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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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* 4-6 NF Reviewed by Mary Warner

*Irons* is a wonderfully informative and entertaining book. Alphin, the author of *Toasters* (also part of the Household History Series), has once again taken a mundane household item that is often taken for granted and given the credit it deserves. *Irons* covers the history and purpose of ironing and the evolution of tools used to perform this chore. The heat and pressure of ironing kill parasites and bacteria, keeping clothes fresh and healthy. Irons have taken many forms, from cast iron irons (or sad irons, called this because sad means heavy) that were heated on top of a blazing cookstove, to the sleek, lightweight aluminum electric steam irons of today.

*Irons* is a wonderful book, a timely reminder of the care our ancestors took in looking after their homes and families. This book also provides a fun activity that involves using an iron. This could be done as a family or in the classroom. Alphin is careful to cover safety precautions and proper handling of the iron. Everyone will enjoy *Irons*. It may makes readers grateful for all the things that make daily life a little bit easier.

Toasting is a way to dry the bread and still have it taste good. *Toasters* covers all methods of toasting bread, from a fork held over a fire to a modern toaster oven. The invention of the pop-up toaster is covered with delightful detail.

The author has made a common, ordinary subject simply fascinating. Toasting bread has become an integral part of our everyday life. This book covers every aspect of toast-making, including the emotional and social aspects of eating toast. The physics of toasting and the mechanics of toasters are covered with enough technical information to inform but not confuse the reader.

Teachers and parents will appreciate the many resources for further study that are included in the text. There are little interesting points and photos in the side margins of each page. Words typed in bold are listed in a glossary in the back of the book. There is also an index. *Toasters* is highly recommended to readers of any age who are interested in the world around them.


* 3-4 FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

One July day in 1950, Bobbie Jo meets flamboyant Bam Morrison selling advance tickets for “Bohn’s United Circus Shows.” His charm, wit, and enthusiasm for his work draw Bobbie Jo to him. When Mr. Morrison offers to make her his advertisement assistant, she jumps at the chance. The whole town is buying advance tickets to “the most thrilling, daring, exciting shows you’ll ever see.” All, that is, except for ol’man Swank, who views F. Bam Morrison as a two-faced weasel. His friendship with Bobbie Jo teaches her how to overcome her painful stuttering. It also enables...
Bobbie Jo to make friends with the mean Clara Jean—a classic bully who ultimately becomes Bobbie Joe's ally.

Based on a true event that took place in Wetumka, Oklahoma, the book weaves an interesting tale of deceit sprinkled with honor. The scattered black and white cartoon-styled illustrations complete the picture.

My Mom Married the Principal

By Margaret Bechard

© 1998 Santiago Cohen


B 5+ FI Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

My Mom Married the Principal explores an unusual relationship between a boy and his stepfather, who also happens to be the top man at school.

Jonah thinks he's just an ordinary eighth-grader, but all his friends believe he will get the leading role in the school's play, Romeo and Juliet. Amanda, Jonah's next-door neighbor, wants Katherine to play Juliet. She has been trying for weeks to get Katherine and Jonah to go out on a date. Jonah finally agrees and the date is planned—laser tag at the mall. Things don't turn out as wonderfully as hoped, and Amanda feels guilty when Katherine and Jonah break up.

Jonah is not without friends, however. He is constantly bombarded with requests for favors from his classmates who take advantage of his connection to the top.

This story is easy reading with no sexual innuendos. Boys, as well as girls, between the ages of ten and fourteen will find this book stimulating. The simplicity of the book adds to the charm of the content.

Children's Book and Play Review


A 3-5 NF PB Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

Meet six kids from different cultural backgrounds who share their feelings and experiences. All describe what it means to them to belong to a particular race or ethnic group while living in the United States. Rosa shares some elements of her Hispanic culture. Akram talks about what it means to be Arabic and Islamic. Jenny celebrates her Chinese heritage. Tad, who is Caucasian, describes his experience of living in a racially diverse neighborhood. Janell tells about some of her Native-American customs and traditions. Jason celebrates his African-American roots. Some recount experiences with prejudice or discrimination, but all talk about the respect and equality they believe should exist between races. The result is a hopeful and educational book, without being overly political. A great pick for home or school.

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* FI 2+ Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Billy is excited to have his dad help him catch a frog for the class frog-jumping contest. While his mother bakes frog-shaped cookies, Billy waits for his dad. Still waiting for his dad, Billy is encouraged by Grandma to try on the frog suit she has made for him. Grandpa has painted a frog mask which Billy dons to hide the tears that are ready to fall. Billy knows that Dad isn’t going to come. But still, he had hoped that for once, Dad would keep his word. Instead, it falls to Billy’s mother to help him find a jumper. Armed with a flashlight and bucket and dressed appropriately, Billy and his mother head into the night. They are lucky. The pair manage to grab a gigantic frog with a monster leap. At school, Billy follows Grandpa’s advice to whisper high expectations into the frog’s ear, gently stroke his back legs, and then promise him a Fig Newton. Billy is not disappointed. Not only does his frog, Amphibian, win the contest, but Grandma, Grandpa and Mom, who has come straight from work, cheer him on. That night, as Billy and his mother return Amphibian to the pond, Billy concludes that Dad’s presence would have “enhanced” the events of the day, but the day was good, nonetheless.

Bunting’s text and Medlock’s oil paintings convey the heartbreak of children when the adults around them fail to honor their promises. Billy is lucky. He has a supportive core of family members who don’t rail on one another, but pick up dropped batons. That all children should be so fortunate is the message conveyed by this story.


A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

This simple story is accompanied by a repeated visual illusion. Little Frog invites his friends to a party but calls them by the wrong color. His mother asks each time if the Little Frog is sure of the color, because the animal is pictured right there on the page and Mother can see that Little Frog is naming the wrong color. The opposite page is totally white—except for one small black dot. If the reader looks at the animal for a length of time and then looks at the dot on the white page, the animal indeed becomes the color Little Frog names.

