

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

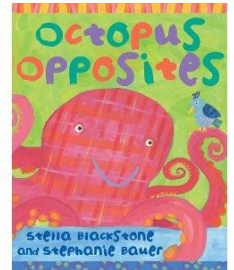
Minnesota State University, Mankato

April 2011

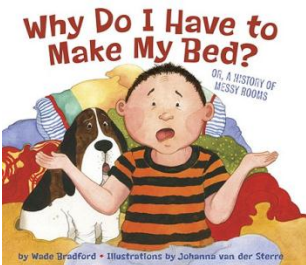
As we polish our reviews for this issue of *Book Notes*, we're also getting a booklist and display ready for the Spotlight on Books conference that takes place in northern Minnesota every April. Even though the ice won't be off the lakes, and no flowers will be blooming, the bright pages of new books will add lots of color to the display tables. Teachers, librarians, and other assorted book lovers gather to browse and chat about what they've been reading. We will post a list of the Spotlight titles on our website in mid-April. (<http://lib.mnsu.edu/collections/ccyab/>) In the meantime, we hope you'll take some time to read reviews of some recent arrivals in the CCYAB.

Picture Books

Stella Blackstone's simple rhymes form the text of the concept book, *Octopus Opposites*, but Stephanie Bauer's acrylic illustrations give the book its pizzazz. (Barefoot) Pairs of animals demonstrate the contrast between terms like wet/dry, push/pull, high/low. Many of the colors, patterns, and facial expressions bear little resemblance to their real counterparts in nature, but all of the artistic features will hold the attention of the youngest listeners, for whom the book is designed. Contrasting backgrounds and patterned borders add visual appeal, and montages at the end show the animals in groups. Preschoolers will enjoy reviewing the pictures on their own after reading time is over for the day.—KP

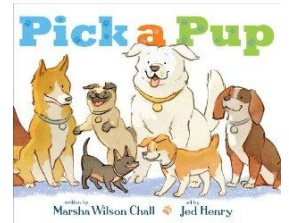


What child hasn't posed the following question: *Why Do I Have to Make My Bed?* (Tricycle Press). Wade Bradford traces this puzzle back through time after a boy tries to convince his mother that he has done enough chores and the bed will simply get messed up soon anyway. Mom recalls how his grandmother might have posed a similar question to her mother, protesting that she had dealt with her slinky, Hula-hoop, and roller skates in 1953. Back goes the reader as one mother after another recalls an ancestor with similar complaints in pioneer days, colonial times, medieval daysall the way back to 40,000 B.C. The child wonders why bed-making is required. "Me already clean cave! Me hunt mammoth!" His mother offers the classic response, which resonates through the centuries, "Because I said so."

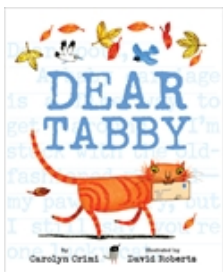


Johanna van der Sterre's illustrations feature beleaguered, overworked children. While they might not convince a complaining child of the fairness of the request, they may bring a few smiles. Additional information about "Chores Through the Ages" appears at the end of the book. Several paragraphs about each time period depicted talk about what children were probably required to do to help their parents.—KP

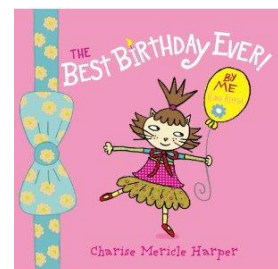
Sam faces a dilemma when it's time for him to *Pick a Pup* from the city animal shelter. (Simon & Schuster) As he and his Gram stroll to their destination, he observes a number of dogs that belong to different neighbors. Does he want a pet like Mrs. Well's sit-in-your-lap dog, a pedigreed show dog like the one owned by Mr. King, or a "hates-to-play-alone pup" like the one that romps in the park with David? How can he possibly make the right decision, especially when there are so many waiting for him at the shelter? By the end of the book, he knows he has made the right choice, or rather, the choice was made for him. Dog owners or aspiring dog owners definitely will appreciate the story, but even those who prefer cats or other pets will be charmed by Marsha Wilson Chall's bouncy rhymed text and Jed Henry's watercolor illustrations.—KP



