Book Reviews

Janet O. Francis

Cinda Clement

Vicky M. Turner

Keith R. Westover

Annette Van Wagenen

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Authors

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Book Reviews


* 5-7 FI  Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

England’s Carnegie Prize for children’s books this year goes to a delicate fantasy based on hope and sadness with side trips to science, imagination, and William Blake.

Michael, his parents, and a new sister have just moved out to the country into a very neglected old house. It needs fixing up and the family takes on the challenge. At least Dad and Michael will be doing the renovations because Mom and Baby (too new even to have a name) are spending time in the hospital since Baby’s heart doesn’t work right.

To begin with, Michael’s not even sure that this baby is a good thing, and digging out a 20 year accumulation of dirty trash from the yard and garage is certainly not! Michael’s recreational time, which used to be spent playing football and hanging out with his friends, is now monopolized by fixing up the old house.

When Michael finds a flattened, raggy, dead-pale something in the garage, he is appalled and fascinated. He suddenly starts to care about fitting in at school and is rewarded with the friendship of Mina, who is taught at home and proud of it, and who has some ideas of her own about the very much alive creature in the garage.

*Skellig* is densely written and full of new ideas for kids. Mina is studying birds, fossils, and William Blake’s angels, and she sees connections. Michael is worrying about Baby, the creature in the garage, and life in general, and Mina helps him to find his own connections. The creature heals, with their care, enough to become what he was or what he will be. Skellig is his name.

Obviously not cut from the same cloth as the *Harry Potter* books, *Skellig* has its own voice for the imaginative and curious young reader. It would make a solidly satisfactory read-aloud with lots of possibilities for discussion. This is a book not to be missed.

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A  K-4 PB  Reviewed by Cinda Clement

This free-verse poem about Alaska asks the question “Who knows the song of the north?” Each page has beautiful photos of Alaska’s animals in their natural environment with a few words of the poem which give information about the animal. At the end of each phrase is the question, “Who knows the song” of each animal? It ends with a picture of a little native child listening for the Song of the North.

The poetry is simple and the photos are wonderful. Children should enjoy this book.

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A  2-4 PB  Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Third grade has just begun and the new teacher has a very strange name—Kempzsinksi. “Say it like this,” she instructs, “KEMP-CHIN-SKI.” Ann Zesterman loves the sound of her teacher’s name and uses it in rhymes while plaing basketball. She would “bounce, dribble, turn, and shoot to that long, fun name.” Mrs. K. makes
8 Brigham Young University

school more fun—it’s interesting. Mrs. K. calls her students the third grade explorers, or the third grade detectives, or the third grade travelers. Mrs. K. has been to many interesting places, and she knows sign language. Worm day in the third grade is an event. But one day Mrs. K. isn’t at school. And she doesn’t return for a long time. The children learn that she has cancer and is very ill. She may never be able to return to school.

At first glance this book looks like a chapter book with pictures, but a closer look reveals that there are no chapters. The book stresses reading and learning without preaching it. The love of a good teacher makes this a marvelous story.

★★★★


B 4-6 NF Reviewed by Keith R. Westover

On the Field is one of several books by Bundey in the series First Sports Science. In this book the author attempts to present most of the major sports which are played outside on a field, primarily on grass or artificial turf. The book begins with a few brief pages in which the author discusses various types of playing arenas, playing surfaces, body mechanics, elementary physiology, sports psychology, and clothing for sports. This is followed by brief presentations of the sports themselves, taking up about half of the book with various track and field events, followed by brief presentations on football games (American football, soccer, and rugby), hitting and catching games (American baseball, softball, cricket), stick games (lacrosse and field hockey), and finally tug-of-war.

The sports are presented very simply without any actual detailed presentations of rules. The value in this book would be to present to children something of the variety in sports so that they might possibly be able to choose sports of interest for later involvement, or even to interest children in the science of physiology or the field of recreation.

The book is abundantly illustrated with appropriate photographs and drawings. Other books in this series by the same author cover sports that take place in the gym, in the water, in the snow, etc. These books appeared originally in England, first published by Zoe Books Limited, which would explain why there is a somewhat international flavor to the presentation which includes sports such as cricket, a sport not generally played in the United States.

★★★★


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Leora’s webbed hand has always marked her as different. As a resident in her stepmother’s household in Village 15, she is in constant fear of being sent to the “Institute,” a place for “detectives.” Yet her strange hand allows her to draw pictures with haunting power. The villagers are not allowed to go past the locked gates of the village. Leora feels that life for her might be different out there. One day, Wilfret, a cruel relative of the family, captures a baby birmba, a supposedly fierce mutated species of animals. He plans to take it to the Rulers for study and evil purposes. When Leora dares to free the baby birmba, a creature that she has been taught to fear, her life begins to change. This act of kindness sets in motion unforgettable experiences. She sets off into the forbidden Outside on a quest that takes her on an adventure of excitement, but extreme danger.

