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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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* 2-3 NF PB Reviewed by Jeanne M. Gubler

Have you ever had your fears come true? If so, you’ll relate to Miguel in this captivating story. Miguel is from the Philippines. His teacher selects him and several other boys to go on a field trip into the jungle for several days. The unfamiliar sounds of the jungle feed Miguel’s fears, especially about the eagle. As Miguel lags behind the others, he has an experience with the eagle that changes his fear into awe and respect.

The illustrations in this book are superb! They draw the reader immediately into the story, give additional insights about eagles, and create a tremendous sense of respect for the eagle. This book is a wonderful combination of information and illustrations that children will love!

* * * *


A 1-6 NF Reviewed by Lisa Baer

This creative book will delight children who enjoy both nature and crafts. The pages explain step-by-step how to put together projects using natural objects such as rocks, leaves, petals, sand, and seeds. Animal-shaped bean bags, pressed flower pictures, and wind chimes can all be made in a very short time. Each project is explained by a short paragraph and a list of "things you need." For the "smelly things" project, you need a small orange, whole cloves, knitting needle, ground cinnamon, plastic bag, teaspoon, and a ribbon. The projects sometimes require items that are not commonly found in an average household. Items such as earring fixings and orris root will have to be bought or found before starting some crafts. A parent or adult will need to help children get started with each project. Crafts in this book would provide excellent entertainment during arts and crafts time at school or at home and help children appreciate the beauty and usefulness of nature.

* 8+ NF BI

Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Chosen from a host of artifacts, photographs, maps, and taped oral and video histories now housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., this collection of important events related to the Holocaust will have a profound effect on those who read it. Susan D. Bachrach has written a series of one- or two-page, double-spread chapters on various events that led up to and included this dark period in history. Accompanying each short chapter are pictures and descriptions ("identity cards" from the museum) of some of the one and a half million children who were witnesses to the persecutions and murders of millions of people, most of whom were Jews. The book is divided into three main parts: Nazi Germany; the "Final Solution"; and Rescue, Resistance, and Liberation.

The book also contains an I.D. Photo Guide that can be referred to as readers encounter these same children (several times each) throughout the book. Also included are a Chronology of Events, Suggestions for Further Reading on various relevant topics, a Glossary, and actual pictures of artifacts which are on display in the museum. This remarkable book will help readers understand what it must have been like to be a victim of the Holocaust.

★★★★


C 1-3 PB

Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

In the utopia-like Serene Kingdom, the King and Queen love all their subjects and try to make their two daughters' lives wonderful. During the older daughter's sixth birthday party, the King and Queen give her five golden rings, earning the elder sister the title the Golden Princess. So begins a moralistic tale in which the younger princess, who does not receive golden rings because of "a long and terrible war," becomes the good seed. As the years pass, the younger sister studies as the older sister admires the golden rings. The wise younger princess tells her sister of all the things she has learned, including peace and contentment. "In due time, the Golden Princess learned from her younger sister the beauty of knowledge and life. And they lived in peace and love forever after."
Banning’s fairy tale is based upon a bedtime story he created for his daughters. This, his first children’s book, is blatantly didactic. Children need role models for moral behavior, but a perfect princess needs a flaw or two to seem plausible. And how does a terrible war happen in the Serene Kingdom? What is even more distressing is that the royal parents vanish from the story after they tell the second daughter that there are no golden rings for her. Most children will recognize the heavyhanded message, and many will decide that they do not measure up to the princess, close their books, turn to their Sega games, and blast away. Harries’ bright ink and watercolor illustrations are the best feature of this first book from a new publisher. His Serene Kingdom is a place that the reader might want to stop for a while and think about a perfect land and a perfect time.


Reviewed by Kristin Hillam

Barboza gives readers a different look at slavery. The reader passes through the door the slaves stepped through as they left Africa for America and experiences the feelings associated with that door and the hard times that came before and after. Finally, the reader sees the door now and the people who live on the Goree Island where the door is located.

This book explores many ideas and emotions that most young people don’t consider when they think of slavery. Children will enjoy the pictures and the feelings that Barboza illustrates so well.


Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Miss Ida’s porch is the gathering place for the neighborhood, a "telling place" where children and adults share the past. Stories are told about Duke Ellington and Marian Anderson. Sandra Belton’s conversational style is smooth and pleasing:
Yessir, the great Duke Ellington was coming to play for us, for our dance, and there was not one hotel in the state that would put him up and take his money for doin’ it. If he had a mind to rest himself in a bed, it was goin’ have to be in the home of some black person.

Included in the back of the book are bibliographies of books, sound recordings, and videotape recordings of these two great black musicians: "sometimes the people we hear about have such special gifts that we need to do more than imagine what it would be like to see or hear them."

There are five excellent illustrations to accompany the forty pages of text. The book is informative and pleasant but has no real action. The third grade class that evaluated this book was clearly divided; the boys wanted "something to happen"; the girls liked having three stories in one.