Tabby D. Cat writes an advice column for beleaguered animals from her alley office next to a dumpster. Her column, *Dear Tabby*, dispenses words of wisdom about problems large and small. (HarperCollins) Among her repeat "customers" are a spoiled cat, Boots Whitepaw, who writes on embossed notepaper to complain about having to eat sardines, wear a sweater, and ride in a baby carriage. Because Tabby's responses point out the fortunate aspects of Boots' situation, readers will not be surprised that Tabby shows up on the little girl's door after Boots leaves for a more adventurous life. Other writers include a parrot who needs to talk less to avoid annoying her owners, a skunk in search of romance, and a hamster who needs to stop going in circles. The letters to Tabby appear on one page with her replies across from them, but David Roberts' artwork also depicts the animals writing and the situations they describe, adding to the humor. Different type sizes and colors also indicate the various writers. Carolyn Crimi's humorous narrative weaves the subplots introduced in the letters into a satisfying whole. Tabby comes up with ingenious solutions that result in happy endings all around.—KP



Although birthday parties are meant to be happy occasions, they can be stressful for both birthday child and guests. Charise Mericle Harper, in the guise of Lana Kittie, offers advice on how to have *The Best Birthday Ever!* (Hyperion). Lana suggests that birthday celebrators set up "pretend birthdays" during which they can practice party manners. This will help them avoid the unhappy situation of sitting in a time-out during the party on their special day. The expression on Lana's face as she sits on the steps with a discarded birthday hat at her feet alerts readers that she must have experienced this situation in the past. She provides tips on how to welcome guests and include them in the festivities rather than turning the event into a talent show by the celebrator. In addition to advice about invitations, food, and cake, Lana provides the all-important demonstration of how to open a gift without hurting the feelings of the giver, even if the present in question is underpants! Cartoon drawings add to the fun and help reinforce the important messages underlying the humor.—KP



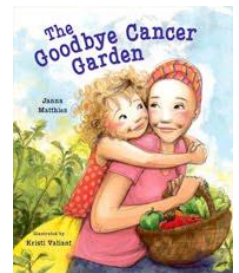
Miss Dorothy loved books and hoped that one day she would be a librarian in a fine brick library. Unfortunately, life brought her to rural North Carolina, a place with no library. People in the community loved to read, however, and raised money to start a bookmobile. They asked



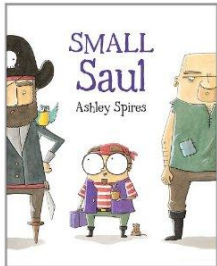
Miss Dorothy to be their librarian. Miss Dorothy brought her books and her love of reading to schools, farms, post offices, grocery stores, churches, parking lots, wherever there were readers to be found. With a donated house, she was able to bring her books indoors, and Miss Dorothy finally had her library. *Miss Dorothy and Her Bookmobile* (HarperCollins) is author Gloria Houston’s recollections of the bookmobile and the librarian that so influenced and encouraged her, and countless others, to love books. Susan Condie

Lamb’s soft illustrations with pastel colors evoke the time and place where a bookmobile and a librarian’s dedication might have been the only opportunity for children to learn about the world beyond their own experiences. —JC

Dealing with illness realistically yet hopefully is a difficult balance to achieve, particularly in picture books. Janna Matthies succeeds admirably in *The Goodbye Cancer Garden* (Albert Whitman). In January Mom learns that she has breast cancer, an unwelcome surprise for the entire family. Soon Jeffrey and Janie (the story’s narrator) meet Mom’s doctor who assures them that the goal of treatment is to make Mom better by “pumpkin time.” Janie comes up with the idea of planting a garden, including pumpkins that will be ready in fall. The project gives the family a positive focus through Mom’s surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Friends and neighbors pitch in to help with meals and housework. Sometimes Mom is too sick to eat much. Her bones ache, and her feet tingle from chemo. Yet, she remains upbeat, working in the garden when she can or cheering on their efforts from the sidelines. Her sense of humor appears in activities such as a “head-shaving party” before she loses her hair to chemo. Kristi Valiant’s illustrations ably depict the loving family and the neighbors who support them during difficult days and celebrate when Mom’s health improves.—KP

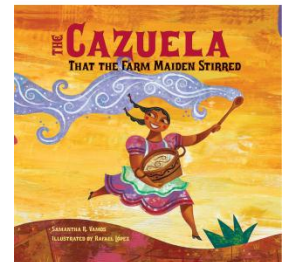


Small Saul (Kids Can Press) dreams of being on the sea. Because the Navy won't have him, he decides to become a pirate. Unfortunately, Small Saul is a terrible pirate. Although he tries, he is better at baking desserts and redecorating the crews' quarters aboard *The Rusty Squid*