After reading several reviews, I obtained this book, thinking it would be perfect for a preschool story time on color. It doesn’t work well with a group of more than about two children. It is still a great one-on-one book, and my grandchildren couldn’t wait to turn the page to find out what crazy color the next animal was going to be.
When Jesse Bear’s mother informs him that a relative is coming, Jesse longs for everyone except Cousin Sara. Of course, Cousin Sara comes and Jesse is dismayed. As the two cousins spend the week playing together, Jesse starts to rid himself of some prejudices. Cousin Sara is still bossy, but Jesse admits that he is learning much from her. When it is time for Cousin Sara to leave, Jesse realizes that he will actually miss her. Even bossy, overbearing Cousin Sara admits that she did not want to visit Jesse. Now both cousins realize how much they mean to each other.

Cleverly written in rhyme and illustrated in watercolor and pen-and-ink, this latest Jesse Bear adventure is a study of human relationships.

Conly has written a page-turner that reveals the dark side of the inner city, but with an element of hope. The characters are well-shaped, and through them runs a gamut of emotions and human intentions. What the affluent teens find, once they journey to the inner city, is people much like themselves minus the economic advantages. The abandoned children find genuine friendship and caring young people and adults who set in motion the processes that will unite the children and their single, hardworking father.


This book traces the history of Arctic exploration. It goes through the experiences several exploring expeditions have as they encounter the difficulties of this new frontier.

The pictures in the book are full-page, brilliant, stark, and as startling as the Arctic itself, but the text reads like an encyclopedia. It is too bad these great illustrations couldn’t have more captivating dialogue to tell the stories, which are interesting and important. The dialogue is educational, containing good information on the expeditions and the Arctic, but it reads like a textbook, which might put off potential young readers.


This is the biography of the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. As the introduction states, the Dalai
Lama, who is the personification of the Buddhist saint of Compassion, is the spiritual and political leader of Tibetans. Tibetans, keeping with their belief in reincarnation, believe that each Dalai Lama has the experience and wisdom of all the previous ones. Dalai Lama, in fact, means “the ocean of wisdom.”

Demi, as author/illustrator, tells of the search for the new Dalai Lama after the 13th one died in 1933. Led by a beautiful rainbow, the lamas found the two-year-old son of a peasant in eastern Tibet. The youngster was taken to Lhasa, tested by the monks, raised, and educated. Although he became the official Dalai Lama in 1939, it wasn’t until 1950, when he turned fifteen, that he took his place as the spiritual ruler of Tibet. Before long the Communist Cultural Revolution began, and in 1959 he fled to India to begin his life in exile. In India, the Dalai Lama continued to live a monastic life and make speeches throughout the world on peace and kindness. The Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his efforts to peacefully resolve the conflicts between the Chinese government and Tibetans.

After reading this book, I wanted to find out more about a culture of which I knew little. It could easily be used as a springboard to other sources on Tibet and current events regarding this religious people. The Dalai Lama, now 63, has recently been in the news. Demi’s illustrations carry the theme of rainbows and clouds. Colors depicting people, animals, and towns are sharp and exact, in contrast to the cold wisps of color used for the harsh Tibetan landscape.

* Pre+ PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Although Willa is tired, she can’t go to sleep. Calling to her brother Willoughby in the top bunk, Willa is lovingly reassured that she won’t have a bad dream. Willoughby instructs his little sister to think of something happy. Then Willoughby leads Willa on a tour of her belongings and objects in the house that are all waiting to greet her in the morning. Morning, he tells her, is happy to wake up a sleeping Willa. Willoughby being there in the morning is “the happiest thing of all!” utters a sleepy Willa.

Simple text and beautiful illustrations of a rabbit family home, in which mother discreetly keeps her distance, will enchant tired little ones who find it hard to sleep.


These two books are reviewed together because of their similarities. Both portray young women taken captive by Indian tribes at about the same time in the Northeast. Durrant creates a fictionalized narrative based on a real-life event, while Osborne creates a diary out of this white captive theme drawn from a number of real-life experiences. Both lives are changed by exposure to a different culture. Durrant deals with this starkly, refusing to romanticize the Delaware. Osborne paints a much more heroic picture of the Lenape.

Both authors use the captive’s voice to relate the account. Catharine Logan is a thirteen-year-old Quaker, and her experience convinces her that the Lenape share the same “light” as her people. Catharine has dream visions that warn her of impending events with the Lenape, and she feels the Holy Spirit speaks to all peoples. When she is finally returned to her people, few can regard the Indians as kindred spirits. This and her experiences with the Lenape cause a deep questioning of her faith.
Mary Campbell is twelve years old when abducted, and her story resonates more for the starkness of the narrative. She is forced to march with other captives all the way to Ohio. Her captors simply “discard” those who would slow them down. This is contrasted with true devotion, shown to Mary by her adopted family. This devotion gradually softens Mary’s heart, and she feels herself being assimilated into this foreign culture. Durrant uses Mary’s musings very effectively to show the reader how these captives can never be the same again, they having lived in both worlds. The world views are so dissimilar that, at least in Mary’s case, she can never feel comfortable in white society again.

Both are good reads, Beaded Moccasins being a more gripping account. Standing in the Light is an offering in the “Dear America” series.


Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Modeling wasn’t exactly at the top of Brad’s list of interests, but Ms. Heinz said, “You have ‘the look,’ Brad.”

Brad first becomes popular when he hits a home run. He is furious with a teammate who keeps telling him he is a loser baseball player. Brad swings the bat with all his might, releasing emotions that have built up for so long. With one crack of the bat, Brad sends the ball flying over the bleachers to hit the billboard. No one has ever hit the billboard before, and Brad becomes instantly famous.

Brad’s popularity doesn’t end there. Ms. Heinz announces that they will put Brad’s face up on that very same billboard for the whole town to see. Brad isn’t prepared for what lies ahead.

Readers will see Brad change with all the extra attention he is getting. They will understand his mistake and appreciate his challenges, as he comes to realize that looks don’t make you better than someone else. When the billboard is taken down, Brad’s popularity wanes. He’s back to his old self again, but with a few extra experiences to make him wiser.