Reviewed by Rebecca A. Gleason

Daniel and his mother stand well back from their apartment window and watch the riot erupt in the smoky streets below. Clutching his cat Jasmine, Daniel watches the looters carry TVs out of Morton’s Appliances, smash the front window of Fashion Shoes, and ransack their neighbor Mrs. Kim’s grocery store. Mama tries to explain that riots "happen when people get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care anymore what’s right and what’s wrong." But Daniel wonders why they look both angry and happy. Daniel and his mother are eventually forced to leave their apartment building when a fire breaks out. They find temporary safety at a local shelter, but Daniel is worried about Jasmine, who is nowhere to be found. When Jasmine and Mrs. Kim’s missing cat are rescued by a fireman, everyone is surprised that the cats seem to have become friends. Perhaps Jasmine and Mrs. Kim’s cat have the right idea; something good can come from this night of rioting, as people who didn’t understand each other before learn to be friends.

The artwork in *Smokey Night*, which earned the 1995 Caldecott Award, adds an intense dimension of realism to the story. Powerful and primitive acrylic illustrations use vivid shades of dark, bold color to bring the smoldering images of the night to life. The striking, black-edged paintings are mounted on background collages of torn paper, burnt matches, broken glass, and other realistic symbols of a city in chaos; this accentuates the intensity of the night.

*Smokey Night* presents a view of the Los Angeles riots that is disconnected from the escalating tensions and racially charged situations that led to the event.
The simple but powerful commentary is presented through the realistic experience of a child who lived through a frightening night. *Smokey Night* could be used very effectively to stimulate discussion about a sensitive and sometimes hard-to-understand subject.

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A FI PB Reviewed by Rita A. Christensen

What is it like to be unloved and unwanted? *Simp* the dog knows. Simp’s owner abandons her at a garbage dump because she is homely. She competes for food with rats and cats and gets caught by a dogcatcher. Simp escapes and runs off to the circus where she is befriended by a clown. During a circus performance, Simp surreptitiously climbs into the clown’s cannon, and "Whoosh!" she flies through the air. "Cannonball Simp" becomes the circus’ most famous act ever. She finally finds a happy home and is loved by thousands.

I couldn’t help but feel weepy as Simp became homeless and then pleased as she found her place in the world. The richly textured illustrations are dark at the beginning of the story—black, browns, deep greens, and rich rusts are used. The colors brighten as the story unfolds—the reader sees intense pinks and reds at Simp’s most joyful moment.

Burningham’s book was originally published in 1966. Replace a worn-out copy with this reissue or purchase it as a new acquisition. This touching story will stir emotions in children and adults alike.

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A 3-8 NF Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Aspects of ballet, from lessons to positions to movements to performance, are explained in two-page spreads that are filled with beautiful color photographs of young dancers. Photographs include both boys and girls enjoying this dance form. The text and the captions to the photographs are clearly written, and the glossary and index are helpful. Of less value are a selected list of ballet companies with affiliated schools and brief details of select ballets.
The authors are well qualified to write about ballet. Bussell is a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet of London, and Linton teaches young people at the Royal Ballet School. Their enthusiasm for and dedication to ballet is evident in the text, which creates excitement that will make many readers want to dance. This book belongs in public and school library collections and in homes that have aspiring young dancers.


Reviewed by Basil P. Yang

This book is a factual account of discovering the history of Imperial China—from the building of the Great Wall to the days of the last emperor. China has its origins as far back as 2698 B.C., when Yellow Emperor started his one-hundred-year reign. In her long history China has experienced periods of unrest and disunity. China can be proud of its many great innovations and technological advances, including gunpowder, paper, printing, and compasses. These inventions have not only had an effect on Chinese culture but have also sparked the light of modern world technology.

Detailed explanations of each illustrated item provide children with factual information. The beautiful photographs of artifacts along with informative descriptions characterize the strength of this book. The book discusses China’s history, culture, civilization, medicine, philosophy, arts, technology, rural life, farming, transportation, literature, waterways, and clothing.

This book is an exciting account of ancient China in various aspects. The world is becoming smaller, and I hope that by reading this book China will not be an untouched land in the hearts of our young children.


Reviewed by Rachael Williams

*Tears of a Tiger* begins with a drunk driving accident in which Rob, the star player of the high school basketball team, is killed. The book then explores how several students deal with the grief, guilt, and fear caused by the death of their friend. Andy, who was the driver of the car and also Rob’s best friend,
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has the hardest time getting on with his life because of the intense guilt he feels. His visits to the psychiatrist help, but he does not get the support and understanding that he needs from his parents. Andy’s friends try their best to help him as they work through their own feelings, but he cannot escape his depression and he eventually commits suicide. The book ends as the students begin to come to terms with Andy’s death, which is even more troubling than Rob’s in many ways.

The events of the book are tragic, but the story is one that needs to be told because many young people may have to deal with similar incidents. The main characters are African-American, and the book depicts their struggles with society’s limitations and stereotypes. The book is refreshing for its portrayal of healthy, sincere high school relationships, and Draper has her characters speak in popular jargon without including obscenities. The most outstanding aspect of *Tears of a Tiger* is its unique format: the story is told through conversations, letters, diary entries, newspaper articles, English class assignments, and more. Draper creates incredibly lifelike characters, setting, and plot without any direct narration. With the type set in a different font for each type of communication, the book has pleasing visual variety also.

