Final Issue

Children's Book & Play Review

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Rating System

To quickly convey the overall quality of a book, a rating appears in boldface type after the bibliographical information.

• Exceptional quality or merit. The asterisk is used sparingly and only in cases where the book deserves special recognition.

A Excellence. Books that receive a rating of A will add strength to a library and should find wide acceptance among young readers.

B Recommended for libraries that need additional books in a specific subject area. Generally books with a rating of B are dependable, if not outstanding.

C Will have appeal for some readers despite significant shortcomings. Should be purchased only after careful consideration.

NR Not recommended.

Grade Level

Considerations:

• The intended reader’s approximate grade level appears immediately after the rating.

• When the reviewer believes that a particular book will appeal to a wide range of readers, no upper limit is indicated.

• Many books, including picture books, find a favorable reader response far beyond the reading level indicated by the vocabulary, treatment of subject, or format.

Book Classification

Book classification follows the grade level. Books are given a two-letter code, indicating the genre of the particular book.

FI Fiction
BI Biography
PB Picture book
PT Poetry
NF Nonfiction

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Pairing Books

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Note: Complete bibliographic information on books mentioned in this article is found on pages three and four.

Those familiar with the saying “Truth is stranger than fiction” can add another truth and fiction saying to their list. Fact enriches fiction and fiction makes fact memorable. Think about it. Facts enrich fiction by providing information about such things as history, places, scientific concepts, or people. Adding this information enriches the story because the reader becomes more familiar with facts used in the story. On the other hand, not knowing some facts may raise questions in the reader’s mind that could be found in a factual book. For example: Can an animal act that way? Does the story portray history accurately? What is the appearance of the location of the story? Fiction makes historical events come to life and paints word pictures of animals, places, and things within the context of an interesting story. Why not use them together to enrich and make learning more memorable for young readers? For Utah parents, teachers, and librarians, the new state social studies curriculum provides an opportunity to try this idea. After a five-year review of the old curriculum, the new theme is to make global connections prior to sixth grade.

Kindergartners learning about small communities will compare Utah’s and Antarctica’s seasons and animals. Into the Ice: The Story of Arctic Exploration is a good introduction to the arctic. Antarctica, by Helen Cowcher, shows wonderful informational pictures of penguins in Antarctica. Antarctic Antics: A Book of Penguin Poems puts information and action into poetic form. One caution when pairing a fiction book with nonfiction is a title alone will not indicate how well the two books will pair with each other. For example, Tacky the Penguin, a fictional book, is too far-fetched and fantastic to be enriched by an informational book about penguins.

First graders will make connections between their own neighborhoods and neighborhoods in Australia. Useful books about Australia include Kangaroos and Koalas: What They Have in Common and Look What Came From Australia. These could be paired with the story of Koala Lou.

Second graders learning about how communities change over time will explore the community of Oueslessebougou in Mali, Africa, where the deserts are similar to those in Southern Utah. Rattlesnake Dance: True Tales, Mysteries, and Rattlesnake Ceremonies, a factual book about desert animals, could be paired with Jim Arnosky’s playful picture book also entitled Rattlesnake Dance.

Third graders will be comparing Incas of South America to Indians of North America. There are few fiction or informational books about North or South American Indians suitable for third grade, but here are some possibilities. Russell Freedman’s Children of the Wild West contains a well-written chapter about the Indians of North America. Chet Cunningham has written a short biography of Crazy Horse, but it may be too difficult for most third graders. Powwow is a wonderful full-color photo essay giving a real feel for the exuberant Indian celebration. Children’s Press has published a set of nine books on American Indians, including one on families, festivals, foods, and games, as well as books about Pueblos, Shawnees, Utes, Wampanoags and Zunis. Inca Town and Lost Treasure of the Inca could be paired with these books. Other books about the Incas include Tim Wood’s picture book The Incas, and Children of the Incas, which includes photographs of the Peruvian Indians of today. Teachers might use
the informational books available to set the stage for an activity in which children write fictional stories about the Indians in North and South America.

Fourth graders studying Utah will also study Asia, because there are several connections between Asia and Utah. Chinese immigrants helped build the railroad, and citizens of Japanese ancestry were sent to internment camps in Utah during World War II. Some factual books that relate to China are *Asian-Americans in the Old West* and Henry Pluckrose’s *China*. A fictional book from China is *Lon po po: A Red-Riding Hood Tale from China*. Fourth graders might also explore the impact of the gold rush on the settlement of the West in the informational book *The Great American Gold Rush*, and the fictional books *Orphan Runaways* and *Boom Town: Gold Fever: Tales from the California Gold Rush* is based on journals and quotes from people who participated in the gold rush and would make another excellent informational book.

Fifth graders will study Canada and Mexico while learning about United States history and government. The factual book *Rio Grande: From the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico* can be paired with Sherry Garland’s poetic approach in *Voices of the Alamo*. *Rio Grande Stories*, a fictional book that sounds like history, could be used as a springboard for students to collect stories of the past from people in their own community. Another topic is the westward exploration. *The Incredible Journey of Lewis and Clark* could be paired with a fictional account, such as Joseph Bruchac’s *Sacajawea: The Story of Bird Woman and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, written as if it were Sacajawea’s journal. The fictional book *The Bunyans* and the informational book entitled *Bryce Canyon National Park* could spark a study of geography. Students could do reports on all the spots visited by the Bunyans.

Sixth graders will focus on ancient cultures, including Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Factual books that could arouse interest include the Usborne Time Traveller Books. *Rome and the Romans* could be paired with *The Eagle of the Ninth*, a historical fiction novel. Other Usborne books include *Pharaohs and Pyramids* and *The Young Scientist Book of Archaeology*, a book about discovering the past through science and technology. *The Riddle of the Rosetta Stone* would be useful in the study of ancient cultures and could be paired with the new picture book *Seeker of Knowledge: the Man Who Deciphered Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema’s biography of Cleopatra could also be used in the study of Egypt. For the study of Greece, Paul Fleishman’s collection of myths, *Dateline Troy*, could be paired with a factual book on ancient Greece, such as *How Would You Survive as An Ancient Greek?*

Adults interested in sharing books with young readers can pair fiction and informational books on topics other than those suggested in the new Utah curriculum for social studies. A possibility for older grades is using the factual book *Killer Whale*, with *Moby Dick*. This could even be adapted by using Allan Drummond’s picture book version of *Moby Dick*.

Possibilities for younger grades include books about water. Jonathan London’s *Puddles* can be used with the informative *Water Book*. (The use of McPhail’s *The Puddle* is not advised because it does not talk about water.) Another topic for younger grades is city markets with the fictional *Peppo, the Lamplighter*, paired with *Market, the Storyteller*, and *Touch and Go Travels of a Children’s Book Illustrator*. *Tornado*, by Betsy Byars, could be used as an appetizer to Seymour Simon’s *Tornadoes*. The fictional “Gator Aid” could be paired with Jim Arnosky’s *All About Alligators*.

As more books came to mind, the idea was suggested that book pairing, whether it were two fiction books, two informational books, or a combination of both, would be a useful feature in each issue of *Children’s Book and Play Review*. Look for other book pairs in this issue and those that follow. Another source to look for book pairs and teaching strategies for comparing fact and fiction can be found in Deanne Camp’s article “It Takes Two: Teaching Twin Texts of Fact and Fiction,” in *The Reading Teacher*, Volume 53, No. 5, February 2000 on page 400. Start enriching the reading of young people by suggesting pairs of books on the same topic. Remember that facts enrich fiction, and fiction makes facts memorable.
Bibliography


Introducing Book Pairs

The preceding article provided the impetus for a new feature in the *Children's Book and Play Review*. As members of CBPR’s editorial board discussed this feature, we recognized that teachers, librarians, and parents often seek complementary books to share with young people, and that young readers often want more—more information on a topic, more books like the one they have just read, or another perspective or context to help them understand a topic, person, or event more clearly.

Beginning with this issue, the CBPR will feature “Book Pairs,” the pairing of two related books that could easily be used together in a classroom, home, or library setting. Look for seven variations of book pairs in coming issues:

1. **Fiction/Fact:** One fiction and one informational work that address the same or complementary subjects.
2. **Complementary Fiction:** Two works of fiction that address the same or complementary subjects.
3. **Folktale Versions:** Works that comprise variations of the same folktales or folktale theme.
4. **Informational Matches:** Two nonfiction works that address the same or complementary subjects.
5. **Biographical Duos:** Two biographies about the same person or different people that share something in common.
6. **Poetry Partners:** A book of poetry paired with another book, either poetry, fiction, or nonfiction.
7. **Different Reading Levels:** Two books, fiction or nonfiction, that address the same or complementary subjects for different reading levels.

* Pre-K PT PB Reviewed by Sandra Tidwell

This rhyming, find-it board book begins with “Each peach pear plum, I spy Tom Thumb.” Tom Thumb is cleverly hidden in the illustration on the page. Turn the page and you see Tom Thumb, and the rhyme tells about the next character to “spy.” All the characters appear on the last two pages.

Children will not only enjoy finding the characters for the first time in the detailed, whimsical illustrations, but they will enjoy making new discoveries in the pictures every time they turn the pages. The inside cover shows the rolling landscape for the individual scenes in the book, and after having the book read to them, preschoolers could be led in another activity of finding the orchard, the well, the forest and the rock bridge. The Ahlbergs have so many things happening in each of the colored illustrations, giving this board book a happy, uplifting tone.

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A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Kathe Homer

Martha and her cat, Sophie, live in a big old house with Martha’s parents. Martha and Sophie love to do everything together. At night, Sophie helps Martha get ready for bed and checks her bedroom to make sure it is safe. When Martha’s parents’ friends come to visit with their dog, Sophie disappears, and Martha has to get to bed by herself. She worries about all the things she sees and hears in the dark. Even though each scary thing she checks on turns out to be harmless, she doesn’t feel safe until Sophie reappears to curl up beside her.

Young children will enjoy this book, empathizing with Martha’s fear of the dark, as well as her love for her cat. The pencil and watercolor illustrations are whimsical, but expressive, from the fear and anxiety on Martha’s face when she’s trying to go to bed to the pure contentment and delight when Sophie reappears.


A 3-6 FI Reviewed by Sandra Tidwell

It’s Erethizon Dorsatum’s birthday! Ereth, a disgruntled old porcupine, heads off through Dimwood Forest to find his own present, salt, at the cabin at Lost Lake. Finding humans there, Ereth hides in the storage area under the cabin. He learns that the humans are fur trappers who have set out traps in and around the forest. After the men have left, Ereth is about to jump down into the cabin to get the glass full of salt when he hears a wounded animal cry for help.

Responding to his inner caring nature, Ereth climbs down from the cabin window and finds Leaper, a wounded fox. Leaper asks Ereth with her last breath to take care of her young kits—Tumble, Nimble, and Flip. Ereth reluctantly agrees and sets off to find the fox’s den. Martin, the Fisher, has his own plan. He wants to kill the arrogant porcupine, who thinks and acts as if he is indestructible. Will Martin kill Ereth? Will Ereth find the kits and fulfill his promise? What kind of a birthday does this end up to be for Ereth?

