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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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A 3+ FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Young Fabrizio, apprentice to the wizard-magician Magnus, is awakened one night and driven in disguise with Magnus to the castello of Pergamontio, where they have been summoned to help the king. A ghost is appearing to his young daughter, the princess Teresina, and the king wants the wizard to banish the troubling spirit. The plot thickens when Fabrizio also sees the ghost, and he and the princess go on an adventure through secret passages and much intrigue. The princess is trying to avenge the murder of her brother by the wicked, scheming Scarazoni, who hopes to make himself king by marrying the princess.

Although some of the vocabulary may be too advanced for third graders, they would enjoy hearing this great tale of magic, ghosts, and princesses.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Okay, so a buoy bobbing in the sea is an unlikely protagonist. But this buoy introduces us to his world as surely and engagingly as any actual person. We learn of whales and waves, foggy mornings and starry nights, storms and sailboats. The lyrical text is full of symbolism and truth in the tradition of The Little Prince.

This book is good for anyone, from first graders to grandmas. It is the kind of tale that can be enjoyed on many levels. The spare illustrations enhance without interrupting the flow of the text.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

The beginning of this mythical adventure finds young Merlin trying to train his shadow while his friend Hallia looks on. They hear painful screaming, and find that it is Ballymag, a creature running from the marsh ghouls of the Haunted Marsh. Merlin heals the Ballymag, and then travels with Hallia travel into the Haunted Marsh to find out why the marsh ghouls have become more cruel than usual. They find themselves in a dangerous adventure, encountering many different creatures in the marsh. To save his life and triumph over evil, Merlin finally must travel through The Mists of Time Mirror, where he has an interesting conversation with his future self.

Barron's fourth book of The Lost Years of Merlin epic is a compelling adventure at every turn. Each chapter ends with a crisis, pulling the reader to the next page. The author's note at the beginning of the book briefly relates what Merlin has gone through since his birth, but the reader can enjoy this title independent of the other books in the epic. Characters are well developed and easy to keep track of, and Gwynnia and the Ballymag are lovable in contrast to darker figures. Merlin's thoughts are just what you'd imagine a young wizard's to be like: "Listening to the echo of her words, I wondered about my own story, my own place in the tapestry. Was I a weaver? Or merely a thread? Or perhaps a kind of light within the thread, able somehow to make it glow?" (p. 101) Barron's expressive, tasteful, writing
illuminates Merlin’s search for self and gives the reader important truths about courage, choices, and learning.


Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

On a cold day in a quaint Swiss village, Matti decides to bake gingerbread. With his mother’s help, Matti finds the “Gingerbread Boy” recipe. Mother and son prepare the dough, shape a gingerbread boy, and place him in the oven. The recipe calls for a baking time of exactly eight minutes. Matti can’t wait. After five minutes have elapsed, he peeks into the oven, and out jumps a gingerbread baby! Though only a baby, this gingerbread character is brash. He dares anyone to catch him, and they all try—Matti’s mother and father, the cat, the dog, the goats, Martha and Madeline (whose braids the Gingerbread Baby has tied in knots), the fox, and finally the milk and cheese man, who has had his nose tweaked by the runaway baby. In the meantime, Matti is home alone, where he quietly measures and mixes another batch of gingerbread dough. After putting the dough into the oven he resists a peek. He is determined to catch Gingerbread Baby, who is now getting quite winded. Trying to elude his pursuers, Gingerbread Baby is delighted when, after following a familiar smell, he comes upon a decorated gingerbread house in the woods. The doors of the house are open, so he runs inside. When his pursuers arrive, all they find are some gingerbread crumbs in the snow. Assuming Gingerbread Baby has been eaten, the crowd breaks up and Matti’s parents return home to report the news to their son. At home, they find Matti with a wonderfully decorated gingerbread house. They report Gingerbread Baby’s apparent demise, but Matti doesn’t seem too upset; only he can hear the tiny voice within the decorated gingerbread house—a lucky and thankful voice.

Beautiful full-page illustrations and accompanying sidebar illustrations tell two stories: Gingerbread Baby’s escapades and Matti’s plans to catch the naughty baby. A lift-the-flap gingerbread house at the end of the story assures the reader that Gingerbread Baby has found a safe haven. Readers will be delighted that Gingerbread Baby doesn’t meet a fatal end.


