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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

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**B Pre-3 PB** Reviewed by Marisol Wharemate

Many children are told "Watch out, or the 'boogie' man will get you." Latin American children are warned about La Llorona, the weeping woman who is looking for children to replace her lost ones. *Maya's Children* is a variation of the folktale about La Llorona. In Anaya's book, Maya is born with a birthmark of a shining sun on her shoulder. When the chief priest sees this birthmark, he thinks Maya is a child of the Sun God. This means Maya will live forever; Thus Señor Tiempo, the God of Time, becomes angry because Maya will never age or die. Since Maya will live forever, he decides to take her children from her as revenge. Maya's parents take her to a house by the lake, hoping she will be safe from Señor Tiempo. When Señor Tiempo discovers where Maya is hiding, he goes to her disguised as a wise man. He deceives Maya and takes her children away from her. Maya weeps for her children and goes through town crying "Mis Niños!" (My Children!) The people of Maya's village are afraid that she will try to take their children, so they call them to come inside.

Rudolfo Anaya has changed this folktale so that it is not as cruel as the original, but it is still a tragic story. (The original legend claims that La Llorona took the life of her own children, rather than losing them to Señor Tiempo.) Anaya has done a good job of making this book appropriate for younger children. *Maya's Children* is recommended to those who enjoy reading folktales or picture books. It is an interesting book to introduce young children to Latin American culture.

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**A 4+ FI** Reviewed by Tom Wright

In 1815, the Nye family pulled up stakes in Connecticut and set off on a harrowing journey to the wilderness of western New York state. This is an account of eleven-year-old Remembrance ("Mem") Nye and her reaction to the experience. Mary Jane Auch has done a wonderful job of integrating the toil, danger, fear, and humor that accompany such an undertaking.

This is part pioneer saga and part survival story. Young readers should readily respond to both components. Somewhat reminiscent of Wilder's *Little House* books, *Journey to Nowhere* packs considerably more action into its pages. While the frequency of the events may not be quite plausible, young readers will appreciate the adventure. The author has spent considerable time researching the geographic area and time period. This will be the first book in The Genesee Trilogy, named after the area in northwestern New York that held great promise for homesteaders.

Auch states that she "had to learn how it felt to be an eleven-year-old girl in the early nineteenth century. . . . Today, a child moving to a new city is full of anxiety about what the new neighborhood and school will be like, but 180 years ago, Remembrance Nye was moving to a place with no neighborhood, no school--just the
endless forest." Auch also ably illustrates the pressure that this kind of move can put on marital relations. Female settlers were not always "happy campers" in these situations. Given the opportunity, young readers will enjoy this account and look forward to the following additions to the trilogy.


* 2-6 PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

When her widowed mother joins the army, Sumi stays with her grandmother on East Blossom Hill, and they watch the trains below. The passing of the trains inspires Grandmother to recount her own escape on a train during the Korean War. Fleeing with her husband and two young children from the communists in North Korea, Grandmother relives the sadness surrounding the little family as Grandfather sacrifices his own life to make sure that his family escapes to freedom aboard the tightly packed train bound for South Korea. Now Sumi and Grandmother look forward to the day when a train will bring Sumi’s mother home to them.

Realistic watercolor paintings punctuate the text, which details a family genealogy of heartache and reunion. Here we find great insight into the human aspect of the Korean War, the Korean Americans serving their country, military mothers and the effects of their absence on their families, as well as the pride a military family feels.


B 6-8 FI Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Annie Armstrong cannot think of a science project. She is the only girl enrolled in the enriched science class, but at the moment her brain does not feel enriched. She wants to become an astronaut alongside her best friend Claude—until other interests come along for Claude, and he no longer has time to be with her. Annie quarrels for the first time with Claude, and soon finds she must pursue her dream solo. Not only is she estranged from Claude, but her friends tease her about wanting to attend “Egghead High.” Then a dear friend and neighbor passes away. In addition, her father never has time to attend her extracurricular activities, and she begins to wonder if anyone cares about her.

The pressures of growing up and feeling lonely seem to ease when Annie receives an invitation to visit her brother and his wife in New York. While in New York, Annie comes to understand why her father works two jobs. Suddenly she feels a deep appreciation for her parents and the new world opening itself up to her view. She discovers great black artists and historic black leaders. Upon her return home, Annie finds renewed courage to face her future.

Although this book may appeal more to girls, the follies of first love are shared by both sexes. Boys, as well as girls, will enjoy reading about travel to new places, whether in space or to a new state. All children must learn to understand their parents and appreciate the restrictions they put on them, as Annie came to appreciate the sacrifice made by her father in her behalf. This book supports the value of education and sacrifice. It also show that opportunities are not as far away as the moon, if you work hard and never give up.


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Reviewed by Janet Francis

Catriona (Cat) is a classic character in a classic story—the child dropped by her parents because their lives are too busy, raised by her grandmother, bullied at school, and catapulted into a custody fight between her parents and her grandmother. Now to flesh out details: Cat’s grandmother is a famous physician, escaped from a Russian disaster, who dresses in black leather and rides a Harley Davidson. Cat’s parents are actors (not very good ones) whose reality is anything but virtual; and the bully who makes her life miserable belongs to a gang who tries to murder an old woman.

Cat is a good narrator—observant and bright, but not unfailingly so. What she is good at is love and reality, not a bad combination for a child of the nineties. There are no trite plot twists here, just real people in real circumstances with real misunderstandings. Well, maybe the parents are a little wooden—after all, consider their lifestyle! This book is well worth the reader’s time.

★★★★


Pre-1 FI PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

My young children loved Berenstain Bear books when they were little and I enjoyed reading them, so I was thrilled to see a new set of books centered around this interesting bear family. The four books in the Berenstain Bear Toddler Books series depict the bears in traditional real-life family situations. Along with the title listed above, the series includes The Berenstain Bears at the Super Duper Market (ISBN 0-679-88184-0), The Berenstain Bears Say Good Night (ISBN 0-679-88183-2), and The Berenstain Bears’ Four Seasons (ISBN 0-679-88182-4).