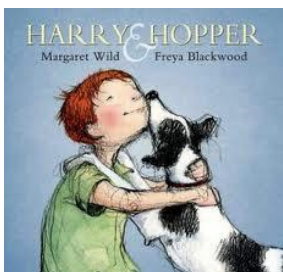


than being fierce and finding treasure. So while Small Saul is painting the plank purple, the captain pushes him overboard. It doesn't take the pirates long, however, to realize that Small Saul's skills might be valuable after all. Author/Illustrator Ashley Spires' Saul reminds readers that it's okay to be true to yourself. Small Saul sports a red-and-white-striped shirt and purple vest. He has a squat body atop thin legs, a goatee, huge glasses and eyebrows that sit on the outside of the pirate bandana on his head. The pirates, on the other hand, are more than twice his height, have stubble on their faces, sport tattoos/peg legs/eyepatches/earrings, and wear worn, neutral colored clothes. In the end, it's the differences that come to be recognized as Small Saul's strengths.—JC

Samantha Vamos deftly incorporates Spanish words into a cumulative tale about *The Cazuela That the Farm Maiden Stirred* (Charlesbridge). Into the cooking pot go butter (mantequilla), cream (crema), milk (leche), sugar (azucar) and other ingredients that eventually turn into delicious rice pudding (arroz con leche). Along the way, the Campesina receives assistance from animals including a duck (pato), donkey (burro), and hen (gallina). The numerous repetitions in the text reinforce the vocabulary, but if the words fly by too quickly, readers can always look at Rafael Lopez's vibrant acrylic illustrations for clues about the process. The intense colors and striking patterns make this a natural choice to share with a group of children, who will soon be eager to fill in the words at the end of lines. While the pudding cooks, animals and humans have time for a little music and dancing. A recipe at the end includes detailed instructions but also cautions that adult help will be required because of the need to use a hot stove.—KP

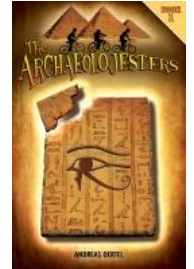


Harry loves his dog Hopper. They play catch and fetch, wrestle, hide when it's Hopper's bath time, and fall asleep next to each other in Harry's bed. When Hopper is killed in an accident, Harry is too stunned to say goodbye. It is nightly visits from Hopper (Is it his spirit? Is it a dream? This is left for the reader to decide) that help begin to heal Harry's grief and loneliness. With each visit, Hopper fades away a little more, until Harry can finally say good-bye. Margaret Wild's **Harry and Hopper** (Feiwel and Friends) is a touching, though not overly sentimental, book that can help children learn about, or weather, the grieving process. Illustrator Freya Blackwood creates a striking effect using simple charcoal lines to put Hopper in motion and a far away perspective with lots of space to highlight Harry's loss and sorrow. – JC



Fiction

At the beginning of *Archaeolojesters* (Lobster Press) small town Sultana, Manitoba is getting even quieter than usual. The campers have stopped coming after the river dried up, and 12-year old Cody is getting worried. Without the tourist trade, his best friend Eric's mother will lose her job as a waitress, and Eric's family will have to move. That's when Cody and Eric dream up their plan. With the help of Eric's twin sister Rachel, they create an Egyptian "artifact" that they hope will draw people to Sultana. It works, and the artifact attracts international attention. The kids are happy, until things begin to spin out of control. This book is fast paced with short chapters. Teachers will appreciate the research and attention to historical detail Cody, Eric, and Rachel need to create a realistic artifact, and the target 9-12 year old readers will appreciate the action and intrigue. This is the first of a series, and author Andreas Oertel ends the books with a teaser, leaving the reader eager for the next installment. —JC

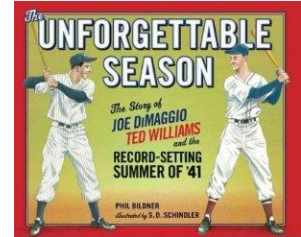


Need a forged hall pass? Or answers to the big test? Or maybe just some advice? Sixth grader Mac and his best friend/*consigliere* Vince can get them for you. For a price, that is. It's a good racket, until the rise of a gambling ring run by the legendary Staples, a high school crime boss, who threatens everything Mac and Vince have worked for. Mac has to use his smarts, contacts (including an unholy alliance of meanest kids in school), and a lot of money to try to take down his enemies, all while dealing with snitches, double crosses and his own doubt in his best friend. While older readers will appreciate the Godfather allusions in *The Fourth Stall* (HarperCollins), from the book's cover to the use of phrases like "you broke my heart," and "make him an offer he can't refuse," the target audience of middle school boys will relate to author Chris Rylander's true-to-life depictions of bullies, clueless adults, friendship and betrayal.—JC