Reviewed by Nancy Alder

She made quilts so fine they looked as if they had “dropped from the shoulders of passing angels,” with white from the northernmost snows and colors from the most perfect sunsets. She shared with the humble and needy. And she taught a greedy king to change his heart. *Quilter’s Gift* is a funny and touching story of finding one’s treasure and discovering where true happiness lies.

This book is truly a treasure trove! As if evocative language, lush and exuberant illustrations, and an engaging story weren’t enough, *Quilter’s Gift* offers a puzzle poster on the reverse of the book cover and a web site that offers additional puzzles and games based on the book, and quilt-block lore, quilting activities and contests with prizes for all ages, and “coversations” with the author and artist. Not to take anything away from this year’s Caldecott winner—which was great—but why didn’t this book at least get an honor award? I loved the complex and colorful illustrations—truly a visual feast. And I loved the tale.

Tony and his family, including his grandmother and grandfather and his aunt, uncle and cousins, are off on another October picnic. Every year, Grandmother insists that the family visit the Statue of Liberty on the statue’s birthday. The family pay tribute to the ideal of American freedom and the opportunities that can be found in this land.

The story is marginal. I thought we were going to hear Grandmother and Grandfather’s story about coming to this country, but I was disappointed. Even the story about the coming of the statue to America would have been appreciated, but again I was disappointed. This is a simple story of a family tradition and how, by helping a recent immigrant, a young boy learns just a little of the feelings his grandmother shows.


Nathan Fields thinks he is a good actor, even though he is young. His confidence and his name are two of the reasons that Abry chooses him to act in his Shakespearean theater. In Shakespeare’s time, no women were allowed to act, so young boys were dressed as women, and also used as acrobats and fools. When the company goes to London to perform in the New Globe Theater, Nat goes to—only to be whisked back into the year 1599 to act in the first Shakespearean plays.

This book is well written, and I hope that children will get as caught up in this historical fantasy as I did.


Willa and her little sister are on the roof, and their Aunt Patty is trying in vain to get them to come down. The girls are with their Aunt Patty and Uncle Hob, because their mother, deserted by their father, has not been able to cope with life since her new baby died. Through Willa’s flashbacks, the reader discovers that Willa is unhappy with the way her Aunt Patty tries to organize and run life for her and her little sister (who hasn’t talked since the baby died). What started as a climb to the roof to see the sunrise quickly becomes a way to proclaim her independence and to be free from her aunt’s authority. Neighbors and friends come and go; Uncle Hob joins them on the roof, and eventually so does Aunt Patty as they resolve their differences before the sun goes down.

Coulumbis’s first novel is a very well-told story of family relationships and feelings. The family is able to resolve the sorrow over the baby’s death so that the little sister can talk again and Aunt Patty can discover more about being a compassionate human being. *Getting Near to Baby* includes the reader in its feeling of hope, joy and a new beginning.


Like others in Coville’s prose versions of Shakespeare’s plays, this blends Coville’s adaptation with key and recognizable lines from the original play. The illustrations—beautifully wrought paintings—enliven the text and stand alone in their beauty. Like Coville’s version of *Macbeth*, this retelling retains the engaging flavor.
of the original and serves to draw the reader comfortably to the original play. But perhaps its greatest virtue is that, unlike other insipid, watered down adaptations of classic literature, this book stand on its own as a good read—very dramatic and strong.


* 5+ PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

When Herr and Frau Rosen’s son is born, there is quite a celebration. The family and guests make wishes for the little infant. When it is Tante Taube’s turn to pronounce a wish over the infant, Major Krieg, the jilted and unforgiving suitor of Frau Rosen before her marriage to Herr Rosen, arrives on the scene. Uninvited and very intimidating, he grabs the child and pronounces a cruel wish: upon the child’s sixteenth birthday, the sound of army drums will take him off to a war from which he will not return. The parents are aghast. Major Krieg tosses the infant to the nurse and leaves the Rosen’s home.

Tante Taube’s turn for a wish was rudely interrupted. Although she can’t undo what the wicked Major has foretold, she does promise the child that when he hears the drums on his sixteenth birthday, “he will fall sound asleep . . . until PEACE comes to Berlin.” Sure enough, after spending his childhood shielded by protective parents, Knabe Rosen’s sixteenth birthday arrives. Inadvertently, he hears the army drums but then falls asleep, as does everyone in the house. Poverty and war ravage the house, but the occupants sleep on. A massive concrete barrier is built to divide the city of Berlin, but still everyone in the boarded-up Rosen house sleeps on. Then one day the wall comes down, and the house is rediscovered. As the doors are opened and sunlight floods the dilapidated Rosen house, everyone wakes up.