This book is a definite page-turner until the very end of the story. It is filled with warmth, friendship, hostility, and adversity. Its chilling tale comes to an exciting climax in the search for family belonging.

★★★★

A Pre-3 PB NF Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Suitable for early elementary grades, *Jamaica* is an informative, colorful introduction to this Caribbean Island. With colored photographs and colorful graphics, children are introduced to the location, climate, history, celebrations, language, people, sports, art, and the food of the island, as well as to the famous Bob Marley and his reggae band.

After spending a year and a half in Jamaica, I found that this book portrays the culture of Jamaica in an accurate, positive way that would be easy for early elementary grades to understand.


B K-3 PB Reviewed by Cinda Clement

This retelling of Cinderella with a mid-eastern twist tells the tale of Settareh, a kind-hearted girl with cruel step-relations. The father is alive in this version, but unaware of his daughter’s problems. He does appear to give each daughter money to prepare for the ball and counsels Settareh to “choose wisely.” After spending her money in different ways than she expected, Settareh has no new clothes for the Ball. But the traditional fairy shows up to prove the necessary finery, and the story ends as is expected.

The drawings are vibrant and help to tell the story. Children will recognize and enjoy this version of Cinderella.


A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Three friends, Cat, Squirrel, and Duck, live together and share responsibilities in the home. They eat pumpkin soup every day; Cat cuts up the pumpkin, Squirrel stirs the soup, and Duck adds the salt. One morning, Duck decides he wants to stir the soup. Cat and Squirrel insist he is too little and besides, it isn’t his job. So Duck runs away. When Cat and Squirrel decide he’s not coming back, they lose their anger, saying that they really should have let him stir and go looking for him. After a long search in the dark, they give up only to find him at home when they return. Even though it is late, they make pumpkin soup and let Duck stir. He makes a mess but they don’t say anything—friendship is more important. At the end of the book is a recipe for Pumpkin Soup.

Cooper’s illustrations are warm and friendly, filled with the good pumpkin colors of autumn. The story supports good friends and recognizes a common source of squabbles. Children enjoy the story right to the end. It’s great to have a good pumpkin story not tied to Halloween! And who knows? Maybe some kids will be encouraged to taste that weird pumpkin soup.


* 4-9 PB Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

“Like his pa before him, Sam traveled the back roads,” calling the Ozarks his home. He sleeps out under the stars with only the clothes on his back and his “fine old lionhead fiddle.” Everywhere he goes he is welcome and people drop whatever they are doing to come listen to Sam play. He can fiddle away their worries, their cares, and the aches in their bones. When he tucks
that fiddle under his chin, something magic happens. He makes music “high and low, fast and slow,” playing tunes that “mingle with the wind in the pines and meander on to the sky.” Folks say Sam has a gift, but Sam never forgets what his pa told him when he first taught him to fiddle: “This ain’t a gift, Son. It’s a loan. You gotta pass the music along.”

The music of the mountains, of the people and their simple lifestyle, bubbles up from deep within Sam’s soul, finding its way to his finger tips, giving life to that old fiddle. But as the years wear on and the winter cold puts an ache in his joints, Sam knows the time has come to “pass the music along.” For years he looks for someone he can pass the fiddle to, but no one is there until the day he meets the boy with the red hair and freckles. When the boy holds the fiddle, Sam sees the music in his face and he knows he is the one. The warmth of a bygone day where people took time to hear the music of living is fondly revisited through Gerig’s evocative watercolor illustrations of life in the Ozarks. Using family members as her models, she has masterfully painted a tenderness that washes over the reader, allowing memories of the past to comfortably spill out and mingle with the present. Combined with Dengler’s lyrical prose, this read-aloud tale will be enjoyed by readers of all ages, over and over again.


A 8-12 PB Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

BaMusa comes from a family of hat makers. The whole family makes wide-brimmed *dibiri* hats from the rice stalks they collect after the harvest. During the rainy season they embroider close-fitting, brightly colored *fugulan* caps. One morning before breakfast, hats piled high on top of his head, BaMusa sets out for a great festival, intending to sell more hats than he ever has before. After traveling several hours, he grows hungry and tired, so he sits down under a mango tree to rest. Little does he know that the mangos attract monkeys, who soon become aware of BaMusa snoring under their tree. Lured by the colorful hats, the monkeys creep down from the tree and steal them all away. When BaMusa awakens and realizes what has happened, he must find a way to get his hats back. With each attempt he learns a new lesson from the monkeys, until he finally discovers that “an empty satchel can not stand.”