Avi is masterful in his descriptions of forest scenes: “Coming with a breathless, hurried hush, the snow’s silence was intense, swallowing...
every sound like a sponge absorbing water. . . . It was as if an enormous eraser were rubbing out the world, leaving nothing but one vast sheet of blank, white paper. Only Ereth, like a solitary, dark dot, moved across it" (pp. 15, 16). Although some of Ereth’s alliterative thoughts and remarks may be offensive, they effectively portray his self-centered personality; many young readers will laugh, as the animal creatures do, at his exaggerations. This could be a fun book to read aloud. The chapters are short and easy to read, and the pictures by Floca help endear the characters to the reader. A number of interesting discussions could result from reading this book as a group: How should one express his emotions? What is a promise, and should promises be kept? Does everyone, even if they sometimes act disagreeable, need to have attention, love, and be genuinely appreciated? Although other Avi animal characters are referred to in this selection, this book can be read and enjoyed on its own. It may lead readers to pick up another book by Avi that involves other Dimwood Forest creatures.


B+ Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Yudonsi, a contemporary Native American boy, wants people to notice he is different, so he writes his name on canyon walls, trees, and wherever else it will be noticed. This alienates him from the rest of his people, who ask Wachi, an old one of the village, to tell Yudonsi to stop. When Wachi warns that the canyon does not like what he is doing, Yusi will not listen. The people turn from him and start calling him "You don't see," or Yudonsi. They will not let him play his flute at their party because they don't want the canyon to know he is there. They warn him of the temper of the canyon, but Yusi ignores the people. He finds a place far above the village on a canyon wall where he can write his name so everyone will see it. As he climbs up the wall and starts to spray paint his name, a storm comes howling in. Yusi finds a cave to wait out the storm. He hides in the back of the cave as his people come in it to wait out the flood and furor of the storm. Yusi finally realizes as he watches his people that everything is a part of the whole, and he plays a beautiful song on his flute. As he plays his music, the sky clears and he is at one with the people, the earth, and himself. He becomes Yusi.

The oil paintings are wonderfully evocative of the canyon country. They are rich in reds, oranges and the bright colors of Southern Utah. The story is a simple one with a simple lesson that can teach us all. The Indian way is to perceive people as an integral part of a circle, rather than the center of it. The story teaches this lesson to Yudonsi, as well as to the children who read it.


* All PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

A man traveling on a train encounters a small town that brings back childhood memories as the red-roofed houses remind him of a flowerbed. In his thoughts, the man goes back to his childhood and the hometown that seemed so big to him as a child. After inheriting his brother’s bicycle, the boy starts to venture beyond his house and its courtyard. The more the boy on the bike explores the town, the smaller the town seems to become. Every Friday, the boy and his bike wait at the train station for his father to come home after working a week in the city. One day after school, the boy peddles down a road that reminds him of an art concept he learned in his drawing class. The adjoining fields are filled with flowers. The boy picks some flowers and brings them home to his grandfather. The boy asks his grandfather if they could raise some flowers in their little yard. The grandfather encourages the boy to plant a garden like the one from his grandfather’s youth. While on his daily bike ride, the boy daydreams about his garden
and suddenly finds himself on a new road with a lovely garden along it that he explores. Inspired, the boy rides home and creates his very own garden which eventually blooms and draws his neighbors' attention. Meanwhile, the train has come to a stop. The man sees his own son waiting for him the way he, as a young boy, used to wait for his father. On their way home, while the train takes off through the countryside, father and son walk past the son's first garden.

Like growing seasons, family generational ties, and the circular cluster of European villages, gardening is a circular activity—"you can take the man out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the man." Beautiful muted illustrations are simple, yet complex. In addition to the text, hand-written lines underscore the illustrations and supply further information about the boy and his environment. All these techniques and the surface simplicity of the story combine to tap the memory bank and entice the reader to open the book again and again.

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**B Pre-2 PB** Reviewed by Kathe Homer

The family members are very excited when they learn that they are going to have a new baby. Father decides to build a cradle. Throughout the book, each member of the family lovingly adds something to the cradle and then falls asleep in it, just like a baby. Each addition is a labor of love, carefully thought out and painstakingly crafted with great affection and dedication. When the baby finally arrives, everyone loves everything about her, and when she cries, the cradle is the perfect place to calm her to sleep.

This is a very loving family story. The family members work hard to put something of themselves into their gifts for the new baby. In spite of the vibrant colors, the acrylic illustrations are not as appealing as the story. Despite this fact, children will love hearing this story and thinking that they were anticipated so lovingly when they were born.

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**B K-2 PB** Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Rudi and the little girl who narrates the story are in the same class at school and have become good friends. Among other activities, they build a hummingbird feeder together. Rudi becomes sick, but their friendship continues until he dies. Because he loved ponds, the class builds a pond in Rudi's memory on the school ground. His friend puts the hummingbird feeder by the pond. When a hummingbird comes to the window by her desk, she thinks it might be from Rudi and is comforted. She takes the feeder home, thinking the hummingbird will find her house too because she and Rudi had painted her gate on the feeder.

*Rudi's Pond* is a story for young readers about a friendship that grows and continues through sickness and death. The illustrations are tender and help carry the story along. This is a heavy subject for little children to think about. For a child in a similar situation it may help to read this book, which shows how someone else dealt with the death of a friend.

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**B+ 8+ FI** Reviewed by Tom Wright

In Cadnum's hands the romantic accounts of King Richard and the crusades are gone. What remains is a cold, hard, gut-wrenching account of a journey to a strange land by a young apprentice, now squire, who searches for glory but finds death and carnage instead.

Edmund takes leave of Nottingham with Sir Nigel, a crusader, and his entourage as they head out nobly on the long journey to the Holy Land. Edmund's eyes and senses share the experience as he is transformed from the greenest initiate.
into a battle-weary, bug-infested soldier who finally turns homeward without reaching his goal. Cadnum adopts an interesting writing style, using Twelfth Century communication, but a style still discernible to today’s readers. The writing also reveals Edmund's view of the world, and it is through the succession of brutal and violent scenes that the reader feels revulsion, even though Edmund still describes much of it dispassionately. Cadnum adroitly manipulates our senses through sounds, smells, and even the feel of these macabre scenes.

Cleary, this is not a work for the casual reader. Cadnum wants us to see the bitter irony here. In his postscript he offers, “I feel the call that war has on young people, how the need for adventure and personal meaning finds its truest expression, for some, on the battlefield. This terrible paradox—that caring, responsible individuals can engage in acts of brutality—both baffles and fascinates me. I respect the faith of these Crusaders, without loving anything that they did.”

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Bright Beetle is the story of a ladybug’s life cycle. Chrustowski chose a ladybug born at the end of the summer and traces its progress to adulthood. The ladybug begins its life as a larva hatched from an egg laid on a stem of a black-eyed Susan. The larva grows, shedding its skin three times before it becomes a pupa. Finally the pupa is transformed to a bright-red adult ladybug with dark-black spots. From larva to adulthood, Bright Beetle eats aphids. Sharp bristles on the larva’s back protect it from ants, its predator. As an adult, a bitter orange fluid is secreted from its legs to protect it from the praying mantis, another predator.

This is Chrustowski’s first picture book, and he successfully accomplished the dual role of author and illustrator. I was immediately impressed by the bright colors Chrustowski used for his true-to-life illustrations. The distinct lines and simple details magnify the insect world in a captivating way and make this book an excellent read-aloud selection for storytime at home or at school. “Let’s Look at Ladybugs,” a section at the back of the book, gives more information about the many types of ladybugs and their voracious appetite for aphids.

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NR 9-12 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Nineteen-year-old Vinny and his friends take the train in to Melbourne, Australia each weekend to go to the clubs and bars until dawn. One early morning Vinny disappears, only to reappear a day later after his friends and mother frantically search for him. He was tempted into a car. An older man drugged him and sexually abused him for a day. He dumped Vinny at the train station to return to his friends. All his friends mull over how this experience will change Vinny, them, and their relationships.

Here is another dark and heavy book from Australia. To whom could this be recommended? No one I know. The group of friends are nineteen years old, directionless, without strong family support, floating on a drifting tide; their strongest commitment is to their little gang. By the end of the book, the reader has waded through a lot of murky water and does not find any real answers or hope for Vinny or the rest of the group. This is a real downer of a book.

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A 4-6 NF Reviewed by Carla Morris

What would it be like to live in the White House as a kid? When John and Caroline Lived in the White House gives us an honest look into lives of the Kennedy children during the years of 1961-1963.
Jacqueline Kennedy shielded her children from the public eye. She wanted them to have a normal childhood, filled with family vacations, birthday parties, Halloween, and school days. Many of the photos in this book reveal toys on the floor, scuffed shoes, and broken crayons. Although they attended school in the White House, the Kennedy children otherwise lived like normal kids.

One chapter gives an hour-by-hour account of the children’s daily schedule. Another chapter reveals close-up shots of John sitting on his mother’s lap on Christmas morning. These photo accounts are combined with remarks made by the White House staff. “Somebody’s been up here making the biggest mess! And it’s not the first time either. Something is going on in this nursery school at night!” complains Miss Grimes to Mr. West.

Some photos are familiar, like the well-known shot of John sitting beneath the President’s desk. Others are rarely seen shots of Caroline and John’s childhood, like Jackie helping Caroline eat her dinner when they traveled to Italy together. The short “Camelot” period is covered from the beginning, February 1961, when the White House gardeners were told to build a snowman for the children’s arrival, to their sad departure in November 1963. Children will enjoy seeing the presidential children, their toys, pets, and living quarters, while adults will be reminded of the much-loved Kennedy family who inhabited the White House during the Cold War, Space Race, and Cuban Missile Crisis.

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B 1-3 PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Over spring vacation the school’s science experiment runs amuck, and fungus takes over the school. The students return to find green and purple slime all over everything.

Here’s a good bit of subliminal education. Read this, and you’ll learn a thing or two about fungus while you are caught up in the fanciful illustrations and a catchy tale. This low-key horror story closes with a happy ending and just a hint of next year’s crisis.

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A Pre-1 PB Reviewed by Maren Purcell

Dorros brings us a toe-tapping counting book in which sheep cancan, crickets jitterbug, walruses waltz, and rhinos rhumba. Beginning with one tutu-clad osprey doing ballet, a variety of animals strut across the page in their respective numbers and styles. After ten flamingos tango, all fifty-five animals converge on the dance floor for a floor-shaking spectacle. The rhythmic text encourages readers to join in the party and move to the beat. McCully’s playful watercolor illustrations (a Caldecott medal winner) bring this dancing menagerie to life. Children are sure to revel in the humorous images and lively text and may even start dancing themselves!