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Dark, eerie acrylic paint illustrations highlight the text, which is too lengthy for small children. Though the publisher deems the book appropriate for children ages 6-9, it would be more suitable for older children studying World War II and its effects on ordinary German citizens, many of whom were not enamored with the prospect of going to war.


A 4-7 PT Reviewed by Lanell Rabner

“It’s not because my daddy thinks the South should fight against the North, but we’ve been so long a piece of Tennessee, today we’re leaving for the war.” Written in journal format, this moving narrative poem describes one boy’s journey to war in the spring of 1863. The thirteen-year-old farm boy from Tennessee accompanies his father to Silver Bluff, Fredericksburg, Brandy Station, Culpeper Court House, and finally, Gettysburg. His job is to care for the horses and help out in camp; however, fresh images of battle open his eyes to the ugliness of war, quickly trivializing the menial tasks he came along to perform. Phrases rich with imagery beg to be read aloud, stirring to remembrance the stark contrast between his mother’s hand soft against his cheek and fields made slippery with blood. “My father’s dead, and I will have to tell my mother I watched him die.” But when he finally arrives home, the boy, now a man, cannot find the words. “I rode from Gettysburg to Tennessee and I saw the country weeping,” he says. He knows his boyhood is gone, and as he watches the Tennessee moon rise high above the corn rows he knows he has a promise to keep.

Christensen’s black and white woodcuts paint an image as somber and lyrical as the text, reminding the reader of the weighty effect of war on young and old alike.
Edward Fraser is fascinated with the fifth grade performance of Peter Pan. His favorite character is the Crocodile, but when he later spots one in the lake at the park, his summer vacation grows more interesting by leaps and bounds! Unfortunately, almost no one believes him until a friend’s sister with a nose for news begins to broadcast.

This story spends a great deal of time exploring middle-grade conversation patterns and crams the action into short spurts in between; the convenient alligator that actually turns up solves Edward’s dilemma but somewhat doesn’t seem very plausible, somehow. The characters are imaginative, but they don’t have much in the way of holding power.


* 3-6 NF Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Ever dreamed of living on a space station? So has author Dyson. Using photographs, illustrations, actual experiences of astronauts, facts, experiments, and simulation activities, Dyson takes readers through crew training and conditioning, the orbit of a space station, the dangers of meteors and radiation, living and working on a space station, and the trip back to earth. Interestingly written and filled with intriguing facts, this book will fascinate readers, young and old, who wish to travel in space, and may give some reason for pause. “With no air in space, lungs empty like popped balloons. Blood boils, turning people into giant bruises. Eyes pop and eardrums burst. Yuck!”

Former NASA mission controller Dyson knows her stuff. Acknowledgment of more than 150 professional organizations, aerospace business, technical reviewers, astronauts, engineers, scientists, and researchers indicate that Dyson did not rely on her knowledge alone but consulted the experts. Buzz Aldrin writes the foreword. A glossary and index add to usability. This is a must-purchase book for school and public libraries.


A 4+ NF Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Born in 1911 and died in 1956 at age 45, Babe Didrikson Zaharias has been called the greatest woman athlete. Freedman details her extraordinary athletic exploits and captures her exuberant confidence in this biography of a legendary sportswoman. Babe was naturally gifted, but her outstanding performances were the result of persistent hard work. She excelled at basketball, track and field, golfing, tennis, diving, roller skating, and bowling. When a reporter once asked her if there was anything she didn’t play, she replied that she didn’t play dolls.

Freedman’s straightforward style follows Babe from her school days of beating everyone on the block, to the end of her life as she loses her battle with cancer. Numerous photographs show Babe in action and vividly demonstrate her athletic grace and form. Numerous quotes from articles and interviews give the reader insight into her supreme confidence and sometimes annoying habit of boasting about her accomplishments. Babe lived at a time when women were just beginning to be recognized as athletes; her unusual achievements aided women in their struggles to compete in sports.

A All NF Reviewed by Janice Card

Did you know that Norman Rockwell’s middle name was Perceval? That he was called “Mooney” as a child because of his thick glasses? That his studio burned down in 1943, and all of his paints, brushes, supplies, and many of his original art pieces were destroyed? These facts and more are told in Ghennan’s brief biography on this celebrated American artist who showed “average people doing average things” in such a way that they still can touch hearts and evoke emotions from tears to laughter. The information is presented with warmth and honesty, and many facts about Rockwell’s life are brought out despite the brevity of the text.

