



13 Ghosts of Halloween

By Robin Muller

Illustrated by Patricia Storms

Kiss the Book (September, 2009):

A group of children are determined to prove that they are brave, even in the face of every increasing numbers of scary creatures. A humorous take on the original 12 Days of Christmas – a ghoulish delight for young children. EL _ ESSENTIAL. Cindy, Library-Teacher.



The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness

By Colin Thompson

Illustrated by Amy Lissiat

Teaching Tolerance (Spring 2009):

Many children in America live with their grandparents. Here, finally, is a book that celebrates that relationship. *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* (\$15.95), by Colin Thompson, is about a boy named George and the happiness he finds after bringing an animal shelter dog home to the house he shares with his grandmother. (Grades PreK-6)

Kids Lit (February 26, 2009):

George lived alone with his grandmother. He spent his Friday afternoons at the dog shelter. He felt most at home in the dark of the last cage where the dogs spent their final days before being euthanized. George was surprised to find a small dog looking back at him rather than cowering in the back of the cage. The two stared at one another and a connection was made. The pound was about to close, but George ran home to tell his grandmother about the dog. The hairy dog had three legs so George carries him home. As they tried to figure out a solution for the three legs, the dog began to change George's attitude and his grandmother's.

Both the text and illustrations are quirky in such a wonderful way. The text laments that dogs can't smile, emphasizes the hopelessness of George and the dogs at the pound, and explains the ugliness of the dog in a vivid way:

"Why would you want him? We've got 87 other dogs here. They've all got four legs and bright eyes and a coat that doesn't look like it's covered in lard."

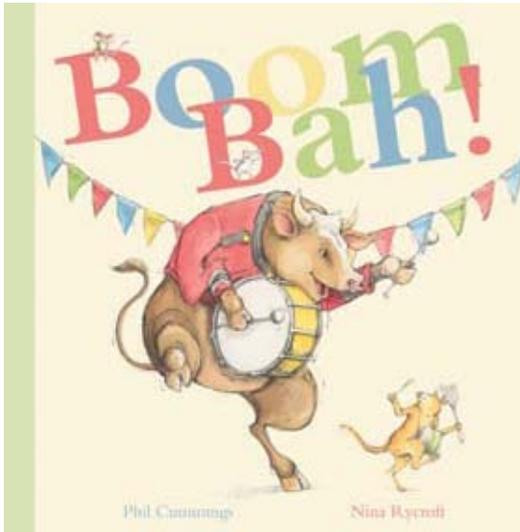
The illustrations have depth, character and their own style. There are so many small touches that surprise but offer a new take on life. The grandmother's face has some wrinkles, but the best part is that her skin is done in a crackled glaze so she looks like her paint is about to chip off. The wallpaper at their home is not dingy, the counter at the pound covered in a lifetime of paw prints, and small pieces of newspaper go everywhere during a papier-mache project.

Because of the question of a dog in a pound being euthanized, adults may not want to use this with sensitive kids. But those children who veer toward the dark and depressed will find a kindred spirit here as well as hope galore.

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

Originally published in Australia, this is the tale of a sad and friendless boy, George, who “lived alone with his grandmother and an empty place where his mother and father should have been.” One special day he sees a way he might overcome this emptiness. It is a sad, three-legged dog, named Jeremy. On the very last day before Jeremy is scheduled to be destroyed, George rescues him from the pound. The dog revels in his new life with George. After some failed attempts, George and his grandma work together to fashion an artificial leg for Jeremy. He joyfully runs in the garden and joins in a soccer game with his second artificial leg, a wheeled one, and even has a third leg with a slipper for bedtime. It is then that “the empty place inside George didn’t seem so empty anymore” and their happiness is complete.

In all honesty, I didn’t like this book when I began reading it. It was too dark and depressing. The combination of drawings over photographs and collages gave a coarse look to the illustrations that did not appeal to me. But this was exactly the mood that author and illustrator Colin Thompson was trying to create. Paired with the message of finding love and acceptance in a lonely world, these quirky pictures won me over. The dark and gritty tone works well and the message contained in this story is irresistible. Laughter and tears are often found on the same page of this emotional story. It is highly recommended for older students who will appreciate the look of this story and its subtleties. It would make an excellent starting point for a middle school discussion about compassion, disabilities, or abandoned animals.



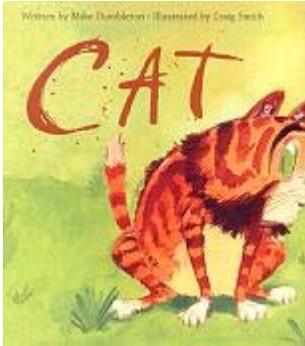
Boom Bah!

Written by Phil Cummings

Illustrated by Nina Rycroft

The Toy Book (December 2009)

“Ting! Tong! Clickety-click!” In *Boom Bah!*, by Phil Cummings and Nina Rycroft, a mouse’s ting on a teacup grows and gathers to become an orchestra of animals marching with homemade instruments. The rhythmic book, published by KANE MILLER, features watercolor illustrations and rollicking, repetitive text. “Follow the band and tap your toe! Boom Bah! Here we go!”



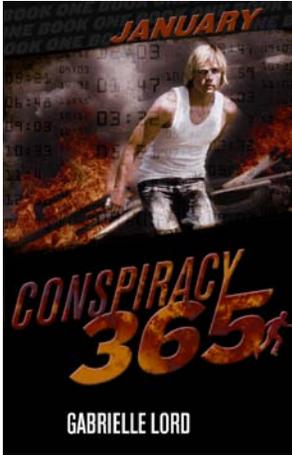
Cat

Written by Mike Dumbleton

Illustrated by Craig Smith

2009 Oneota Reading Journal (December 2009)

With only two to four words per page, the illustrations communicate the action in this children's book for ages 4 and up. Readers follow Cat to see what trouble he gets into. After being chased by a dog, getting wet from a sprinkler, and spilling milk, among other adventures, Cat curls up in a ball for a nap. This book would be excellent for asking young children to describe illustrations and actions in their own words, getting children to think critically and develop their oral language skills.



Conspiracy 365 January

By Gabrielle Lord

Booklist (December 1, 2009)

As gimmicks go, it's a good one: each month of 2010, one title in the 12-book Conspiracy 365 series will be released. The ticking clock (or calendar, in this case) is introduced immediately when a strange man accosts 15-year-old Callum Ormond on the street, shouting, "Get away! Hide and lay low until midnight December 31st of next year." It's good advice, because the following day, January 1st, includes a boat wreck, shark attack, and helicopter rescue—and that's just for starters. Soon Callum is fleeing unknown assailants who are framing him for the attack of his little sister and uncle Rafe (a shady character himself). It all has to do with something called the Ormond Singularity and a group of sketches Callum's father gave him before dying of a mysterious illness. This is the kind of stuff that stretches credibility with every page, but continual time updates ("12:00 a.m.," "12:13 a.m.," etc.) at least create a sense of continual motion. The conclusion offers no answers, just the requisite cliff-hanger.

Kirkus Reviews (December 1, 2009)

Callum Ormond is a wanted teen. One New Year's Eve, he is stopped by a strange man in a cloak who tells him to go into hiding for the next 365 days. Callum believes that his father died of illness, but it turns out he was murdered. Now the murderers are after Callum's knowledge of something called the Ormond Singularity, but the only clues he has to its meaning are some drawings left to him by his father. When Callum's family is attacked and left for dead, the only person who believes in his innocence is his best friend, Boges. Kidnapped and beaten, Callum faces what might be his last minutes in a cliffhanger ending. Several factors make this book a top choice for reluctant readers, including the nonstop action, the small trim, the short length and the amount of white space on the pages. The character development is minimal, but that shouldn't affect readers who are in it for the action scenes. This is the first of a planned 12-book series, one book for each month of the year Callum must survive. (Thriller. YA)

Publishers Weekly (December 7, 2009)

Conspiracy 365: January Gabrielle Lord. EDC/Kane Miller, \$10.99 (192p) ISBN 978-1-935279-49-5

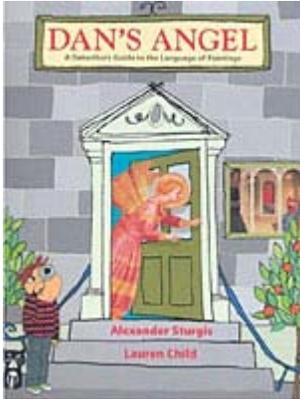
Australian crime novelist Lord launches a gripping new series that should have clear appeal for thriller fans. Australian teenager Cal is approached by a strange man who warns him that he has 365 days to survive and suggests that the recent death of Cal's father wasn't a strange illness, but murder. Soon enough, strange events—a boating accident that appears to be sabotage, a break-in, and a mysterious call from a nurse who cared for Cal's dad—raise his suspicions even more. When he investigates a package his uncle Rafe has hidden away, he quickly gets drawn into a conspiracy involving his family, mysterious drawings, and violent kidnappers, and finds himself on the run from the police. Lord creates a tense environment, and although the action can occasionally get over-the-top, the villains are suitably vile and entertaining, and Cal makes for an affable hero. Readers should be warned that, true to the nature of the planned series (11 subsequent books will follow throughout 2010), the book ends very much on a cliffhanger. Ages 10–up. (Jan.)

Abby the Librarian Blogspot (December 2009)

On New Year's Eve, Cal is confronted by a strange man who tells him to go into hiding. They will come after him, he says, because of the Ormund Singularity. These people killed his father and now they'll come after him. Cal finds it unsettling, but decides it's probably just the ravings of a mad man... until he's almost killed that night. Now Cal's on a wild hunt to decipher the clues his father left behind before he died. What is the Ormund Singularity? Who are these people who are after him? And can Cal get things figured out before his family and friends get hurt?

KidsBookshelf.com (December 2009)

Fifteen-year-old Callum Ormond's father died from a mysterious virus he contracted while researching family history in Ireland. But after Cal is warned by a stranger on the street that his father was murdered, and his killers would be after Cal next, he becomes entangled in a sinister plot that he knows nothing about. Cal keeps hearing the terms Ormund Singularity and Ormund Riddle. Cal doesn't know who is after him, but they all want to know what he knows, which isn't much. All he knows is that his dad stumbled onto something that could change history, and make them rich. But Cal doesn't know where to turn, who to trust, or how to solve the mystery. He only has 365 days to figure it out and stay alive. The clock is ticking, and Cal is running out of time. An edge of your seat thriller you won't be able to put down and will anxiously await the next book in the series! (Young Adult)



Dan's Angel

Written by Alexander Sturgis

Illustrated by Lauren Child

Eclectic Homeschool Online (August, 2009):

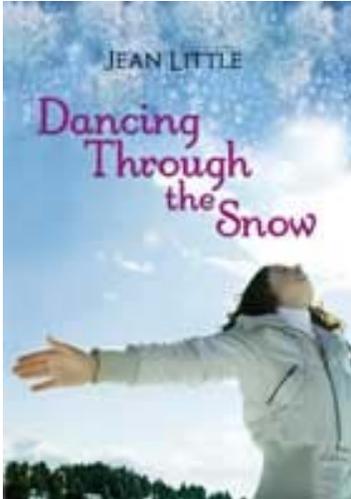
Dan's Angel: A Detective's Guide to the Language of Paintings, is a unique approach to introducing young children to art. This picture book appeals to the imagination; an angel flies out of a famous painting to give Dan, a visiting boy, a personal tour of the art museum.

Dan fancies himself something of a detective, and so his guiding angel appeals to his sense of adventure and mystery by asking him questions about what he sees in the pictures. Dan does a little detecting, that is, his answers as he peruses the pictures show a true detective spirit, and in response the angel goes on to explain to Dan (and to us) some of the various symbols used by the artists.

The main illustrations are simple and somewhat cartoonish, with the effect of setting off the featured artworks which appear to be faithfully represented in the book. As he makes his way through the exhibits, Dan discovers a dozen paintings, by artists that include Fra Angelico, Picasso, Botticelli, even Pollock, in a variety (obviously) of styles. Along the way he learns about how artists use colors, symbols, light, and other details to tell a story within the story of their painting.

Artwork from three famous collections is featured. Our children were a little disappointed when I told them that no, they wouldn't be likely to see all these paintings in one place. On the other hand, they were charmed by the story and planning to do a little detective work of their own on our next visit to the local art museum.

Caution: As you'll often find in the area of art, there is some nudity. For example, our little ones were somewhat disturbed by a carefully draped (otherwise nearly nude) Greek god of war, dozing beside a wide-awake (and fully clad) Venus. If lack of clothing bothers your family, you might want to preview this book before reading it with your children.



Dancing Through the Snow
By Jean Little

Kirkus Reviews (August 15, 2009):

Having lived with foster families since she was abandoned at age three, Min knows how to protect herself from the pain of not being wanted. When she's returned-again-to the social worker in charge of finding her a placement, Min is angry yet stoic. Surprised to find her acquaintance Dr. Jessica Hart sweeping her out of the office and into a new life together, Min still can't trust or feel safe. Little knows how to take a story that could be sad and pathetic and engage readers by describing Min's gutsy instinct for perseverance and the necessity for the self-protection so often misinterpreted as a lack of caring. It's a severely damaged little dog that truly triggers a change in Min's heart. The pets here have as much character as the humans and contribute to Min's ability to rise to the challenge when she finally accepts her home and real love for the first time. While this could have been a tearjerker-the depth of suffering Min has endured is enormous-there is sufficient humor and excitement to leaven and relieve the pathos.

VOYA (October 2009)

Min Randall is dreading Christmas. The kids at school have been making her life miserable, and Enid Bangs, Min's fourth and latest foster mother, has had enough of her and has decided that after all her failed placements must be Min's fault. Min finds herself at Children's Aid being 'recycled' yet again. This time, however, when Enid blames her, she has a savior. Jess Hart, a young doctor familiar with Min's past and a former foster child and mother herself, blasts Enid and sweeps Min out of the office, determined to give Min a chance.

The background connection between the two characters allows Jess to overcome many of the difficulties that Min has settling. Providing a character with a similar background to Min helps her make the necessary adjustments for her assured success. Min is allowed to make friends successfully in her new school, who also dislike the bully that made her life so difficult and help her to overcome his victimization when he turns up in her new school. Min finds happiness in reading and is comforted by tales of other foster children, given to her by Jess, such as Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me and The Great Gilly Hopkins.

Readers will enjoy any of these other great books and will find this tale a heartwarming story.

School Library Journal (October 2009)

This well-written story handles the topic of foster and abandoned children with compassion and truth. Min, 11, has lived through a series of foster homes where she was cared for but not deeply loved. When her current foster mother decides to return her to the system shortly before Christmas, Min feels sorry for herself, but knows that she will not miss Bangs family. From this point forward, her life improves. She is taken in by Jess Hart, a doctor who recently lost her husband and who understands the child's deep psychological pain because she, too, was once a foster child. While some elements of Min's story may seem to be too "pie in the sky," they are told with such warmth and detail that readers believe that Jess could be just right for Min. The child is finally given the chance to leave behind her fierce independence and for the first time in her life trust caring adult who will not let her down.

Swon Libraries (November 2009)

Min, a foster child, gets rejected from her third family, but is adopted by Jess Hart, a widow who has met Min on previous occasions. Her life is paralleled by an abused dog that she finds and nurses back to health, only to discover that the dog belongs to an elderly woman who misses him immensely. Min becomes a part of a concert to raise money for tsunami victims; she also befriends Toby, Jess's godchild.

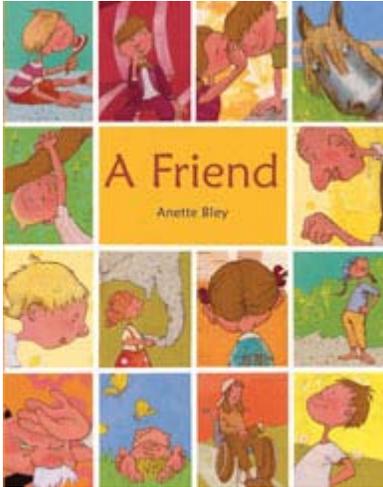
Dancing Through the Snow is a well-written novel whose main character, Min, deals with tough situations involving child abuse, animal abuse, and bullying. The book begins quickly when Min is given back to the foster care agency that has placed her three times. The fourth placement works out well and ends with Min being adopted. This is a very positive novel that illustrates what can happen when adults and children strive for what is good.

Jean Little Library (October 2009)

Of course, you did not expect me to neglect Jean Little's newest novel? Even amidst *Cybils* reading, *Goosebumps* parties, and exciting colds. Jean Little's pervading theme is hope and tenacity; her protagonists are stubborn try-try-againers and there's always hope that they will have a family, friends, or success in their struggles.

Dancing Through the Snow is no exception. Litterbin Min, as a mean bully at school labels her, knows she's a throwaway. She doesn't know who her parents were, the woman who raised her abandoned her, and every foster family has given her back. And now she's being dumped back at Children's Aid again, only a few weeks before Christmas. But this time, it's different. Jess Hart, the doctor who's been in and out of Min's life since she was small, happens to be passing and suddenly Min is scooped up and plunked down in a loving home for the holidays. Jess, who had an even more traumatic childhood than Min, is the first person who really understands; and she breaks Min's hard shell and opens her heart. Experiencing the healing power of love Min begins to learn to give back; to an abused and damaged stray puppy, to Jess's godson, and to her new friends at school. A new life, a new family, and a new Min: it's the perfect Christmas miracle. A story of hope

and new beginnings, perfect for middle grade readers who like realistic fiction or for a family read-aloud.



A Friend

By Anette Bley

Kirkus Reviews (February 15, 2009):

Bley provides readers with a comprehensive list of the traits that a good friend has, from the relatively easy things, like playing together on a rainy day and helping when needed, to the more difficult ones, like stepping back and allowing independence and having the courage to tell the truth. Being a good friend involves some finesse and also some intimate knowledge of your pal: “Someone who shows me the way...when I feel lost. / Someone who lets me find my own way...when I am ready.” The mixed-media illustrations are rich in texture and tongue-in-cheek humor: A child holding out a plate for the dog to lick illustrates the concept that friends share when they are hungry...and when they are not. The split-panel design allows multiple concepts to appear on a spread and also at times extend a scene over a page turn. The borderline-stereotypical image of pale-and outsized-lipped black characters is an unfortunate misstep in an otherwise valuable springboard for discussions of friendship, whether in the classroom, at home or in a storytime setting. (Picture book. 3-10)

Cheryl Rainfield (March 18, 2009):

What do you want in a friend? What do you want a friend to do with you? Picture book *A Friend* answers all these questions and supplies many thoughtful, loving ways to be friends, or things you might need from a friend. This book is an affirming and encouraging celebration of what a friend can offer.

Bley’s text is a beautiful, almost poetic reminder of what a friend can be and what a friend can offer you. It reminds readers of all the ways a person can be a friend, and the many things you can do with a friend—such as play with a friend on a rainy day or get in trouble with a friend when you’re feeling impish. Bley’s text also talks about things you might want from a friend, depending on how you feel—such as quiet when you feel sad—or on what you need—a hug and comfort when you want it, yet letting you go when you ask them to. Bley also covers qualities you might want in a really good friend, such as help when you need it, but not helping when you want to do things on your own, or the courage to tell you when others are laughing at you. The qualities and actions Bley discusses also seem to fit a really good parent. For introspective readers, it may also

remind them of what they can offer a friend, as well as what they can receive. The text is thoughtful, warming, and wise, reminding the reader of the good in people. It feels truly loving and kind-hearted.

The text is specific while being general enough for the reader to identify with (such as “someone who forgives me for my mistakes when I feel small and foolish”—we’ve all been there). This gives the book a universal appeal. I think it will appeal to a broad audience, and to kids and adults alike. At the end of the book, it moves from talking about who a friend is and what they can do, to asking the reader who their friend is. Bley’s text is not a story, but a wise, kind reminder about what it means to be a friend, and what you can hope to look for in one. Each phrase is split up with an elipses and a new illustration and sometimes a page turn, which gives the reader time to think about it and finish the sentence for themselves.

Bley’s pencil-and-gouache illustrations are sweet and playful, with strong, flowing lines. The characters have a slightly cartoonish feel, and always stand out, through the use of lots of white space, lack of background detail or clutter except for necessary elements, characters usually wearing bright clothing, characters being located centrally, and strong lines.