Master storyteller Diakite retells this delightful West African folktale just as his uncle told it to him when Diakite was a young boy in Mali. Vibrantly rich ceramic tile paintings give life to BaMusa and the humorous antics of the monkeys in the mango tree. In the author’s notes at the end of the story, Diakite reminds us that folktales not only entertain, but also instruct us in life’s lessons. The musical African dialect sprinkled throughout the tale make this an excellent choice for a story hour read aloud.


* Pre PT PB Reviewed by Lillian Heil

This book is a must for parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and babysitters because it clearly shows one way to interact with very young children in the family. If an adult doesn’t know what kind of language babies will respond to, this book will advise; if an adult doesn’t know how to stimulate a young child’s brain and give him or her a start on language development, this book will help; if an adult wants to liven up daily activities with a spirit of fun, play, and learning, this book will give guidance. The author hopes that her book will inspire family members or adult friends to create their own rhymes as they interact with a young child.
The book is divided into three sections. The first one is the very beginning of the baby’s life, two to 12 months. The second applies to babies between 12 and 24 months, and the third is between 24 and 36 months. Along with the rhymes the author briefly describes the baby’s development and how the rhymes will help him or her to develop language at each stage. Learning is what a baby’s life is all about, and nursery rhymes and actions make that learning the playful and fun activity that epitomizes the best learning conditions for the young child. Lambert’s illustrations fit the mood of peaceful, happy playtime and show adults interacting with children as they share the rhymes with them.

If adults will make use of Dunn’s knowledge of language development and early childhood education in the home, they will find that children can grow with rhymes and that the activity is fun for both the adult and the child.


* B 5-8 FI Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

Can eleven-year-old Bobbie Lynn and her thirteen-year-old brother, Mason, hide their mother’s “delicate” condition when their father is declared missing in action, just 32 days after he leaves for Viet Nam? Mother always has bad spells when dad has to leave, but this time is the worst. After hearing the news about dad, she came home from the Piggly Wiggly and went to bed, for good. Mason said, “we’re going to act normal, get it? N-O-R-M-A-L!” But how can you act normal when your mother sleeps all day some days, rocks and sobs other days, and then tries to shoot God with a rifle at night? Bobbie Lynn’s anchor to reality comes in the form of the tiny, yet feisty Wendy Kathleen Feeney. Wendy can call doves by whistling through her thumbs and loves to skip because it’s almost like flying. She has a blind, retarded twin sister who she pushes around the yard on a couch on wheels and everybody at school thinks she’s loony. Wendy believes in guardian angels and says if you listen closely you will hear their wings rustle, just like the wings of the doves.

Bobbie Lynn and Mason are determined to protect their mother; they promised their dad they would take care of her. But what if dad never comes home? *Dove Song* is a heartwarming story...
about friendship and our need to not be alone. Bobbie Lynn and Mason discover that it is okay, even normal, to ask for help.

Franklin’s characters are comfortably down-to-earth, yet somewhat underdeveloped. The story is quick paced and at times is disjointed. Despite these minor flaws, Dove Song is a good read that warms the heart, lifts the spirit and reminds us all that guardian angels just don’t fly around heaven.

★★★★


A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

It is a beautiful fall day when Mr. Long goes to town and brings home a surprise for the whole family: a brand new Model-T Ford. But no one is more surprised than Mr. Long when he gathers all the “men-folk” together to learn the fine art of driving. Mrs. Long, mother of five children and seven step-children, takes exception to the statement that men need to learn to drive and women don’t. She quickly jumps in the car and shows one and all that women are as good at driving as men are.

This marvelous sequel to Mountain Wedding features all of the same characters—Mama, Papa, and all of the Long children. A few years older, willing to try new things, but still wearing (on different children) the same clothes from the last story. Grab Mountain Wedding to see what great hand-me-downs Rand has created for the children.

★★★★


A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Dr. White is a remarkable doctor in the pediatrics ward of the hospital who is especially good with critically ill children. But he happens to be a dog, so when the health inspector comes, Dr. White is banned from the hospital. When the health inspector’s child becomes critically ill in the same hospital, a nurse lets Dr. White in to be with the child. The next morning, the inspector comes to the hospital and finds Dr. White lying beside his smiling, recovering daughter.

Based on a true incident, this story is simply told and beautifully illustrated in soft, spare pencil and pale watercolors. This wonderful, heartwarming book can be enjoyed by all.

