Book Reviews

Authors

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Book Reviews


Reviewed by Jan Porter

Filled with easy recipes, this cookbook should entice budding chefs right into the kitchen. Directions are simple and carefully illustrated in pastel cartoon drawings. Readers are cautioned to “always ask a grownup for help” when using a toaster. Recipes suitable for beginning cooks include cinnamon toast, strawberry waffles (using frozen waffles), banana shakes, and English muffin pizzas. A favorite might be a mixture of cream cheese, jelly, and walnuts spread on bread. It’s amazing how many things you can make without using a sharp knife!


Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham

Lloyd Alexander, the magnificent master of modern fantasy, has created another stunning masterpiece with his latest novel *The Iron Ring*. Pushed forward by a deep sense of honor, the young King Tamar undertakes a dangerous adventure to fulfill a debt. Along the way, he makes many friends, including a mischievous monkey and a grumbling eagle. He also finds the love of his life. Kept on the edge of the seat until the surprising ending, the reader learns (along with Tamar) stirring lessons about life, class systems, and the truth about honor.

This novel is absolutely the best one that Alexander has ever written. Combining the hard-hitting social commentary of the Westmark trilogy, the playfulness of the Vesper Holly series, the memorable themes and characterization of the Prydain chronicles, and the stirring adventures of *The Marvelous Misadventures of Sebastian* and *The Journey of Prince Jen*, this novel combines the best of Alexander. There are just not enough praiseworthy adjectives to describe *The Iron Ring*’s beautiful language, style, and skillful combination of literary elements. Arguably one of the best children’s books ever written, *The Iron Ring* should not be missed!


Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham

If you believe that childhood is a time of innocence, Francesca Lia Block’s short story collection, titled *Girl Goddess #9*, will show you a completely different truth. Block, best known for her Weezie Bat novels, presents nine starkly realistic stories about girls, their lives, and the challenges they face. Set in a fluorescent pink, retro-seventies, new age, middle-class America, *Girl Goddess #9* frankly discusses such topics as premarital sex, homosexuality, transsexuals, and drugs.

With a few exceptions in the believability and plausibility of characters and their responses, Block’s stories are extremely well-written. All the literary elements—plot, setting, theme, style, and the majority of characters—mesh well together. Unfortunately, the stories’ graphic content gets in the way of the writing. Ultimately, these stories serve better as sociological case studies than...
insight-giving literature. Unless you want a unique and hard-hitting look into some of the realities of life for kids in the nineties, the Girl Goddess #9 is a good book to just pass by.


Adults see tantrums as childish and unbecoming; but for children, tantrums are quite different. Deborah Blumenthal writes The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum from a child's perspective. It is a story about a girl named Sophie, who sees a chocolate-covered cookie in the hands of another child and just has to have it. Watch out!

The illustrations are spectacular—rounded shapes in watercolors. The ground rumbles, the earth cracks, and mountains rise up with Sophie right in the middle of all the commotion. Her mother stands calmly with hands on hips. The sky "tumbles and rumbles and spins, turns, and goes around and around."

Intense emotion mixed with curiosity holds the reader to the end. Will Sophie get what she wants? I would highly recommend this book to any parent or child during the age of tantrums. Hopefully we all outgrow them, just as Sophie does.


In the city, probably in every city, there is a secret place, left over from when the city was woods and streams and wild animals. Bunting tells of just such a place where wild ducks swim and nest, and where even a coyote and opossum may be found. But, warns the book, we must be careful of letting the out secret of such places, because they may become even more rare than they already are.

Both Bunting and Rand have done a nice job with the story: nice, but not exceptional. The pictures are dark (depicting pollution) just what you might expect to find in the city. The story starts at the beginning and goes to the end, nothing exceptional here. This is a nice book, if you are looking for a fiction, picture story on pollution and animal survival.


Dead Letter is about a girl named Herculeah Jones who finds a letter in the lining of a coat she bought at a used-clothing store. The letter says the person who wrote it is going to be killed. Herculeah finds out that this person was named Amanda Cole, and she lived on Elm Street, not far from Herculeah's home. Herculeah goes to Elm Street and gets caught by the murderer, who turns
out to be Amanda Cole’s nephew. The nephew shuts her up in a stable with an attack dog. Just when all seems to be lost, she is rescued by her friend, Meat, and some construction workers. The nephew is then arrested.

I had a few problems with this book. When Herculeah found and read the letter, I wondered how she knew that the writer was a woman. Also, I didn’t like how the story kept switching from Herculeah’s point-of-view to Meat’s point-of-view. However, I liked the suspense of the story and the way the reader could tell what all the characters were like from the moment they were introduced. Overall, I would say this is a pretty good book.

*This reviewer is a talented young reader—age 11.


B 8-12 FI Reviewed by William L. Bryson

Jason and his girlfriend, Kris, love being out in nature, and they often escape to Pinehaven, a wooded haven in their expanding city. When the city council decides to re-zone the area so that a mall can be built there, Jason and Kris form an environmental group of high school students to oppose the new mall. Despite their efforts, the re-zoning effort passes. Upset, Jason and Kris drive upstate to deal with the loss. Followed by the high school bullies, a confrontation leads to an accident that kills one of the bullies and Kris.

