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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol17/iss5/3

**A 2+ NF** Reviewed by Lisa Baer

*Fraction Fun* introduces children to fractions in an engaging and playful manner. The author gives a very simple definition of fractions in the beginning sentence: "A fraction is a part of something." He goes on to explain how fractions are used in telling your age, sharing a granola bar, and dividing a pizza. The author then takes the explanation a little deeper by using "pizza math" to show how to calculate a fraction. Finally, he explains how different fractions such as 2/8 and 1/4 can be equal in value. Each example is accompanied by an activity that children can perform at home. Three cartoon children help to demonstrate the uses of fractions while their dog tries to eat the pizza.

The text is clear and easy to follow. The bright-colored illustrations are cartoon-like and cover the entire page. The pictures are so big and bright that they seem to jump off the page to capture the reader’s attention. I do wish the illustrator had included more pictures of the children and especially the dog throughout the book. This book is true to its title by teaching fractions in a fun way.

★★★★


**K-3 PB** Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

"My grandfather used to say that the warmth of the sun is the blanket of the poor." So begins a journey exploring family values, illustrated with traditional Native American images and told in two languages (Spanish and English). This is a story of a mother's love, a grandmother's tenderness, and the strength of the American Southwest. These elements combine to make a story worth snuggling up with on a cold winter eve, or a hot July day for that matter!

The well-told story proves a simple example of the importance of family. I have always had a fondness for the bright colors and stylized images that the Native American cultures use. These marvelously vivid and colorful images make this book a joy to read and look at. One small problem with the illustrations is the faces of the people; they seem beyond old, almost to the point of macabre.

★★★★


**PreK-3 PB** Reviewed by Vivian Milius

The children of the Nile Street School visits the Exhibition of the Mysteries of Ancient Egypt with museum guard, Mr. Gluddery, hot on their
heels watching for any sign of infraction. Their teacher hits the wrong button and actually whisks them back in time. Adding to the fun, readers are invited to look for various objects throughout the tour. "Where's Waldo" type illustrations make it fun to read about life on the Nile, in the fields, in town, in the workshops, in the house, in the desert, what a temple festival was like, visiting a pyramid, making a mummy, going inside a tomb, and visiting the pharaoh's palace. Each subject receives a double-page spread with lots of conversation bubbles. At last, the tour is over—that is for all except poor Mr. Gluddery who is still trapped back in time.

This information book will be enjoyed by all those "Where's Waldo," "Magic School Bus," and "I Spy" fans. Terrific!


B K-3 PB Reviewed by Vivian Milius

Poulette, an unusual hen, spends her days preparing to make her dream of becoming a ballerina come true. (Other hens may lay eggs and scratch for bugs, but not Poulette.) One day the farmer brings home a strange new bird, haughty Percival Peacock. Percival misses no opportunity to put down his poultry companions, and, of course, he doesn't "do bugs." He convinces them all of their hopeless ordinariness, all except Poulette, that is. She recruits the hens to her corps de ballet and suggests a performance of *Hen Lake!* Though her corps remains sore, cranky and hopeless, Poulette puts together glittering costumes from cast-off items and is encouraging always insisting that if they believe in themselves they can do anything. At the moment of the performance, nature intervenes with a storm that literally moves the dancers through the ballet routine. The corps carries it off, gives Poulette and the storm the credit, and even invites the down-cast Percival to join them in their last number. At last the hens realize that Percival isn't any more special than any of them.

Auch's humorous drawings of poultry in tutus engagingly carry her story of human foibles and triumph over obstacles.


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Robert Peel has departed from Ireland and is bound for America, the land of plenty. Among the passengers are first-class passengers Clemspool and Grout; steerage passengers Horatio Drabble and the O'Connell children, Maura and Patrick; and stowaway, Lawrence Kirkle. This book, part two of *Beyond the Western Sea*, covers the events which happen in the lives of these interesting characters during January 24—March 8, 1851.

Avi is a versatile writer. Reader's may also have enjoyed other books of his including the whimsical story of *Poppy* and the intricate emotions in *Nothing But the Truth*. *Beyond the Western Sea; Book Two: Lord Kirkle's Money* is an exciting historical novel, which tells of the challenges and problems Irish immigrants encountered in Massachusetts. It is just one more example of Avi's gift of expression. This selection can be understood and enjoyed even though the reader had not read the first book in the series. This selection can stand alone! Avi creatively and clearly defines the pertinent information about each character's background and personality. Readers will enjoy the fast pace of the short chapters which switch between localities and characters—much like a movie only in writing. Readers may also look forward to reading the first book, *Book One: Escape From Home*.

**B preK-3 PB** Reviewed by Vivian Milius

Young Peter, watching a small green furry spider, declares to his mother that he will become a spider. She asks him what he will do as a spider. He says he will crawl onto the table and drink from her glass and eat her crumbs. She replies she will sweep him out the door. Then he will crawl back in through the keyhole and into her bed and bite her toe. She replies she will wash him down the drain. Then he will climb out of the sewer, up the wall, back inside, up into her lap, and onto the book she is reading and fall fast asleep. She replies she will put him in drawer with sheets and towels where he may live. Then he will crawl out and up her leg into her pocket. She replies she will put him in a jar and if he doesn't like that she will set him free. Then he will climb up her arm and hide in her sleeve. She replies she will shake him out of her sleeve and become a spider too.