In a day when so many nontraditional aspects of family life are being emphasized, these books are a breath of fresh air! In The Berenstain Bears Are a Family, the rhyming text portrays a family that works, plays and cares for each other. They deal positively with problems and understand and love each other. The Berenstain Bears Say Good Night shows both mother and father helping with the bedtime routine of bath time, story time and good night kisses. The entire family goes shopping at their favorite store in The Berenstain Bears at the Super Market. Finally, The Berenstain Bears’ Four Seasons tells of the excitement and positive wonder of each season. “Old Earth has circled around the sun. Another set of seasons has begun.” Arbuthnot states in her book Children and Books that stories that portray humans “in fur” “must be told with light-hearted wisdom.” A positive look at the world and families is evident in these short toddler picture books.

★★★★

A 1-4 NF PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

It's Mama Bear's birthday, and Papa Bear helps Brother and Sister Bear plan and prepare breakfast in bed for Mama. Make-it ideas included in this *First Time Do-It* series selection include making a “bouquet,” a napkin ring out of paper cups, and a bed tray out of a cardboard box. And how do you make the entire event enjoyable for Mama? That's right, clean up the kitchen! Practical hints on keeping the kitchen in order while cooking are explained and illustrated.

This Berenstain book helps children know ways they can positively contribute to the family at mealtimes and special events. Parents and teachers can both benefit from the practical planning, preparing, and cleaning ideas for children's cooking adventures. Children will want to complete the make-it ideas and recipes, so be ready to supervise so they can have that "I-can-do-it" experience.


* 5+ NF Reviewed by Janna Wise

*Life in the North During the Civil War* is a thorough and impressive work, describing an important era in U.S. history. The book is part of the series entitled *The Way People Live,* and the reader comes away with the feeling that perhaps life was indeed like this. The author manages to cover a wide range of aspects of the Northern lifestyle—from rural to urban, poor to rich. The fads of the era, leisure activities, and other parts of day-to-day life are presented, so that one feels she has stepped back into a time of "real" people rather than the stock figures often presented in history books. The format of the book breaks down the various aspects of Northern life into chapters and sections, allowing the reader to peruse the book for the subjects of most interest to her. This book would be a wonderful addition to any bookshelf.

Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

When Amy doesn’t show up to babysit, Erin knows something is wrong. Amy always shares secrets with Erin while babysitting, like telling her about the secret cabin in the hills where Erin believes Amy is staying. Erin must convince her parents that tracking animal prints in the snow is an excellent science project, and is the reason she must explore the snowy hills behind their home. “Don’t get lost in that imagination of yours,” says her father. Angry and upset, Erin decides Amy’s rescue is all up to her.

However, it’s not all up to Erin. She must now work with Tiffany, whom her teacher assigns to be her science project partner. The idea of exploring the hills does not seem so excellent anymore. How can she work with a girl she hardly knows, and one she believes to be a “sissy”?

When the two girls get caught in a spring blizzard, Erin begins to appreciate how useful Tiffany is, and their science project turns into a journey of survival. They must depend on each other.

Readers, as well as Erin and Tiffany, find themselves giving more thought to what supplies are needed when snowbound for several days.

Bledsoe is qualified in writing about outdoor survival, being an active cyclist, mountain climber, backpacker, and skier. Her details of survival are accurate, as well as appealing, and will keep budding scientists on their snow toes.

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Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

What does it take to wake up in the morning? Children seem to have no problem, or do they? *A Child’s Good Morning Book* is a story of how the morning star (the sun) rises out of the east and awakens the plants, animals, and children. Do they all awaken in the same way?

Birds and roosters make their familiar sounds, chirping and crowing “to the dawning day.” Horses, rabbits, and goats gallop, leap and “nibble their way through the day.” Flowers, thistles, primrose, and daisies “open to the morning sun.” But what do the children do? The suspense lies in the discovery that humans respond differently in the morning than do animals.

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Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Joseph Bruchac, an Abenaki-Native American, has written a beautiful poetic story about Little Turtle and his uncle, Old Bear, who decide to go walking in the magnificent world created by *Kit-se-le-mu-kong.* They first visit *Ma-hi-ka-ni-yewk,* the Hudson River Land where their Delaware ancestors had lived. Old Bear tells Little Turtle that this land is sacred to their people. Little Turtle asks the meaning of the word “sacred.” Drawing a circle on the soft earth, Old Bear answers:

They can be found in all of the Seven Directions. They are found in the East and in the North, in the South and in the West, as well as Above, Below, and the place Within. Without those places we lose our balance.

The rest of the book answers Little Turtle’s next question: “Are Delawares the only Indian people with sacred places?” First, Old Bear explains about the Wamoanoag, who lived in the East; then the Seneca, who lived in the North, the Navajo from the West; the Cherokee from the South; the Papago from the West, the Hopewell
from the Center, the Cheyenne from Above, the Hopi from Below, the Walapai from the Balance Lost, and the Abenaki from the Balance Held. Each of the tribes is allotted a full-page spread with a picture on one side, the narrative on the opposite, and a small piece of the painting to add color. The text conveys the message that we keep our balance by making sacred all the places we go if we "remember that we always carry the teachings with us." Indeed, "the seventh direction is within us all, the place that helps us see right and wrong and maintain the balance by choosing to live in a good way. Everything is sacred between Earth and Sky."

Thomas Locker has once again outdone himself in these lavish illustrations. Each page is rich with greens of the forests; golds of the sunshine on white rock and cliff dwellings; reds of the deserts, sunset, and canyons; whites of the spray from the waterfalls and snow on the mountains; and blues of the waters and skies. The paintings seem to come alive with the energy Locker has created in every scene. This is truly a book to be shared, not only for the beauty of the illustrations, but also the depth and wonder of the Native American beliefs.