The theme of environmental awareness is stressed very well. The first person stream-of-consciousness style does a good job of representing a confused, in-love, thoughtful teenager. Teen sex is implied, but its consequences are not adequately dealt with. The book does a good job of representing the reality and seriousness of teenage love. However, courtesy and consideration for the feelings and views of others are not considered—things are very black and white in this boy’s view. This book tells a compelling story and brings out its themes in a way that validates them as real issues.


A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Genevieve Crossley

During the no-school season, five monkeys lament that there in nothing to do. Each time their mother hears this statement, she points out the plentitude of work present to prepare for their grandmother Bessie’s upcoming visit. The monkeys clean their room, clean the bathroom, beat the rugs, and finally go to the swamp to pick berries for their grandmother. When Grandma Bessie arrives, the monkeys run through the clean house to wash up and put on clean clothes. Ironically, they are oblivious to the fact that a trail of mud and berry juice has been following them. Their hard, time consuming work has been reversed within moments.

This book combines the insights of a parent, with the perspectives of still ego-centric children, resulting in a truly humorous look at reality. The illustrations consist of gouache, pen and ink, on lanaguarelle, hot-press water color paper. These mediums prove very effective. The illustrations are so powerful that irony is strongly felt even though the text carries a neutral tone. When child-tested, a six-year-old’s summation of the book was a smiling, “Oh brother!” Children will “get” this book.
Davey prefers to sit in his room and work on his model airplanes; but his dad thinks he should get out in the fresh air. So Davey is forced to do something he hates—go fishing before dawn. He hates the muddy walk to the sea. He hates the dark water with unknown creatures beneath the smooth surface. He hates his dad for making him go. Davey also fears the things he hates. Then the dinghy is bumped by something so big it lifts the boat out of the water, causing a seam to rupture. As Davey and his dad work together to reach shore, the day dawns and a new understanding grows between them.

Filled with symbolism, this award-winning book is beautifully written and illustrated. Its themes of father vs. son, light vs. darkness, and fear vs. freedom and understanding can be read on many levels.

* Pre-3 PB FI Reviewed by Jan Porter


What do you do when you leave your homework at home or forget to study for the test you are about to take? How can you eat your lunch when you hear buzzing noises from your lunch pail and find your once plump, juicy grapes all dried up? Dakos' collection of poems covers all aspects of school life ranging from “The Goof Who Invented Homework,” to “A Good-bye Poem from a Retiring Teacher.” Dakos has brought together 36 poems that share a bit of fun and good humor to season the unsurmountable challenges school-aged children seem to face. The poems demonstrate just how difficult it is to take tests, make friends, and endure until recess time.

Brunkus' lively illustrations add flavor to the mood of each poem. Each poem will encourage children to solve their problems with creativity.
and humor. Even younger children will easily decipher the moral to be learned from each poem. Dakos' fresh ideas make this a book worth reading and re-reading.


B 8-12 FI Reviewed by April Baadsgaard

Fifteen-year-old Haven is having a summer filled with weddings. Her news-anchorman father is marrying the weather girl he works with, and her sister Ashley is marrying Lewis, a "dull-as-dishwater boy," whom Haven would never pair with her sister. The story revolves around Haven's personal changes as the world around her seems to be falling apart.

In the midst of all the confusion, Haven can't help but look back to a more blissful summer. Her mother and father were still married, and Ashley was dating Sumner. Haven liked Sumner more than all of Ashley's other boyfriends. To Haven, Sumner helped hold her family together. Everyone seemed happy when Sumner was around. After Ashley broke up with Sumner, it wasn't long before things started to change. Haven can't help but think that maybe Sumner could help make things the way they were. Though Haven is in the middle of chaos, she learns that she can't always make things better. She learns to see others differently, and she gains a greater appreciation for those around her—especially Ashley, who has been stressed out and irritable ever since her engagement was announced. Haven also learns that Sumner isn't the perfect boy she once thought he was.

Dessen develops the characters in such a way that the reader can identify with their feelings. This story portrays divorce in a very real setting. It also portrays the thoughts and actions of a normal teenager who is too tall and can never think of the right things to say. *That Summer* is suitable for older readers. There are some adult themes and strong language that come out in the


C 3+ FI Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham

By tuning his other senses into the world around him, a nearly blind Native American boy overcomes his handicap by learning to "see" behind trees. This extraordinary skill, to see what can't be seen, earns the young boy the name of "Sees Behind Trees" and launches him into a strange adventure to lead an old man of the village back to a beautiful land that the man had visited as a child.