Baseball and modeling are a unique blend, rarely brought together in the same book, which will make this book an instant success for girls and boys. Watch out!


Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Oh, my goodness, talk about being carried away. From the first sentence, “The first time I set foot in the Sultan’s harem, I was hoping to catch a glimpse of Shahrazad,” to the last paragraph “A new life. Like in stories, where you could set off on an adventure and come to a land where having a crippled foot or being born poor or a woman was not an obstacle to living out your dreams,” this book grabs you and won’t let go.

Shahrazad is in trouble. She is running out of tales to tell the Sultan. Before she came to the harem, he was killing a wife a day, because he didn’t want them to be untrue to him. Shahrazad has wound a series of tales that leave him hanging each night. He doesn’t kill her or he will never find out the end of the story. Shahrazad is running out of tales. For nearly one thousand nights, she has been able to find new ones to keep the sultan interested, but she is desperate for a new one. One day a young, crippled merchant girl visits the harem and tells the children a tale—one Shahrazad has never heard before. She “invites” Marjan to come back to the harem and retell the story so she can pass it on to the Sultan.

Marjan goes, not fully realizing that she will never be allowed to leave the palace again. To make matters worse, when Shahrazad returns from the Sultan the next morning, he remembers the tale and wants the ending very badly. Marjan didn’t know there was any more to the story. She heard it one day a very long time ago from a blind beggar in the rug bazaar. The only way she can
find the ending is to be smuggled out of the palace and return with the rest of the story.

Hooked yet? At the beginning of each chapter is an explanation in a small square box. I was so hooked I was tempted to skip over these to get back to the story. Don't do it! They are as much a part of the story as the rest. Want to know what happened to make Marjan a cripple?

Guess you'll just have to read the book to find out, won't you?


A K-4 NF Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

The ocean is full of treasures. All you have to do is ask it for something. While you wait, notice how far the water stretches or how it sails above you in clouds bigger than cities. Each day the gifts from the sea are different but special: there could be such things as coconuts, sea turtle skulls, or a beam from a sunken ship. You may experience things that are too big to carry home: sea turtle tracks at dawn or the sound of waves.

The illustrator has carefully planned rich collage backgrounds mixed with live photographs. Each colorful page brings the ocean to you. A calming, peaceful book awaits you, "out of the ocean."


* 7-12 BI Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Outstanding in the new biographical genre, *Martha Graham* is a fine example of the well-crafted study that can create an appetite for biography by choice. Freedman, who is always exacting in his research, has combined the intimate details of an interesting life with an overall picture of the progress of modern dance in America.

Graham's overwhelming attraction to dance occurred later in her life than is ordinarily the case, not until she was sixteen and happened to attend a concert of Ruth St. Denis, one of the pioneers of free-form dance. She never varied from that first flush of dedication, in spite of the fact that there was nothing about her to recommend her to the career. It was a time when only spectacularly beautiful girls achieved show-girl status by dancing on the American stage, and ballerinas (the other major form of dance entertainment then) began studying at six or seven. Graham met opposition from her family, her teachers, and finally from audiences, who could not fit her new art into their expectations. Because of her immense talent and determination, she forged ahead of all opposition and became essentially the creator of what is now modern dance.

Freedman's biography is factual, not romantic. Graham's life style, essentially artistic, is neither idealized nor emphasized. Matter-of-factly, her bouts with depression and temper, her contacts with other famous creative members of the arts world, her accomplishments and her failures are documented. Almost every page is blessed with photos, black and white, to be sure, but with such quality and drama that they could almost serve without text. There are quotes from Graham and from her friends (as well as those who are not so friendly), and the eventual result of the reading is that you have become well acquainted with an icon of the American entertainment world.

Well written, well illustrated, an interesting subject: these qualities define a good biography. *Martha Graham, A Dancer's Life* is such a book.


A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner
After the war in Asia, the son cannot stay in his home country—and the father cannot leave. The son of three generations of fishermen travels to America and made a new life, which includes a son who wants to be just like him. Father is always telling the boy about his father, the boy’s grandfather, in that far-away country. He tells him that he is probably doing just as they are, in a different type of boat perhaps, but the techniques they use are pretty much the same. The boy wants to meet his grandfather, and father tells him that he hopes he will be able to.

Through pictures, the reader meets the grandfather. With the father and his son on one page and the grandfather on the facing page, it almost seems that they do meet and grow to love each other. The artist has done a great job of enhancing the story. Without the pictures, some of the atmosphere of the story would be lost.


B 4+ Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Perhaps that was courage. Doing what had to be done, no matter how it terrified me.”

Hope is taken captive by Tories, who come looking for her father in Fairfield, Connecticut during the Revolutionary War. When Noah learns that her father has gone to join General Washington’s army, he takes her to Long Island to be his wife’s slave until her father comes looking for her. These plans are cut short, however, when Mother Thomas takes pity on the child and helps her escape.

Inspired by a true story, Goodman takes us on a journey full of unexpected twists and turns. Readers will cheer for Mother Thomas’ collusive strategies and smile wide for her brilliance in concocting half truths to conceal Hope’s identity. They will be saddened when smallpox strikes hard at death’s door. Emotions will teeter with Hope’s close encounters with being taken captive again.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Tom Wright

This is Hahn’s third book in a series that started with a somewhat autobiographical sketch of time and place in her childhood. Her first offering, Stepping on the Cracks, received acclaim for its depiction of World War II home-front life in America. Hahn has moved away from period pieces in the sequels. This story has little to do with the time period, but it has everything to do with Gordy Smith and his struggle to survive as a healthy human being in the face of an abusive family and continual dislocation.

As Ever, Gordy begins with Gordy responding to the first stable and supportive environment he has lived in. This stability is
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short-lived, however, as his Grandmother dies and he must return to his hometown to live with his struggling brother. This relocation brings back old friends, enemies, and habits. Hahn does an admirable job of telling a tale of a young man fighting to break a cycle of self-destruction. Told in Gordy’s voice, the reader can feel the heartbreak and fear that confront this young boy. Hahn adds a romantic interest to the story and adroitly handles it as a way to show Gordy’s efforts (successful and unsuccessful) to communicate with the opposite sex. This is definitely a worthwhile read.


Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Whose side would you take, Mom or Dad’s? This is the decision Martin must make. His parents are divorced, and Martin lives with his mother. “I had always taken it for granted that what she told me was good for me.”

Martin’s father is easy-going but tends to run away from responsibility. The story turns complicated when Martin’s mother thinks her ex has won the lottery and Martin is kidnapped.

The story consists of alternating journal entries from two key players, Martin and Hannah. It’s hard at first to figure out the relationship between the two of them, which adds confusion, yet mystery. The flow of the beginning of the book also seems cumbersome, with too many words to a page. With patience, the reader will appreciate that the words reflect Martin’s thoughts, which, like most of our own thoughts, come fast and sometimes disjointed.

The reader will not put the book down, however, until the identity of the kidnaper is discovered. It’s a bit shocking to find out who else is involved. At this point, the plot turns hot and emotions will simmer.

This is an excellent book to help children understand that when physical or emotional abuse is involved, we must take sides. Sometimes that requires disobedience. Adult involvement is recommended to help the young readers understand this challenge.


Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer

Gabby and Will have lost their mother in death and their father to the long disappearances and tentative returns of alcoholism. At twelve, Gabby has full responsibility for five-year-old Will, the house, and making ends meet. Late one spring, her father returns after a three-week binge, promising that he will not go away again. As time stretches, he gets a job, buys food, clothes and other necessities, and even some luxuries, Gabby begins to hope that he really will remain. The family struggles to stay together and find a way to relate. They do love each other, but Gabby can’t trust her father because he has let her down so many other times. Just as life is beginning to feel secure, tragedy strikes, and Gabby has to learn to trust someone else and accept love where it is offered.

This is an intimate, poignant story, beautifully written. The author provides amazing insight into the feelings of a preteen girl who is faced with so much responsibility and so little support. The characters are well developed. The reader can’t help being drawn into the struggles and rooting for a happy ending. An outstanding book for the older child and even teens.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

This Iraqi version of Cinderella tells the story of Maha, daughter of a widowed fisherman. Urged by her daughter’s begging, the fisherman finally marries the neighborhood widow, who has a daughter of her own. As the typical Cinderella tale
goes, the stepmother, seeing how much more beautiful and talented her stepdaughter is compared with her own daughter, begins to mistreat the stepdaughter. Instead of a fairy godmother, Maha's wishes are granted by a red fish that she saves from being eaten. The red fish continues to help Maha through her growing-up years to cope with her difficulties. Instead of a royal ball where the prince will choose a wife to marry, the occasion for gathering all the women of the town is a wedding celebration for the daughter of the town's master merchant. At the occasion, the women of the town see the unmarried girls and decide which young women will marry their sons. The red fish grants Maha's desire to go to the bride's "henna," but she must leave the party before her stepmother. Maha attends the celebration dressed in a silken gown, a pearl comb, and a pair of golden sandals. In her rush to leave before her stepmother, one of Maha's golden sandals falls into the river. Tariq, the brother of the bride, finds the golden sandal while riding next to the river, is fascinated by its delicacy, and desires to find its owner. Tariq's mother goes from house to house, allowing all unmarried women to try on the sandal. Maha is finally found! The stepmother tries still to foil Maha's good fortune, but she is caught in her own trap!

If you like Cinderella stories, you'll love this Middle Eastern version. Hickox adapted it from *The Little Red Fish and the Cog of Gold* in Inea Bushnaq's Arab folktales. Hillenbrand's illustrations are consistent with the Iraqi story line, while still being animated and delightful. The illustrator's note at the end of the book explains the intricate way the illustrations were made. This selection is sure to become a favorite for all ages!

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**A 6+ FI Reviewed by Wendy Bishop**

What does it take to become a man? Daniel is about to find out. At his mother's request, Daniel is forced to live with his uncle, captain of the lifesavers' station. Here he will learn the surfmen's vigorous routines. It is the autumn of 1880, and Daniel can think of a hundred different things he is better at and would rather be doing.

At first, Daniel's attitude is very poor indeed. He tries to conceal his fright of heights, which isn't easy when the captain orders him to climb the wreck pole. When he reaches the top and throws up, the captain must stop the drill. Even though Daniel is humiliated, he begins to change his attitude.

With time and practice, Daniel learns the surfmen's skills and becomes proficient using them. One day, when the captain calls them out on a real life-saving mission, Daniel proves himself to be the man his mother hoped he would become.

Hill's ability to show children another way of life on the sea makes this book interesting and dependable. Young readers will learn what it takes to overcome fears. Adults will learn how to be more sensitive to their struggle. Just as Daniel learns, maturity is a process and comes with a price. When he admits his fears and accepts help openly, maturity becomes a lot less painful.

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**A 6+ FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen**

What lengths would a person losing his eyesight take in order to restore it? That is the question fifteen-year-old Yeshe Anjur, heir to the throne of Padma, answers as he begins a classic quest to the far-off land of Tigristan.

As the story begins, young Yeshe is going blind. In the past two years, his parents, Lord Anjur and Lady Anila, have engaged the specialties of physicians, folk doctors, and even witches to help restore their son's partial blindness. No potions, foul-tasting pills, incantations, or steaming poultices have made one bit of difference. Without eyesight, he will be an unfit ruler, so it is decided that Yeshe, accompanied by three very trustworthy, capable men, will seek out the legendary White Bean Llama, a man of folk or fable who supposedly can rid people of all kinds of fevers, broken bones, or other infirmities. The risk is great. It is believed
that the mountains are virtually impassible. Few folks from the mainland have ever made the trip. The royal court doubts that Yeshe and his party will ever find an east-west pass through the great Tigri Mountains. Yet, disguised as caravan traders, they begin the trek.