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* 6+ BI Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

Eleanor’s family, who immigrated to America during the German depression which followed World War I, makes a big mistake. Her father decides to accept a job back in Germany. While they are crossing the Atlantic, war breaks out and they cannot return. Trapped in Germany during the Second World War, Eleanor shares her experiences of growing up and coping with war. Her family’s two-year stay turns into seven, during which Eleanor matures; her family adds two members and survives against extreme adversity. Her life is strained by nightly bombings of Berlin, scrounging for food, hiding from the Russian conquerors, hearing pounding
from the rubble of bombed-out buildings, and fear in voicing disapproval of the Nazi regime and other hardships. Eleanor has nightmares about being buried alive with no one to rescue her. These experiences are balanced with the support Eleanor feels from close friends. Her family, although not always amicable, sticks together and supports each other through the hardships. Following the war, there is finally a long awaited return to America.

The experiences shared in the book are intriguing; the book is hard to put down. Much has been written about the horrors of the holocaust for the Jews; this book presents the challenges of daily life for the Germans, many of whom never knew the extent of Hitler's terror. The book is a valuable addition to junior and high school history curriculum. The reader learns much about the Second World War and about the horrors of war in general. The black and white photographs give the reader a welcome look at the people in Eleanor's life. Growing up is difficult at best, but during a war, even the simple things become complex. This book is exceptional.

**Dive** is a book of switches, with a protagonist stepchild who is the interloper. Basically this is Dustin's story, yet he remains a shadow in the action. The details of Ben's life are given incidentally as he focuses on the new brother (Dustin) he wants to adore—the glamorous, offbeat, beautiful young man who, to Ben, seems to have it all.

Ben can't recognize that the antagonism Dustin feels toward him is free-wheeling, not the result of a woman and child moving in after the death of his mother. Another switch occurs: Ben's mother moves out (without Ben) followed by Dustin after he graduates and gets a car. Now it's Dustin and Ben's mom together and Ben and Dustin's father together.

Ben's mom is a surviving drifter; Dustin proves to be a drifter with few survival skills. Lyle (Dustin's father) is a skillful psychologist who can counsel people out of their fears. He recognizes Ben's low sugar symptoms early on, long before Ben does, but he can't counsel Dustin because his eyes are focused away. This is a story of the switches life makes in loving and living—intriguing, sad, and pertinent.

Young Giotto di Bondone prefers sketching to watching the family's flock of sheep. After he loses one of the lambs, his angry father forbids him to attend a great religious feast in the town. Giotto watches the procession from his bedroom window and notices his father walking in the procession, carrying the most beautiful painting he has ever seen. He leaves the house and follows the men to the church, where he overhears someone say that Cimabue is the artist responsible for the painting. Giotto summons the
courage to talk to Cimabue, who gives him pigments to work with. Giotto spends the next day painting instead of watching the sheep. He hides from his father, expecting him to be angry. Instead, his father and Cimabue are impressed with the boy’s natural talent. Cimabue persuades Giotto’s father to let Giotto study with him as an apprentice, and the father agrees. Cimabue teaches the boy how to paint frescoes and soon discovers that the boy’s work outshines his own.

This fictional biography of Italian pre-Renaissance painter Giotto di Bondone imagines how he might have met his mentor Cimabue. Italian art critic Guarnieri tells the story in the present tense and keeps his text simple and easy to read. The stunning illustrations are done by Landmann, Guarnieri’s wife. Her work combines various artistic styles, including Russian religious art (icons), Egyptian art (birds that resemble hieroglyphs), and modern art. The illustrations are presented as framed paintings and as triptychs.

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* K-2 PB Reviewed by Carla Morris

Henkes gets an A+ for capturing typical preschool jitters. Wemberly Worried attacks a common problem in a realistic way without being preachy. Although Wemberly finds a new friend, she still worries, just a little less. Bright colors of yellow, pink, lavender, and green “worry rings” on the cover of this book will attract young worriers.

● ● ● ●


A- 4-7 FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Curtain Going Up: The First Decade begins on New Year’s Eve as the Aldrich family gather together in their big old house in Maine. Ten-year-old Peggy awaits the midnight chimes that will usher in a new century: the year 1900. The whole family of actors and entertainers celebrate together. We meet Lionel and Adele Aldrich, as well as many of their talented descendants. Peggy learns two important secrets that night that are revisited as the story unfolds. The more important one will help her save the family home.

Readers will be pulled into the story by experiencing new inventions that came about during the beginning of the century. Daredevil Cousin Harry enters a race in a new 1903 Oldsmobile. Science-whiz Jack is into experimenting with chemicals and mechanics. Grandpa expects the new gadget, the grammaphone, to replace the theater. Consequently, he works very hard to create a play, bringing in many patrons. It uses state-of-the-art special effects to produce a show more spectacular than has ever been seen before.

This book uses actual photographs of Aldrich family actors. Not only is this a great story, it also provides historical information placed in an entertaining setting.

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B 5-8 FI Reviewed by Tom Wright

When twelve-year-old Michael Morrissey loses his family to cholera in 1839 in New York City, he considers himself extremely fortunate when Dr. Asa B. Cornwall—otherwise known as
12 Brigham Young University

Dr. ABC—takes him in. This fortuitous event is muted somewhat when Michael realizes he has become an assistant to a phrenologist who needs to procure real skulls to practice his trade. Hence the pun in the book's title as Michael actually becomes a grave robber.

Michael, although a bit conscience-stricken, sets out to help Dr. ABC complete his magnum opus by seeking to collect the skulls of renowned and infamous individuals, including Aaron Burr and Voltaire. This quest takes place down dark alleyways and foreboding cemeteries and crypts while threatening specters lurk in the shadows. This all creates a good tale which Karr laces with comical moments. His conversations are erudite, and this lends a somewhat formal tone to the book as a whole.

Everything comes to a head (please excuse the play on words) at the island of St. Helena, as they try to gain access to the corpse of Napoleon. The dark figure who has stalked them throughout their travels reveals himself, and Dr. ABC finds resolve to finally offer his great book to the world. It might have helped younger readers to have Karr's postscript offered as a preface as it neatly puts the practice of phrenology into a historical context. A good tale, but the somewhat formal tone of the book may limit its appeal to a wide audience.


A 5-8 FI Reviewed by Laura Wadley

The Girls is a story about the cruelty of cliques. One Saturday morning, Maya calls to invite a friend to the amusement park, only to discover she has inexplicably been dropped from Candace's "in" crowd. From here, the story unfolds through the narratives of all five girls in the group. Some are mystified by Maya's exclusion, but they figure she must have done something really bad for Candace to be giving her the cold shoulder. Most interesting is Candace's obvious enjoyment in wielding her power to hurt.

The girls in Koss's book all have distinctive personalities and voices true to the frantic social demands of the middle school years. The relatively happy ending may provide perspective for a child who is struggling with popularity issues.


* 5+ FI Reviewed by Laura Wadley

In a tender departure from his usually funny animal fare, Dick King-Smith tells the story of a childless couple who find and raise a foundling boy, John Joseph—nicknamed Spider for his peculiar crawling style. It becomes apparent, by and by, that Spider is mentally deficient in traditional ways, but vastly gifted in his abilities to communicate with animals and find joy in life.

Spider Sparrow is a beautiful book, filled with rich British dialect and memorable, fully realized characters. This would be a good read-aloud for talented readers.


A 1-4 NF Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

Learning about artists while creating your own art is the theme of this terrific book. On every page there is a work of art by a famous artist—a painting, drawing, sculpture, or collage. There is information about such artists as Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Cezanne. In addition, there are step-by-step instructions for creating art like those of the masters. A variety of styles, elements, and techniques are explored through hands-on projects.

The illustrator has done an excellent job of blending the real artwork with watercolor drawings and photographs. Each page is vibrant and colorful. This book is sure to please the budding or experienced artist.

* 2+ PB Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Splendidly enhanced by Kiesler’s arresting illustration, this is Loomis’ homage to a country she clearly loves. Like Woody Guthrie’s famous tune, but with words that sing without need of music, this book celebrates the beauty and diversity that is America.

Rich with anthropomorphism, the text instills, without any didacticism, a desire in the reader to nurture this land as the land itself can nurture each of us. This is truly a beautiful book.

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A- Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Maren Purcell

Used to riding and roping with the best of the buckaroos, Cindy Ellen must do all the dirty work on the ranch after her father marries the “orneriest woman west of the Mississippi.” One day, the biggest cattle king around invites his neighbors to a two-day celebration with a rodeo and square dance. With the help of a straight-shootin’ fairy godmother, Cindy Ellen arrives at the rodeo in the finest riding clothes around, complete with a dazzling pair of diamond spurs. Cindy Ellen succeeds in roping first place at the rodeo, lassoing the heart of the cattle king’s son, Joe Prince. When Cindy Ellen arrives at the square dance the next night, Joe Prince instantly claims her for his partner. They dance the night away, and before she realizes it, the clock begins to strike twelve. Cindy Ellen rushes off, but in the process, one of her diamond spurs falls off. Joe Prince picks it up and begins a search for the boot that will fit that spur. After searching all over the territory, he finally reaches Cindy Ellen’s ranch. He tries the spur on the stepsisters’ boots, and just as he is about to leave, Cindy Ellen appears. Of course, the spur fits, and Joe Prince and Cindy Ellen get hitched, living happily ever after.

Lowell’s western retelling of the classic Cinderella story is sure to delight readers of all ages. Bursting with wild western jargon, the story comes alive. Words roll off the tongue, and readers can’t forget for a moment that this isn’t your ordinary Cinderella story. Manning’s watercolor illustrations complement the text and add humor, as the reader sees why the stepmother and stepsisters are compared to rattlesnakes and what a character the fairy godmother really is. *Cindy Ellen: A Wild Western Cinderella* is a great read aloud, especially for the younger grades, and is sure to elicit laughter. Readers cannot help enjoying this Cinderella story.

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B K-3 PB Reviewed by Sharon Kuttler

A dappled-gray rocking horse, purchased early as a Christmas gift, is hidden in an attic. The boy for whom the horse is intended discovers it and is delighted with the toy. Each night he dreams that the horse is alive, and he rides it closer and closer to a dangerous storm. Before he reaches the storm, however, he always lets go and falls into blackness until he awakens. The boy becomes weak and feverish. He is put to bed by worried parents. The boy overcomes his serious illness with the help of the rocking horse, who tells him that they must fly into the storm because beyond the storm, the boy will be well. The horse earns the name of “Angel” as the boy recovers from serious illness by trusting the horse and holding on until the storm is past.

The colorful, computer-generated artwork by Mayer begs for careful study of his highly-detailed illustrations. Crisp in places and dreamy in others, the illustrations add interest and atmosphere to the story. The story itself is confusing, but the artwork is exquisite.