Also of interest is a map of the United States that identifies all the areas where many of those "original Native nations lived, most of which still exist to this day." Also included is a "suggested" guide to pronunciations to many of the words used in the book.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

This is Conlon-McKenna’s third book about the Irish O’Driscoll Family. The events of the book find Peggy living in nineteenth-century Boston and working as a maid for a wealthy family. Peggy’s older brother, Michael, is in Ireland, employed as a stable hand to Henry Buckland of Castletaggart House.

I found it very hard to establish the who’s and where’s in this book and to stay with them as the chapters switched between the main characters. Although I’m sure it would have been clearer had I read the preceding two books about the family, I think each book in a sequel arrangement should be able to stand alone. Unfamiliar words appeared in the text (i.e., jinks, boreen, sidhe, and quare) and there were no footnotes or glossary to help the reader with their meanings. Even with these drawbacks, Conlon-McKenna’s selection helped me to better understand the many challenges immigrant families encountered in the nineteenth century.


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

JoEllen’s new stepfather is handsome, kind, and considerate—and she hates him. He has taken away her mother’s attentions and as the story begins they are honeymooning in Europe. JoEllen is stuck with an elderly cousin, “Granty” Macallan, whom she has never met but who lives in an old stone replica of a Scottish castle called Winterbloom. The castle has a very interesting attic with a turret and round sealed window. JoEllen works to open the window. She just wants to look out over the countryside, or maybe she wants an escape route. When she finally opens the window, she steps through and discovers it is a door to the past. Her past? Granty’s past? Just whose past she isn’t sure. She realizes the danger but is drawn into the life of the intriguing female she meets in a dusty old barn. She is caught in the riddle of Winterbloom and the window to the past.

This is an intriguing book! What would happen if we could visit the past, maybe even change it? What if there were witches that bid us
to do strange things we were compelled to obey? What if . . . ? Get a glimpse of the possibilities in *Moon Window*!

★★★★


A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Seymour Sleuth is the greatest detective in the world and, along with his faithful assistant (photographer, Abbot Muggss), travels the world, unraveling the most complicated crimes. One day, he is summoned to the side of his good friend Professor Slagbottom to help with the case of the stolen “Stone Chicken.” (The first and only time you see Abbott Muggs is in the photo on his visa. However, the reader remembers he is the one taking all the pictures.) Seymour interviews the suspects one at a time and cleverly deduces who the culprit is by their misstatements.

Told in diary format with pictures, tickets, and other mementos affixed to the pages, this is a delightful story. Although the reader may quickly figure out who the culprit is, gathering the clues one at a time and decoding the messages are fun aspects of this story.

★★★★


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

This small-sized book is part of the *Dear America* series, written by many authors about their particular area of expertise. Barry Denenberg is an acclaimed nonfiction writer whose main interest is American history, and since the “Civil War was a pivotal event in our history, and because the main activity was overwhelmingly in the South, [he] decided to tell the story from the Southern perspective.” His protagonist is fourteen-year-old Emma Simpson, a Southern, Gordonsville, Virginia girl, who keeps a record in her diary of all the turmoil going on right in her front yard. The book begins in late December, 1863, just two days before Christmas, when Emma’s older brother, Cole, is brought home in a casket. He had been wounded in Richmond and was only waiting to get a little stronger before he would be sent home. But while he was recuperating, he died of pneumonia—not a very glorious way to die during a war. As we read Emma’s diary, we glimpse what it is like to be a young teenager during a war. She wonders if she’ll ever fall in love; she finds comfort in her chatterbox cousin, Rachel, who eventually suffers a nervous breakdown; she begins corresponding with Tally Mills, who becomes her beau; we watch Emma’s mother slowly deteriorate from the lovely Southern Belle to a sickly, poverty-stricken woman upon whom depression takes a great toll. Aunt Caroline comes to the rescue and is a great comfort. Yet all around them are death, bloodshed, and constant prayers for the war to be over. The diary ends one year later on Christmas Day, 1864.

Denenberg has created a diary that gives us great insight into the lives of the civilians who must cope with all manner of depravity and deprivation. His words, as written in the diary by Emma, let us into the private thoughts and concerns of a young girl during this time. The book also contains an epilogue which ties together all the loose ends and historical notes about the Civil War, and includes many black and white pictures, drawings, and maps printed at the end of the book. Denenberg has successfully captured the emotions and insights of a fourteen-year-old girl during the Civil War.

★★★★
10 Brigham Young University


**B+ K-3 NF** Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

A group of children accompany their friend Sophie, an archaeologist, on a dig. Through text, illustrations, sidebars, and dialogue, the reader learns about archaeologists, scientific excavation, artifacts, midden, features, and record-keeping. The information is presented with humor: “Archaeologists hardly ever find treasure. They aren’t even trying to! . . . Archaeologists love ancient garbage!”

Part of the *Let’s-Read-and-Find-Out Science* series, this picture book is an engaging introduction to archaeology that could be successfully used by teachers or parents who are planning a visit to an archaeological site or a historical museum exhibit. Many young readers will be inspired to go on their own dig, even if it is only in their backyard.


**A Pre PB** Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

When Bear smells “winter in the air,” she knows it is time for her to sleep, but first she must tell Snail. Snail tells Skunk; Skunk tells Turtle; and so on until Ladybug decides that she must tell Bear, who is already snoring in her cave. Silly Snail awakens Bear to say, “It is time to crawl in your cave and sleep.” Annoyed, Bear points out that she is in her cave and was asleep. Ladybug apologizes, and the woodland creatures settle down for a winter’s nap.

Fleming uses the earth tones of late autumn and her trademark poured-cotton-pulp technique to create images set in handmade paper. From the humor of Bear’s snout pressed up to the leaf on which Ladybug sits to the sleepy darkness of Bear’s cave, the illustrations express the happy, calming tones of the story. This engaging bedtime story for toddlers and preschoolers is also a simple introduction to the concept of hibernation. Parents and teachers will find this an easy book to share with one child or twenty children.