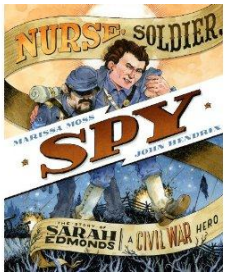


Non Fiction

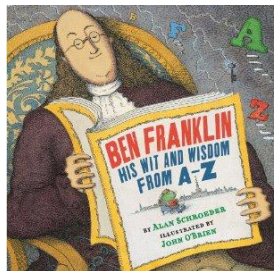
As baseball teams take to the field, Phil Bildner carries fans back 40 years to *The Unforgettable Season* of 1941, when Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams each set a record that still stands (Penguin). Without the diversion of dozens of television sports channels broadcasting continually, the entire country was riveted to radio broadcasts that covered the achievements of two future hall of famers. On May 15, the Yankees were in the middle of a slump when DiMaggio, their center fielder, got a hit that began *the Streak* that helped them move into first place. For 56 games, he hit successfully, and the country followed his progress. Les Brown’s orchestra recorded a song, “Joltin’ Joe DiMaggio,” and radio broadcasts were interrupted for updates on his performance. Meanwhile, Boston Red Sox slugger Williams flirted with a .400 batting average for the season, a record that had stood for more than 10 years. As he went into the final doubleheader, his average stood at .39955, which would be rounded up to .400, but he insisted on playing. His hits in those games boosted his average to .406. S.D. Schindler’s watercolor illustrations transport readers back to the era. As Bildner points out, many other “unbreakable” records have fallen after many years. Could this be the summer a player outdoes DiMaggio or Williams?—KP



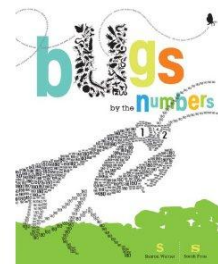
Although other women have disguised themselves as men to serve as soldiers in war, Sarah Emma Edmonds was the only woman to be recognized as a veteran of the U.S. Civil War. Not only did she receive a pension and back pay for her service, but she also was buried in a military cemetery plot reserved for Civil War veterans. Marissa Moss recounts some of the heroic exploits that led to these honors in *Nurse, Soldier, Spy* (Abrams). When Edmonds enlisted at the age of 19, under the name of Frank Thompson, she was already used to dressing as a man. She had used that disguise to flee from Canada to the United States to avoid an arranged marriage. Her upbringing on a farm had given her skills in handling a gun and riding a horse. During some of the most horrible battles of the war, she pulled wounded men to safety and helped tend them as a nurse. Eventually she was recruited to spy for the North. Moss describes her first mission, in which she impersonated a freed slave and worked for the Confederate army while gathering information. John Hendrix’s ink and acrylic illustrations incorporate some of the text into the actual pictures, often by using oversized and unusual type faces. The people’s faces often have the qualities of caricatures. Together the arresting images and exciting account present a little-known aspect of a war likely to be featured in numerous books during its sesquicentennial years.—KP



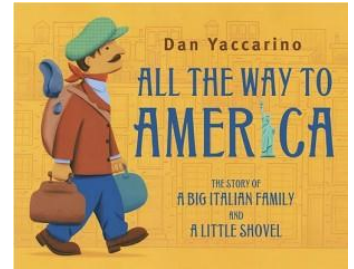
Ben Franklin had only two years of formal schooling. Despite this, he invented bifocals, the lightning rod, and the Franklin stove. He was an author, politician, diplomat, successful businessman, scientist, and military commander. He started both the first library in America and first fire department in Philadelphia and helped found a college and a hospital. Ben Franklin's accomplishments and interests are so varied that author Alan Schroder needs the entire alphabet to describe them in *Ben Franklin: His Wit and Wisdom from A-Z*. (Holiday House) The accompanying ink and watercolor illustrations from John O'Brien range from full-page spreads to small cartoons complementing the Ben Franklin quotes that pepper every page. These pictures are sometimes literal, often funny, and deserving of a closer look. Though classified as a biography, a straight through reading of this book will give the reader a muddled look at how the pieces of Ben Franklin's life fit together. Choosing to focus on his vast array of accomplishments, however, works well in illuminating the influence of this important (and tireless) Founding Father. – JC