Hallensleben's impressionistic paintings beautifully illustrate this arachnid rendition of Margaret Wise Brown's *Runaway Bunny.*

★★★★


**A 3-8 PB** Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

"Jabberwocky" has long been a favorite with illustrators, having been treated alone, as well as in conjunction with the rest of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass,* hundreds of times since it was first published in 1872. Illustrator Graeme Base, author of *Animalia* and *The Eleventh Hour,* illustrated an edition of *Jabberwocky* in 1987, and now this has been rendered as a pop-up book. The book is constructed in a somewhat unusual way: at each layout the book is prevented from opening more than 45 degrees by the fore-most section of the illustration, which stretches across the scene as a flat page with an opening in the center allowing a view of two or three layers behind. This gives a stage-like effect where a drama unfolds in which the young man, vorpal sword in hand, kills the Jabberwocky and returns its head to his regal father (amusingly dressed in slippers and a bathrobe), to be mounted as an addition to his bizarre trophy collection.

The entire text of *Jabberwocky* is included, but less than half of the illustrations from the 1987 edition are reused here. This is partly a matter of space; The pop-up format, even with the number of illustrations cut down, is much thicker than the original picture book. This limitation, however, is not really a limitation at all. The 1996 revision is in fact a much more vivid setting of the text of the poem. Not surprisingly, the pop-up format suits Base's water-color illustration technique perfectly, and readers will hope he will produce more of these.

★★★★


**C K-3 PB** Reviewed by Vivian Milius

Emily, obsessed with ballet, persuades her mother to let her dance to the corner in a snowstorm. Dressed in nothing but a tutu, tights and slippers, Emily disappears. What her family doesn't know is that Emily is now in Ostrichville, where she must remain because she doesn't know how to get back. Most ostriches ridicule and exclude her, but one ostrich, Ernest, is kind and his family takes her in. She learns to dance with them and is "discovered" by a New York City choreographer, who can slip into Ostrichville and back into New York with ease. In fact, over the years he has modeled many of his ballets after what he has observed in Ostrichville. He offers to spotlight Emily in one of his ballets and, of course, the ostriches insist on coming too. Emily's parents happen to be in the audience and
she is reunited with her family. Her dancing is a success and a Ballerina-Ostrich Troupe is formed. Aagaard’s whimsical and lovely oil illustrations perfectly bring out the fantasy and humor of Bernstein’s almost too fantastic story.


A preK-3 PB Reviewed by Vivian Milius

The young narrator shows us her laugh and then tells how it whooshes out of her, sweeps around the room until her baby brother catches it. Then the laugh rustles through Dad’s newspaper and he laughs, too. Mother is next to catch the laugh where it sparkles in her hair, and then their dog catches it with his waggy tail. The dog rushes the laugh out the door and down the block. Others catch it too and then it comes spinning back to where it began.

The liberal use of description, action, and playful fun carry the story along. Each page includes just one or two lines of text, making it a good book to share with very young readers, yet older readers will enjoy it as well. The delightful, realistic illustrations portray various ages and races in stages of infectious laughter.


A preK-3 PB Reviewed by Jan Porter

Patrick just can’t sit still, but all he ever hears is "sit still." He hears it at school, he hears it at church, he hears it at home. The doctor doesn’t know what to do with Patrick. Finally, Pat’s mom finds the answer.

This delightful book has entertaining illustrations and a simple text. It would be extremely helpful for use by parents or teachers of hyperactive children. *Sit Still* deals with a very real problem in an enjoyable and helpful way.


B 5-9 NF Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

Demi has given us an illustrated biography of the central figure in her religion, the Buddha, also known as Siddartha. "Once every hundred years, a Buddha is born to purify the people of the earth." The reader is taken from the miraculous birth of the Buddha, through a childhood where the king, his father, in Sleeping Beauty style, tries to keep him from seeing "an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a monk." Of course, Siddhartha sees these people and promptly leaves the kingdom to become a holy man. After an extensive but unsuccessful search for Truth, Siddhartha sits down under a bodhi tree, "a spot where many Buddhas had been enlightened," and vows not to move until he finds Truth. After a struggle with Mara, the Evil One, who furiously claims the "seat of virtue" for himself, Siddhartha overcomes evil, becomes enlightened, and the age of thirty-five, becomes a Buddha. He returns to his kingdom, teaching and gathering disciples along the way, and eventually converts his father, wife, and son. After triumphing over his evil cousin, Devadatta, the Buddha lives out his life as a peaceful preacher of truth. Buddha dies at the age of eighty.

If this book is a somewhat pious hagiography (as we might expect from Demi, who is a Buddhist nun), still, it appears to tell the Buddha story accurately in a manner that might be interesting to older children. It would be useful in offering the reader a glimpse into a religion that would be unfamiliar to most English-speaking children. Demi has used traditional Chinese paints, inks, and brushes for her gilded watercolor paintings. The paintings are done in an Indian style, and the illustrations and layout are

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successful. The stylized figures meld very well with the story itself.