**A 4-6 NF** Reviewed by Janna Wise

In her book *Diabetes,* Elizabeth Ferber explains both the scientific as well as the psychological aspects of diabetes, in terms that can be easily understood by readers with no formal medical training. The book seems to be especially written for young people and families who must deal with diabetes. It covers everything from the two types of diabetes, to other effects on health caused by diabetes, to how young people with diabetes wish to be treated by family members and peers. One unique feature of the book, interviews with young people who have diabetes, helps the reader to better understand their thoughts and feelings. This book would be a wonderful addition to any juvenile library collection.


**B 9-12 PT** Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

The title of this book immediately caught my attention, but I think it is a bit misleading. True, the book is made up entirely of free verse poetry, but the hostage situation is more of a loose structural frame than the main idea of the book.
The poems primarily tell the thoughts, feelings, struggles, desires, and situations of the high school students in Mr. Wiedermeyer’s Senior History Class before the room is taken hostage.

The first poems describe the students’ thoughts and conversations as the students stand in line before class to get their yearbooks. Then come a few poems by the principal, policemen, a news reporter, teachers, parents, students, and other spectators as they discover that Mr. Wiedermeyer’s class is being held hostage. The bulk of the book comes in the next section, which contains poetic “biographies” of each student. For each student there is a poem about his or her experience as a freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. The last poem for each student tells his or her thoughts on the day of the crisis. Each is thinking of last moments of high school glory or disappointment, and of future hopes and plans. The last few lines of the poem register shock or confusion about being held hostage. The book ends with a short section of poems describing the students’ rescue and revealing why Mr. Wiedermeyer was holding his class hostage.

Although the hostage story was not very believable or compelling, the strength of the book is its realistic and penetrating portrayal of high school students with a variety of personalities and backgrounds. These poems express what modern youth are really dealing with: school achievements and struggles, good and bad relationships with parents, faith and religion, cultural differences, success and failure in sports, sex and dating, homosexuality and AIDS, and more. Controversial subjects are treated with frankness, but there is nothing obscene here. This book is recommended for high school students, and for adults who want to understand them better.

★★★★

Children’s Book and Play Review


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Another in the Dear America series, this book by Kristiana Gregory focuses on the diary of eleven-year-old Abigail Jane Stewart, supposedly written during the Revolutionary War. Gregory is well-known for her historical fiction for young readers and has the ability to create life-like characters who fit right into the historical settings. The time period covers the war from December of 1777 and ends on the 4th of July, 1778. It takes place in the village near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Abigail’s family is a typical family living close enough to Valley Forge to see what the soldiers are going through during the cold, hard winter of 1777. Abigail’s mother becomes the laundress to Mrs. George Washington when Mrs. Washington arrives at Valley Forge. This gives Abigail and her sister Elizabeth the opportunity to spend time at the Washington home while delivering clean laundry. They get to meet many of the soldiers and leaders who are trying hard to survive the winter so the war can continue. Abigail helps with making clothing for the poor soldiers, many of whom don’t even have socks. The girls are in the Washington house when Mrs. Washington writes down her recipe for George Washington’s birthday cake. When their mother found out that it took forty eggs and four pounds of butter, she knew that the Stewart family would not be making any such birthday cake. Then they are all amazed when a friend, Lucy Smith, runs away from home. You’ll just have to read the book to see how it all turns out!

Also included are the historical notes of the time period, black and white photos and drawings, and maps that make it easier to follow the traveling army. This is an interesting look at how the poor and the famous lived through the American Revolution.

★★★★
Invited to a magical summer night birthday party, Lucy evades a hungry owl, finds a long-lost doll, and makes friends with a host of whimsical creatures who all spring a birthday surprise on an unexpected and self-invited guest. Lush watercolor illustrations and corresponding read-aloud and sometimes-rhyming text feed the imagination in this tale of magic and childhood. Especially touching is Lucy’s discovery of a doll lost by her grandmother when she was Lucy’s age, and its subsequent return to Grandma.


This extraordinary book, part of the W5 (Who, What, Where, When, Why) series by Henry Holt Reference Books, is unlike any book I have ever seen. The back cover contains this warning: “May be habit-forming. Laboratory tests have shown that prolonged exposure to books in the W5 series can cause the reader to develop increased awareness and an uncontrollable enthusiasm for the subject matter.” It’s true!

It is hard to describe what makes this book so special—you have to see it to believe it! Each two-page spread presents a different aspect of Aztec history and culture. One can skip around to different topics of interest, or read the book from cover to cover. The layout of each page-spread is unique, but all contain fascinating text, intriguing illustrations (some original and some historical works), and a catchy, often humorous title that piques the reader’s curiosity. Some examples include "In Mexico blood transfusions kept the sun alive," "In Mexico, people played basketball with their elbows and Parcheesi with beans," and "Unfortunately for the Aztecs, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the world became round."

The creators of this book brought pertinent knowledge and talents to the project. Mathilde Helly holds a doctoral degree in Latino Studies and is a middle-school teacher. Rémi Courgeon is the art director of an advertising agency and the illustrator of several children’s books. The book includes a brief index, a list of books for further reading, and illustration and photograph credits. It is a must for libraries serving middle schools, high schools, or even adults. Other books in the series include Victoria and Her Times, The Beatles and the Sixties, Alexander and his Times, Caesar and Rome, Michelangelo and his Times, Ramses II and Egypt, and Lucy and her Times.

**B 2-4 FI** Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Mary Mouse decides that for the last and smallest of her dozen mouse pups she must select an important-sounding name. She discovers that name as she reads a scrap of sheet music she has used in her nest: "WOLFGANG AMADEUS MO." She is certain that the last letters of the third word are "USE." Wolf discovers that he can sing and makes friends with Mrs. Honeybee, who was once a concert pianist. She coaxes Wolf into joining her as she plays the piano. Precocious Wolf eventually composes his own music, to the delight of Mrs. Honeybee.

King-Smith has created a humorous beginning chapter book, but some inconsistencies are befuddling: Mary Mouse can read English, but she and Wolf cannot understand Mrs. Honeybee’s conversations with them; Wolf discovers that he can sing and makes friends with Mrs. Honeybee, who was once a concert pianist. She coaxes Wolf into joining her as she plays the piano. Precocious Wolf eventually composes his own music, to the delight of Mrs. Honeybee.


