Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews


A K-3 PB Reviewed by Vivian Milius

A boisterous family of five moves from their "Cracker Jack box" brownstone apartment to an old "fixer-upper" home complete with a sleeping porch—just like the home Mom grew up in. They all love it at once and busy themselves making it "home." All goes well until the first hard summer rain when they discover leaks in every room and are driven to the sleeping porch with blankets, pillows and flashlights in tow, hoping for a dry place to sleep. Their dampened spirits soon revive and after that the porch becomes a center for many family celebrations and activities. What could be more fun than a sleeping porch slumber party every summer?

Ackerman, author of *The Song and Dance Man,* renders a delightful look at family life and traditions, which Sayles' lively pastel full-page illustrations bring to life with energy and warmth.


A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Vivian Milius

This delightful rhyme is a toddler's rap Halloween "epic," telling of the night the graveyard came alive with skeletons, ghosts, ghouls, a banshee, goblins, and witches. Bats, cats, mice, owls, and everyone in town joins the "BOOMA-BOOM beat" and keeps on rockin' till the light of dawn.

The story is fun, rhythmic, and includes all those necessary scary characters in a non-frightening, rollicking romp that youngsters will love. This is Andrews' first book, but probably not her last. Plecas' off-beat cartoonish pen and ink and color wash illustrations complement the story perfectly.


A K+ PB Reviewed by Vivian Milius

Anno takes us a step beyond Jack and the Beanstalk when his "happy-go-lucky" young man named Jack is presented with two large golden seeds from a wizard he chances to encounter. The wizard instructs him to bake one and eat it and he will not be hungry again for a year. The other he is instructed to plant. Jack does so and each year the seed produces a plant which bears two seeds. Jack repeats the process several years before he decides to go one winter without eating one of the seeds so he can plant them both. What follows is a fascinating mathematical story replete with examples of exponential growth, entrepreneurship, tragedy, survival, and renewal. The tale is definitely entertaining and for those with mathematical interest, fascinating. Anno's style moves the story along with spare use of text. His watercolor wash illustrations are cartoon-like and appealing with use of subtle colors and gilding for the magic seeds.

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

Jesse discovers a hidden watermelon among the vines and shows it to Pappy who assures her “it’ll be just right for a Watermelon day.” Jesse can hardly wait, picturing the day in her mind. She keeps watch over “her” watermelon all through the long, hot summer till at last Pappy announces that “this looks like a Watermelon Day.” The melon is cut from the vine and cooled in the pond while relatives gather, play ball, and join in other summer games. To Jesse the day seems as endless as the summer. At dusk, Pappy retrieves the cooled melon from the water, whacks it with his fist, and serves it up. Jesse relishes her slice as only one who has anticipated it so much can.

The story and oil pastel illustrations exude a down-home, banjo-playing, summertime, folksy spirit.

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**A 3-6 FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell**

The Prime Minister DeCree is writing a dictionary, but finds the whole kingdom upset over what should be entered as the meaning of the word ‘Delicious.’ The King and Queen have their distinct ideas and so does everyone else. Twelve-year-old Gaylen, the Prime Minister’s adopted son, is given the task to go to the five towns in the kingdom and write down what each person considers to be the most delicious food. What starts as a harmless survey, turns almost into a civil war when Hemlock rides before the king. Also woven into this fantasy adventure is the magical world of dwarfs, wolddwellers and the mermaid Ardis.

What a pleasure to listen to this excellent reading of Babbitt’s 1969 publication by the Words Take Wing Repertory Company. Babbitt’s descriptive expressions of people, nature scenes and sounds are a natural for this medium. The story line is imaginative and compelling and the variety of voices helped me keep the characters straight. Try this book on tape in your classroom, at home, or on a trip with your family.

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**B K-3 PB Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen**

"Once there was a beautiful butterfly kiss which fluttered among the trees of the forest." The poor little kiss is alone and wonders if anyone wants it around. She flies through the forest asking a tiger, an elephant, a stork, a crocodile, a hare, a bat and a cow if they want a kiss and none of them do. Last she asks a child who is listening to an old man tell a story. "'Yes, please,' said the child. 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' So the kiss fluttered happily between the old man and his grandchild as they gave each other a goodnight kiss."

For me, the story is weak because I remember "butterfly kisses" as those given by fluttering an eyelash on my mother’s cheek. I wanted the story to build on that light fluttery feeling, and I think it could have with very few changes. The butterfly is referred to as a kiss after the first sentence. I felt like a kiss was something the butterfly could offer but not something it was. The illustrations, however, are beautifully done, with the feeling of India in them.

