2000

Book Reviews

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Card, Janice; Clement, Cinda; Kupitz, Gabi; Alder, Nancy; Maxwell, Robert; de Jong, Katie; Woods, Susan; Purcell, Maren; Evensen, Nancy C.; Wadley, Laura; Olsen, Suzanne; Homer, Kathie; Hamar, AnnMarie; Morris, Carla; Olson, Sarah; Heil, Lillian; Christensen, Rita; and Tidwell, Sandra L. (2000) "Book Reviews," Children's Book and Media Review: Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol21/iss1/4

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Book Reviews

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Janice Card, Cinda Clement, Gabi Kupitz, Nancy Alder, Robert Maxwell, Katie de Jong, Susan Woods, Maren Purcell, Nancy C. Evensen, Laura Wadley, Suzanne Olsen, Kathe Homer, AnnMarie Hamar, Carla Morris, Sarah Olson, Lillian Heil, Rita Christensen, and Sandra L. Tidwell

This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol21/iss1/4

A K-3 PB Reviewed by Janice Card

At the foot of a mountain, on a small rocky island, lived a man and his wife and their daughter, Cleito. They were happy together and worked hard to care for the barren land. The god Poseidon was curious how the family could be so content when they had so little, so he came to visit them in human form, intending to study the situation. In time he grew to love Cleito, and she grew to love him, so they were married. Poseidon could not hide his true identity forever. He returned to his divine form and vowed to make the island a fit home for a king and queen. Soon the rocky isle became a magnificent paradise with every convenience imaginable. After a long time, Poseidon made his son, Atlas, high king and split up the kingdom among his ten sons. To retain peace and order in the city, Poseidon engraved laws on the stone pillar of the temple. If the laws were ever broken, a terrible curse would come upon the land. “The people of Atlantis became very wise, gentle, and great-spirited.” Poseidon saw this and was content. He returned to his home beneath the sea. Very slowly the people of Atlantis changed: “The godlike part of their souls faded . . . and their human natures took over.” They argued and became greedy for wealth and power. When Poseidon discovered what had become of those who lived in his beautiful city, he wept. He had no choice but to carry out the curse. Like many true stories from history and the scriptures, selfishness and greed caused the society to decay and become ripe for destruction. So it was with Atlantis.

Based on Plato’s Timaeus & Critias (with a note by historian Goeffrey Ashe), this retelling of the mythical story of Atlantis is brief and clear. Balit’s familiarity with the Middle East is apparent, and her art style truly enhances this ancient tale. Rich colors and stylized drawings will give readers the feeling they are discovering a magical place of sea and sun from long, long ago.


B 3-6 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Eleven-year-old Tim returns to the home of his grandparents who raised him until his mother remarried and moved the family away. He overhears his grandmother and mother talking about his grandfather’s Alzheimer’s and about selling the house. Tim thinks they are cruel. He believes he can save his grandfather by running away with him, so together they plan a fishing trip, which turns into a near disaster. Tim later learns the truth about Alzheimer’s and caring for an Alzheimer’s patient. He also finds out that his mom and grandmother are not planning to put Grandfather into a nursing home, as he had earlier thought.

This book deals well with a child’s learning experience with a loved one in failing health. For a child’s reading pleasure, I would not choose this type of heavy story, but perhaps for a child who is dealing with this type of problem, this book could help him see the problems and possibilities.

* 3- FI  Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Vendela, who doesn’t particularly like her name, lives in Stockholm, the Venice of the North. Vendela’s father proposes a trip to Venice, the “fairy-tale city,” during Easter holidays when the weather will be at its best—not too hot, cold, or wet. Father and daughter prepare for the trip by reading all they can about the sinking city. Once in Italy, Vendela’s father suggests they go to Venice by boat rather than airport bus. From that moment on, they and the reader sample Venice through daily cultural experiences. Enhanced by sumptuous artwork and informative text, Vendela’s Venetian experiences include traveling via vaporetto (“little steamer”) and gondolas; sampling Italian ice cream; visiting the local hospital to have a fish bone removed from her throat; watching her normally straight hair begin to curl; admiring the gilded lion of St. Mark and the beautiful sculpted horses; drinking almond-syrup milk; delighting in the charms of an outdoor café; visiting the glassblowers of Murano; touring the art museums as well as the fish market. Soon, Vendela’s week in Venice is over, but for her, as well as the reader, the memories live on.

Historical and current information along with maps combine to take the reader on a fabulous visit to one of the world’s most unique cities. Like Vendela, the reader can return to Venice again and again. Originally published in Sweden, *Vendela in Venice* is a Batchelder Honor Book.


NR 9-12 FI  Reviewed by Cinda Clement

What is this? Two high school girls fall in love with each other and engage in a lesbian relationship. Willa has already had a lesbian relationship with another girl, which got her expelled from her old high school. “Louie” realizes early on that the feelings she has for Willa are sexual, but she has few qualms about pursuing the relationship. The book rather explicitly chronicles the development of the relationship and how it affects the girls and people with whom they have other relationships. Louie visits with her Catholic priest, who responds, “How lucky you are, to love and be loved in return. Tell me about her . . . . Love comes from God. And so to turn away from love is to turn away from God.” In the end, the girls decide to be openly in love with each other.