This challenging adventure is fast-paced, intriguing, and exciting. Through well-written descriptions, the reader feels the steep mountain terrain or the mysterious Great Dream Lake. Through it all, one comes to understand, as Yeshe did, that each of our journeys crosses the distance of hope.


A K-4 NF Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

How can you mix the biggest batch of bubbles in the shortest time? How can you get water to flow uphill instead of downhill? The answer is in the book Simple Machines—a great how-to book. With the help of the six simple machines—the lever, wheel, axle, pulley, inclined plane, screw, and wedge—you can have hours of fun experimenting. The easy-to-follow directions are user friendly (especially for busy parents).

The full-colored photographs make these projects look inviting to perform. Each project shows a child happily engaged in one of the thirteen hands-on experiments. Teachers and parents can use the additional activity and information guide to answer kids’ challenging questions. Books like this one make science a delight to study.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Another in the swash-buckling Redwall series. Jacques continues his tales of daring-do, combined with imaginative meal descriptions and animal bravery. Again the animals are out to save Redwall from the latest of villains. Again they overcome all obstacles in fighting and defending their dear Abbey.

Although much the same as the other books by this author, anyone hooked on this series will be glad for a new legend and will avidly follow the antics of these marvelous creatures. Even though this book is on a rather high reading level, the younger crowd can still enjoy it.


A 4+ NF Reviewed by Mary Warner

If history excites you and you love to look at old photographs, this book is for you. All Around Town is a collection of photographs taken by
Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) in the 1920s and 1930s. Roberts chronicles African-American life in Colombia, South Carolina. The author has taken a unique blend of fact and speculation with the text to create interest in the old photos. The photos are nicely placed on well decorated pages with just the right amount of text to spark the imagination and let the photo tell the rest of the stories. Johnson has selected a variety of photos that both children and adults will find interesting. This is the perfect book for families learning about the past—getting excited about history and the “realness” of people gone before. They are just like us, with the same wants, needs, and desires, the same sorrows, joys, and passions of living. All Around Town is recommended for anyone who wants to take a tender journey to the South Carolina of the '20s and '30s and get acquainted with some of its people.


A 1-6 FI PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Thinking that taking his wife’s place at home for a day will give him a much needed rest, Mr. McTeague, a farmer in the Willamette Valley, begins the day with confidence. Off to the woods to clear land for plowing goes Mrs. McTeague. Early in the day, Mr. McTeague finds out that coordinating the milking, baby tending, butter churning, and cooking is more complicated than he had imagined. Tying the cow to his ankle, the baby’s cradle to the dog’s tail, and the churn to his leg—everything is under control . . . until he falls asleep. When Mrs. McTeague comes home after a hard day’s work cutting down tress, pulling stumps, and burning brush, she finds her worst fears realized. Not only is the place a mess, but the cabin has been burned to the ground, the baby is in tears and very upset, and the cow is gone!

“Easy work?” laughed Mrs. McTeague.

Mr. McTeague shook his head. ‘Not hardly!’

This story is based on a Norwegian tale by Peter Christen Asbjornsen entitled Manden som skalde stelle hjemme. Kimmel has adapted this familiar tale to an early pioneer setting, and Glass’s comical and expressive illustrations are perfectly matched to it. Children will be intrigued by Mr. McTeague’s ingenuity in solving the many demands on his time and will enjoy watching the predictable outcome unravel.


A 3-9 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Two young Ethiopian girls must make a dangerous journey out of the country during the political strife and famine of the 1980s. One is Christian, the other Jewish and blind. They are brought together as they leave their own families behind in the struggles of the exodus.

The story is interesting, well-told, and historically enlightening. Because most of the story is told through the girls’ thoughts as the experience unfolds, it is personal and involving.
18 Brigham Young University

This book would be an interesting addition to a history lesson on Ethiopia, the Mideast, or any lesson on countries with internal political struggles.


B 5+ NF Reviewed by Mary Warner

The Boston Tea Party is an interesting and factual tale, related plainly by Kroll and made gripping and exciting by Fiore. Just prior to the American revolution, goods coming from England were being taxed, and the colonists disliked the practice. The tax on tea was especially oppressive, so the colonists handled the situation by boarding a ship carrying tea and throwing it overboard. This event is now known as the Boston Tea Party.

The events leading up to and during the Boston Tea Party are covered clearly and accurately. There is even an informative time line of events in the back of the book. What makes this book especially exciting is the illustrations. The full-page illustrations, a combination of pencil and watercolor, give the story a sense of drama and excitement. The blue-green wash of the sky brings to the text a sense of mystery and intrigue. The figures are real and earnest. The paintings, especially the one of the town meeting, draw you in and make you a part of the action. It feels as if you are there. This book is a very well written account of The Boston Tea Party that led to the American Revolution, and it is brought to life and given depth with beautiful and exciting illustrations.


B 2+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

This charming series of books all take place in the “Jewel Kingdom,” hence the name of the series. Other stories in the series include:

The Diamond Princess Saves the Day
The Diamond Princess and the Magic Ball
The Emerald Princess Plays a Trick
The Emerald Princess Finds a Fairy
The Ruby Princess Runs Away
The Ruby Princess Sees a Ghost
The Sapphire Princess Meets a Monster
The Sapphire Princess Hunts for Treasure

These books are written on a second grade level and are pure fluff—but everyone needs a little fluff in their lives. If you are looking for great literature, don’t look in the direction of these books. Do look their way if your child wants a quick, fun read. Oh, did I mention that each book comes with its own jewel necklace, ring, or bracelet? Great fun as a birthday gift, two for the price of one. If the book is for the library, save the trinkets—they make great give-aways at story time.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Young, feisty, eighteen-year-old Jeanne Chatel is a French orphan. The convent which she calls home is ready to let this adventurous spirit take flight to New France as a bride to an unknown Frenchman. As one of many young female French orphans, raised in a convent at the state’s expense, Jeanne is aware of her status as a ward of the crown. Now King Louis XIV will provide his “daughters” with a dowry of suitable clothes and a husband in New France (North America). On the ocean voyage, Jeanne’s friend, Marie, falls in love with a ship’s lieutenant, even though while in France, she consented to marry a distant and unknown relative—a settler in New France. When the ship docks, Jeanne decides to help her friend by offering herself as the frontier
bride to the settler to whom Marie is engaged, but with whom she is not in love. Thus, Jeanne’s New France adventures begin. Now an instant wife to a widower and mother to his two children, Jeanne maintains an energetic outlook on life and is obedient to sister Bourgeoys’ counsel to observe and implement the healing practices of Native Americans; these make her an asset to the colony and her new family.

