

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

April 2006

Since April is Poetry Month, this issue of Book Notes will begin with one of the many poetry books that arrive in the CCYAB regularly. In Once Around the Sun Bobbi Katz provides a poem for each month as seen through the eyes of an elementary school child (Harcourt). As the young boy gazes out the window in June he realizes that his math book “is completely lopsided:/the piles of unfinished pages on the right/is/skinny/but you need to use your left hand to hold down/all the stuff you’ve already learned.” LeUyen Pham’s illustrations enliven the pictures created by the words. Two double-page spreads, one for summer and one for winter, showcase the vibrancy of the city neighborhood where people of all ages and races enjoy time spent with relatives and friends throughout the year.—KP

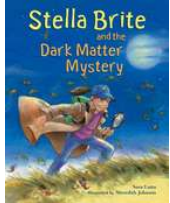


Susan Kuklin’s Families tells what it’s like from the children’s perspectives to live in all kinds of families (Hyperion). Some children have brothers and sisters of mixed races while others describe the experience of being an only child. Others have two moms or two dads. Some children have parents who each hail from different cultural heritages, which results in the children’s speaking English at school and another language at home. Some children live in



extended families, and others come from families of Muslims, Jews, or Christians where religion plays major roles in their lives. Still other children divide their time between their mother’s and father’s homes due to divorce. However, all the children agree on one thing: feeling loved and safe makes families special. Kuklin allowed the children to describe their families in their own words. The children decided what to include, what to omit, who should talk, and what everyone should wear in the photographs that Kuklin took. Those photographs add a rich dimension to the book and to the diversity that composes families in today’s world.—MF

Stella Brite and the Dark Matter Mystery by Sara Latta follows Stella and her younger brother Max of the Brite and Brite Detective Agency as they respond to a newspaper article on missing dark matter. Quickly shelving their self-appointed search for Mayor Pickle’s missing Pekingese, the young detectives begin in the library with a background check of dark matter. Their search for the invisible matter takes them from the top of Lookout Hill to Professor Bella Black’s



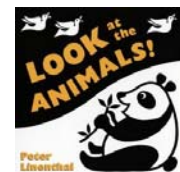
laboratory and finally to a giant cavern deep within an old mine. Terms like WIMPs (Weakly Interactive Massive Particles) and MACHOs (Massive Compact Halo Objects) become familiar as Stella and Max pursue the elusive dark matter.

While the young detectives do not solve the dark matter mystery, they do find Mayor Pickle’s Pekingese. Sara Latta earns an A+ as she introduces the mysteries of science in a friendly, non-threatening manner with her two detectives. Meredith Johnson’s illustrations are engaging, and her depictions of scientific formulas make science look natural and fun in this winning book from Charlesbridge.—MF

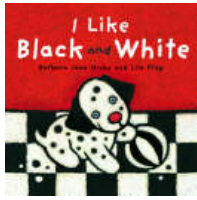
Etta Kaner introduces a number of science concepts with examples from different seasons in Who Likes the Wind? (Kids Can) She explains the basic dynamics of wind itself, as well as how wind cools a person, creates sand dunes, and turns a pinwheel. Other topics include how wind chimes make the music carried by the breeze, why someone can smell the odor of fresh bread from a bakery down the street, and why leaves fall when the wind blows in autumn. Marie Lafrance’s illustrations for each topic initially include a double-page spread explaining what the person likes about the wind and how that aspect of the wind leads to a question. The “wonder” page on the right opens on a flap to reveal the science explanation on the fold-out pages. The simple introductions may lead to additional investigations about many of the topics. Overall the book will make elementary school children think of the wind in new ways.—KP



Among recent books for the youngest listeners is Look at the Animals! by Peter Linenthal (Penguin). This board book has a very simple text. Its main attraction is the series of high-contrast black-and-white illustrations of various animals such as pandas and a zebra. Babies who cannot focus on color yet will be able to discern the patterns in this well-designed book.—KP

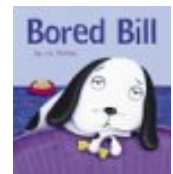


A picture book for children beyond the board book stage also features black and white animals. I Like Black and White by Barbara Jean Hicks (Tiger Tales) uses simple rhymes to create verbal