This is a book for children? Or teenagers? Or anyone with traditional moral values? Whatever happened to *A Wrinkle in Time*, or *The Dark is Rising*, or even *The Hardy Boys*? I keep reading new books “for children” and youth that are heavy and heavy-handed, and I am dismayed. This one has a skewed moral value as well as being heavy. If this story were the story of a heterosexual relationship, the explicitness and attitude would preclude my recommending it to any youthful audience, but to have that attitude with the story of a lesbian relationship leaves me wondering where we are headed, or perhaps better asked, where are we directing our children? I am not of the view that we need lots of books disguised as children’s storybooks on all the hard things a few of them are facing. Where is *Harry Potter* when you need him to lighten things up and give a rollicking good read to one of those children who are having a hard time? Or where is a grand White Garden or Little Women to lightly teach grace, kindness, good manners, and civility? Either publishers or writers are trying too hard to be politically correct and accept any view. The result is a great percentage of books which do not read like children’s books to this reviewer.

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Otis yearns to be one of the gang, but being an extraordinarily tidy pig, he just can't bring himself to join in any piglet games. The thought of stinking, sucking, sticky mud oozing about him, drying on his soft pink flesh—yuk! Instead, he sits on the sidelines acting as score keeper as the others frolic and play. Then, one day, a frog in distress begs Otis to jump into the mud and retrieve his ball for him. He himself is quite meticulous and can't bring himself to go into the gunk to get it. Between the two of them they manage to get the ball without sullying their spanking-clean selves, and voilà, a friendship is born.

A dandy book with the cutest pig this side of Poppleton.


Originally published in 1865, Carroll's classic tale of little Alice's tumble down the rabbit-hole and its ensuing string of adventures will never grow old. Even so, Helen Oxenbury's watercolor illustration's mix of traditional characters with modern interpretations is a refreshing invitation to read the story once again. Oxenbury presents a modern, totally bored Alice, with long, naturally curly, blonde hair clothed in a sleeveless blue shift dress ideal for summer romping. Alice is chewing on a blade of green as she lies in the grass, propped against her book-absorbed older sister, when a White Rabbit runs past. And thus begins the adventure. The text, set in “Berkeley Book and Aquinas Plain,” is a pleasure for the eyes. But most important, the illustrations lure the reader into this beautiful edition which no library, personal or public, should be without.
Hair in Funny Places tells the story of puberty. Typical of most young children, a little girl asks her teddy bear when she will become a "grown-up." The teddy bear tells her what happens when Mr. and Mrs. Hormone, tiny creatures who live inside everyone, mix the potions that turn kids into "grown-ups." By using the girl’s parents as an example, the teddy bear goes through the various physical and emotional changes that each respectively went through to become adults. The teddy bear then tells the girl about the "wildest potion of all"—love potion, which brought her parents together. The story ends when the girl assures her teddy bear that even when she is grown up she will always love him.

While Cole’s objectives may have been to present puberty playfully and comfortably with her fun pictures and light-hearted tone, her story is a gross misrepresentation of the truth about puberty and could give children many wrong impressions. First of all, the girl learns about puberty from her teddy bear—not her parents, who should be the ones to teach her. Her dependence on a stuffed animal to tell her the facts of life could discourage children from feeling comfortable confiding in their parents. Cole’s portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Hormone adds to the unnecessary mystery and intrigue of puberty. Mr. and Mrs. Hormone are hairy, pimply characters with horns—kind of a combination of porcupine, bug, and mad scientist. It seems that these mischievous, insidious looking creatures have nothing better to do than plot to thwart a child’s life with potion. Mr. and Mrs. Hormone could cause further confusion for children when they create their crazy love potion. The picture at this point shows the girls mother and father running wildly at each other, as if being driven by an uncontrollable force. This idea cheapens the idea of love by insinuating that it is simply a byproduct of our hormones. Finally, the story’s ending further separates children from discussing these issues with their parents when the young girl exclaims, “Oh no, Ted, you are so wise, I will always love you.” There is much potential to encourage children-parent relationships at this point, but instead Cole chooses to end the story in the world of make believe, where wise stuffed animals take the place of loving parents.


This is the story of an old man who ate so much his britches burst and his buttons popped off into the fire. His wife and three daughters decide to help him find replacement buttons, each daughter trying in her own way.

The first decides to dress up in her finest clothing and find a rich man who will give her buttons in exchange for her hand in marriage. The second daughter decides to join the army and take the buttons from her uniform to send to her father. The third explains that she will run about the fields, her apron outstretched, waiting for buttons to fall from the sky. Each of girl finds a young man to marry, but only the youngest successfully finds buttons for her father. When her suitor-turned-husband relinquishes his trouser buttons, the father is overjoyed.

Water-color pictures and old-fashioned drawings are reminiscent of Randolph Caldecott’s paintings. The story is a humorous fairy tale, with young girls setting out on a quest and returning happily wedded. This book could be used as a comparison to other fairy tales, identifying the elements for a good fairy tale, i.e., a young girl, a handsome young man, a quest, a problem, a satisfying conclusion. Storytellers will like the whimsical wording as they relate the story aloud.
A 3+ NF Reviewed by Susan Woods

Coombs chronicles the experiences of children during the 1930s Dust Bowl era through text and photographs. A map of the United States and Canada documents the areas affected by drought and dust storms, highlighting areas where the worst damage occurred. At the end of the book is a glossary of terms, an index, and a list of resources on the dust days. Instructions and sketches for a burlap shirt, often worn by poor schoolchildren during the Dust Bowl era, is included. This statement by Coombs sums up the tone of her book: "People cannot make the rain fall or halt the wind. But we can keep the wind from carrying away the soil. The sad times of the dust days need not come again."