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10 Brigham Young University


Reviewed by Lanell Reeder

It is January of 1944, and fourteen-year-old Bobby Lee Pomeroy has just answered a Liberty magazine ad for the "Great American Writer's School's" ten easy lessons to success, fame, and fortune. Bobby Lee will do anything to escape Twin Branch, Kentucky, where she must help her father run a men's clothing store. Throughout the whole year of 1944, Bobby Lee works on her writing lessons, corresponds with the "School", and becomes a well-practiced writer. This book records her life and writings all in her own words.

Although the publisher has indicated a 5-9 grade audience, parts of the storyline would go over the heads of most fifth graders. In the beginning of the book, Bobby Lee's naivete is disconcerting. Then, the reader begins to be involved enough to see the book as an effective piece of historical fiction and a wonderful story about a girl who really wants to write and works at it. The reader meets one girlfriend, who had to quit school and go to work in a war plant factory, and another who is Jewish. One gets a real feel for what it was like for teenagers during the forties and also for the language and entertainment of the time. A stereotypical English teacher, who Bobby Lee thinks is an old fogy, encourages Bobby Lee's writing talent and carefully leads her through some of the world's greatest literature. I like how the story is presented but would definitely recommend the book for an older audience with some understanding about World War II.


Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

In this simple, beautifully illustrated picture book, Bunting and Toddy have captured the terrifying and incredibly sad experience of the young Native American children, who, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were taken from their families on the Indian Reservations and placed in "Indian Schools" with the intention that they become "white men." The story focuses on Young Bull, a small Cheyenne boy, who is taken away from everything that he loves. His native clothing is replaced with school uniforms, his long hair is cut, and his soft moccasins are replaced with stiff boots.

"No more Cheyenne," they say.
"You have lost nothing of value.
You will be like us."

Among other subjects, he is taught the history of his people, but from the white man's point of view. They are drilled and marched and taken to church to learn of the white man's God, but

"We never speak Cheyenne
or talk of the Great Spirit,
the One who raised us in this land.
The Indian in us must disappear, they say.
It must be tamed."

Young Bull tries to run away but is found, and a ball and chain is attached to his ankle for a day. Even though this new world is so restrictive, Young Bull finally finds a way to live in both worlds:

"And in my mind
the warriors and I
ride side by side across the golden plain.
Cheyenne again."

This little masterpiece truly gives the reader a glimpse into the harshness that was inflicted upon the Native American Indian children during this complex time in our history. Bunting has managed to capture the dignity and courage of a
people who nearly vanished into the "American Dream." Toddy's illustrations skillfully combine the white man's and Indian worlds into an illuminating look at this often savage way of integration.

At the end of the book, there is a short afterword that gives more details of the twenty-five actual off-reservation Indian boarding schools that were established across the United States, at least one of which's motto was "From Savagery Into Civilization," and goal was to separate Indian children from their backgrounds and culture."


Reviewed by Rebecca Gleason

"Any two compartments could be flooded and this vessel would still stay afloat," the captain had said. "And we would never let two compartments be flooded. This ship won't sink." But fifteen-year-old Barry O'Neil isn't so sure. He's had a strange feeling about this trip ever since he came aboard. Maybe it's because he's leaving his grandparents and Ireland far behind to go live with his parents in America. Maybe it's because the trouble-making Flynn brothers are traveling down in third class and have hinted that he'd better watch his back. Or maybe the eerie ship's steward is right and something terrible is going to happen to the RMS Titanic on her maiden voyage. Barry tries to ignore this feeling as he explores the ship and makes friends with the other passengers, especially Jonnie and Frank's sister, Pegeen Flynn. Barry's sense of foreboding grows as he notices the lack of adequate life boats and overhears a radio operator discussing repeated warnings of icebergs. Hardly anyone else seems to be concerned, even when the ship grazes the side of an iceberg in the middle of the night. Even putting on life jackets and moving up on deck seems to be just a precaution. Suddenly Barry is plunged into a nightmare of panic as the passengers finally realize that the unthinkable is happening. Barry sees many fellow passengers lose their lives, but after a frantic search he is finally able to rescue Pegeen from below, where the third class passengers are kept behind a locked gate. They are swept overboard as the Titanic sinks deeper into the ocean but are finally pulled aboard an overturned lifeboat to be counted among the one third of the passengers who were saved.