Sharon Werner and Sarah Forss create striking graphic representations of insects and other small creatures to present *Bugs by the Numbers* (Blue Apple Media). Numerals in different sizes and type fonts actually form the illustrations. For example, the phases of complete metamorphosis proceed from clusters of 1s representing eggs to a glorious adult butterfly composed of 4s. Most pages have additional small illustrations incorporating relevant numbers in colorful borders along the bottom of the double-page spreads. More information is presented in tiny type in the larger illustration. For example, the gold page related to bees features hexagon messages resembling the cells in a hive. Unique flaps and fold-out pages add to the visual intrigue and will draw readers back more than once. However, the pages may not withstand heavy library use. The authors note that not all animals that people term “bugs” are insects. In fact, not all insects are bugs either. They carefully note the animals they include, such as spiders, that belong to a different class.—KP



Michele Iaccarino left Italy for a better life in America with a small shovel and some advice from his father: “Work hard, but remember to enjoy life. And never forget your family.” At Ellis Island, Michele Iaccarino became Michael Yaccarino. He married, had children, and started his own business, using his little shovel to measure dried fruits from his pushcart. Michael’s son Dan opened a restaurant, and Dan’s son Mike opened a barbershop. Mike had a son, Dan, who grew up to become an author and illustrator. His son, Michael, named for his grand-father and great-great-grandfather, uses the little shovel to plant seeds in his family’s terrace garden, in the process learning about hard work and enjoying life and family. Dan Yaccarino’s *All the Way to America* (Random House) is a wonderful look at the American experience. This is a book that will get many children wondering and asking where their families came from and how they got here. Children will also enjoy looking for the shovel that continually reappears throughout the book. –JC



Book Reviews written by:

KP—Kathy Piehl, CCYAB Director

JC—Jennifer Christianson, CCYAB Graduate Assistant

Books Reviewed in this issue:

Bildner, Phil. *The Unforgettable Season: The Story of Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and the Record-Setting Summer of '41*. Penguin, 2011. ISBN 9780399255014. \$16.99.

Blackstone, Stella. *Octopus Opposites*. Barefoot Books, 2010. ISBN 9781846863288. \$16.99.

Bradford, Wade. *Why Do I Have to Make My Bed? A History of Messy Rooms*. Random House, 2011. ISBN 9781582463278. \$16.99.

Chall, Marsha Wilson. *Pick a Pup*. Simon & Schuster, 2011. ISBN 9781416979616. \$16.99.

Crimi, Carolyn. *Dear Tabby*. HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 978006114251. \$16.99.

Harper, Charise Mericle. *The Best Birthday Ever!* Hyperion, 2011. ISBN 9781423137764. \$15.99.

Houston, Gloria. *Miss Dorothy and Her Bookmobile*. HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 9780060291556. \$16.99.

Matthies, Janna. *The Goodbye Cancer Garden*. Albert Whitman, 2011. ISBN 9780807529942. \$16.99.

Moss, Marissa. *Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story of Sarah Edmonds, a Civil War Hero*. Abrams, 2011. ISBN 9780810997356. \$18.95.

Oertel, Andreas. *The Archaeolojesters*. Lobster Press, 2010. ISBN 9781897550830. \$10.95.

Rylander, Chris. *The Fourth Stall*. HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 9780061994968. \$15.99.

Schroeder, Alan. *Ben Franklin: His Wit and Wisdom From A-Z*. Holiday House, 2011. ISBN 9780823419500. \$16.95.

Spires, Ashley. *Small Saul*. Kids Can Press, 2011. ISBN 9781554535033. \$16.95.

Vamos, Samantha R. *The Cazuela That the Farm Maiden Stirred*. Charlesbridge, 2011. ISBN 9781580892421. \$17.95.

Werner, Sharon and Sarah Forss. *Bugs by the Numbers*. Blue Apple Books, 2011. ISBN 9781609050610. \$19.99.

Wild, Margaret. *Harry and Hopper*. Feiwel and Friends, 2011. ISBN 9780312642617. \$16.99.

Yaccarino, Dan. *All the Way to America: The Story of a Big Italian Family and a Little Shovel*. Random House, 2011. ISBN 9780375866425. \$16.99.