Bley’s characters are vibrant and expressive, with strong body language, and are beautifully drawn. They show that friends come in all ages and sizes, and sometimes even in animals. The characters change in each illustration, though are sometimes repeated for comparison next to each other as part of the same sentence. This will allow both girl and boy readers to identify with the book. At the same time, there is a great fluidity and a sense of all the characters belonging together, though Bley’s strong individual style, and a similarity in the characters’ faces.

One small thing that may detract from the book for some readers is that there is not enough variation in ethnicity.

Bley changes the layout and size of the illustrations in the spreads throughout book; some illustrations are split in a spread, coming to 3/4 and 1/4 page, which moves to 3 illustrations per spread, then 2 or 3 long narrow illustrations split horizontally, then vertically. This greatly adds to the visual interest.

There is some great bonus material in the front and end papers, where we get more text and drawings about what kind of friend we might want, and what we want the friend to do, with illustrations and text that are not in the book. The illustrations in the front and end papers are in green and white.

This is a wise, feel-good book about friendship. It’s a great book for a child, as well as a good gift to give to a friend. It has comforting, heart-warming text and illustrations. The book encourages friendship and thinking about what you might need from a friend, and also offers good limits that a child—or person—should have.

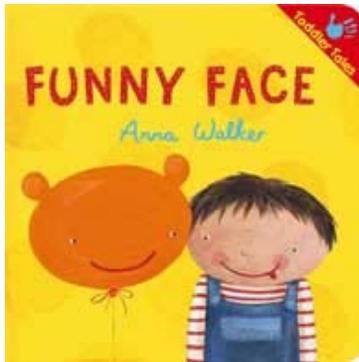
Highly recommended!

The Midwest Book Review (May, 2009):

A Friend is a charming children’s picturebook about friendship. The thoughtful text and adventurous color illustrations list various qualities and wonderful things that true friends share. “I’m glad I have a friend to play with.../ ...on rainy days. / Someone to get in trouble with... / ...when I feel like playing tricks. / Someone to dance and laugh with... / ...when I am happy.” A lovely and heartwarming picturebook, highly recommended.

Booklist (March, 2009):

In this stirring picture book, dozens of lively, detailed scenarios show that friendship means bonding and loyalty—and also independence and freedom. First published in Germany, this title speaks to universal feelings and relationships, across generation, gender, race, class, disability, and place. In one scene, a boy has the courage to tell a girl the truth about herself, instead of laughing at her, as everyone else does. On another spread, an elderly woman holds a boy when he needs comfort, and she lets him go when he asks her to. Each immediate situation could be a story of its own, and kids can fill in their own experiences as they view each situation. A powerful offering that explores the difference between solitude and loneliness, and the human need for both connection and space, trust and independence.



Funny Face

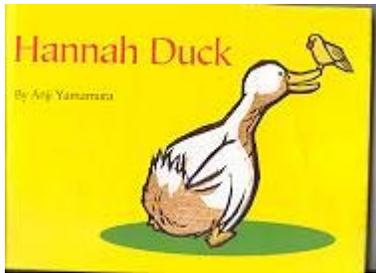
By Anna Walker

Curled Up With a Good Kids Book (September, 2009):

The only thing better than enjoying the board book entitled [*Funny Face*](#) myself is the reaction I received from a one-year-old and a three-year-old as I read it to them aloud and they mimicked the face described on the page.

Each page highlights a different face and is accompanied by a warm, scrumptious illustration of a character making it. Specifically, Sam is happy, Lucy is surprised, Milly is angry, and Joe is sleepy. Tess's face shows that she's scared, and Charlie's face is scrunched up tight so that he looks like a bunny. All of the characters are skilled at making a funny face, which is how the book concludes.

[*Funny Face*](#) is an adorable book that little ones will come back to again and again.

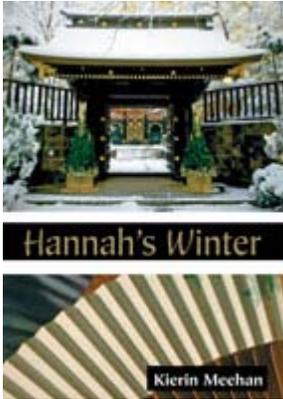


Hannah Duck

By Anji Yamamura

2009 Oneota Reading Journal (December 2009)

This book describes a duck that walks every Sunday to experience the outside world, but she finds she does not enjoy these walks because she is nervous about going into a park with various other animals. One Sunday, she admits this problem to her friend Gigi, who is a parakeet. Gigi decides to join Hannah on her walk to make her feel better about meeting new animals. This is a sweet story about making new friends and valuing the old ones.



Hannah's Winter

By Kierin Meehan

Kirkus Reviews (February 15, 2009):
(STARRED)

Twelve-year-old Australian Hannah has been sent to spend the winter with Japanese family friends in Kanazawa so she can improve her ability to speak the language. She and 13-year-old Miki find a written message in an old box of papers. It outlines a series of mysterious steps that both girls quickly realize they are inadvertently following, after a nighttime tour of a temple and a strange encounter with a singing monk. As readers raptly follow the deepening fantasy, they will find themselves flipping pages time after time to reread the message. Determined to fit in, Hannah makes a few humorous missteps (bowing self-consciously and smacking her head on a table that's in the way), all of which keep the tale lighthearted and make her seem endearingly real. Meehan utilizes beautifully crafted similes and metaphors as she creates a loving and detailed portrayal of Japan and its people. Told in the first person, the tale remains so grounded in reality that it never defies belief. A fine fantasy debut (first published in Australia in 2001). (author's note) (Fantasy. 10 & up)

School Library Journal (March 2009):

When Hannah's writer mother travels from Australia to Japan to do research for a new book, she takes her reluctant daughter with her. While Liana travels throughout the country, the 12-year-old stays with her mother's friends, the Maekawas. She is able to converse with the family as she spent time in Japan when she was younger and has been studying Japanese at school. Hannah is soon swept up in a mystery with her new friend, Miki Maekawa. Opening an old toy box, the family finds a riddle that appears to be an appeal for help from 'the ocean boy,' a lost soul seeking peace. The girls and their friend Hiro set out to solve the riddle, traveling to markets, temples, shrines, and an ancient castle and meeting people from the past who aid or hinder their quest. Following the realistic and likable characters on their journey gives insight into the beauty of Japanese culture and tradition, and the fast-paced action as the children figure out the clues will appeal to many readers.

Travel for Kids (March 2009):

A mysterious note in an antique box leads Hannah and her friend Miki on an adventure to search for a restless ghost, a samurai child from the past. Japanese legend and local color are beautifully interwoven in this contemporary story.

The Horn Book (May/June 2009):
(STARRED)

Twelve-year-old Hannah gets dragged to Japan by her mother, who's researching Japanese gardens. At least Hannah speaks the language, having lived there briefly as a child and studied Japanese at school in Australia. But nothing has prepared her for what awaits her in the town of Kanazawa, whose narrow streets and wooden shops make her feel she is "traveling backwards in time." While her mother crisscrosses the country, Hannah stays with the Maekawa family, whose daughter, Miki, is thrilled when Hannah discovers a ghost—a young boy who needs their help. Australian author Meehan shrouds her first novel in a quietly creepy atmosphere: a Ninja Temple with a dramatic, bloody history; a town white and silent with snow; a house in which unexplained breezes suddenly occur. The spooky mood, however, is lightened with humor—the ghost hurls donuts at Hannah and writes on her mirror with sunscreen; the three elderly sisters whom Hannah, Miki, and neighbor-boy Hiro encounter one stormy afternoon are as mysterious but as unthreatening as *A Wrinkle in Time's* Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Who. Hannah helps free the ghost boy to finally join his loved ones; Miki's aunt is reunited with the man she loves; and Hiro's missing scientist father is found (more L'Engle!) in a comedic ending featuring Hannah's eccentric, boisterous mum. The happy reunions provide a satisfying conclusion to this entirely accessible, but agreeably exotic, ghost story. j.m.b.

Family Time Magazine (March 2009):

When you have a reluctant reader, you are willing to try anything to get that child to read. My 12-year-old is not a big reader which is disappointing to me because I love books and have since I was a child. There is nothing I love better than crawling up with a book. For my son, we have tried mysteries, wizardry and anime. The books of Harry Potter, Narnia, and Naruto grace out shelves.

While there is excitement about all of these books, he only ever gets half way through. The ones that have held his attention the most is the Naruto Anime, so much so that he has requested the many books in the series.

But that is the exception and not the norm.

However a new book, Hannah's Winter, came across my desk lately that intrigued me. The story is set in Japan and tells the tale of an Australian girl who must solve the mystery of a ghost so that he can rest in piece.

Hannah is staying with the Maekawas while her mother is researching a new garden book. But weird things start to happen; a ghost boy keeps appearing helping Hannah on her quest. While her Japanese family accepts the ghost, he and other ghostly events can be unsettling for Hannah.

Now my son found this book and expressed interest right away. He has continued to read the novel out loud to me at night during our before-bed routine. I know part of the attraction is his interest in Japan. One of the great aspects of this book is the insight to

Japanese culture and social mores. Why father gets a taste for forbidden food is as interesting as the need to change shoes from outside to inside to bathroom.

However I would also like to think that the expressive writing is the other reason for his enjoyment. The descriptions are not too flowery while putting you right in the middle of the scenes. I felt the woods in the mountains and watched with interest the little jets of water in the streets that helps melt the snow.

Kierin Meehan has given us a taste of Japan that is tangible. Kids going to school and visiting their aunt, who lives in the spiritual world as much as she does the physical, at her coffee shop is as real as our lives.

If it takes a book like this to get my son reading, and reading out loud which will improve his skills in the long run, then I am all for it. (SIC)

A Fuse #8 Production (July 1, 2009):

I run a bookgroup for homeschooled kids between the ages of 9 and 14 out of my library. They're good kids and voracious readers but they serve as a strange litmus test of what children out there are reading and enjoying today. I often will bring them new books out of curiosity and once in a while, they surprise me with their insights. For example, I got a bunch of Kane/Miller books in the other day so I spread `em out on the table to see who bit. Considering how jaded I am in general, I assumed that the classy cover bereft of even a hint of glitter would make little to no impact on them. How wrong I was. One of my girls zeroed in on Hannah's Winter and plucked it up right there and then. For a fantasy, Kierein Meehan's novel sports a pretty tasteful and serene cover. Next week my homeschooler was back, and she informed me in no uncertain terms, "It's really good." From the horse's mouth. Who was I to argue? Her vote plus the starred Kirkus review this book has garnered were enough to get me reading it as well. And darned if she wasn't right all along! Steeped in extensive details about modern small town Japanese life, Hannah's Winter is like nothing out there on American bookshelves for kids. Got a kid who loves fantasy? Got a kid that loves Japan? Meehan delivers the goods in spades. Worst. Mother. Ever. Maybe that's a bit harsh. But believe you me, Hannah is not feeling particularly charitable towards her mom when she finds herself picked up from Australia and left in Kanazawa, a city on the west coast of Japan's largest island, Honshu. Forced to stay with one of her mom's friends and a girl roughly her own age, Hannah quickly finds herself immersed in an entirely new world. The Maekawas are nice people who run a paper shop. When Mr. Maekawa receives a mysterious box containing a piece of paper with instructions on it, Hannah suddenly finds herself plunged into a historical mystery and the ghost of a young boy. With her friend Miki and the boy next door, the three kids work to decipher the riddle and help the ghost, even if it means going against an unknown evil. An extensive Author's Note gives further information on Kanazawa and offers commentary on the real life places and people mentioned in the book.

The crazy thing about this book is that in spite of its fantasy elements, this is the kind of story fans of realistic fiction will also dig. Meehan has a dead keen talent for conjuring up the feel of different places, temperatures, colors, and sights. You don't just get a sense of Japan in this book. You live it. You're there. Heck, on top of that I've hardly ever read a book that did as good a job at describing wet snow. Meehan has conjured it up perfectly here, getting down its dampness and the sheer annoyance of slush. Or when discussing having to take off your shoes in a poorly heated building, "my feet snap-froze to blocks

of ice as soon as we took off our shoes." Slightly less keen is her skill with people and their emotions. I'm not saying Meehan is bad at them or anything. Certainly Hannah is a three-dimensional character, full of sparkle and energy. I think it's just that when compared the love lavished on the setting, Meehan's strength clearly lies in putting you in a character's eyes, if not shoes.

The written language itself serves as sufficient enticement for picking this book up, I think. I took particular pleasure in sentences like, "Its light quivered across walls and floors, across the other papery patterns and shapes around it, bending their sharp edges and colors into hazy uncertainty." Or how about this look at a city's downtown area during snowy dusk: "Along the footpaths, tiny gold lights shone from spindly, naked branches of thin trees, like delicate hands in black jeweled gloves."

As with any book that takes place in another country, there is the little matter of communication. But the language barrier is cleverly covered here by allowing Hannah to be proficient in speaking Japanese (her mother taught her). Just not at writing it. Of course there is the occasional moment when I'm not entirely certain if there's a Japanese equivalent for what she says. For example, there may well be a way of saying, "No problems, Mr. S" in Japanese, but it sounds pretty particular to English for my tastes. This book was originally published in Australia, a fact that you can mostly forget. However, there are a couple moments when Hannah's speech (and she is Australian herself, remember) utilizes words or phrases not usually thrown about in American conversations. There may be some American kids that can parse the sentence, "Wild Wattle is the world's pongiest," or "She's like David Suzuki and Ita Buttrose rolled into one," but it's definitely not a given. I liked that, though. I like it when publishers bring in books from other countries and don't Americanize the speech. It gives the books a distinctive flavor when they contain the occasional Australianism. Wakes `em up.

The homeschooler I handed this book off to left me a note in the front when she gave it back to me. In it, she mentions that the author got the Japanese character for winter slightly wrong. The character appears at the beginning of each chapter and, according to my twelve-year-old source, lacks two little slash marks. However, due to the fact that this is my only source of Japanese written know-how, you will need to consult with your own expert in the field to determine whether or not this is correct. I trust her, but suspect there might be another reason why the character looks the way it does.

With the rise of manga amongst kids today, fascination with Japan has reached an all-time fever pitch amongst our tween and adolescents. I know kids who study the language with the sole dream of someday getting to visit Japan themselves someday. But if I look on my library's shelves, I don't see much of anything speaking to this need. How many contemporary novels for kids can you name that take place in Japan? The pickings are slim to none. This book stands as a delight, mixing realism and fantasy in a believable fashion. There is a need for this title on our library's shelves. Those kids meant to find it, will. Like nothing else you can name.

Notes on the Cover: As I mentioned before, I didn't think this was an effective cover, but apparently it acts as catnip to those kids already thrilled with all-things Japan.

A Chair, A Fireplace and a Tea Cozy (September 2, 2009):

he Plot: Hannah, 12, is staying with friends of her mother in Kanazawa, Japan. It's supposed to be an opportunity for Hannah to polish her Japanese language skills. Instead, it turns into an adventure to help a ghost.

The Good: Japan and Hannah's Japanese family are never portrayed as the "exotic other." Hannah's parents, and Hannah, had lived in Japan when Hannah was a toddler; Hannah continued studying Japanese back home in Australia. Her mother, a horticulturist and writer, is visiting Japan to write about gardens so believes this is the perfect opportunity for Hannah to improve her Japanese skills. Meehan studied and taught Japanese and lived in Japan; her love and respect for Japan, its culture, history, and language shines through. When Hannah is at a local festival, her reaction is open, enthusiastic: "wonderful smells wafted past." Not exotic, not different, not strange -- just, simply, wonderful. Meehan also avoids stereotypes in describing the physical appearance of the family Hannah will be staying with. Miki, the 13 year old girl, "had an oval face and a long nose and her grandmother's wicked black eyes." As for Aunt Yukiyo, "[t]he first thing that struck me [about Aunt Yukiyo] was that she looked like a movie star. Her face was perfectly symmetrical, pale skin, jet-black hair. People who look like Snow White and not like a garden gnome are so lucky." (Hannah thinks of herself as a garden gnome).

What else?

Meehan's description of people captures personality in a handful of words; here is Hannah, talking about her mother: "But if it's logical my mother won't do it. She's opposed to logic and common sense. If there were street marches protesting against logic, she'd be at the front of the crowd carrying the biggest banner."

Hannah and Miki find a mysterious verse in a box of old toys and soon after, a ghost starts to haunt the family. This is a great middle grade story; Hannah and Miki are 12 and 13, so at just the right age for younger kids who want to read up. The story is mysterious and also logical; and the girls (along with a neighborhood boy) have to take action, decode things, figure it out. There is some help from the grown ups; but there is just enough autonomy.

Having finished this, I really want to visit Japan and especially Kanazawa. Books are going to make me go broke; not from buying them, but from all the places I want to visit (and food I want to eat) after reading them. There are some delicious doughnuts described in this book. Yum.

Charlotte's Library (September 19, 2009):

"...this medicine is so powerful that it can warm cold stone and make dragons happy. Keep it safe, keep it with you. The time of the deep snow is coming and you may find it useful." (page 141)

The time of the deep snow is coming...and I read faster and faster, caught up in a haunted Japan where three children are following a trail of clues that will bring peace to the ghost of a restless boy. Cold winds are blowing, and a malevolent presence is fighting against them. But strengthened by delicious donuts, and guided by a myriad of wonderful, magical signs and coincidences, they will prevail...

12 year-old Australian Hannah has been left to stay with a Japanese family while her eccentric mother searches for the secret gardens of Japan. When a surprise delivery arrives at the family's stationary shop (the father is a collector of antique paper and ephemera), Hannah and Miki, the daughter of the family, find an ancient message--a

riddle that tells how they can help "the ocean boy." Following the clues the riddle gives them, the girls, along with Hiro, a boy with his own sad past, set out to bring the ocean boy (a slightly rascally, donut-throwing ghost) back to his family. From the temple of secrets to the place where the old mountain god waits, they travel through a magical, story-filled Japan, where the deep snows of winter are falling...

"We say western Japan lies in the east's shadow. Perhaps in our winter dark, the screens between past and present thin and weaken, and ghosts slip more easily between the two." (page 39)

This is an utterly wonderful book. If it doesn't make you want to go to Japan, nothing will. It has magic in spades, yet the fantasy elements are set in a funny, matter-of-fact story that even the non-fantasy reader should enjoy.

Here's one of my favorite bits:

"Granny," said Okaasan, "today I don't want to hear one word about souls or ghosts or small samurai boys. Not one more word. It's bad enough that the great suit of armor in the living room has been blowing out yellow smoke for the past hour. I don't mean I don't like the samurai, because I do. But why does his smoke have to smell? I'm not saying it's not a good smell, it's a little like freshly cut timber. I'm just saying that if he must blow smoke around, I'd prefer it was odorless." (p 153).

I love this book. Give it to your older middle school child who loves fantasy, who loves things Japanese, who loves stories of travel. Read it yourself. Appreciate the appendix, which gives a nice historical and cultural background to the story. Go to Japan and find a donut shop.

Note on the cover--this might appeal to kids already drawn to Japan, but it gives No Clue that this is a fantasy book. They should have put a dragon on it. I don't much care for the Australian cover either.

Other reviews: A Chair, a Fireplace, and a Tea Cozy, A Fuse #8 Production, and at 3T News and Reviews, a blog where three library turtles share their thoughts...It's interesting to see how people pick up on different things in the same book. For Liz at Tea Cozy and Betsy at Fuse #8, the main strength of the book seems to be its portrayal of Japan. From Liz: "Japan and Hannah's Japanese family are never portrayed as the "exotic other." From Betsy: "Meehan has a dead keen talent for conjuring up the feel of different places, temperatures, colors, and sights. You don't just get a sense of Japan in this book. You live it." Atlas the Turtle, on the other hand, wrote that "The first part of the book begins to feel like a travel guide, trying to cram in as many Japanese words and cultural tidbits as possible."

But none of these reviews mention the haiku-loving dragon.

MultiCultural Review (Fall, 2009):

Hannah's mother drags her to Japan from Australia so that she can research her latest horticultural masterpiece. While her mother writes her book about the endlessly colorful and exotic Japanese foliage, Hannah will be living with the Maekawa family in Kawanza, outside Osaka, who own a stationary store. "Paper is a source of history and wisdom." This belief will begin Hannah's adventure not only through life in Japan, but also through a mysterious old script regarding an ocean boy who needs help.

With the help of her new friends, Hannah sets out to discover more about this ocean boy. His name is Kai, but he must be long gone now. How could Hannah, Mikiko, and Hiro possibly help him now? With every new clue, the mystery gets deeper and deeper, like the ocean, its possibilities and its dangers. What happened to Kai and who was he really? Perfect for 10-14 year olds who love culture, writing, and mysteries, *Hannah's Winter* holds surprises all the way to the last ink drop. Who wouldn't want to know how a good story ends?