Full of fabulous description and imagery, this is a nice coming-of-age story about a boy learning what it means to be an adult. Beyond that, however, this novel has very little to recommend it. The book has the strange feel that it is several short stories that have been unsuccessfully linked together. The plot has strong incongruities, and there are just too many elements packed into 104 pages. The characters are often unconvincing, they undergo very little change, and they seem out of place in what should be their native environment. Overall, the novel seems forced into a mold it doesn't fit, just as if the author consciously selected this culture because they had a rite of passage ritual, instead of letting the story find its own artistic form. This could be a good story to introduce children to Native American culture, but if you're looking for a stirring read, it is best to look elsewhere.

A 4-7 FI Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Ever wonder why on some days everything seems to go wrong? “Maybe it’s a gremlin,” thought John as he got up to fix the television set on the blink. One minute the light cuts out and the electric fire fades, but the next minute everything works fine. This is just one example of the spooky things going on in Granny’s house in Scotland. Robin and her cousin, John, think the house is haunted. What else could explain someone crying in the middle of the night, or the nasty pranks that grow into vandalism? They must find out and put a stop to it.

Eileen Dunlop keeps the reader turning pages in her story of suspense and drama. Family jealousy and loyalty spin a web of events that make no sense until the truth is discovered about Milly and the history of Culaloe. The story will entertain children and adults alike. Dunlop’s story is a remarkable presentation of complex issues, developing characters, and relationships that grow. Even the most reluctant reader will find this book entertaining.


A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Genevieve Crossley

The ghosts Henry, Lucy, George, and Edward head to Scotland in search of the Loch Ness monster. Though the creature appears several times throughout the book, the ghosts miss the monster every time due to various distractions.

This humorous tale is child-tested, resulting in a two-thumbs-up appraisal. Significantly, this book is also a good source to introduce children to aspects of Scotland such as: Loch Ness, Herding, rolling hills, run down castles, the surname prefix “Mac,” bagpipes, Scottie dogs, and plaid patterns. Further sub-topics which could prompt adult/child discussion include: convertibles, ferryboats, rowboats, telescopes, and tripod cameras.

The cartoonish illustrations for this book are simple, yet effective. Likewise, the text moves in a “less is more” fashion. Both text and illustration blend to form a very enjoyable book.


A K-6 NF Marsha D. Broadway

From Albania to the United States, sidewalk games from twenty-six countries are described in colorful, two-page spreads. Each game includes brief facts about the country, game directions, and equipment needs. Small world maps, with each game, identify the location of the country. A helpful classified index arranges games by continent, grade level, and number of players. Games are also suitable for indoor play.

An excellent enrichment source for social studies and multicultural studies, this title should be considered for all elementary school library media centers. Scout leaders will also find fun activities that require minimal equipment to share with troop members.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

From her apartment window, an elderly woman watches Kim huddled over something in the trash-strewn lot. Is the child burying drugs and/or money? Hobbling down to the vacant lot,
the woman inspects the newly dug holes and finds only lima bean seeds. Ana, the elderly lady, begins the daily ritual of “spying” on the young girl who daily pours thermos-bottle water over the little mounds. With a pair of newly purchased binoculars, Ana finds, after a four-day absence of the little girl, that the plants appear to be to be dying. Summoning her neighbor, Wendell, Ana implores him to help her rescue the emerging, but wilted plants. Wendell, a school janitor who can’t change much of anything about his personal life, decides that he can make a change in this trash-cluttered vacant lot by removing the rubble.

The efforts of these three invigorate an entire neighborhood. A cab driver hopes to earn extra money by driving garden-fresh lettuce to gourmet restaurants on his route. A pregnant Mexican teenager must deal with the life she’s carrying, as well as her own life, and the life of the plants her counselor encourages her to raise as part of her GED program. People who’ve never had a reason to speak to one another find that the life Mother Earth gives to their seeds lends an energy of community to their own lives. Over the spring and summer, the once-vacant lot bursts into flower and vegetable patches as resplendent and diverse as the hands which work her soil.

Told in interwoven vignettes and in non-offensive language and scenarios, Seedjolks is appropriate for the reluctant reader, exploring multiculturalism, a read-aloud selection, or a trip for any who have been, or are engaged in, coaxing life out of Mother Nature’s bowels, and other formidable venues.


B+ 4-8 FI Reviewed by Tom Wright

Perry Dubois is alone in Minnesota’s north woods. This isn’t survival literature in the traditional sense, but Perry finds himself isolated, nonetheless. Perry’s sister was killed in an auto accident when he was eight, and his parents’ marriage couldn’t survive the emotional strain. His father takes Perry north and they live deep in the woods. No neighbors, no school (Perry is home schooled), and no friends.

The subject matter here is not new. There seems to be a plethora of “divorce” and “emotional baggage” books around as of late. However, the writing style is easy and readable and the characters are believable. Not surprisingly, Perry has developed a hard shell, and a character is introduced that gets through it, namely Willow Pestalozzi. She is Perry’s polar opposite. Where Perry is reserved and reticent, Willow is gregarious and impetuous. Predictably, they form a bond and, through this friendship, Perry begins to deal with emotions that have long been buried.

This book doesn’t surprise, but it is warm and well written. Willow’s character is charming and the reader feels Perry’s awkwardness in relating socially once again. There are strong and warm family scenes at the Pestalozzis that affect Perry and his father. The reader sees a gradual reconsideration on the part of the father, and attempts are made to reconnect Perry with his mother.