**4+ FI** Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

That fool of a fairy Lucinda did not intend to lay a curse on me. She meant to bestow a gift. When I cried inconsolably through my first hour of life, my tears were her inspiration. Shaking her head sympathetically at Mother, the fairy touched my nose. "My gift is obedience. Ella will always be obedient. Now stop crying, child." I stopped.

And so the story of Ella (Eleanor) of Frell begins. This is a richly worded "Cinderella" story. It follows the basic outline of any "Cinderella" story—the fairy bestows a gift; the girl grows into a beautiful young woman; her father is not around much (in this case he is a traveling salesman); her father marries a woman with two daughters; she is granted her wish of going to the ball by her fairy godmother and does so in an orange colored coach; and she marries the prince. But this is not any ordinary "Cinderella" story.

Ella is a real-life girl with one problem: she has to obey if anyone gives her a command—even if it means her death or the death of someone she
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loves. She learns early on not to tell anyone that she must obey, but people figure it out anyway. One of the first to know is her stepsister Hattie. Hattie seems not to realize the extent of Ella’s "gift," and she uses it for simple fetch-and-carry things. When Ella falls in love with the prince Charmont, or "Char" to his friends, Ella realizes that if she marries him it may ruin not only their lives, but also the kingdom of Frell. Ella decides to seek out Lucinda and have her take back the gift. Along the way she meets elves, ogres, giants and even ordinary people—some who realize she must obey and others who think she is just a charming child.

This book is beautifully worded, and the twists to the story are delightful. Read this one—maybe even read it aloud to a group of children who know the "Cinderella" tale. See if they don’t love it too!

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A  2-4  FI     Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

This book was published in 1971 as *Hill of Fire,* but is the first Spanish edition, published as a "Ya Sé Leer" (I Can Read) paperback. The story is based on the true occurrence of the eruption of Volcano Paricutín in Michoacan, Mexico. A village of Indians witnessed the birth of the volcano in a cornfield. There is only one other account of humans witnessing the birth of a volcano, which happened in the Canary Islands. This telling of the story focuses on one farmer, bored with his routine life, who always complains that nothing happens. One day as he is plowing in his field, he discovers a hole with smoke coming out that rumbles and widens. He runs to warn the villagers, and from a safe distance they all watch the mound grow into a hill that spouts lava and ash. No one is hurt, but the villagers have to relocate and rebuild a new village, where they prosper because of business from tourists coming to see the volcano.

This fascinating story is especially appropriate for a Spanish translation because it takes place in Mexico. It is translated clearly and appropriately for the grade levels intended. The illustrations are simple, with a touch of humor. This book would be a great addition to any library trying to acquire good Spanish books for children.

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A  6+  FI     Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

This is a story of the war begun when some of the republics of the former Yugoslavia turned away from communism. They wanted to become democratic nations of their own. Marybeth
Lorbiecki became greatly concerned because she had relatives living in Croatia (one of the republics) when it was invaded by Serbia (the largest republic). Lorbiecki tells the story of these wars through letters written between ten-year-old Nadja, who lives in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and her cousin, Alex, who lives in America. The letters, beginning in January 1992 before the war started, and ending in November 1995, are at first just a way for Nadja to practice her English. She writes them while sitting in her "palace of leaves" in the tree near her home. Soon, however, the letters turn into cries for help, and Alex's letters become a refuge for Nadja and her family. In her letters, Nadja describes all that is happening around her: bombs, stores closed, long lines to get small amounts of food, cries of dying animals, "trata-trata of machine guns," no electricity, no running water, blood and injuries, and a myriad of other life-threatening circumstances. When several packages get through from Alex, it is like Christmas for Nadja--she even gets tapes and a Walkman. Alex, in turn, feels weird writing about all the fun things happening to him because of his being in America, but he and his family constantly try to find ways to help Nadja and her family come to America. Autumn of 1994 brings no colored leaves in Sarajevo because there are no trees; they have all been chopped down for firewood. One of the most precious gifts to Nadja from Alex is a packet of seeds to grow elm trees. The contrast between the two children's lifestyles is remarkable and, at times, chilling.

Lorbiecki has created a true picture of what went on in Sarajevo during the war. She befriended a number of Bosnian refugees and Croatian immigrants who told their stories to her, from which she has written this book. Tauss has created watercolor paintings drawn from the many photos that were actually taken in the war zone. Even though most of them are dark in color, almost all of them have splashes of bright colors which seem to depict the overall spirit of these courageous people. Because the main character is trying to learn English, her letters will need to be read carefully; she often simply gets the words in the wrong order or slips into the Bosnian language. Thankfully, there is a glossary and pronunciation guide in the back, as well as a discussion of the Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian language complexities. Also included are addresses for readers who would like to write letters or send care packages to the children in these lands, and a "portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Bosnian relief efforts." For such a small book, My Palace of Leaves in Sarajevo will touch the reader in a way that will remain for a long time.


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Carol Matas has written many books on the children of the Holocaust and the horrors and trials they endured. Now comes a book we have been waiting for: After the War. This book addresses the continued trials of what came after the war for the many Jewish orphans of Eastern Europe. The central character, fifteen-year-old Ruth Mendenberg, having spent much of the War in Buchenwald, has just returned to her home in Poland. Her home has been taken over by Saul, her family's former, very rude maid. Alone at the city hall, Ruth searches for the names of all her relatives, but no survivors are on the lists. Then she hears a young man say the word "Amcha" ("with the people," a Jewish password which means that he can be trusted). Saul then tells her that he is from Eretz Israel and is there to help her emigrate—to help build a Jewish homeland. Ruth feels as if there is nothing within her to help build a new country or to even survive; but since she has nowhere else to go, she joins Saul and the other young people making their way from Poland through Eastern Europe into Italy, where they board a ship that will try to get them into Eretz Israel.