Washington Parent (December 2009)

Australian teen Hannah balks at her mother's plan to park her with family friends in a Japanese port city while Mum does horticultural research across the country. Soon, though, Hannah finds herself curious about this place of "splintery rain," Buddhist temples and frog fetchers, a place that also harbors a small, determined ghost. One of the greatest charms of the book is the Japanese family's calm, accepting manner toward the ghost, who writes with sunscreen on Hannah's mirror and lobs doughnuts at her. "Shouldn't we be doing a tiny bit of PANICKING?" asks a dismayed Hannah. As Hannah and her young Japanese hosts piece together clues to help the phantom "ocean boy," they encounter a haiku-loving dragon and a strange diary from 1840. By turns eerie and impish, this tale is perfect for a solstice read under the covers.

Paper Tigers (December 2009)

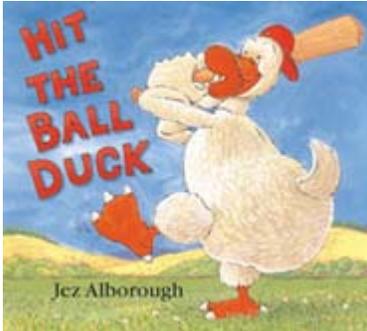
Japan on a quest for plants, Hannah is staying with family friends, the Maekawas, in a fictional area of Kanazawa, on the west coast of Honshu, Japan's largest island, in order to improve her Japanese. Hannah would have preferred to stay at home in Australia but the opportunity for her to improve her already decent knowledge of Japanese was too good to miss, at least as far as her mother was concerned! However, an outbreak of flu shuts down Miki Maekawa's school so the opportunity for formal learning becomes limited. This is where the adventure really begins and Hannah actually learns a lot more about Japanese history and culture than she bargained for: a mischievous spirit requiring their help seems to have found his way into their midst, along with a box of antique curios that is a seemingly insignificant portion of a parcel sent to Miki's father by a fellow antique Japanese paper collector. All the girls' time is now devoted to solving the mystery of the cryptic poem they have found in the box (and usefully quoted for reference at the beginning of the book), and they gradually realise that there are also malevolent spirits about, who are trying to make them fail.

Hannah and Miki are joined by Hiro, a boy who lives across the street and who has his own family mystery, in this case a missing father. Their quest leads them, among other places, to the local fortress, a remote shrine, a traditional tea house and a magical frog pond: and as they delve deeper into the mystery, it becomes every more apparent that Hannah herself is a focal point for everything strange that is happening.

Despite the supernatural elements in the plot, Kierin Meehan weaves a perfectly credible tale, full of intrigue and drama. Hannah's narrative voice is humorous and at times self-deprecating, so that her audience will genuinely empathise with her as she tries not to commit social gaffes; puzzles her way through the riddle poem; and seeks to define her own central role in the mystery. Along the way, readers are introduced to a delightful array of characters; encounter campaigning for the protection of bears; collude in the

long-overdue dénouement to a love story, and absorb some fascinating cultural details about both ancient and modern Japan, without ever feeling lectured at. By the end of the story, past and present merge in a satisfying climax to what is a very exciting read.

Hannah's Winter is a gripping read that will stay with readers long after they have finished the book – and will probably also fill them with a desire to go and explore Japan in wintertime for themselves.



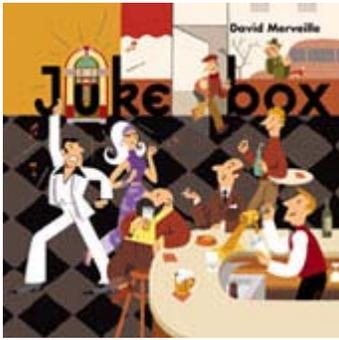
Hit the Ball Duck

By Jez Alborough

Swon Libraries (November 2009)

Duck, goat, sheep, and frog go to the park to play baseball. Duck hits the ball and it gets stuck in a tree. In an attempt to get the ball down, the bat and glove also get stuck in the tree. The four friends cooperate with each other by standing on each other's shoulders to stretch tall enough to get the baseball items back. But before they can reach high enough they tumble down shaking both the ground and the tree. That causes the bat, ball, and glove to come free. Frog catches the ball on its way down and duck is OUT ending his turn at bat.

The simple text and colorful illustrations are sure to delight the young reader. The detail in the expressions of the characters show clear emotions which give feeling to the text. The book can also be used as a good example of cooperation as the four friends work together to solve their problem.



Jukebox

By David Merville

Teaching Tolerance (Spring 2009):

Jukebox (\$14.95), by David Merville, illustrates many genres of music from opera to hip hop to jazz. This practically wordless book illustrates that music reveals as much about the people who listen to it as it does about those who make it. (Grades PreK-6)



Minji's Salon

By Choung Eun-hee

Reading Matters (SCIRA) (Winter 2008):

When Minji's mother goes to the salon to get her hair done, Minji uses her imagination and her dog to create her own beauty salon at home. The images show parallel stories taking place with accompanying text that speaks to both. For example, one page shows the stylist of Minji's mother mixing colors to dye her hair, while Minji is shown mixing flavors of ice cream. The text on this page reads, "The colors must be mixed carefully. (No tasting allowed.)" (unpaged) The illustrations complement the text by expressing Minji's artistic creativity. For instance, there are splashes of paint on many pages.

Book Links (January 2009):

While Mother visits the beauty salon, a young Korean girl creates her own salon at home for the benefit of the family dog. Brief text and parallel illustrations mirror Mother and Minji's progress from start to finish, reminding readers that imagination is universal. Other titles with Korean settings include Hyun Young Lee's *Something for School* (Kane/Miller, 2008), Yoo-duck Kwon's *My Cat Copies Me* (Kane/Miller 2007), and Hyun-Joo Bae's *New Clothes for New Year's Day* (Kane/Miller, 2007).

Teaching Tolerance (Spring 2009):

When Minji's mother visits the local salon to get her hair done, Minji decides to open a salon of her own. *Minji's Salon* (\$15.95), by Eun-hee Choung, celebrates the power of imagination. (Grades PreK-3)

Roundtable Reviews (March 2009):

Minji's mother is going to the beauty salon to get a make over and while she is gone Minji decides that she can open her own play salon at the same time. She takes a look at her little dog and says, "Good morning, madam. What would you like today?" She imagines that is just what the stylist is asking her mother at the salon. It's going to be a great day at Minji's Salon!

She offers different styles, wigs and even offers the choice of hair coloring for her dog to think about. It's getting messier by the minute, but the end product will be superb. "What do you think?" Of course the dog isn't going to answer, but Minji is proud of her work. Her mother will be home soon and what will she think?

This is an adorable imaginary playtime story. Minji wants to be just like her mother and, like many little girls, reenacts things her mother does or things that happen to them (even

if there is a huge mess in the process). On one side of the page we see Minji's mother at the salon and on the opposite we see Minji pretending to be the stylist. It is a wonderful story of playtime and patience on the part of a parent. If your child has a Barbie styling head, this book would be the perfect accompaniment!

Paper Tigers (April 2009):

Minji's mother has gone across the street to get her hair done. Minji and her dog wait outside peering in at the window...but not for long!

While Mom gets a very neat cut and color in the predictable and very grown-up salon, Minji experiments at home with a fairly cooperative client (the dog) and whatever salon supplies (ice cream, water colors) she can find around the house.

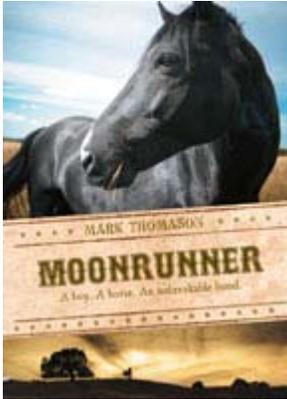
"You have to be patient," Minji tells her dog who is happily slurping ice cream from the container, some crayon rollers dangling from the fur on her ears, "beauty takes time."

Meanwhile Mom relaxes, eyes closed, on the facing page as her hair is expertly colored and curled. The two narratives run parallel through the book and much of the humor is relayed by Minji's running dialogue to her "client", which is always perfectly attuned to what the stylist would be saying to Mom at each stage of her normal salon experience. Minji has obviously observed the process carefully in the past.

While we see a little evidence that Mom's artiste-stylist sometimes colors outside the lines (some splatters on the shelves, drips over the bowl of dye), he is very restrained and professional when it comes to interacting with the client. Minji's boundless creativity, on the other hand, sometimes leaps the page border and winds up in a clump below the frame of Mom's nice, neat experience.

Minji works hard throughout her mother's appointment, her long-suffering canine pal loyal to the end. Mom's new do is a smashing success, and she leaves the salon with a lilt in her step. What will she think of Minji's efforts when she gets home???

This lively first picture book from Korean author/illustrator Eun-hee Choung is a must for little girls who are fascinated by what happens when Mom visits the hairdresser – and who would perhaps relish the opportunity to do some experimenting themselves. Family pets beware! Minji's Salon is so much fun, I'm looking forward to Choung's next offering, if not, perhaps, another book featuring the delightful Minji.



Moonrunner

By Mark Thomason

School Library Journal (June, 2009):

In the 1890s, Casey and his parents immigrate to Australia, to a homestead that they inherited from his grandfather. The 12-year-old finds the change difficult. He is bullied at school, and he misses his baseball team in Montana and his horse. Then he happens upon a magnificent wild stallion, and he is determined to befriend the brumby, whom he names Moonrunner. When the stallion is captured and resists all attempts to tame him, Casey knows that he has to save the horse and return him to the wild. This well-paced story effectively portrays the family's struggles. Casey is a strong, engaging protagonist whose interactions with the other characters are believable and interesting. His determination to defend both Moonrunner and another horse from an abusive owner will resonate with readers.

Kirkus Reviews (January 15, 2009):

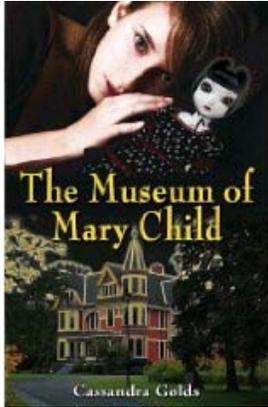
It's the 1890s, and Casey and his family have just moved to the Australian outback from Montana. Casey's had to leave his horse and his friends behind, and now he has to ride an old mule to school, where he is teased mercilessly. Casey and his parents—clones of Ma and Pa Ingalls—strive to make their way in their new country, and it's the wild brumbies (Australian mustangs) that help him most. Casey's kind of a finagler: He drives a bargain with a wealthy rancher, acquiring a beautiful mare when she loses a race, makes a bet with the school kids around baseball (a new sport to them) and ultimately—and hugely implausibly—"negotiates" with the wild stallion he's named Moonrunner for the care of his mare and her colt. This portrait of Down Under pioneer life is built around a love of horses. There is almost enough hardship to give a sense of reality, but often Casey's peculiar brand of salesmanship works a little too miraculously. Horse lovers will gulp this down, but for most the ride will be a walk instead of a gallop.

Travel for Kids (March, 2009):

It's 1894, and there's plenty of hard work for twelve year old Casey on his family's homestead, but Casey daydreams of the brumbies, wild horses that run free, especially one black stallion, Moonrunner. Wonderful local color of a vanished way of life.

Booklist (April, 2009):

This historical novel follows Casey, a 12-year-old transplant from Montana, as he adjusts to his new homestead in 1890s Australia. The transition is rough: Australia's wild, scrubby brush is nothing like Montana's open spaces; his family can't afford another horse, so he rides a mule to school; and the boys there bully him mercilessly. One evening he finds a herd of wild horses and immediately feels a connection to a fierce, free-spirited horse he names Moonrunner. Casey's visits with Moonrunner form a loose thread connecting the events of his life: enduring lean times, winning over the bullies, trapping with his father, working to buy his own horse, and so on. This slice-of-life story is short on plot and action, though Moonrunner's capture by a rancher provides some tension at the end. Though the setting is well realized, the narrative and the characters are often bland. Still, Casey's homesickness and trouble fitting in will resonate with young readers, as will his love for animals. This may appeal to boys looking for a tame western.



The Museum of Mary Child

By Cassandra Golds

Mysterious Reviews (July 1, 2009):

Synopsis (from the publisher): Heloise lives with her strict and forbidding godmother in an isolated cottage. Next door is a sinister museum dedicated to the memory of Mary Child, where visitors enter with a smile and depart with fear in their eyes. One day, Heloise finds a doll under her bedroom floorboards. Against her godmother's wishes, she keeps it. And that's when the delicate truce between Heloise and her godmother begins to unravel ...

Heloise runs away. She journeys far, but knows that one day she must return to uncover the secret at the heart of her being.

Review: In a prison far away and long ago lives a young man who as hope vanishes nearly completely, is visited by birds who instruct him to tell stories. The same birds visit a young girl whose hope has disappeared completely as she lies in a mental institution. However she does not listen to the birds, and at once they know they cannot help her. And so begins Cassandra Golds' *The Museum of Mary Child*. At the center of the story is a young girl, Heloise, of a nondescript age who lives with her godmother in a house completely lacking in any sort of love or compassion. Her godmother runs a museum on their property – a horrific museum that leaves its visitors shocked and appalled – *The Museum of Mary Child*. Heloise knows only this life – a life of solitude, fear, loneliness, and emptiness. She is forbidden to ask questions or speak with other children or even to enter the museum. Her reading is monitored so much so that her Bible is glued together so that she does not read parts her godmother deems unnecessary. But for the most part, Heloise accepts her station in life – simply because she doesn't know any better.

However, more than anything else, Heloise wants a doll; for although Heloise knows nothing about “love”, a doll can be loved and can love unconditionally. Much to her surprise, Heloise notices a floorboard that is not quite like the others, and hidden beneath the floor is a doll. Everything in Heloise's life changes at that very moment. *The Museum of Mary Child* is a story of stories. The lives of the prisoner, the ward in the mental institution, and Heloise are intertwined tighter and tighter as the novel progresses. With the help of the birds, Heloise realizes that “everything is in prison” and that only she can bring down the “bars” that confine them all.

Both intriguing and disturbing, *The Museum of Mary Child* captures its readers and thrusts them into a world that is both known and unknown to us all. The rather complex

story is intertwined beautifully around a central theme – the power of love. Although at times, particularly early on in the novel, the plot seems to drag, curiosity propels the reader ahead in a need to uncover the mystery behind Heloise and her connection to the museum and the unfortunate souls.

The character development in this novel is simply outstanding. Heloise is a multi-layered character. As the story begins, the reader is merely aware of the outer layer – the girl that is oppressed and forced to avoid anything that could be construed as A Waste of Time. However, as Heloise learns to love in spite of her godmother and escapes the ties that bind her, we are introduced to a deeper layer as she begins to make sense of her previous life. Heloise runs away with her doll to a new home and feels true love for the first time. “It was as if the blood in her veins had turned into something shining and magical.” Once Heloise learns that everything is in prison and that she is the only one who can bring freedom, we meet a more mature and wise Heloise, one that is willing to risk her new freedom and newfound family to free others. Finally, at the intense climax, Heloise is stripped of her layers and we are finally able to understand the real Heloise.

Along with Heloise, the reader is required to recognize the bars that imprison all of us. Golds incorporates remarkable symbolism throughout the novel that forces deep reflection while reading. At once, the reader suddenly realizes that this book isn’t just about Heloise, but rather it’s about the reader. We all are part of a story, and we all are bound by bars of some kind. Ultimately we all can begin to tear down those bars with something as simple, but yet as complex as love. *The Museum of Mary Child* is undoubtedly a book that can be read over and over again uncovering new meanings with each reading.

Kirkus Reviews (August 15, 2009):

(STARRED)

"Riveting allegory" sounds like an oxymoron, but this novel lives up to the billing. From a young man chained in prison, the story turns to Heloise, a child raised by an unloving godmother who runs a mysterious museum from which visitors emerge troubled and shocked. Raised without toys or playmates, her only book a much-censored Bible, Heloise takes refuge in her imagination. When she finds a doll hidden in her room and discovers the secret of the museum, her true journey begins. The riveting plot ranges far and wide, finally coming full circle. Along the way, readers meet dolls that come to life and dolls that don't; the Society of Caged Birds; a church choir of orphan girls; hate, suffering, joy and, most of all, love. Although the tropes are Christian, this is not an allegory of Christianity like the *Chronicles of Narnia* but of the love and the common humanity that underlie and connect all faiths. Beautifully written, this work by a seasoned Australian author revisits territory once owned by Robert Cormier: the enthralling moral fable. (Fantasy. 11 & up)

Kids Lit (August 31, 2009):

Heloise lives a lonely, subdued and severe life with her godmother. She is not allowed to have toys, not allowed to play, and must spend her time being constructive. Heloise yearns most of all for a doll and then she discovers a secret niche under a floorboard where a doll is hidden. She succeeds for some time in hiding the doll from her godmother, but when her godmother discovers the doll, she flies into a rage. Next door

to their house is the Museum of Mary Child, a place where visitors come but Heloise has never been allowed to enter. Her grandmother drags her there. Stunned by the revelations of the museum, Heloise flees her godmother's home with her doll in tow. Ending up in the city, Heloise is taken in by a choir of orphans, where she begins to learn about what life is about and to feel like a real little girl. But she cannot escape the mystery of her own upbringing for long.

This gothic tale owes a lot to folk tales with birds who guide humans, and a prince in prison. These elements weave themselves into Heloise's tale, offering glimpses of magic and wonder against the darkness of madness and solitude. Just as Heloise is a unique child, so this book is unique and fascinating. It doesn't fit into a genre niche neatly, offering so many different but well-worked elements. Because of this, it is a very fun read. Readers will be unable to figure out how the novel will end because they won't be sure if they are reading fantasy, gothic, horror or fairy tale – perhaps it is all of them at once.

Heloise is a great character with her fierceness and inquisitiveness. She carries this book forward, gradually learning along with the reader what her story is. It is a delicately balanced story, never moving too far into horror, never too far from its fairy tale elements. The setting is such a large part of the tale from the museum to the city itself and its madhouse and prison. Golds does a great job creating and sustaining a mood though the entire book along with a tension that makes it difficult to put down and impossible not to puzzle about even when not reading.

Recommended for tweens who are a little too young for *Twilight*, this book has quality writing and an intriguing premise. Children as young as ten who are looking for a little horror and creepiness will find a great read here. Appropriate for ages 10-14.

Publishers Weekly (September 28, 2009):
(STARRED)

Gothic and wonderfully creepy, Golds's (*Clair-de-Lune*) atmospheric story delights, offering meditations on the nature and power of love. Lonely Heloise wants only to be loved, but lives as if jailed in the house of her stern and sometimes cruel godmother. One day Heloise uncovers a beautiful doll, Maria, hidden under the floorboards of her room, and it is love at first sight. Heloise hides Maria from her godmother, whose personal Ten Commandments include forbidding play, "pretty clothes" and the possession of a doll, not to mention never uttering the word love ("We are all of us evil. And to love something evil is wicked," she professes). Once Maria is discovered, Heloise finds out the horrible truth about the museum that adjoins her godmother's cottage and is thrust down a strange and magical path that reveals how sheltered she has been ("Most people, she now knew, had heard music. Most people had seen pictures"). Readers will wonder throughout: who is Heloise really—or better, what is she? Aside from an occasional tendency toward sentimental prose, Golds's novel is pure fun, filled with mystery and nearly impossible to put down.

Curled Up With a Good Kids Book (October 2009)

In this truly original novel with a surprise fairy-tale ending, Australian author Cassandra Golds narrates the story of Heloise, an orphan girl who lives with her oppressive godmother next to a bizarre doll museum. Forbidden amusements - including dolls - Heloise studies a narrow range of subjects with a tutor, learns limited parts of the Bible, and sews for charitable causes.

When Heloise finds a doll, Maria, under the floorboards, she begins to comprehend the meaning of love, but does not yet fully understand it. After her godmother discovers Maria, Heloise learns that the museum is filled with the horror of rag dolls with twisted, over-sewn faces created by her insane mother, Mary Child.

A flock of fantastical birds (The Society of Caged Birds) guides Heloise as she runs away from this nightmare into the caring arms of a choir director and her Christian chorus of orphan girls. Finally safe and secure, Heloise gradually learns to trust and form friendships, yet she feels a longing to somehow help Mary Child. Guided once again by the birds, Heloise discovers a mysterious prison underneath the church next to her new home.