★★★★


* 5-6+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Cinders-Ella is what her “step-evils” call her. Ella is what she calls herself, but when she becomes a princess about to wed Prince Charming, Princess Cynthiana Eleanora is what everyone in the castle is obliged to call her. Slowly she learns that getting even with Lucille (her evil step-mother) by marrying “charm” is not the sweet revenge she thought it would be. It’s awful being a princess—too many rules, too many things she can’t do because it isn’t princess-like, too many strange and uncomfortable clothes—just too much! Ella wants to be her own person, one who can choose to make a fire if she is cold, one who can run in the halls, one who can go outside and smell fresh air. Eventually she decides to tell Charm that she cannot marry him, only to find that this, too, is forbidden.

Just Ella is another delightful Cinderella story that doesn’t exactly follow the plot of the familiar fairy tale.

A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Hague has illustrated this familiar psalm with childlike images. For example, the phrase “he leadeth me by the still waters” shows a boy standing by the quiet water of a stream with a fast-moving waterfall (as contrast) in the background. The phrase “as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” has a child walking through a cemetery, and the phrase “thy rod and staff” is represented by a lovely country church.

The children are in old fashioned dress and in a rural, country setting which may be hard for a young city child to understand, but the peace and beauty of the scenes certainly fit the spirit of this beloved psalm. One very minor complaint is the picture of a child walking with a goose almost as tall as she is to illustrate the phrase “he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.” Too many experiences told by people who have owned geese make it doubtful that any child in their right mind would stand that close to this fierce member of the fowl family.

Young children can begin to understand the 23rd psalm with the help of this picture book.


A 5-8 FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen


* 2-7 NF Reviewed by Nancy Alder

The cartoon illustrations and unabashedly straightforward approach to sex education make this a very clear, readable, and child-friendly resource.

The unfiltered full body nudity cartoons and lack of euphemisms and beating around the bush in the text may draw criticism from readers who balked at the author’s earlier book, *It’s Perfectly Normal*. But my 15-year-old liked that the book is neither too “soft and cute” nor “like a technical manual” as other sex-ed books sometimes tend to be. My 11-year-old liked the book because he could understand it without having to ask a lot of questions. I found the information to be correct and complete, and presented in a logical, amusing, readable way. The index and the fact that the book deals a bit with peripheral issues such as adoption, how to play with and enjoy a new baby, and some multi-cultural celebrations of a new child joining the family are bonuses.

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The cartoon illustrations and unabashedly straightforward approach to sex education make this a very clear, readable, and child-friendly resource.
“Wheels make you free” is one message behind this beautifully written novel. Freedom to be yourself and not confined to set rules and spaces is a theme interwoven with friendships that can be built between two entire different individuals.


Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Nine-year-old Dorothy decides to follow her older shepherd brothers who are taking a prized lamb the Christ child in this version of the Christmas Rose legend. Recognizing that she has no gift for the babe, Dorothy begins to weep. An angel holding a pure white flower appears. Dorothy covers her face, and when she opens her eyes, white flowers carpet the ground. Dorothy races through Bethlehem with an armful of flowers to find the baby surrounded by chests of gold, frankincense, myrrh, a lamb, three kings, and three shepherds. (The illustration shows Mary, Joseph, a couple of cows and a chicken also present in the stable). Dorothy is the last to present her gift, which she lays at the Child’s feet. He grasps a flower, apparently giving it healing power. Sleepy Dorothy is carried home in her oldest brother’s arms.

Some inconsistencies exist in the illustrations and text. Even though the text states that Dorothy was born “long after the youngest of her brothers had gone to the fields to tend the flocks,” Dorothy’s brothers appear too old—Joab and Jonathan in their thirties and Micah in his forties. One’s beard is so precisely trimmed that he must have had access to a Norelco. The story states that the shepherds’ journey was more than a day, but that they would arrive in Bethlehem by nightfall. Amazingly, the wise men in this story arrive prior to the shepherds. Wise men, shepherds, and the holy family are together in a stable, and the Baby appears to be several months old. Certainly the Christ child was several months old when the wise men visited, but was a newborn when shepherds came from their fields. This magical legend has been presented for centuries; however, this version and its illustrations are quite ordinary.


Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Lenny, a Jewish boy during World War II, must leave London and the bombing there to live in the English country. He is sent to a family who are not Jewish, nor are they very sympathetic to the trauma he is feeling. He tries to adjust to the new surroundings, a new school, and to not having any friends, but he misses his family terribly.

This book has some good messages in it. It might be a good catalyst for discussion on several different subjects ranging from bed-wetting and kindness to bravery and war. The writing seems a little disjointed, but the illustrations are evocative of the feelings the little boy must be having, which adds to the story.


Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Dedicated to “all the frogs that never made it out of the seventh-grade biology lab,” Frankenfrog is invented by mad Dr. Franken to catch the offspring of a hideous Hyperfly—accidently also invented by Dr. Franken. Frankenfrog has ideas of his own, though. He
doesn't want to tackle Hyperfly, he wants to go to the swamp. The regular frogs at the swamp, are, of course, afraid of him and run off. Suddenly, Hyperfly buzzes by with the mad doctor and his assistant. Frankenfrog zaps him and they all go back to the castle.