Children of the Dust Days would work well as a factual preview to Karen Hesse's Out of the Dust, a free-verse story of a young girl who experiences the tragedies of the Dust Bowl. Students could learn the meaning of many terms used in Hesse's book, such as "Okie," "blizzard," etc. Children of the Dust Days would also be a great prelude for older students in junior high and high school who might encounter The Grapes of Wrath. The real-life photographs and easy-to-read captions and information would help students form a frame of reference for other Dust Bowl stories.


A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Maren Purcell

In Seneca Falls, New York, Amelia Bloomer is not a proper lady. She thinks the proper ladies are just plain silly. Women can't vote, they can't work, and the clothes they wear are absolutely
ridiculous! Why would anyone want to wear a tight corset that makes you faint, dresses as heavy as a pile of bricks, and skirts so wide you are always getting caught in doorways? One day, Amelia receives a visit from Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s cousin who is wearing a new outfit composed of baggy pantaloons with a short skirt over them. “Brilliant!” Amelia declares, and she immediately makes herself a matching outfit. Finally she is free to do all the things she always wanted to do, without the constraints of a dress. Many people are aghast to see Amelia walking about in her new costume. “Shocking,” everyone says, and one boy even calls out, “You forgot your skirt, Amelia Bloomer!” There are other women, however, who think the new outfit is fabulous and inundate her with letters requesting patterns. Bloomers become the rage for all those other improper women. Eventually, though, they go out of style, and proper ladies and gentlemen everywhere rejoice, thinking everything will finally return to normal. Did people really forget about Amelia and her ideas? We are left to decide the answer.

The illustrations and text work hand in hand to tell a story of the courage to go against the norm and stand up for what you believe in. Bright, cheerful illustrations done in gouache capture the personalities of the characters and radiate with energy. The text and illustrations combined seem to dance across the page, sweeping the reader into the story. An author’s note at the end delves into greater depth on the women’s rights movement that took place in the mid-1800s and gives more biographical information on Amelia Bloomer. Not only is this book a delightful read, it is also informative. It would be a great springboard into a study of women’s rights for children of all ages. Corey and McLaren succeed in giving us a fresh portrayal of history, but they don’t stop there. Going one step further, they bring the past to the present and show how what happened over a hundred years ago affects the way we live today. A definite must for any library.


A 3-6 FI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Despite the depression, Frances lived a comfortable, sheltered life with her father. She was cared for by servants and taught by a tutor. Things change however, when her father, who lost his fortune, commits suicide. Frances is forced to leave the security of her home and the servants, who have been the only family Frances has ever known. She is intrigued with the stories of hobo life shared by one servant, and, after being placed on a train to live with her aunt, she decides to make a move. Frances leaves the train, turns her ticket in for a refund, cuts her hair, puts on boy’s clothing, and begins her life as “Frankie Blue” the hobo by hopping a train. To her surprise, a young boy is also in the car. Stewpot becomes a true friend, acclimating her to the protocol of the hobo life. Cold, hunger, embarrassment, and worry become her companions. However, she sees her fellow hobos for the most part as generous people who have no where to turn. When Stewpot dies, Frankie decides it is time to return to her former life as Frances. As she approaches her aunt’s home, she can’t help but notice a symbol left by a hobo which indicates the residents will help someone down on their luck.

The book gives an insightful look at life during the Depression. Stewpot and Frankie have some exciting adventures which make for an interesting read. The book is currently a Utah Children’s Book Award Nominee. It is a solid choice for a historical fiction lover.


A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Laura Wadley

India Opal Bulou goes to the Winn-Dixie for groceries and winds up with a great big ugly dog

**A 1-3 PB**  Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Jimmy craves a moon pie, but his mom says its too close to dinner. What is he to do but climb into his old jalopy and fly off to the moon to get some for himself? He heads off to the Milky Way to get something else—milk to go with the moon pies—when he runs into some hungry Mars Men and the dreaded Grimble Grinder. Forced to fend off the Grinder with his last moon pie, Jimmy is helped back to earth through some ingenious crafting by the Mars Men. So hungry by now that he eats all of his brussels-sprout noodle-bean casserole, Jimmy finally gets his moon pie for dessert.

Wonderful, vibrant illustrations with a hero so All-American-Boyishly cute you could eat HIM up. The clever, fast-paced story has substance enough to keep the reader engaged and set the imagination going.


**K-3 PT PB**  Reviewed by Suzanne Olsen

Paul Laurence Dunbar was a black American poet, famous at the end of the 1800s all over America. During his short life (he died at age thirty-four), he captured the fresh vitality of nature, youth, and the South in both standard English and black dialect. His poems quickly became part of the common culture as people memorized them and made them part of family rituals, from jump rope rhyme to bedtime refrain. The poems in dialect are more easily understood

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who is taking the place apart and will be sent to the pound if she doesn't instantly adopt him. Opal lives with her father—"the Preacher"—for the Open Hand Baptist Church—in a trailer court. Opal's mother left the family when Opal was much younger, and Opal's desire to know about her mother buttst up against her father's wish to forget painful times. Opal is also having trouble making friends in a new town. Winn-Dixie (the dog) changes all that. The big lurpy dog opens every door, and Opal finds friends as well as an enriched relationship with her father. *Because of Winn-Dixie* is one of those children's books which adults will like better than most children will, but since I'm a grownup, that doesn't bother me. This book is filled with great stories and richly realized, funny, memorable, down-home characters.
when read aloud, and even to an untrained ear are captivatingly beautiful.