A 2-6 FI Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

This new book by Demi, who last year wrote a biography of the Buddha, (Buddha, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1996), has now produced a lovely edition of ten "Jakatas," stories traditionally attributed to the Buddha that carry a moral message similar in nature to the fables of Aesop or the parables of Jesus. Included are the "Tales of the Lion King" (who stops a rumor started by a rabbit that the earth is breaking up, a story similar to the western "Chicken Little"), the "Turtle and the Geese" (the geese try to fly the turtle to a new home but the plan fails when the turtle, who is supposed to be holding onto a stick with his mouth, indignantly scolds some children for making fun of him), the "Cunning Wolf" (who decides to become a pious vegetarian but fails in his resolve when the Buddha turns himself into a tempting lamb), and "The Golden Goose" (who rather than laying golden eggs gives golden feathers). Each story is accompanied by a moral. For example, in "The Lion King," "when one person tells a falsehood, one hundred repeat it as true."

The art work and layout of the book are stunning. Demi has patterned the illustrations after the earliest extant block book, a Buddhist teaching, printed around 600 A.D. with gold ink on indigo rice paper. She has painted the illustrations of gold indigo vellum. This, combined with a gold type setting, is spectacular. The stylized figures are exceptionally well suited to the stories they accompany. This book will be very useful in both familiarizing children with an Eastern style of painting, well worth knowing, as well as teaching them about unusual ways of looking at problems with strangely familiar tales.


A preK-3 Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Young Mouse believes that he is the strongest animal on the plains. He sets out to find and prove himself to Elephant, who, his wise grandfather suggests, is stronger. Young Mouse hasn't seen an elephant before, so he goes from the lizard to the zebra and then to the giraffe asking "Hey! Are you Elephant?" Finally he meets Elephant!

Young readers will enjoy the repetitious boasting of Young Mouse in this East African folktale. Gorbachev's cartoon-like illustrations whimsically yet realistically portray the terrain and animals of the African savannah.


A 0-3 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

This bright, colorful board book features the numbers one through ten and will delight babies and toddlers. As she did in In A Small, Small Pond, Fleming employs her unique poured-paper illustrations.

Parents will find this book a good choice for their child's library collection. Libraries that collect board books will want to add this one to their collections.

**B preK-3 PB** Reviewed by Vivian Milius

Kindergarten-aged Melinda is heartbroken when her neighbor, Mrs. Wilcox, moves into a nursing home. However, Mrs. Wilcox writes her a letter story every week, telling all about her new home and friends. Melinda works hard learning to write so she can surprise Mrs. Wilcox with a letter she wrote all by herself. When Mrs. Wilcox passes away, before her letter is written, Melinda is devastated and stops trying to write altogether. Then one day Melinda gets an idea. She can write to Mrs. Wilcox's friend, Mrs. Mingo.

This story for younger readers deals with separation and loss of a loved one with sensitivity and hope. Full pages of large-type text are matched with full pages of expressive color illustrations.


* 4+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

In Elizabethan England, young, red-haired Dickon is apprenticed by his stepfather to the local tanner. When Dickon's father, a merchant, was alive, Dickon's focus was on reading and writing. Now, he abhors the work he must do. While on an errand for his master, Dickon comes to the area of the new Globe Theatre and the nearby Bear Garden. While there, he witnesses the cruel treatment of captive bears and hears the dogs who are used for bear baiting to entertain the crowds at the upcoming Southwark Fair. Instrumental in calming a young bear cub, Dickon is seen, paradoxically, as a hero by some, and as a witch by others. Given no choice but to flee for his life, Dickon leaves behind his family, country, and angry master. In company with the bear cub, and through the help of his deceased father's friends, Dickon heads for France where he sets the bear cub free and where he finds his own personal freedom.

This is an adventure story of a young boy who loves living creatures and whose skill at reading and writing gives him a new chance at life. Interspersed throughout the story is the bear cub's perspective on young Dickon, his kindness and determination, and their mutual quest for freedom.


A FI 3-6 Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Twelve-year-old Joe Stoshack really likes baseball, but he is not a great player. He's big, awkward, and sometimes clumsy. When he gets a job cleaning out his neighbor's attic, Joe finds the world's most valuable baseball card, a 1909 Honus Wagner card, among the items to be discarded. That night Joe finds Honus himself in his bedroom and discovers that the card will allow him to travel back in time to the 1909 World Series. As part of the plot, Joe faces the dilemma of whether to sell the card or to return it to the neighbor.

This intriguing blend of baseball and time travel will hold the attention of even those readers with little interest in baseball. Baseball fans of all ages will enjoy this novel with its detailed account of the 1909 World Series. Not a typical sports novel, this book would be a well-circulated addition to public and school libraries.

* preK-3  PB  Reviewed by Jan Staheli

"We were having breakfast when the phone rang...'Aarrggh!' [Mom] cried. 'Your cousins are coming over this afternoon. The house is a mess, and there's nothing to eat.'" The children are ordered upstairs to clean their room while mother works furiously downstairs. A jungle camp is more fun and the room does not get clean. Then mother makes a dash to the grocery store, where the children whine, beg, fight, and then crash into grocery carts. Back home, they try to help by baking a cake, but the mess is too daunting and they are sent outside where they make an obstacle course on the lawn. "I hope Mom won't mind the mud," says Sam. The children next help themselves to the prepared food, leave muddy clothes all over the floor. Suddenly they remember mother's mood, and they run upstairs to hide.

This is a book that young children will understand well, unless they come from a very unusual home! (*My children would have known exactly what is was about!*) As the day progresses from one frustration to another, the mother acquires monster accouterments such as: green hands, strange green ears, frazzled hair, and even a long green tail. By the time poor Mom has reached the end of her rope, she really has turned into a "monster." Fortunately, mother realizes what is more important, the children choose to help instead of hinder, and the day is saved. By the time the cousins arrive, all is under control, and only Sam and his sister notice that their cousins are so bad that their aunt is growing a long green tail!