This story is told in a most fascinating way. When any event reminds her of her past, Ruth has
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a flashback to her past experiences (written in italics) so we get a clear picture of what her life during the Holocaust was like. Once she arrives at the first camp, she is given paper and pencil and told that she must record the stories of all the little children under her charge. At first she doesn't want to hear any more; but she finally realizes that everyone must deal with their terror and learn to grieve before they can begin to heal.

Matas has created an engaging story that carries the reader into the depths of these children's sorrow, yet she manages to bring all of us, reader and characters, to a realization that if we try to forget the bad, we also have to forget the good. Since good memories are still there, and we don't want to forget them, life must go on. This is an uplifting story, based on real events, but Matas has taken the liberty of combining stories to make the book work. At the end of the book, she reminds us that from the end of the war in 1945 until May 1948, 69,000 Jews traveled to Palestine by sea, illegally. There are sadness, surprises, happiness, danger, love, compassion, fear, and a happy ending. What more could we ask for?

★★★★


A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Young Moql was raised as one of the “folk”—very small people with magical powers who live in the caves beneath the moor. However, when she is unable to disappear like the rest of the folk children, she knows something is different about her. Moql’s mother was folk and her father was human; Moql is neither. Rejected, she is exchanged with a human baby who will become a servant for the folk. In her new life as Saaski, again she does not fit in. Neighbors become suspicious, even vindictively blaming Saaski for things that go wrong. Despite this, Saaski is supported by a mother and father who seek to understand her, usually unsuccessfully. When Saaski determines her true identity, out of love for the parents who have sought to protect her, she is determined to find the human child she was changed with. This involves an exciting visit into the Mound, which must be completed by the end of Midsummer Night’s Eve. She is heroic and successful in her quest. Saaski leaves behind her old life, and is invited by a friend to join him in beginning a new one.

The book is dedicated to “children everywhere who have felt different.” Through the successfully developed character of Saaski, the reader feels the sorrow of being an outcast. The heartache of trying to please and “fit in” is powerful also. Certainly, many children could relate to this theme. The fictional world created by McGraw is clever and believable. Her writing weaves the real world and world-in-the-Mound into one. The climax of attempting to rescue the human child provides a strong culmination which keeps the reader turning pages! The book justly received the Newbery Honor in 1996.

★★★★

© 1996 Eloise McGraw

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol18/iss2/3
Greg "Slam" Harris is a talented basketball player. This is the story of the first few months at his new high school. He has just transferred from Carver, a predominantly "black" school, to Latimer, a "magnet" school, in order to take advantage of their arts programs. Still, basketball is his main thing. The question, however, is not only how Slam will succeed on the basketball court, but how he will succeed in school, as well as in life.

Told in the first person, this is a very believable story. Slam speaks as a seventeen-year-old black boy in New York City would speak. He acts very much as a teenager with a chip on his shoulder would act. The result is a genuine slice-of-life impression. The only apparent weakness in the plot is that no history or reason is presented to explain how or why Slam has arrived at this point in his life with the attitudes he displays. Overall, it is an engrossing read. Slam! has been awarded the 1997 Coretta Scott King Award.


One of the Mysterious Deaths series, this incredible book combines the best elements of biography and mystery to keep the reader interested from beginning to end. A brief account of Mozart's life is given in the first chapter, followed by possible accounts of his death and a great deal of evidence to show pros and cons of the theories. Many of the more popular theories are positively refuted, while the new ones are explained in detail. Even the explanations of medical terminology are written to be understood by the young reader, though on the whole this book is quite challenging. An enjoyable and interesting read for anyone!


A young Jewish girl, Ruth, is forced to leave behind her beloved doll Elisabeth when fleeing from the Nazis; miraculously, she and Elisabeth are later reunited. Ruth and Elisabeth loved each other so much that they shared everything. One day, Fifi, their mischievous dog, bit into Elisabeth's arm and dragged her dancing around the room. Luckily, Ruth's father, a physician, was able to help Ruth bind up Elisabeth's "wound." With the rise of Hitler, things began to change for Ruth: she was called a "Jew," she was no longer called on in school when she raised her hand, and a soldier patrolled in front of her house. One
morning Ruth’s parents woke her while it was still dark and told her to take nothing; they were leaving. Ruth whispered to Elisabeth that she would come back for her. They fled to Italy, then Paris, and finally America.

Ruth grew to be an adult and had a daughter of her own. When Ruth’s daughter asked for a special doll that would fill her arms like a real baby, Ruth began looking. Nothing seemed to measure up to Elisabeth, who had filled Ruth’s arms years ago. Then, in an antique shop, Ruth noticed a doll that reminded her of her childhood. She picked up the doll’s hand: the doll’s sleeve fell back and exposed the teeth marks Fifi had left many years ago. Thrilled, she bought the doll, which became a family treasure.

Claire Nivola’s retelling of her mother’s childhood experience is powerful. The simple prose is easy to read and well written. The theme helps children see a new side of war. Not only did Ruth leave behind a toy, she left behind her childhood; Hitler’s regime forced the realities of life upon her. The detailed illustrations support the text, conveying a strong message of love and loss. The photograph on the book jacket of young Ruth holding Elisabeth reinforces the reality of the story. The book will be powerful addition to any library.


† 7+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Anne Harper is an educated, upper-middle-class, college-bound Texas teen who is temporarily sidelined by her unexpected pregnancy, for which her parents have sent her to a home for unwed mothers. With bravado, Anne chronicles her life leading up to the pregnancy and her resolve to give up the baby for adoption so as to be able to pick up the pieces of her life. En route, Anne realizes personal and maternal feelings. As the other young women in the home for unwed mothers come and go, Anne realizes that she too may be able to fit into her “before” clothes, but never into her “before” self.

A heart-wrenching look at teenage pregnancies and all of their implications. Present is the angry language and graphic confessions of young mothers who go on to give up their babies because of their love and hope for these infants.