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Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 2000

Reviewed by Frank Harmon

Revolution, part of the History News series, aims to give the reader a feeling of being at each revolution described through a newspaper format. It begins with the Boston Tea Party and key events in the American Revolution and then goes through the French Revolution (1789-1794), the Russian Revolution (1917-1924), and the Chinese Revolution (1934-1976). It ends with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There are interviews, on-the-scene descriptions by reporters and historical reviews of key events, all done in concise newspaper style. The fight for freedom and the efforts by different leaders to make life better for everyone are vividly described. The reader sees both the successes and failures of the different visions of equality that have taken so many lives.

Descriptions of revolutions of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in newspaper format and style allow the reader to quickly grasp key events and to see the connections between revolutions experienced by the human family. Maynard has reported the past as if there were a free press at that time. Teachers and parents could take advantage of this intriguing book to give life to history and as an example of newspapers (about the past) that young people could write during their studies of past events. The History News series also includes books about Aztecs, Egypt, Greece, Explorers, In Space, Medicine, Romans, the Stone Age, and The Vikings.


Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

When the cow Molly is milking kicks over a pail of milk, Molly narrowly escapes a typical death sentence because she is able to read the Bible. Instead, her punishment is to be sent to America as a seven-year indentured servant. When her obligation is fulfilled, Molly sets out and stakes a claim on land four miles away. (This is very unusual for a woman of the time.) She buys an African slave to help her care for her farm. They fall in love, marry (even though it is against colonial law), and have a family. On the final two-page spread, Molly is teaching her grandson, Benjamin Banneker, how to read and about her life. Thus the cycle of courage and literacy continues.

This oversize fictionalized biography of a woman with fortitude, determination, and strength is a very interesting read. Molly is a wonderful role model for all readers; she is not constrained by the norms of the day. The reader is intrigued with little known practices of the seventeenth century such as sending milkmaids to the gallows for such little infractions as spilled milk and laws against marrying a slave. In the author's historical notes, we read that Molly's grandson, Benjamin Banneker, grew to be a famous African American astronomer and mathematician.

The vibrant watercolor illustrations are truly a work of art. They complement the text; the contrasting colors are stunning. The book is beautiful and tells a wonderful story—which, of course, is a perfect match for a picture book.

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A 7-9 NF  Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Thanks to Meltzer's usual careful scholarship, the inflammatory subject of witches assumes a somewhat more historical and scientific description than is sometimes found in accounts of this aspect of our world. As the subtitle indicates, the author tends to deal with the unfortunate circumstances of those suspected of witchcraft. His historical research encompasses cases recorded from Medieval England to current complaints in Montana in our century. In addition to the brief mentions/descriptions, Meltzer coordinates psychological explanations of the mindsets that explain life's mysteries with great lack of reason and research, relating hate crimes focused on other "different" groups to the same mindsets.

The book has no illustrations and will likely not satisfy the thrill-seekers, but it has a substantial bibliography, notes and index for the more discriminating reader.


A 3-6 NF PB  Reviewed by Maren Purcell

Did you know that Michigan has more miles of shoreline than any state except Alaska, or that the Hawaiian alphabet only has twelve letters? *The United States of America: A State-by-State Guide* is full of interesting facts such as these, as well as more practical information, such as the state flower, tree, bird, name, population, etc. Beginning with a map of the United States and information about the nation as a whole, the book then dedicates a page to each state, Washington, D. C., and Puerto Rico. Following the state pages is a two-page spread of the state flags. The index gives the reader a feel for the breadth of information included about the states: activism and civil rights, agriculture and industry, animals, colonial times, education, geographic attractions, landmarks, music, sports, etc.—the list goes on and on.

All the illustrations in this book are done in watercolor. For each state, major cities, landmarks, bodies of water, and tourist attractions are marked on the map. Surrounding the map are captions and paintings that relay information about the state. The watercolor illustrations and accompanying captions make this book seem more like an artist's sketchbook than a reference book on the fifty states, which will appeal to readers. Rather than providing an in-depth look at each of the states, Miller and Nelson give the reader an overview to pique their curiosity and encourage them to learn more. The fun and interesting facts cover a wide array of topics to illustrate the uniqueness of each state. This book is a great resource to any classroom or home. Children will enjoy looking up information on a particular state or reading the entire book, and adults will learn trivia they never knew before. Readers will delight in the informal format, detailed watercolor illustrations, and variety of information presented.


A 3-5 PB  Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Patty, Mickey, and Liza Sue live in big brown boxes, comfortably furnished, even beautiful, but boxes nevertheless. Morrison's philosophical rhyme astutely describes the condition of protection from freedom as the children (good kids—no wild ones here) are closely confined because they make adults nervous (acting like kids). The illustrations are big and brash; so is the concept, couched in Morrison's understandable slang: "I know you are smart and I know that you think you are doing what is best for me. But if freedom is handled just your way then it's not my freedom or free."
The ideas are provocative but not inflammatory, the language is accessible, and the conditions are not foreign to most readers. An appealing book.


* 4-6 PB NF Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

This outstanding reference work is well organized and easy to use. It begins with basic information on how to use the atlas, types of maps, and how to read a map. The first thirty-one pages of this oversize book contain maps that display information such as topographical features, climate and vegetation, endangered species, and population density as they pertain to the entire world. A section is devoted to each of the seven continents. The atlas is well organized in that each continent section is introduced by a large color photograph of that continent as seen from space. The section then breaks down to countries, states or other political divisions, and includes a brief history of the continent as well as languages spoken, country or state flags, population and size.

All maps are colorful, clearly marked, and easy to read. The majority are displayed in a double-page format. The editors have included color photographs depicting topographical features, wildlife, people, and cities that can be found on each continent. Created by the cartographers, researchers, writers, and designers at the National Geographic Society, this book is the kind of superb work that has become the signature of the NGS.


* Pre-K PB Reviewed by Sandra Tidwell

Peek has taken a familiar counting nursery rhyme for the theme of this board book for preschoolers. A little boy finds himself in bed with nine different animals: a monkey, bear, deer, snake, parrot, cat, dog, rabbit, and raccoon. One by one, each falls out and finds another place to sleep in the bedroom. At last the little boy is alone. He blows out the candle next to his bed and goes to sleep. The last page of the book shows the animals, really imaginary ones, in their places on the accent wallpaper decorating the bedroom.

Peek’s illustrations, which are in soft shades of blue and yellow, give a restful air to the book. I learned this rhyme as “Ten bears in the bed and the little one said, ‘I’m crowded! Roll over!’ So they all rolled over and one fell out. Nine bears. . .” Peek’s version of this nursery rhyme gives an exciting variety to the preschooler. I read it to two different sets of preschool grandchildren, who laughed as they named the animals as they fell out of bed and pointed to where they had curled up to go to sleep. Peek includes the music so you can sing your way through the book the next time!


B 2+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Professor Poopypants hails from a country where silly last names are in vogue. Not so in the United States. Here, Professor Poopypants had hoped to show people his latest invention to end world hunger, but all attention is on his name, and he is not taken seriously at all. Without funds to return home and hoping to rebuild his reputation as a credible scientist, Professor Poopypants answers an ad for an
elementary school science teacher. Of course, the elementary school children are as silly as the adults who laugh at the professor’s name. Enraged, the brilliant professor shrinks all the children and imposes silly names on them all. Two of the students, naughty George and Harold, enlist Captain Underpants’ help in their fight to return the school to normal.

The fourth in the Captain Underpants series, Professor Poopypants, is not for the serious reader of literature. However, some adults and many children love the naughty boys, the pranks they play, and the words like “fart,” which they use. They also learn that one is accountable for one’s actions. Reluctant readers will enjoy the short chapters punctuated by the many illustrations, the summary chapter, the “Flip-o-rama” which animates select illustrations, and the name charts on pages 90-91 from which the reader can construct his or her own silly name. Lots of fun and perhaps a springboard to great literature.


A 4-6 NF PB Reviewed by Suzanne Olsen

Part of the “Read About” series, Ancient Greece gives an overview of Greek history and culture to interest a young student. The eye-catching layout includes drawings, paintings, photographs and maps to illustrate ancient Greece and its parallels in the modern world. Also included are a table of contents, chapter headings, and an index.

Besides being visually attractive, the “narrative text, accessible language, and easy-to-follow format” will invite students to explore the world of the Greeks. The text covers a variety of subjects, including language, drama, math, philosophy, history, geography, life style, and culture. Interesting questions lead students to examine the text and illustrations for answers, with an answer key at the end of the book.


A 9+ FI Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

Fifteen-year-old Hannah Ziebarth is pregnant. Milo Fabiano, Hannah’s boyfriend, reacts to the news of his impending fatherhood by punching Hannah in the face and calling her a whore. Later that evening, determined to prove to herself that Milo didn’t mean to be rough with her, Hannah drives to Milo’s neighborhood, where she first sulks around the Fabiano house, then climbs into his 4Runner and takes comfort under a familiar blanket. Milo and his former flame, Mimi, leave the pool area of his home, climb into the 4Runner, and drive to Mimi’s home. Parked away from the streetlight, Milo and Mimi make-out, unaware that Hannah is in the car. Eventually Mimi exits the 4Runner, and Milo drives home. Physically satisfied, Milo parks the car in the garage and closes the door. Alone, Hannah exits the vehicle and makes her way home. Emotionally and physically assaulted, Hannah “goes over the edge.” In the care of a compassionate yet tough psychologist, both Hannah and her widowed, agoraphobic mother make progress in healing. Drawn into the process this psychotic episode has generated are Hannah’s remorseful ecclesiastical leader; her nemesis, neighbor Rosa Benson; friend Trilby; and Milo’s brother Roman, the only Fabiano with clear vision despite an eye impairment.

Set in Salt Lake City, the story paints a realistic picture of teenage sex and its consequences. It is also a brutally honest portrayal of children who take on too many adult responsibilities because their parents are non-functioning; of hope amid despair; of repentant teens and adults. And though Hannah’s father is not a physical presence, the love he showered on his wife and daughter, before his untimely death, establishes him as a decent man and good father figure, in contrast to Mr. Fabiano, who is very much a physical, but ethically clueless, presence in his family.

* 1+ PB Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

One evening while the Nazis occupy her French village, Monique awakes to see "a small ghost" sitting on her bed. She later learns the ghost is really a little Jewish girl who is hiding with her family in Monique's basement cellar. Monique and Sevrine, unaware of the danger, slip away from their families to play at night. Monique collects things during the day from the outside world for Sevrine to see and touch; one is a butterfly. Monique promises Sevrine that one day her family will be as free as the butterfly. As the girls take the butterfly to the window to let it go, they see the man next door looking right at them from his courtyard. Quickly the girls wake their parents. Sevrine's family leaves in the dark of the night to face the Nazi patrols—with a gift from Monique, her cat. Monique's family never hears whether or not the family is safe. One day, however, a flock of butterflies come into their garden. One butterfly lands on Monique's finger, and as she brings the butterfly to her cheek, its wings flutter. Monique believes it is a sign that Sevrine, Sevrine's parents, and her cat are free.