In the prison, she meets a young man, a prisoner with whom she shares stories; stories of both their lives and that of Mary Child. The holes in their lives become filled when Heloise must return to her godmother and forgive all the years of cruelty for a greater love.

With the exposition introducing a prince and another girl living in a madhouse, Heloise's story gradually knits these separate threads together to create a positive message of love and forgiveness. Elements of fantasy, an intimation of times gone by, and an underlying base of faith unite to create an unforgettable story with striking images of both suffering and love.

My seventh-grade reviewing partner found the prologue puzzling, yet ultimately fell in love with the multifaceted plot, well-rounded characters, and intriguing conclusion. Girls who like mystery with a smattering of horror will enjoy *Change-up*, provided they have the patience to persist through the early accounts of the key characters.

Charlotte's Library (October 29, 2009)

Writing a review of **The Museum of Mary Child**, by [Cassandra Golds](#) (Kane Miller, 2009, 329pp, for readers 10ish on up) is a bit daunting. I somehow want to convey just how much I enjoyed this book without spoiling it at all. I hope I succeed, because I think this book is rather special...

A long while ago, near a city that isn't a real city, a girl named Heloise lives next door to the Museum of Mary Child. She has never been inside it. Her godmother, cold and unloving, shows visitors through it, and always the visitors leave disturbed and shaken. Heloise who is not allowed to have friends. She is not allowed to play. She is not allowed to know the meaning of love--her bible, the one book she can read, has been edited, and pages glued together, to keep her from anything that speaks of that forbidden subject. But one day, hidden under the floorboards of her room, she finds a doll. And, having at last found something to love, something that needs protecting, Heloise is about to escape. Her escape will take her into a family of orphaned girls, trained as a church choir (I loved this part most of all). It will bring her into contact with envoys of the Society of Caged Birds, who fly through the city at night doing good deeds. It will take her to the prison,

and the mad house next door to it, and, at last, it will bring her face to face with what lies inside the Museum of Mary Child.

This book is many things. It is a fairy tale, and it is a Gothic horror story. It is a lovely story about a girl discovering who she is and growing up. It is a fantasy, with magic that is real. It is a little bit of a mystery. And at the book's heart is a story about the redemptive power of love, with gentle allusions to Christianity. All these elements are happening at the same time, like juggling balls flying through the air, but they are held together in coherent form by Golds' wonderful characterization of Heloise.

I was riveted, and lost track of time and space. I also had to occasionally work hard at suspending disbelief, and I remain uncertain about the ending. But boy, did I have a good time reading this one. It felt to me a little bit like Elizabeth Goudge crossed with Oscar Wilde's fairy tales...and if you think you might know what I mean, you will probably like this book very much!

Note on the cover: This is not what I would have chosen. The girl show looks far too modern to be Heloise, and the whole ensemble leans too far, I think, toward the Gothic end of things, and doesn't convey enough of the book's fairy tale-ness. At right is the Australian cover, which doesn't match my image of the book either...

The Museum of Mary Child has been nominated for the Cybils in the Middle Grade Science Fiction and Fantasy category, for which I am a panelist. Here are other two other reviews, at [Kids Lit](#) and [Sweet Trees](#).

PS: The museum is the creepiest museum I have ever read about. Anywhere.

PPS: Golds is also the author of *Clair-de-lune* (2006); after reading [this review](#) of it at the Guardian, it is high on my list of books to read after I have fulfilled my Cybils obligations!

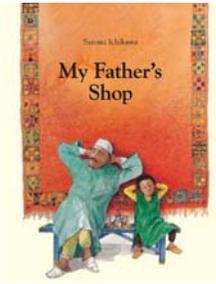
Kiss the Book Reviews (November 2009)

Golds, Cassandra *The Museum of Mary Child*, 329 p. Kane Miller, 2009. Heloise has been raised as a lonely child in a very strict household consisting of Heloise, her guardian, who is only referred to as Godmother, and Mrs. Moth, the housekeeper. No play is allowed, noise is not tolerated, and Heloise is more like a little adult than a child. Then Heloise happens upon a doll, hidden in the floor of her attic room and her world changes forever. With the help of the birds, Heloise walks all the way to the City to begin the second phase of her life. Circumstances, however, will drag Heloise into another world of mystery and she must confront her past in order to find closure. The cover of this novel perfectly compliments the gothic feel of its story. The old-fashioned feel may be a bit much for younger readers to embrace, but older readers who persevere will be rewarded in very unexpected ways. MS, HS – OPTIONAL. Cindy, Library-Teacher

The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books (December 2009)

Heloise's life in the care of her godmother, who rejects all love as a waste and a trap, is joyless and oppressive; Godmother even forbids Heloise the pleasures of books, dolls, and human contact with anyone other than herself and her equally dour housekeeper. When Heloise finds a doll hidden in the floorboards of her room, she lavishes her affection on it, but when her secret possession is discovered, Heloise also learns the

source of her godmother's hatred and fear: Heloise's mother, Mary Child, was quite mad, and the museum that her godmother oversees contains hundreds of Mary's cloth dolls, whose faces have been sewn over with tight black stitches and who have been unearthed from every conceivable hiding place and old house might offer. A frightened Heloise flees and finds aid and succor in the outside world, which eventually imbue her with the strength to face the remaining mysteries of her strange past. The sweetness of this tale of an unloved, cast-off waif who eventually finds affection and happiness blends with a full complement of the uncanny, and its prettily turned present-tense narration is edged with sufficient eeriness to send occasional shivers up the spine. Gothic sensibilities and conventions peek through a veil of Dickensian settings to gild a plot that is most reminiscent of a fairy tale, complete with avian helpers and a disguised and imprisoned prince. Though unlikely to appeal to a broad range of tastes, those who like it will really like it; think cult appeal for the nascent goth crowd.



My Father's Shop
By Satomi Ichikawa

Book Links (January 2009):

As a young Moroccan boy runs through the marketplace showing off a prized possession, he meets a wandering rooster and a collection of tourists who teach him what a rooster sounds like in each of their languages. Brightly colored illustrations highlight the sights and sounds of this multicultural bazaar.

Ladybug Magazine (May/June 2009):

This story takes place in the wondrous land of Morocco, where the sights and smells are as colorful and exciting as my scratch-and-sniff polka-dotted pajamas (some spots smell like strawberries, and some like pickles!) Mustafa is a young boy who works in his father's rug shop. One day, his dad discovers a hole in one of the rugs, and is upset because he can't sell it. But Mustafa takes the rug happily and runs out into the marketplace for his own adventure. There he meets a rooster who follows him around, as well as people from around the world who teach him how to speak like a rooster--in five different languages! For example, in French, a rooster crows like this: "Co-co-ri-co!" Finally, Mustafa makes his father very proud, but you must read the book to see how.

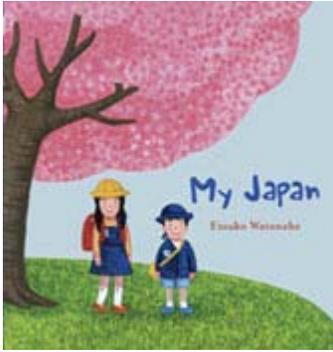
PaperTigers.org (June 2009):

Mustafa loves the beautiful carpets in his father's Moroccan shop. "They come in all colors of the world." And his father knows how to speak to the tourists when they come into the shop: "Bienvenue, hermoso, good price" are some of the things he says. One day Mustafa finds a hole in the center of a very beautiful carpet. His disappointed father agrees to give Mustafa the carpet if he will learn some foreign languages. Mustafa is thrilled, but it soon becomes obvious that he would rather be playing with his carpet than sitting through a lesson. He runs to the market to show the carpet to his friends. At the market he picks up some unexpected new skills, a new and unusual friend, and brings many new customers back to his father's shop.

The illustrator and sometimes author of more than 20 children's picture books including *Grandpa's Soup* and *Nora's Stars*, Satomi Ichikawa's vivid illustrations for *My Father's Shop* are a feast for the eyes, celebrating the joy of childhood with detail, nuance, and rich colors. From the lush carpets in his father's shop to the items for sale at the market, the pictures come alive on the page. This story of cross-cultural exchange from a Japanese writer who has lived her adult life as an expatriate in Paris has been recognized with an ASA Children's Africana Book Award and was listed on the Bank Street College

of Education Best Children's Books of the Year and the USBBY Outstanding International Booklist.

My Father's Shop is a lighthearted and richly illustrated story which celebrates friendship - old and new - and the delightful possibilities that come from sharing culture and language. The spirited Mustafa is a loveable character who shows readers that having fun can be productive and educational.



My Japan

By Etsuko Watanabe

Kirkus Reviews (February 15, 2009):

Originally published in France, this picture-book introduction does half the job. Seven-year-old Yumi shares information about home, her younger brother Takeshi, school, holidays and a summer visit to see grandparents. The vivid paintings have a naïve quality and include many objects, including Japanese and Western toilets, complete with diagrams of how they are used. In one spread, the kitchen is pictured on one side and small vignettes of various foods fill the opposite page. Some are familiar (hamburger and spaghetti), but without descriptions, other dishes will remain unknown to anyone who is not a Japanese foodie. Japanese translations of each heading are placed decoratively in upper-left corners, but without pronunciations. Illustrations of several origami projects appear, but the word itself is not used. Yumi tries to explain the writing systems, using the difficult word “ideogram” to explain kanji, and the syllabic hiragana system is shown. Photos of real kids playing with their electronic gadgets would have enhanced this fairly traditional description. With a little help from knowledgeable adults, this book may serve its purpose. (Informational picture book. 5-8)

Booklist Online (February 17, 2009):

Yumi, a seven-year-old Japanese girl, shows readers her home (bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom), her school, the public bath, a Tokyo subway station, and a street of shops in the city. In the next section, she introduces traditions related to the New Year, Girls’ Day, Children’s Day (or Boy’s Day), Tanabata (a traditional star festival), Undokai (Sports Day), and Shichi-Go-San (a festival for “three- and seven-year-old girls, and three- and five-year-old boys”). Finally, the book introduces Japanese forms of writing. Expanding the text, the paintings offer charming yet informative glimpses of a child’s world in contemporary, or near-contemporary, Japan. A typical spread includes a full-page painting facing a white page with a few lines of text and several small, captioned pictures. First published in France but created by a writer/illustrator who grew up in Japan, this picture book presents an appealing look at family and school life in her native country.

School Library Journal (May, 2009):

Yumi introduces readers to her country via this informational picture book. She starts with her bedroom, detailing her desk, lamp, bed (futon), closet, and school bag, and then takes readers through her kitchen, explaining what she and her family eat, and the

bathroom. Small illustrations of the featured items face a full-page, full-color picture of the room, and children can look for the individual objects in it. Yumi then shows her school and explains how things work there. Transportation, vacation times, and holidays and festivals are also described. There is an illustration of a public bath (which includes cartoonish nude figures from the rear). There are no detailed descriptions of the items. On the topic of food, for example, tiny renderings show dishes such as sushi, sukiyaki, and kare raisu, but there's no explanation of what they consist of or how to pronounce them. There are tidbits that may be interesting, such as the fact that the students all help to clean the school each day, and that they remove their shoes and change into slippers there. There are also samples of Japanese writing, with the hiragana characters included as well. This is an additional purchase, better for browsing than for gaining information.

Kids Lit (May 22, 2009):

This book provides a fascinating look into the life of a 7-year-old Japanese girl named Yumi. Readers get to see her house, her room, what school is like, the public bath, and the holidays she celebrates. There are so many things that are similar to our lives in the United States and so many that differ. The illustrations are friendly and offer the reader additional information. Personally, I am intrigued by the trapdoor in the kitchen floor that opens to an extra storage area. Children will find their own things to be intrigued about, ask questions about and explore. Most American children will be amazed by the concept of the public bath.

Watanabe does an excellent job of showing how similar we are and yet allowing readers to really see the differences in the societies we live in. The illustrations are done in a very welcoming style that invites readers to look closely at the details. This is a very nice introduction to Japan and its modern culture through the eyes of a child.

Recommended for children studying Japan or Japanese as well as children who are interested in other cultures. With its friendly, inviting style, this book is a welcome addition to any library.

A Chair, A Fireplace and a Tea Cozy (June 22, 2009):

The Plot: Yumi, seven years old, lives outside of Tokyo. She shares her life with the reader, from going to school to holidays.

The Good: Yumi presents her life in a matter of fact way, full of the details that readers love. Even the back cover gives information (Japan has over 3,000 islands).

Yumi's Japan is modern; when she shares the meals she eats, there is sushi, ramen, tonkatsu...and hamburger. And spaghetti. It is also traditional; during summer vacation at her grandparents, she wears a yukata.

The illustrations are bright and full of things to be discovered, some of which are explained (the process of taking a bath, where one washes before going into the tub) and some aren't explained (the kitchen shows storage in the floor, something I learned about from reading Apartment blogs.) Other details, such as those about the school days, are ones I've read in Here and There Blog, a snapshot look at Japan written for kids.

Kane/Miller publishes children's books from around the world. Guess where *My Japan* was first published? Wrong! France.

Great Kids Reads (April 13, 2009):

My Japan is a fabulous book about Japanese culture. Through bright illustrations, the reader is exposed to the ins and outs of current Japanese culture. Housing, food, holidays, and even social events such as going to the public baths. What is so neat is that it not only names and gives definitions of items, but it gives step by step instructions for rituals. I found it fascinating, even for adults. A great intro to current Japanese culture.

MultiCultural Review (Fall 2009):

My Japan is not the fictional telling of the exotic, stereotypical version of Japan. Neither is *My Japan* a dull non-fiction book full of facts but very little fun. *My Japan* is what Japan enthusiasts have been waiting for in a children's book – and informative and descriptive guide to life in Japan as told by a girl named Yumi. Yumi takes readers on a tour of her daily life. Everything kids would ask is shown through the detailed illustrations, such as the layout of a Japanese home, complete with Japanese names for items like school backpacks, clothes, decorations, and different types of food. Yumi makes sure that readers learn about her country's customs, but not by simply telling; she shows readers scenes from Japanese life, filled with colors, people, and the events and celebrations that make life in Japan special. *My Japan* ends by highlighting what so many of us are curious about, Japanese writing. Kids can practice writing and make a real connection to their own learning and what Japanese children learn about reading in school. Young readers will finish this book and want to know more – and maybe even start asking for their first passport.

Not Just for Kids (November 2009)

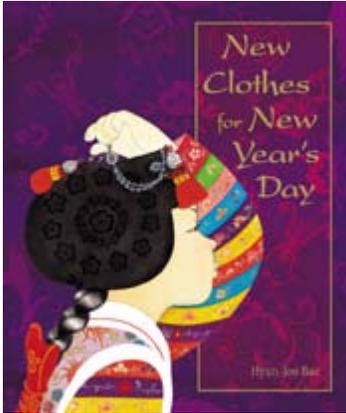
If young readers today know anything about Japan, I would speculate that their knowledge base consists of Pokemon, Hello Kitty, and Naruto. Possibly, if they are manga readers, they know that the Japanese read from right to left. And they might have heard of ninjas. But do they really have any idea just how different every-day life in Japan is from every-day life in the West? That even though children in Japan go to school, and like to shop, and go on vacations and play sports, that the details are simply different?

My Japan introduces readers to Yumi, a 7 year old girl living with her parents and younger brother in a Tokyo suburb. This is a bone-fide "informational" book. There is no narrative. The reader is given a look at the day to day activities and notable celebrations of a typical Japanese family. The first thing readers will learn is how compartmentalized everything is in Japan. Sometimes this compartmentalization is practical (separate rooms for men and women in the public baths,) sometimes it's functional (the picture of Yumi's mom getting dinner ready in the kitchen shows how every space is efficiently utilized for storage,) sometimes it's for uniformity (girls have red school bags, boys have black,) and sometimes it's just....here's that word again.....different (there are no street names in Tokyo--only district names.) Readers will also learn that Japanese students clean--and by "clean" I mean scrub--their school every day. They will learn that Japanese bathrooms have two types of toilets: a Japanese and a Western variety, and neither one really works like the ones in America. They will learn that 3 and 7 year old children have their own holiday (Shichi-Go-San,) that every public bath (which is not for cleaning yourself, by the way) seems to have a painting of Mount Fuji in it, and that there are three different

types of writing in Japan--two of which are presented at the back for ambitious readers to try and replicate.

Cultures are, of course, different from one another, which is what makes learning about them so much fun. But there is something unexpectedly unusual about *My Japan*, because on the surface, it doesn't look different at all. The cover of the book shows Yumi and her brother standing under a tree--just a couple of kids, like the audience at which the book is aimed. It's not until you start to read that you get the impression that the differences between Yumi's world and a Western child's world involve not just types of food or sleeping on a futon as opposed to a bed. They involve holidays evolved out of a feudal system of which we have nothing to compare. They involve knowing when and where to wear a kimono. They involve buying pet stag beetles at department stores (I somehow cannot imagine Macy's hopping on that bandwagon!) When you read this book you really get the impression of looking through the window at a foreign culture. If such an impression was made on an adult reader like myself, imagine the impact on the mind of child, curious and open to a different way of learning and living.

Yumi's seven year old life is rich with details to share and discover. And *My Japan* is nothing if not child-centric. The illustrations are full of smiling faces, toys and games, and easy to follow instructions for making paper chains and origami. While some pages are illustrated catalogs (thing's in the kitchen, things in the bathroom, necessities for school, to name a few,) others, like the the two page spread of an underground subway stop, are ripe with i-spy opportunities. And, just like the kitchen, every inch of the book is used efficiently: even the back cover provides a learning opportunity, with a map of Japan showing the five (of over 3000) largest islands which make up the country, as well as the 47 prefectures. This is a book to be revisited, because there is an amazing amount of information in here. It is compactly organized, cheerfully presented, and intriguingly different.

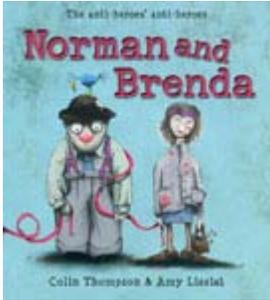


New Clothes for New Year's Day

By Hyun-Ju Bae

About.com Guide to Children's Books (January 22, 2009):

This charming picture book from South Korea is the story of a little girl who is getting ready to celebrate Solnal, the first day of the Lunar New Year, by putting on her special new holiday clothing. In words and artwork author and illustrator Hyun-Joo Bae portrays the little girl's joy in her new clothes as she carefully dresses herself in the colorful clothing, including a long crimson skirt, embroidered socks, rainbow-striped jacket, flowered shoes, furry vest, winter hat, and lucky bag. At book's end, there is more information about the Lunar New Year in Korea.



Norman and Brenda

By Colin Thomson

Illustrated by Amy Lissiat

Kirkus Reviews (January 15, 2009):

Norman and Brenda toddle separately toward middle age desperately lonely, believing they will never find a companion. When their pet goldfish and salamander abandon them, they give up all hope until a chance collision brings them together. These pitiable, ragged characters trudge across double-page panels in this pint-sized picture book, with Norman's story on top and Brenda's below. Lissiat's illustrations, sharp sketches amid washes of purples, blues, browns and grays, perfectly capture the bruised souls of two quiet, peripheral people. Simply told, their stories mirror one another, making readers aware of many ironic little brushes with potential happiness. The stacked graphic layout reinforces the unhappy characters' achingly close proximity to their future soul mate. Lyrical repetitions of language also echo between Norman's and Brenda's worlds, fairy tale-like. Though it's presented solidly from adult emotional perspectives, some teens will relish this realized romance between two unlikely ugly ducklings. This deeply affecting story makes clear just how elusive happiness can be, and how wonderful it is when you finally find it.

A Chair, A Fireplace and a Tea Cozy(June 17, 2009):

The Plot: Norman and Brenda live their own lives, waiting for life to begin, waiting for that someone. Will their paths ever cross?

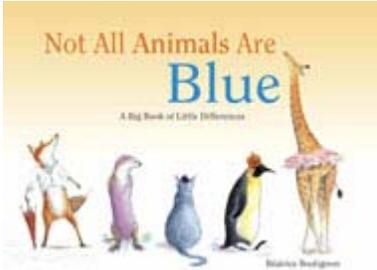
The Good: I wanted to read this after reading Betsy's review: "Norman and Brenda ain't sexy, but they're hopeful."