With nineteen full-color Rockwell illustrations (and several in black and white) and many photographs of Rockwell and his family, Ghennan shows the breadth of one man’s work and life, demonstrating her enthusiasm for the man and his accomplishments. Reading this book will help readers young and old appreciate this historian and “storyteller with a brush.”


B+ 4-6 FI Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Give Joe Stoshack an old baseball card and he can travel in time. In *Honus and Me*, he finds a Honus Wagner card and is transported to the 1909 World Series. *Jackie and Me* opens with Joe having a difficult time controlling his anger as he is taunted on the baseball field. In a quick transition from the field to the classroom, an assigned report for Black History Month inspires Joe to travel back to 1947 to meet Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play major league baseball. Joe quickly discovers that he has not only traveled in time but also that his skin is darker. He observes the racism Robinson experienced from teammates, other teams, and fans, and is subjected to racism himself. Impressed with the dignity and self-control of Robinson, Joe returns to the present with a stellar report and new attitude about anger.

Although the message is somewhat heavy handed, this sports novel is an interesting and informative read. Gutman does his research, and, in a message to readers at the end of the novel, he distinguishes historical fiction from the facts. The text is supplemented by historical photographs. A 1999 Silver Award Winner by Parents’ Choice®.


A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

One day we were playing outside in our yard
When my brother got mad and he pushed me so hard
That I pushed him right back—with all of my might—
And quick as a wink we were having a fight!

So begins this tale of feelings hurt and squabbles mended. Brother and sister, neighbor and foe, join up with what becomes a glorious parade that travels “to the place where the whole country ends with hundreds and thousands and millions of friends.” This cumulative story rhymes and bounces along. Hawkes’s illustrations burst off the page. It is a rollicking tale of making things right that begins in the backyard and spreads across the world.
The plight of early Irish immigrants is not a new theme, and the hard life of newsboys has also been brought forcibly to public attention. Holland gives us a truly Irish protagonist—a hustling, proud, loyal, quick-tempered, independent and sensitive young man. Kevin has a truly hard row to hoe, and he does a better job than many. But when Da ends up in the hospital with slight chance of working again, and Kevin and young Maureen are about to end up on the streets, life seems impossibly unfair. As if things couldn't get any worse, a false accusation against Kevin makes him quit his newspaper job, but the situation somehow translates into money that he really does steal. Kevin is sure that no one can be trusted when even Mr. Langley, the boss he thought was a friend, believes the false story. Strangely enough, it is Mr. Langley—with the prompting of Father Martin—who puts things right so that Kevin can have a chance to make good. But Kevin has a lesson to learn, and it takes a long day and night in jail to get some sober thinking done.

The clear tone of the book makes the reader do some thinking too, while being absorbed in Kevin's problems. This is a good recommendation for a middle-grade book.


The religious tradition of Las Posadas is celebrated just before Christmas in many Hispanic communities, and this book describes how it is celebrated in the town of Española, New Mexico. The book introduces the town and its inhabitants, featuring an eleven-year-old girl named Kristen who will play the part of Mary in the festival. Española's history, especially that of its churches, is introduced, as are the local religious folk artists and the santero, who makes statues of the Catholic saints. A brief history of Las Posadas is given, as well as details about the variety of ways it is celebrated in Española. The book includes the recipe for a traditional cookie and the words to a traditional song.

The photographs really bring to life the tradition of Las Posadas and the people of Española. The text is well-written, but I fear there
is too much detail here to hold the attention of young people. Overall, it is a good informational book on Hispanic culture.


A All PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Rodney Rat has a speech problem: he can’t pronounce his r’s. To him, his name is “Wodney Wat,” and he is on the receiving end of a lot of teasing at school. One day Camilla Capybara comes to school. She is big. She is mean. And she is smart. No one feels like taking her on—least of all Wodney Wat, but he is chosen to lead the game of “Simon Says.” When Wodney tells everyone to “read,” Camilla begins to “weed,” and before the end of the game, instead of resting, Camilla is headed out of town to the “west,” never to be seen or heard from again.

This is an excellent book. The story is captivating, and Wodney turns shame into fame. The illustrations are delightful; I have long been a fan of this writing-illustrating team, and the picture of Wodney “wapped” up in his tail is one of the best I’ve seen!