*SOS Titanic* is riveting without being sensationalized. Bunting skillfully incorporates the layout of the ship, the names of real people, and the actual sequence of events into this extremely readable fictional account of the Titanic's tragic voyage. The characters are interesting, believable, appealing, and successfully draw the reader into the action. One interesting aspect of the tragedy Bunting chose to emphasize was the class factor. Most of the passengers that did not survive were third class passengers. Barry, a first class passenger and Pegeen and her brothers, third class passengers, had very different experiences aboard the ship. With little time left, Barry finds the third class passengers locked behind a gate down below. "'Why hadn't they [knocked down the gate] before, with only one puny gate and one seaman on guard?' Barry wondered—and he answered his own question, 'Because they knew their place. Because he and Grandpop and the rest had taught them they should do only what they were told.'" This interesting perspective gives an added dimension to a compelling story.

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Reviewed by Leon Archibald

DeFelice returns to an earlier America in her newest book for young readers, *The
Apprenticeship of Lucas Whitaker. This fine author impressed us with her handling of a frontier setting in her powerful novel, Weasel. These two books share another important element: strong central characters, boys, just passing into manhood, who both are confronted with challenging dilemmas.

In 1849 in rural Connecticut, Lucas Whitaker has lost his family—his Uncle Asa, sister, Lizy, Father, and finally, mother—to an epidemic of tuberculosis, then called consumption. Lucas abandons the family farm and after wandering some distance, is taken in as an apprentice to a doctor in a neighboring village.

Even as he begins to blossom in his new work, Lucas is still haunted by a belief that he could have saved his mother if he had only opened the door—days before her death—to a neighbor with news about a "cure." Superstition held more sway at that time when the medical community still knew little about the spread of disease. The dead were considered to be the cause of this epidemic. One could disinter a loved one who had died of the same illness, cut out their heart, burn it, and cause the consumptive patient to breathe the smoke from that fire.

The dilemma for Lucas is whether to believe his new friend, Doc Beecher, who maintains that the dead are not to blame for illness, or to believe the seemingly strong evidence that the sick are being healed by the breathing of heart-smoke.

DeFelice presents us with a great book. The characterizations are finely drawn and the people are interesting. At the heart of the book is the excellent detailing of Lucas' mental journey away from superstitions belief toward true knowledge.

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A Pre-2 FI PB Reviewed by Lanell Reeder

A salesman comes to the door selling a bottle of soap guaranteed to make baths "thrilling." Casey is unimpressed, but his mother is willing to try anything. Three blobs of soap in the tub produce bubbles that reveal little green creatures who bring fun and cleanliness to Casey's tub.

This will be a great story to read to a class talking about personal hygiene and dental care. It's also an imaginative way of repeating the old line: you need a bath tonight. The text moves quickly, and the illustrations are splashy. The theme is one very familiar to readers in this age group. Any library should have this great story about bathtime, and anyone with a great imagination could enjoy it.

* 7+ FI PB Reviewed by Lanell Reeder

Farmer, who has lived in Mozambique and in Zimbabwe, gives us a compelling quest and survival story set in Africa. Young Nhamo, whose name means Disaster, is cared for by her grandmother and aunts because her mother was killed by a leopard when Nhamo was very tiny, and her father has gone away. Although her grandmother loves her and treats her kindly, her aunts make life difficult. She is treated as a servant and eventually contracted in marriage to a degenerate old man in a neighboring village. Secretly the grandmother urges Nhamo to escape in an abandoned fishing boat across Lake Cabora Bassa to find her father in Zimbabwe.

Nhamo’s journey is both a physical and an emotional one. She discovers why her father left. Her spiritual connection to her dead mother changes. She learns to deal with spirit influences both evil and good like the witch Long Teats and the dead fisherman Crocodile Guts who hinder and help her on her way.

In addition to her own tribal beliefs, Nhamo comes in contact with Christianity, as practiced by the Portuguese Catholic trading post owner and his wife, and with a peculiar sect of protestants in Zimbabwe, both of which she finds puzzling. However, both appear to be effective in some respect as they touch Nhamo’s life.

The details of African life, the material hardships, the cultural traditions, and the limited choices create a powerful reality and effective tension as the plot moves forward. Nhamo’s challenges and setbacks are met with believable fear and despair, but commitment to her grandmother and to finding her father stimulate her own ingenuity and courage as she solves each problem.

Nhamo begins menstruating on her journey, an important stage for a young woman in Africa. The event is treated briefly and in a practical way.

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Farmer’s well-written book is highly recommended for its combination of dramatic narrative and vivid anthropological background. Farmer creates a memorable reading experience, and she provides a satisfactory but open-ended conclusion that makes the character linger in the reader’s mind. While Nhamo is victorious in her escape and her quest, nothing is as she expected, and clearly challenges remain to be faced.

This book includes maps, lists of characters, a glossary of African words, notes on history and customs, and a bibliography.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham

Roger is a Prince with a problem. Everyone laughs uncontrollably in his presence. King Whatchamacallit is fed up, so with the help of a wizard, Roger is sent off on a quest. Traveling through the Forever Forest and into the Mountain of Malice, Roger makes friends and even some enemies. Despite difficulties, Roger finally masters his fate and gains the boon of his quest.