© 1996 Peter Malone


A 3+ NF Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

The familiar story of Homer’s *Odyssey* is skillfully retold in this new book by folklorist Neil Philip. The episodic nature of the original naturally lends itself to retelling as a children’s book, and much of the text is paraphrased directly from Homer. Although Homer’s story has been rearranged to put the tale into chronological order,
this is still a satisfying rendition of Odysseus’ adventures, and is quite faithful to the original. Unusual for modern versions of the Odyssey, one of the main points of the original—that people are responsible for their own foolish behavior—is emphasized without being explicitly stated.

The title page of the book is a map of the central Mediterranean, showing many of the hypothetical stopping points in Odysseus’ fantastic voyage. This is immediately followed by a helpful, illustrated “Who’s Who” listing eighteen of the more important characters of the story (both gods and mortals) and explaining how they fit in to the story. Malone’s stylized illustrations are colorful and charming, and entirely appropriate to the story.

In a field full of bad versions of the Odyssey, both as children’s books and films, this book stands out as an exception and is highly recommended. Since it is faithful to the original, there are a few violent episodes which might frighten small children.

★★★★


Tecumseh, son of a Shawnee Indian chief, and Rebecca Galloway are the central characters in this historical novel by Rinaldi. The Galloways, who left Kentucky to live in the unsettled Ohio Territory because they did not believe in slavery, have a large and growing family. Their oldest daughter Rebecca is just seven years old when the book begins, in the summer of 1798, and the story is told from her perspective. Tecumseh comes to the Galloway farm, the original site of his Shawnee village before the white men forced them to leave. At first, Rebecca is frightened by the powerful Indian, but Tecumseh regularly visits the family to talk about Indian affairs and takes time to interact with the “little straw-hair girl.” Eventually, Rebecca gains trust in and then love for Tecumseh. Rebecca also teaches Tecumseh to read, write, and speak correctly. When Rebecca is almost seventeen, Tecumseh asks for her hand in marriage.

I enthusiastically recommend this one! It’s well written, educational, and romantic. As related in the eight-page “Author’s Note,” Rinaldi extensively researches each of her historical novels, and it was interesting to note the many facts that she incorporated into The Second Bend in the River. I think readers of historical fiction want and deserve to know which events, people, and places are factual and what is part of the author’s imagination. Teachers, let’s use such well-researched historical novels to supplement the social studies and history courses we teach to so that children gain not only a love for history, but also a better sense of people and their feelings.

★★★★


A collection of short stories and excerpts, Leaving Home deals with the coming-of-age rituals imposed on young people in the process of maturation. Some protagonists are children, but many are not. Sometimes home is involved, sometimes not. The dust jacket describes it as a book of journeys in which each voyager is an alien in one form or another. Sometimes the alienation comes by color, sometimes by circumstance, sometimes by perception. Amy Tan’s young heroine in “Rules of the Game” learns the secret of invisible strength at age six. The coward of Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River,” overcomes his fears and goes back to the war. In “The Circuit” Francisco Jimenez gives us a glimpse of the challenging life of a young migrant farmworker. A dozen other renowned authors, including Toni Morrison, Gary Soto, Sandra Cisneros, and Norma Fox Mazer, contribute short works to this collection.
There are as many conclusions to be drawn from these stories as there will be readers who pick them up; no one will walk away untouched. The selections vary in length, including some very brief ones, and would serve well in multicultural, immigration, or history discussions.


Michael Rosen has assembled a collection of stories that display some of the best attributes of the human spirit. Each of his characters grows in compassion and understanding by facing some basic challenges that life throws at all of us. They find that, truly, *the heart is big enough*. Rosen is adroit in presenting these vignettes. What could be heavy handed and moralistic is instead warm and moving.

Rosen begins with Matthew, whose plastic hip causes him pain and embarrassment as he tries to fulfill a lifelong dream of swimming with dolphins. His perseverance brings out the best in himself and others, including the dolphins! The stories that follow deal with single parenting, aging, and mental illness. In the last offering, "The Remembering Movies," Decker must come to grips with his grandmother's failing memory. He creates a lasting memory by spending the summer filming all her favorite places and his family activities for her to view. The manner in which this relationship is depicted is masterful.

I believe many young readers can appreciate these stories. Their best use, however, might be in a read-aloud setting followed by discussion.


Deal McCarthy is a cool girl—there's never been enough warmth in her life to make her otherwise. Now, dumped on her Gram for a year while Mom explores a new relationship, she is making a new resolution. The game she plays with all the cool boys and pop girls, the one in which she always wins and they lose, is no longer worth her time. So what is? A ghost, inextricably linked to Gram; an uncool young man who sings and understands bitter circumstances; a Gram who blows past and present expectations clear
away—these may be just the thing she’s looking for.

Ghost stories for older kids are “iffy” these days since special visual effects have made us so blasé, but this one is romantic, crisp, and almost believable.

★★★★


A 4-12 FI Reviewed by Lillian H. Heil

Sherwood Smith’s Crown Duel is the fast-moving action story of fiery young Countess Meliara of Remalna, who, with her older brother Branaric, wants to save her country from a greedy king named Galdran. At the end of this nonstop adventure tale of fights, capture, flight and resolution, the reader is surprised to realize the action has really been the vehicle for portraying memorable characters, especially the character of Meliara.

The first-person account is by Meliara, and the reader learns to expect that she will plunge into every situation with minimal thought about the consequences. Her fortitude in the face of enormous difficulties, her willingness to admit her mistakes, and her concern for others make her an appealing, if stubborn, young woman. The first mistake she admits is getting captured by the enemy:

For at last I faced the real truth: that by my own carelessness, I might well have graveled our entire cause... I have to confess that, for a short time, hot tears of rage and self-loathing stung my eyes and dripped down my face.

In the very last few pages of the book, Meliara is still admitting she has misjudged people and situations:

I had been so wrong I had nearly gotten a lot of people killed for no reason. Just thinking it made me grit my teeth and in a way felt almost as bad as cleaning the fester from my wounded foot. Which was right, because I had to clean out from my mind the fester caused by anger and hatred.