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* preK+  FI  Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

*Sam and the Tigers* is a retelling of Bannerman's classic story of "Little Black Sambo". Lester's rendition is set in the town of Sam-sam-sa-mara, a land where the animals and people, all named Sam, live and work together. Sam is getting outfitted for school and chooses his own colorful outfit. On his way to school the next morning, Sam encounters hungry tigers and soon gives away his red coat, purple pants, yellow shirt, his pair of silver shoes, and green umbrella. The tigers come back and, in their argument about which one is "the finest Tiger that ever was," are reduced to a "pool of butter as golden as a dream come true." Sam puts on his clothes, goes to school, and on his way back home gathers up the butter so his mother can fix a pancake feast for all
the Sam's in Sam-sam-sa-mara and their animal friends.

Lester and Pinkney, author and illustrator of the award-winning *John Henry*, have again combined their skills to make another unforgettable picture book. Lester uses repetition, consonance, assonance, and similes, such as "yellow as tomorrow," "green as a satisfied mind," and "words as big as him that nobody could say," to give a distinctive spirit to the story line. Pinkney's intricate pencil and water color illustrations combine the fanciful and the realistic to illustrate Sam-sam-sa-mara, a world where people buy clothes from animals, tree trunks have faces, and all "lived and worked together like they didn't know they weren't supposed to." Pinkney's tigers are especially wonderful! This classic story can be enjoyed by all ages.

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*K+ PB Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

The text, printed on the far left edges of the illustrations (and usually only the left hand page), is arranged in a free verse format. The poetic narration gives us a glimpse of the painting of Claude Monet. Le Tord shares with us what Monet painted and where he painted, and what colors, ending with the following: "He painted, dazzled by the light he held on his brush, just for an instant, like a blue butterfly."

Le Tord's illustrations use Monet's color pallet and have an impressionist quality, though they are not done in the style Monet used. Included as an introduction is the author's explanation of her experience and a list of museums where one can see a Monet painting.

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A preK+ PB Reviewed by Lisa Baer

This is a very simple story about a two-year-old boy named Max who sees a red tractor drive by his house and disappears down the road. He very much wants to go outside and see the tractor again. His friend, Sara, comes by the house and sees Max at the window. She takes him on a walk where they see chickens, cows, and some boys fishing in the river. The highlight of the walk comes when they see the tractor roar by in the fields. Sara then takes the very happy, but sleepy, Max home.

The colored pencil illustrations are beautiful and create a peaceful mood. Lewis does an excellent job of giving Max realistic expressions. The reader can imagine his squeals of laughter as he sat on a fence and his awed reaction to the sight of the tractor. Young children will like this joyful adventure.

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A- 6+ FI Reviewed by Tom Wright

"Hand Gunther found his dad's body early on an evening in May." So begins this story of thirteen-year-old Mohandas Gunther and his struggle with the death of his father and his unreconciled feelings toward his mother. In this respect the story is rather straightforward. Rudolph Gunther dies of a heart attack. Hand's estranged mother returns to fulfill familial duties and to try and salvage the Oasis, Rudolph's old dilapidated motel in rural Massachusetts. Hand is consumed by guilt for not being with his father to prevent his death. He is also terribly angry with his mother for leaving the family and having the temerity to return now, to take charge. It is difficult to tell where one of these emotions end and the other begins.
Beyond the basic facts, Maguire uses some interesting techniques in the development of this story. It is told from Hand’s point of view; yet through his interactions with others, the reader is allowed to witness aberrant behavior that is not evident to Hand. There is also the appearance of two Iranian refugees (father and son) at the Oasis at the behest of the now deceased Rudolph. Hand’s relationship with young Vuffy is therapeutic for both, and brings some gentle humor to an otherwise stern account.

There are many elements at play here, but they seem to work well together. Maguire has Hand uncover a family secret in regard to an uncle dying of AIDS. His care for this uncle, in his last days, allows Hand to overcome his guilt and reconcile with his mother. In the end, life goes on. It must. As a matter of fact, I like Hand’s response to a well intentioned teacher who is concerned about what adolescent phase he was going through. “Life is a phase I’m going through.” And quite a phase it is too.


A preK-3 PBReviewed by Genevieve Crossley

This inspiring tale centers around Danielle, a young artist who struggles to please her father, a photographer. Danielle’s drawings are fanciful; she sees the world through creative eyes. Her father prefers realistic portraits, seeing no use for reconstructed scenes. Suddenly, Danielle’s father becomes ill and Danielle finds herself concentrating on the meager tasks of each day. She tries to earn money by following her father’s example in photography, only to meet despair. Her father’s friend soon comes to Danielle’s aid, not only providing her with a job, but also teaching her how useful and marvelous Danielle’s talent can be.

Appropriately, McClintock provides the text and illustrations for this intriguing book. Her passion for art grabs the reader. She uses watercolor, sepia ink, and gauche throughout. The theme is poignantly supported as a result of McClintock both writing and illustrating this piece. This book was very effective.