Set in the early Canada of 1672-74, Jeanne’s story is a romantic historical adventure.


A 5-8 NF Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

With the recent motion picture _Amistad_, curiosity has been aroused in people of all ages about the story of this unique group of Africans. The _Amistad_ captives were brought to America during a time when slavery still existed in the United States, but bringing new captives from Africa was no longer legal. From thence a two-year court battle ensued, ending in the Supreme Court’s decision to free the captives and send them back to Africa. While the movie may not be appropriate for young people, Myers’ book tells them all they want to know in clear, captivating text with original drawings and photographs. The book explores the historical background, personal insights, legal arguments, and political impact of the incident. The significance of _Amistad_ in the progress toward freeing all African-American slaves is made clear, and questions like “What does it mean to be human?” and “What is freedom?” are explored. This will be a valuable addition to the growing body of African-American literature, and the book will be enjoyed by both young and old.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

This varied collection of fifty-two fairy tales from thirty-five countries/cultures in the world includes the familiar fairy tale _Jack in the Beanstalk_ from England and _Cinderella_ from France. It also has unique stories, such as _The Wonderful Brocade_ from China and _Why the Sea Moans_ from Brazil. Philips begins this book with an interesting introduction and short articles on the history of fairy tales and storytellers. The tales are divided into the following sections: Under a Spell, Riches & Rags, Heroes & Heroines, and True Love Conquers All.

The fairy tales are from one to six pages long, but most are two pages. Just as a fairy tale is woven through years of tradition, Mistry’s color illustrations are woven through the text, making each page turn interesting. On the edges of the pages are small photographs of pertinent places and paintings, and paragraphs explaining the history and evolution of the fairy tale and its similarities with those of other countries. These features add interest to each selection, making the book a good collection for silent reading for a single reader or for reading aloud to a small group at home or school. Other features of the book include a detailed index. Use the following list of countries/cultures represented to use this collection to its fullest: Australian, Brazilian, Cape Verdean, Chinese, Costa Rican, Czech, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Indian, Inuit, Iranian, Irish, Italian, Jamaican, Japanese, Jewish, Kenyan, Maori, Native American, North American, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish, Spanish, Surinamese, Trinidadian, Vietnamese, and Zairian.


A 4-9 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement
When Nell arrives from New York to stay with her aunt and cousin for the summer, the atmosphere has changed. Cousin Folley’s sweet-talking friend has guns for both boys. They ask Nell to hide Folley’s gun in her room in the dollhouse she used to play with. The days become tense with the knowledge of the hidden gun, and Folley’s changing attitude. It is love and support within the family unit that finally saves the day.

This is a coming of age story of African-American children who have loving, supporting, adult family members to help them grow through the difficulties they place themselves in. It is a strong story, well told in an African-American voice, which is interesting. The author uses restraint and good taste in moving the plot along while still letting us feel the tension, pain, fear, and sorrow the characters are feeling. By the end of the story, the overriding feeling is the closeness each family member feels for the others. Here is a family that will bear each other’s burdens and be kind—a good lesson, a good feeling, a good book.


“Can you imagine your insides turned into soup?” That is how Pipe describes what happens to an assassin bug’s prey after being injected with poison by feeding tubs. *The Giant Book of Bugs and Creepy Crawlies* is a whopping fifteen by twelve inches, and is filled with random facts of common and not-so-common insects and spiders. The immense size of the book lends itself to enlarged and detailed illustrations of arthropods. The thirteen illustrations create a pleasing variation in style and medium. Most depictions are of bright, watercolor creatures on a white background. Colored pencil, pen and ink, and computerized photo images are used.

The content covers major insect and arachnid orders, such as beetles, true bugs, flies, wasps, bees, butterflies, scorpions, centipedes, and web spiders. Various species are chosen from each order and given brief descriptions. The information is accurate, though it often portrays these creatures in a negative light, and uses words like yucky, freaky, and creepy. The child who now fears or is disgusted by “creepy crawlies” may dislike them more after reading this book. Little is mentioned about their tremendous ability to adapt to difficult environments, and how they balance nature as a whole.

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“This is a story about Thelonious Monk and his music. There are no wrong notes on his piano.” Jazz great Thelonious Monk, his piano, and the text slither and jive across the pages of this colorful portrait of Monk’s best-loved composition, *Misterioso*. Raschka has matched the twelve musical tones of the chromatic scale to the twelve color values of the color wheel, using paint strokes for the notes and watercolor washes for the harmonies. It is certainly an interesting concept, painting music itself, yet one that requires some real musical expertise for the book to make any sense. It is easy to visualize the increasing complexity of the music, but if the reader does not have music in his head, he will not be able to hear the piece. Rashka’s message of “no wrong notes” comes across loud and clear, and the artistry is clever; however, for the average reader to fully appreciate Monk’s musical genius, as represented by this book, requires serious explanation.

**A Pre-1 PB** Reviewed by Cinda Clement

The Bear twins have hidden the Christmas presents mother bought for the family. Through rhyming clues the reader is asked to find the presents and other objects hidden in the pictures.

This is a picture book with doors to open and hidden objects to find. It should capture the attention of pre-schoolers. The bright illustrations are filled with holiday images.