This matchless modern fairy tale is a remarkable combination of theme, plot, setting, and characterization that makes an exceptionally good read and an even better read-aloud. Its optimistic mood emerges naturally from the theme which grapples with such timely topics as the meaning of life and overcoming doubt. The light language and structure perfectly complement the author’s personal interjections, which respectfully draw the reader into the story. Excellently humanized characters and memorable passages make up for the halting plot and lack of a true climax. Gratifying on a number of levels and appropriate for any age, the theme is particularly seasonable for those who are just beginning to strike out on their own. Complemented with enchanting black and white...
line drawings, this unpretentious quest fantasy is a rousing addition to children's literature.


Reviewed by Jan Porter

A high school production of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" serves as the backdrop for the real story in Good Moon Rising. Two seventeen-year-old girls meet, fall in love, and declare their homosexuality to their fellow actors during the course of the play's rehearsals and running.

If not for its strong promotion of a lesbian relationship, I would have strongly recommended this book. It is well-written and accurately portrays many aspects of a stage production. But the message comes through loud and clear and "therein lies the rub."


Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

One cannot read this book without feeling a soaring of the soul! George takes a young girl and her readers on a climb from the foot of the mountains to the waterfall at its height. As we ascend, all the beauties of the climb are pointed out in such a way that we feel as if we are also climbing. The glorious illustrations, almost leave us breathless as we climb past all sparkling waterfalls, holding onto rocks and tree roots as we pull ourselves past other adventurers, starflowers, and flying birds until we finally "come over the rim to the sky." And, as we stand at the source of the waterfall, George tells us that "the waterfall is now part of [us]."
discrimination. Her courage was demonstrated at an early age. When a young white child pushed her, she pushed him back despite the fact his mother was close by. The mother informed Rosa she could be arrested. Rosa calmly explained to the mother she did not want to be pushed by the white boy or anyone else. Thus, the tone for her life was set.

She grew into a gentle woman, yet strong in her feelings towards injustice. On December 1, 1955, when Rosa boarded a bus to return home from a tiring day sewing, she sat in the first seat for blacks. When the bus filled and a white man wanted her seat, she calmly decided she was simply not going to move. Her actions set in motion the civil rights movement.

The book is readable by the audience intended. The print is large, there are only 41 pages and eight short chapters. The format is encouraging for a reader new to chapter books. The story is told in a powerful but simple way, incorporating incidents to which a child could easily relate. The pencil illustrations are effective. The information is accurate and needs to be taught to children of all races. The book won the 1975 Notable Children's Trade Book in Social Studies and the 1974 Carter G. Woodson Award. It is definitely deserving of recognition as it is an excellent piece of literature.


A 4+ NF Reviewed by Camella Talbot

Careful and extensive research is the driving force of this general overview on the history and course of gymnastics. Gutman covers a wide range of topics, including the original forms of gymnastics, evolution of the sport, modern apparatus, judging and scoring, and the price of success. Men’s and women’s events are contrasted, as well as past superstars and the stars of the 90’s. Written by an admitted gymnastic-know-nothing, the book presents the exciting world of this competitive sport in laymen’s terms.

Clearly written, Gymnastics brings the reader to a comprehensive understanding of an extremely complicated sport. Gutman has been thorough in presenting not only the strengths and benefits derived from gymnastics, but also many of the hardships and dangers. The book has a slight U.S.A. women’s gymnast bias, but Gutman has admitted that information from other countries is difficult to come by. Most media related to gymnastics is produced by the United States. Written with feeling, this book opens eyes to the pinnacles and perils of a demanding and controversial athletic program. This is a definite must read for gymnastics enthusiasts and oppositionists, or for those who would just like to know more about the sport. It is especially interesting in light of the recent 1996 Olympics—you might be surprised to learn which athletes the author predicted would be successful.


A 1-3 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Precisely at midnight farmer Nicholas Greebe dies on a wintry night in Colonial Massachusetts. Hurriedly the next day, he is buried in a shallow grave. One year later, the family gathers to remember the dead man. Precisely at midnight, a little dog digs and finds "something thin and hard with knobby knobs on the ends--the bone of Nicholas Greebe." So begins Greebe’s one hundred year haunting of his farmhouse. "From this day forth, I quest, I quest, till all my bones together rest."

Johnson weaves a ghost story filled with comical twists and eerie events that eventually sends the bone back home. The narrative has the flavor of the oral traditional ghost stories of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but with fewer morbid and more comic elements. Schindler’s
ink and watercolor illustrations capture the setting and mood of the story. A good choice for Halloween story times, however, this story will have popular appeal all year long.