A 5+ FIReviewed by Tom Wright

This tragic story takes place in 1993 and is set in Kosovo, formerly a province in Yugoslavia, and through its telling, Mead acquaints the reader with the terrible conditions and deprivations that exist there. Through this well-written, fictional tale of a boy and his family, the author allows us a look at the dynamics involved in occupation, and the noble and ignoble actions it engenders.

Adem is a fourteen-year-old ethnic Albanian who, along with the majority of his Kosovo compatriots, is victimized and terrorized by Serb
forces who claim the land is theirs. This has placed enmity between former friends and neighbors, who now must live separate and unequal existences. Mead is adept at showing the many moral dilemmas that all concerned must face. This is particularly true of young children. Adem’s sister chooses to voice her resistance through poetry and is shot while reciting her poem. This incident brings more attention to the family, and the authorities feel compelled to commit further acts of violence against them as an example to the rest of the population. Adem’s father is beaten, their home is repeatedly ransacked, and soldiers carve a cross (a symbol of their religion) on Adem’s chest.

There is no solace or silver lining in this story. Only the perplexing issue of hundreds of years of conflict between these ethnic groups. With no little irony, it is a gypsy that gives his life to help Adem escape the terror. In reflecting, Adem knows that he went to the gypsies for help only out of desperation, for the Albanians looked down upon the gypsies just as the Serbs disdain the Albanians. Despite this moroseness, this is a story that needs to be told and can give young readers a human perspective to the sound bites they may encounter in this part of the world.


Reviewed by Pat Birkedahl

This retelling of Psyche's and Cupid's love story and the wrath of a jealous Venus is Psyche's first-person narrative interspersed with third-person narrative in italics.

Psyche considers her beauty a burden that invites the envy of her sisters and the awe of everyone else. She longs for a husband; but suitors are intimidated by the beautiful princess. Venus is jealous of Psyche and sends Cupid to punish her. Instead, he falls in love, spiriting Psyche away to a magical place. She doesn’t know the identity of the lover who comes to her every night, though she falls deeply in love with him. She honors his wishes and promises she will never look upon him.

Then Psyche’s interfering relatives enter the story. Psyche’s sisters convince her she must look at her lover. As a result of her disobedience, Psyche is cast from Cupid's presence. Venus sends horrendous trials Psyche's way, but she perseveres because of her love for Cupid. Cupid is moved by Psyche's devotion, and he succeeds in having her made a goddess.

Psyche's first person story is conversational. Teens may identify with her longing for love and sexual fulfillment. The third-person narrative fills in background and reveals scenes of the gods interacting with each other. The two methods blend for a balanced tale bringing mythology to life.
B 9+ NF BI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Gary Paulsen tells of Cookie, his female lead sled dog, her litter of pups, and how the dogs learn their responsibilities as sled dogs and as loyal friends to their master. Paulsen writes introspectively about how his attitudes about life and living have matured over the years through his association with his sled dogs. Paulsen's wife’s humorous, and sometimes exasperating contacts with the dogs are also included in this biographical account. Her beautiful paintings of the dogs are included as well.

I have read many of Paulsen's books and was anxious to read another. This book is very different. It is a personal story of devotion to a special animal. The book lacks a driving story line and is better suited for a more mature young reader, who will be able to stick with the book despite this lack. The reader will then be able to identify with the deep feelings of love and respect expressed.

In the middle of the book, the author used stronger language than necessary in expressing his anger to those who think animals are expendable and unable to learn. I thought it was unfortunate that this inappropriate language was included in a book that the publisher targeted for 10-year-olds. I did keep reading the book, and Paulsen came through at the end to capture me in the warmth of his deep feeling for Cookie.


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Melanie's mother has begun to act strangely. Melanie seems to be the only one who notices. Her father, who works long hours, avoids noticing. The situation rapidly deteriorates as her mother begins to act inappropriately in public. Melanie doesn't know what is wrong, but she knows something terrible is happening. She fears her mother is drinking or going crazy. When Melanie's father can no longer escape from noticing, he takes his wife to an alcohol treatment center; however, a few days later he receives a call telling him alcohol is not the problem. His wife has Huntington's disease, an incurable, progressive deterioration of the nervous system that is genetic and has a 50% chance to be passed on. Now Melanie must handle the anger and grief of loss, as well as the very real fear of her own possible susceptibility to the same dreadful disease.

This book is not only about living with illness, but about living with oneself when disaster strikes. The reality of sudden tragedy is dealt with sensitively, showing how both Melanie and her father struggle with feelings for which neither has prepared for. With great compassion, and even humor, Rubalcaba shows how Melanie progresses from feeling bewildered, angry, and
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fearful, to feeling an acceptance of her mother and
a tentative beginning of hope for herself.

"There were times working in the
gardens I'd sit back on my heels
and look over at Papa on his
hands and knees working the
soil...Suddenly it would come to
me I'd gone nearly half a day
without dwelling on my
becoming afflicted...One day I
might be able to drop a spoon
and just pick it up without
thinking a thing of it, the way
normal folks do. One day I
might go dancing without
thinking of St. Vitus. Today I
planted a rose garden with Papa."

$20.95. 246 pp.