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* 5+ NF BI  

Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Zlata Filipovic began writing in "Mimmy," her diary, in September of 1991, three months before her eleventh birthday. Her accounts of her family’s holidays in Jahorina and listening to Michael Jackson strongly contrast to the wartime entries she writes after she watches the news and sees Croatia, Dubrovnik, and Herzegovina being bombed. Zlata writes regularly for two years, relating the horror of war as it reaches and ruins her own city of Sarajevo.

The reader experiences through Zlata the fear, loneliness, uncertainty, inconvenience, and boredom of war. Zlata is right when she says that the war has robbed her of her childhood. She describes spending long hours in a dark, cold cellar, learning that some of her friends, innocent children, were killed when a nearby park was shelled. She worries about her grandparents, who live in another part of the city. She is hungry; she goes without electricity and running water for months at a time. Zlata does not understand all the "politics" of the "kids" who keep shooting from the hills. Zlata relates that "among the
good there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims, just as there are among the bad."  
War does not solve differences.

Zlata and her mother and father have been living in Paris, France, since December of 1993. Zlata's Diary was published with the help of UNICEF, and it is hoped that this book will bring a voice of understanding to other children who still live in Bosnia and other war-torn areas of the world.

★★★★


A 5-8 FI

Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Expecting a long hot summer of being broke and unable to find jobs, Matt and Lewis stumble onto a suitcase containing $400,000. They consider turning the money into the police, but Lewis needs new glasses, and a new bicycle to replace his second-hand girl's bike would be nice. The boys guess that the money belonged to a drug trafficker who died outside of town, but spending the money creates a problem. How will they explain the new possessions to their parents? Then Matt and Lewis come up with a plan that not only allows them to take a trip to Disneyland, but to buy what they want with the money. It seems perfect, but once again things start to get complicated. Matt and Lewis begin to wonder who is in control, the money or them. A loss of that much money does not go unnoticed by the drug dealers. They realize that someone must have the money, and enough time has passed for that someone to get careless. It is time to go back and try to find it. Matt and Lewis are then confronted by seasoned criminals.

This book is well written. It begins with one powerful word—money. The descriptions in the book are excellent. For example, in explaining the way the sunburned swimmers at the beach look, the author writes, "others glowed neon red, as though they had been dunked in sweet-and-sour sauce mixed with radioactive waste." The reader understands the conflict Lewis and Matt face in wanting the nice things they could now buy, yet facing the challenge of explaining their purchases and hiding the money. Is the money a dream or nightmare come true? Moral questions are raised, and Lewis and Matt learn some hard lessons. The suspenseful story is one young readers will relate to.

★★★★
Nora's mother dies of breast cancer, and life can be pretty lonely when you're thirteen, even with two parents. There's not much help from her sister Patsy, who is one year younger and who has always been a little too independent and prone to temper tantrums. Nora's father is not much help either. He is dating a jet-setting businesswoman whom Nora and Patsy have nicknamed "the Tooth," and it's impossible to talk with him anymore. When Nora is most discouraged she starts to notice things. Are these signs that her mother is close by? She thinks she smells her perfume, feels her caress, and finds some comfort to help her through the trials of being thirteen.

This is a story of two sisters who deal in their own ways with the absence of their mother and who adjust to their father's reentering the world of romance. The story is written well enough, but I find the main character too young for a
young adult book, and some of the discussions about the dad's sex life a little too old for elementary readers. It deals well with Nora's problems, but it is hard to figure out the appropriate audience for this book. The hardback is also unusually small (4 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches), about the size of a paperback. It has the margins of a hardback though, and seems like a lot of page turning and wasted space.


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Brian Winsor would rather be anywhere than on the Joshua Slope, and not because he doesn't like hard work but because it is his fault that his father is injured and cannot work. Rounding up cattle and moving them to the summer range proves to be hard work, and even though Brian knows all about horses and riding, he has much to learn about surviving in a strange place.

Very reminiscent of the Ralph Moody "Little Britches" books. This book is well written and the characters are well developed—even the characters of the horses. The two old crotchety cowboys, Will and Malcolm, play against each other in a good guy/bad guy fashion that allows Brian to do a lot of growing up. Hafen is another new and wonderful Utah author.


Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Widowed for the third time, Mrs. Gray is determined to devote her life to her three newest mouse children, Thomas, Richard, and Harry. Absolutely first on her list is to enable them to terrorize cats in revenge for their father's horrible death. She doesn't realize that in order for them to do that, they will need to associate with a different class of mouse! In the process of removing the cats from Farmer Budge's house, the boys find and train a new husband for their mother, unite the divided mouse colonies of the farm, and organize a whacking good soccer league. They even rescue Farmer Budge's glass eye. This trio isn't called the Terrible Trins for nothing!
King-Smith has an animal point of view unmatched by any writer of today, with sly puns and real characters peppering his texts. This volume is not difficult to read and there’s plenty of action for all.


Reviewed by Marlene Mabey

Did you know that a spider crab can reach twelve feet from claw tip to claw tip? Or that a crab can molt up to twenty times over its lifetime? Did you know that some crabs carry weapons for protection? These are just some of the interesting facts included in Patricia Kite’s *Down in the Sea: The Crab*.