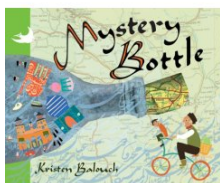


pairings that are effectively illustrated by Lila Prap. Black and white animals set against vibrant backgrounds generate visual interest for young viewers. The double-page spread of five Dalmatian puppies with their mother (or father?) offers a perfect interpretation of “lots and lots and lots of spots!” The bouncy text ends appropriately with a dancing boy and girl using feet and hands to move in time to music.—KP

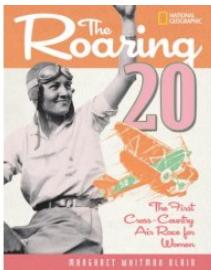
The dog in another Tiger Tales arrival doesn't find anything that will make him move a muscle—at least at the start of Bored Bill. Bill's energetic owner Mrs. Pickles stays busy all day long, but Bill refuses to participate in cooking, cleaning, gardening, or any other activity. Only after a huge gust of wind carries him to a distant planet does Bill realize the value of doing things. The aliens are more bored (and boring) than he could have imagined. As Bill cooks delicious meals, teaches them some of Mrs. Pickle's kung fu moves, and plays games with them, he undergoes a transformation. He returns to Earth a changed canine. He and Mrs. Pickle never have a dull day again, especially when the aliens come to visit! Liz Pinchon's humorous illustrations, especially of the bored aliens on their boring planet, add to the fun.—KP



The main character in the picture book, Mystery Bottle (Hyperion) written and illustrated by Kristen Balouch, takes an extended journey here on Earth. The book is an imaginative tale of the relationship between a boy and his grandfather. Each illustration is layered on top of a map, creating the back story of a boy who receives a mysterious bottle that takes him from New York to Iran to have tea with his grandfather, Baba Bazorg. Baba Bazorg reminds the boy that if he wants to have tea, he should, “Breathe in the wind and mix it with love and blow into the bottle.” Both children and adults will enjoy the complex illustrations that complete the simple, poetic text. —TS



Margaret Whitman Blair chronicles “the first cross-country air race for women” in her new book The Roaring 20 from National Geographic. Will Rogers quipped of the 1929 race, “It looks like a Powder Puff Derby to me!” But the race was deadly serious, and for one pilot, just deadly. Twenty women agreed to the nine-day, 2800 mile race from Santa Monica, California, to Cleveland, Ohio, where the Aeronautical Exposition was taking place. They flew over deserts and mountains, through wind storms and rain storms, and 100°+ temperatures, many of them in open cockpits. Some suffered sabotage that caused them to quit the race, and others got lost several times trying to navigate the difficult terrain with nothing but highway maps and railroad tracks to guide them. Of the twenty who started the race, only fourteen finished. Blair gives a play-by-play of the action of the race. She also provides thumbprint biographies of the women who participated. This real-life adventure shows the determination and grit of those who risked

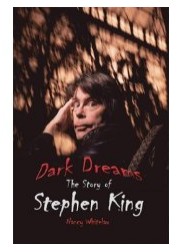


their lives to bring women into the age of aviation. While they started the race as competitors, they finished as comrades. Two months later, 26 women assembled to create an organization for female pilots. They sent 117 invitations to all licensed women pilots, and 99 responded. Thus, “The Ninety-Nines” came into existence. They still provide information and

scholarships for future female pilots and often fly compassionate missions. Blair’s fast-paced book, filled with fascinating information on the frenzied lives of the female pilots of the 1920s, will intrigue elementary school readers.—MF

Older readers looking for information about an author who creates plenty of excitement in his plots will enjoy Dark Dreams: The Story of Stephen King by Nancy Whitelaw (Morgan Reynolds). This biography traces King’s life from childhood through adulthood, as do the color photographs that complement the text. When Stephen was two, his father left the family.