Norman and Brenda's stories are told at the same time; Norman on the top of the page, Brenda on the bottom. Both alone; both waiting; both yearning. Norman felt as if life had started without him. "Everyone else was having theirs, but his hadn't arrived yet."

Meanwhile, "Brenda felt as if life was always going on in the next room. If she went into the next room, it moved out into the garden."

Their paths always almost cross. Will these two ever find each other?

Like Betsy said, this is a book to give as a gift to grown-ups; especially grown-ups who need a little hope in their life; a reminder that happiness comes, just at different times for different people.



Not All Animals Are Blue
By Béatrice Boutignon

For Immediate Release Reviews – Kids (January 19, 2009):

The format used here makes for an unusual book, albeit a pretty interesting one. Initially I wasn't quite sure what to make of it, but the response from our test group was unanimous. The kids absolutely loved it! Their response coupled with the fabulous illustrations completely won me over.

Each page (twenty pages total) has five animals pictured together with a unifying phrase, such as Five Monkeys Hanging Around. Directly opposite the photo page are five statements or comments, which describe each animal individually. Some of the statements are simplistic, while others require more thought. The reader's job? Why, to match each descriptive phrase to the animal it pertains to. And this is a very fun job, indeed! Here, give it a try with Five Friends Caught in the Rain:

Who hates to get wet?

He's blowing away!

Whose umbrella shines like the sun?

He likes to feel the raindrops on his face,

But he just like the puddles.

Subtitled *A Big Book of Little Differences*, this is an interactive book meant to spark discussion about colors, movement, attitude and accessories. At the turn of each page, the children in our group were scrutinizing the drawings, eagerly awaiting each statement to be read aloud. They loved examining the tiny details that set each animal apart from the group. In addition to being adorable, this book is also very clever, and certainly meets its goal of discussion through discovery. A sure winner!

Publishers Weekly (1/19/2009):

Newcomer Boutignon, a French author/artist, invites readers to examine five animals on one side of the spread, read five descriptive sentences on the other, and determine which sentence describes which animal. Working in pencil and watercolor, Boutignon confers on her creatures an elegance that they maintain even when they are wearing flippers or their umbrellas are being blown inside-out. "Five Otters, Ready for the River," one group is labeled. Each wears a purple swimsuit, but they're all subtly different; one wears a two-piece swimsuit, another a suit with polka dots and so on. "A bathing cap!" reads a sentence. "She's practicing her diving," reads another. Children won't have any trouble matching words to pictures. Occasionally the sentences require the child to make a deductive leap—to decide which raccoon could be the most relaxed, for example, or to understand that the sentence "Look! Look what she got!" refers to the mouse shown taking a doll out of a box rather than the mouse choosing which present to open. Colored

fonts quietly key sentences to pictures. Absorbing, lasting entertainment for younger readers. Age 2–6.

Kirkus Reviews (2/01/2009):

Boutignon’s debut encourages an interaction among the text and the adult and child(ren) who are sharing it. A seek-and-find book of a different sort, each spread presents readers with five similar animals with slight differences in attitude, manner, dress, accessory, color or movement. Five statements encourage children to look closer and differentiate among them. The key word in each statement appears in a different color, and that color correlates to the answer. For instance: “He can’t sleep without his blanket.” The pink of the highlighted “blanket” matches the pink blanket in the illustration. Not all are that easy, challenging children to think in new ways and to use the process of elimination in their problem solving. The animals are rendered with whimsical precision in pen, pencil and oil on a clean white background, making their similarities and differences stand out all the more. Reminiscent of Judi Barrett’s *Which Witch Is Which?* (2001), illustrated by Sharleen Collicott, this is certain to stand up to repeat readings. While the delicacy of the illustrations limits audience size, smaller groups will surely enjoy it. (Picture book. 2-6)

The Horn Book (May/June 2009):

(STARRED)

Each double-page spread in this French import features a handful of animals (“Five Elephants on Their Way,” “Five Brand New Babies,” “Five Monkeys Hanging Around,” etc.) on the right-hand page, while on the left are five sentences (e.g., “Why is she wearing pajamas?”); young viewers get to figure out which sentence refers to which animal. Some of the answers are less obvious than others (which of five different animal tails is “elegant?”), but preschoolers will be up for the challenge, learning something about the process of elimination along the way. Hints are embedded in the sentences: a key word in each appears in color and in larger type. The softly colored animals drawn in pen, pencil, and oil possess just the right amount of detail and personality to intrigue young audiences, and while the small pictures won’t work for a large group, the book offers a lot to puzzle out (there are twenty groups of animals) for a child or two and an adult. j.m.b.

The Midwest Book Review (April 2009):

Not all Animals are Blue: A Big Book of Little Differences is a picture book designed to get little ones thinking about basics concepts. The simple color illustrations show five creatures on every other page, while the text on the opposite page has five sentences, each of which refers to a different animal. For example, one picture shows “Five Monkeys Hanging Around” on vines, while the five sentences read “Look, no hands/ Whose tail is wrapped around?/ Who is using both hands and both feet? / One hand and one foot? / One hand?” Young children can point to the appropriate picture while adults read aloud the sentences – and key words in the sentences are often highlighted with larger font and a special color. An excellent read-aloud book highly recommended for stimulating young minds.

Kids Lit (May 6th, 2009):

This French picture book is a treat in its innocence and freshness. Each double-page spread features one page with a line of small, detailed animals which faces a page with five descriptive phrases – one for each animal. Some of the matches are easy while others can be difficult until you match other animals first. Children will enjoy this book because of the cuteness of the animal figures and the challenge of the game.

Boutignon's illustrations are small, clever and make you want to look at them longer. Some animals have pieces of clothing on them, while others are more realistically portrayed. The mix of the two is a winning one. There are several figures that will steal your heart. One of my favorites is a very cuddly penguin wearing footie jammies. A book to read with one or two children so that everyone gets to pick the matching animals and enjoy the details of the illustrations. Perfect reading for 2-4 year olds.

School Library Journal (May 2009):

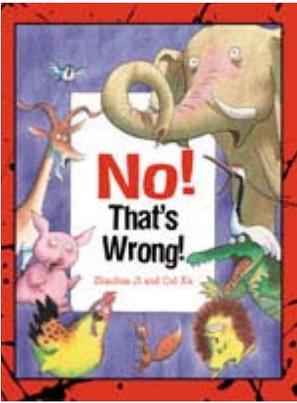
Each spread in this concept book presents five animals with slight differences. Five questions/statements require children to examine the picture carefully to locate the particular animal that best fits the description (e.g., "She loves to sunbathe"). Youngsters will need to pay attention to things such as color, movement, emotions, apparel, etc. The illustrations are appealing and exhibit a gentle humor as, for example, a giraffe that can't decide on just one necklace is shown wearing several while another giraffe stands gracefully en pointe, bedecked in a pink tutu. Some of the vocabulary is sophisticated ("flexible," "celebrities"), but the pictures provide context clues. A sweet but additional purchase.-

Education Resource Center, University of Delaware(June 1, 2009):

French author/illustrator Beatrice Boutignon has created a wonderful picture book for the preschooler. This is a book that requires the child to make connections between the sentences on the left hand page with the pictures on the right. Each right hand page pictures five animals doing different things or attired differently. The five statements on the left are one to one matches the child must make. Clues include enlarged, colored words in the sentences plus easily identifiable clothing or body posture on the animals. For instance, opposite the picture page of "Five Raccoons Making Mischief" are such questions as "Who has the best balance?" The word balance is larger and is blue; the statement matches a raccoon doing a hand stand and wearing a blue shirt. "He's just relaxing..." matches the raccoon propped up on his elbows with one knee up and wearing red shorts.

This very clean, crisp looking book will be a delight for interactive reading with youngsters. I took it home for a grandchild's visit where it was a favorite. Let's hope for more from this new contributor to children's books.

The publisher, Kane / Miller, is dedicated to bringing books from around the world to American children.



No! That's Wrong

By Zhaohua Ji and Cui Xu

Uplifting Picture Books that Don't Preach (2/13/2009):

Rabbit mistakes a pair of frilly red underwear she finds for a beautiful hat, and parades around happily wearing them. The other animals all try on her “hat”, too, enjoying it. Then a donkey in a suit tells the rabbit that it’s not a hat, it’s underwear (as does the unseen narrator). But wearing underwear just doesn’t work for the rabbit—her tail won’t fit and it makes her uncomfortable—so she goes back to what made her happy in the first place—thinking that it really is a beautiful hat. Children will delight in the rabbit’s mistaking underwear for a hat, and wearing them on her head.

Ji perfectly understands a young child’s sense of humor and what they will enjoy. I, myself, delighted in this funny story. Ji’s text is divided between the characters’ dialogue, shown within the illustrations, and the unseen narrator, filling in for the parent or adult, which is shown on the outside of the illustrations at the bottom of the page. The narrator/adult voice will add to the child reader’s sense of fun and hilarity, as the narrator/adult insists that the hat is not a hat, and eventually states that it’s underwear, while the rabbit continues to insist that it’s a hat. This works beautifully. Children will especially enjoy telling the rabbit that she is wrong since they have so many rules imposed on them, and are themselves trying to figure out what is right and wrong—but they’ll know that wearing underwear on your head isn’t something that you do. I’m sure kids will enjoy shouting out that the underwear is not a hat.

Ji uses wonderful humor throughout the book, from the various animals all trying the frilly red underwear on their heads as a hat, to the rabbit trying to stuff herself into the underwear after she discovers the correct way and finding that her tail doesn’t fit, to all the animals being shocked at seeing rabbit wearing the underwear correctly and insisting that it’s wrong and that it is indeed a hat as the rabbit thought, a hat—all the while ignoring the narrator who insists in vain that they are underwear. The tension between the unseen and unheard narrator and the animals also increases the humor of the story. The text is all dialogue, from the characters to the unseen narrator, and this helps the story move quickly and feel animated.

This is a very funny, light-hearted book, sure to bring laughter and giggles to young and old alike.

Xu’s bright, humorous illustrations really add to the hilarity and fun of the book. They show so much of what’s happening, often more than the text does, and greatly build on

the story. Xu uses bright gouache, with purple and turquoise frequently filling the background trees, and a lime green for the grass. The red frilly underwear stand out on every page, being the brightest spot of color and the only red. Xi includes a bonus illustration before the text of the story begins, showing the red frilly underwear flying off a clothesline, which helps readers understand where it came from.

Body language in the illustrations is strong, accentuating the characters' feelings. I love the rabbit's shocked body language when she first sees the way that people correctly wear underwear. Illustrations appear one per spread within a thin black border, though sometimes there are really two illustrations (one per page, with the backgrounds and border cleverly matching up), and sometimes there's one with the rabbit appearing multiple times in an illustration, interacting with different characters. This works well, and brings a seamless feeling to the book, while still bringing variety.

Xu makes the donkey who knows how underwear is really worn stand out from the other animals through his clothing. He wears a suit coat, tie, shirt, shorts, running shoes, and sunglasses, while all the other animals wear nothing at all until they put on their "hats". The donkey also brings out a book to illustrate his point, while the other animals aren't ever seen with books. This makes the donkey character more believable, and it also helps the reader believe that the other animals wouldn't recognize underwear.

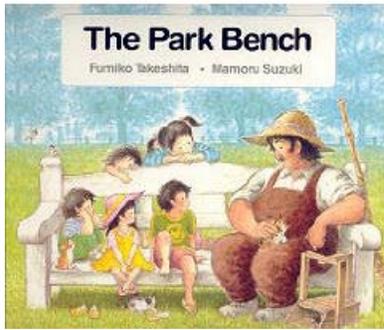
Xu captures the emotion and intent of the story text perfectly, building on it and enhancing it. In the second-to-last illustration, we see the rabbit pull up the illustration border as she decides that the underwear really is a hat. This adds to the sense that the rabbit is freeing herself from outside constraints, from what others think or insist is right, and is instead following her heart. In the last illustration, the rabbit is particularly joyous when she reclaims the underwear as a pretty hat, appearing huge on the double spread, leaping through the air as she holds onto her "hat." This is the only illustration without a border, the colors bleeding right to the edges of the pages, which gives the illustration a free feeling. These illustration help the ending feel very happy and joyful. The happiness and humor is increased by a bonus illustration on the end papers showing all the animals with various articles of clothing proudly on their heads, copying rabbit and adopting their own special hats. What a hoot!

No! That's Wrong! is an absolute delight to read. It is funny and entertaining, silly yet holding a good message—that you can believe in yourself and stick to it, and find your own personal happiness, no matter what others think or what the conventions are. And in so doing, you might even set a trend! If you're looking for a picture book to bring good feeling and laughter, or to encourage readers to be themselves, this is it. Get a copy for anyone who's been down in the dumps and needs cheering up.

Highly recommended!

BCCB Guide Book to Gift Books (November 2009)

Despite the helpful efforts of an unseen narrator, a sequence of animals persist in wearing bright red underpants every way but the correct one, a confusion that will leave young listeners giggling.



The Park Bench

Written by Fumiko Takeshita

Illustrated by Mamoru Suzuki

Paper Tigers (October 2009)

A beautiful read at any time of day, but particularly ideal as a gentle bedtime read and exploration, *The Park Bench* by wife-and-husband team Fumiko Takeshita and illustrator Mamoru Suzuki (Kane/Miller, 1988) is a gem. Taking the simple focus of a park bench sitting silently under a tree, the finely honed narrative takes readers through the day from dark, early morning to dark, starry night. I have to say it sits silently because there is a magical expectation throughout that if the bench wanted to, it could actually speak. And the stories it could tell, of old people through to tiny babies, not to mention birds and animals! We are given a glimpse of some of them through the gorgeous illustrations, which expand on the simple words. For example,

Friends meet at the park.

The two mothers begin to chat.

They talk on and on.

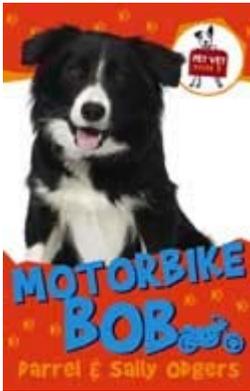
Chitter-chatter, chitter-chatter, until its time to eat.

All the while the white bench listens quietly.

...While the mothers are busy chatting (and there's a situation many young readers will empathise with!), their two toddler children are keeping themselves occupied, playing on the bench; the jolly park worker is mowing the grass backwards and forwards behind them; and a kitten arrives unnoticed and settles down under the bench. All these narrative threads can be followed in the cartoon sequence on the facing page, though there is no mention of them in the text. Two double-page illustrations of the park offer hundreds of details, as well as scope for comparison, both with each other and with the characters who surround the park bench more directly. The most important of these is the aforementioned park worker, who cares for the bench and talks to it - through him, young readers' affinity with the actual bench is caught and held, as they explore, and perhaps speculate on, the myriad of different lives passing through the park.

The Park Bench is published as a bilingual book, in its original Japanese and English. I can't read Japanese and read this review from *School Library Journal* with interest. It made me wish, as ever, that I could have a handle on the original - but I actually like the simplicity of the English (including the fact that the narrative is in the present tense, which presumably does reflect the Japanese) and had already noted the use of very English onomatopoeia in Ruth A. Kanagy's translation...

All in all, I would say that this charming book looks set to have enduring appeal on both sides of the Pacific... and every time it is opened, some new detail will pop out - oh, yes, there's another one!



Pet Vet Book 3

Motorbike Bob

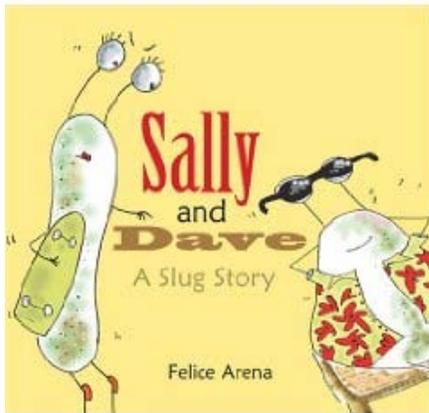
By Darrel & Sally Odgers

Curled Up With a Kids Book (September 2009):

[Motorbike Bob](#) is a cute children's story narrated by a terrier named Trump who works as an assistant to veterinarian Dr. Jeanie. It's the third in the "Pet Vet" series, but it works fine on its own.

The book has several chapters in the story of Dr. Jeanie and Trump doing their rounds and meeting Motorbike Bob and his owner, eventually rescuing them after a motorbike crash. Each chapter features a little section at the end, 'Trump's Diagnosis', which draws a moral out of the preceding events. Some more complex words are explained in small boxes in the text, although I was somehow surprised at what was explained and what was not.

I believe this book is aimed at ages 4-8. It makes a good read but might be a bit too simple for the older end of that age range.



Sally and Dave: A Slug Story
By Felice Arena

Curled Up Kids (August 14, 2009):

Dave is a fat, lazy slug who loves to indulge in whatever he finds pleasurable and avoid whatever he does not. Being a large common slug, Dave is nothing spectacular in the eyes of the magnificent Sally.

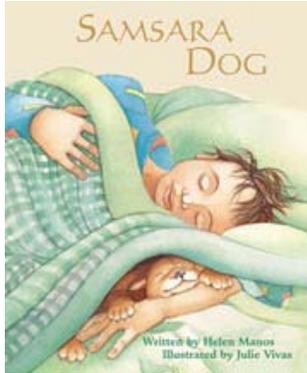
Sally is a thin, hip, totally gorgeous slug who loves to do all sorts of sports and activities. She's always the best at what she does and never forgets it. Seeing her neighbor, the common couch potato Dave, always sitting and never doing anything, really disgusts Sally.

Dave and Sally are diametrically opposed, but they do have one thing in common: both find their lifestyles just fine and think they are special for who they are. Sally, unfortunately, finds Dave anything but special and makes sure he knows it. Pity she doesn't consider his feelings as he does.

As Sally continues her showoff ways, Dave mulls over Sally's hurtful words. If Sally was so great, she would know that slugs are all made differently, and it is these differences that are special.

Hopefully the confrontation between Sally and Dave will resolve their problems - if not, they might find it hard to help each other when bigger problems come swooping down upon them. Differences are special and make each slug the more interesting for them. Felice Arena's cute and clear story delivers messages for both young and old. Tolerance for differences, compassion for others, being aware of other's feelings, and doing unto others as you would have done unto you.

The illustrations are nothing spectacular, but their simplicity makes the messages of the story clearer. For what the illustrations are, they are fun and bring a good chuckle. Arena is a talent worth exploring, possessed of some fun creativity that reaches her audience.



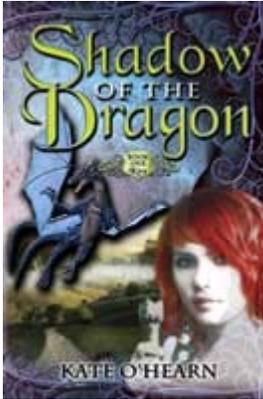
Samsara Dog

Written by Helen Manos

Illustrated by Julie Vivas

2009 Oneota Reading Journal (December 2009)

Dog lived many times. Each of his lives came and went, and with each life came a new role for him with new lessons to learn. Along the way he was a dog on his own with nobody to love, a rescue dog in the cold mountains, and a family pet with four girls who adored him. In his final life he learned his greatest lesson when he came to live with a boy and learned to love him more than he loved himself. Young readers will enjoy following Dog's journey through his many lives and the lessons he learned on the way. The illustrations tell the story of Dog's journey and convey Dog's many adventures to the reader.



Shadow of the Dragon

By Kate O'Hearn

Kirkus Reviews (August 15, 2009):

Entering the crowded field of middle-grade high-fantasy series featuring feisty heroines and dragons, this largely predictable first novel fails to distinguish itself from the herd. The setting is a generic rural kingdom where girls are forbidden to read and must marry by age 13. After evil Lord Dorcon torches the family farm and marches their parents and siblings off to serve the king, Kira, 12, and Elspeth, seven, magically able to communicate with animals, evade capture in a cave on a mountain that's home to a rogue dragon and its mate. During their cave sojourn, the girls rescue and raise the dragons' hatchling, but pursued by Dorcon and the hatchling's parents, they flee again, this time to the castle of Paradon, a wizard with an uneven track record. In a second plotline, their brother Dane, whose ambition is farming, is drafted into the dragon-riding arm of the military. Characters-the dragons excepted-are flat. The story comes to life whenever the girls escape, but adult characters repeatedly step in and take the initiative from them, making this an ultimately disempowering contribution to the genre. (Fantasy. 9-12)

Kiss the Book(September, 2009):

When the King declares war on the neighboring countries, Kira, 12, and her sisters are outlaws just because they are unmarried. Her father, mother and brother are taken to the castle – her father as the best dragon knight trainer in history and her brother to take up the danger of being a dragon knight. Only Kira and one of her sisters escapes – and thus gain the wrath of the king. More than his ire awaits the girls however, as they take refuge right under the nose of an untamable, rogue dragon. This doesn't stop Kira and her sister from saving and loving one of the Rogue's own offspring. This is a fine tale of high fantasy – the only shame is that everyone will now have to wait for the next books in the series – and waiting is VERY hard to do when the book catches your imagination and heart like this one does! EL, MS – ESSENTIAL. Cindy, Library-Teacher.