* 2+ FI PB Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

At first glance, this is a simple little book: the story of a young farm girl whose family is moving away from the farm, and the girl is trying to remember all the things that she loves so she will be able to tell her baby brother all about the farm when he gets old enough to understand. In that context, it is uncomplicated. What makes this little picture book different is more complicated. First of all, it is written as free verse poetry, with a concentration of richness that touches both the younger and older reader. In the beginning of this short book, the girl does not want to leave with her family—there is too much wonder and beauty that she seems not able to live without. Finally, her father and mother convince her that the baby will not be able to remember the magnificence of the farm if she is not there to tell him. "What you know first stays with you," her Papa tells her, but just in case she forgets, she takes a few souvenirs, "So the baby will know What he knew first. And so [she] can remember, too."

Moser’s black and white etching add another layer of richness to the story-line that will make this a book to keep and reread over and over again, especially in this mobile society that never seems to be able to stay in one place. Cheers to MacLachlan and Moser for creating a little masterpiece! Cheers to MacLachlan and Moser for creating a little masterpiece!


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Lord Artos, known later as King Arthur, must find horses big and strong enough to be mounted by his knights when they go against the Saxon armies. Young Galwyn Varianus, knowledgeable about both horses and languages, joins Lord Artos’s company as they travel to Septimania to select the mounts they desire. The story is told from Galwyn’s point of view.

This historical fiction gives the reader a feel for life in the backwoods of English about 500 A.D. *Black Horses for the King* presents the interesting history of farriery, the craft of shoeing horses. I admire the way MacCaffrey compares the character traits of the various characters and emphasizes and commends the noble character traits of honesty, perseverance and thirst for learning without being preachy. The character’s language contains just enough of antiquity to give the reader a flavor for the times without being hard to understand.


* Pre-4 FI PB Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

An unsuspecting vacationer boards a cruise ship only to open his cabin door and discover a pack of insolent pigs. The pigs enjoy every aspect of the cruise—the aerobics class, the swimming pool and dinner with the captain creating havoc everywhere they go. Before long, the pigs are loaded into a lifeboat and sent back to shore. Things just aren’t the same on the cruise ship for the lonely vacationer; they are quiet and relaxing. That is, until the vacationer arrives home.
This amusing tale told in rhyme is delightful. The bright illustrations depict vividly the disasters. The book is named in the National Reading Association's Children's Choices for 1996. It truly is a book to read for fun and pleasure.


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Helen Hoopes

Sixteen-year-old Hallie finds herself the "mother" of her seven brothers and sisters when her mother dies following childbirth. The grieving Horton family struggles in their small eastern Oklahoma town (up in the hills) to come to grips with the loss of their mother; but when the United States enters World War I, things begin to change. The small community feels a consuming fear as many of their sons, including the Starlin Horton, are sent to war; but soon that fear changes to hate as their actions settle on the German immigrant family living in their midst. Hallie is in danger from another source and is rescued by a stranger who doesn't believe in war, while later, Hallie also becomes a savior in her own way. This is a well-written, fascinating look at the effects of war, fear, prejudice, hate, and young love on a small community, and on a young girl who is forced to grow up before her time. Myers has clearly created a remarkable story.


A 7+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Switzerland in the mid-1500s is a region lush in natural scenic beauty and endowed with bustling towns and cities. On this tableau appear Zel and Mother. Mother and daughter rarely go into town, but when so doing, the soon-to-be thirteen-year-old Zel is enchanted by the town and its people, while Mother is clearly repulsed by the bustle and press of humanity and ventures into town only when necessity drives her to do so.

While shopping for Zel's birthday, Mother leaves her precious daughter admiring a spirited mare being worked on by the town's blacksmith. Soon enough, Zel is introduced to the mare's owner, the teenager, Count Konrad, when he returns for his horse. After Zel assists the blacksmith in removing a tick from the mare's ear, Konrad offers to pay her. Zel asks only for a warm goose egg. Struck by Zel's cheerful boldness and peasant simplicity, Konrad searches out the egg only to find Zel gone. Konrad becomes obsessed with Zel—she occupies his every waking moment. In the meantime, Mother sensing that Zel is reaching the age of maturity and beginning to unknowingly turn a man's head, decides one day to lock Zel away in a high tower so as to "save" her.

Based on the fairytale, Rapunzel, the story of Zel is told from the viewpoints of the three main characters: Zel, the spirited child and imprisoned emerging beauty; Konrad, the Count, who spends
his youth searching for her; and Mother, who, in trying to force Zel to make the correct decision, takes all choices away from her. When Konrad finally does find Zel, they consummate their relationship in spite of Mother’s efforts to prevent it. This is a fast-paced look inside a fairytale that becomes unbelievably realistic as characters, motives, and consequences are laid bare. It is suggested for mature readers.