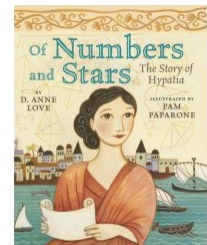
Stephen’s mother, Ruth, took any job she could to support Stephen and his brother, Dave. The family moved frequently and was always poor. From Stephen’s early childhood, Ruth fostered his love of books and his imagination. Stephen enjoyed novels, comic books, and adventure stories. Stephen also seemed to be fascinated with death at a young age. When he was five or six,



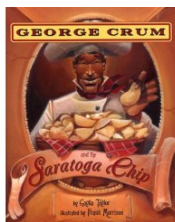
“he asked his mother if she had ever seen a dead person.” Stephen recalls many of the topics he contemplated as a child, such as God, death, and various fears. Some of his novels came out of

those early musings. For example, King wrote It “to pursue fears from his own childhood.” The biography interweaves King’s life with the basis for his books and paints a compelling portrait of an author who always dares to ask, “What if?” The book also follows King’s struggles with alcoholism and the literary world and his role in establishing the credibility of the horror fiction genre. Some of the topics and language indicate that the book is written for the senior high students who read King’s novels. –TS

Although the CCYAB houses biographies of well-known contemporary figures such as Stephen King, many books deal with people from the past who may have been overlooked or forgotten. Of Numbers and Stars by D. Anne Love provides an overview of the life of Hypatia, born in Alexandria, Egypt in the fourth century (Holiday House). Unlike most women of the era, who received little education, Hypatia was taught by her father, a professor at the world-famous university. Not only did she learn practical skills such as fishing, swimming, and riding, but also she pursued academic subjects such as science and literature. Her knowledge of mathematics and philosophy attracted students to her home, and some of those students made important scientific discoveries themselves. Love includes a bibliography of sources that she consulted for her own research and acknowledges that firsthand information about Hypatia is limited. Pam Paparone’s full-page illustrations and text borders reinforce the appeal to students in early elementary grades. An author’s note talks about Hypatia’s brutal death at the hands of fanatics, but the picture book itself stresses her accomplishments.—KP

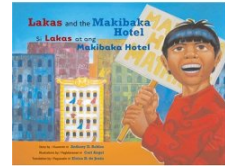


Gaylia Taylor’s picture book biography, George Crum and the Saratoga Chip, introduces readers to the inventor of a picnic staple (Lee & Low). Taylor notes the lack of “definitive historical information” about Crum and his creation of the potato chip, but she builds on available facts to create an interesting narrative. Born in 1828, Crum enjoyed outdoor activities more than school, where he was looked down upon because of his Native American and African American ancestry. After learning to cook all kinds of fish and game, he eventually made his mark as a chef at Moon’s Lake House. Sometimes Crum’s temper got the better of him when his meals were criticized. As the result of a customer’s insistence on receiving extremely thin potato



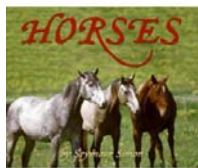
wedges, Crum produced a plate of fried potatoes that made him famous. When he opened his own restaurant, he insisted that all customers—regardless of race, age, or social status—receive the same treatment. Frank Morrison uses interesting colors and perspectives in his acrylic paintings that illustrate the biography.—KP

Anthony D. Robles documents a contemporary fight for better treatment for the poor in Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel, published by Children’s Book Press. Based on a protest by residents of the Trinity Plaza Apartments in San Francisco when they learned that their homes were scheduled for



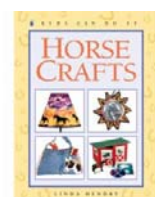
demolition, this picture book for older readers follows a young boy named Lakas as he rallies people from the neighborhood to fight eviction. Rather than leaving the hotel where they had lived and held karaoke parties in the lobby, some of the musicians and residents march to the landlord’s house in protest. Although the book’s ending is ambiguous, the landlord seems to reconsider his plans to sell the building. The book’s introduction explains the importance of Makibaka, “the spirit of struggle,” to Pilipino immigrants, and the book has texts in both English and Tagalog. Carl Angel’s illustrations contain messages of their own, such as the landlord’s clothing made from \$1000 bills.—KP

While biographies and fact-based stories about people hold a certain appeal, other readers may prefer books about animals. Scary animals such as sharks and dinosaurs usually generate lots of interest, but books on more common animals also attract readers. Among the perennial favorites



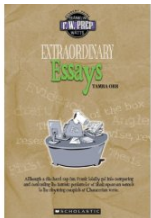
are books about horses. Seymour Simon provides a well-crafted introduction for elementary school students in Horses (HarperCollins). Accompanied by large, clear photos, his text explores topics such as the animal’s different gaits, ways of communication, coat colors, and breeds. Simon also explains the important part horses played in history and the kinds of work they did in manufacturing as well as in farming.—KP