Second graders find this book especially hilarious. The pictures are zany and bold, and the story is lots of fun.


A 3-6 FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Shy Charlie Mouse is quite a grown-up mouse farmer. He breeds every imaginable color of mice. He is also a taxidermist who has an interest in model railroads. One day a young woman comes to buy a mouse from him and they fall into an easy friendship. Merry Day (the young woman) loves mice and encourages Charlie to try to breed a green mouse. Charlie feels this is not possible but tries anyway. Finally, after a year and many generations of breeding, one green mouse is born. Merry and Charlie marry and take the mouse (Adam Mouse, by name) to the Mouse Show where he wins Supreme Champion. In order to protect Adam from being stolen, Charlie paints him black and dyes several white mice green. When a theft does occur, they decide to let the public believe that Adam has been stolen. Even though Adam is bred several times, there is never again a green mouse. When Adam dies, he is stuffed and kept on the mantle, where the couple’s daughter, Cherry, can enjoy him and hear his story over and over.

Very typically King-Smith, this unlikely story is fun to read, incorporates a bit of scientific knowledge about breeding and taxidermy, and keeps the reader’s interest until the end. The type is large and there are illustrations, but the story would appeal to an older child needing an easy-to-read book.


* 6-10 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Fifteen-year-old Dakota is having trouble accepting his mixed heritage and is thrown back in time to be with his ancestors, the Lakota Indians, and Chief Sitting Bull. He learns the Indian ways and comes to accept them and understand that they are his own ancestors. He quickly realizes that he is in the time of the massacre at Little Bighorn, but he has no power to change the events of history.

This book is very interesting reading, both from a historical perspective and a personal point of view. The author is familiar with the customs and history of the Indian people of this time and enlightens the reader through the eyes and adventures of Dakota. This is great, entertaining reading for the elementary grades studying U.S. history or for anyone interested in understanding more about this time period. The history is wrapped in a novel that is well-written and captivating.


A- 2-4 FI Reviewed by Donna J. Jorgensen

Two eight-year-old girls, both born on the 4th of July, are journeying from Missouri to Oregon on the Oregon Trail. Sarah and Almira Ann have been friends all their lives and are glad they won’t have to leave each other behind. On the trail, Almira Ann makes clothes for her beloved doll and makes a rag doll for Sarah’s birthday. As the trail gets difficult and dusty, Sarah’s temper gets the better of her, and her behavior disappoints Almira Ann. When she tries to make up with
Almira Ann, Sarah plays a joke on her, and Almira Ann falls out of the wagon to have the wheel run over her leg, and a goat eat all but the head of her doll.

Although the accident was unintentional, Sarah feels responsible and Almira Ann doesn’t want to see her. After days of sadness, Sarah embarks on a plan to make amends. She plans a surprise of lemonade, made from the carbonated waters at Soda Springs and some lemon syrup, and she makes a new doll with the head she rescued. The two friends are reunited.

The author adds a note explaining the facts and fictions of her story. It is well written and accurate to the time period. The values stressed, of self-control, not envying others, and of making the best of what one has are not new to pioneer stories, but are desirable nonetheless. Since the character are eight years old, going on nine, this book will appeal to a third grader who reads well.

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**A 2-6 PB** Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

In a story set about 100 years ago, Polly and Digory meet in London during the summer. One rainy day, while exploring the attic, they discover Uncle Andrew’s forbidden study. When Uncle Andrew gives Polly a magic ring, she disappears. Digory follows to rescue her and finds himself in a mysterious wood. When he meets up with Polly, they are plunged into the dying world of Charn. The evil Queen Jadis wants to return to London with the children to overtake their world. Polly and Digory’s exciting journey to Narnia is just beginning. Many adventures await them.

This beautifully illustrated book lets young readers enter the world of Narnia. Maze’s rich water-colored illustrations vividly bring the story to life. Inspired by the original books, the enchanting characters and settings are brilliantly portrayed. This book will appeal to those whose hearts were captured by C. S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* as well as first time readers of this series.

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**A 2-4 FI** Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Nine-year-old Olivia and her demanding five-year-old sister, Nellie, are sent to live with Great Aunt Minty upon the death of their mother. The girls’ father promises that it will be a temporary solution to their care. He realizes that white-haired Aunt Minty knows almost nothing about children.

Things are very rough on their great aunt. Nellie expects to have all the toys she wants, the food served how she wants it, and to be able to walk the stairways backwards. She absolutely does not want Aunt Minty to invite any friends over for her or Olivia to play with.