This informational book presents the life cycle and habits of the crab to young readers. Discussions and photographs of land and water crabs in many sizes, body shapes, colors, and types are included. The text is written on an introductory level, which is attractive to young readers and scientists. The book’s last page includes more facts about crabs (including a caution to not pick them up).

Each of the large, eye-catching photographs is labeled clearly with the scientific and common names of each crab. To avoid confusing the reader, many of the photographs are also internally labeled with clarifying bits of information. The clean uncluttered appearance and durable paper add to this book’s appeal. Patricia Kite has created a book that should be discovered and read by young readers and researchers, future scientists, librarians, teachers, and all those intrigued by our world.


Reviewed by Lisa Baer

This beautiful book of fruit showcases Lember’s talent of hand-tinted photographs. For each type of fruit there is a still life of the fruit, a picture of the orchard or field where it grows, and a close-up of the fruit still attached to the tree, vine, or bush. The photographs are rich in color but soft in texture because of the tinting. The text reads “cherries,” “cherry orchard,” etc. The simplicity of the text adds to the charm of the book. Curious children will enjoy seeing where and how fruit grows.

**Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen**

*Troubling a Star* is part of the Austin family chronicles. We have met Vicky Austin in numerous Austin family books, and we've met her boyfriend, Adam Eddington, in *The Arm of the Starfish* and *A Ring of Endless Light*. While Adam is a college student, Vicky is still sixteen. The "romance" is appropriate for a sixteen-year-old. In this adventure, Vicky is introduced to Adam's elderly and wealthy Aunt Serena. They form a deep attachment, and Aunt Serena surprises Vicky with a trip to Antarctica with an educational research group. Adam will be in Antarctica at the same time on a research semester from the university. Cook is going to visit his brother and will act as chaperon.

Vicky, Cook, and Adam become dangerously involved in the explosive politics of the South American countries who are vying for a piece of the mineral wealth of Antarctica, to the point where their lives are in danger. The book is almost entirely written in flashback, beginning with "The iceberg was not a large one, but it was big enough so that the seal and I were not crowded, and I was grateful for that. . . . I tried to control my panic, to assess my situation. Several things could happen. I could be missed and someone would come for me. That was my brightest hope. But I had to face the possibility that nobody would find me in this vast space, and that I would ultimately freeze to death." Suspense is maintained by a combination of the sequence of events leading to her being on the iceberg and brief checks on her current status.

This novel is well researched and is ecologically and politically rich. The characters are well formed and interesting. The title, which reflects a common theme of L'Engle's, comes from a poem by a nineteenth-century poet, Francis Thompson:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{All things by immortal power,} \\
  \text{Near or far,} \\
  \text{Hiddenly} \\
  \text{To each other linked are,} \\
  \text{That thou canst not stir a flower} \\
  \text{Without troubling of a star.}
\end{align*}
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For those not inclined to enjoy ecological and political intrigue, this book might seem slow. Otherwise, it reflects Madeleine L'Engle's usual excellence.

∗ ∗ ∗ ∗
What would it be like to be captured and made to live with the Indians? This question was in the minds of many who lived along the Appalachian frontier in the eighteenth century. From its first publication in 1824, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* answers the specifics of this question by recounting the true account of Mary’s capture in 1755. Lois Lenski’s faithful retelling of the story (the obvious exception being Lenski’s use of the name of Molly for Mary) includes all the essential facts. Led on a forced march through the wilderness, Mary’s captors soon separate her from her parents. Her mother tells her to never forget her family, her language, or her religion. She also implores her daughter to have courage.

Mary becomes the "property" of two Indian women who take her to live among their Seneca tribe. She struggles with the dilemma of remaining true to her mother’s request while learning the ways of her "adoptive" people. This dilemma is the appeal of the book. At the end of the story, after deciding to remain with the Seneca, she is given a new name by the chief himself: Little Woman of Great Courage. Lenski again emphasizes that courage has turned Molly’s struggles into success.

Previous editions of this work, which appeared in the nineteenth century, primarily appealed to adults. Lois Lenski’s retelling of the story, reprinted in 1994, removes the story from the adult realm and places it squarely in the world of childhood. Lenski’s self-illustrated book does more to bring the life of Jemison into the consciousness of twentieth-century readers than any of the previous volumes. The book’s sense of place and its ability to show children other ways of life make this a very dependable book, one that will help readers know the appeal and reality of life among the Indians.


Myra Cohn Livingston has collected poems about small things—snails, eggs, butterflies, earthworms, and even a virus. Her vegetables include mushrooms, radishes, sweet peas, tree seeds, and milkweed. Poems about minerals were about things like teeth, knotholes, needles, and watches.
The collection represents an excellent variety of authors and viewpoints. Some are lighthearted and some are serious; readers will find themselves giving more thought to everyday sights. For example, "The chicken scratching for food in the dirt stirs up tiny tornadoes" (Kristine O'Connell George) or Bodeker's "The radish is the only dish that isn't flat but spherical. Eating small green peas off it could make you quite hysterical." And in the mineral category, consider Esbensen's "Snow Stars":

Once there was a girl who spoke diamonds when she opened her mouth to say hello.
I breathe my hello against freezing glass and diamonds blow out of my mouth.
They prism the pane with landscapes etched in silver.
Once there was a girl whose breath filled a winter day with stars.