VOYA (October 2009)

Twelve-year-old Kira's peaceful world has been shattered. As a result of the coming war, King Arden has commanded all retired knights, including Kira's father, back into service. While her mother, father, and brother are to report to the palace to fulfill their obligations, Kira and her sisters are ordered to the notorious Lasser Commons prison for the 'crime'

of being unmarried girls. When the evil Lord Dorcon and his knights comes for her family, Kira and her younger sister Elspeth narrowly escape their clutches. Now with a death warrant on their heads, Kira and Elspeth's only chance for survival lies in the shelter of the neighboring mountain. It is a mysterious place fraught with danger and guarded by a fearsome dragon known as the Rogues. Here the sisters will discover their true strength, and Kira will find she is the key to the fulfillment of a prophecy that will forever change the course of the kingdom.

This exhilarating story captures the reader's interest from the opening interaction between Kira and her parents to the breathless conclusion. The underlying theme that girls are capable of anything infuses the novel, and the heroine's bravery and spunk will particularly appeal to older junior and high school female readers. Fortunately the wide-open ending leaves plenty of room for a sequel to this stellar first novel. One cautionary note: there are scenes of violence and death throughout, although the depiction is not overly graphic.

School Library Journal (October 2009)

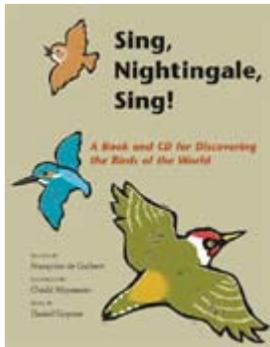
Kira is almost 13 and, by law and at her parents' insistence, must be married by her birthday or be sent to prison. She is devastated as she secretly dreams of working with dragons, though she knows its illegal. She goes for a walk, followed by her younger sister, Elspeth, who tends to shadow Kira's every move. While they are gone, their family is captured by Lord Dorcon, who believes that Kira's father wronged him. Her father and brother are sent to the dragon army, a sister is imprisoned, and their mother is made a servant. Kira and Elspeth flee to a mountain where a rogue dragon lives, and Elspeth's powers with animals allow them to tame one of his offspring. The girls are befriended by a wizard who tells them of a prophecy that a girl with a dragon will bring down the king. The sisters and their brother Dane separately begin to bring about what the king fears most: the loss of his kingdom and power. The story alternates between Kira and Dane, which serves to heighten the suspense as things race toward a confrontation. At times the events seem a bit too convenient, but on the whole the adventure is exciting and fast paced. The characters are well rounded and believable. *Shadow* will be popular with fans of Anne McCaffrey's "Harper Hall" trilogy.

Swon Libraries (November 2009)

War comes to their kingdom and the notorious Lord Dorcon and his knights are sent to Kira's home to escort her father, mother, and brother Dane to the palace where they are to serve the king. Meanwhile, Kira and her sisters are being sent to Lasser Commons, which is a prison. Their only crime is being unwed girls. Kira and her sister, Elspeth, come back from exploring to find their home in shambles and escape the clutches of Lord Dorcon. In order to protect her sister and her family, Kira strikes out on a mission to stay alive and rescue her family with the help of a tiny fox and a baby dragon. Meanwhile, Dane is fighting to stay alive and trying to find a way to help his mother and father escape their prison at the palace.

Kate O'Hearn's first novel in this series is a page turner. I could not put this one down. The story moves at a steady pace, and makes the reader feel as if they are going on this

journey with Kira and her sister Elspeth. Kira is a strong female character in the story and I admired her bravery and perseverance. I liked the way the author alternated the story from Kira and Elspeth to Dane. It kept the story moving fluidly and the transition was done smoothly. I highly recommend this for any collection that has a teen interest in fantasy and for reluctant readers. Some of the story is kind of graphic so I would recommend this for teens ages 13 and up. This would make an excellent addition to any collection.



Sing, Nightingale, Sing!

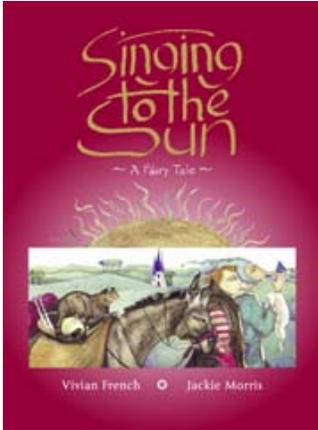
By Françoise de Guibert

Illustrated by Chiaki Miyamoto

Music composed by Daniel Goyone

Skipping Stones (Jan. – Feb. 2009):

This great book introduces 60 birds found in various environments, from gardens to mountains.



Singing to the Sun

By Vivian French

Illustrated by Jackie Morris

Curled up with Kids (April 2009):

young prince named Thorfinn is the sole heir of a greedy and ambitious king and queen who care for nothing but power and wealth. Thorfinn spends his youth alone but for his two friends, the wise court jester and a tabby cat. When the time comes for Thorfinn to marry, he must choose between the three beautiful daughters of the King of the Golden Mountains.

The king's daughters each bring power, riches, and happiness respectively, but Thorfinn must correctly determine which princess brings power, which wealth and which love. If he chooses correctly, he may select his bride from among them; if he chooses falsely, he will be fed to the wolves. Will Thorfinn make the right choice? Will the princess choose him in return?

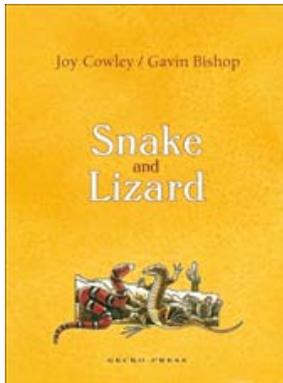
Singing to the Sun is a lovely modern fairy tale, ably narrated by Vivian French and beautifully illustrated by Jackie Morris. The surprise ending adds a note of whimsy and interest to what might otherwise have been too predictable a story.

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

This title is an intricate story which, while full of traditional elements, concludes with a novel twist. Young Lord Thorfinn's parents are obsessed with wealth and power. When their pursuits have left them virtually bankrupt they send their son to the King of the Golden Mountains who has three daughters who are to be married. Each daughter will bring a portion of her father's kingdom to the marriage. One will inherit the king's lands and another will inherit the king's wealth. Only one princess will bring love. Thorfinn and the court jester journey to the Golden Mountains at the urging of Thorfinn's parents whose greed has overcome their dread of the fate that befalls suitors who do not correctly identify each princess and her gift. With the help of the jester, Thorfinn solves the puzzle and his life is spared. Fed up with his parents' preoccupations, he chooses the princess who will bring happiness and love. She, however, refuses him and runs off with the court jester, whom she rightly perceives as the wiser of the two men.

Thorfinn does not wish to marry either of the remaining princesses and instead dons the jester's hat and sets out to travel the land until he can become as wise as the jester. He is accompanied by his tabby cat who sings to the sun as they embark on their journey. The

watercolor illustrations are appropriately detailed to match the story's intricacies. However, the muted earthen tones are at times as variance with the vibrant adjectives of the text. The glowing, shimmering and shining princess' hair lies flat upon the page and their eyes contain no spark of life. Nevertheless, lovers of fairy tales aged four to eight will find much to interest them.



Snake and Lizard

Written by Joy Cowley

Illustrated by Gavin Bishop

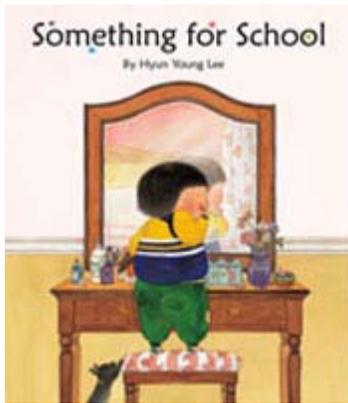
The Crimson Review(Spring 2009):

Snake and Lizard are two friends that are total opposites yet they appreciate this aspect of their friendship the most. The two use their friendship to teach and learn from each other as the book takes the reader on several of their experiences through a series of short story chapters that include humor and excitement. The stories contain lessons of acceptance and understanding about diversity and disagreements. Highlighted in each story are simple, colorful pencil and watercolor sketches that assist in supporting the storylines.

This book is a good read that would hold the attention of the most uninterested reader and is simple enough for those just beginning.

Kiss the Book (September, 2009):

Snake and Lizard learn more about each other during their encounters and find that they may have more similarities than differences. The short vignettes are perhaps best for reading to a small child at night, but they don't flow in a way that makes you want to read it at one go. EL – OPTIONAL. Cindy, Library-Teacher.



Something for School!

By Hyun Young Lee

MultiCultural Review(Spring 2009):

Another recently published picture book focusing on Korea is Lee's *Something for School*. Translated from the Korean, this tells the story of Yoon's first day at kindergarten. Yoon is nervous about starting school, and it gets worse once she gets there. Because she is wearing pants and has a short haircut, her classmates tell her to stand with the boys when the teacher says, "Boys come over here, girls over there." Yoon is reduced to tears and even cries during the class photo. At home, Mother tries to assure her that she is her beautiful girl, but Yoon takes matters into her own hands. She tries on her mother's things and her sister's things, and finally dons her sister's headband that has pretend hair attached to it. This solves the problem, and Yoon decides that kindergarten is terrific. The settings and scenes are Korean, but the story speaks to the universal anxiety of a new school year, demonstrating that half way around the world we are more alike than different. Expressive, colorful illustrations expand the text.

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

The valuable message of looking beyond the exterior is easily grasped in Hyun Young Lee's story, *Something for School*. Originally published in South Korea, the universal theme of acceptance is told in a simple and straightforward manner. On the first day of kindergarten, Yoon is mistaken for a boy. Horrors! At home she cries for a long time and wonders, "Do I look like a boy?" After trying on many girly items, she settles on a headband to wear the following day. She has a wonderful time the second day and no one mistakes her for a boy. But on the third day, the headband is missing and again she worries about being thought a boy. It is then that she discovers her classmates, boys and girls alike, are all her friends and her worries disappear. An easy to understand story of acceptance and self-expression for younger children who are always concerned about fitting in, this would be good for students in preschool to first grade.

Curriculum Connections, School Library Journal (August 4, 2009):

In Hyun Young Lee's *Something for School* (Kane/Miller, 2008; PreS-Gr 1), Yoon's first day of kindergarten results in tears when everyone mistakes her for a boy. Though she makes a statement about her gender the next morning by donning her sister's fancy

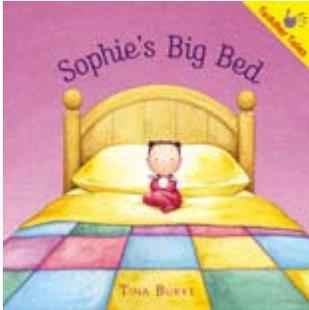
headband, Yoon realizes that her classmates are willing to accept her for who she is, not what she looks like. This warmly illustrated import from South Korea provides a look into another culture and proves that going-to-school concerns are universal.

International Examiner (December 2, 2009)

“Something for School” starts with a little girl, Yoon off to her first day of kindergarten. Yoon is very sad. Because of her short hair she is mistakenly identified as a boy by her classmates and her teacher and is placed in the wrong group.

This picture book details the little girl’s hard time on the first day of school and how she copes with it and finds ways to make herself feel better and how other kids relate to her feeling and presence.

The illustrations are wonderfully drawn out in detail showing the traditional Korean classroom setting and how the kids would wear uniform slippers in the classroom. On one of the pages, Lee makes good use of the blank space, portraying the anxiety, emptiness and worries of little Yoon who couldn’t find the headdress that she took from her sister to bring to school to show her identity. This book can be appreciated by kids and is a great story to instill in them a sense of care and acceptance.



Sophie's Big Bed

By Tina Burke

Family Time Magazine (January 2009):

Change can be difficult.

Despite the need to make changes not a one of us want to make it, no matter how old we are.

Go green, find a new favorite restaurant, replace an appliance that still works but is falling apart. Or my family's favorite problem – sleeping in a new, bigger bed.

Sophie is having that problem. The toddler has been happy in her crib with her banana blanket and squishy star pillow. Her toys – Bunny, Scarlet and the teddy Bear – are happy there too.

But Mom and Dad have bought her a new bed that fits her better. So each night she tries to sleep in the new bed with its new blanket and pillow.

And each night, somehow, she finds a reason not to sleep in it. No one wants to get lost under the big blanket or fall off the tall bed. Each of her toys point out the dangers of the big bed, reaffirming that the crib is better.

It perfectly fits the banana blanket and the star pillow. How could Sophie ever want to leave that kind of comfort.

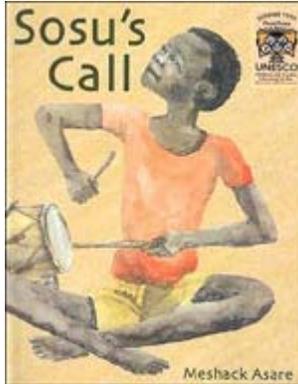
In the final pages, Sophie becomes resolute and explains her choice to her toys gently but firmly. Parents cheer as we see that final happy smile of fears faced and decisions made.

What makes this book so sweet to read to your toddler is Sophie, a strong little character who does not throw a fit about her choices. She just does it. The smile on her face is always one of pure happiness and her fearful looks are the same queasy ones adults never let out.

By using a bright pastel color pallet, writer/illustrator Tina Burke is allowing Sophie to express herself in a safe environment. The pictures are instantly identifiable, instantly connective. Kids will see themselves in Sophie and her animals, even if their rooms do not look like hers.

Moreover, young children will identify with her situation of changing into a new bed.

Few children really want to do it. But with Sophie as an example that perhaps, perhaps, transition can be easier.



Sosu's Call

By Meshak Asare

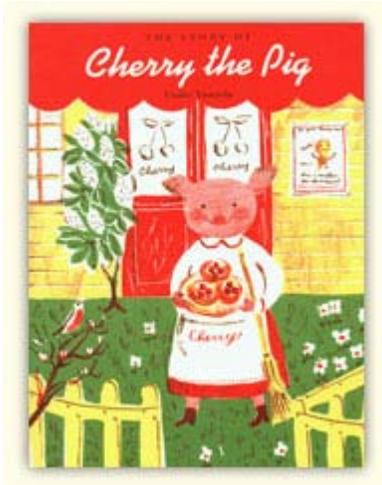
PaperTigers.org (June 2009):

Sosu is a young boy who has not seen the world outside the fence of his family's small hut for many years. "Most of the things Sosu knows about the village are from the days when he was small enough to be carried on his mother's back... when everyone wished for him to stand up on his legs and walk. But that did not happen." Though his father taught him how to mend fishing nets, and his brother and sister have taught him how to read and write, the villagers believe Sosu is bad luck and should not leave his family's home. Housebound with only the family dog, Fusa, to keep him company, Sosu spends his days doing what he can and envying everyone, even Fusa, who is free to come and go. "What use is a boy without a pair of good, strong legs?" he thinks to himself.

Then one day, everything changes. The narrow strip of land between the sea and the lagoon where Sosu's village sits is threatened by rising waters while most of the villagers are away. The only other people in the village are too old or too young or too weak to do anything. They could all be trapped and drowned! Sosu has to use his wits and all his physical capabilities to save the village and earn the respect of his neighbors. He proves to everyone that a boy without good, strong legs can be not only useful but a lucky person to have in a village!

First published in Ghana in 1997, this inspiring and at times heart-rending story is a worthy recipient of the numerous awards it has received, the most prestigious being First Prize in the UNESCO Children's & Youth's Literature in the Service of Tolerance Award in 1999. It is listed as one of Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century and an IBBY Outstanding Book for Young People with Disabilities. It has also been featured on Reading Rainbow and is the recipient of an ASA Children's Africana Book Award.

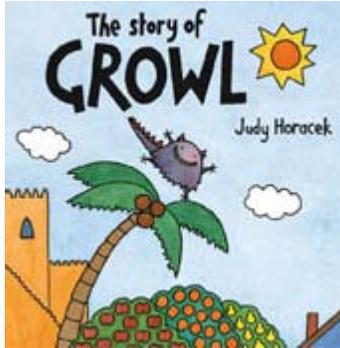
The illustrious Ghanaian Meshack Asare, who has been winning international awards for his picture books since before many of today's parents were born, combines his talents and education in art, educational psychology, and social anthropology to give readers a well-conceived story that will touch the hearts of people from many backgrounds. This beautifully illustrated book featuring a protagonist who refuses to be defined by his disability reminds us of the value in every person and all that can be lost if we fail to recognize it.



The Story of Cherry the Pig
By Utako Yamada

Ladybug Magazine (May/June 2009):

As you know, I am quite an expert on desserts. My favorite is blueberry pie, but I will also settle for chocolate cake, snickerdoodles, watermelon taffy, and peanut butter milkshakes. I knew I would love this book because Cherry the Pig is also a whiz at desserts. Her favorite thing to do every day is bake a sweet treat just for herself. Cherry makes a delectable, fluffy apple cake one afternoon, but to her great disappointment, a mice family sneaks into her kitchen and gobbles most of it up! Never mind those pesky mice--Cherry knows her apple cake is maybe the best apple cake ever, so she enters it into the baking contest at the Harvest Festival. Will Cherry win the contest? Or will those naughty mice stand in her way? Read this book to find out!



The Story of Growl

By Judy Horacek

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

Sometimes you don't realize how dearly you love something until it is taken away. That's the idea behind *The Story of Growl* by Australian cartoonist, illustrator and author Judy Horacek.

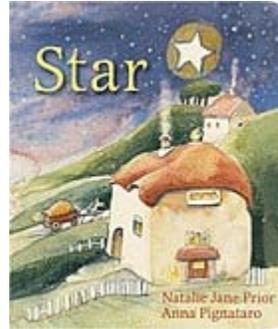
In this tale of neighborliness and compromise, a little monster named Growl loves to growl. She runs about her garden growling all day. She sings about growling. But when her growls upset the neighbors' tea, a rule against growling is made. Growl is heartbroken, she cries and cannot sleep. Life is glum for her now. When she spies a strange man creeping in the neighbors' garden, she does what comes naturally to her, she growls! The prowler flees and the neighbors consent to let Growl growl once again, just not during teatime. They even join her in a growl in the garden.

Simple cartoon drawings with bright colors will draw children into this comical picture book. Growl's story is appropriate for children in preschool through second grade.



Sun

Written by Natalie Jane Prior
Illustrated by Anna Pignataro



Star

Written by Natalie Jane Prior
Illustrated by Anna Pignataro

Kids Lit (August 12, 2009):

A pair of poetic board books, these titles focus on morning and nighttime respectively. *Sun* features a repeating format with the phrase “This is where the sun shines...” completed by different animals waking to the new morning. *Star* uses the phrase “This is what the star sees...” in a similar manner. Both books have repetition perfect for young listeners. They are both wonderful first poem books for babies. The illustrations by Pignataro are watercolor landscapes. One awash with the brightness of the morning and the other deepened by evening.

Curled Up Kids (August 24, 2009)

The sun has the power to jumpstart the day of all of the people and things within the reach of its rays.

First, it extends over the rocky island to wake the seal pups, through trees in the forest to jostle the birds out of their slumber, and into the hives where the honeybees seem to be at rest. The calves, the mice, even the family of five with a dog are all warmly greeted by the sun signalling that it is time for the day to begin.

Sun is a serene board book with simple text and unique watercolor illustrations that add to its natural appeal. This board book is a great way to welcome the morning with a ray of light, or to end the day with anticipation of what tomorrow will bring.

Children will love this view of the world through the eyes of a star high above. Since the star is perched high in the sky, it can view boats and cats, sleeping sheep, and lambs that are wide awake. Glowworms and people scurrying home late at night are also in sight. Near the end of its journey the star comes across a wide-eyed baby peering at it through an open window immediately before falling fast asleep.

The presence of both the simple text and the delicate watercolor illustrations make *Star* a calming, soothing book that’s a wonderful addition to any young child’s book collection.