A All PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

A little three-eyed monster boy knows his monster mama loves him because she tickles his pointy toes, makes sure he brushes his fangs, and bakes bug-filled cookies for him. When he is sick, she takes his temperature, puts him to bed, and keeps him hydrated with cold lizard juice. She attends his “beatball games” and teaches him to avoid the “scary tings” (human boys) intent on bullying him. When his mama tucks him into bed at night she hangs his favorite bat above his bed—that’s how he knows how much his mama loves him.

Sparse text, catchy cadence, and bright, full-color illustrations offer a soothing story of mother-child love appropriate for monster and human children that is wonderful as a read-aloud.


* Pre-K PT Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

This treasury of classic nursery rhymes is masterfully illustrated by Sylvia Long. The illustrations, done in pen and ink and watercolor, are bright and detailed without being overwhelming. All the characters are animals, which adds a fun twist to the traditional verses. The touches of imagination and humor in the illustrations add dimension to rhymes that are prone to be repetitious or nonsensical. In addition, Long often uses one picture to connect two verses on facing pages. An index of first lines in the back provides an easy way to find favorite verses. This volume would make a great addition to any home or library collection.


A All PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Patrick is about to have his first sleep-over at Granny’s house, but he doesn’t have a bed, pillow, blanket, or teddy bear. Each time Patrick explains that he doesn’t have something he needs,
Granny cries “WHAT?” and goes right out and chops trees, plucks chicken feathers, shears sheep and pulls down front-room curtains to make sure that Patrick will be comfortable at her house. But by the time she’s through it’s morning, and Patrick doesn’t want to go to bed!

The illustrations are as funny as the story. Granny runs into every grandmother’s nightmare—a child who won’t sleep. I realize this book was published in 1998, but it was a book I missed that year. I hope you didn’t.


This collection of nine troll tales is perfect for reading aloud. Lunge-Larsen pays attention to the sound, pattern, and tempo of the words and sentences and has presented the stories clearly and effectively. A few of the tales are familiar, such as the “Billy Goats Gruff,” but most of the stories are new. All tales keep the flavor of Norway and are true to the formula of the “troll tales” genre.

The woodcut illustrations are just right and enhance the stories. Lunge-Larsen offers an introduction and sources for each story. An introductory chapter gives tips on effective storytelling. This delightful book provides a clutch of new, entertaining tales for the younger set.

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A 3+ FI Reviewed by Nancy Alder

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C 4+ FI Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Rose Wilder leaves her hometown community to work as a telegraph operator in Kansas City and then San Francisco. She barely makes a living and has no friends, until she meets Louise Latimer. Louise and her mother introduce Rose to night life in San Francisco and to handsome, restless Gillette Lane. Rose and her hometown boyfriend break up because of her independence, and she begins a new career of selling real estate for Gillette in the San Joaquin Valley.

The book’s theme centers on Rose’s feeling of dissatisfaction with life on the farm and her restless search for something better. She becomes increasingly unhappy with Paul (her hometown boyfriend who is opposed to working girls). He views her San Francisco friends as vulgar and cheap. Rose resents his judgmental attitude, but she doesn’t want a life of rushing from party to party either. She does consider parties to be better than loneliness, though. Her new friend Gillette represents excitement, but he is as restless as the others who go from one big deal to another. At the end of the book Rose feels her life has reached a turning point, but it appears to be as pointless as her life was before. She’s off to sell real estate for Gil, who doesn’t mind if a girl works; his dynamic energy goes into a headlong search for money. If, as she seems to think, Gil is different, it doesn’t come through in his characterization. It appears that the values that carried the *Little House* books have disappeared, and Rose hasn’t found anything better.

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C 4-6 FI Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Jasmyn finds her plans for the summer pretty much upended when her mom is called into active service in the Gulf War. Jasmyn has the opportunity to be team captain of her preseason basketball league, but the position requires daily participation, which Jasmyn can’t fulfill. When Jasmyn and her small half-brother, Andrew, are made orphans by Mom’s call-up, things get very grim. Andrew’s father—Mom’s boyfriend—moves in (sort of), but his contribution seems mostly visual. Everyone has to learn that life demands sacrifice at some points. The characters do some maturing by the time Mom comes home again, but the situation still seems heavy on the propaganda side. This book incorporates new times, new formats, and new values.


A 1-3 PB Reviewed by Rachael W. Galvez

In this book Mora fictionalizes an experience her mother, Stella, had as a young girl. Stella speaks Spanish at home and English at school. She feels frustrated that her mother is more protective, conservative, and shy than other parents. However, Stella still has a very special relationship with her mother. When the girls in Stella’s school class are told to come dressed as tulips for the May Day celebration, Stella decides she wants to be a rainbow-colored tulip. But when she arrives at school in her costume, she is not so sure she wants to be different. However, her mother’s smile in the audience gives her courage, and she enjoys weaving the Maypole. Afterward, mother and daughter discuss how while it’s hard to be different, it can also be good.