Horse lovers in upper elementary and middle school may want to try some of the activities offered by Linda Hendry in Horse Crafts (Kids Can). Her thorough introduction includes explanations about the types of supplies that will



be needed and what activities will require adult assistance. She provides diagrams of various types of sewing stitches needed to complete some projects. Illustrated step-by-step instructions for projects such as the “paddock mirror” and “pasture pillow” will keep equestrians busy when they can’t be at the stable.—KP

High school students must write several kinds of essays each year as part of their assignments for English, history, and science classes. But how should they approach these essays? What’s the difference between descriptive essays and process essays? When should they write



comparison/contrast essays? What’s a persuasive essay? And how can an ordinary essay become an extraordinary essay—an “A” paper? Tamra Orr answers these questions and more in Extraordinary Essays (Scholastic). Quotes from authors such as John Updike, Ernest Hemingway, and Virginia Woolf are

interspersed with Tip Files, samples of ordinary essays turned into extraordinary essays, and Brain Jams that inform students not only what to think about before they begin writing but also how to approach their rewriting. Orr gives advice on finding topics and writing about them from new and interesting perspectives. From openings that grab readers’ attention, through bodies and supporting details, to endings that leave memorable impressions, Orr provides a friendly overview of writing essays. As a bonus, Orr also lists Dos and Don’ts for writing all kinds of essays. Kevin Pope’s illustrations are entertaining, and teens will enjoy his humor as they learn to write using a step-by-step approach to essays. This book should serve as a valuable and delightful resource for all writers.—MF

Junior high readers may want to take a break from their own writing to enjoy a humorous novel written by someone else. Judy Goldschmidt, author of The Secret Blog of Raisin Rodriguez, has written the sequel: Raisin Rodriguez and the Big-Time Smooch (Razorbill/Penguin). In this book, seventh grader Raisin Rodriguez pines for her first kiss—not from just anyone, but from CJ Mullen, who makes her feel like she has Pop Rocks going off in her stomach. Raisin blogs to her friends



“kweenclaudia” and “PiaBallerina” about the trials and tribulations she faces when she tries to get CJ’s attention, attempts to hang out with him, and plans for the kiss. In an effort to impress CJ, Raisin has a series of mishaps including the time when she irons her hair and sings her

bangs into frizzle (or as she puts it, “a sideshow attraction.”) Teens will enjoy Raisin’s sense of humor and imperfections. –TS

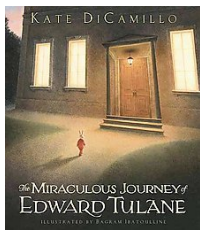
David Levithan wrote Marly’s Ghost: A Remix of Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol at the request of Dial Books, which wanted a Valentine’s Day version of the original. When sixteen-year-old Ben loses his girlfriend Marly to cancer, he also experiences a death within himself. He says, “I was what remained. And that’s what my life felt like: remaining. I went through the motions.” Marly’s late-night, spectral visit to Ben allows her to show him the chains she wears, “Because I am still tied to this life. Just as you have been tied to this death.” To find release, Marly tells Ben three spirits will visit him: The ghosts of Love Past, Love Present, and Love Future. As Ben relives what was, sees what is, and discovers what could be, he realizes that as much as he misses Marly, rather than mourning her endlessly, he should celebrate what they once shared. Brian Selznick’s illustrations remix and adapt the art of the original manuscript. This adaptation for young adult readers truly captures “not only the ‘holiday spirit’ but the human spirit as well.”—MF



Eric Kimmel uses a Tlingit Legend as the basis for a picture book that provides a twist on the familiar tale in which a frog turns into a prince (Holiday House). In The Frog Princess, the daughter of the village headman is so dissatisfied with the young men who want to marry her that she declares that she would rather marry a frog. Soon afterward, she receives a visit from a young man dressed in green who takes her to the bottom of the lake. There they marry and have children, but while she is happy in her underwater life, her parents mourn her disappearance. When a traveler brings news of seeing a young woman near the marsh, the headman threatens the frog chief and tells him he will drain the lake unless his daughter returns. Although she comes back to the human world, she misses her husband and family, and ultimately she and all the frogs of the lake disappear together. Rosanne Litzinger explains the research about colors and clans that she employed in producing her watercolor illustrations, and Kimmel provides notes on his own research for this unusual and well-crafted tale.—KP