Each poem is interpreted by one of six accomplished illustrators, all well-known for their work in children's literature. The media used vary, and include pencil and watercolor, acrylic and oil, tempura and gouache, and scratchboard. The artists share stories of their experiences with Dunbar's works, often having childhood memories of his poems. I was enthralled.


George causes his mother a lot of grief. Whenever she asks him to bark, he makes an animal sound uncharacteristic of a dog. George meows. He quacks. George doesn't bark. Frustrated, George's mother takes him to the vet, who dons latex surgical gloves before reaching into George's mouth. Sure enough, the vet pulls out a cat. Asked to bark again, George makes his characteristic quack-quack sound. The vet reaches deeper and pulls a duck out of George. A pig is next to be pulled out of George. Finally, the vet dons his longest gloves and reaches very deep into George and pulls out a cow. Asked to bark again, George responds with a doglike "arf." Satisfied, the vet pronounces George cured. George's mother is thrilled beyond words. Proud to show George off to all pedestrians they meet on the way home, she asks George to bark, and George responds with, "Hello."

Sparse text and expressive, yet simple, illustrations make this a great read-aloud.


This cookbook by chef Gary Goss contains thirty-three soup recipes with such clever names as Sob Soup (onion soup), Mary Had a Little Lamb Stew and Lickity Split Pea Soup. The recipes are divided into four chapters, one for each season, with an additional chapter devoted to salads, breads, and appetizers. The text is rounded out with directions for setting the table, a list of
cookware required for the recipes, and rules of the kitchen.

Goss includes recipes that are family favorites (chili and chicken noodle soup) as well as some that feature more unusual food combinations (corn and pumpkin chowder and tomato and orange soup). Instructions are clear and simple. Although none of the recipes are too spicy, some food combinations seem to be geared more to adult tastes than to those of young children. Most of Goss's recipes can be adapted for vegetarians. Dyer's delightful watercolor illustrations of dancing vegetables and animals in settings reminiscent of nursery rhymes introduce each chapter and decorate the recipe pages.

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A 4-6 FI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

The two gifts Ben receives for his twelfth birthday—a room and a letter from his uncle—seem to change his life. Ben’s parents are thrilled to present the room to Ben to use as an art studio, but Ben is uncomfortable with his parents’ expectations of him as an artist. On the same day, he receives a letter from his Uncle Ian, whom he hasn’t seen since he was very young. Ian was baby-sitting when Ben lost his pinkie finger in an accident; his mother still holds Ian responsible. The letter is an invitation for Ben to visit Ian in Oregon. Ben desperately wants to meet his uncle, and he finally persuades his mother to accept the invitation and accompany him to Oregon. Ian is married and his wife is expecting their first child very soon. Things are strained between Ben’s mother and uncle. Ian feels guilty about the loss of Ben’s finger and wants to see Ben before the birth of his child. He has to know that the accident hasn’t ruined Ben’s life.

While in Oregon, Ben and a new friend innocently trick a young boy into believing there is a new leaf on a dead tree. The young child, trying to see the leaf, attempts to climb the tree and falls, breaking two of his limbs. Again, blame circles around—with Ben feeling his share; Ben now understands Ian’s feelings of guilt. Ben discovers that total blame is a hard thing to pin on one person, and it serves little purpose. As Ben learns about himself and begins to understand the adults in his life, he can better deal with the birthday room and his parents’ expectations for his success. In time, Ben convinces his parents to turn the room into a spare bedroom—a sign of the family’s reconciliation.

Although the book begins slowly, part two picks things up and they continue moving along. The characters we meet in Oregon give the story life and more action. Henkes is skillful in helping his characters grow and mature while allowing the readers to learn some lessons along the way. The story is an instructive one about healing and forgiving. Some people learn that while they are still twelve—for others it takes more time!

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A 6+ FI Reviewed by Carla Morris

When the fattest boy in America rides into the small town of Antler, Texas, the effect is anything but small. Zachary Beaver’s small trailer, decorated with Christmas lights, stops in the town’s Dairy Maid parking lot, where people can pay $2.00 to take a look at six-hundred-pound Zachary. Toby and his friend Cal join the long line for a brief glimpse.

It is a summer of change. Toby’s mother leaves her family for a western music career. Toby’s best friend’s brother is fighting in Vietnam. Toby himself is in love with Scarlett, who in turn loves an older and more suave Juan. When Zachary is deserted by his legal guardian, Toby and Cal begin to leave food on his doorstep. This begins a friendship which includes some tender scenes of building a set of steps to get Zachary in a truck to see his first drive-in move
and efforts made to help Zachary realize his goal of being baptized.

The small-town setting allows the larger themes of love, friendship, loneliness, despair, hope and fulfilled dreams to take their rightful place in this memorable coming-of-age story. Boys and girls ages twelve and older will enjoy this story.

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A K-2 PB Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

Eight-year-old Sophie dreams of becoming a professional ice skater. She goes to ice shows and watches the dazzling performances of the skaters, but she looks forward to the day when the applause will be for her. Her training involves lessons five mornings and two afternoons a week. She even takes ballet to become more flexible and graceful. Isadora’s watercolor and ink illustrations show Sophie as she learns to spin, jump and trace figures on the ice. We learn what it’s like for her as she prepares for a competition. The illustrations also show what kind of clothes skaters wear and some of the moves they learn. A simple, interesting introduction to ice skating that will delight very young children.

