baby isn't the end of everything, but the beginning of something new.

Some British vocabulary may be unfamiliar to readers, but footnotes are provided. The setting of the story is enchanting and effectively aids in producing a universal approach to the problems, concerns, and solutions regarding teenage pregnancy. The author also impressively intertwines Chris's and Helen's points of view throughout the novel, sustaining the idea that pregnancy involves both mother and father.


C 9-10 FI Reviewed by Camille Andersen

Lacey Brighton is an average teenager trying to deal with her parent's divorce, a "perfect" lawyer-sister, and the usual burden of homework. But then she has a dream about her friend Celeste being killed. The next day she finds out her dream was actually reality. When she tries to tell the police, they do not believe she is psychic and arrest her. She must discover the identity of the real killer or she is doomed!

This story seems to be a spinoff of every Sunday night movie this year. While there were several good ideas, they rarely go anywhere. The characters are cardboard clichés. The reader feels very little sympathy for any of the characters, including Lacey. The ending is rather interesting, but it's definitely not worth reading the whole book. Aside from the problems with the plot and the characters, there is really nothing bad except an affair between a teenage girl
and an authority figure. However, there is nothing explicit. The book is okay, but it has significant shortcomings.


Reviewed by Heather Lynn Kunz

*Jack's Fantastic Voyage* is a captivating story of suspense and sentimentality. A young boy spends the summer at his grandfather's house. Jack loves his grandfather and enjoys very much his grandfather's stories about voyages, islands, typhoons, icebergs and creatures of the sea. The neighborhood boys think Jack's grandfather is crazy. Jack doesn't know quite what to believe. One night Jack experiences all the wonderful things his grandfather has told him about. When he awakens the next morning everything is beautiful. He finds his grandfather chipping away at some ice on the back of the house and wonders if what he experienced was a dream or reality.

Michael Foreman provides great detail and captivates the reader through words and illustrations. He describes the grandfather's house as having wooden birds hanging from the ceiling and fish carved into the floor. The bed has a ship's wheel at one end and "a picture of an ocean of icebergs" at the other. All around the bed are scenes of wild seas and shipwrecks. The vivid pictures, mainly done in pastels, reflect the detail of the story.

The narrative captivates the reader; for example, Foreman describes the house shaking and swaying and mentions that the house is afloat. The grandfather uses vocabulary of a sea captain: "We need more steam!" "Keep her steady, Jack."

The story shows the love of two people for one another and explores the relationship between grandfather and grandson. The book leaves you excited and wondering, and it reinforces the idea that things are not always what they seem.


Reviewed by Jennifer McEntire

Emmy, an eleven-year-old girl, is the third oldest child of six in a coal mining family. Her father, disabled in a mining accident, lies in bed all day
regretting his life. To bring in money, her mother runs a bed-and-breakfast out of the family’s small home. Because Emmy is the oldest girl in the family, she is responsible for all the household duties her mother can’t perform; her older brothers work in the fields and sawmills to contribute to the family income. The whole family values school, but must forfeit their educations when a crisis comes. Emily’s poverty-stricken family finds out that they are to be evicted from their home—their primary source of income. The family can either fall apart or pull together to face social, financial, and internal pressures.

*Emmy* is a wonderful book that everyone will enjoy, because every age is represented by some character. These characters are placed in realistic situations and have realistic reactions to their challenges. Life for Emmy’s family is not romanticized: when the book ends, the family’s problems have not all been solved, but the family members realize what’s most important—the family itself.

★★★★★


Reviewed by Stacey E. Spencer

Ecstatic that his father is returning home from Vietnam earlier than expected, Luke Canvin anxiously awaits his father’s arrival at the airport. But the soldier who greets Luke is not the father he knows, nor the wounded hero he expects. The stranger is thin, tired, and tearful. Luke, fascinated by his father’s Purple Heart, takes it, hoping that somehow it will provide him with answers to the questions he cannot ask his father. Instead, Luke loses the medal from his pocket while trespassing, and the medal provides old Mrs. Pederson with the name of her trespasser. As punishment, Luke must help Mrs. Pederson in her home. While there, Luke learns that she is not the witch she is rumored to be, and he comes to care for her. When Luke’s dad finally talks to him about the war, what he says is not what Luke wants to hear. His father’s honest account of being wounded in Vietnam destroys Luke’s grandiose illusions of war. In their place, a new definition of bravery forms.

Using the framework of the Vietnam War, Marc Talbert takes war from the impersonal level of brass bands and fearless soldiers to war as it changes an individual who is involved in face-to-face combat. *The Purple Heart* also provides a compelling view of relationships and explores what is required to maintain and rebuild them as they change in response to stressful situations.

★★★★★

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Reviewed by Anne Hendricks

*When the Nightingale Sings* is the story of a fourteen-year-old girl named Marigold and her struggle to develop her talent for singing. Jealous of her talent, Marigold’s foster mother, "Cousin" Ruby, convinces Marigold that she shouldn’t bother people with that "frightful noise." Marigold is then forced to write her songs while she hides in the outlying swamp areas. Parallel to Marigold’s story is that of Queen Mother Rhythm. Wanting to retire from her position as choir leader, Queen Mother Rhythm must find a replacement—as she puts it, a nightingale. She sends a group of men to audition people from the surrounding communities. Unknown to Marigold, this search is for her, but only after many disappointments is the Nightingale found.

Although *When the Nightingale Sings* could be an interesting story, the novel gives the reader nothing fresh. Instead, it is a retelling of the Cinderella story, complete with wicked stepmother and two selfish stepsisters who delight in overloading Marigold with menial household tasks. Marigold is not a believable character—she is a stereotypical good girl, who silently bears her trials and doesn’t question the unfairness of her situation. While the author does create an interest in the music of the swamps, an image of creative freedom, it is not maintained throughout the novel. The novel doesn’t contain any questionable language; however, its treatment of one man who maintains simultaneous relationships with three sisters, while only briefly discussed, may concern some readers.

★★★★


Reviewed by Wendy Duffin

Ann Turner’s picture book *Rainflowers* describes a thunderstorm as it sweeps through a small farm, leaving the fields and animals refreshed from the rain. As the storm moves in, the suspense builds: the trees bend and the animals scurry to safety. This feeling is created beautifully through Turner’s descriptive verbs and adjectives, and through Robert Blake’s bright watercolor illustrations.

The artwork on the first page of the book sets the stage; it reveals the farm surrounded by an enormous sky filled with jagged lightening. The following pages explain the flight of the terrified animals. The crashing thunder sends
"mice chittering," "birds skittering," and "chipmunks lumbering" to find safety. Turner’s vivid descriptions can’t help but stimulate a young child’s imagination. At the end of the book, the rodents poke their heads out, and the robins "bloom like flowers" as they discover that warm sunshine and clear skies have returned to the farm. The illustrations tell the story for young children who cannot read. The trees and fields become magnificently streaked and smeared as the rain pours, and the dew sparkles on the farm after the downpour. I strongly recommend this delightful picture book to young readers who love and appreciate nature.

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