Then Aunt Minty takes them to the big, horseshoe-shaped garden off her side porch. It’s so wild and overgrown that the sisters avoid it. Then Olivia discovers an old story about a party of children transformed into flowers by an evil fairy. The spell can only be broken if the lost children’s eight cups and teapot are brought together. When a teacup is uncovered in the dirt, the girls begin to spend hours in the garden looking for more. What happens next is a miraculous discovery as the sisters work together and find their truest selves.
A family backpacking trip into the mountains offers all of the wonderful experiences a backpack trip includes, capped by the boys’ enthusiastic hike to the top of a waterfall that “can’t be done.” At the top, the boys holler down to their parents to come up, too. With the boys’ encouragement, the parents make it, and the whole family enjoys the victory and the experience. They hike up farther and one of the boys finds a piece of driftwood to carry home. The family place it in the yard as a reminder of their great adventure. This enthusiastic story of camping is told through the eyes of a young boy. The illustrations, done in oil paint, are vivid and evocative of mountains, the outdoors, and good times. The whole book has a feeling of cheer that a trip to the mountains brings. Some good lessons are offered in the book: lessons on perseverance, on doing what can’t be done and achieving goals.


Oakley, Pauly, and Lilly are far from the ordinary high school run-of-the-mill gang, what with poetry and disconnection, mystery and erudition—even a town that sets its tempo by the railroad. These children, or, more properly, these innocents, can’t fit in and can’t leave, and the reader is pretty much in the same situation.

Pauly is the hero/anti-hero in this story of three very unlikely friends in a small town. He’s bigger than life, considers himself the poet and the lover and has dreams too big for Whitechurch (which, by the way, may be a symbolic title for things that should be white on the inside but are only white churches). Pauly can only express the width of his visions to Oakley, who is the real hero, the unsung poet, who always listens and picks up the pieces. Lilly never belonged with the group to begin with, she just showed up once and became part of a trio.

This is not a book for casual readers and parents may not like it, but for the mature adolescent who is looking for communication consisting of maximum ideas and minimum description, *Whitechurch* will sound a clear note. There is bad language and a murder; there is despair and hope and very good writing. It may well be thought of as the nineties’ *Catcher in the Rye*—or it may not. But whatever this book ends up being, it won’t go unnoticed!


Children’s book historian Leonard Marcus spotlights an award winner from each of the last six decades, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Caldecott Medal. The artists featured are Robert McCloskey for 1942’s *Make Way for Ducklings*; Marcia Brown for *Cinderella* in 1955; Maurice Sendak for *Where the Wild Things Are* in 1964; William Steig for 1970’s *The Magic Pebble*; Chris Van Allsburg for *Jumanji* in 1982; and David Wiesner for *Tuesday* in 1992. The book gives a bit of personal history for each author, focusing on the moments that led them to a career in art, and specifically to children’s book illustration. It also shares insights into their struggles and triumphs in creating the award-winning books.

The book is primarily illustrated with photographs of the artists and preliminary drawings from the featured books. This glimpse into the evolution of the artwork is fascinating! The book would be most appealing to children and adults who are familiar fans of the Caldecott
books featured. It would also be enjoyable for those who are interested in becoming artists or illustrators themselves.


A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Tudor renders this ever popular holiday poem for the third time (previous versions: St. Onge, 1962; Rand McNally, 1975). Employing her familiar Victorian motifs and still using her Vermont home as the setting, Tudor creates pencil, ink, and watercolor illustrations that harmonize with poem. Tudor fans will delight to add this title to their personal libraries. It will also be a welcomed gift book for many families. Tudor’s first and second versions are likely missing from many public and school library collections, and this third version will be an excellent replacement.


* K-4 PB Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

The wind loves a mortal woman who is not afraid of his wildness. In a blowing house with wild branches, they are happy. But then a child is born and the wind’s wife dies. Like other brokenhearted fathers, he flees the baby and her love and leaves her to grow up with an old woman and a restless heart.

Resshie, his daughter (he named her for the sound his sweeping passage through the trees makes), spends her life searching for what she knows is hers, but along the way she develops an extraordinary talent for weaving. When it brings her happiness, it is of an unusual sort.

This lyrical fairy tale bears the marks of Murphy’s talent for mysterious romance. The Dillons’ elegantly colored illustrations could not be a better match for Murphy’s tale. Wind Child is a highly satisfactory experience.