A 5-8 FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

The novel begins in the year 1941. Tomikazu
Nakaji, born in Hawaii, is an American citizen;
but his parents and his grandfather are Japanese
citizens. Tomi attends a local school with his
friends Billy White, Mose and Rico Corteles (of
Portuguese descent), and with the neighborhood
bully, Keet Wilson (in whose home Tomi's mother
works in as a maid). Tomi's family may be poor;
his father is a simple fisherman, but life is not at
all bad. Tomi doesn't realize until after the
Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor just how
prejudice and hatred work. His father's pigeons
are all killed by the local police because they
suspect they are carrier pigeons to deliver
messages to the enemy. His father's fishing
partner is killed and their boat is sunk when they
return to Pearl Harbor not flying the American
flag. The last straw is when Tomi's crippled old
grandfather is arrested as a spy. Tomi learns first
hand that fear and suspicion can be used to justify
intolerable acts.

The book is very well written and the
characters are developed in such a way that you
feel you personally know and understand each of
the people in this story. Even though you may not
agree with their actions, you may understand why
they feel as they do.

Schnur, Steven. *Beyond Providence.* Harcourt
245 pp.

* 7-12 FI Reviewed by Marlene Mabey

Twelve-year-old Nathan Burns looks forward
to being old enough to begin farming the family
land. He can not imagine doing anything else,
although the farm is a struggle and has become
run down. Life has never been easy there, but it
gets worse when the never-ending battle between
Nathan's father and older brother drive his Mama away. Cousin Kitty comes to stay and her outgoing and cheerful personality help to warm the Burns' home. Uncle Ray comes and helps to lighten the work load and be a friend as well.

*Beyond Providence* is a captivating story from the first page. It is a wonderful story of relationships and growing up that will be a favorite for readers to return to again and again.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Middle-school student John "Crash" Coogan is a cocky, jock football and track enthusiast who helps torment fellow student, Penn Webb. Crash and Penn have know each other since the first grade, but only Penn has made any effort at friendship. Crash doesn't want to be bothered with Penn, who doesn't fit Crash's mold of an ideal friend. Penn and his aging, white-haired parents are Quakers, vegetarians, thrift-store buying people who turn the other cheek and are always cheerful and perky. To make matters worse, Abby, Crash's little sister, idolizes Penn's gentle ways. Like Penn, she chooses not to eat "anything with a face;" starts wearing "Stall the Mall" t-shirts, even through Mrs. Coogan's real estate firm is handling the mall's development; and chases away the Chemlawn man to save her backyard natural habitat plans. When grandfather (Scooter) comes to join the Coogan family, all goes well for a while: Scooter's home cooked meals and his attendance at his grandson's football games are appreciated, especially since neither parent can break away from the office to attend. But when Grandpa suffers a stroke and Mrs. Coogan decides to down-size, Crash begins to come to terms with his inner self. He no longer delights in tormenting Penn, and his plans to be the school's most cocky jock just don't seem so important. In fact, when Crash and Penn are running neck and neck in the Penn Relays, Penn wins because of Crash's pre-race instructions and last-second encouragement.

Spinelli's humor, realism, and touching descriptions of human inner struggles make this book an adventure.


A 1-6 PB Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Steptoe and Lewis have given a new perspective to differences among people. Steptoe's prose catches the rhythmic speech of a black American city boy; Lewis's soft water colors show the variety of colors and facial features in one American classroom.

More a definition of diversity than a suspense-filled story, the adults in this book gently lead Charles to see that being different is really being yourself. Each human being thinks, talks, looks, and acts like himself. Therefore, being different is the way each person creates his of her own identity. For example, when Charles's mother teases him about his English usage, his daddy remarks that "Charles is just trying to be creative with his language." Or put another way, he's saying what he means in his own special way. Mr. Cohen, their teacher, shows how Spanish, African, Indian, and Chinese people mix together to make Puerto Ricans. Then Charles can see that if Puerto Ricans do not speak Spanish the same way it is spoken in Spain, Puerto Ricans are "being creative too." With that lesson in mind, Charles protects his new Spanish speaking friend from teasing classmates who don't know that looking, talking, and acting different is "just being creative."

The softness of the watercolor illustrations fits the manner in which each adult teaches about differences in people. The voice of the story is not a strident demand for equal rights or a denunciation of prejudice. It is a calm explanation of the fact that "everybody in this
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room (or world) is the result of different people mixing up together."

Charles observes wisely that "if everybody don't kill each other, everybody will get all mixed up together." Creativity is a book that can move us from "killing each other" toward getting "all mixed up together."

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A 6-8 NF Reviewed by Jan Porter

Another volume in the Visual Geography Series, Switzerland in Pictures covers it all. Chapters include: The Land, History and Government, The People, and The Economy. Did you know that one can find palm trees in Switzerland, or that artifacts of an unknown civilization dating back 350,000 years have been found there?

Filled with photographs and maps, this book would be perfect for those country reports every parent dreads. A must for school libraries.

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A 7-10 FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

In 1918, fourteen-year-old Bonnie Rose Shaster comes to live with cousin Audra at her boarding house. Her father has been dead for some years and her mother died less than a year ago. Cousin Audra's large house, recently made a boarding house for economic reasons, is full of progressive women: Audra Devereaux, her sister-in-law; Miss Winnie Devereaux, Audra's daughter; Sally, and her granddaughter, twelve-year-old Claire. All the boarders are men because the bank manager has said that men are the only ones with a reliable source of income.

A new boarder is arriving on the same day Bonnie arrives. Handsome Carson Younger was blinded in France during the war and is very reluctant to mingle with the others. Bonnie reads the paper to him regularly and they become friends. The other three men are of varying temperaments and politics leading to lively dinner conversations, with Mr. Younger commenting from the connecting parlor where he takes his meals.