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* 4-7 NF PB Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

Calligrapher and Taoist philosopher Huang’s book is a fascinating introduction to the Chinese zodiac. According to Chinese legend, Buddha once gave a sermon in which he taught twelve animals about their strengths and weaknesses. He taught that each animal represents some form of chi, the creative life energy found in all living things. Buddha linked each animal to a month and year, then sent them into the world to guide and teach others. Since that time, the Chinese have believed that every person is born with one or two of the powers of at least two of these animals. The month and year of our birth determine which animals we are most like.

The strength and appeal of this book lie in the way the vivid textual descriptions, calligraphy, and red and black ink drawings support each other. The text is entertaining, and offers explanations of the role each animal plays in Chinese mythology. Huang uses the energetic strokes of the Chinese calligrapher in his illustrations of the animals. He includes the Chinese character for each animal (which often resembles the animal itself or its movement) and a transliteration of its name. Readers who want to match themselves to the animals of their birth month and year can do so by checking the chart at the back of the book. This book will appeal to adults and children alike.

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* 4-6 NF  Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

Jessel gives readers the opportunity to visit the students of England’s Royal Ballet School and experience a year in the life of dancers-in-training. The book is a detailed look at every aspect of the students’ lives, from the audition required to get into the school to daily classes and rehearsals to performances. Through text and color photographs, Jessel explains what it is like to study ballet and the dedication and determination required for the pupils to succeed as professional dancers.

Produced with the cooperation of the faculty and students of the RBS, *Ballet School* is a superb way to introduce young people to dance. While it is quite detailed in its description of the students’ daily lives, the text is simple and to the point. Jessel explains ballet terms clearly, using color photographs to illustrate positions and steps when possible. A brief history of dance and a glossary of ballet terms at the back of the book is helpful.

Jessel’s book is simply superb.


* A K-2 PT PB  Sarah Olson

The timing is spectacularly appropriate for this collection of poems that celebrate the elephant version of the Olympic games—the Elympics. Kennedy divided the book into two sections, one for the summer and winter Games. The poems represent a joyful and humorous look at the greatest of human sporting events as it would be in the elephant world. Sports represented include the triathlon, gymnastics, diving, the slalom, and ice-skating. What is lacking in the poems themselves is compensated by the collection’s real beauty—the charming and almost breathtaking watercolor and colored pencil illustrations. What a wonderful way to welcome our upcoming Olympic games!


* All PT  Reviewed by Cinda Clement

This collection of poetry is divided into several categories. The first, “What Do Poems Do?” illustrates ways we use poetry, such as to make us smile, tell stories, send messages, share feelings, help us understand people, and start us wondering. Another category, “What’s Inside A Poem?” goes over images, word music, beats that repeat, likenesses, and word play. “Special Kinds of Poetry” gives examples of a variety of poems, including limericks, take-offs, songs, show-and-tell poems, finders-keepers poems, and Haiku. Some of the other categories are “Do It Yourself Ideas” and “Notes to Parents.”

Each section is composed of poems that demonstrate the concepts of the categories. They
are clear and easy to enjoy. In addition, a short educational introduction at the beginning of each section is valuable for children, parents, and teachers. *Knock at a Star* is a useful collection of good poetry, perfect for helping readers learn about poetry and how to enjoy it. There are even ideas on how the reader might begin writing poetry.


B 4-8 FI Reviewed by Sarah Olson

Kimmel interweaves two stories about the power and danger of blindly heeding the love of a best friend. Jenna is assigned to read aloud each Wednesday afternoon to the elderly Miss Caples as part of the eighth-grade human-services project. One day Jenna forgets to bring something to read, so she tells the running story of her relationship with her long-time best friend, Liv, and the tricks they play on Jane Walsh, the nerd girl at school. Finally, when Jenna is asked to prove herself to Liv by doing something downright mean to Jane, Miss Caples opens her mouth and teaches Jenna a lesson from her own life. As it turns out, Miss Caples has hidden herself away from the world for years as penance for helping the best friend of her youth with an act she thought led to the lonely death of the sweetest girl she'd ever known.

Because of Miss Caples, Jenna decides to stand up to Liv, who then uses her popular influence to make Jenna an outcast the own school. Liv's words and actions toward Jenna and others grow continually meaner, and Jenna begins to find that her only true friends are Jane Walsh and Miss Caples. As Jenna takes a stand in her own life, building stronger relationships with her friends and her mother, she encourages Miss Caples to do the same and right the wrongs committed over half a century ago. With the help and support of Jenna's mother and Jane, both Miss Caples and Jenna begin to redeem themselves and start living with their own inner strength.

For being about the woes of junior high, this novel rings with a surprising clarity. Kimmel effectively intertwines the two story lines together, and we are grateful to see all the ends cleanly tied. This book teaches a powerful lesson about the overgeneralized subject of "peer pressure" but in such a personal way that even I was forced to reevaluate the influence I let others have on me. It would be a useful tool to reaffirm the importance of living according to our own consciences, even in the eighth grade.


A All FI Reviewed by Lillian Heil

Did you ever wonder why the Dragon is number 5 in the Chinese Zodiac and the rooster only 10? The rooster is convinced that he was not chosen first because he was foolish enough to loan his spectacular antlers to the Dragon Sun for as long as he needed. Enjoy the story of the crafty centipede and how he helped Dragon cover his bald head. Yong Sheng Xuan's bold black outlines and brilliant colors give the story a dramatic oriental flavor that fits Kimmel's retelling of this Chinese tale.