A 2-5 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Welcome Comfort, a lonely, plumb foster child, is taunted by his classmates. Portly and joyous Quintin Hamp, the school’s janitor, befriends Welcome. Even with Quintin’s encouragement, Welcome finds believing in Santa Claus difficult until the jolly man appears in Welcome’s bedroom and whisks him away for Christmas Eve deliveries. At the flight’s end, Santa give Welcome his golden star pin. Christmas day is celebrated with Quintin and Martha Hamp, but the pin is not mentioned. Over the years, the Hamps are like parents to Welcome—proud of his graduation, his job with Quintin, his marriage to Ruby Jean. The Hamps always travel north for Christmas Eve until the year that Quintin retires as Superintendent of Maintenance. That Christmas Welcome and Ruby Jean are invited north with the Hamps. Arriving at a cabin on the edge of a forest, Quintin hands Welcome a small box. It contains the gold pin. When urged by the Hamps to put it on, Welcome becomes Santa. The story ends as it begins with a portly and joyous Mr. Comfort finding a plumb little boy surrounded by children.

With gifted storytelling, Polacco weaves a tale about the magic of love and believing. Bad things happen, but Polacco’s tales often find hope in unlikely places. Her bright watercolors move the reader from Welcome’s humiliations and fears to his soaring success. The emotional impact is similar to Van Allsburg’s The Polar Express.
Welcome Comfort is a story for every child and for believing adults.


Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Rockwell’s “garden guessing game” book introduces preschoolers to ten common garden flowers and nine garden insects and bugs.

My two-year-old granddaughter loved the repetition of the phrases “Bumblebee, bumblebee, do you know me?” in the riddles (the insect changes with each flower) and was anxious to turn the page to discover the flower that was being described. The basic shape drawings of insects and flowers are brightly colored. The glossy pages feel durable and the size of the book is just right for preschoolers.


Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Sharp-toothed, stealthy, and scaly, alligators and crocodiles have been among the most feared of predators. These giant reptiles were probably the source for fables of fire-breathing dragons and huge serpents.

This book captures the wealth of “serpent” secrets by renowned science writer Seymour Simon. Discover information about the types of crocodiles and alligators and how to tell them apart. Twenty full-color photographs show such things as sharp teeth in powerful jaws, fierce mouths alert to prey, and eyes watching for a kill. Learn how these reptiles can eat their food without chewing or how an animal’s habitat may affect how long it lives. Most importantly, share the wealth of knowledge of the important role that alligators and crocodiles play in their natural surroundings.

B 6-9 FL PT Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

When the mouse Emmaline moves into Emily Dickinson’s bedroom wall she is unaware that there is any significance to this event; however, when one day Emmaline is inspired to write a poem in response to one of Emily’s that has fallen near her hole, a verse correspondence begins between the two. Emmaline becomes quite attached to her hostess and even goes so far at one point to nearly bean an uncooperative publisher over the head with a vase pushed from the mantel. The friendship grows until the other inhabitants of the Dickinson establishment—including a cat—become suspicious and call in the exterminator. Emmaline must leave, but she has learned that she, too, is a poet, and in fact she passes on her gift to her children.

This is a theme that has wonderful possibilities, and Spires takes advantage of some of them. Unfortunately the writing is somewhat pedestrian at times, and is particularly at a disadvantage when put side-by-side with Dickinson’s masterful poems. Though the book is not too long, I must wonder if it would retain the interest of its (presumably) young-teen audience. It does appear to be an accurate depiction of what the Dickinson household might have been like and includes and afterward telling the story of Dickinson and the publication of her poems. *The Mouse of Amherst* is illustrated with Nivola’s charming line drawings that complement the story well.

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* Pre+ PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

This “cock”-eyed story tells the tale of the Little Red Hen’s grandchildren looking for something new and unusual to eat when they rediscover grandma’s cookbook. Again the Cat, Dog, and Goose are asked for their help and—no surprise—they are still unwilling to help. But the Pig, Iguana, and Turtle are ready, willing, and more than able to help, saying “I can do that!” These characters are so slow on the uptake that nothing goes according to the recipe, but that’s OK. With a little help from each other the marvelous strawberry shortcake is finally finished. Ooooooops! Iguana drops the dessert and Pig immediately eats it. The only thing to do is start again.

This is Stevens at her best. The strawberry shortcake paper adds much to the taste of the book. Try the shortcake recipe at the end of the
book, only leave Pig, Iguana, and Turtle at home if you want a taste.

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being lifted in more ways than one. Great for reading, great for telling.


A 6-9 FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Fifteen-year-old Josh Harris, who last winter was leading a normal life and playing on his high school ice hockey team, now finds himself “roughing it” during an Alaska winter with his Dad and older half-brother, Nathan. Survival skills are not the only thing that the family struggles with, as Nathan goes off to live alone after a disagreement over killing a charging bear. Josh is the level-headed son, but he can only see his father’s concern for Nathan. Even Shannon, a girl who comes to stay in a nearby cabin with her father, admires Nathan’s philosophical approach to nature.