This book successfully portrays the general concept of cultural difference through the specific experience of one child. It can apply to the Hispanic child who feels different because of language or background and any other child who struggles with being unique among his or her peers. The use of Spanish terms, which are defined in context, adds a nice flavor to the text. The illustrations are beautiful and appropriate. This book is a good find.


* Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

Opie and Wells have collaborated again to produce a superb second volume of nursery rhymes. Their first collaboration, *My Very First Mother Goose* (1996), received much well-deserved praise and appeared on many “best book” lists. This companion volume may well be the better of the two. The fifty-five rhymes range from the well-known “Mary Mary Quite Contrary” and “Old King Cole” to the unfamiliar “My Aunt Jane” and “Dusty Bill.” Well’s exuberant illustrations are filled with friendly, charming people and animals. A perfect book for lap-time reading, a baby gift that is sure to be treasured, and a must-purchase item for any children’s book collection.

Opie, along with her late husband, is the preeminent collector of seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century children’s books and co-editor of *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1997) and *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book.* Wells, an award-winning illustrator, is known for the warmth and humor of her characters. No one can doubt the expertise,
creativity, and accomplishment of this duo. *Here Comes Mother Goose* will be classic.

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A 9-12 FI Reviewed by Rachel Welton

This abridged version of Peck’s 1980 novel of the same name provides an engaging, adventurous, and romantic story that teenage girls would love. Mary has been trained from her infancy to be a servant girl in a large manor. Her first mistress is Amanda Whitwell, the spoiled and conniving daughter of a wealthy British tea producer. Amanda immediately renames Mary Miranda and proceeds to use her for her own ends. Amanda is betrothed to Gregory Forrest, a wealthy American, but she is desperately in love with the rugged John Thorne, the Whitwell’s chauffeur and handyman. Miranda and Amanda look like twins, and Amanda uses this to her advantage. Amanda orchestrates a number of schemes that leave Miranda married to John Thorne while Amanda is carrying his baby. All seems to be going just as Amanda would like.

But when Amanda and Miranda set sail aboard the *Titanic* so Amanda can marry Gregory in America, things take a turn for the worse. Amanda soon meets a man with a reputation as a womanizer and begins a final fling with him before being tied down to two men. On the night the ship goes down, Amanda perishes below decks with her new lover, and Miranda must decide if she can—or should—pull off an unbelievable identity switch.

This novel is much more than the generic *Titanic* disaster story. Teens will get caught up in the romance and intrigue of the novel, and the setting of the *Titanic* is secondary to the action. Peck’s writing is engrossing and Miranda is a strong and likable character. The plot moves quickly and will keep the reader’s attention long after the story is over. Allusions to sexual intimacy, as well as a few more direct references, make this book better suited for older readers.

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A Pre+ PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

With clever rhyme, bright colors, and his trademark pop-ups, Pieńkowski takes the reader on a riotous romp through a child’s outrageous reasons not to go to bed.

Another marvel of paper engineering, *Good Night* equals Pieńkowski’s *Haunted House, Dinnertime,* and *Little Monsters* but does not match his superb Botticelli’s *Bed and Breakfast.* The pop-ups, flaps, and pulls will keep little hands busy and make this a book for home libraries but not public or school library shelves. A sure-to-be-enjoyed gift book for babies and toddlers.

A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Autumn, Mother Earth’s wild child, tries one thing after another to put off going to bed for the year. Mother Nature, ever patient, gives Autumn a song and a snack and some pajamas until finally the wild child goes off to sleep.

A wonderful, rhyming mouthful of soaring words set off by soothing pictures makes this a lovely and logical step forward for the *Good-Night, Moon* set. From the song of "chutter, chatter and chipmunks patter" to the "whooshy, whisly windswept snuggle," a loving mother eases a beloved, if obstreperous, child to sleep. The illustrations are a vibrant wash of earth tones with a gentle softness of form that soothes the eye as the words stroke the ear. *Wild Child* will likely become a cozy part of the bedtime ritual for many children. It is truly a delight.