A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Lillian H. Heil

Shortly after reading George’s ecological mystery, a report by several environmental groups urging protection for the cutthroat leaped out at me in the local newspaper. They reported that the closeups of cutthroats used in the movie A River Runs Through It were actually rainbow trout. No cutthroats could be found. Although George’s book was originally published in 1975 (under the title Hook a Fish, Catch a Mountain), the
cutthroat could still use some more friends to insure its existence.

With plenty of danger (perilous rock climbing, sudden storms, grizzly bears, etc.) and vivid descriptions of the breath-taking Teton mountain scenery, George carefully unravels the mystery of why a huge cutthroat was caught in a spot where cutthroats were no longer supposed to be. George's detailed descriptions of flora and fauna make the reader want to journey to the Teton, with microscope in hand (for the small creatures in the streams) to see first-hand the wonders of the wilderness.

Both educational and exciting, The Case of the Missing Cutthroats is a timely reprint about the habits of a fish that is threatened with extinction.


Grossman's cumulative counting book is absurd, which makes for humorous reading. The narrator's sister ate a variety of outrageous delicacies—from one hare to nine lizards. She has no problem until she eats ten peas. Then, everything comes back up alive and well. The conclusion is drawn that eating healthy foods makes her sick. The book is a classic. The idiocy of the story and conclusion create instant interest. Rhythm and word selection are delightful and add to the repeated pattern. A taste of the text is as follows:

My little sister ate 3 ants.
She even ate their underpants.
She ate 2 snakes. She ate 1 hare.
We thought she'd throw up then and there.
But she didn't.

The illustrations portray an eccentric sister in a variety of settings observed by wide-eyed, amazed onlookers. The illustrations not only support, but enhance the text. Little details such as the caption on little sister's T-shirt: "Save the whales (for dessert)" add to the humor. It is a book which can be enjoyed by all ages. It is an essential choice for any book collection.


Sid Hite presents his second offering about the Dither family of Willow County, Virginia, and it is as enjoyable as the first. Hite's unique writing style flourishes as he describes this charming cast of characters. Each has his or her story to play out—from Leopold Hillacre's efforts to complete his lifelong work, The Comprehensive Guide to Emma Bean's creation of the "astral projector," which allows Archibald Dither to communicate with a soul beyond the veil. Hite guides the reader masterfully between stories until all resolve themselves in the warm pastoral surroundings of Dither Farm.

Hite truly has a way with the language. As the exploits of the Dither clan unfold, a scattering of homespun philosophy appears. One of his favorite topics for rumination in this book as well as Dither Farm is time:

Anyone who has ever visited Willow County knows the place is so flush with time its residents always have plenty to spare. Rarely do Willowites grow anxious about clocks or calendars. Why should they? That would be like Bedouins worrying about the supply of sand . . .

This book can be savored on more than one level. Young people can find the individual plot lines intriguing enough, and the humor quite self-sustaining. More mature readers will certainly appreciate Hite's clever manipulation of the language and his warm reflections of bucolic life.
Regardless of age, there is plenty here to enjoy, and hopefully, more Dither Farm material to come in the future.


Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Kit, Mia, Elaine, and Megan declared “friends til the end” in eighth grade, but the shape of their friendship changes drastically as they move into high school and Kit is suddenly pregnant. Does friendship require keeping your mouth shut, or taking over? Does it mean supplying the TLC that Kit’s mother won’t or can’t provide when Kit has to go to bed? Or giving up their own lives to pave the way for a new one? The girls learn some new things about friendship and about each other as Kit fumbles her way through trying to grow up, without much obvious success.

Actually all the girls have somewhat ordinary growing pains for young adults of the nineties (most without the long-range effects that Kit’s have). Megan drafts an article for the school paper about the sex habits of her schoolmates and circulates it in defiance of the principal’s opposition. Mia breaks up with her steady boyfriend, at least partly because of her racial background, and Elaine suffers from being the steady one. These girls are believable and likeable, and not that far removed from the ones next door or down the block. The discussions of sex, etc. are not graphic, but the attitudes are current. The kids will want this book; however, the librarian may want to read it before recommending it.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Juan Guillermo, a seventeen-year-old Colombian boy, leaves his family in Bogota to visit his grandmother who is a wealthy land owner in the country. During his visit, he discovers more about his family’s background and the political unrest that is affecting his country. Juan finds himself in a complex situation which requires him to choose between being loyal to his grandmother, or to his new-found, activist friends. His romantic feelings for Chia add to the conflict.

Through this selection, young readers can gain a better understanding of a contemporary country’s unrest. Jenkins, born and raised in Columbia, expresses the conflict that Colombians experience as the war between the army and guerilla forces continues. This selection is easy to read. Short chapters move the reader through the book. Readers also have the opportunity to increase their foreign vocabulary, as Jenkins includes a few Spanish words and phrases in the text.


