

BOOK NOTES

Center for Children's & Young Adult Books

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Starting with this issue of Book Notes, we will include reviews of a mix of new titles from a variety of publishers. Instead of concentrating on a theme, each month will feature noteworthy books that have arrived in the Center for Children's and Young Adult Books. In this way, we hope that we can provide more regular news about some of the many outstanding titles published for children and young adults.

Although the leaves have disappeared from the trees in Minnesota, Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert offers a visual feast that features their vibrant shapes and colors. The plot line is minimal, based on Leaf Man's journey over a variety of landscape. The book's glory lies in the illustrations. Each double-page spread uses a variety of leaves to create the plants, animals, and landscapes over which Leaf Man passes. Among the creations are orchards, butterflies, spotted cows, and a flock of birds. In addition, the upper edges of the pages are trimmed to various heights, and the layers create ever-changing vistas for the viewer. This book not only works well for group sharing, but it is actually more effective when viewed at a distance rather than up close. The end papers include a leaf identification page. Buy a copy now to have on hand for next fall or to remember the bright colors during the stark winter. (Harcourt)



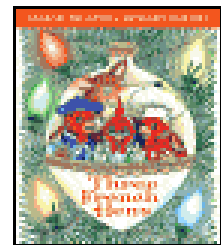
For older readers who want to explore how shapes can be used to convey different meanings, consider Walter was Worried by Laura Vaccaro Seeger. (Roaring Brook) A cast of characters reveals various emotions related to weather events. For example, the title character, Walter, was worried when the sky grew dark. What is striking about the book is that the facial expression of each character is created by the use of the letters of the emotion. Because various sizes and styles of type are used, the exercise is obviously intended for those who can read. The book would be a great starting point for creative projects by students who want to create "word faces" of their own.



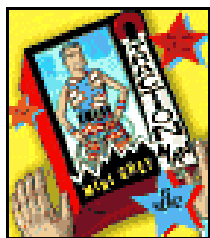
More complex artistic skills would be required to produce the kind of art featured in Winter Lights by Anna Grossnickle Hines. (HarperCollins) For each of her 15 poems related to winter scenes and holidays, she created an intricate quilt with vibrant designs and colors. Some of the words and images evoke winter sights such as the flames in a fireplace. Others relate to specific celebrations such as Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa. She includes detailed explanations and photographs to inform interested readers about how the quilts were created. This book would appeal to quilters and/or poetry lovers of any age.



Among the many holiday books that have arrived in the CCYAB in the past month is a humorous look at what might happen if Three French Hens wound up in New York City instead of their intended destination. Instead of reaching mademoiselle's true love, Philippe Renard, they wind up at the seedy apartment of Phil Fox, who views the three plump birds as a potential Christmas feast. However, Colette, Fifi, and Poulette proceed to do a home and personal makeover fit for a television special. Phil and his new-found friends spend Christmas and Hanukkah (they're kosher chickens) together. Marge Palatini's verbal humor is reinforced by Richard Egielski's amusing illustrations. (Hyperion)



Mini Grey also employs humor to hold readers' attention in Traction Man. (Random House) This "generic action figure with dazzle-painted battle pants" becomes a boy's constant companion. Traction Man undertakes hazardous special missions such as swimming in foamy water to help wash the breakfast dishes. Aided by brave Scrubbing Brush, he escapes from the Poisonous Dishcloth. His heroic status remains unchallenged until he opens a Christmas gift from Granny. How can a superhero possibly wear an "all-in-one knitted green romper suit and matching bonnet"? Yet, even the embarrassment of such an outfit can be overcome when Traction Man and Scrubbing Brush unravel the green thread to perform a daring rescue. The book is sure to appeal to elementary students with action figures of their own.



Anyone who has ever heard the phrase "you have to eat _____ before you get dessert" will appreciate the predicament of Little Pea. (Chronicle) According to Amy Krouse Rosenthal, Little Pea has a wonderful life, playing with his friends, listening to stories, and

rolling down hills. However, he hates dinnertime because he must eat the food he despises:



candy. Yes, every good pea has to finish a plate of candy before dessert arrives. Little Pea tries strategies familiar to human children, and in the end, he succeeds in getting his reward, a gigantic bowl of spinach. Jen Corace packs plenty of personality into the peas that roll through the pages.

Miram Cohen tackles a serious subject in her picture book, My Big Brother. (Star Bright) The narrator is a boy about 8 or 9 years old. His big brother helps Mama take care of the family, and the narrator obviously adores him. Big brother plays basketball with him and lets him help fix up his old car. Yet, he decides to enlist in the army because “college costs a lot.” Then the narrator assumes the status of big brother for his younger sibling. Although the family misses the young man, they do what they can to keep him close, including baking cookies to send him. Many families must share the same emotions as someone they love serves in the military far from home. Ron Himler’s illustrations capture the poignancy, especially the last painting of the narrator polishing the car to keep it shiny until his big brother returns.



Ina Cumpiano draws lots of family members into her exploration of Quinito’s

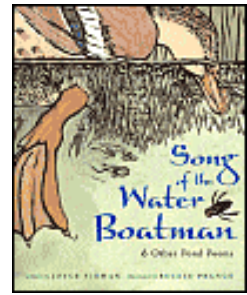


Neighborhood/ El Vecindario de Quinito. (Children’s Book Press) The English and Spanish texts introduce readers to the occupations of many people in an urban neighborhood. Because the text employs many words for family relationships and for people in different occupations, the book would also be useful for those learning either of the languages. Jose Ramirez employs bright colors and flat perspective in his striking illustrations that take us on a journey through a vibrant city landscape.