* 5+ NF Reviewed by Lanell Reeder

This isn’t just a collection of comics and fun pictures to peruse, this is a brass tacks step by step explanation of how someone actually produces a comic book. The first chapter sets the stage with a brief history of comics. Then the different jobs in comic book production are revealed: writer, editor, penciller, inker, letterer, and colorist. Next, how to develop comic book characters and typical genres of comic books are covered. The reader is told what kind of paper to use, how to actually format the pages, and the different artists’ tools needed for drawing comic books. Different ways of writing the story and incorporating the illustrations are demonstrated, along with hints on drawing and producing consistent art throughout the story. The final chapter leads the reader through the steps of producing one’s own home-made comic book.

This book was thorough and very understandable with a good index and glossary. The binding is sturdy and catchy. There were examples of comics through the years, along with great original drawings to explain the text. It is a visually pleasing book, packed with information that is both interesting and easily understood. I had to wrest this book away from my eleven year-old son who has been drawing comics and cartoons on his own for the last year. He said the best part of the book was how it explained every little detail of what it takes to put comics together. When asked for the worst part, he said, "the pictures of real kids could have been left out." I thought they were rather effective.
Amanda is sent to Lowell, Massachusetts, a successful mill town, to be united with a long estranged great-grandfather. Hard times have fallen on the cotton plantation of her father. Amanda's grandmother/mentor sends Amanda and a steamer load of cotton as a peace offering to her father, the mill owner. On the way, Amanda is given up for dead in a steamboat explosion. In an ironic twist of events, she finds herself trapped in a new identity as an exploited textile worker in her great grandfather's mill.

Rinaldi is as effective in describing the languid but morally bankrupt life on a South Carolina plantation as she is in portraying the grim working conditions in a Massachusetts textile mill. Within this context she is able to frame the self-righteous abolitionist sentiments of the North and the South's charges of hypocrisy in the practice of wage slavery and exploitation of northern mill workers. In Amanda Videau, Rinaldi has found the perfect protagonist who experiences both worlds.


A Pre-2 NF Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Where Babies Come From is a simple yet clear explanation of reproduction in the plant and animal worlds. It covers with realistic colorful illustrations and text where baby plants, baby birds, baby animals, and human babies come from.

How refreshing to see a positive, healthy, tender approach to the creative process. I can see how having and sharing this book from time to time would encourage children to ask questions and parents to discuss them in the family setting. Parenthood is portrayed as a natural, accepted goal of every child and a happy part of adulthood.
This book is unique in that it portrays some gut wrenching tragic events. And yet it is a book of comfort, of healing. Schmidt has found the way to express, in evocative language, the weight and darkness of loss. In like manner, he weaves through his prose wonderful images of love, family, and belonging. His characters are warm and real. Through these characters and the legend of "The Sin Eater," Cole discovers the answer to his own burden of grief.

Schmidt finds so many ways to "connect" the reader with collective feelings. His depiction of the county fair is masterful. The descriptions of weekly services at the Albion Grace Church of the Holy Open Bible are at once poignant and comfortingly comical. The changing of seasons on the farm and the observance of accompanying holidays is presented in a way that stirs memories as well as making this book memorable.


A K-3 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Katie gets out on the wrong side of the bed, and her first day at a new school turns into a nightmare. She has to wear dirty clothes; her teacher is an ill-tempered gorilla; the school is without bathrooms; and the cafeteria's menu features snakes, snails, and spiders. Katie runs home, closes her eyes, and starts her day anew. This time she gets out on the right side of the bed, and the new school is not scary. Katie finds a cheery classroom, a smiling teacher, bathrooms, and a friend with whom to share lunch.

Simon has created just the types of terror that a six- or seven-year-old would imagine, but the fear is tempered by delightfully humorous illustrations in pen and watercolor. Bright colors, wide-eyed characters, and simple lines help create the visual humor. Text and illustrations combine to make a laugh-a-page picture book.
packed with kid-appeal. This is a terrific choice for reading aloud or storytelling. Some teachers may disapprove of the gorilla teacher, but her grimace will be recognized by many young students. The sewn signatures of the review copy are somewhat loosely set in the binding, and the book may not stand up to repeated readings.