Polacco shares in the author's note at the end of the book that this is based on a true story and includes the names of those actually involved. Not only is The Butterfly a story of friendship and sacrifice, it also gives young readers a sense of the Holocaust. The terror inflicted on children by the Nazis is powerfully portrayed. This terror is counteracted by the act of kindness bestowed by Monique in giving Sevrine her beloved cat. The watercolor illustrations are in Polacco's typical style, and she is especially successful at capturing the changes in Sevrine's countenance. Her use of color is particularly effective: she contrasts the darkness of the Nazis and fear with the light of the butterflies and nature. Polacco has written a truly exceptional book.

A K-4 NF Reviewed by Annette Van Wageneo

Let's have a blast with sound! This book has terrific hands-on projects that teach practical skills while expanding scientific knowledge. There are ideas for testing vibration, timing lightning, and bouncing sounds. Sound & Music offers an excellent introduction to the world of frequency, sound waves, and musical instruments.

Colorful photographs illustrate the projects presented on each page. The easy directions and materials list will enable readers to duplicate the activities described. "Sounds" like a fun book to read!


* 6+ PT Reviewed by Maren Purecell

As a companion to Rosenberg's earlier anthology Earth-Shattering Poems, this anthology is intended as a message of hope and a way to turn toward the light. Rosenberg has gathered poems from many nations, spanning centuries. Well-known poets like Blake, Dickinson, Frost, and Yeats are included, as well as some lesser-known poets. Arranged alphabetically, the poems all describe a message of light, literally or figuratively. Hope, courage, love, gratitude, joy, pleasure, and comfort are all found in the music of the verse. Biographical notes and suggestions for further reading on each of the authors are found at the end of the book, along with an index. Rosenberg’s introduction puts the collection in perspective and describes her purposes. In this she explains that the alphabetical organization of the collection is to emphasize "that each poet here is a ‘shard’ of light forming a greater whole." As we immerse ourselves in the poetry, we become a part of this whole, adding our light. Suitable for reading aloud in a classroom or on its own,
Light-Gathering Poems uplifts, inspires, and encourages readers to look for light in all they see and examine how they can contribute to the radiance.


Reviewed by Sharon Kuttler

The whimsical titles rightly imply fun as well as the delivery of factual information. Spiderology and Millipedeology are two books in the series, Backyard Buddies, by Ross, a Yosemite National Park naturalist. Ross introduces creepy-crawly things to children in an entertaining way. Other published titles in the series include Caterpillarology, Rolypolyology and Wormology. Ross begins each book with a group of suggested hands-on activities that encourage observational skills and curiosity. He explores questions kids might ask, such as “How long do spiders live?” “How many babies can spiders have in one year?” “How many legs do millipedes have?” and “Is there such a thing as a mommy longlegs?” Factual information is presented with ample illustrations and photographs. Actual explorations designed by children from a California elementary school conclude the books.

These books are full of fascinating facts, but their real value is in their curiosity-building presentation of the subjects. Facts are presented only after readers have encountered activity suggestions and questions to ponder. The explorations designed by elementary kids will inspire readers to devise experiments to answer their own questions. The clear illustrations help explain important concepts, and the close-up photographs of spiders and millipedes stimulate interest.

A table of contents, an adequate index and a small glossary help make these books useful to young researchers. Children are naturally curious about spiders, millipedes and other arthropods, but readers of all ages will be captivated by this series.


Reviewed by Nancy Alder

Hard on the heels of her Why Do You Love Me? comes another Schlessinger book with a message to clobber your child with. With stilted language and so-so illustrations, But I Want It! Gives advice on how to handle your child’s tantrum when the “gimme bug” bites. Picture this: You take your child to the toy store to purchase a birthday gift for another child, and your child throws a screeching tantrum and wants the stuffed animals for him or herself—not just one, but eleven of them. Schlessinger’s suggestion? Buy them all. Let the child take them all to bed where he or she will find no comfort or sleep. The child will, in fact, decide to “find those [needy] children and give them each one of these toy animals so they can feel loved and protected.” Is this woman from Mars? Does she actually know any children?

Goodness knows we parents can use advice on how to guide our children down the stony road to maturity, and our kids can use help dealing with life’s little disappointments. This book, though, offers neither sound advice nor an entertaining read. Give it a pass.


Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

The tradition of The Nutcracker has been expanded in this version of the beloved magical story, answering questions that are missing from the ballet. Marie finds out why the King of Mice and the Nutcracker are enemies and how the Nutcracker turned into a handsome prince. Characters like Princess Pirilipat and Dame Mouserin play a role in the Nutcracker’s fate.
Throughout the story, beautiful watercolor illustrations cover the pages. The intricate detailed artwork enhances the story. This book also features a full-length audio CD featuring Tchaikovsky's music and a narration. This is an excellent version of this special Christmas story.


A K-3 PB Reviewed by Kathe Homer

The children of Korovenko call him Shnook because he seems to them to be a simpleton, an evil magician, or at least someone undeserving or their respect. It is true that bad luck seems to follow him, and he doesn’t seem to be a very good salesman. When a boy’s mother needs something from the peddler, however, it never costs her more than she has to spend. The peddler helps those in need and never takes advantage of anyone. One boy steals a beautiful dreidel the peddler has dropped, and, overcome with guilt, he can’t sleep. When he slips out to find the peddler and return the dreidel, he discovers there is more to the peddler than meets the eye. The experience changes the boy’s attitude toward other people forever.

This book deals with the issues of honesty and judging others. The soft illustrations are beautifully done. An excellent message is delivered in a quiet, but compelling, way.


A 2-7 FI Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

When Pequele’s parents become ill with the plague, they send him to live with his grandmother. To protect her young son, his mother fashions an angel of branches and dried flowers and tucks it into the boy’s blanket. Pequele proves to be a natural acrobat whose love for somersaults and juggling earn him enough money to feed himself and his grandmother. Although they are poor, they pray each night to the angel that Pequele’s mother made, giving thanks for each other and “for the warmth and light inside us.” One day the boy awakes to find his grandmother has died, and he must find another home. Forced to beg for food, he collapses one night in front of a roadside cross. A kindly monk rescues Pequele from the bitter cold and takes him to the monastery. Pequele is made to feel welcome there until he performs acrobatics in front of the statue of an angel in the chapel. The abbot, furious, demands that the boy give up his acrobatics if he wants to stay. Since Pequele has nowhere else to go, he reluctantly agrees. One morning a woman whose baby has the plague shows up at the monastery begging for a blessing for her child. In order to comfort the stricken infant, Pequele performs somersaults to make him laugh. The result of his broken promise is a miracle for Pequele, the sick child, and the monastery.

Shannon bases his story on a twelfth century French folktale. The acrylic illustrations are vibrant, elaborate and captivating. Shannon frames his characters with stone archways decorated with gargoyles and flowers, except for Pequele, whose acrobatics often break the stone framework. The story itself is thought-provoking and charming without being overly sentimental.


A 2-7 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire are the most unfortunate children. The children, having lost their parents, are in the care of Mr. Poe, a family friend and banker, who is taking them to their Uncle Montgomery. They have already tried living with another distant relative, Count Olaf, who proved unfit to parent them in the first book of this series. He just wanted their inheritance. The children are delighted with their new Uncle, a scientist who collects and studies reptiles. Their newly discovered uncle, however
is soon disposed of, and the villainous Count Olaf reenters the picture. The children use their brains and special talents to foil Count Olaf and save themselves.

This book is a rollicking spoof of a mystery. "Unfortunate" things happen right and left, but the author prepares the reader, and we never feel the intensity of a heavy mystery novel. The style is similar to that of The Princess Bride, where the author frequently stops and talks to the audience. An enjoyable read.

A Pre-3 PB Reviewed by Nancy C. Evensen

The rules to this book are simple: Don't laugh. The consequence for such actions is also simple: You must go back to the front of the book. The reader is told three little humorous stories as our guide, Mr. Frimdempney, checks to make certain we're obeying the rules. Finally, when Mr. Frimdempney gets a good look at the reader's face, he must face the consequence... back to the front of the book.

This silly slapstick book is delightful. It is sure to elicit a smile from any reader, if not laughter from many. The reader interaction is absorbing. Much of the humor is communicated in the sketchy watercolor illustrations. However, the book jacket shares a warning: If you feel like laughing, you had better not read this book, because no laughing is allowed. The book is a 1999 Parents' Choice Silver Honor winner.

A 2-4 PB PT Reviewed by AnnMarie Hamar

Taylor has compiled a collection of twenty-six children's rhymes and poems from her homeland of Ireland. She introduces readers to the sneaky "Mr. Nobody," "who does the mischief that is done in everybody's house." We meet such characters as the too-perfect "Baby Over the Way," who never does anything wrong, and the sly "Fairy Shoemaker," a leprechaun who manages to escape without having to give up his pot of gold. Emoe's colorful illustrations are reminiscent of children's crayon drawings. This collection is a wonderful introduction to Irish wit and humor, as well as a fun way to learn rhymes.

* K-4 PB Reviewed by Janet O. Francis

Cheerful and spooky, the slightly askew cartoon style of Teague's illustration in this book seems perfectly made-to-order. Three friends—Wendell, Floyd and Mona—celebrate Halloween in the traditional way, in spite of some bad luck caused by a wandering black cat and some schoolmates—definitely not friends. As they are being gifted with healthy snacks, surprised by tricks instead of treats, and turned into prey by Leona Fleebish's witch gang, the holiday assumes a dubious cast. Wendell's sage observation, "Anything can happen on Halloween," proves absolutely true when wit and magic come to their aid. Just the sort of Halloween every trick-or-treater has always wanted! Total satisfaction guaranteed!

B 1-4 FI Reviewed by Cinda Clement

Ellen goes with her grandmother to visit her grandmother's friends in the country. Grandmother warns her not to snoop, but Ellen's curiosity gets the better of her. However, Janet, Grandmother's friends, is empathetic to Ellen's
curiosity and shows her around. She then asks her to help make apple pies with her grandma. As they visit, peeling apples for the pie, we learn that Grandma’s curiosity got her into trouble when she was young too; that is why she is so strict with Ellen.

This is a simple story told in very short chapters. There are two or three illustrations in each chapter. This would be a good introduction to chapter books.

Varriale’s book discusses how students audition for the school and what is involved in their training. The text itself, clearly written, stresses that while dance might be fun, it demands discipline and hard work. Varriale, who is married to a professional dancer, includes quotes from students which show their enthusiasm for their art form. Each double-page spread is devoted to a different dance-related topic, such as basic ballet steps, choreography and the athleticism of male dancers. A spread is also devoted to the challenges girls face when learning to dance en pointe. The book is a refreshing change from many of the usual children’s dance books in that it depicts a racially and ethnically mixed group of dancers. Varriale’s black-and-white and color photographs capture the energy of the dancers without the dances looking staged. The casual reader will find the text and photographs interesting, while those with some background in dance will be the ones who enjoy this book the most.


Emily’s teacher, Miss Cribbage, says, “Every morning we will make a new number friend and write it down in our number books. When we reach one hundred days we will have a party.” Emily and her classmates don’t believe they will ever make it to one hundred. Wells’ book documents these first hundred days of school.