Kate DiCamillo's remarkable new novel, The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane, also documents the transforming power of love. The elegant Edward, a three-foot-high china rabbit, considers the adoration of his owner Abilene his due. However, once he is lost at sea during a voyage with Abilene's family, he embarks on a series of encounters that slowly strip away his elegance and self-absorption. Among his various owners are a fisherman and his wife, a wandering tramp, and a young girl who hugs him fiercely through weeks of illness before her death. Between his human interactions, he spends days and weeks on the ocean bottom, in a dump, and on the shelf of a toy store before he is finally reunited with a much older Abilene and her own daughter. While the plot recalls numerous other children's classics, this story is a



unique and powerful tale in itself. The action and episodic structure will lend themselves to reading aloud, but you'll need tissues on hand for points when the emotion overwhelms you or your listeners. Heavy, creamy paper and the full-page color plates that show Edward with his various humans add to the book's richness and testify to the care that Candlewick invested in its production. Bagram Ibatoulline's illustrations have an old-fashioned quality that works perfectly with the text. –KP

Books reviewed in this issue:

Katz, Bobbi. Once Around the Sun. Illus. by LeUyen Pham. Harcourt, 2006. ISBN 0-15-216397-2. \$16.

Kuklin, Susan. Families. Hyperion, 2006. ISBN 078680822-5. \$15.99.

Latta, Sara. Stella Brite and the Dark Matter Mystery. Illus. by Meredith Johnson. Charlesbridge, 2006. ISBN 1-57091-883-X. \$16.95.

Kaner, Etta. Who Likes the Wind? Illus. by Marie Lafrance. Kids Can Press, 2006. ISBN 1-55337-839-3. \$14.95.

Linenthal, Peter. Look at the Animals! Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-525-47582-6. \$6.99.

Hicks, Barbara Jean. I Like Black and White. Illus. by Lila Prap. Tiger Tales, 2006. ISBN 1-58925-056-7. \$9.95.

Pichon, Liz. Bored Bill. Tiger Tales, 2006. ISBN 1-58925-053-2. \$15.95.

Balouch, Kristen. Mystery Bottle. Hyperion, 2006. ISBN 078680999-X. \$15.99.

Blair, Margaret Whitman. The Roaring 20: The First Cross-Country Air Race for Women. National Geographic, 2006. ISBN 0-7922-5389-2. \$21.95.

Whitelaw, Nancy. Dark Dreams: The Story of Stephen King. Morgan Reynolds, 2006. ISBN 1-931798-77-X. \$26.95.

Love, D. Anne. Of Numbers and Stars: The Story of Hypatia. Illus. by Pam Paparone. Holiday House, 2006. ISBN 0-234-1621-6. \$16.95.

Taylor, Gaylia. George Crum and the Saratoga Chip. Illus. by Frank Morrison. Lee & Low, 2006. ISBN 1-58430-255-0. \$16.95.

Robles, Anthony D. Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel. Illus. by Carl Angel. Children's Book Press, 2006. ISBN 0-89239-213-4. \$16.95.

Simon, Seymour. Horses. HarperCollins, 2006. ISBN 0060289449. \$15.99.

Hendry, Linda. Horse Crafts. Kids Can Press, 2006. ISBN 1553376463. \$12.95.

Orr, Tamra. Extraordinary Essays. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-531-16761-5. \$30.50.

Goldschmidt, Judy. Raisin Rodriguez and the Big-Time Smooch. Penguin, 2005. ISBN 1-59514-057-3. \$12.99.

Levithan, David. Marly's Ghost: A Remix of Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol. Penguin, 2006. ISBN 0-8037-3063-2. \$14.99.

Kimmel, Eric A. The Frog Princess: A Tlingit Legend from Alaska. Illus. by Rosanne Litzinger. Holiday House, 2006. ISBN 0-8234-1618-6. \$16.95.

DiCamillo, Kate. The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane. Illus. by Bagram Ibatoulline. Candlewick Press, 2006. ISBN 076362589-2. \$18.99.

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