B 3-6 FI Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

"I am a forgotten princess," eleven-year-old Elizabeth writes in her diary. "At times my father, King Henry VIII, needs to forget me." Elizabeth,
a princess of England, lives a life surrounded by court intrigue. Daughter of the fallen queen Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth is aware of her precarious situation at court and knows that her father may exile her at any time. She loves her younger brother Edward, the heir to the English throne, and her governess Kat, but she despises her older sister, Mary, who enjoys tormenting her. Elizabeth is afraid of her father's temper, yet longs to be noticed by him, even if he does nothing more than wink at her. She confides to her diary how badly she wants to be queen and writes that she will never marry. Her great fear, she says, is that her diary will be found and she will be accused of treason.

This book is one in a series entitled The Royal Diaries. It is an interesting, fictionalized account of the life of the princess who would eventually become Queen Elizabeth I. Readers of historical fiction will enjoy the detail of sixteenth-century court life. Lasky also incorporates into the story some fairly accurate historical facts about the House of Tudor and England. The book has an appendix which contains the Tudor family tree and black-and-white photographs of historical sites.

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Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

When Wilma sees an elderly lady on the subway train, she lets the woman have her seat. Because of her good turn, the woman promises to grant Wilma the wish of her heart—to be the most popular kid at the middle school. At first, Wilma is skeptical. Before, she was so unpopular that she ate her lunch in the girl's bathroom, but it soon becomes apparent that everyone at school is doomed to like her. She is amazed at the changes. A wave of horror hits Wilma when she realizes there are only three weeks left of school, for when school is over her popularity will end as well. She then begins to study the popular girls who have become her friends, watching their behavior and personalities, in an attempt to unlock their secrets. Wilma befriends some lonely students and, in the end, succeeds at keeping most of her "popular" friends.

What junior high or middle school girl doesn't want to be popular? Levine addresses an issue that is extremely important to the targeted age range. It seeks to uncover more than just shallow popularity but to find out what actually makes someone sought after, teaching some valuable lessons. As Wilma learns to understand and like herself, she gains confidence to help meet the needs of others. The story is believable; the characters are well developed. The Wish has a great moral and is a fun read.

Note: One portion of the book may be of concern to some parents. For her second date, Wilma spends over an hour with her new boyfriend, Jared, in a "kissing session." They share long kisses, short kisses, open-mouthed kisses, and closed-mouth kisses.


A K-3 PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Benny's mother has a cleaning fetish. She not only rearranges Benny's toys, but she is set on giving Benny a bath and giving his toy, Little Piggy, a good wash in the washing machine. Benny is upset and leaves home. Out in the world, Benny learns that other adults have fetishes, too. Some are too busy at their computers to even look up, much less answer his plea to let him and Little Piggy move into their cabins; some don't want anything to do with children; some are just mean and threaten to "straighten your curly tail" if Benny tries to make a nice mudhole in their large field. Benny temporarily loses Little Piggy and in the interim realizes that he misses his home. On
finding Little Piggy, who is now dirtier than ever, Benny seeks to make amends by washing Little Piggy in a puddle before heading off for home.

This run-away-from-home story is told in simple text and charming illustrations that capture the expressions of a child lacking control—real or perceived—over his life.


A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Rita Christensen

An imperious crocodile, who considers himself an aristocrat, is living the good life in Egypt until Napoleon captures him and ships him off to France. He is humiliated to be living in a fenced Paris fountain. He is soon, however, a popular attraction and becomes the toast of Paris, at least until fashions change and the Emperor decides to eat him for dinner. Escaping to the slimy sewers of Paris, he finds a comfortable refuge but not much to eat. What is a hungry crocodile to do? He cunningly finds a tasty morsel ... not for the faint of heart.

The illustrations in *Crocodile* are deftly rendered with a sophisticated yet comic quality. This amusing crocodile biography will make youngsters chuckle and may kindle the older reader’s curiosity about crocodiles and history—a first-rate book for a children’s library.


A 1+ PB Gabi Kupitz

Saruni is a Tanzanian boy who longs for a bike. He has spent much time learning to ride his father’s bike. He saves and saves his hard-earned coins until he has amassed a fortune, and, thinking himself the world’s richest kid, he goes to the bike dealer in the marketplace. The bike dealer laughs at Saruni’s bundle of coins; Saruni’s fortune is hardly enough to purchase a bike. Disappointed, Saruni takes his money and goes home. His mother senses his defeat. Saruni tells his mother that he not only wants a bike for himself; with a bike, he can assist her when she takes the family produce to market. One day, Saruni’s father surprises his family by riding up to the house on a motorbike. Now that he has a different mode of transportation, he offers to sell his bike to Saruni for the exact amount of money Saruni has saved. Saruni takes his father up on the deal. His father’s bike is not exactly the bike he dreamed about, but it’s a bike, and he is now the proud owner. In addition, for all his help to his family, Saruni’s parents return his box of coins to him. Helping his mother to market the following Saturday, Saruni realizes that if he had a cart to pull behind his bicycle, his mother won’t have to carry big loads of produce on her head. That evening, Saruni empties his box of coins and starts lining up the coins in rows.

Rich, bold watercolors underscore the text of a story set in a foreign country with a plot that is universal to all children who dream about ownership of something that seems beyond their reach.