Each number from one to one hundred is followed by a fun school activity, counting exercise, song to sing, or short story involving that number. On day two, Emily’s teacher sings “Tea for Two.” On the eighth day, Emily teaches her little brother Crazy Eights. Thirty-four acorns blow onto Emily’s steps on day thirty-four; she counts them and makes a necklace for Granny. Emily’s First 100 Days is a
colorful book children will enjoy reading and counting over and over again.

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* Pre-K PB PT Reviewed by Sandra Tidwell

You can sing your way through the pages of this board book, which puts a fun farm story to the familiar folk tune “Skip to my Lou.” The inside cover shows the well-kept farmhouse and orderly farm. The Mom and Dad leave their little boy in charge, saying, “Take care of the farm. We’ll be back by two! Skip to my Lou, my darling.” The boy and his dog joyously celebrate the peacefull afternoon they are expecting to have, but the animals have something else in mind. From flies in the sugar bowl to roosters in the pantry, the little boy finds every room in the house in commotion. Finally, he joins the animals in their playful rollicking until he sees it is almost two o’clock. “Look at the clock, It’s a quarter to two! Goodness gracious, What will we do?” With everyone helping, the house is put back in order, and the animals return to their places on the farm.

Westcott’s fanciful detailed illustrations are in bright colors. The scene in the kitchen with cows making and flipping pancakes is just plain fun, as is the bathtub scene in which the sheep are zipping off their wool and donning scuba gear before diving into the tub. My preschool grandchildren thoroughly enjoyed this humorous take on a familiar folk tune. Children will see new things to delight in as they turn the pages and sing their way again and again through this board book.

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A- 4-6 FI Reviewed by Laura Wadley

Thondup Dorje, nicknamed Thunder, is a Tibetan boy growing up in the early days of the twentieth century. Thunder is a farm boy who wishes to be a trader and visit faraway lands, but he lives in a society that believes contact with outsiders is both polluting and dangerous. One day, a “fringic,” or outsider, rescues Thunder from a storm. Because he fails to turn in the foreigner to the men of the village, the people believe he has invited demons into the community and send him away to a monastery to become a monk.

The strengths of this book are also its weaknesses. Though Thunder initially hopes to escape his fate and become a trader, he eventually embraces the monastic life, realizing that the monastery is where he belongs. Though his choice may be deeply satisfying to an adult reader, young people may be disappointed by the promise of adventure that is never fulfilled.

The book is well-written, and the culture and religion of Tibet are beautifully depicted. The narrative is overshadowed by the knowledge that most of Tibetan culture has been crushed and destroyed since the time described by the Communist Chinese.

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A Pre-2 PB Reviewed by Carla Morris

Anticipation builds up for weeks as Tom, a polar bear, pictures himself in kindergarten. Everything goes as planned until Tom actually arrives in the classroom on the first day. Panic sets in as he suddenly grabs Mom’s leg in one paw and Dad’s leg in the other. Understanding this display of separation anxiety, the polar bear parents agree to stay a little longer with their nervous son. They have so much fun they end up staying for the whole day. Illustrations of this
polar bear family, along with their great facial expressions, are memorable. The enthusiasm is catching. Children who read this book will definitely develop a positive outlook toward attending school for the first time. A perfect read for young children just beginning school.


B 4-7 FI Reviewed by Sharon Kuttler

Set in Medieval England, this story is about the daughter of an executioner. Thirteen-year-old Lily spends her days caring for injured wild animals, collecting herbs, working, and playing alone in the forest. She is an outcast because of her father's occupation, and the town children taunt her. Lily makes friends with one small boy who is interested in her animals. Her mother, Allyce, assists her husband during the executions, and she attempts to shield Lily from the horror that she herself must endure. Allyce sickens and dies, and Lily is expected to become the executioner's assistant. Lily, finding her duties abhorrent, determines to escape to another life, although it means leaving her father alone.

The subject matter is intriguing, and the author did do research into an executioner's life during the middle ages. Despite the macabre topic, the story is not offensive. One bloody beheading, with Lily acting as an assistant, might be objectionable to some readers. The story culminates in Lily's ability to escape her fate as the executioner's assistant, but not enough is said about what happens to her after she leaves her father. Overall, the story is mild, without the depth and drama the subject matter warrants.


A 5+ FI Reviewed by Annette Van Wagenen

This compelling novel, inspired by true events, is about Nell Bullen, the daughter of a well-to-do country squire. Her childhood, until the age of nine, is an extremely happy one. This changes with the devastation wrought by England's Bubonic Plague in the seventeenth century.

After the mysterious death of her beloved older brother, Nell spends more time with her father. She learns of the banishment of her father by Parliament years earlier and how he fled for his life. He settled with his new bride in Branford Hall and became a skilled scientist. Nell's father, Richard Bullen, teaches her about microscopic organisms, using a French microscope. Will this knowledge help save their small village?

Nell finds herself in the worst part of the disease-infested city of London. The adventure and horror of escaping this deadly plague will keep the reader riveted to discover what will happen to Branford Hall.


A 4+ NF Reviewed by Maren Purcell

Have you ever wondered who invented the bicycle, Legos, and other toys? Wulffson, author of *The Kid Who Invented the Popsicle and Other Surprising Inventions*, brings us another invention-type book, this time dealing with toys and games. The inventions range from remote-controlled cars and toy trains to Twister and Trivial Pursuit to Mr. Potato Head and Raggedy Ann. Some of the toys described have ancient beginnings, while others were created more recently. The seesaw was part of the ancient Roman circus, and toy soldiers have existed since Ancient Greece. Some toy inventors set out to invent a toy, while for others it was more
of an accident. For example, Play-doh began as wallpaper cleaner, and Silly Putty was an attempt at a rubber substitute during World War II. Each toy or game has its own unique story that will fascinate and surprise readers of all ages.

Wulffson includes a wide variety toys. The text is easy to follow, and the reader does not get bogged down in unimportant details. Succinct chapters relate who invented the toy, why, and even how the toy may work. At the end of each chapter is a short list of other interesting facts about the toy. A short bibliography and list of related web sites are included at the end. Keller’s humorous black-and-white illustrations complement the text and provide some comic relief. Readers are sure to enjoy this book and the many questions it answers about toys we’re all familiar with.


* All PB Reviewed by Gabi Kupitz

A man, viewed to be an eccentric by his fashionable neighbors, nurtures a neglected little tree. The man knows a secret: “Living things need love and care.” With the man’s attention, the little tree flourishes and so does a little boy, who occasionally joins the man on his front stoop. Together, they watch the birds gather to eat the food the man scatters for them at the foot of his pine tree. As the years pass, both man and boy grow older. The tree grows taller—an asset to the neighborhood. One Christmas Eve, the boy, David, suggests that his group of carolers stop in front of the man’s house. The birds nestled around the protective foot of the man’s tree are startled and fly into the tree. A white dove lights on the tip of the pine. The other birds adorn the branches of the pine with their unusual colors, and they, too, join the carolers in singing. The man watching from behind his window knows that “this is what Christmas was meant to be.”

Originally published in 1972, the story is timeless. Watercolor illustrations, though not full-page, convey the winter coldness of the city and the coldness of Mr. Crockett’s neighbors. As the brightly-dressed carolers and birds sing, only Mr. Crockett’s home and the pine tree show any sign of light and color.

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The following books have recently appeared in paperback, either for the first time or after a long absence from the marketplace. All are recommended.

Byars, Betsy. *The Two-Thousand-Pound Goldfish*. HarperTrophy, 2000. ISBN 0-064-4085508. $4.95. 160 pp. Grades 3-6. Reprint. Warren's mother is an activist on the run from the FBI; and Warren hasn't seen her for over three years. To escape his longings for his mother, he uses his imagination to create movie plots, like his newest one about the man-eating, two-thousand-pound goldfish named Bubbles swimming in the city's sewers. As Warren is confronted with his grandmother's sudden death, he must face the responsibility and understanding that come with growing up. The title and cover of this book do not accurately reflect its quite sensitive subject matter and Byars' equally sensitive treatment.


Granfield, Linda. *Silent Night: The Song From Heaven*. Illustrated by Nelly and Ernst Hofer. Tundra, 2000. ISBN 0-88776-434-7. $7.95. 24 pp. Grades Pre-3. Reprint. Primarily the story of an Austrian town preparing the crèche on the night the carol was first sung, it also gives a brief history. Illustrations are done in scherenschnitt (cut-paper art), which was popular at the time the carol was written.

Greenwald, Sheila. *Mariah Delany’s Author-of-the-Month Club*. Houghton Mifflin, 2000. ISBN 0-618-04928-2. $4.95 124 pp. Grades 3-5. Reprint. Greenwald continues the Mariah Delany series with another tale of Mariah's wild schemes. This time she begins the Author-of-the-Month club, to which she invites authors to speak to her friends in her living room. With a disastrous visit from the famed author of a beloved series of books, she discovers that authors are real people, "not what she expected," and that books hold the best surprises of all.


Paxon, Tom. *The Story of the Tooth Fairy*. Illustrated by Robert Sauber. HarperTrophy, 2000. ISBN 0-688-17523-6. $5.95. 32 pp. Grades 2-4. Reprint. Glynnis, a young fairy, rekindles true friendship between mortals and fairies by giving a coin to a girl named Emily in return for a gift only a mortal could give—a human tooth. When the exchange takes place at night under Emily’s pillow, we know this is the beginning of the world’s favorite fairy—the tooth fairy.

importance of washing her hands after touching things—dirt, dogs, sneezes—and before eating. The emphasis on the “nasties, dirties, and other horrible things” is balanced by the amusing illustrations and light tone.


Sis, Peter. *An Ocean World*. Illustrated by Peter Sis. HarperCollins, 2000. ISBN 0-688-17518-X. $5.95. 24 pp. Grades Pre-3. Reprint. This book tells the story of a whale who, after having lived alone in Ocean World since she was a few weeks old, is returned to the ocean. In her search for a friend, she encounters an island, a school of fish, a submarine, etc., which are all delightfully misleading—they are all shaped like whales. In the end, she finally meets another whale.


Wynne-Jones, Tim. *Stephen Fair*. HarperTrophy, 2000. ISBN 0-064047206-X. $5.95. 246 pp. Grades 4-8. Reprint. When the nightmares that drove his older brother away from home at fifteen start to plague Stephen, he decides to endure them; he finally discovers the truth about himself and his family. Wynne-Jones has crafted a coming-of-age novel with a central teenage character who, despite his troubles, is not self-centered. This book would be worth reading just to meet Wynne-Jones’ people and the houseboat named *The Ark*, even if it was not the emotionally elegant work it is.