G. Brian Karas places people in a much larger context in considering our life On Earth. (Penguin) Explaining the way the Earth revolves and rotates around the Sun to create day, night, and seasons is complicated and not often geared to those in primary grades. With its large format and clear diagrams, this book succeeds in helping readers visualize the place of Earth in the solar system, personalizing abstract concepts.



Joyce Sidman takes us through the year in a cycle of “pond poems,” Song of the Water Boatman. (Houghton Mifflin) She provides a poem that introduces readers to some of the creatures that live in or near a pond and then offers additional scientific information in a separate paragraph. The subjects include various insects such as the green darner as well as topics such as the food chain. Beckie Prange’s prints deserve to be framed in their own right and provide a perfect accompaniment to the poetic and scientific discourse. Because both the author and illustrator are from Minnesota, and the landscape will be familiar to anyone who has visited a pond or woodland in the state, this book will hold particular appeal for those who live here. However, anyone who can explore the outdoors will have their senses heightened after this encounter with the natural world.



Prange’s snowy landscape on the final two-page spread is but a prelude to a book set in a place where snow is the norm. Sandra Markle documents a remarkable tale of endurance in A Mother’s Journey. (Charlesbridge) Once the female emperor penguin has entrusted her egg to her mate, she joins the other females for the trek to the open sea 50 miles away. After enduring storms and other hardships as they traverse the ice, they arrive at the water where they can find food at last. However, their fishing expeditions are filled with danger as well since leopard seals lurk in the water to catch their own meals of penguin. When the females make the return trip with food for the newly hatched chicks, the males can start their own journey. Those who enjoyed the movie “March of the Penguins” will be particularly intrigued by the book, including Alan Marks’ illustrations, but even those without previous knowledge of the penguins’ feats will be amazed by their endurance.



Animals in a much warmer climate are the subject of Joy Cowley’s Chameleon. (Scholastic) The story chronicles a chameleon’s search for food, all the while alert for potential danger. The gecko and frog are harmless, but the scorpion’s sting would be poisonous. What really holds the viewer’s attention, though, are the remarkable photographs. Not only do we see the variegated colors of the chameleon’s skin, but we also marvel at the way his long sticky tongues zaps a caterpillar on a leaf far away. After the story concludes, Cowley



supplies two pages of additional information about chameleons, and Nic Bishop explains the techniques he used to photograph the shy creatures.

Some of the photographs might remind viewers of creatures that lived long ago, the dinosaurs. A new pop-up extravaganza created by Robert Sabuda and Matthew Reinhart



provides careful readers with a three-dimensional look at them in Encyclopedia Preshistorica: Dinosaurs. (Candlewick). Not only do dinosaurs spring from the pages of the double-page spread, but on the corner of almost every page is a smaller “book” containing additional information and smaller pop-ups. Because of the number and complexity of the pop-ups, it is unlikely that this book would survive long in a library’s circulating collection. However, the work will fascinate dinosaur lovers of any age and would be a valuable addition to a teacher resource area or a home library.

The final book in this month’s edition could also serve as a handy resource in a home library to help answer questions about familiar objects. Bill Slavin’s Transformed: How Everyday Things are Made is a lively compendium of information about the production of dozens of items from erasers and dental floss to polyester and cement. (Kids Can) The production steps are outlined clearly in two pages, and the informative drawings include touches of humor as miniature people demonstrate how the process works. As a reference book or a resource for browsers, this volume has lots of appeal for readers in elementary school through adults.



Kathy Piehl

Books reviewed in this issue

Ehlert, Lois. Leaf Man. Harcourt, 2005. ISBN 0-15-205304-2. \$16

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro. Walter was Worried. Roaring Brook, 2005. ISBN 1-59643-068-0. \$15.95

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. Winter Lights. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0-06-00818-0. \$17.89

Palatini, Margie. Three French Hens. Illus. by Richard Egielski. Hyperion, 2005. ISBN 0-7868-5167-8. \$15.99

Grey, Mini. Traction Man is Here! Random House, 2005. ISBN 0-375-83191-6. \$15.95

Rosenthal, Amy Krouse. Little Pea. Illus. by Jen Corace. Chronicle, 2005. ISBN 0-8118-4658-x. \$12.95

Cohen, Miriam. My Big Brother Illus. by Ronald Himler. Star Bright, 2005. ISBN 1-59572-007-3. \$15.95

Cumpiano, Ina. Quinito's Neighborhood/ El Vecindario de Quinito. Illus. by Jose Ramirez. Children's Book Press, 2005. ISBN 0-89239-209-6. \$16.95

Karas, G. Brian. On Earth. Penguin, 2005. ISBN 0-399-24-25-x. \$16.99

Sidman, Joyce. Wong of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0-618-1354702. \$16.00

Markle, Sandra. A Mother's Journey. Illus. by Alan Marks. Charlesbridge, 2005. ISBN 1-57091-621-7. \$15.95

Cowley, Joy. Chameleon, Chameleon. Photographs by Nic Bishop. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-439-66653-8. \$16.95

Sabuda, Robert and Matthew Reinhart. Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Dinosaurs. Candlewick, 2005. ISBN 0-7636-2228-1 \$26.99

Slavin, Bill. Transformed: How Everyday Things are Made. Kids Can, 2005. ISBN 1-55337-179-8. \$24.95