These poems add sparkle to small, everyday sights and sounds.

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A K-2 FI PB Reviewed by Janet Francis

Miranda's father is a painter, and when he wants to paint her portrait Miranda is elated. Unfortunately, her tooth falls out at this time, and as every painter knows, a changed model is no model at all. Locker's elegant paintings illuminate Miranda's father's dilemma and his loving, but truly artistic, solution. The combination is a thoroughly satisfactory story which makes liars of those who say creative life cannot exist in a family situation.

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* Pre-3 NF PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Nancy Luenn and Ronald Himler combine their skills to depict the wonderful adventure of discovering a wetland. I highly recommend this picture book. The simple but expressive words relate the importance of wetlands as a home for birds, reptiles, insects, and small mammals, as well as a water
storage area and a floodplain. The watercolor illustrations are realistic and have a soft misty quality which goes along well with the wetland theme.

"Splish! A wetland is a water meadow. It is squishy under boots," relates the first page of text, while the illustration shows the back of two figures at the edge of a wetland. A young boy, dressed in a yellow raincoat and hat and knee-high boots, is standing by an older gentleman, probably his grandfather. The grandfather has his head slightly turned to the youngster as if listening to his grandson’s comment on the waterfowl they are observing in the distance. From this beginning, the book and illustrations combine to create a warm feeling of nature discovery and a positive companionship between an adult and a child. The last page shows the front view of the grandfather and grandson, hand in hand, splashing and noticeably enjoying their trek through the shallow wonderland.


If everything a man touches turns to gold, is he blessed or cursed? Unlike my childhood recollection of this well-known Greek myth, this version takes a more benevolent view of King Midas. It portrays Midas as a kind king who makes a foolish mistake which he regrets, rather than as a greedy man who needs to be taught a lesson. Beyond the lesson on greed, this author adds a mythical explanation of how gold came to be veined throughout the river Pactolus. The story is told well, and is appealing to the fourth- or fifth-grade child, as my ten-year-old and her friends can attest, but the illustrations are what really attracted them. Each painting is beautifully gold-leafed to add emphasis, and borders bring out the Greek character of the story. Some of the vocabulary is a bit difficult for ten-year-olds, but overall the story is very readable. It would be a welcome addition to any elementary school library.


A group of boys in Nazi-occupied Denmark rebel in their own quiet way against the German troops stationed in their town. They start small, placing
signs around the town at night, knifing tires, and stealing license plates. Then Otto, a boy from the working class, joins them and pushes them into performing deeds more dangerous and damaging to the Nazis.

The story centers around two brothers: Gunnar, who is the head of the group, and his younger brother, Lars. Lars idolizes his older brother, and Reuter adds more tension to his tale by creating a romance between the younger brother and the older brother’s girlfriend.

*The Boys from St. Petri* is a book about self-sacrifice. All the boys, except Otto, end up getting captured. But they accept their fate as a price worth paying for the stand they made against the Nazis.

The book was okay. Boys would probably enjoy it more than I did. Several times I felt lost. The book’s major achievement lies in the fact that it was translated from the Danish original. In fact, it won the 1995 Mildred A. Batchelder Award for the most outstanding translated book.


Reviewed by Sandy Call

“On Tuesday Morning, April 1940, the people of Denmark were awakened by the drone of German military planes flying low overhead. The planes were scattering leaflets proclaiming, in poorly written Danish, that the German army had come to protect Denmark and Norway from England.”

Although the German occupation is peaceful at first, the Danes are immediately conscious of their loss of freedom. Nazi soldiers are everywhere. Most people soon feel helpless and hopeless. A small group of young men form a club where the initiation takes much strength and courage, but this close group soon finds itself divided. Each young man tries to make his own stand against the Germans, and each questions the other.

This is a tale of coming of age and finding oneself in the face of war. I rated this lower not because I didn’t find the story wonderful, but because it doesn’t flow smoothly. I wonder if a young adult could stay with it.

* 5+ FI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

While her mother is away on a business trip, thirteen-year-old Vickie has another confrontation with her grandmother, who is staying with her and her younger sister, Joanie. Vickie decides that spending the rest of the week with her mother gone will be unbearable. The only solution is to take a bus to California, where her father lives, and stay with him. Joanie talks Vickie into letting her come along. After a long bus ride, they arrive to find an empty apartment. A kind neighbor encourages the landlord to let them stay until their
father returns. The children begin to worry when their father doesn’t come back that night or the next day. The neighbors befriend them, including a young boy named Jake. The plot starts to thicken as the children detect blood on the window sill, find a picture of a woman and child they do not know, and discover that their father has called in sick for work. They begin to wonder if their father has been hurt or killed. In an intense series of events, the situation is resolved and the children return to their worried mother.

The plot is exciting and believable. Especially at the end, the book is difficult to put down. Also woven into the book are Vickie’s stormy relationship with her grandmother, her mother and father being separated then reunited, and Vickie’s struggle to think before she acts. Character development is strong; each person is an individual and human. This excellent mystery will intrigue readers!