Reviewed by Genevieve Crossley

This nonfiction piece describes the author’s hobby of searching the earth for carnivorous plants. He describes his experiences with bladderworts, butterworts, cobra lilies, giant African sundews, pitcher plants, and Venus flytraps. The illustrations, done in ink line and watercolor, combine with the witty text to create a truly horrifying masterpiece. Who can resist the author’s remark:
14 Brigham Young University

People do all sorts of things in their spare time. There are people who collect yogurt containers and people who make models out of bottle tops. There are beetle hunters and giant-leek growers. Me, I like watching plants that eat animals.

This book should be in every nonfiction collection. It is exciting reading; it’s even suspenseful at times! To top the cake, this piece also serves as an excellent introduction to carnivorous plants. Without hesitation, I wholeheartedly applaud this book.

♦♦♦♦♦


A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Fourteen-year-old Lucy assists a fugitive slave in her escape, performing her late grandfather’s role in the underground railroad. Lucy’s grandfather was a strong influence in her life. She knew he was against slavery, but when he unexpectedly dies, Lucy is faced with an immediate decision: what to do with Afrika, the escaped slave who is hiding inside her grandfather’s clock. As Lucy’s character emerges, hundreds of miles south, a girl named Afrika is fleeing her harsh life as a slave. The reader also becomes acquainted with Afrika and her escape.

The book successfully tells the story of both Lucy and Afrika before weaving the two lives together. Afrika’s escape is dangerous to both characters, which provides a “page-turning” climax. It describes the divisive nature of slavery to families, as well as the bond between two friends. Lucy’s relationship with her grandfather is tender and refreshing. The book is an excellent look at the heroes, both black and white, of the underground railroad.

♦♦♦♦♦


A+ 4-6 NF Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

The shoes people create and wear tell stories about them—how they live, work, and play. Through looking at shoes, the reader travels to every era in time and all over the world. Interesting facts are shared in the divisions of protection, authority, status, fashion, magic, life’s milestones, and play. Some bits of trivia included are the following:

- Eskimo women living on the arctic coast west of Greenland carried their babies naked in their massive reindeer-skin boots. The patterns on the soles of Egyptian sandals left messages for others.
- Professional ballerinas may wear out sixty-five pairs of toe shoes in one month.
- Wealthy people had their servants “break in” their new shoes by wearing them for six months so that they would be comfortable.
- Thomas Jefferson was the first president to wear oxford shoes with shoelaces. At the time it created quite a controversy. Because he was flat-footed and slightly pigeon-toed, President Lincoln found boots uncomfortable and instead wore carpet slippers around the White House.
- One legend says that the practice of binding feet by Chinese women was started by an Emperor whose daughter was born with deformed feet. He didn’t want the future Empress to be embarrassed, so he announced that only women with very small feet could be considered truly feminine and desirable.

The eight-page bibliography gives the reader confidence in the thorough research done for this book. There are 82 superb photographs which allow the reader to see extravagant as well as essential shoes. The book is interesting and well written. The novelty of the topic is certain to draw both young and old readers. It is a must-have for a public or school library.

♦♦♦♦♦

**Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner**

Hedgehog is hungry and in the mood for a "goodie." A cake sounds like just what he needs. Out come the bowls, the flour, the butter, and the eggs. In comes Hedgehog's friend Rabbit, with a suggestion for a better cake—add more flour. He leaves when his mistake is apparent. In comes Squirrel, who also has a suggestion—eggs, shells and all. Owl suggests a nice hot temperature. Then they all leave intending to return when the cake comes out of the oven. Hedgehog quietly puts the mess in the garbage and begins again. He invites his friends back only when a delicious cake is taken from the oven.

This is a fun story of how to be unhelpfully helpful and what to do with well-intentioned suggestions. Lynn Munsinger has long been one of my favorite illustrators and I never pass up a book with his pictures. Although this is a beginning reader, it reads like a story and works well as a read-aloud at storytime.


**Reviewed by Genevieve Crossley**

For children who enjoy picture riddles, this book is a treat! Twelve scenes of excellent photography and ingenius riddle techniques make this piece a delight to work through. This book can literally hold a reader's attention for hours! Each spooky scene holds approximately ten hidden objects, masterfully embedded in the photography. Be aware that these are not simple picture riddles; adult help is required.


**Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner**

Little Pig, "Preston, the Masked Avenger," sneaks all over town yelling "BOO!" just when folks least expect it, scaring them into near apoplexy and disappearing into the night. Mr. Wolf is the exception:

"Boo!" says Preston the Masked Avenger, very quietly, as he sneaks right past. "I may be a super-hero," says Preston, "but I'm not dumb!" And he disappears into the night.

But the fellow Preston the Masked Avenger likes to lie in wait for most is the greatest villain in the universe, his dad. Father and son take great delight in being the last one to pull the prank.

Just in time for the "Thrills and Chills" summer reading program, this is a great read-aloud and a fun family spoof.