Book Pairs

Submitted by Marsha D. Broadway

Females in Folklore

Folktale Versions


Move over Robin Hood, King Arthur, and Paul Bunyan to make room for strong, resourceful female characters of legend and myth. Cut from the Same Cloth and Not One Damsel offer thirty-three tales featuring heroic females, such as Japan’s samurai maiden, Tokoyo; Scotland’s Burd Janet; and America’s Sally Fink. Until the 1990’s folklore collections for young people often neglected strong-willed females. Now young girls can find the equal of John Henry in Annie Christmas. These two books make great family pleasure reading, provide storytellers with lesser known tales, and gender-balance classroom study of folktales.

Jewish Holocaust

Biographical Duos;
Different Reading Levels


Chiune Sugihara, Japanese consul to Lithuania in 1940, defied his government and hand wrote some six thousand exit visas for Polish and Lithuanian Jewish refugees who were trying to escape the Nazis. Passage to Freedom, told from the viewpoint of Sugihara’s five-year-old son, allows young readers to absorb the events of the Holocaust from an intimate family perspective. For older readers who want more information about the Sugihara family, the atrocities of the Holocaust, and one of the largest Jewish rescues, A Special Fate offers details gathered from eyewitness interviews, stories of fates of two refugee families, and an account of injustices and disgrace that the Sugihara family bore.

Any study of WWII or the Holocaust would benefit from using these books, both of which provide a springboard for the discussion of ethics and personal integrity.

Share a Book Pair

If you have a book pair to share, please use the following format and send it to Marsha Broadway, Editor, Children’s Book and Play Review, 4724 HBLL, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84058 or e-mail it to marsha_broadway@byu.edu.

Book Pair

Identify Topic

Identify Variation(s) (Fiction/Nonfiction, Complementary Fiction, Folktale Versions, Informational Matches, Biographical Duos or Different Reading Levels)

Author #1. Title #1. Illustrated by (if available). Publisher, Date of publication. ISBN number. Number of pages. Reading level (use grade level, Pre-S-12).

Author #2. Title #2. Illustrated by (if available). Publisher, Date of publication. ISBN number. Number of pages. Reading level (use grade level, Pre-S-12)

Brief description of the books, how they relate, and how they might be used.
Play Reviews


Reviewed by Angela Ottosen

Based on Irish folklore, this play tells the story of Rafferty, a small boy with a magic finger and two different-colored eyes. Fearless and courageous, Rafferty is up for the challenge when he is told to rescue the Moon from the jaws of the Great Fish who swallowed it. Joined by his friends Spider Murphy and Finbar Bat, Rafferty uses his magical powers to return the Moon back to its proper owner—the sky above. Full of quips and streams of wonderfully concocted phrases, this play is cleverly written. The characters are wild and humorous, yet somehow believable at the same time. There are great possibilities for creativity in the use of set, costumes, and props. The play is for five actors with doubling.


Reviewed by Shelley Graham

A widely diverse group of children with different talents and cultural and social backgrounds are all members of the "cool" clubhouse. Throughout the show, kids move in and out of different groups, discussing their similarities and differences, remembering times when they have excluded someone new or different, and commenting on how much better it is now that they know that they are all cool for different reasons. A mom and daughter discuss friendships with people who are from foreign countries, and we learn that sometimes, even parents don’t understand what it means to be different. Girls make fun of people for what they wear; boys make fun of another for still having a teddy bear. One young girl begs the groups not to fight because she recently saw her brother stabbed in a gang fight. The children learn to talk and play with a child with a hearing
impairment, and they discuss the ever-important question of popularity.

The play leaves room for a very large, versatile ensemble cast. With no real lead character, all cast members have a chance to be an important part of a scene. The lines would be easy to memorize, and scenes could be broken down into workable sections. Because the story is so diversified, however, it lacks a real sense of plot, in the traditional sense. It has a tendency to seem more like several small skits, each dealing with a different problem, tied together with songs sung by the group. This makes for nice workability, but it doesn’t give the audience a chance to really identify with one or two characters. The didactics aren’t couched in an overarching story, but as lessons to be learned. On the other hand, the music is engaging, and each of the “lessons” is one that would be relevant and meaningful to an audience of this age.


Reviewed by Shelley Graham

Each of the plays in this collection are preceded by a section entitled “The Playwright Speaks,” in which Kraus describes the play’s history and significance. After each play there is a section entitled “Classroom Concepts,” in which Rubin offers suggestions for use of the play in the classroom. The ideas apply not only to drama classes, but also to history, English, geography, and other classes as well. Two of the plays, *Remember My Name* and *Angel in the Night,* deal with the Holocaust and World War II. *Sunday Gold* is a play that deals with the gold rush in North Carolina in the 1840s and the issues of slavery and friendship. *Mean to be Free* is the story of two slave children following Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad to freedom. The first play in the book, *The Ice Wolf,* offers students an opportunity to discover the culture of the Eskimos and some of their myths. The plays themselves are exceptional, and in conjunction with the ideas that Rubin presents, they have the potential to be more than just artistic experiences. They may encourage research among the students and a deeper understanding of other cultures and periods of history. The plays are easily applicable to students from third grade to eighth grade, and all five shows run about an hour each.

A review of each play follows:

Kraus, Joanna H. *Angel in the Night.*

Many courageous people during the Holocaust risked their liberty and their lives to help the persecuted Jews escape the torture that awaited them if Nazi soldiers found them. Marsia Pawlina Szul was one such person. She is honored now in the Avenue of the Righteous Parks found outside Jerusalem and in Evanston, Illinois. This play is the story of her courage in harboring a mother, her newborn boy, young daughter, and another young Jewish girl. Pawlina led the Nazi soldiers away from the family, hiding in a homemade bunker in their barn. When she was discovered, she suffered unspeakable torture by the Nazis, yet she remained silent.

This play is inspiring, even more so because it is based on the real actions of one brave young Polish woman. The characters are loveable—we suffer with them throughout the play—and we are grateful to learn of the love, respect, and adoration the Jewish characters feel for Pawlina, their savior during World War II. Every child should learn stories such as these, which reaffirm our faith in humankind in the midst of some of the worst examples of man’s inhumanity to man. The play deals with these concerns in a delicate but touching manner, and all who see it will be grateful for women like Pawlina Szul, an angel in the night. The first and last scenes require the main characters to be approximately forty years older than they were during the war, but double casting is possible. Running time is approximately one hour.
Anatou is an Eskimo girl born with pale skin and blond hair. An anomaly among the other Eskimos, she is estranged from the rest of the village and blamed for a famine that occurs. When her parents leave in search of food, Anatou finds herself alone amidst the insufferable villagers. Before long, they banish her from the village. She travels into the forest—which no Eskimo should ever do—and speaks with the Wood God. She begs him to turn her into a wolf so that she will not remember what it was like to be hated and to be an outcast. The Wood God consents, and for the rest of the winter, she lives happily as a wolf with the other animals. But one day in the early spring, she defies the Wood God’s orders and ventures into the nearby village. Shot with an arrow by a villager, she suddenly remembers all the hatred she feels for the village. In an act of revenge, she kills the hunter. The village hunts her deep into the forest, where she perishes because of her hateful act.

This is a wonderful play for exposing young audiences to different cultures and traditions. It also gently teaches the importance of tolerance of those who are different, as well as the value of love instead of hate. There is no “happy ending” in the traditional sense, but the script is stronger and truer for it. Staging and scenery would pose the greatest difficulty for performance, but the script lends itself to interpretation and the abstract. The script also leaves room for creativity in costuming, which can range from simple masks to elaborate animal costumes. Running time is about one hour.

Kraus, Joanna H. *Mean to be Free.*

A 6-12

Hedy and Tom are two slave children who hear the call of Moses (Harriet Tubman) one night and take the opportunity to escape their plantation in Maryland and follow her on the Underground Railroad to Freedom. They travel a cold, hungry, difficult road to the home of Thomas and Sarah Garrett, devout Quakers who hide fugitive slaves in their house. With faith, courage, and much reassuring from Moses, the children make it safely to the Canadian border where they mean to be free.

The story of a difficult journey is told expertly through the eyes of these two children. We have an opportunity to see a bit of their life on the plantation and come to appreciate their sufferings for something we all have taken perhaps—freedom. The plot moves forward steadily, with new obstacles at every turn. The characters are real and loveable; even Linda, who complains throughout the entire journey, earns our affection as she struggles to keep up with Moses. *Mean to be Free* is a wonderful opportunity for young audiences to get to know more about history and heroines like Harriet Tubman.

Kraus, Joanna H. *Remember My Name.*

A 3-8

During World War II, Jewish families were separated forcefully into concentration camps, children being placed in one area and parents in another. Sometimes, however, Jewish families separated themselves, before they were found by the Nazis. This is the story of one such family, the Simons, who send their daughter, Rachel, to live in Auvergne by herself until the war is over. Rachel gets a new French name and must begin an entirely new life on her own, as if the Jewish girl she once was never existed. Now Madeleine Petit, she finds a kind priest who helps her to the village of St. Laurent des Pins and finds her a place to live. She stays with Mme. Barbière and learns to make lace, attending school under Suzanne Fleury’s tutelage. The Nazis watch her and the school very closely—no one is safe, even in a small town. After several frightening instances, they hear British reports on their contraband radio that the war is over. Rachel’s father returns for her as promised, but alone. He promises to stay in St. Laurent des Pins for a bit, to give himself time to recover from the horror of the concentration camp, from losing his wife,
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and to give Madeleine time to say farewell to the
wonderful people who kept her safe.

Once again, a young girl is the heroine
of a tale of courage and fortitude during a time
of tremendous turmoil. Rachell/Madeleine is real
and loveable, someone young people will be
drawn to. The plot is thick with intrigue and
suspense, as well as humor and happiness.
Though the happy ending is slightly marred by
the death of Rachel's mother, it accurately
represents the situation of many Jewish families
after the war. The play moves gently, but with
moments of excitement that impel its
progression to the climax. Though it isn't based
on a true story, it is based on situations that were
common during World War II. Running time is
approximately one hour.

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Kraus, Joanna H. *Sunday Gold.*

A 3-8

The Gold Rush hit North Carolina in the
1840s, and in a little mining town called Gold
Hill, there lived a small girl with big dreams.
Lizzy works as a rocker in the gold mine with
her father. Barely twelve, she earns her keep and
does her best to be a good girl.
On her way home one evening, she sees a pair of red leather
boots with glass buttons and a black patent
leather toe. Never has she wanted anything more
than those boots. Never, that is, until she hears
Dr. Thornton telling her pa about the new
common school that is going to be built in Gold
Hill. Just as the boots represent to her a higher
class of living, so does an education represent
her way out. She soon realizes, however, that
she has considerable freedom compared to her
friend Annie, a young black girl who is "fixin' to
be sold to the meanest plantation owner in South
Carolina." Although Lizzy finds her chance for
an education glittering in the stream below her,
she offers the nugget to Annie and helps her buy
her freedom. In the end, her pa has a change of
heart, and it looks like she might get to go to
school after all.