★★★★


A 7+ NF Reviewed by Rebecca Gleason

Which first lady had her own daily newspaper column? Which first lady championed mental health reform? Which first lady used tobacco snuff in public? Which first lady saved a priceless painting from a White House fire? Which first lady was known as the "steel magnolia blossom?" The individual stories of the "first ladies" are a fascinating and important part of American history. Since the United States became a nation, forty-three remarkable women have served as America’s first ladies. The lives of these unique women reflect the social and political climate of their time and offer a glimpse into the history of all American women.

This compelling biography of America’s first ladies details the contributions and achievements of the presidents’ wives or official hostesses throughout their lives. The information is presented within its historical and social context and in addition to biographical data the book contains sections dealing with issues of importance to women such as slavery, women's suffrage, temperance, and educational equality. The text also includes summaries of each historical period from "The New Nation, 1775-1830" to "Modern Times, 1920 to the Present." The illustrations, over one hundred and twenty photographs and paintings, add a fascinating dimension to the biographical data and bring these intriguing women to life. All of the

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information is presented in a very readable and organized format making this biography an excellent reference tool for school and public libraries, as well as a very interesting book to read just for fun.

★★★★


A 1-6 FI PB Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Selina’s Mennonite family cannot support either side of the Civil War, as their religion forbids violence. Like many other Mennonite families, they decide to move to Canada. Grandmother will not move with them, however, because she is too old. The Bear Paw quilt top she is working on is just finished as the family packs up and leaves. Grandmother gives it to Selina to remember her by.

The illustrations are wonderful and the story reads smoothly. Every illustrated page is bordered by a quilt square border in traditional fabric prints. A few are named in the narration. A key that identified every quilt design would
have been helpful. There is a full page introduction explaining the Mennonite's position.


A Pre-2 NF PB Reviewed by Lanell Reeder

"Me" is an unnamed girl who shows you her room and a map of her room on which she has drawn herself. Then she shows you maps of her house, street, town, state, and country and where they fit into the world as a whole. She then retraces her steps back to her room again. The book ends with a double-page spread that shows children dotting the different continents, each with their own special place.

The font and text are designed for easy reading, and most first and second graders should be able to read it themselves. It would also be suitable as a short read aloud. The book would be effective to share with a child and then find his/her own state and town on a map and would easily work into an art project with the young reader producing a map or two of their own. It is colorful, attractive, and well illustrated.


A 3+ NF Reviewed by Denice Barainca

Orphan trains were a part of American history about which many people do not know. Between 1854 and 1929, they carried 200,000 children from orphanages in large eastern cities to new homes in the midwest. Warren skillfully alternates the history of the orphan trains with the personal experience of Lee Nailling to tell the story of the "orphan train riders."

One chapter describes the crowded conditions that forced orphaned and abandoned children to live in large orphanages or on the street. In the next chapter, Lee remembers what life was like in an orphanage. Other chapters tell about agents of the Children's Aid Society taking homeless children to towns where families were willing to adopt them, provide them with food and clothing, and teach them how to become self-sufficient adults. Lee recalls the excitement, then sadness, of the train ride, the awful feelings of helplessness when he was separated from his innocent victims in this fractured and clever collection of stories. Velde rewrites the stories and changes the action entirely around. For example, in "Hansel and Gretel," the witch is simply the innocent victim of two spoiled children.

The book is well-written and enjoyable. Much of Velde's humor and many of her plot-twists are subtle however, and younger children might not understand the complete story without a further explanation. Older children will certainly enjoy the book and its plot turn-arounds. Fun to use in an upper grade classroom, there is one word of caution. Some of the stories have a very cynical tone and resort to low humor. Overall though, this is a fun way to poke fun at "old favorites."


A- 5+ FI Reviewed by Camella Talbot

This book provides some clever twists on the plots of the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. Heroes become villains and villains become
brothers, and his adjustment after finding a loving home.

The children on the orphan trains were real people, and some did not have good experiences. The author includes stories of children who were abused or mistreated by their adoptive parents, but she does not dwell on them. Instead, she highlights the success of the program with the story of Lee and his life with Ben and Ollie Nailling.

Lee's story is compelling reading. It is a good book for reading out loud. Large, bold titles invite readers into each new chapter. Black and white photographs introduce Lee, his brothers, the Naillings, and other orphan train riders. A bibliography helps interested readers find other books about the orphan trains.

Lee Nailling believes he was lucky, and he shares his story because "Americans should know about the orphan trains and their role in history."


A 9-12 FI Reviewed by Janet Francis

Each war that touches world shores also touches the imagination of writers and recorders. Westall seems particularly driven to record the experience of war and to comment, however obliquely, on its effects. *Gulf* is no exception to this rule, but its pattern is somewhat different since no one concerned actually experiences the Gulf War—or perhaps that is his comment on this particular war. Andrew (aka Figgis) was born with an extra sight or heart—he *feels* things other people only notice in passing: like the injured squirrel or the newspaper picture of the starving child in Ethiopia. In fact, Figgis becomes the things he sees, and when he is twelve, the Gulf War begins.