A All PB Reviewed by Jan Porter

A bird’s visit to a dinosaur museum turns into a flight of fancy in this Caldecott Honor Book. Inspired by the theory that birds are the modern relatives of dinosaurs, Rohmann’s museum exhibits seem to come to life. The bird is swallowed up by a back-to-life dinosaur, only to escape through the skeleton as reality returns.

The illustrations are imaginative oil paintings, including a delightful interior view of the dinosaur’s mouth. Although this picture book may be a little frightening for younger children, it will stimulate lively discussion among elementary school students.


B 2-5 NF Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Ronald Rood describes the plants, animals, and insects which live above, in, and below the “wonderful, watery world of the wetlands” and shows how they are vital parts of the food chain. The author invites young readers to take a closer look at the wetlands and suggests that a magnifying glass be used. The
last chapter explains how to make a homemade microscope, but I was frustrated when it didn't work the way it was supposed to. The plentiful illustrations coordinate well with the text. Either half-page or full-page color illustrations appear on each page, making this a good selection as an easy-reader information book and as a transition from nonfiction picture books. Noteworthy is a "Would You Like to Know More" section at the back of the book; it contains a bibliography of additional books to read to learn about wetlands.

★★★★


A K-5 NF Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Each book contains twenty simple, creative crafts made with common household items such as poster paint, glue, and old socks. Each craft idea includes a materials list and step-by-step instructions. Colorful illustrations guide the young crafter through each step. Younger children will need adult supervision, but most third graders could manage these crafts independently. The three titles are part of the Holiday Crafts for Kids series.

The author's twenty years of experience as a nursery school teacher is evident—the crafts are easy to make. Elementary school teachers will find great inexpensive projects for classes to do. Parents will be happy with crafts for their children that do not require hard-to-find or expensive materials. Children will find satisfaction in creating these holiday crafts for their own enjoyment and to share with family and friends. These books will be well used in libraries, classrooms, and homes.

★★★★


* 8+ NF BI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Safe Harbors is the sequel to Touch Wood (1988, Four Winds Press; see review in the Brigham Young University Children's Book Review, Vol. X, Number 1, Sep/Oct 1989, p. 22), in which Roth-Hano recounts her childhood
experiences from the days when she, as an eleven-year-old, was sent by her parents from her native Paris to live in a Catholic convent in the Normandy countryside with her two sisters in order to escape capture by the Germans at the beginning of World War II. Safe Harbors picks up in 1951 as Renée disembarks from a ship which has brought her from France to America. Renée has been hired, for two years, by an American woman to become a nanny to her daughter. Renée’s dream is to learn English and then return to France and marry Fernand. The contrast between the wonderful, full-of-opportunity America and the still poverty-stricken, war-torn France is startling to the young girl. The customs and the abundance of food, are amazing to this sensitive young girl. Yet Renée quickly adapts and then finds her position as a nanny (where she is paid nothing for her efforts) too restricting—she can’t save enough money to go home before Fernand joins the military.

Roth-Hano has written a remarkably touching and brilliant story of the daily life of a girl in New York City during the early 1950s. Her reflections on the war and its aftermath will touch your heart. You will quickly learn to love free-spirited Renée as she slowly comes alive in the atmosphere of this great country. The descriptions are so lifelike that readers will experience Roth-Hano’s circumstances as if they were their own. A highly recommended look at the impact the Holocaust had on one so young who survived and found many safe harbors and friends in America.


Reviewed by Jan Staheli

When cousin Annie comes to visit Henry and Mudge, it looks like it’s going to be a long stay. Annie is CLEAN. She doesn’t like Mudge’s drool on her shoes or his wet kisses on her face. She doesn’t like fudge cookies from a dusty bag under the bed, and she doesn’t even know how to play frisbee. But when Henry teaches her—ZAM! Even when the frisbee is wet from Mudge catching it, Annie can really throw! Pretty soon she is looking and acting like a normal child, and the visit is over too soon.

This is the thirteenth Henry and Mudge easy reader, and I am crazy about this series! The text is fun and entertaining, and the pictures are inviting. What more can you ask of a book for "newly independent readers"?

Reviewed by Rachael Williams

Rylant has written poems to accompany several of Walker Evans' renowned photographs of America during the Great Depression. Evans' photographs are fascinating: they capture the stark realities of people who are struggling to survive. Rylant's poems bring each picture to life. Together the two artists give the reader an incredibly personal look at this period in our nation's history. The subject matter and writing style of *Something Permanent* require mature readers, and adults may well be the audience that enjoys it the most. However, the book could also be valuable for helping young adults understand what their grandparents' generation lived through.


Reviewed by Jan Staheli

One of the most beautiful and unusual Christmas books I have seen, this pop-up ABC of Christmas paper sculpture ranks at the top of my holiday list! Each leaf of the book holds two lettered "windows" to open, and each window contains a delightful surprise. From a Dove that flies, to a gabled roof hung with Icicles, to a gift that explodes with a paper as it is Unwrapped, each sculpture is ingenious, delicate, and enchanting. I endorse, extol, and promote this book for your Christmas list—you won't be sorry!