**B K-3 PB** Reviewed by Cinda Clement

This is a tale, possibly a legend, from the eastern woodlands about a group of animals who work together to return summer to their long frozen land. They are led by a lynx, who gets his information from the stars. The animals travel to an Indian village and free the birds which the Indians have captured. As the birds fly to freedom, the earth in their path begins to warm. The lynx, unable to escape the pursuing Indians, jumps into the night sky with the stars. We see him today as the Big Dipper.

The illustrations are dark, energetic watercolors of winter scenes and animals of the forest. This is not one of the most interesting legends of the Big Dipper. The plot is a little weak, but the illustrations are interesting.


**A 3-9 FI** Reviewed by Cinda Clement

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After Livvy’s mother dies she is sent to live with her mother’s old college roommate, whom she has never met. This woman, who has never married, runs an antique shop with her mother. She is as sensible as Livvy’s mother was not. In journal letters to her dead mother, Livvy chronicles her settling into this new “family.”

A quiet yet worthwhile story of a young orphaned child adapting to the adjustments of a new life in a new family, it recounts sad and angry feelings, which slowly change to accepting, loving ones as Livvy and her new family make a life together. The story is well told, not melodramatic. It would be an interesting and enlightening read for older elementary children.


**A 7+ PB NF** Reviewed by Denice Barainca

*The Dog Who Walked With God* is a beautiful creation story, a gift to us from the Kato Indians who lived years ago in northern California. The story, translated from Kato legends, expresses both their reverence for living things and their love for dogs. Rosen writes, “A dog was so much a part of their world, they even believed their creator had to have such a companion as he undertook the difficult making of a world of goodness out of emptiness.” Thus the story follows “The Great Traveler” and his companion dog through the creation of the world, from a time of darkness, when water was everywhere and there was no land, to the time when the earth was full of living and growing things.

Although a picture book, this book is not for small children. It is written for more mature readers—at least junior high. The text, as poetry, is meant to be read aloud. It is an excellent book for a teacher to read to a class while studying Native American culture. The rhythm of the poetry expresses Native American love for nature and transmits the feel of their oral storytelling. The soft texture of watercolors complements the
reverence of the text. Fish, birds, animals, and plants are all beautifully illustrated, as they appear in the creation story and bring life to a new world. This book is highly recommended to readers who loves nature and wants to better understand Native American culture.

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* 3-6 PB PT Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

Daybreak comes first in thin splinters shimmering. Neither is the day here nor is the night gone. Night is getting ready to go And Day whispers, “Soon now, soon.”

Sandburg’s words are like a warm blanket that wraps the reader in memories of a simpler time, “when the corn [stood] yellow,” the October sun sweetened the crab apples, the prairie fog moon created a pearl mist on the horizon, and the field after the harvest was “a proud place to come.” Sandburg weaves the sights, sounds, and grassroots warmth of America's heartland into a tapestry that tenderly tells the story of the Midwest. Minor’s watercolor images draw the reader into a time and place long since gone, however, fondly remembered by those old enough to recall and wistfully envisioned by those too young to remember. A profound portrayal of the roots of American life that bind us to the land and to each other.

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Schoschana, Rabinovici. Thanks To My Mother. Translated from German by James Skofield.

A 9+ NF Reviewed by Suzanne Ostvig

Thanks To My Mother is an inspiring book about young Susanne who is saved from the Holocaust by her mother’s will to survive. The book relates their survival through the ghetto, work camps, concentration camps, and a death march. The trials these women encounter throughout the book leave one in awe of their courage. They endure lice crawling on their bodies, being naked all night in below zero temperatures, and seeing their loved ones die. Susanne’s mother’s positive attitude in the face of adversity keeps them alive, as she refuses to give up. Her mother puts a turban on Susanne’s head and rouge on her cheeks to make her appear older despite her preteen body. She insists on her bathing, keeping clean, and in the times when she is ready to give up, it is her mother’s will and courage that push her onward. Rabinovici is the daughter, and her love and admiration for her mother is evident in reading this book.

Thanks To My Mother addresses difficult themes and is vividly gruesome in many scenes. This is an important book to read, because it opens the reader’s eyes to the strength of the human spirit. This book clearly shows the importance of perseverance and will in times of grief and absolute horror. Although the book deals with an unpleasant topic, it is sure to touch and impress all who read it.

★★★★


A 7-12 FI Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

Soto gives us another book full of Mexican-American flavor, but this one is a collections of short stories. The variety of characters and events is delightful, and while it is hard to put a finger on what the stories have in common, they all fit together nicely in this volume. Many of the stories are humorous, some contain elements that are painful, but all are believable. Overall, the tone of the book is much lighter than Soto’s last novel, Buried Onions, and for that reason Petty Crimes will probably appeal to more readers. Some will particularly enjoy the book for its Hispanic flavor, but young adults of any culture will be able to relate to the misadventures and growing pains the characters in these stories experience.

★★★★


A 3-6 FI Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

When Patrick’s father gets a new assignment that brings them to Waskasoo City, the boy’s disgust is immeasurable. Diving into a book first thing is his answer to dealing with movers and new surroundings, but he reckons without Nairen, the skinny redhead next door, who won’t take no for an answer. She soon has him acquainted with the town store, the library, and the resident bullies. Then, of course, there’s the school, Craven Hill, complete with gables, a belfry, and bats. Oh yes, and a ghost, who seems focused on contacting Patrick.

Regular school is hard to endure—the main bully is hot on his case, and his father is absorbed in problems far removed from Patrick. Nairen proves a good friend and investigator as they track the ghost’s quest and uncover a historical tragedy at the school. Even the bullies gets involved in the mystery and proves to have had reason for his impossible behavior.

This is no realistic explanation ghost story in which all the supernatural is explained in the ending paragraph with perfectly natural phenomena; the spectral appearances are real as is the fear connected with them. With plenty of action and a third to sixth grade reading level, this book should be especially popular among the middle graders. An added bonus for Utah Valley dwellers is the resemblance of Craven Hill School to the old Academy Square buildings, now defunct in preparation for a new city library. Ask Grandma and Grandpa about it, kids!
Children enjoy learning about fast things. So pose the question "What's faster than a speeding cheetah?" and see what answers you get. This book will keep you whirling as it compares fast animals to faster animals. It speeds up when it compares the fastest animal to airplanes, rockets, and other orbital objects.