* 2-5 BI PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Five-year-old Hiroki Sugihara, the oldest son of the Japanese consul to Lithuania in 1940, was awakened by his mother and aunt one July morning. Hundreds of Jewish refugees from Poland were seeking visas to escape the Nazis. Authorized to allow only a few refugees into Japan, Chinue Sugihara requested permission three times from the Japanese government to issue the hundreds of needed visas and each time the answer was no. “That night, he said to my mother, ‘I have to do something. I may have to disobey my government, but if I don’t, I will be disobeying God.’” After the family agreed that they must help the refugees, Sugihara issued thousands of handwritten visas until he was ordered to go to Berlin.

Told through the eyes of a five-year-old, the events are related with a poignant naivety. Complementing the text are emotionally powerful illustrations rendered in sepia tones by applying encaustic beeswax on paper and scratching out the images, then adding oil paint and colored pencil. In the afterword, Hiroki Sugihara tells of the family’s imprisonment in a Soviet internment camp, and his father’s forced resignation from diplomatic service. This story, about having the courage to do the right thing, should be shared with every child for its historic and human value. An outstanding choice for any library-school, public, or personal.

★★★★


A 6-9 NF Reviewed by Kuuponani Naluai

This book focuses on the disease Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It begins by defining the disease as one that causes hyperactivity and other behavioral problems. It defines ADD by showing its effects on the people who have it, as well as on those associated with that person. Included in this book are also quotes and stories by people personally affected by the disease.

It seems like Moragne designed this book so that people with ADD could read it. People with this disorder have a hard time sitting still for long periods of time and they become distracted quickly; but this book is fast-reading and easily comprehensible. The print is large and there are only about ninety pages. Moragne also includes a lot of pictures with big headlines and a lot of bold areas. Moragne will concentrate on explaining one aspect of ADD, and then quickly switch to a story, a quotation, a new aspect, or a picture on the page.

I find it helpful that the book is written this way so that people with ADD can read it. It is important that they be able to read books that deal with their disease so they can learn to understand it and control it. I think that books like this one can also give hope to those who are struggling, as it shows how other people have overcome the same problem.

★★★★★

**B 7-9 FI** Reviewed by Jan Porter

Alex Shafer is *always* in trouble! He’s in trouble at home, in trouble at school, and in trouble with the law. He is *always* telling lies—even when he doesn’t mean to. But then, his mother has *always* lied to him. Now Alex has a chance to start over. He loves living on the farm and working with his grandfather. He loves coming home from school to warm cookies and his grandmother’s affection. However, things are far from perfect. He doesn’t fit in at school, and trouble seems to seek him out.

The author does a good job of getting inside the brain of a troubled adolescent. *Liar* deals with Alex’s struggles to overcome obstacles, to accept responsibility for his actions, to forgive others, and to accept love by believing himself loveable.

★★★★


**A 4-7 FI** Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

“*It’s a big house,*” thought Remi, as he tried to get to sleep. His bedroom window was sealed shut by what could have been a century of paint. He tried to open it when the house began to shake as the engine came closer. It was too dark to see clearly, but a fierce heat from a headlamp and the shrieking of steel upon steel made Remi crouch low. Then the train car passed from Remi’s sight. “Did you sleep well, my son?” asked his mother. “Yes, except for the train in the night.” His parents both shrugged their shoulders. “We did not hear a train.” When Remi finds out he is the only one who can hear the train, he decides to ask Niya, his neighbor living downstairs, for help. Together they find out the truth behind a murder and a ghostly night train that threatens them with death.

The strength of the book is in the growing relationship between Niya and Remi. The


**A- 6+ BI** Reviewed by Jan Staheli

John Ronald Reuel Tolkein was a quiet, scholarly man who could lecture in the Gothic language, who wrote about and taught linguistics at Oxford University, who was injured in World War I, who married his first love and stayed married for fifty years, and who had a family and took great pleasure in being with them. These adventure they both take, into a supernatural realm, is appealing to both young people and adults. Jess Mowry uses jargon popular with African American inner-city kids which makes the story seem authentic. The suspense lasts right up to the last chapter. Definitely a book worth reading.

★★★★
facts tell you only a small part about his life because he was immersed for most of it in the monumental struggle going on in his other world—Middle Earth—where hobbits, dragons, orcs, and wizards met in splendid battle for good over evil. His massive work included the creation of a completely new language of “elvish,” a mythology and history of Middle Earth, geographical maps, and cultural chronicles that established a brand new world which seemed entirely real to those who read and took to heart his grand inventions.

This biography tells Tolkien’s life with heavy emphasis on his fantasy writing—how he started, his difficulties and triumphs, and the influences in his life that led him onward in his remarkable achievement. It would be very interesting for any child or adult who has read and loved The Hobbit, or the trilogy of Ring books, as it shows Tolkien to be a person of many facets, and one who kept working on his dream in spite of trials and fears.


Peck has developed interesting, humorous, and believable characters: Aaron, who is always on the verge of computer discovery; Josh, who is mainly interested in not having to go to soccer summer camp; boy-crazy Heather; and lonely Miss Mather. As I silently read the expressive dialogue between the characters, I thought how perfect this would be as a read-aloud selection for home or school. This is an all-around fun book!