Reviewed by Gayanne Ramsden

It's Christmas Eve in the Tirolean Alps. War has visited the land, and there has been no work for the cobbler. This has left the larder bare. But tonight the cobbler must go down to the valley to get work from a soldier. He leaves his three motherless sons, Fritzi, Franzl, and Hansel, and goes out into the cold. Soon there is a knock at the door. The boys are afraid, but they let
in a little old man. He demands food and warmth, and when there is none he jumps into their bed, kicking the boys out one by one. When the boys protest and say they are cold, he tells them to turn cartwheels. Fritzi does turn cartwheels, and to his amazement he sees a trail of oranges behind him. Franzl also turns cartwheels and finds a trail of cookies and sweets. When the older boys say Hansel is too young to turn cartwheels, the old man says to hold him by the heels. When the boys do this, gold coins fall from his pockets. When the boys turn to thank the old man, he is gone and the bed is empty. When their father returns, he tells them they have been visited by Laurin, the Goblin King.

This story is told in charming and clear prose by Ruth Sawyer, winner of a Newbery Award. The pictures, by Caldecott medalist Barbara Cooney, capture the Alpine scenery and the coziness of the cobbler's hut. The detail of the cobbler's work and the beauty of the Alps enhances the tale. This is a beautiful book, and both story and pictures tell a delightful Christmas tale.

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Reviewed by Denice Barainca

Six woolly sheep load up their packs to take a hike on a nice warm day. But the hike becomes a misadventure when they get lost in the fog and lose their compass in a swamp. All ends well, though, when they discover that the woolly fuzz they left snagged on the underbrush marks the pathway home.

Rhyming text and delightful colored-pencil illustrations carry preschool children and beginning readers along the trail with the sheep. Those who have read Shaw's other books know that the silly sheep will find a unique solution to their problem. Readers will recognize friend sea gull and will enjoy meeting other creatures in the forest.

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Reviewed by Lovisa Lyman

New collections of authentic folk tales are hard to come by these days, and this is a good one. College professors Spariosu and Benedek, both from
Brigham Young University

Romania, and artist Kubinyi, whose roots trace back to Hungary on the border of the Transylvanian Mountains, have the backgrounds and expertise to put together a scholarly collection. The authors heard these tales during their childhoods from grandparents and neighbors. The source of each story is provided in an "about the stories" section at the end of the book, as are definitions of unfamiliar terms. A list for further reading is also appended. The tales are at once like other folktales in narrative voice, magical elements, and plot, and unlike other tales because of their unique setting. Werewolves, vampires, and underground mines are prominent motifs as are the more common ghosts, hidden treasure, three sons, and blood sacrifice.

Though the folk tales are authentic, or perhaps because they are authentic, they are extremely violent and bloody. Every page has a grisly murder, though innocent victims are later brought back to life by sprinklings of blood or water. At the same time, redeeming virtues of generosity, honesty, sacrifice, and filial and romantic love also dot the pages. These brighter elements counterbalance the unsavory. The one thing that was a bit off-putting was a statement in the introduction that attempted to link the book with the currently popular Bram Stoker book about Dracula. Fortunately, the book does not need to depend on a current fad. It stands solidly alone and would be a strong addition to libraries with large collections of folktales, though probably not for the home library.


Reviewed by Lovisa Lyman

I've got to get my own copy of this book. It's full of great writing ideas for children, but adult writers can get their creative juices going too. As a teacher whose charge is to help elementary school teachers learn to teach writing, this is a treasure. It covers the same ground in the same practical ways as do the best writing guides for adults—using a notebook, voice, editing, point of view, figurative language, character, plot, and more. But it is not just a matter of defining terms. Writing exercises follow each segment. For instance, after an explanation of personification, one suggested activity is to "personify your shoe, which insists upon eating your sock." After a section on character development Stanek suggests that the writer ask "what people like best about your character," and after a discussion on choosing character names comes the directive to "think of a nickname that could make your character cry." These preparatory activities could lead to some thoughtful writing.

Some exercises are more productive than others, but the combination of descriptions of good writing, ample sprinkling of the author's experiences,
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presentation of terminology basic to writing, and exercises makes it an excellent choice for a classroom teacher, a library, and even a student textbook. Parents of budding writers would do well to purchase a copy for their children.


Reviewed by Basil P. Yang

To many westerners China is mysterious because of its long history, abundance of land, growing population, complicated language, and its ancient civilization. It is especially difficult for children to understand such a vast nation. Discovery series, published by Crestwood House, is a good source to help children learn about the people and history of many countries. China is one of the titles in the series.

This book starts with the Chinese greeting "Ni hao" which means "How are you?" to introduce the Chinese language. The short paragraphs help the children understand the land, history, population, language, culture, geography, government, arts, family, and leisure life of China. The book is illustrated with colorful photographs, maps, and paintings. Most children should be able to grasp a brief picture of China in about an hour or so. This book is a very good beginning introductory book to help children understand China.


Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Zeke, a naturally musical pig, finds a magical harmonica that puts everyone to sleep. Not realizing its power, Zeke runs away from his ungrateful family, who goes to sleep instead of appreciating his music. The trip teaches him that his family is responding to magic, and the harmonica saves his life several times as he makes his way back home.