The novel is woven with historical events such as the labor strikes in Seattle, the Spanish Flu, Women's Suffrage, and Prohibition. Mr. Younger helps Bonnie see that to be truly free, a woman must prepare to provide for her own livelihood. Bonnie helps Mr. Younger (somewhat painfully) to see he also needs to prepare to provide his own livelihood.

In spite of their progressive ideas, the women of the house keep the very old tradition of an Ornament Tree. One tree in the yard is designated to hold the wishes of the family on thin strips of paper. No one ever tells and no one ever reads what is printed on those strips. At first Bonnie wishes to be useful to the family, then decides what to do with her future. Mr. Younger wishes for Bonnie on the past page.

There is subtle suggestion of romance though not expressed because of Bonnie's youth. Thesman does not disappoint her readers, weaving a solid, interesting story with the promise of growth.

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A 4-8 FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

This is a book of short, fractured fairy tales that start out true to the traditional tales, and end up somewhere in left field! For instance, Hansel and Gretel are not the ones done wrong by the wicked step mother, but rather are the evil ones in the story. The princess of The Princess and the
**Pea** does still prove what a marvelous princess she is, but in the process also shows how spoiled rotten she is. Neither the prince nor his mother are any too sad to see her return home.

Like a little lemon in your life? This book is just the thing to add a little unpleasant tingle to a life otherwise filled with too much sugar. This book is recommended for all those who like spooky tales, but preferably not for younger children as they may become confused after reading the tales.

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A preK+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

While the rain continues outside, and after the chores are all done, Noah does his best to keep everyone occupied and happy. Soooo -- "pick your partners and form a square, Then bow and curtsey, pair by pair." Then "walk or waddle, hop or crawl" to the lively tune of the fiddler's bow. But "Don't get too close to the porcupine." When the rain finally stops Noah declares, "Hug your partner, I'll kiss my wife- We're all going to have a mighty fine life."

The story is delightful and the artist's work is unique. Although the style is kind of a cartoon, the illustrator seems to have worked on a very course canvas and gives the appearance of an old master. I look forward to seeing more books by both of these people.

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B preK-3 PB Reviewed by Marlene Mabey

Muffin Pigdoom lives with his family in the Three Counties. Everything is wonderful except for the bullying and thieving Urgs that live there too. One day the Urgs steal Muffin's father's savings, and Muffin takes after them to retrieve the loss. What an adventure takes place! It takes courage and quick thinking for Muffin to outsmart the Urgs and return home.

This original story is the first picture book in the adventure series, *Tales from the Three Counties* by Warren. Young readers will relate to Muffin and enjoy reading about his unforgettable friends and exciting escapades.

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A 8+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Told from the perspective of Greg, a high school senior, *Lean on Me* is a story of five Mormon teenagers who are brought together by their love of singing. Greg, Amber, Jonathan, Brook, and Ryan form an a capella singing group called Fast Forward. Through the course of the novel, the reader sees their relationships with each other, with their brothers and sisters, and with their parents grow and mature.

Although young men will especially enjoy this selection, because of the point of view from which it is told, the book will also be enjoyed by young women. Weyland includes a lot of witty dialogue which makes the characters come alive and the story fun to read. Through Greg's experiences and thoughts, the reader will be able to identify with his challenges of boy-girl relationships, parent-child communication, and pre-mission decision making. Weyland weaves together a variety of characters including a young
man with a drinking problem and a girl with an eating disorder. These characters make the story interesting and realistic, but at times I felt that he was trying to put too many characters, with too many diverse problems into one volume. Weyland is definitely writing for Mormon youth, but this is a selection that any young adult would enjoy. I came away uplifted and positive about the rising generation.


Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham

*Enchanter's Glass* by Susan Whitcher creates a facade of greatness; but upon closer inspection, it is found to contain nothing of significance. While the deeply philosophical theme of how the archetypes and symbolism in fantasy allow us to more clearly see reality, it is very compelling; However, the language, structure, and theme presentation overpower the story and, ultimately, the true message is lost. From the beginning, when the characters are not given any real reason to begin a journey of discovery to the pessimistic resolution, *The Enchanter's Glass* is moralistic, didactic, and strained. Because the characters are stereo-typically presented, the reader is required to build their personalities through previously held beliefs, and so, no true empathetic bond can be achieved. Combining all this with the novel's stale action, illogical event structure, and non-threatening evil, *The Enchanter's Glass* is certainly a tale that should be forgotten.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

*Little House in Brookfield* is the first of a new series of pioneer stories which tell of the growing up years of Caroline Quiner—Ma Ingalls in the *Little House* books. She lives in Brookfield, Wisconsin with her Grandma Quiner, her mother, Charlotte; and her brothers and sisters: Joseph (almost 12), Henry (10), Martha (8), Eliza (3), and baby Thomas. Charlotte Quiner has been a widow for almost a year and this selection tells how this single-parent family meets the challenges of pioneer life as seen through the eyes of five-year-old Caroline.