* All PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Cora is getting along in dog years. When the family gets ready to harvest the annual Christmas tree, Cora is dismayed to realize her owners want her to stay home. Susan convinces her parents that Cora deserves to come along. After all, she points out, they didn’t leave Susan at home when, as a toddler, she wasn’t of any help. Cora is allowed to come along. However, when Papa attaches Cora’s daughter and granddaughter to the tree-laden toboggan to pull the load home through the woods, Cora takes action. She runs through the forest to head off the two doges doing her job—hauling the Christmas tree. Successful at taking the lead, Cora guides the dogs home. Susan and her parents are amazed that Cora still wants to do her job, and promise that next time she’ll be part of the team.

Colored woodcuts highlight this story, but they can also stand alone. At first reading, this is a simple tale of an older animal determined to be part of the family activities. However, the story is much more complex and will appeal to all ages.


* All PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Grandmother Winter lives alone and has a gaggle of geese. In the spring, Grandmother tends her geese as they drop their feathers. During the summer, she gathers their feathers. When autumn comes, Grandmother works on her quilt, stuffing it full of goose feathers. At that time of the year,
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when days are short and nights are long, Grandmother "shakes her feather quilt," and the snow begins to fall. Animals prepare for hibernation; grownup humans dig out winter clothes and assemble wood piles; children sleep soundly after playing in the snow; Grandmother Winter climbs into her bed and sleeps. Her geese rest and wait until spring, when they will drop feathers again.

Scratchboard illustrations hand-tinted with watercolors give the perfect depth to the country scenes, and to a pleasantly plump Grandmother, who dispels the fierce Old Man Winter image often attached to the cold season. In this story, winter takes on a soft, quiet, restorative aura.


Farmer Brown has a nice, orderly farm—everything goes according to the rules. But one day a tornado touches down and swirls everything all up and around and together until the animals are all wearing a pair of the farmer's plaid underwear. When the tornado suddenly stops and drops everything safely back to earth, nothing is the same. "The cows oinked, the pigs moo'd. His sheep clucked and the cat coo'd." That bossy old rooster takes to ordering Farmer Brown (who can only cock-a-doodle-do) to do very strange chores, such as "You have to milk the mooing sows, and slop the muddy, oinking cows" and "Go check the nests the sheep have made and gather any eggs they've laid." It's a good thing when another tornado strikes and mixes up everything until it is back to normal. But watch out for the next storm—and the one after that and the one after that!


A- Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

The first Caldecott Medal book of the new millennium is a retelling of a Yiddish folk tale and song. It is also a new edition, with new illustrations, of a Taback book first published by Random House in 1977. As the tale goes, Joseph, a tailor and, in this version, apparently a farmer, recycles his overcoat into smaller and smaller items as each becomes "old and worn." Joseph loses the final item, a button, and then he writes a story about it, proving "you can always make something out of nothing."

The traditional cumulative tale, with its minimal plot and word repetitions, is often recommended to beginning storytellers as an easy story to learn. In order for young audiences to appreciate the illustrations, this version should be read and not told. Taback, using a folk art style, a vibrant palette, and himself as the model for Joseph, employs a mixed media approach with watercolor, gouache, ink, pencil, photographs, and collage. Photographic clips of vegetables grow in the garden. Photographic strips of fabric appear in clothes, curtains, and rugs. Photographic snips of faces hang on walls and stare from windows. The die-cuts on the front jacket hint at the strategically placed die-cuts in the text, which outline the smaller and smaller garments that Joseph makes. The button collection on the back dust jacket hints at the story's ending. Scattered in the illustrations are headlines, a book title, and correspondence that will be humorous to adults but will not be meaningful to preschool and early-elementary-age children. The illustrations are clever, but a point of distraction is that Joseph, who does not seem to age, wears the same outfit with the same patches throughout the story as the overcoat, jacket, vest, scarf, etc., become old and worn. Should not Joseph and his clothes become a bit old and worn also? Every public and school library in the United States should make this title available to readers.

A 5-6 FI Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Grady Jacobs, Junior High Genius, has won enough national science fair projects to be invited to participate in “Embryo’s Woodstock Project.” The only problem is that Dr. Carter and his associates didn’t realize how young Grady is. When he shows up in Brazil, he is given only grunt work. Grady is itching to do some research of his own, and he senses something is going wrong with the perfectly engineered trees that Dr. Carter is growing. With the help of Andru and “Sue,” both native South American Indians, he realizes that his worst fears are true, but he also discovers that he can talk to trees and plants and make them do as he wishes.

This is a very exciting, highly believable science fiction story.