As older brother Tom observes, first in annoyance then in horror, Figgis becomes Latif, a young Iraqi boy on the front lines of the war and so strong is this vision that Figgis cannot resurface. American decisions and battle techniques appear quite different from this point of view, and the entire war takes on the aspect of the mercantile greed that surely was a major part of its cause.

Westall has, once more, written a complicated multi-level story with characters real on the narrative level and clearly representative of larger forces for those who read deeper. Although the United States doesn't come out looking so good in this one, it's a must-have for high school and junior high libraries, and for those private readers who don't believe everything they hear on the 6:00 News.


* 4-6 FI Reviewed by Pat Birkedahl

Gypsy—along with most the people in Coal Station, Virginia—wants to know what happened to her aunt Bell Pratter who disappeared right off the face of the earth. After Belle's disappearance, her boy Woodrow comes to live with his grandparents, next door to his cousin Gypsy. Gypsy is intent on solving the mystery, but on the way she discovers many important secrets about her life and the lives of those near her.

It's impossible to miss the theme in this book stated outright in a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince*, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Every major character in this book grapples with the importance of physical beauty. Yet, the book is not didactic. The flow of events is carried along by Gypsy's folksy, first-person narrative, a narrative rich with strong images and the insights and emotions of a 12-year-old girl.

Woodrow is a solid companion to Gypsy, a protector who is seen by Gypsy as the one in need of protection. Both children have been
abandoned by a parent, but Gypsy's abandonment is far crueler, so much that she represses the horrifying image of her father's suicide-destroyed face. She faces the reality of his death in the book's climax.

The title Belle Prater's Boy must be intended to tell readers this is not a "girl" book. Both boy and girl readers should find plenty to hold their interest as the book's many mysteries are explored and solved.

★★★★★


A 3-8 FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Nine-year-old Abby has received an old music box from her aunt, along with lots of hand-me-down clothes which are too little. Abby is big for her age and shy. When summer comes, Abby and her older brother David feel they are too big for a babysitter, but Mom and Dad insist and arrange for a shy eighteen-year-old girl to stay with them. Abby and Hannah hit it off right away and begin an adventure with a ghost.

The music box used to belong to a family in town. A young girl who came to work for them began to take pretty things from the house. The music box was a favorite of hers. Her angry spirit haunts them whenever the music is played. Abby and Hannah finally bury the box in her grave and the haunting stops.

Betty Wren Wright is a persistent favorite writer of ghost stories for children. Haunted Summer is right up there with the best of them.

★★★★★
For readers who don't know Camelot, this book is an enticing introduction, but some background knowledge of the original will flesh out the stories tremendously. For Arthurian buffs, it's a can't miss.


Reviewed by Tom Wright

Young Merlin knows about mystical powers. He knows he has power in his dreams; they come true, "on the slant." As he struggles to make meaning of his power and the dark powers around him, he instinctively knows something even more powerful, the truth.

A *hobby* is a small falcon or hawk trained to fly at small birds. Merlin is dubbed "Hobby" by a traveling magician who introduces him to the world of magic, thus maintaining the hawking metaphor begun in the first part of the Young Merlin Trilogy.

Book Two of the *Young Merlin Trilogy* finds Merlin orphaned again as his adoptive family perishes in a fire. He is captured by a dark man, who proposes to sell young Merlin for his labor. The boy will not disclose his real name but substitutes *Hawk* which is close in meaning. In dreaming of his own escape, Merlin realizes his dreams come true. It is in the company of Ambrosius, the magician, that Merlin truly begins to realize his own power. His dreams are visions, prophecies. Those around him sense something special about him, and some fear him. His power ultimately leaves him alone again at the end of the tale.

Yolen builds on the first offering of this trilogy quite successfully. The imagery in Merlin’s dreams is mesmerizing and the reader is engaged in discovering how these dreams come true, but “on the slant.” Young Hobby’s innocence and compelling adherence to the truth cast him as a heroic character in this legend. This reader eagerly awaits the last volume.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

*Popposites* invites the reader to lift a tab, turn a page or pull a tab to discover the opposites of little, sad, few, right, closed, front, outside, short, full, off, and up.

Yoon’s and Culbertson’s very creative paper engineering shows a child jumping in the air, a light going on, and the inside of an orange. This is an interactive pop-up book—it requires the reader to move the flaps and tab arrows to put the “opposite” into action. Realistic colored illustrations are another feature of this fun way to portray sometimes difficult to visualize “opposites.”