The absence of bad language in the book was much appreciated and left the moving plot free of distractions. The conversations between the teenagers in the story are believable. Josh’s perspective, through which the story is told, reveals his inner fears and struggles. And the story doesn’t have a fairy-tale ending. Just like life, challenges are met a little at a time and the family’s struggles aren’t all solved during this single winter in the wilds of Alaska. At the end of the story Nathan is recovering in a hospital after being mauled by a bear, Josh’s parents are still divorced, and Josh’s dad still has many concerns for independent and often stubborn Nathan. The book’s main message to parents and teenagers is to communicate.

Reviewed by Nancy Alder

The Bible account of the birth of Jesus and the flight to Egypt is embedded in this tale of a mother trying to soothe and entertain her injured child.

Five-year-old Jesus is hit in the head by rocks thrown by village children. His mother, Mary, settles him down to rest by telling him the story of his birth and mission. Woven through the fabric of the story she tells is the love, wonder, and understanding of Mary and Joseph and a Father in Heaven for this little child. This engaging telling of the familiar story adds dimension to the life of the Christ Child and reinforces the message of love given and love accepted. This book expands the setting of the story in away that will appeal to older readers and make the story fresh for young listeners.


Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

What was old is delightfully new again with the republication of Morris’s Disappearing Bag. First published in 1975, this comic story about siblings opening and sharing Christmas gifts features new brightly-colored illustrations. Toddler-rabbit Morris is all smiles with his new teddy bear until his siblings refuse to share their toys and have no interest in his. After an unhappy day, Morris discovers an overlooked gift that makes him and his bag the center of attention.

Wells masterfully captured the emotions and behaviors of Morris and his family. Both prose and illustrations are simple but exact. Facial expressions clearly convey the characters’ moods. For libraries with lost or tattered copies of the 1975 edition, this is a must-buy. Why not buy two; they will be well-circulated regardless of the season.


Reviewed by Robert L. Maxwell

In these new stories set in rural and small-town eastern Canada, young adult writer Wynne-Jones has given us an evocative glimpse into a world that will seem vaguely familiar and yet vaguely foreign to many American readers, and not only because of the international border; it may seem vaguely foreign to urban Canadian readers as well. The stories are a pleasurable read, but are also thought provoking, some even troubling. Many are set in the dead of the Canadian winter, where small-town and farm life can seem both enchanting and vulnerable, and the weather sits as a constant backdrop to stories with serious themes as diverse as privacy and homelessness, sexual harassment, and paralyzing shyness, making friends out of rivals, and nationalist bigotry. Serious themes; but the stories are laced with wit and good humor and one does not feel any satire or cynicism in them.

The titles of the stories themselves lighten what might be unbearable gloom. Ick, for example, takes its name from the disease that goldfish contract after a while in many kids’ fish bowls—the fish get white blotches and float to the top of the water. But it also describes what is going on in the story, which is how a class of young teenagers, in a very clever way, deal with and counteract unwanted flirtation by their teacher toward one of the girls in class. In the title story, Lord of the Fries, two girls attempt to find out the imagined secret past of a short-order cook who wants nothing more than to be left alone; and the girls learn to respect his privacy. Two of the stories have overtly Canadian themes: in
Anne Rehearsals a girl must learn to deal with her jealousy when her best friend is chosen to portray her hero, Anne of Green Gables, in the school play. In the final story, The Chinese Babies, contemporary Canadian nationalist issues surface when an Anglophone family in an isolated farmhouse on the border of Ontario and Quebec must rescue three Francophone couples and their three newly-adopted mainland Chinese babies from a winter storm, resolving both tensions within the family and between the two cultures. Three of the stories deal with fears many teenagers have experienced: what if a parent disappears (The Bermuda Triangle)? What if I didn’t have any place to live (The Fallen Angel)? How do I make friends in a new town? Can I let someone into my own private world (The Pinhole Camera)? These stories are engaging and will appeal to teenagers. They may even act as a point of dialogue between these teenagers and their parents.


A 2-6 NF Reviewed by Nancy Alder

This fun, hands-on book lets kids experience some of the scientific aspects of art by examining illusion, perspective, and more as they relate to well known and less renowned works of art.

This book deals only a glancing blow at its subject matter, but it is a fun way to whet a child’s appetite for science and art. A dip into this volume will give kids an experiential, tactile reading session that may cause them to view things in the real world—and the art world—differently.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Daisy Pandolfi isn’t old enough to drive, but the little old broken-down VW Beetle in the ice house is calling to her. When she finally convinces her father to let her have it so she can get it into working order, she finds that it takes family, friends, a few ups, and lots of downs to restore an old car.

This book is a fun read, especially for girls who like repairing cars, but it is not so technical that those of us who only know how to turn the key are indifferent. It also has just enough of a love story to appeal to those looking for young love.

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