Through the Looking Glass Children’s Book Review (September, 2009)

It is nighttime and a star is shining in the sky. What does the star see from its place in the heavens? It sees a sailor’s cat standing in a little boat. The cat and star greet one another and then the star tells the cat to close its eyes. “Night-night” says the star.

In a wood full of trees, the star sees a little glowworm. Its tiny light is shining brightly. The star and the worm say “hello,” and then the star tells the worm to “turn out your light.” It is time for sleep.

In this beautifully illustrated bedtime story, the author uses a familiar nighttime friend, a twinkling star, to tell a soothing little story that children are sure to fall in love with.

Young Adult (and Kids Book) Central (November 2009)

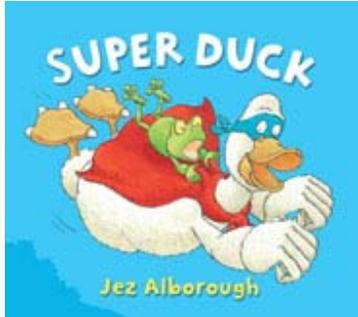
This is a delicately beautiful little board book. It’s a quiet book and not the least bit flashy or loud. Everything about it is gentle, from Natalie Jane Prior’s simple text to Anna Pignataro’s simply joyous watercolor illustrations.

It’s a book about the sun and where the sun shines, from rocky islands where seal pups doze to sunny bars where mice slumber in the straw. It’s a morning book, for those first rays of sunshine that wake up the world.

I wondered, when I first saw it, whether it would hold the interest of a young child used to being bombarded with board books full of primary colors and the clash, bang, boom of many stories. As an adult, I can’t help but love it (the art is something I’d be happy putting up on my walls), but would a child?

My little Max is one and a half and he actually asks for this book by name. “Sun!” he cries, holding it up and bringing it to me. After I finish reading it, he almost always says “Again!” It has definitely caught his heart, as well as mine.

This one will be equally enjoyed by both adults and children alike.



Super Duck

By Jez Alborough

School Library Journal (March 2009):

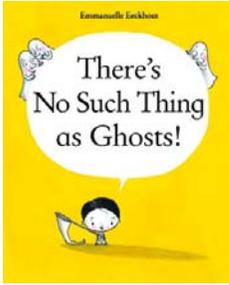
After reading *Super Duck*, Duck dons a cape and mask and tries a variety of ways to get Goat's kite up in the air. His friends patiently let him try his own ideas, like using a truck to fly the kite, before coming up with their own conventional solutions. Finally the superhero comes through with an unexpected maneuver. Alborough's short, amusing rhyming couplets keep the text moving along fluidly, making the book a good choice for storytimes. Each spread has several panels of illustrations, which will remind readers of other, more successful superheroes. The characters' movements and energy sometimes cause them to break out of the boundaries of their panels, creating a dynamic feel. All in all, this funny book is about friendship—the protagonist is allowed his individuality, but is supported when things don't work out. A gem.

Booklist (May 2009):

Finally, in this sixth adventure for Duck and his buddies Sheep, Frog, and Goat, it's Duck who gets to be the hero. After reading a book titled *Super Duck*, Duck dons a cape and mask and attempts to help the others fly a kite. But it's the wind that eventually gets the kite aloft, lifting Frog along with it. In a slapstick sequence of events, Frog is saved and all agree that Duck really is a Super Duck hero. As with the other five Duck books, the illustrations of Duck's boisterous antics often spill out of the borders to make this a natural read-aloud choice.

Children's Bookwatch (June 2009):

REVIEWERS CHOICE “*Super Duck*” is the latest in a series of humorous “Duck” books written and illustrated by Jez Alborough for children ages 3-7. Filled with wonderful colorful pictures of Duck and his friends Goat, Sheep and Frog, “*Super Duck*” is a fast paced tale of the well-intentioned hero Duck who comes (somewhat irregularly for a superhero) to the rescue of his friends and their flyaway kite. The cartoon-like illustrations leap and expand beyond their frames in a thoroughly loveable, enticing way. The rhyming couplets also help to keep the pace and interest at key pitch. “*Super Duck*” is a fable of gentle friendship, punctuated with joy and delight. Unlike some super heroes, *Super Duck* sometimes fails, but he keeps trying with the help of his friends. “*Super Duck*” will be a favorite read-aloud book for its generation.



There's No Such Things as Ghosts!

By Emmanuelle Eeckhout

The Horn Book Magazine (January/February 2009):

A little boy goes ghost-hunting at the haunted house in his new neighborhood. He doesn't believe in ghosts, but if they exist, he says, "I'm going to catch one!" Equipped with his trusty butterfly net, he searches the house. And though he doesn't see a single ghost, young viewers will spot a whole bevy – blithely going about their business in each room, everywhere the boy isn't looking. A ghost family squabbles at dinner while the lad peeks under the table; a bespectacled ghost sits reading in the library while our hero diligently removes books from the shelves; a pair of ghosts tags along as the boy discovers a secret passage, and all three are spooked when a spider appears. The boy checks every single room, even the loo: kids will laugh at the panicky-looking ghosts in a long line outside the door clearly leading to the toilet. Yellow highlights in the black-and-white art keep the illustrations, often in black silhouettes, warm and sunny. The ghosts, short and squat, with big smiles and rosy cheeks, look even friendlier than Casper in this book that will be a treat for young ones at Halloween.

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

Want a ghost story that's not so scary? Belgian author and illustrator Emmanuelle Eeckhout's latest book, *There's No Such Thing as Ghosts*, is sure to be a hit with little ones that want a ghost story without the fright.

A brave little boy promises his mother he won't go near the strange old house in his new neighborhood after his mother whispers, "People say it's haunted." He doesn't believe in ghosts but if there is one, he is planning to catch it. With his butterfly net, our intrepid hero searches every room of the house from top to bottom but doesn't find a ghost anywhere! He ends his quest declaring, "There's no such thing as ghosts!"

Readers, of course, will notice that all the ghosts are just outside of his line of vision, exactly where he is not looking. The pictures tell a different story than the text, making it a fun game to find the ghosts that he can't seem to see.

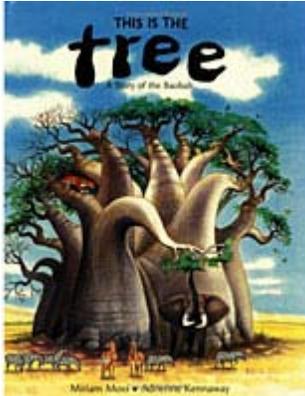
The yellow, black and gray illustrations and silhouettes add to the charm of this tale. The ghosts, who have just a touch of rosy pink on their cheeks, are adorable characters.

Students in preschool to first grade will enjoy this kid-friendly book.

New Books for Missouri Students MSTA (2009):

A small boy searches in vain for ghosts in the haunted house on the corner.

Recommended



This is the Tree

Written by Miriam Moss

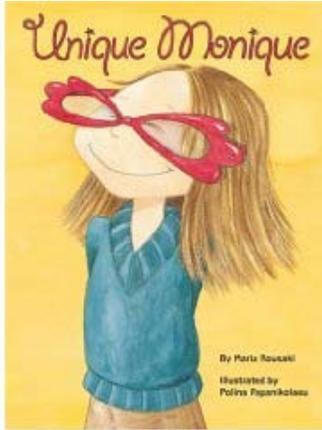
Illustrated by Adrienne Kennaway

Ecelectic Homeschool Online(June 1, 2009):

his is the Tree: A Story of the Baobab is a strikingly illustrated picture book for young children. The poem written by poet Miriam Moss will delight children as they look at the drawings by Adrienne Kennaway.

Each page has intensely colorful depictions of the variety of animals found around the Baobab tree. Elephants, zebras, squirrels, monkeys, bats, leopards and more are shown in way you might find them near the Baobab. Other vegetation finds refuge to grow near the Baobab tree. Mushrooms grow near the large roots, and the fruit of the tree sustains many of the lives that struggle to survive in the African climate.

Pre-readers and early readers will enjoy this book. Parents who love an easy to read story will be glad this book is on their children's shelf.



Unique Monique

Written by Maria Rousaki

Illustrated by Polina Papanikolaou

Curled Up Kids (June, 2009):

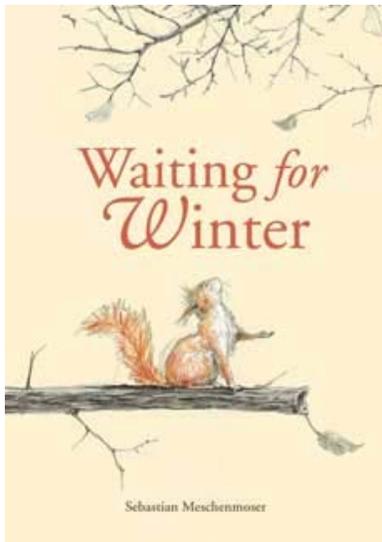
Monique doesn't like her school uniform. She's tired of looking like everyone else. This little trend-setter is determined to be different and stand out. But with each attempt, the school principal squashes her creativity.

Eventually, Monique finally conforms and shows up for school dressed according to code. But don't count her out yet; individuality has a way of smiling through even the thickest fog.

Artwork by illustrator Polina Papanikolaou brings this spunky story to life with lots of energy, making it impossible to not fall in love with big-eyed Monique and friends.

Papanikolaou is the illustrator of several children's books and has worked in animation, publishing and the design fields.

Author Maria Rousaki lives in Greece and originally published *Unique Monique* as *Unique Melpo* before it was translated into English and published in the U.S. Since then, she has sold the rights to Korea and Taiwan, where Monique will add her own brand of international flair.



Waiting for Winter

By Sebastian Meschenmoser

A Fuse #8 Production, School Library Journal(July 25, 2009):

My reviewing process is very neat and orderly. As I read books I place them on my To Be Read shelf, where they are cataloged by those most likely to get a review to those least likely. Everything has its place. Some titles wait months before I get to them. But once in a great while, if I'm lucky, I run across a book so spectacular that I have to review it immediately. *Waiting for Winter* was that book. Now if I say the name Sebastian Meschenmoser to you, does it ring any bells? No? Well, the man first burst on the American scene with his touching if strange *Learning to Fly* about a penguin with flights of fancy. But *Waiting for Winter*, his latest title to be released here in the States, is far more accessible to the American market. It is smart, clever, beautifully illustrated, and downright funny. Each season there is one good "snow" book that comes out for kids. This book should be considered the good snow book of this and any other year. Read it! Under normal circumstances, Squirrel tends to sleep through the winter. However, this year Squirrel has heard from Deer that it's going to snow soon. Squirrel has never seen it snow before so he commits himself to staying up to wait for it. When merely staying up doesn't work he runs like a madman to keep himself occupied. Such energy wakes up Hedgehog, who also has never seen snow before. To keep themselves open eyed they sing loud sea shanties which, in turn, wakes up Bear. Now all three animals are waiting for snow. But what if it has already fallen? Taking Deer's description of the element ("White and wet and cold and soft") each one finds an object that might be snow. But after looking at their toothbrush, tin can, and sock, a single snowflake falls to the ground and the three are left in a whirl of white. And after making a snow creature (to be discovered by a confused pair of humans later) the three can finally burrow down for a long, comfortable sleep.

Meschenmoser's style is mesmerizing. Look at the lines closely and they just appear to be the hastily scrawled lines of a palsied hand. Back up a little and the lines come together and coalesce into not just recognizable characters, but sympathetic ones. After all, what human being doesn't identify with sleep deprivation? In this book various characters are

so bleary-eyed and sleep starved that they look half dead on their feet. There's an absolutely wonderful close-up of the squirrel sitting on a branch, feet splayed. His fur looks like he just rolled out of bed and he's holding his tiny paw to his head as bags form under his eyes. This is one tired pookie. Facial expressions on realistic animals are also difficult, but when a seriously disgruntled bear hears Squirrel and Hedgehog's explanation for why they're being so loud, his skeptical look askance at the reader is priceless.

Pacing is so important too so the author doles out each image beautifully. The two-page wordless sequences sometimes act like silent comedies. For example, on the first page Squirrel and Hedgehog are letting rip some sea shanties, on the second they continue to belt out the tunes, and on the third Hedgehog has launched into a particularly boisterous part (using a leaf for emphasis) while Squirrel notices the awake and grumpy bear standing nearby. Two of these three spreads are wordless, but Meschenmoser renders any need for explanation unnecessary. You get where he's coming from. The crazy thing too is that in spite of the fact that this is a translation, the writing reads aloud beautifully. There's a real wonder to the words here. So kudos to both Mr. Meschenmoser and his translator. One gets the impression that the feel of the original tale has been well preserved here.

The little details are wonderful as well. For example, Hedgehog initially walks into the story with a couple leaves haphazardly stuck to his spines. Near his tail is a nut of some sort. And while the leaves do eventually fall off in the course of the story, in the last image when he's curled on top of bear's rump, fast asleep, the nut and one of the leaves remain firmly ensconced on his own backside. Meschenmoser also knows how to use his endpapers properly. At the beginning of the book the front endpapers show a scene of birds flying south for the winter. And as for the back endpapers, they kind of give the book its final joke. Turn there and you'll see a snowy woods. Two men laden with firewood stand stare at a lopsided snow. . . bear? It must be. With its sock nose, tin can hat, and toothbrush pipe, the animals have also taken care to use sticks and branches to give it claws and a tail. Fabulous.

Great snow stories are hard. Sometimes I feel like other countries write better snow books than we do. Consider *Snow Day* by Komako Sakai and now Meschenmoser's title. What I like about this book is that the author/illustrator really knows how to make use of the subject. You don't want a snow book where the world looks exactly the same after a snowfall as it did before (albeit with the landscape white) do you? No! Snow changes more than just how the land looks. There's a kind of light that accompanies a snowfall. An eerie glow that comes only when the scant light from the sky reflects off of falling frozen particles. Meschenmoser plays off of this when he has the fake snowfall dream sequences of Hedgehog and Squirrel. When toothbrushes or cans are falling against a dramatic sky, it looks especially silly. Then, when the real snow comes down, the silliness is gone. The shot of the three animals making a snowbear has this ethereal blue light shining on the scene. Any artist thinking of making a picture book where snow falls at night should be required to pick up this book and examine it closely (alongside the aforementioned *Snow Day* and probably *Owl Moon* too) first.

The actual medium Meschenmoser is working in here isn't divulged on the publication page, but we can make some informed guesses. Graphite, certainly. And the orange of Squirrel, the green of some dying leaves, Hedgehog's yellow underbelly, the red of his

berry, and Bear's brown highlights are all colored pencil. The only time you see any paint here is when the snow (in its myriad incarnations) comes down against the blue/black background that is the sky. That sky is painted, as are the flakes that fall. So suddenly you have a graphic world covered in thick blue and white paints. The result is that you really feel a kind of awe at the snowfall. It's special, and it makes everything it falls on special too.

The flaw? Because every picture book has to have one flaw, right? Okay, so the flaw of this book is so minor it's almost inconsequential but I figure I should bring it up just to be fair. I can't figure out if this is a problem on the part of the original manuscript or the translation, but the book begins with squirrel finding out about snow from a deer. But a quick glimpse at the accompanying picture and that animal squirrel is talking to? It ain't a deer. A goat, maybe. Though what a random goat is doing in the forest is anyone's guess. Maybe there are wild goats in the German trees. Or perhaps their deer are short and squat with ram-like horns. Dunno. In any case, feels like something got lost in translation along the way.

Meschenmoser is probably the best-known contemporary German picture book author/illustrator published in America today (which isn't saying much). Eric Carle doesn't count and you might be able to make a case for Ole Konnecke, but that's pushing it. Nope, like a latter day Janell Cannon Meschenmoser is our man and if ever there was a book of his deserving of our attention it is *Waiting for Winter*. Touching and funny by turns, this turns out to be not only an idea winter tale, but also a perfect bedtime story too. For any kid who has ever tried to stay awake for an important event, this tale rings true. A must purchase. Can't talk it up enough.

Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast (July 26, 2009):

Yesterday Betsy Bird reviewed the latest picture book of German author/illustrator Sebastian Meschenmoser (WHEW, look at those paintings at his web site's home page), *Waiting for Winter* (Kane/Miller). I happen to have a copy of this book, too (an early copy, I thought, but I guess it's already out. Der. This is what happens when you're unorganized, as I am, and have a lot of your books sitting around in piles). Speaking of books that make you laugh outloud a lot (as I did above), this is another one of those. This picture book is winning in every way, and it is hysterical. Betsy pretty much agrees. In fact, we're already talking about perhaps co-posting about it or trying to interview the man; the latter would make me extremely happy, as I particularly lurv talking to international illustrators. I don't know what I'll do, but it's simply a fabulous picture book. So, more on that later. The kick here is that someone else has a deep and abiding love for it, as I do.

Curled Up With a Good Kids Book (September, 2009):

Deer has to explain snow to Squirrel: its color, its texture, and its temperature. Being an inside squirrel, he's never seen snow. But now he is intrigued and wants to wait for the snow. The problem is waiting is boring - and sleep-inducing. Squirrel does find ways to stay awake, though, and in the process, he discovers two other animals that are just as curious about snow. Together, they search for white, wet, cold, soft snow in the woods. What they find does fit the description of snow, but not exactly. Bear's snowflake is smelly, and Hedgehog and Squirrel's snowflakes are more apt to be used inside a house

than seen falling from the sky. When a white, wet, cold, soft snowflake does fall from the sky, they are in awe, and in no time at all, they know what to do.

How the illustrations were rendered in this book is not specified, but it looks like pencils and pencil crayons were used. The long, loose-flowing lines used to draw the squirrel fit the animal's energetic demeanor. He's so full of anticipation, he cannot keep still. He's so full of wonder, it's contagious!

Set in the forest before the first snowfall, the views range from faraway shots of the trees to close-ups of the forest floor that show details like the burr and leaves stuck to hedgehog's spikes, bear's squinted morning eyes and tousled fur, and the location of the first snowflake. When more of the background is included in the illustrations, the reader will see two-page spreads of various "snowfalls" and different areas of the forest, including the tree with a cave-like entrance and Hedgehog's leaf pile.

Author/illustrator Sebastian Meschenmoser's use of white space when illustrating the woods makes it feel like winter, even before the snow starts falling. The subtle colors here are streaked through the animal's fur and certain areas of the forest, such as on a few blades of grass or leaves.

An excellent read-aloud, [*Waiting for Winter*](#) is humorous and the text changes in size and boldness when emphasis or extra emotion is needed from the reader. Be sure to turn to the endpapers at the back of this story, too. It's funny what Squirrel, Hedgehog and Bear do with the "snowflakes" they find.

This book is perfect.

Born in Germany, Sebastian Meschenmoser is the author and illustrator of the children's book *Learning to Fly*.

School Library Journal (September 2009)

Deer nonchalantly mentions that "Winter is almost here. I think it is going to snow." Since Squirrel has never seen it, he decides to forgo hibernation, and see what this "white and wet and cold and soft" substance looks like. He waits and waits and waits – but to no avail. He decides to do some exercises in order to stay awake, and along the way he wakes up Hedgehog. They wait and wait, but still no precipitation. Soon, their boredom-busting antics awaken Bear. Based on Deer's definition, each animal finds what he thinks is snow, but readers will know that they're wrong, and will be delighted as Squirrel, Hedgehog, and Bear when the real flakes begin to fall. One minor quibble with the text and pictures not meshing completely is when Squirrel puts an old tin can on his head, thinking it matches the description of snow, when the picture of the can is clearly shown in shades of gray, not white. The illustrations are deftly drawn in colored pencils, complete with sketching lines that give the renderings depth and maturity. The addition of broadly stroked hues of azure paint when the snow arrives will startle and delight young readers as it makes the white space of the page really come to life. This is a beautiful title to share with children on a lap or with a small group.

★ *Publishers Weekly* (September 21, 2009) Starred Review

Like furry slapstick comedians, a squirrel, hedgehog and bear make one sweet goof after another as they look for the first snowflake of winter. Told that it will be "white and wet

and cold and soft,” they put off hibernating and begin to search. Hedgehog holds up his discovery in triumph: it’s a toothbrush (“Winter will be wonderful,” Hedgehog thinks, as the next page shows the animal delighting in a shower of white toothbrushes against an inky sky). Squirrel is convinced that a tin can is the first snowflake, and Bear appears with an old white sock. Meschenmoser (*Learning to Fly*) sketches freely on white pages in dark gray and sepia, drawing with casual grace and unerring comic instinct. Squirrel’s reddish hair springs forth frenetically, Hedgehog’s prickles look untidy and sleepy, and Bear’s luxurious fur hangs over his eyebrows, making him look even grumpier. Giggles and guffaws will abound (three whole spreads are devoted to Squirrel and Hedgehog belting out sea shanties to keep themselves awake). The moment when the snow really does begin to fall is worth waiting for, too. A quiet, atmospheric and offbeat treasure. Ages 5–8.