A All PB Reviewed by Vicky M. Turner

Old Witch bakes a scrumptious Halloween Pie, then puts a spell on it so that only she will be able to eat it. The spicy scent is blown to the other creatures of the night, and none can resist the smell. “‘Give me some pie!’ Vampire called and the Ghoul bawled, and the Ghost sighed, and the Banshee cried, and the Zombie groaned, and the Skeleton moaned.” When they realize no one is home, they munch and nibble until the pie is completely gone. Then they make the mistake of sleeping in the witch’s house. As they sleep they dream unusual dreams and begin to change shapes—Vampire grows round (as a pumpkin), Ghoul hears the clucking of chickens (eggs), Ghost is drowning in a salty sea, Skeleton becomes cinnamon sticks, Banshee becomes sugar; and Zombie turns into cream. When the witch returns she simply gathers up the ingredients and bakes another pie—and since the other creatures are already dead, they drift out of the new pie and back to their final resting places.

This book is full of great phrasing—ghost in her cloud, banshee in her shroud, zombie in his cave, skeleton in his grave—and word pictures: “Ghost dreamed in an empty drawer, Banshee snored high in the rafters; Zombie dozed behind the door; Skeleton snoozed on the mantel.” The marvelous pictures are full of surprises. Don’t forget to read the inscriptions on the headstones.


A K-1 PT PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

In August . . . .
The trees are bored
with being green
Some people leave
the local scene
And go to seaside bungalows
And take off nearly
All their clothes

So begins entry number eight in this collection of a dozen poems that move the reader through a child’s life month by month. The poems deal with comfortably familiar aspects of daily experience and with highlights of each season. The attending paintings are typical Hyman: homely, engaging, and beautifully executed. The reader recognizes these people and places! Unlike many children’s poetry collections, this offers poems that really say something about the theme, not cutesy or lightweight little ditties. This is a good choice for home and school collections.
Vaughan relates seventeen-year-old Abbie's harrowing experience during the worst storm in two hundred years. Readers almost feel they are there in the lighthouse with her and her mother and sisters as they battle the storm. Her father has left the island to get much-needed supplies, and the stormy weather keeps him away for several weeks. During his absence, Abbie keeps the lights going in both towers. "Not once in all that time did the lights fail. Not one ship floundered. Not one life was lost." While the winds and waves hammer at the island, Abbie moves her family to safety and rescues their chickens. At any time she could be swept away by the storm, but she overcomes her fears and faces the dangers that accompany her responsibilities.

Having read quite a bit about lighthouses and their keepers, I was already familiar with Abbie Burgess and her experiences at Mantinicus Rock, off the coast of Maine. I was drawn to this book because of the subject matter, and also because of the marvelous artwork by Bill Farnsworth.

When Abbie's father leaves her to tend the lights all by herself for the first time, Farnsworth's illustrations take on odd angles, leaning this way and that, like the ocean waves, reflecting fear, the storm itself, and the real danger that Abbie faces as she goes about her duties as light keeper. When the sea calms and her father returns, the pictures reflect the peace and relief Abbie feels. But the final scene shows the damage debris on the rocks, reminding the reader of Abbie's courage and heroism in the face of a devastating gale.

The epilogue sums up the rest of Abbie Burgess Grant's life. She spent well over half of it tending lighthouses. Her selfless service should inspire others to face their storms as bravely as she did.

* Pre-3 PB  Reviewed by Marsha D. Broadway

On a field trip to the Empire State Building, a boy is whisked away by a friendly cloud to Sector 7, where clouds are designed and dispatched around the world. The boy designs some fantastical clouds, shaped like fish and sea creatures, but the adults of Sector 7 are not amused, and he is sent to join his class. As the class leaves the Empire State Building and returns to the classroom, the skies above New York City are filled with fishy clouds, leaving the Sector 7 adults bewildered.

Wiesner has created another amazing wordless picture book using watercolors, winning a second Caldecott Honor. *Sector 7* is as engaging as his first Caldecott Honor, the dream sequence *Free Fall*. Wiesner, who also garnered the Caldecott Medal for *Tuesday*, is a master visual storyteller. *Sector 7* is a must purchase for school and public libraries. Creative writing classes for children, young adults, and even adults could have quite a field trip with this book.

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*Editor’s Note: The publisher of* *The Last Straw* by Fredrick H. Thury was incorrectly listed as *Tradewinds* on page 21 on the January/February 2000 issue. The correct publisher is Talewinds, a division of Charlesbridge. We apologize for the error.*