I loved the *Little House* books as a youngster and I enjoyed Wilkes' treatment of Caroline's year as a five-going-on-six-year-old. Wilkes researched Laura Ingalls Wilder's Aunt Martha's letters, personal accounts of the family, and other sources of pioneer life in the 1800's to be able to successfully carry on the Wilder tradition. The overall tone of the book is warm and loving. When an early frost ruins the harvest of vegetables from the family garden, you feel the hardship that the family must endure, but the message is one of faith and patience in hard times rather than despair. This is largely due to the story being told from Caroline's standpoint. Even though this is almost the 21st century, little girls will easily relate to Caroline as she describes feeding the hens, gathering the eggs, helping with wash day, going to the small town's grocer, anticipating the first day of school, and helping mother bake delicious Christmas bread.

NR FI Reviewed by Tom Wright

This “gothic novel” received a starred review in *Booklist* and was described as having superb pacing and provocative character development as well as being “chillingly believable.” Granted, it is fast paced and riveting, but I found the character development lacking, and I can not consider a tale about lycanthropy and shape shifting particularly believable. It is because of the seductive nature of this story (that *Booklist* finds laudatory) that I cannot recommend it for young adult readers.

Sixteen-year-old Marris travels to England to be an “au pair” for the summer. She is alienated from her mother, and this rather unclear relationship is apparently used to account for inaction at a point of crisis later in the story. Basically she encounters a strange family: a mother who vomits blood, and a strangely detached husband who is at once intimidating and alluring. Throw in two children who continually exchange knowing glances with one another and you just about get the picture. When the mother dies of an apparent suicide (wrists not slashed but gnarled into hamburger), Marris, rather than hightailing it home to Mom, sees an opportunity to take over the matriarchal role. When Derek reveals himself a wolf, Marris volunteers to join the club and vows not to have the weaknesses that her predecessor apparently possessed. They prowl the countryside together, feasting on sheep and Marris even bags a deer. Marris eventually develops misgivings when she realizes this is a rather permanent condition, and Derek turns out to be, well, wouldn’t you know, evil.

While this might be a good read for some fans of the supernatural, I cannot recommend it for the young adult audience. The seductive nature of Marris’ “conversion,” and the general dark cast of the work, push it beyond appropriate, in my opinion, for this age group.

☆☆☆☆☆

**23 Children’s Book and Play Review**

*The Sunflower Family*  
*A Carolrhoda Nature Watch Book*  
by Cherie Winner / photographs by Sherry Shahan


B 3-6 NF Reviewed by Lisa Baer

The sunflower has become very popular in the last few years. You find them growing in flower gardens, printed on clothes and wrapping paper, and used as kitchen decor. This book is about the group of flowers that make up the sunflower or composite family. Sunflowers are different from other flowers because they produce many small flowers on a single head. The flowers produce seeds in a hard shell that are dispersed by wind, gravity, animals, and sometimes cars. Some composites can be used for food, insecticides, and latex. Others, such as ragweed, cause allergic reactions. The desert yellowhead lives on only 20 ares of land in Wyoming, while dandelions and sagebrush reproduce and spread easily. There are over 25,000 species in the sunflower family.

This book is filled with photographs and facts about the composite family and would be helpful in writing school papers. The close-up shots of
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the individual flowers, heads, and seeds are especially interesting. Line drawings and diagrams are included to explain their anatomy and life cycle. The author also includes a table of contents, glossary, and index for ease of use. *The Sunflower Family* would be a good addition to any juvenile botany collection.


* pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Old, gruff, grumpy Mr. Jonathan Toomey would rather be left alone. The children call him Mr. Gloomy. "And though it's not kind to call people names, this one fits quite well." Some claim that Mr. Toomey is the best wood carver anywhere. When the widow McDowell asks him to carve a replacement nativity for the one she has lost, Jonathan grudgingly accepts. The Widow McDowell and her young son, Thomas, come to watch Jonathan carve the figurines. At first, Jonathan is all gruff and grumble, but slowly he becomes used to their presence and just as slowly begins to leave the memory of his tragically dead wife and child behind, and starts to look toward the future.

Though it is not Christmas, this book is too precious to pass up. It was awarded the 1996 Kate Greenaway Medal, given in the United Kingdom for distinguished illustrations. Whether in May, June, or September, a good book is a good book. You can see the rays peeking out of the book even before you open the cover. The words and the pictures work together like a Christmas miracle, bringing warmth, love, and gentle understanding. This book should become as much a Christmas reading tradition as *The Night Before Christmas* and *The Polar Express.* Don't wait for Christmas to read this one.


* 3+ FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Yolen's story, *Wizard's Hall*, is not new to me. Published in 1991, it is one of Yolen's most entertaining books. Our young wizard-to-be, Henry (soon to be known as Thornmallow) enters the hall as an apprentice wizard. He doesn't seem to be the best student ever, in fact he can't carry a tune (very important to spells; but he manages to save Wizard's Hall by doing the only thing he can do. He tries.

Yolen is a gifted reader of her own books, and brings her storytelling experience to the job. A very good recording to add to your library of books-on-tape.


C K-3 PB Reviewed by Jan Staheli

An Italian explorer, looking for China, lands in Miami and discovers a giant race of primitive people who spend their time sleeping, eating, and bowling. He takes a giant back to Italy to do a song-and-dance routine, but discovers people don't understand the giant's charm. Instead, they riot in the streets. The giant is taken back home to Miami and the explorer goes on to discover Boca.

Maybe all the jokes are insider New York jokes. Maybe I've lost my sense of humor. Readers may find this book to be strange and pointless, leaving them scratching their heads and muttering, "Huh??" However, the Sendak illustrations are clever and do what they can to make sense of the senseless.