★ *Kirkus Reviews* (October 15, 2009) Starred Review

Squirrel usually sleeps through winter, “[b]ut not this year!” The rumped red squirrel is determined to see snow—but waiting gets pretty boring. Fresh air and exercise help, as does the companionship of Hedgehog, with whom he sings sea shanties, and Bear, who helps them look for snow. Meschenmoser’s minimalist text provides just enough support for his laugh-out-loud illustrations, rendered in swift, penciled lines on creamy white space. Squirrel’s red coat provides a spot of color against the autumnal grays and sepias used to sketch out the trees and the other animals. He packs a wealth of expression into each animal’s face without venturing into heavy anthropomorphism. Readers will howl at the animals’ mistaken notions of snow, and they’ll sigh with satisfaction at the just-cozy-enough end. A perfect marriage of words and pictures. (Picture book. 4-10)

Words to Treasure (Fall 2009):

Simple sketches and narrative combine to tell the story of Squirrel who is eager to see snow for the first time. He gathers other animals who also usually hibernate to wait with him until the snow comes. They carry on with antics like singing sea shanties to keep themselves awake. The final pages capture their wonder in the first snowfall.

Booklist (November 1, 2009)

Informed that snow is coming—“White and wet and cold and soft”—young Squirrel vows not to miss this new experience. Fearful that he may fall asleep while waiting, he and his friends try exercise and singing; finally, they set off in search of the elusive white stuff, mistakenly imagining the forest covered with discarded toothbrushes, old tin cans, and abandoned socks. At long last the predicted precipitation arrives, blanketing the forest in a luscious whiteness that enables Squirrel and his friends to construct a snowman.

Meschenmoser’s sketch-pad colored-pencil artwork features mostly browns and grays until a wash of blue is added along with the arrival of snow. Squirrel’s impatient and exuberant personality is naturally well suited to young listeners, who will giggle appreciatively as he rushes frenetically from branch to branch. A great story hour choice (especially for preschoolers who don’t remember snow from the previous year); pair with Bernette Ford’s *First Snow* (2005).

Suffolk Cooperative Library System - Youth Services (September 2009)

Autumn is here and squirrel is tingling with excitement because winter will soon arrive. Unfortunately, squirrel has never experienced snow. He has heard that it is cold and white and wet and soft. As he waits, he meets hedgehog and bear, who are also wondering about snow. Brimming with gentle humor and expressive illustrations, this book is the perfect introduction to winter. I'm sending a copy of this wonderful little book to my grandchildren, who anxiously await a trip to New York to experience snow for themselves.

The Midwest Book Review (October 2009)

“Waiting for Winter” is a charming children’s picture book about Squirrel’s not so patient approach to waiting for winter and snow. Joined by friends Hedgehog, Bear, and Deer, Squirrel tries a variety of methods to pass the time or to distinguish that wet, cold white stuff called snow from a variety of other comical media. Just when the animals’ efforts grow wearisome, the amazing event of the first snowflake touchdown occurs! In a series of wonderful, poignant artistic illustrations, the animals celebrate the marvelous event of winter, and then curl up to sleep through the rest of it. “Waiting for Winter” will appeal to children age 4 and up. The author/illustrator’s sense of humor is a great enhance of the impact of the book!

Through the Looking Glass Children’s Book Reviews (November 2009)

Winter is on its way and Deer tells Squirrel that it will soon snow. Squirrel, who usually sleeps through winter, has no idea what snow is. This year he is determined that he will get to see snow. There is a problem though, the snow does not arrive straight away, and squirrel waits and waits. What if he falls asleep and misses the snow?

Squirrel decides that he should run around to get some fresh air and exercise. That should keep him awake. All the noise he makes running to and fro wakes up Hedgehog. Hedgehog decides that he too will stay awake to see the snow. To keep awake, Hedgehog and Squirrel sing sea shanties. There is nothing like a good song to keep one awake. Unfortunately, Bear is trying to have a nap nearby and he cannot possibly sleep when Squirrel and Hedgehog are singing. Bear decides that he might as well stay awake to see the snow too.

This hilarious picture book will have readers of all ages laughing out loud. The wonderful pencil illustrations are vibrant and beautifully expressive, and the mistakes the animals make as they try to find snow are deliciously silly and funny. This is a book that cannot fail to entertain and delight.

Bookends (November 2009)

Lynn: We are having a stretch of unusually warm sunny days. Our gray Michigan winter will be here soon though. To help get ready we have two charming books that celebrate wintry fun. One of our new favorites is *Waiting for Winter* by Sebastian Meschenmoser (Kane Miller, 2009). Deer tells Squirrel that snow is coming soon. Squirrel doesn’t remember snow. “Snow,” answered Deer, “White and wet and cold and soft.” Squirrel resolves to stay awake to see this amazing stuff. Eventually he is joined by curious Hedgehog. They enthusiastically sing sea shanties to stay awake and the noise rouses

Bear who decides to stay up too. Alarmed at the thought that the first snowflake has already fallen, the three animals decide to go look for snow and turn up hilarious examples that don't quite fit the definition. Meschenmoser's pencil sketches in muted winter tones have an endearing comic charm. Squirrel's ruffled fur looks like my grandsons' hair, full of exuberant cowlicks. Leaves and seeds stick to Hedgehog's spines and there is a striking resemblance between Bear and the way I look in the morning bear before coffee - the essence of grumpy sleepiness. Fortunately the real thing makes a beautiful appearance and our three tousled friends decide that snow was worth waiting for. This is one of those wonderful books that offers fun at multiple levels. Children will giggle at the silly mistakes the animals make as they look for snow and adults will love the energetic detail and humor in the drawings. The accompanying text in a bold black font is perfect for reading aloud. This would work well for a winter story time but is perfect for sharing and snuggling under a cozy blanket. Bring on the hot chocolate!

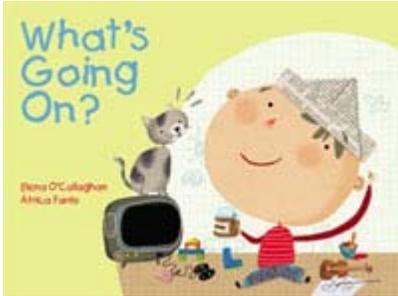
Kid Lit (November 18, 2009)

As my son waited for the bus this morning, he asked when the snow was going to come. Here in Wisconsin in mid-November that is a very good question and the answer is "very soon."

In this charmer of a picture book, Squirrel is told by Deer that it is going to snow. Squirrel hasn't seen snow before, so he decides to wait for it. Deer explains that snow is "White and wet and cold and soft." But it is very hard to stay awake, so Squirrel runs up and down the tree trunk. The noise wakes Hedgehog who agrees that he wants to see snow too. The two of them stay awake by singing – sea shanties. This wakes up Bear who waits with them for the snow. But what is snow has already arrived and they haven't recognized it? So the three look around for items that match Deer's description of snow with very funny results. In the end, they learn exactly what snow looks like. Meschenmoser excels at telling a story through few words and wonderfully evocative illustrations. Just the appearance of the animals themselves shows how very tired they are. The close-up of Bear's face after he is woken up perfectly captures the grumpiness and blariness of that moment. All of the animals are wonderfully scruffy and real. Hedgehog always has leaves and other objects stuck in his spines, and Squirrels wild fur carries a lot of his frantic pace even when still.

The voice of the book is also right on the mark. Told with great excitement and delight, the tone conveys their wonder at being able to see snow even before they have caught a single glimpse of it. Meschenmoser's pacing also works very well, filled with just enough tension but also forward movement.

A perfect choice for this time of year when snow would be met with cheers and joy by all of us who are waiting for winter. Appropriate for ages 4-7.



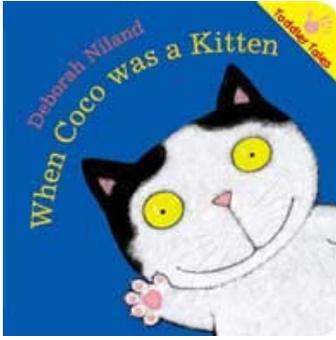
What's Going On?

Written by Elena O'Callaghan

Illustrated by Àfrica Fanlo

2009 Oneota Reading Journal (December 2009)

This entertaining story is about a young boy who has noticed that everything has changed around his house. Everything used to be calm and clean around the house, and now everyone is busy and the house is a mess. In the end, the reader finds out that the reason why everything is so chaotic is because the young boy has just recently become a big brother and everyone is busy taking care of his new little sister. Children will enjoy the unique layout of the pages. On one side, there is an illustration and a description of what a room used to look like and then on the next page the reader is able to compare what the room now looks like. The illustrations are humorous and creative because of the use of mixed-media collages. The young boy is a very relatable character because many children will be able to understand what he is going through as a new big brother. This book would be appropriate for children age's four to eight



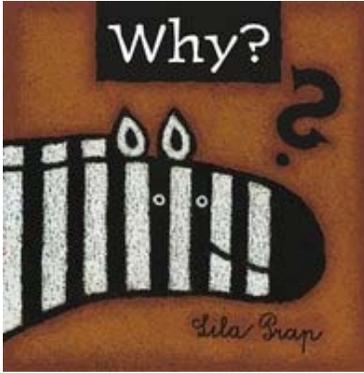
When Coco Was a Kitten
By Deborah Niland

Curled Up With a Good Kids Book (September, 2009):

[When Coco Was a Kitten](#) centers on a sweet little girl who loves her pet just as soon as she is born, when she looks like a ball of fluff and loves to play with her tiny ball. Her owner is by her kitten's side as she grows, giving her everything she needs - including her hat, which the cat decides will be her new bed!

As Coco grows up, she starts to participate in new activities such as learning to walk along a tall wall and climbing up trees. However, it comes as no surprise that she never outgrows her toy ball, her owner, or curling up in her fluffy hat.

[When Coco Was a Kitten](#) is a board book that should be a welcome addition to a young child's library, particularly in a home where a young reader shares or will be expected to share with a family pet.



Why?
By Lila Prap

The Miss Rumphius Effect (May 25, 2009):

[Why?](#), written and illustrated by Lila Prap, answers some of the questions kids often ask about animals, such as:

Why do hyenas laugh?

Why do camels have humps?

Why do hippos yawn?

Here's how the book begins.

Dear Curious Friends,

Some of the answers in to the questions in this book are silly, some are sensible, and some are scientific. (Those are the ones marked by an asterisk *.) But feel free to make up some questions, some answers, and some animals of your own. They can be silly or serious ... whichever you like.

First published in Slovenia in 2003, this gem from Kane/Miller is witty and informative. The illustrations and text are whimsical and kid-friendly. On the spread that asks "Why are zebras striped?" you'll find these silly answers.

Zebras are horses wearing pajamas.

They escaped from prison.

Because their mamas are striped, too.

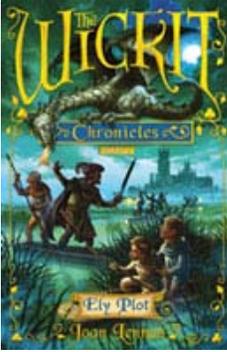
Because they can't decide whether to be black or white.

You'll also find this scientific one.

Every zebra has a different and unique stripe pattern, just as every person has a different and unique fingerprint. Their stripes can be used to tell them apart, but many scientists believe their stripes also help to confuse predators.

This is a book that provides a relatively unorthodox introduction to popular animals (elephants, giraffes, monkeys, etc.) while managing to be silly and serious at the same time. It is not only a terrific read aloud, but a great book for reading and discussing one-on-one.

This would make a great mentor text paired with Rudyard Kipling's [Just So Stories](#). After reading, kids could be guided to write their own animal questions and answers--from silly to creative and scientific. Recommended.



The Wickit Chronicles: Ely Plot

By Joan Lennon

Catholic Library World (March 2009):

Ely Plot is the first book in The Wickit Chronicles. Book Two in the series is listed as Fen Gold. Pip is an orphan who has lived at Wickit Monastery since he was a baby. As the book begins, he meets a gargoyle named Perfect on the roof of the monastery and smuggles him down from the roof and into his room. In London, at the same time, King Arnald, 14, has ascended to the throne upon the death of his father. But some nobles want to put his cousin Frederick on the throne and are scheming to kill Arnald. When Perfect and Pip learn of the plot, they try to save the king and bring him to safety.

The front of the book shows a list and line drawings of the people at Wickit Monastery, in London, and in Ely (where the plot to kill the king is set into motion). In the back of the book are 16 pages called The World of Wickit, which pose questions and then answer them. Some of the questions are: Why is Ely called Ely? and What's a posset?

...Children who like the Spiderwick Chronicles would enjoy this, too.

Travel for Kids (March 2009):

High-spirited medieval adventures, all set in the Fenlands. Young Pip, who lives at Wickit Abbey, is sent to Ely to sing in the famous cathedral choir, but Pip uncovers a plot to poison the king of England.

For Pip's next adventures, he searches the Black Bog for Viking gold in Fen Gold, and skates through the frozen waterways to stop an invasion in Ice Road.

Family Time Magazine (April 2009):

The Wickit Chronicles caught my attention first because the setting is in an old cathedral somewhere in swamps of England. The placement can make travel back and forth to the capital, where the markets are located, difficult. The swamps can be eerie with the mist and gassy areas and eels.

Secondly, the time period is in the middle ages. It is a time of great Christian fervor with monks who live in the cloisters. The people surrounding the villages may be believers but they remember the old superstitions and take heed of them. It is also a time of great danger as sickness can take away parents and boys are left to fend for themselves.

That is how we meet Pip. He lives and works at the Cathedral in Wickit and has been there since his parents died during and outbreak of swamp fever.

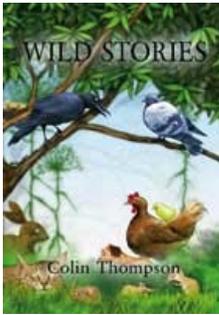
It is a peaceful life but Pip has no friends his age. One day while helping with some roofing chores, Pip discover a gargoyle living in the top spire. Perfect has been living up

there without anyone knowing she was there. She was created by one of the artists who worked on the cathedral. When she and Pip meet each other, they know they are friends forever.

In the first book, Ely Plot, Pip travels to the capitol on business and discovers a plot to kill the young king. Excitement builds as the two boys flee from danger, one who knows how to survive in the swamp and the other who can survive in royal court. In the second book, Fen Gold, Pip helps a Norse noble girl look for lost family treasures in the swamps surrounding the cathedral. For her, the treasure is her last hope.

Both books read well for intermediate school age children. Pip is easy to like and understand. We see his frustration with some of the brothers and why he would prefer to be around others. Plus there is a section at the end that describes how various part of the story came from actual practices of the middle ages.

It is a series that entertains and teaches by making sure the story is the most important aspect. Book Three, Ice Road has been released and makes me what new adventures Pip and Perfect will find together. (SIC)



Wild Stories

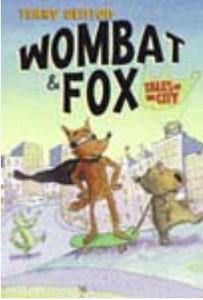
By Colin Thompson

Kirkus Reviews (September 1, 2009):

These previously published stories of the creatures that inhabit a garden left to run wild is a complete and felicitous package, enhanced by the addition of a few poems and winning pen-and-ink drawings. The rabbits, spiders, mosquitoes, cat, owls, chickens and even slugs and maggots display charm and personality even as their diets remains true to each one's nature. Death happens, as the food chain is obviously intact, and it's surprisingly easy to accept, as it's portrayed with the same humor as the thoughts that guide the creatures in their daily pursuit of food and satisfying relationships. The humans of Number Fourteen figure incidentally to both problems and solutions experienced by the animals of their garden. The short chapters are ideal for families to read aloud with a wide age range of children and supply entertaining and fascinating fun for lovers of the natural world who would like to have a conversation with the insects, birds and mammals that populate the typical suburban setting. (Short stories. 6-11)

School Library Journal (December 1, 2009)

After the old woman at Number Fourteen moves away, the garden she leaves behind remains teeming with animal life. Everyone from Sid the Mosquito to Ethel the Chicken has a story to tell of life in the garden. Ted the Flea is tired of living on an old rat and sets off to have adventures on other animals, only to realize there's no place like home. Barry the Hedgehog stubbornly decides he doesn't want to hibernate and is saved from the bitterly cold winter by a family of rabbits. When a new family moves into the house, the dynamics in the garden change and the humans occasionally affect the lives of the animals—such as giving Ethel eggs to hatch when it becomes clear to the family that that is what she is longing for. *Wild Stories* is a collection of three books previously published in the UK, and the stories are interspersed with occasional poems and sweet black-and-white drawings of the animal inhabitants. The tales are short, lending themselves well to reading aloud, and children will even learn some things about animal behavior—such as the fact that some cuckoo birds lay their eggs in the nests of other animals. All in all, a satisfying collection.



Wombat and Fox

By Terry Denton

Curled Up with a Good Kid's Book (April 2009):

[Wombat and Fox: Tales of the City](#) is an illustrated chapter book for early readers that follows the many misadventures of good friends Wombat and Fox in the big city. In “Wombat’s Lucky Dollar,” Wombat finds a shiny coin in the gutter - a lucky coin. But the lucky coin brings luck to everyone but Wombat and Fox, who have run-ins with an ice cream vendor, a Water Rat, the Hippo Sisters and their tandem bike, and Bandicoot and his shiny red sports car during their adventure.

In “Golden Cleat Fox,” Fox learns that he is utterly unable to kick a soccer ball. Perhaps his feet are crooked? When the Five Monkeys run off with Fox’s ball, Fox accidentally destroys a bird’s nest in trying to retrieve the ball. But Fox’s efforts to replace the nest bring good karma in the form of golden cleats and a newfound ability to make the goal. The final story in the collection, “A Hot Night in the City,” features the friends attempting to keep cool on a very hot day.

Terry Denton’s Aussie story [Wombat and Fox: Tales of the City](#) has oodles of offbeat charm. The modern, urban setting (the story begins with Wombat trying to add minutes to his cell phone, for instance) makes for a nice surprise in a story featuring animals. The art was originally not to my taste, but eventually grew on me; it actually suits the plot and style of the book quite well. The many line drawings, the casual dialogue, and the goofy appeal of the main characters should appeal to beginning readers who will want to be eager to learn more of Wombat and Fox’s adventures.

Catholic Library World (June 2009):

This new book from “Down Under” could be the next hot read among boys. It tells of the sophomoric antics of cape-wearing Fox and his friend Wombat, who don’t go looking for trouble but always seem to find it anyway. Their misunderstandings often involve Croc, Bandicoot the millionaire, the Hippo Sisters, and the devilish Five Monkeys.

Containing three tales, this book has Wombat’s Lucky Dollar, Golden Cleat Fox, and A Hot Not in the City. Common Australian jargon pervades these simple stories.

Frameless, comic-book style black-and-white illustrations are intermixed into the text, which often uses varied sizes and fonts to show emphasis and emotion. Similar to those found in the wildly popular *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Captain Underpants* series, this has the potential to be as equally as trendy with reluctant readers.

An understanding of Australian colloquialisms is essential to comprehending these stories. Lacking that, much of the humor will be lost to the reader. For this reason, I

recommend this for students in grades 3-6, even though it is readable to a younger audience.

Halloween wouldn't be halloween without a few scary stories, right? If you're going to a Halloween party, you might want to take the stage and tell a scary Halloween Urban Legend. Just in case you don't know what an Urban Legend is imagine a story about a woman who had a hairdo so big, spiders began to live in her hair! It's not an easy story to believe, but it has become one of the greatest Urban Legends. Here are Kidzworld's Top 5 Urban Legends for Halloween...Â Have you ever wondered why there is no 13th floor in most buildings? The urban legend comes from an old haunted house somewhere in Pennsylvania. People were invited to the house on Halloween and they were asked to sign waivers to protect the owner from anything that might happen to them. Facebook Â© 2019. OCT26. 13 Ghosts of Halloween at Bar 13. Public. Â· Hosted by NYC - Events for Each Day and 4 others.