Steig’s expressive comic art adds to the tale of the sleep-producing mouth organ—the zonked out family, the snoring passengers of a passing boat, and the hospital patients who prefer his music to sleeping pills. The author’s use of sophisticated words (reviling, surcease, obliged, and bamboozled) give
convincing proof of Zeke’s intelligence and makes Steig’s latest tale of wit and cleverness a story to enjoy.


Reviewed by Marlene Mabey

"Imagine fish that tie themselves in knots, plants that flash lights in the dark, sea stars that turn their stomachs inside out and mammals that hammer their food. Life in the sea is bizarre, beautiful, funny and fabulous." Diane Swanson supports this statement with photographs and informative text. The chapters titled "Plants of Plenty," "Spineless Superstars," "Far-Out Fish," and "Mind-Boggling Mammals" enrich the reader’s knowledge of the fascinating inhabitants of the sea. The most interesting and unusual characteristics and habits of these inhabitants are spotlighted.

Each chapter also includes large and intriguing photographs with captions, several inserts containing more detailed information relating to the page’s text, and a chapter-ending segment which identifies little-known facts. This book also includes chapter headings and subheadings, a table of contents, and an index for easy reference use. The glossy photographs and durable pages are an attractive part of this book.

Diane Swanson has written many highly acclaimed nature books for young readers, as well as articles for *Ranger Rick* and *Owl*. Her skills and abilities have produced a book that is appealing and instructional to young readers and oceanography buffs alike.


Reviewed by Rita A. Christensen

Before Ming Miao sends her five kittens out into the world to enter new homes, she explains that they are really descendants of Chinese cats, rather than Siamese. A kitten ancestor, Sagwa of China, lived in the House of the Foolish Magistrate. She one day found herself high up on a shelf when the Magistrate issued a new rule: "People must not sing until the sun goes down." Sagwa eventually leapt from the shelf and landed in an ink pot, blackening her face,
ears, and paws. She wiped her nose on the Scroll of Rules and accidentally blotted out the word "not" so that the new order read: "People must sing until the sun goes down." And sing they did. The Magistrate’s fury over the unceasing singing soon gave way because of the heartwarming songs. He decided to change all of his old petty rules into delightful ones, thus creating a happier province for himself, his people and, of course, the cats.

Tan’s story is clever and charming. She uses many interesting Chinese words and names in her tale. The illustrations (aqueous media) are incredibly vibrant. Shields illustrates the text with a beautiful oriental flair, no doubt due to her experiences in Japan and Hong Kong as a child. This is a superb book to use for storytime or booktalking on subjects such as the Orient, cats, or even family history. It is a picture book children will want to read again and again.


**Reviewed by Patricia Frade**

Fifteen-year-old Peg and her father, Samuel Toland, decide that they will take this year’s camping trip to Sweet Friday Island, an uninhabited island in the Sea of Cortez. They begin their vacation from Boca de Cangrejo, a little Mexican village on the shore of the Sea of Cortez. They are warned not to go to Sweet Friday Island by the local storekeeper, but Samuel shrugs the warning off. They raft over to the island and settle down for several days of sun and sand. However, they discover they are not alone on the island, and they must fight for their lives. The "enemy" slashes their raft and steals their food and supplies, even Sam’s insulin. With no way off the island, and Samuel starting to go into a diabetic coma, Peg decides to attack the enemy by herself. With a homemade bomb, she attacks the enemy and then rescues him. The enemy turns out to be the elderly insane father of the storekeeper.

This is a suspenseful story of a quiet camping trip turned to terror. Most of the events are realistic, which will keep young adults turning the pages. The book does start out slow though, and some may have difficulty getting into the book, since most of the suspense and action is toward the end.

★ ★ ★ ★

Reviewed by Lillian Heil

This version of the ever-popular *Aesop's Fables* is retold by Werner Thuswaldner, translated by Anthea Bell, and illustrated by Gisela Durr. The collection contains such well-known tales as "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Bet between Wind and Sun" as well as lesser-known tales such as "A Dress for the Moon" and "The Monkey and the Camel."

Durr's illustrations lend wit and humor to this collection. Her pencil drawings add funny human qualities to the animals such as the variety of the expressions of big fish who are trapped in a net, the vixen who is proud of her seven cubs, and a widely grinning frog. She has made the book cohesive by continuing each illustration from one page to the next. For example, the snake's tail on one page is wound onto the next illustration, and the frog's leg is continued into a head and a ribbon. The soft pencil drawings draw attention to shapes, forms, and wonderful composition without distracting from color. The whimsical nature of the excellent drawings perfectly captured the mood of these old fables.

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Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Elana Rose Rosen has moved to a new complex of apartments on Melon Hill. She has brought with her her favorite toy, a scooter, which she uses to make friends as well as have fun. Not only is Elana a whiz with the scooter, but she uses art and poetry to express her feelings. For example, she leaves herself the following note:

Makes me
Answer too quick—
Dumb and smart in one body.

Children everywhere will be able to relate to Elana.

On the book jacket Ms. Williams notes that this is not an autobiographical story, and yet she drew much from her life as a child in New York City.
also includes an excellent example from her third grade class from Long Island. I believe the ambiance of life in the city comes through nicely.