A lot of research obviously went into the
writing of this play, and it makes for an
interestingly authentic-feeling piece about gold
mining and two little girls who want more. Once
again, Kraus writes unforgettable characters to
whom young audiences can easily relate.
Staging may present a small difficulty—i.e., the
necessity of a horse and heavy mining
machinery in one scene. However, with the
stylization or "theatricality" the author suggests,
it's workable. The play teaches that there are
things more important than material possessions,
and that good things come, eventually, to those
who will do good to others. Running time is
approximately one hour.

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Markham, Shelly, adapted from Judith Viorst.
*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No
Good, Very Bad Day.* Dramatic Publishing,

A K-3 Reviewed by Angela Ottosen

According to Alexander, Australia would be
an ideal place to live—or at least escape to!
Alexander is having a rotten day, and he
receives no sympathy for his trials. His
hardships include waking up with gum in his
hair, losing his best friend, suffering in the
dentist's chair, and being yelled at after messing
up his dad's copy machine at the office. Not a
soul seems to care as six-year-old Alexander
faces these traumatic events. He eventually
receives sympathy when his mother sings his
terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day—to
sleep. Alexander realizes that people in Australia
must have bad days, too.

This play with music is based on Judith
Viorst's book bearing the same title. A favorite
childhood story for many, this play brings to life
the characters of the book. Lyrics and text in this
play are both very well written and contain
much humor. Adults can play the characters
effectively if they portray them as young
children. Set changes need to be swift in order to
create fluid transitions between scenes.

△ △ △ △
A K-5  Reviewed by Mindy Boam

A collection of seven short scripts by the Paper Bag Players is presented in this book, along with ideas for costumes and props. Famous for their usage of paper bags and cardboard, the Paper Bag Players put out this book so that children could put on plays of their own quickly and inexpensively. The plays are all short, averaging a page and a half each. They are based on a variety of topics, ranging from getting lost in the mall to taking a bath. The plays are all simple and fun. If you are looking for a play with instructive elements, however, you will not find it in this collection. For example, "Lost in the Mall" is about a family getting separated in the mall. When they find each other, instead of making it a learning experience to teach the audience what to do in such a situation, the Mother says, "Never mind. We're all together now." The collection does afford children the opportunity to put on a show of their own.


A- K-1  Reviewed by Tracy Twitchell

The premise of this book is sound: "Children are motivated to read aloud when they feel they are contributing in a meaningful way, rather than just because they are next in the circle." The text contains numerous reproducible, short thematic plays for young children, broadly arranged by seasons. While they are best suited to reading, they may also be produced. The book also contains excellent cross-curricular and extension activities for each play.


A 6-12  Reviewed by Nancy Hovasse

This collection contains several plays originally available as single copies. Although
Some of these works have been reviewed as individual plays in past issues, they are reviewed again as part of this important new collection.

Surface has done our field a great service with *Most Valuable Player and Four Other All-Star Plays for Young Audiences* by creating an anthology of works that are perfect for junior and high school audiences. This often ignored audience will revel in these five plays that speak directly to their life experience and emotional journey. Producers, both educational and professional, will appreciate Surface's largely optimistic yet honest storytelling.

In his insightful introduction to the anthology, Graham Whitehead offers what he considers to be the "underlying mantra" of this collection: "We must embrace the responsibility of making choices and living with the consequences." Although the anthology could be described as offering social issues plays, the scripts are well crafted and character driven so that they do not seem to preach. Instead, they offer glimpses into various situations in which individuals have choices to make with life altering repercussions.

In this anthology, Surface has assembled plays that capture the emotional journey of the young characters she creates, as well as the imagination of the audience. Dealing with a plethora of real life, contemporary issues, participating in these plays either as actor, audience member, or simply as reader will provide junior and high school age students with the knowledge that at least one playwright is listening.

A review of each play follows:

**Most Valuable Player.**

*Most Valuable Player,* created collectively with the California Theatre Center in 1984, provides contemporary young theatre audiences an entrée into the racial strife in America during the 1940s. At the center of the play are the life and ultimate triumph of Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play professional baseball for an American major league ball club. Opening with Robinson's childhood, Surface expediently renders his journey from a child spurned from a neighborhood ballfield because of the color of his skin, to winner of the 1949 "Most Valuable Player Award." Littered with racial epithets, the script illustrates the injustice that has victimized African Americans throughout the past century. Fortunately, the integrity of Robinson as the protagonist supports the dramatic action of the script well enough that the audience is not distracted by the offensive language.

A perfect script for touring companies, it can be produced with five actors using very minimal sets and costumes. As with many of the plays in this collection, the script demands a great deal from actors, who will be called upon to play multiple roles. The script also poses challenges to the director; the staging of several different baseball sequences is crucial to the success of the production.

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**Prodigy.**

*Prodigy* begins with Wolfgang Mozart's early childhood when his gift for music is nurtured by his doting, playful parents. Quickly, the script progresses to only a few years later when Wolfgang's musical genius is revealed. The play darkens as Leopold Mozart assumes control over every aspect of his son's life in an effort to ensure his success, inevitably losing sight of the boy behind the music. A dutiful son, young Wolfgang surrenders his own needs to assuage his father's misguided desires.

In the playwright's notes, Surface asks that *Prodigy* be "considered as a piece of music—each scene following smoothly into the next, with minimal scenic adjustment." To this end she has named each scene with familiar musical terms—prelude, allegro, in tempo misurato—to define the tempo implicit in the scene that reflects the fluid emotional journey of the primary characters. With only slightly heightened language, Surface adequately transports the audience to Europe in the eighteenth century. Producers may take the same approach and only minimally suggest the period in sets and costumes through the use of appropriate silhouettes. With some doubling, the script can be performed with a minimum of
eight actors. Although it would be nice to cast an actor capable of performing the works of Mozart, it is not necessary for a successful production.

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Dancing Solo.

*Dancing Solo* depends on the metaphoric language of modern dance to tell the story of Kara, an adolescent whose life has become a labyrinth of dysfunctional relationships. Using the theatrical device of a choreography session with David, her dance teacher, Kara is encouraged to tell the story of her relationship with her alcoholic mother and drug-dealing boyfriend. Unaware of Kara’s combustible emotional state, he continually coaches her to “dance what you feel, tell your story,” while she responds, “Can’t I just repeat a pattern I know?” Although the analogy between the choreography and the emotional state of the dancer is accurate and clever, the dialogue goes a bit too far to ensure that the audience sees the parallel.

This piece is the most challenging of the five offered. Since the emotional journey of the protagonist is represented through movement as well as dialogue, the script requires actors (three women, two men) and a director with an understanding of dance as a metaphor and the ability to do it well. The staging needs of the play are limited to the suggestion of a dance studio with free-standing dance bars, two stools, and frames representing rehearsal mirrors.

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Broken Rainbow.

Set in “a middle-income neighborhood in Montgomery County, Maryland (or any suburban area near a large city),” *Broken Rainbow* is an honest observation of contemporary suburban life from the perspective of teenagers from disenfranchised minority groups. African-American Gina (seventeen) and her brother, Damond (nineteen), live next door to Italian-Jewish-American Joel Cohen (eighteen) and his mother. Joel and Gina discover a common love for music and are in the very early stages of friendship. Joel and Damond’s lives intersect with much less harmony when Joel goes to work for the same trash collecting business as Damond, and the two are assigned to work the same truck. Driven by his concern for the environment, Joel sees this job as an opportunity to make a difference. Damond, on the other hand, sees the job as simply a means to an end. The relationship is further strained as Damond taunts Joel with racial slurs, then fails to show up for their work shift. Joel is finally pushed too far when Damond is awarded a coveted managerial internship.

The play requires a flexible set design that allows for fluid movement between the multiple locations called for in the story. A great piece for touring because of the small cast size (four actors), the script invites much discussion and could be the catalyst for exciting postshow activities with proper facilitation.

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Blessings.

*Blessings* is the most realistic play in the selection. Set in a cabin in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California, this play deals with the battles and victories of Rene, a high school freshman with severe dyslexia and an auditory perception deficit. On a weekend get-away with her mother and some family friends, Rene is forced to spend time with Katie, also a freshman at the same school, but an overachieving perfectionist. The two girls appear to be as different as could be imagined. The weekend, however, provides an opportunity for Rene and Katie to learn what they have in common.

An even more important relationship develops in the play between Rene and Jesse, a twenty-nine-year-old man who lives in the basement apartment of the cabin. A bit of a recluse, Jesse spends his time making redwood framed mirrors and taking care of the cabin and its visitors. Jesse introduces Rene to the beauty of his simple poetry while Rene challenges him to learn to read aloud. This wonderfully gentle play will provide young audiences an opportunity to meet the human side of their peers who struggle with learning disabilities.
With a cast of seven actors (four women, three men), this play calls for a realistic set and costumes. Lighting needs are fairly simple. It would be best if produced in a theatre rather than on tour. Like all the other plays in the collection, casting young actors in the teenage roles would be an exceptional opportunity for them to speak dialogue that is manageable and appropriate in their development as young artists.


A K-6 reviewed by Shelley Graham

As the bitter winter winds rush through the poor city streets of Imperial Russia, young Anya and her father, Victor, fight Alexander II's tax collectors to keep their precious "spot" on the street where they sell birds. Anya is enchanted with the young tsar, Alexander "Alexi" Nikolaevich, and though they have never properly met before, Anya is certain that she can convince the tsar to change his severe laws and promise that Victor can keep his spot. Alexi, however, has other problems; the law requires that he marry a true princess. He has three days to do it, and the only princess left is Masha, a bossy, domineering shrew. Though Alexi seems enraptured by Anya, he is unwilling to grant her request that he travel outside the palace walls to visit the poverty-stricken and suffering city. With the help of two scoundrels, Alexi travels inside a burlap sack outside the city walls and is forced to see the wretchedness that his laws promote. Alexi promises Victor that he will not lose his spot, and the whole company travels back to the warmth of the palace, where the spurned Masha has lost patience and threatens to leave. When it seems the tsar's hope of marriage is crushed, an old King of a distant Russian province comes to the palace for help. He tells the queen of his shipwreck long ago and the daughter he lost and has been searching for ever since. Victor tells the queen that he, in fact, is not Anya's father, but that he found her one evening along the shore after a bad storm. The queen makes the essential connection, but to prove Anya's royal heritage, she places a tiny pea underneath the myriad of blankets and mattresses on Anya's bed. When she awakes the next morning, disheveled and sleepy, the queen is convinced of the depth of her sensitivity, both physical and emotional, and Alexi and Anya are married.

Not the traditional story of the princess and the pea as I remember it—but much better! The dialogue is creative and engaging, the characters are comical, human, and heartwarming, and the plot proves more intricate and more exciting than other "watered-down" versions of this delightful tale. The cast may be as small as ten, but is flexible to be as large as twelve or more. Costuming and scenery is versatile, with great room for creativity. The action moves quickly, pushed forward by both plot and character, and at a running time of approximately one hour, it will easily engage kindergartners and sixth graders alike.
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