Stan, a sixteen-year-old former tennis player, stops coaching the “runts” to help his friend Ginny get out of her rut. They help each other to understand life and friendship better as Ginny’s game improves and she goes back on tour. Stan learns what it is like to share important things with someone special, through letting go of his fear and embarrassment in his relationship with Ginny.

I recommend the book because it is an entertaining story about real friendship. It’s not deep, but it’s a good portrayal of teenage life and some struggles which most teens go through with the changes of adolescence. There is nothing in this book that would cause me to hesitate in using it with junior-high or high-school students.


Filled with drawings, photographs, and quotes from primary sources, Life in the South answers questions about the everyday existence of common people. How did people make candles? What did they eat? What kind of clothes did they wear during the Civil War? What did they use for toilet paper? This book not only gives information about the war and its causes and ramifications, but
it also tells how the lives of Southerners changed during and after the confrontation. It examines the hierarchy among slaves, as well as the caste system among whites. The lives of women and children are discussed. Did you know that boys could do almost any chore except milk the cows?

"The Way People Live" series strives to flesh out the traditional, two-dimensional view of people in various cultures and historical circumstances. This book, as one of the series, does just that.


*C 8-12 FI Reviewed by Heather Hodgkinson*

*Remembering Mog* begins with an ambiguous opening line. It is uncertain whether the "she's home" refers to Annie's denial of her sister's death, or to her cousin, Reilly. Annie's sister, Mog, has been murdered and the family is forced to deal with the unexpected death. Annie's mother is in denial throughout the book and the rest of the family avoids all confrontation with the issue. Annie eventually seeks help before leaving for college.

The novel shows, very effectively, the problems that can occur from denial and the benefits of facing the fears and sorrows that accompany death. The book also deals with love and love lost through the relationship between Annie and Bobby, Mog's old boyfriend. Rodowsky's voice in the novel is appealing. His characters are strong, and his use of dialogue moves the story forward.

The major flaw in the novel is in Mog's death. In a flashback to Mog's death, the detective tells the family that Mog "was shot twice in the head and once in the chest." In a later flashback to the funeral, Annie can't believe that Mog is dead, even when she sees her lying in her coffin. It doesn't seem logical to have the casket open if Mog received two shots to the head.

Despite the inconsistency, this book provides a good representation of the problems that can occur while trying to deal with death. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to gain insight to the various ways people deal with difficult issues.


*B Pre-2 NF Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen*

African wildlife is presented in panoramic views. On each page, the reader lifts a flap to view a close-up of the animal described in the text. The illustrations are excellent, the animals are realistic, and the scenery around them is detailed. The text on each page begins with an adverb and is rich in description. However, the audience interested in lifting the flaps is younger than the one who could understand and appreciate the rich text. The flaps may not be durable enough for the wear and tear they would get in a lending library.


*A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Lillian H. Heil*

Schneider's strength, as a writer, is showing relationships between peoples and cultures. Her purpose in this book is to show the trading route from China to the Western World of Rome—the route from the Dragon to the Eagle. The trip is tied together by what happens to a bolt of blue silk purchased by Han Tzu, the Chinese caravan leader, as it travels across thousands of miles of forbidden terrain to Rome. Schneider describes the land, the people, and the cultural background of each person who trades for the blue silk. Even
the blue silk becomes a kind of a character because its beauty seems to bring out the best in each of its purchasers.

*Between the Dragon and the Eagle* would be a good read-aloud book to use with a map so that the caravan route could be marked as the story progressed. Another book which would enliven this study is Lily Toy Hong’s *The Empress and the Silkworm*, a picture book telling the story of the discovery of silk (Albert Whitman & Co., 1995).

Schneider’s book is stronger at revealing the historical relationships between people, land, and cultures, than as an exciting adventure story. However, the strength of these connections drives the reader to find out what happens to the blue silk. It is a satisfying story filled with historical information.

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A K+ PB FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Thembi’s Gogo (grandmother) rarely leaves her home yard. She is too old and feeble. When all South Africans are permitted to vote for the first time, Gogo is determined to cast her ballot. Her worried family does not know how she’ll be able to take the bus and then stand in long lines at the polling stations. Thembi’s mother marshals the relatives. Mr. Ramashu, a rich uncle, sends his car and driver for Thembi’s family. Gogo, as a black South African, casts her vote for the very first time.

Lush pastels on sanded board illuminate the text which describes South Africa’s historic polling procedures, including the ingenious invisible ink used to ensure that voters only vote once. With an endorsing statement from Nelson Mandela, President of the Republic of South Africa, this picture book is a window into the feelings of a people determined to exercise their right to vote. The text and pictures also chronicle the love and determination of an extended family to respect their elders and to make things happen.