The delightful cartoon-like pictures help illustrate speed comparisons. Animals sport astronaut suits, and children drive space ships. A graph at the end of the book reviews the information in an easy-to-understand format.


A 6+ FI Reviewed by Wendy Bishop

Wilson's beautifully descriptive story I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade is set on the Mongolian steppes within the Asian continent at the end of the thirteenth century. Oyuna is haunted by bad luck. After a horse crushes her leg, the need to know if Oyuna overcomes her handicap keeps the reader turning pages. This is a story about overcoming obstacles and fabricated fate. Although it is a horse that disfigures Oyuna's foot, she uses this eminent animal to give her freedom of movement. Oyuna's largest limitation launches her greatest achievement. "That by crushing your leg it freed you from the ground and invited you upon its back to travel with the wind."

Wilson's description of human sounds paralleled with nature's dissonance makes this book exhilarating and refreshing. "The raucous laughter of ravens spilled from the ger" or "A voice high and brittle, like ice splintering across a creek."

Contents with chapter headings let the reader know right from the start what kind of adventures are ahead. At the end, the reader can find a glossary that defines dialect.

This book portrays all the melancholy of childhood, "I stopped the treatments—the day was too cold or I was too tired." Oyuna struggles to improve, to reach a destination, to sanction respect and dignity from others. Impatience, harsh judgment of others, confusion, and self-pity threaten to halt her progress.

Oyuna almost gives up several times until her grandmother Echenkorlo wisely asks, "Do you not see both good luck and bad luck around you always?" Then she empowers her granddaughter with this question, "Can you not reach out . . . and take either good luck or bad luck into your hand?" Oyuna understands that she is the master of her destiny when her grandmother explains, "I, too, have felt the pity of others. But always I choose my own path. And I pull my own luck from the air."

The grandmother, an outcast, wanders alone. Her tent's stench and the comrades she travels with cast doubt in Oyuna's mind. Oyuna soon learns that a toothless mouth can spill forth wise words, and Oyuna finds guaranteed guidance in the most unusual places.

Echenkorlo teaches her granddaughter to respect the earth and its powers. "Pray, . . . and the earth spirits will know that you know their power. By asking them to help you with their power, you will not be harmed by them."

I would highly recommend this book to young and old. It is for horse lovers, for those branded by bad luck, for girls limited by societal expectations, for the handicapped who feel they can never find freedom. This book has it all, with excellent adventures and beautifully descriptive words—a vocabulary that invokes the creative mind to stretch for new ways of expressing itself. "Listen with your heart instead of your ears. And always, always, follow your own path." This book is worthy of an accolade.

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Is it possible that things long lost to memory can come back to haunt your dreams until you are forced to remember? At fifteen, Stephen has begun to have the same nightmare that haunted his older brother into leaving home and disappearing. Stephen tries to hide the dream from his mother, who lives in fear that he will also disappear. His search for the meaning of his dream leads him to the truth about his own past and allows the family to get back together.

This story begins with a very dreamlike, fantasy feeling. The reader can imagine all kinds of meanings for the nightmare, Stephen’s brother’s disappearance, his mother’s fears, etc., and all of them founded in “fantasy.” As the story moves along, however, the reader realizes that the nightmare replays a very real occurrence in Stephen’s life when he was just a baby—a reality so shocking that both his father and brother have left the family.

This is a very interesting story. I believe the author fools the reader into thinking the story will be a fantasy of some kind. He has a way of leading the reader through a hazy, unreal atmosphere into a hard, cold reality that has to be faced in order to move on. The literary style changes as Stephen comes closer to a realization of the truth. This would be very good for older children and teens.

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A  K-6  FI  Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Long ago in China, a poor old farmer lived with seven daughters. More rocks grew on their land than rice, and the family would have starved had not the youngest daughter, Seven, sold her beautiful embroidery and fine silk tapestries. Under her needle, dragons, unicorns, and other magical beasts come to life. Noble families even seek her out to sew for them.

One day when the farmer is coming home from town, a huge dragon springs upon him and clutches him in its paws. He demands one of the farmer’s daughters for a wife. One by one, the daughters see their father in the clutches of the fierce beast but will not agree to marry the dragon—until Seven comes along. After Seven agrees to marry the dragon, he soars into the sky through the Milky Way. Seven is led to a place beyond imagination. She learns the secret of the dragon’s ways through the days of their marriage.

Though she is treated elegantly with fine apparel and the best delicacies, Seven severely misses her family and the old way of life. One day the dragon agrees to let her return home. She meets with extreme misfortune that delays her reunion with her husband. He, in the meantime, realizes that Seven has come to mean everything to him, not for her beauty but for her kindness.

This story unfolds into a beautiful tapestry of magic, treachery, and love. The illustrator does a magnificent job of capturing the spirit of this story. Each full-colored page is painted with a brilliant focal point. The dragon practically jumps off the page with its flamboyant red and orange details. Two brilliantly orange fish spotlight a detailed blue and green ocean background. All the pictures are exquisitely fresh and detailed. This is a book that children as well as adults will enjoy poring over.

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A  3-6  PB  NF  Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

House, House provides an engaging snapshot of middle-class America, viewed through two different sets of camera lenses one hundred years apart. From 1882 to 1907 Alvah,
Walter, and George Howes were in the "view business." They traveled throughout New England, chronicling everyday life and the people who lived it. Hatfield, Massachusetts was one of the towns they visited, capturing on film the dozens of houses and the families who lived there. One hundred years later, Jason Stemple, a local Hatfield photographer and son of author Jane Yolen, has photographed the same houses and their current owners. This mother and son duo have aptly documented how things have changed over the past century. Yolen's concise commentary on life then and now, coupled with the Howe and Stemple's illuminating photographs, place the houses in their historical context, providing a delightful look at American life.

Includes a list of books for further reading on this subject.