A heroine who is willing to admit such mistakes and make mighty changes is definitely worth reading about. Meliara’s last change is not revealed until the final two pages of the book, and it should endear her to the heart of all teachers. Finally Meliara has harnessed her restless, impetuous spirit and is able to lose herself in the service of her people. It’s the kind of book that makes you impatient to read Book Number 2 of this series. I shall be looking forward to its publication.

★★★★

© 1997 Victor Lee
This book tells the life story of Jim Henson—from his youth, through the highlights of his career, and to his sudden death. The author establishes her credibility as a friend of the Hensons, but also shows the massive research done in finding out such detailed information. Included are examples of how the Muppets are worked, how special movie scenes were produced, how the Muppet Company developed as a business, and the future of the company. There are even eight pages of photographs to illustrate the text.

The book is divided into fairly short chapters, but is still advanced enough to challenge a young mind. One feels some lack of reality, since the author rarely mentions any low moments in the life of either Jim Henson or his company. Overall the book is extremely interesting and fun to read—definitely to be recommended for the library shelf!


Getting homework help from your father is not that unusual of an occurrence, unless your father is deceased! Kelly and her sister Sasha find themselves in just that position. As a matter of fact, they start to take advantage of their father’s generosity, which causes some interesting situations.

This is a light work with a few poignant moments. The girls have lost their father suddenly and miss him terribly. Their mother is doing her best to put her life together and is sometimes distracted. Kelly discovers that her father’s ghost is cleaning up Sasha’s room for her every morning. Once acknowledged, the girls are more than willing to let their father be a part of their life. Kelly, with her father’s help, is able to perform far above “normal” on her math assignments, but not able to discuss math coherently with her teacher. She also has a hard time explaining why her soccer ball was suddenly diverted into the net for the winning goal in the championship game.

Strasser works this situation well with humor and pathos. Ultimately, the father has misgivings about the role he is playing and, when Mom discovers what is happening, everything comes to a head. This is fun and warm reading.


"Once upon a time, if you stood on the moon and looked down on earth, you could see the Great Wall of China." So begins this book about pollution. If you live on the moon two thousand years in the future, all that can be seen of the earth will be a "never-ending mask of yellow mist. Like a pale copy of the sun, soft and blurred at the edges, the tired planet sat alone in the vastness of space." The beginning sentences are pleasant and have an agreeable sound, but for me the book went downhill as steadily as the tower went up.

The pictures are dark. (What do you expect from a polluted planet?) The story details one man’s dream—seeing the sun again. No mention is made of trying to clean up the planet. This dreamer only dreams of climbing through the clouds of pollution. He tries various methods of getting above the clouds and finally succeeds in building a tower. He uses giant machines, similar to the ones that caused the original pollution, but only ends up adding to the problem. He builds his tower by uprooting famous landmarks and stacking them one upon another. From the moment he feels the warmth of the sun on his
face, a line begins to form, a line of "dimwits" (my term, not the author's) who would rather stand around and wait than try to make the planet better. I just wasn’t impressed with this pollution book.


Reviewed by Keith R. Westover

"I could kill that kid!" and "My parents sent me here to get rid of me" are a couple of statements the author overheard from parents and children, respectively, which helped provide the inspiration for *The Grounding of Group 6*. Thompson tells a somewhat hard-to-believe story of a group of five sixteen-year-old students, each sent by his or her parents to the Coldbrook Country School in rural Vermont for the express purpose of being exterminated. Their erstwhile assassin, who was posing as their group leader, has a change of heart while leading his victims around in the Vermont woods. From that point on, their lives become a contest for survival against the "evil exterminators for hire" led by the school headmaster, known by all as "Doctor," who is coldly heartless, yet can burst into song at the slightest word prompt.

This book is a hardback reissue of the original paperback, first published in 1983. It originally opened to mixed reviews, although the dust jacket naturally quotes only the positive comments, including the claim that "it was instantly hailed as a classic" when first published. To be a classic, a book must be timeless and well written; this book is neither. It is dated throughout by references to passing cultural icons of the time (e.g., Bo Derek), while the speech, dress, and actions of the characters immediately identify them as being lost in the 70s. The poorly written dialogue can be excused as an example of how careless teenagers would indeed talk, but to have the narrative written at the same fifth-grade level is distracting.


Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

An orange marmalade cat, Ginger, suffers the pangs of rejection when his small female owner turns up with a kitten to keep him company. With succinct text and cheerful large illustrations, the brief story is told to delight and instruct (in case you are wondering what might happen if you bring a kitten home to your already well-situated cat). Voake knows cats very well indeed, from the side-eyed glare of Ginger, to the kitten's takeover strategy. The very young will love it; the cat people will say "Oh yes, of course," and read it again.


Reviewed by Marlene Mabey

Amos and his sister and brother get separated from their father during an Indian raid while traveling down the Ohio River. At first they aren't too concerned, since they are on the boat, but it isn't long before it catches on fire and they have to swim to shore with their pet cow.

Their adventures and troubles are many as the three children follow the river in the direction of
the Marietta settlement. Amos’ rescue of a wounded Indian boy from the river complicates their situation in many ways. Despite their slow progress and the danger from the mistrusting Indian boy, Amos will not leave him behind. The children are later captured by the Indian boy’s tribe. They are on the trail to the Indians’ camp when frontiersmen intercede, and the children are rescued and returned to their father.

From the very beginning, the reader is drawn into the fast-paced historical fiction. Patricia Willis, the author, shares wood-lore and the thrill of the frontier in 1793. Boys and girls alike will enjoy reading and rereading this adventure, especially if they have ever pretended to live on the American frontier.

★★★★


* 3-6 NF Reviewed by Janna Wise

This high-quality book would be a wonderful addition to the shelves of a school or public library. Not only are the historical facts about the state interesting, but numerous pictures support and add to the information given. Further, there is a quick-reference section in the back with facts about the state (the state bird, flower, etc.), as well as a time line of Michigan history. The book would most likely be of special interest to those familiar with Michigan, but would be useful for others as well. If the other books in this states series are as well done as is this volume, they would all be beneficial additions to the library.

★★★★