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C 6-8 FI Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Leo’s agreement, to help his friend Tim break into the art world, has terrifying side effects when both are abducted by aliens and involved in a major outer-space power struggle. All of the standard science-fiction machinery comes into play as the two boys are subjected to invasive experiments, separated (Leo is returned to face the music at home alone), and betrayed repeatedly by people they should be able to trust. Some slightly
original twists occur with the use of Tim’s drawings, showing the effects of ecological irresponsibility, although that was not their intended use. There are occasional strokes of intelligence when Leo enlists the TV station in his cause and shows the world the drawings, thereby defusing their power over one of the alien forces. However, as is usually true in the genre, the aliens prove older and wiser, and the last page precludes a sequel. Sleator has wide experience in the fantasy field, but he’s done better than this one.

★★★★


A- 9+ FI Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Johnny Dixon’s best friend, Fergie, is out of town for the summer, so Professor Childermass arranges for Johnny to work at the Gudge Museum. Johnny fears this will be a boring summer, but soon things start happening. Johnny makes a new friend, Sarah Channing, who plays baseball and becomes Johnny’s sidekick as the mystery at the museum unfolds. A collection of items once owned by a wizard, living during Puritan times, is housed in the museum. A strange man, Mattheus Mergal, comes to town determined to steal the collection. He believes the objects will give him great power; and as Johnny, Sarah, and the Professor become more deeply involved in the bizarre affair, it seems he is right. The object of greatest power is a wooden hand made by the old wizard himself. If Mergal can obtain that hand, the consequences could be terrible and terrifying.

Brad Strickland completed four of John Bellairs’ books after Bellairs died, unexpectedly. This is his first solo effort using Bellairs’ characters and style, and it is well done. Johnny has kept his timidity, and Professor Childermass, his curmudgeonlyness, and their antagonist is appropriately menacing and supernatural. The new friend, Sarah, is a good foil for Johnny—eager where he is shy, outspoken and assertive where he is reticent. The story moves smoothly, inviting the reader to suspend disbelief as Johnny is attacked by a lightning storm, chased by a skeleton, and imprisoned inside a snow globe. The threat to Johnny is frightening enough to give readers a thrill, but not intense enough to produce full scale nightmares. The Hand of the Necromancer is a welcome continuation of John Bellairs’ tradition of hair-raising adventure stories for young people.

★★★★


* 7+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Gen, the king of Sounis’ prisoner, is hauled out of his cell because his cockiness and abilities as a thief are to be utilized by the king’s scholar, the magus, for an upcoming mission. The magus’ mission, as the filthy and unkempt Gen finds out, is to steal Hamiathes’ Gift, a precious stone hidden by the king of Eddis, prior to his death. It is coveted by Sounis and Attolia, the two countries bordering Eddis, because it is rumored that the stone confers immortality on its possessor. On the mission, Gen is inept around horses, whines about his fatigue, and talks boldly while scoffing and correcting the magus’ stories of ancient gods and goddesses. Thieving skills intact, Gen secures the stone, but not for the magus or the king of Sounis–Gen gives the stone to his cousin, the Eddisian Queen.

This is an adventure/fantasy with excellent characterization that treats the question of loyalties. It also asks: “What is the value of reading, writing, and the study of history, languages, and cultures?” Gen discovers that the dual brain-and-brawn combination outwits the singular emphasis of one or the other.

★★★★

* 2-4 PB FI Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Paul Bunyan and his giant bride, Carrie McIntie, hew and mold the U.S.A. in their daily activities and leave it better than they found it in this new, very-tall tale by Audrey Wood. Did you ever know where Mammoth Cave came from? Well, Carrie hollowed it out, looking for her wishbone. Barren Utah’s red rocks made a safe playground for young Jean Bunyan (There’s a French Canadian ancestor here somewhere!), while Paul logged up in Montana, and what a sandpile Bryce Canyon turned out to be! From coast to coast and top to bottom, the Bunyan family make their mark—and when the earth’s frontiers are used up? Guess what!

David Shannon’s illustrations are remarkably apt for this giant story, cheerfully detailed with a kind of sculptured solidity that well fits their gigantic subjects. They’re also well-suited for read-aloud, large and brightly colored. The whole is a tall tale production directed at younger grades who may or may not know Paul Bunyan; but they’re not likely to forget him after this introduction. Incidentally, don’t miss the small details—several laughs lurk there.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Jan Staheli

Magic is here, accepted and worked with (or against), used and fought, taken seriously and laughed at. There are werewolves, enchanted roses, cats and unicorns, kings and witches, a soldier with a sword, beautiful sisters who love and hate, and a frying pan of doom. A student is tormented by the Lorelei, a sleeping princess in a castle more than one hundred years old. There is even a “Quick After-Battle Triple Chocolate Cake* recipe which begins:

First, round up the prisoners and have them make a good fire. Pile shields around it to hold in heat. Assemble ingredients: **butter the size of a good spear head, a good big fistful of brown sugar** . . . In somebody else’s helmet, beat butter and [sugars] together—make sure helmet is clean before using!

Each story is either absorbing, funny, enlightening, or all of the above. The characters live, breathe, and deal with life in convincing ways that also entertain and teach the reader about friendship, courage, and enduring love. They would be a welcome addition to any collection, especially for those who love fantasy.