A Pre PB Reviewed by Rita Christensen

Bam! Rattle! Zoom! It is hard for an energetic little penguin to keep quiet when the baby is sleeping—even with Mother penguin’s reminders to please be quiet. After being outside, the penguin continues to be loud. Thrup. Clunk. Splash. When it starts to rain the noisy penguin is invited back inside the house on the condition that he keep quiet. Bent on expending energy, the little
penguin comes up with a clever way to quietly frolic around the house.

Puffa puff puffa. *My Puffer Train* rolls down the tracks, picking up animals on its journey. Conductor Penguin introduces toddlers to plump pig, a bossy old goose, a scraggy old crow, and other noisy animals. The animals frolic and play at the puffer train’s destination. Splish splosh splash.

The bright illustrations and fun use of onomatopoeia make this set an amusing yet educational read for toddlers. I read this book to my one-year-old daughter and later found her trying to read it herself by making up her own sound imitation words. An excellent book for home or public library use.

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A 4+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

A young soldier visiting his grandmother is mentally transported to the summer his grandmother intervenes in his quiet and desperate life. She has invited him, when he has barely passed the eighth grade, to live and work with her on the Minnesota farm where she cooks for two old Norwegian bachelor brother owners. Learning the ways of farm life is hard, yet interesting and financially rewarding. Certainly, farm life is a much better fit for him than living with his two alcoholic and irresponsible parents. Alida’s nurturing and the brothers’ mentoring foster a new confidence in the boy and that makes all the difference. Only later in his life does the boy learn of the sacrifice his grandmother and the brothers made to help him turn his life around.

The simplicity of the text frames a story of deep love for a troubled child who is worth every effort to save. Paulsen has crafted a story based on his own life, and his gratitude for his grandmother and her two employers is evident. *Alida’s Song* is a companion to *The Campcook* (1991).

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A 4+ PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

San Souci retells Edgar Rice Bourrough’s Tarzan story for young readers. Adding to the primitive feel of this fictional character are scratchboard colored drawings by McCurdy.

Details of Tarzan’s early life are interestingly woven into the account. The reader will not be surprised to learn that the original story differs from the recent Disney movie. At the end of the book is a detailed author’s note, in which he explains why Tarzan has become a hero figure in legend literature. Tarzan characterizes courage and strength, and through his exploits he finds the truth about himself and his relationship with others.

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B Pre PB Reviewed by Rita Christensen

*All the Pretty Little Horses* is a lullaby that appears on many children’s recordings, yet is not a widely known ballad. This picture book is a good introduction to this beautiful cradlesong, which invokes images of horses, cakes, meadows, and lambs. Lustrous pastel illustrations—in tranquil yellows, greens, and purples—reflect the gentle lyrics as well as their heritage. A note at the beginning of the book tells the reader about the song’s origins. On the last page of the book is an easy arrangement for voice and piano. Included in the text of this book is a seldom-heard second verse, which will make the reading or singing of this lullaby at bedtime even more satisfying.

A 4+ FI Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Schroeder has put together a very interesting book on the four-year project which led to the production of Disney's new Tarzan movie. *Disney's Tarzan* explains how Tarzan was chosen as a Disney movie, details the two-week African expedition taken by the production team, and introduces the people whose voices helped define the personalities of each of the animal and human characters.

I also reviewed San Souci's *Tarzan*, a retelling for young readers. Although I was not surprised to find that the original Tarzan story differs from the movie storyline, I could see how Disney chose some aspects of the story and changed others to make the storyline appropriate for children. Disney's goal was to concentrate on the relationship Tarzan developed with his gorilla family, especially his gorilla mother, Kala.

If you're a lover of Disney animated movies, you will find this selection fascinating. The book's chapter subheadings carry the adventure theme: e.g., "The Expedition is Proposed," "Exploring the Terrain," "Getting to Know Your Fellow Travelers," and "Journey Completed." Students of film, art, and theater could benefit from the information about carrying a theme from an idea to actual production. Art students of all ages would be interested in the illustrations, which carry a storyboard sketch to the finished animation. Readers learn that a computer process called "Deep Canvas" was developed to make the jungle scenes three-dimensional. The book includes the movie storyline, and the last chapter is a brief biographical account of Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of the fictional, now legendary, hero character Tarzan.

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B Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Cinda Clement

This picture book is filled with all kinds of children doing the things that all children do, in all kinds of weather and seasons—working, playing, eating, and sleeping. The book reminds children of things each has in common with other children around the world. There are illustrations of different kinds of homes, food, activities, and even beds.

The book is simple, the illustrations are engaging, and the content is fun for children to consider. *All Kinds of Children* would be an effective way to open a parent-child discussion on the many different cultures that make up our world population. It also shows children how although they may come from different places and not look alike, they still have much in common. Teachers could use this book to promote appreciation for diversity within their classrooms.

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* 3-6 FI Reviewed by Laura Wadley

Todd and Tessa find a very odd store at the mall. Gemini Jack's U-Rent-All is a front for an alien incursion looking for the DNA of evil twins to spice up its own bland gene pool. Tod and Tessa go through extensive testing, only to be found to be too nice. Fortunately, Tod and Tessa's twin classmates, Nancy and Ned Gneiss (nicknamed Notso and Never), reveal themselves to be a perfect fit for the alien's needs.

*Be First in the Universe* is one of the funniest books I have ever read. Filled with ingenious word play, hilarious situations, and telling characterizations, it is a perfect read-aloud for a

A K-5 NF PB Reviewed by Cinda Clement

St. George, in a very reader friendly way, presents a series of facts about the qualifications and characteristics of the past and present presidents of the United States of America. Did you know Howard Taft was the biggest president, more than three hundred pounds, and had to have a special bathtub, which fit four men, built for his White House bathroom? If this information isn’t enough to grab your attention, the illustration of a crane lifting him into the tub will. Here are just a few of the interesting facts presented. "One thing’s certain, if you want to be president—and stay president—be honest." Harry Truman paid for his own postage stamps. Grover Cleveland was famous for his motto: "Tell the truth." "Other presidents weren’t so honest. Democrat Bill Clinton was impeached for lying under oath. Republican Richard Nixon’s staff broke into Democratic headquarters to steal campaign secrets."

*So You Want to Be President?* should appeal to almost everyone who picks it up. It has a lot of interesting information, revealed in an interesting manner, with delightful, recognizable illustrations to go with the dialogue. The book could be read alone. It could also be used in the home or classroom to initiate a discussion on presidents, the office of president, what is needed in a president, or many other possibilities.


A Pre-2 PT PB Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Tafuri has taken the Gregory Gander poem "The Twelve Months" and added full-page, vibrantly colored illustrations. In addition to seeing the changes of nature through the year, the reader is carried into the lives of two children and their parents as they grow and progress through a year of their lives. You see the children sledding in "Snowy" January, flying kites in "Blowy" March, swinging in "Flowery" May, and going to school in "Droppy" September. "Freezy" December pictures the mother inside cuddling a new baby as she looks out the window and watches her husband and children bring home the Christmas tree on a sled.

Each of Tafuri's expressive illustrations include birds, animals and plants that reflect the changes of the seasons. The lines of the illustrations move the reader through the pages, and the entire book will help readers reflect on the joy, beauty and reverence one should feel for nature.


A 4+ NF Reviewed by Sandra L. Tidwell

Do you know someone who is interested, or are you interested, in finding out about your ancestors? Taylor’s step-by-step basics of doing United States family history research includes all the fundamentals of fact gathering from family and home sources, organizing information into pedigree charts and family group sheets, and using technology to enhance access to genealogical information. As I read the "Getting Started" chapter and saw the computer listed as an
optional tool, I had my doubts about the currency of the text. However, a couple of chapters later, "Where to Find Help" lists major genealogical libraries with their URLs. "Helpful Technology" reviews the use of the World Wide Web as a way to access and share family history research, and also lists Web sites and includes a short glossary of computer terms. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ recently developed FamilySearch web site (http://familysearch.org) was not listed.) Helpful facts on census, immigration, and government records, including the Soundex code, are included.

When I was a teenager and interested in family history research, I would have benefitted from such a publication. As Taylor talks about gathering family heirlooms, photographs and stories, recording information and researching war records, she does so by quoting the research experiences of others. These experiences, along with family and historical photos, personalize the chapters. I like the way Taylor emphasizes the need to verify and evaluate information sources, especially Internet findings. Unfortunately, this book lacks an index. Every family history or genealogical work should include a detailed index for the reader to have a way to access the information efficiently.

A Pre

**Reviewed by Rita Christensen**

Lulu has a little yellow house with a picket fence. We are invited in and meet her mommy, daddy, siblings, pets, and even her shoes. The use of rich oil pastel on paper give the happy illustrations, with large close-up renderings of Lulu’s favorite people and possessions, a soft texture. Although the story is simple, it is appropriate for young children whose lives revolve around their family and home. A comforting and sensitive book for toddlers and preschoolers.

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B 4+ FI

**Reviewed by Kathe C. Homer**

The story begins as Ted, the narrator, explains that he is part of a perfectly normal family living in the same house they have lived in all of his twelve years. Only now, something has changed. His five-year-old sister, Vicky, is acting very strange, keeping a hammer under her pillow to scare away the “bad lady” that comes through the walls of her bedroom, and spending most of her time with a new, invisible playmate, Marella. Vicky is terrified, but no one believes her until Ted becomes the object of the ghost’s wrath. Ted seeks his cousin’s help as he tries to solve the mystery and get rid of the ghosts.
I picked this book up because I have loved some of Vande Velde’s short stories and longer books: *User Unfriendly*, *Dragon’s Bait*, and *Smart Dog*. All these have very clever twists and more complicated plots than many junior fiction books. Unlike other Vande Velde books, *There’s a Dead Person Following My Sister Around* has a relatively uncomplicated plot and is very neatly written—all the loose ends are tied up at the end. It does, however, have one unexpected twist, as Ted decides who the real “bad guy” is. *There’s a Dead Person Following My Sister Around* is a ghost story that will appeal to young readers, particularly children nine years old and older.

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**B K-4 NF PB** Reviewed by Rita Christensen

Could a giant dinosaur actually be a loving mother to its babies? *Dinosaur Babies* explores theories on how dinosaurs possibly nested and raised their young. Zoehfeld examines how birds—which are related to dinosaurs—care for their eggs and babies and links this to fossil clues to explain varied postulations on the beginnings of life for dinosaurs. The ideas presented are current, and the author tries to spark the reader’s imagination and curiosity with thought-provoking questions on the subject. Young school-aged children will like the way this informational book is presented in a picture book format with many nice pastel illustrations. Activity instructions on how to make a fossil egg are included at the end of the book. A fine addition to any library’s dinosaur book collection.

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